
Climate, Culture, and Memory: Exploring Ecological Consciousness in Roy and Ghosh

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Abstract:

The research paper, *Climate, Culture, and Memory: Exploring Ecological Consciousness in Roy and Ghosh* examines the relationship between humans and nature in modern South Asian literature by studying Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*. It looks at how both authors portray ecological awareness, human-nature conflicts, and the role of ecological memory in shaping cultural and historical identity using a postcolonial ecocritical approach. In Roy's novel, the rivers, floods, and landscapes of Kerala are closely tied to human lives and memories. This connection shows how nature affects social and cultural experiences. In Ghosh's story, the tidal floods, mangrove forests, and interactions between humans and wildlife in the Sundarbans highlight the fragility of human life and the value of local ecological knowledge.

The research paper addresses how marginalized communities experience environmental changes and how historical and colonial legacies contribute to ecological challenges. It emphasizes how climate, culture, and memory combine to deepen understanding of human responsibility toward nature by comparing the two novels. This research study states that Roy and Ghosh depict the environmental realities of South Asia and also promote ecological awareness and reflection. Their novels illustrate that literature can link past and present, humans and nature, and individuals and communities, providing insights into the social, cultural, and environmental aspects of human life.

Keywords: climate, culture, human-nature conflict, ecology, ecocriticism etc.

Introduction:

The relationship between humans and nature has been a key issue in literature, especially in postcolonial societies where environmental changes often relate to historical

exploitation, social inequalities, and cultural memory. Modern South Asian literature provides an excellent space to explore these themes, as authors portray the effects of environmental harm, climate change, and human activities on communities and ecosystems. This research focuses on Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) and Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2004) to analyze human-nature conflicts, ecological awareness, and the role of ecological memory in shaping cultural and historical identity. This study investigates how climate, culture, and memory intersect in these texts by using a postcolonial ecocritical approach. It also examines how marginalized communities face environmental challenges and how literature reflects and critiques these experiences. Through a comparative analysis of Roy and Ghosh, the research aims to show that literature documents ecological and social issues and it also promotes awareness, reflection, and understanding of the complex relationship between humans, nature, and history in contemporary South Asia.

Literature Review:

Postcolonial ecocriticism has become an important framework for studying the connection between humans, nature, and culture in literature. Scholars argue that literature mirrors not only environmental realities but also the social, historical, and cultural aspects that shape human interactions with nature. Glotfelty (1996) emphasizes that ecocriticism looks at literature to understand ecological awareness and human responsibility toward the environment. In the context of South Asian literature, many critics have pointed out how writers examine human-nature conflicts and the environmental impact of colonial and postcolonial histories. Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* has been analyzed for its portrayal of Kerala's rivers, floods, and landscapes, illustrating how nature intertwines with social structures, memory, and cultural identity (Nayar, 2010). Similarly, Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* has been discussed for its representation of the Sundarbans, emphasizing human vulnerability, tidal floods, wildlife, and the ecological knowledge of local communities (Bhattacharya, 2015). Many studies focus on each novel separately but there is a lack of comparative research specifically addressing climate, migration, and ecological memory in these texts. This research seeks to fill that gap by analyzing how Roy and Ghosh depict humannature interactions, the effects of environmental change, and the cultural and historical memory embedded in landscapes. It highlights the role of contemporary South Asian literature in encouraging ecological awareness and reflecting the socio-environmental realities of the region.

Theoretical Framework:

Postcolonial Ecocriticism: This research is rooted in postcolonial ecocriticism, which studies how literature represents the relationship between humans, nature, and culture in societies shaped by colonial histories. Postcolonial ecocriticism examines how colonial exploitation, economic policies, and social inequalities have contributed to environmental harm and human interactions with the natural world. Scholars like Cheryll Glotfelty and Vandana Shiva emphasize that literature can reveal ecological consciousness, human responsibility, and the socio-cultural aspects of environmental change.

Ecological Memory: Another key idea in this research study is ecological memory. It refers to how landscapes, rivers, forests, and other natural elements preserve historical, cultural, and emotional experiences. Ecological memory connects people to their environment, aiding in understanding how climate change, displacement, and environmental loss impact communities. In literature, this memory is expressed through storytelling, local knowledge, and cultural practices, showcasing how humans and nature are intertwined over time.

This research study examines how climate, culture, and memory intersect by applying these concepts to Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*. It looks at how environmental change affects marginalized communities, how nature holds historical and cultural significance, and how literature reflects human responsibility toward the environment. Postcolonial ecocriticism and ecological memory together provide a framework for understanding the socio-environmental and cultural dimensions in these novels, underscoring their contribution to contemporary ecological awareness.

