

Comics as Conservation: Environmental Awareness in Rohan Chakravarty's *The Great Indian Nature Trail with Chunmun*

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Abstract— The study focuses on the use of graphic novels and comic books to successfully communicate environmental issues through an ecologically-based examination of Rohan Chakravarty's *The Great Indian Nature Trail with Chunmun*. This comic book is used as a means of linking scientific information about the rapidly increasing number of ecological problems we are facing to the general public's understanding of the subject matter. The study uses qualitative methods and analyses a selection of different comic book panels to identify a range of themes within the graphic novel; including the way in which different perspectives on biodiversity are communicated, how humour can be used to teach us different things, the use of anthropomorphism in literature to create empathy for non-human animals, and different conservation philosophies. The findings of the study reveal how the comic book redefines how we view environmental issues by combining visual narrative with language that is intended to be easily understood, which improves cognitive comprehension and emotional involvement in the subject matter. Using theoretical frameworks provided by Scott McCloud and Lawrence Buell, the study illustrates how sequential art has the potential to create a more active reader experience and increase ecological consciousness. In addition, the use of humour and character development encourages readers to feel empathy for non-human beings while also providing readers with scientifically accurate information. Eco-comics have the potential to be an underutilized and valuable resource to help educate individuals about environmental issues, particularly with respect to sustainable development and conservation awareness in India.

Index Terms— Ecocriticism, Eco-comics, Environmental Communication, Biodiversity Representation, Anthropomorphism

I. INTRODUCTION

As the environmental crisis continues to escalate at an unprecedented rate over the course of the 21st century, it becomes increasingly important for communicators to develop new ways to communicate with various types of audiences. Traditional forms of scientific writing can provide useful information, but they are frequently written using technical terms that are not easy for most people to understand, and do not typically contain any elements that draw the audience in. In light of this, comics/graphic novels have arisen as valuable forms of education that can provide visual representations of stories and utilize language that is easier to read and comprehend in order to portray complicated stories about the environment. As Scott McCloud (1993) argues, comics have the ability to represent complex concepts in simple and understandable manners, whilst also having an emotional connection to the reader; thus, they can help raise public awareness of issues related to the environment.

Various types of creative media, including cinema, written expression and other artistic forms, are being utilized more often for communicating issues surrounding climate change, the decline of biodiversity and the conflicts between humans and animals in India. Rohan Chakravarty is one of the leaders of this new movement towards using humour and illustrations as a medium for educating people about the importance of conserving natural resources. *The Great Indian Nature Trail with Chunmun* (2024) represents an innovative contribution to the field of eco-communication by providing readers with a unique perspective on the wildlife and environment of India through the experiences of a bird-watching character named Chunmun who is both very curious and observant in nature. While educating readers about Indian wildlife, R. Chakravarty also uses Chunmun's experiences to address numerous environmental issues, including: habitat destruction, extinction of species, degradation of the environment.

Chakravarty's work is marked by its ability to combine education and entertainment ("edutainment") in a cohesive manner. One way he does this is by personifying animals to create situations with which readers can relate to develop their empathic feelings toward animals and, in turn, their attitude towards the environment. This technique also corresponds to ecocriticism, as described by Lawrence Buell (2005), in that it supports ecocritical scholars' beliefs that literature plays a significant role in how we understand nature and our responsibilities toward it, both ethically and morally. Chakravarty employs humour and satire in his comics after using them initially as stylistic elements to achieve an engaging result while simultaneously exposing the inequities that humans have caused in the environment by using both humour and satire as tools for change.

Comics as an artistic medium can also support multimodal learning by using combined text and image to improve cognitive memory and emotional engagement. Edward P. Mounsey (1998) notes that the use of sequential art encourages readers to actively participate in constructing meaning and that through this level of involvement, readers gain a deeper understanding of the entity they involve themselves with. In terms of ecologically-based education, the participatory level is significant, as this causes readers to internalise ecological values rather than passively absorb information. Chakravarty's body of work demonstrates this ability, as he provides scientifically supported information in a visually attractive and narratively attractive format. This paper is intended to investigate how *The Great Indian Nature Trail with Chunmun* serves as a model for using comics to create advocacy for environmental issues. The comic follows the idea of creating unique and imaginative worlds through visual storytelling, humour, and creative characterisation to promote ecological education and environmental consciousness. In addition to examining Chakravarty's works from a prediction and visual culture framework, this study will demonstrate that comic media can provide a transformational role in conservation discourse as it relates to India today. Creatively, making these types of connections will help

to close the gap between scientific knowledge and public comprehension, and therefore create a more educated public that is aware of their environment.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Recently, research on the intersection of comic book and environmental awareness has gained more scholarly attention, particularly in ecocriticism and in the context of environmental education. Comics are a multi-modal medium combining different forms of visual and textual representation; therefore, there are many pedagogical benefits associated with the use of comic books as a means for communicating complex environmental concerns. As Scott McCloud (1993), describes comics as being a type of sequential art that helps readers understand meaning through the relationship between pictures and words; therefore, the use of comics can engage readers in the process of creating meaning through the use of the sequential aspects of the art form. Will Eisner (1985) states that visual storytelling has great potential to communicate information and stimulate emotional responses from readers.

More recent empirical evidence confirms that comics are successful media for teaching people about the environment. A comparative study by von Reumont and Budke (2023) shows that when learners used comics to learn about climate change, they performed better than learners who used written resources. Additionally, the authors of this study found that the emotional connections and concerns about the environment created by comic book readers are much more meaningful than using written resources. Comics have also been shown to be effective tools for teaching younger students about the environment. In particular, a study of the use of comic books to teach younger students about environmental issues (Utara et al., 2025) found that students are more likely to learn about environmental behaviours when information is presented to them in an engaging, easy-to-comprehend manner (comic books). In the same way, other studies have also shown that digital comic books also help improve students' conceptual comprehension and environmental awareness when used as part of an interactive visual instructional strategy (Idayanti et al., 2022).

There has been an increase in research on eco-comics as a distinct area of study. Ludewig (2025) discusses the ecocritical comic genre and its visual representation of the ecological connection of humans to the natural world, with a focus on visual storytelling that communicates about current environmental issues, including non-human agency. This research finds that comics are a means of materializing ecologically based thoughts into a format that is accessible to both academic and non-academic audiences, thereby creating a more inclusive and democratized view of environmental discourse. This point also can be found in the larger perspective of ecocritical theory as presented by Lawrence Buell (2005), who looks at the relationship of different kinds of cultural texts in establishing a person's environmental ethic or consciousness. Echegoyen-Sanz (2025) provides examples of how a comic-based pedagogy has combined environmental awareness with social and gender issues as presented through ecofeminist theory. The authors found creating comics supports the development of critical thinking, empathy, and engagement in sustainability, contributing to the development of teachers. Also, recent research on sustainability has identified that comics help to illustrate abstract environmental concepts and create connections between them and experiential learning through the use of stories and illustrations (İlhan et al., 2026).

Studies have shown that comics are effective ways to communicate about the environment with their combination of accessibility, engagement with readers, and insight or directly addressing some aspect of critiquing or observing the environment. However, there is still very little research on Indian eco-comics or the contribution of these types of comics toward raising awareness and promoting the conservation of natural resources; therefore this creates a need to explore a piece like *The Great Indian Nature Trail with Chunmun*, that helps create localized discourse on environmental issues through the use of universal storytelling devices.

III. METHODOLOGY

The qualitative research method is used for this study; By and through an eco-critical lens using text analyze the interactivity of both comics and images based on comic theories. Data was gathered using purposive sampling to select specific comics and narratives focusing on environmental themes. The themes will then have been analyzed thematically to reveal patterns regarding; biodiversity representation, anthropomorphising animal subjects through comic stories, comic humour, and conservation messaging. The final results of the process will provide a basis for critical understanding of graphic narrative systems as a means of creating social and environmental change.

IV. DISCUSSIONS

Representation of Biodiversity

Rohan Chakravarty's work *The Great Indian Nature Trail with Chunmun* provides a visual representation of biodiversity that creates awareness about the environment through storytelling. The broad range of Indian species of fauna, from birds to mammals and lesser-known species, allows readers to gain an understanding of the country's ecological complexity. This representation of different species fits within eco-comic trends in which visually told stories depict the interconnectedness between human and non-human organisms (Ludewig, 2025). The work represents animal species not only as part of the background but also as focal points in the narrative. This indicates that Chakravarty's comics are moving the traditional story-telling model from an anthropocentric to an ecocentric approach. Another important feature of the representation of biodiversity is that it emphasizes the animal point of view. Studies of Chakravarty's "Green Humour" comic series show that animals are often portrayed as active participants in the environmental conversation rather than as passive participants in the conversation (Yadav & Sinha, 2024). This writing technique gives readers a chance to learn about environmental issues in a way that provides insight into non-human life and their interdependence with humans and culture. Also, this representation of animal species within the natural environment provides an accurate reflection of their ecology, illustrating the importance of understanding each species' habitat in terms of conservation.

Additionally, this writing distills intricate scientific data about biodiversity into an approachable manner that can be understood by a variety of audiences. Because comics are a hybrid medium which use both visual and textual modes of representation to express scientific ideas, comic books are exceptionally good for communicating science in an entertaining way. Numerous studies demonstrate that environmental comic books can transform complex scientific ecological knowledge into comprehensible stories without distorting the underlying information (Anderson, 2022). Examples of this situation in *The Great Indian Nature Trail with Chunmun* are that scientific information about how species behave, what their ecological function is, and what threats they pose to

the environment are all articulated through the humorous and dialogical form of the writing such that the reader is able to comprehend the main ideas in an effective way. The use of scientifically accurate information presented in simplified terms also relates well to modern environmental education, where the emphasis is on clarity and student engagement with the subject matter. Education research indicates that pictorial narratives (such as comic books) improve ecological literacy by providing a means by which to demonstrate cause-and-effect relationships and to present environmental issues in concrete terms within everyday contexts (Sustainability, 2026). For instance, in comic book illustrations of food chains, habitat loss, and species interdependence, readers are able to see and understand how these ecological processes happen when they would be otherwise somewhat obscure and unclear. This ability to visualize these processes does not only assist readers in better comprehending them, but also increases their memorability of the information they acquire about the environment.

Additionally, comics' representation of biodiversity promotes both emotions and thinking about the environment, both of which are key to being an environmental steward. Research on storytelling about the environment has demonstrated that all kinds of stories about wildlife or ecosystems can lead to an empathetic response towards the reader and their environmental relationship (Journal of Environmental and Sustainability Education, 2025). In Chakravarty's works, by including so many species (both ecologically and biodiversity-wise, i.e., from charismatic animals to no name examples in their ecosystems) creates a larger understanding of the reader's understanding of what should be important to them regarding their environment, which pushes the reader to value all living things.

Humor as a Pedagogical Tool

Since micro-textual construction (the level at which humor is incorporated into *The Great Indian Nature Trail with Chunmun*—through the speech bubbles, individual panels and the relationships between captions and images) results in producing ecological knowledge through the form of comics rather than just the content, Rohan Chakravarty's use of humor in *The Great Indian Nature Trail with Chunmun* is very effective and adds a unique perspective on various species depicted in comic relief. A close analysis of the repeated pattern of the three-step sequence of Chunmun's introduction of a species: (i) the introductory description (e.g., factual identifier—name, habitat, characteristic) of the species, (ii) the response of the species in a brief line that offers a humorous or ironic reframing of the original description, and (iii) the visual background of the individual panel either complicating or contradicting the preceding statement—has the effect of transforming the act of describing something into inferring something about it. Thus, the reader does not simply “receive” information but reconstructs the information they receive through resolving the conflicting tensions between what the description and what the visual depiction communicates, an example of what Scott McCloud (1993) termed “closure,” or the active process of creating meaning through movement between panels. At both the lexical and syntactic levels, humor is built on compressing definition.

Typically, dialogues will have shortened versions of sentences, most often just one part (or one clause) or even just a few words. This shortness serves two purposes: 1) to emphasize ecological vocabulary (species names, habitats, and behaviours) by placing them in high-visibility spots within a speech bubble; and 2) to create some semantic space in order for images to fill in the gaps. For instance, an image will depict the fragility or alteration of the habitat being noted in the text, and the “funny” part will be the difference between the neutral way that line is written and the obvious visual disturbance shown in the image. Overall, the irony will be created through an impression of understatement (from the text) and overstatement (through the image), requiring the reader to create a synthesis of what's happening ecologically (Chakravarty, 2024).

Through a shift of tone or voice from serious to casual (or vice versa), humor creates a “pragmatic dissonance” between the speaker's “matter-of-fact” (ecologically speaking) description of an alarming and often urgent condition. The irony of this dissonance is that there is an impression of casualness in the delivery, and yet, the contextual (ecological) setting provides urgency. This use of irony has an educational purpose as it helps readers and people who learn to assess the humorous utterance themselves. Research shows that humor can help reduce resistance to complex or difficult subject matter and improve retention and critical thinking skills (Banas et al., 2011). The reader of this text is also taught to read against the grain of each statement, noting any implication that may exist rather than just the literal meaning of each statement.

There's an additional comical component resulting because of the contrasting themes of humanizing animals in talking about them and how different animals actually are from humans. When the animals talk to each other, they use actual human terms; however, when they're actually talking, they are utilizing anthropomorphized language to describe ecological functions (for example: what an animal eats, the animals' habitat, how an animal acts). These two different elements being juxtaposed together in terms of everyday language vs. animal specific ecological content is cognitive contradiction which is a primary source of humour, and at the same time is a precise description of what is occurring ecologically to each animal. This is not simply that animal is animated; rather, that the anthropomorphization of the animal has a specific evolutionary trait. The humour therefore enhances the recollection of the ecological fact: the reader will remember the humorous part and be better able to recall the ecological fact related to the humorous part.

The comic format enhances educational humour by linking panels together. Oftentimes, a statement made in one panel can be reconfigured in the following panel through the image. A phrase that starts off neutral or humorous becomes critical or dire when the following visual provides evidence of environmental stress (for example, altered environments or restricted habitats). This idea of sequential memory is a significant element to the theory of comic art. Will Eisner (1985) demonstrated that sequential art relies on the use of humour to unify space within comic form; the humour is utilised as the method by which space within a comic is connected helping the reader bridge the gap between knowing and understanding.

Anthropomorphism and Characterization

Rohan Chakravarty uses storytelling in his book *The Great Indian Nature Trail with Chunmun* via Chunmun, the birdwatching guide, as a means of constructing anthropomorphism. He uses the protagonist of the book, Chunmun, in a well-defined way throughout the book, to introduce different animal characters to the reader through several different ecological environments in India. In addition to being the story's narrative guide, Chunmun also serves as a mediating voice between traditional scientific knowledge and the reader's understanding. Each section of the book has a set structure where Chunmun identifies the animal, gives a brief background on its ecology, and then the animal responds to Chunmun's identification in a conversational manner using humour and knowledge of ecology. By consistently using this structure for each article in the book, anthropomorphism is used as a means of conveying knowledge as opposed to simply a stylistic element of characters.

Through close textual analysis, characterization occurs via the sound of animals and their actions within the habitat in which they encounter Chunmun. Through this method of representing the characters of the various types of animals— birds, reptiles, and mammals— in the story in the different settings within the context of the tale, the dialogue spoken by the various animals reflects their distinct ecological role. For example, birds will often speak about nesting and migrating, while the other animals' dialogue may refer indirectly to their need to live in a particular habitat or be threatened by changing environments. These brief exchanges among the species of animals in the text are representative of the concept of non-human agency as discussed in ecocritical literature today, wherein animals are understood as having the ability to know and act (Kautz, 2024). Therefore, the presence of anthropomorphic language within this text does not detract from the unique biological characteristics of each animal; rather, it provides easier access to understanding ecological concepts through the use of participatory dialogue.

One other major characterization element is characters' comments about their environments and habitats. The comments vary and involve animals describing disturbances of their environments either as habitat changes, reduction of natural ecosystems, or the presence of humans disturbing their natural habitats. While the animals do not elaborate much on what is being disrupted, they do give good clues through contextual information in the visual aspect of the story. Additionally, these occurrences signify that anthropomorphism provides a form of ecological commentary through normal daily interactions. Studies about anthropomorphism in environmental narratives indicate that this strategy develops empathy for environmental issues from non-human character's perspectives to improve overall empathetic understanding (Keen 2019).

Chunmun himself is central to the anthropomorphic structure of the text; unlike a neutral narrator, Chunmun interacts with the animals, often showing curiosity, humor or surprise about them. The interaction Chunmun has with the animals creates a dialogic relationship, rather than a hierarchical one, reinforcing the idea that humans are not the only ones who interpret nature. This is also a recent finding by contemporary narrative research that shows that storytelling with anthropomorphic characters increases ecological awareness when it maintains a balance between engaging an emotional response and offering scientific accuracy (Prato-Previde et al., 2022). Therefore as a guide to readers, Chunmun's pedagogical role functions to help readers create an understanding of biodiversity and to develop empathy for non-human forms of life.

Readers can see that animals are depicted as feeling a number of feelings (curiosity, frustration, amusement or concern) which makes it easier for readers to relate to animals in the form of characters instead of just as abstract biological entities. However, the ecological role of each animal is not changed or diminished in the context of each character's emotional story. The balance of these two elements, and the combination of these two ideas of ecocentric anthropomorphism, represent the recent research findings of which will help to define how to use humans as an engaging way to develop people's environmental awareness but not anthropomorphize, or create a human essence, out of nature (Gavilan Tatin et al., 2025).

Environmental Ethics and Conservation Message

Through the use of dialogue and situational framing, environmental ethics are presented at the text level in brief, yet suggestive ways. For example, during an introduction of a species in its habitat, any comments made by Chunmun or the animal regarding environmental change are implied statements, not direct teachings. As such, these observations of change become meaningful only when considered together within a context. A statement about an animal's habitat or behavioural adaptation implies that the animal's habitat is at risk, particularly when read with accompanying visual images of environmental changes or disturbances. This technique is an example of what ecocriticism considers to be mendacious ethical positioning wherein the text and its characters do not tell the readers the ethical responsibility of their actions, but rather leave it up to them to interpret and determine (Heise, 2016).

While human interference is not often shown directly, it is apparent throughout each depicted instance as an implied cause. The absence of humans as characters, along with the visible effects of the environment, creates a story that the reader must complete. This gap is significant in terms of ethics because it places the reader in the position of being a witness to human accountability without actually needing to be told. For example, in a number of cases, animals' references to their respective states based on location, survival, or adaptation are delivered in a manner that implicitly critiques humans' behaviors. This is in agreement with ecocriticism's argument that literature de-emphasizes the authority of humans by placing emphasis on the outcomes of human behaviors rather than on the who done it (Buell, 2005).

Another essential thing about the conservation message is how interdependent all parts of a system are. In Chunmun's guided journey through the text, there are many ways that animals are connected with each other and to their environment. These connections are not purely theoretical; rather, they are evident in how characters interact with one another. When a species talks about its role in the ecosystem, the reader understands where that species fits into its larger ecological surroundings, confirming the reader's view that biodiversity is a series of connected relationships, not merely an assortment of single entities. Most importantly, the ethical aspect of the text is demonstrated through implicit rather than explicit moral instruction. There are no direct social appeals or prescriptive statements about conservation; rather, each experience contributes a small part of a much larger ethical framework through the accumulation of experiences. Through repeated experiences with ecological realities, readers create a sense of ecological responsibility throughout their journey. This method also parallels modern-day environmental education in its focus on experiential and interpretive learning as opposed to direct moral instruction (Monani & Adamson, 2017).

V. CONCLUSION

Through the preceding analysis it is possible to determine that *The Great Indian Nature Trail with Chunmun* by Rohan Chakravarty is evidence of how comics can be an evolving and intellectually vibrant medium for communicating about the environment. The format of comics allows for translating knowledge about the environment from a conventional scientific method to one that can be very accessible and engaging as opposed to scientific publication; thus allowing for many more people to gain an understanding of the environment. Another important finding is that biodiversity within the comic is not only described, but conceptually establishes biodiversity as being ecologically interconnected and decentralizes humanity's position of authority. The addition of non-human living beings acting within the story suggests that there is an ecocritical perspective regarding ethics and culture associated with environmental issues as described by Lawrence Buell. Integrating humour and sequential art is very important from an educational point of view. The interaction of text and images, as explained by McCloud and Eisner, enables readers to engage and interpret actively. This not only improves the understanding of the reader, but also improves the emotional and cognitive connection of readers to the topic of the environment. Additionally, Chunmun's anthropomorphism and characterisation use several narrative devices to facilitate the reader's connection between their scientific knowledge and the

empathic response to the conservation message because it is framed ethically through implicit rather than explicit means. In addition, because it is less overt or prescriptive than other forms of communication, readers must create meaning through the context in order to align with current trends in environmental humanities. The study confirms eco-comics are an important yet under-researched area of environmental discourse, particularly within India. Chakravarty's work demonstrates how visual storytelling promotes equitable access to ecological information, cultivates environmental consciousness and provides leadership to build a more knowledgeable and ecologically responsible society.

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