Study of selected novels in Comparison:

1. Climate and Environmental Challenges

In *The God of Small Things*, Arundhati Roy presents Kerala's rivers, backwaters, and rainy season as essential to the social and emotional lives of the characters. The Periyar River and seasonal floods are not simply part of the backdrop but are active forces that shape human activities and societal structures. Floods disrupt daily life, complicating movement and affecting work, education, and communication. For example, floods isolate villages, forcing communities to face the fragility of their existence and their reliance on nature. Roy emphasizes how environmental events intertwine with cultural practices, social hierarchies, and family stories. Nature is both nurturing and destructive. It supports agriculture and life, and also tests human resilience during crises. Through vivid descriptions of rain, waterlogging, and river landscapes, Roy highlights that climate influences not just physical survival but also emotional and social connections, shaping memory, trauma, and communal identity.

Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* also explores the Sundarbans, a region of tidal rivers, mangrove forests, and storms. Ghosh focuses on practical challenges and survival strategies within a fragile ecosystem. Tides, storms, and rising sea levels dictate the daily routines of fishing communities and their movements across islands. Nature is unpredictable and potentially dangerous, with floods threatening lives and livelihoods. Ghosh illustrates that climate is a powerful force that humans must respect and adapt to, as failing to understand ecological patterns can lead to disaster. Additionally, past exploitation of the Sundarbans, including colonial land use and resource extraction has heightened the region's vulnerability, showing how human history connects to environmental fragility.

Both novels highlight the complex relationship between humans and climate. In *The God of Small Things*, the focus is on social and emotional impact. In *The Hungry Tide*, the focus is on ecological and survival challenges. Both texts show that climate is not separate from human culture as it shapes memory, social organization, and group identity. Both authors promote ecological awareness and illustrate the interconnectedness between humans and nature by emphasizing floods, tides, and unpredictable weather.

Human–Nature Conflict

Human-nature conflict is central to both novels, though it appears in different forms. In *The God of Small Things*, Roy portrays conflict as symbolic and social. Human actions, such as deforestation, construction, and river modification, disrupt the natural environment and subsequently affect society. These altered rivers and landscapes impact livelihoods, mobility, and daily routines, revealing the vulnerability of communities dependent on natural resources. Nature reflects social hierarchies and acts as a force that challenges human relationships. For instance, the river and monsoon floods often parallel family tensions and societal conflicts, showing that environmental disruption mirrors human social issues. In *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh presents a more direct, ecological conflict. Humans coexist with a dangerous environment, facing threats from floods, storms, and wildlife like tigers. Ghosh highlights the practical necessity of understanding and respecting nature. Conflicts arise not merely from environmental forces but also from historical and socio-political conditions that render communities vulnerable. The inhabitants of the Sundarbans must rely on ecological knowledge, timing, and awareness to safely navigate their environment. The novel depicts a delicate balance between humans and nature, illustrating that survival depends on understanding, adaptation, and mutual respect for ecological systems.

Roy emphasizes the symbolic and cultural aspects of human-nature conflict. Ghosh focuses on practical, survival-oriented interactions. Both approaches reveal the consequences of ignoring ecological limits as social disruption in Roy's work and physical danger in Ghosh's. Together, the novels illustrate that human-nature conflict is both a lived reality and a reflection of broader cultural and historical dynamics.

Ecological Memory and Cultural History

Ecological memory is the way landscapes preserve cultural, historical, and emotional experiences. It is a key theme in both novels. In *The God of Small Things*, rivers, trees, and villages hold memories of family histories, social ties, and local culture. Nature acts as a living archive, linking personal experiences with collective memory. The recurring imagery of water, backwaters, and floods serves as a reminder of past events, emotions, and traumas. Roy emphasizes that memory is connected to the environment, and loss or change in nature impacts cultural identity and social continuity. In *The Hungry Tide*, the Sundarbans are repositories of ecological and historical memory. Islands, mangroves, and tidal rivers hold knowledge passed down through generations about fishing patterns, tides, and wildlife behaviors. Ghosh highlights practical ecological memory as understanding the environment is vital for survival. At the same time, the natural landscape preserves historical experiences, including colonial exploitation, migration patterns, and local myths, showing that ecological

memory includes both practical and cultural aspects. In comparison, Roy emphasizes emotional and cultural memory, where nature reflects human feelings, social norms, and collective histories. Ghosh highlights practical and communal memory, where understanding ecological patterns ensures survival and fosters community cohesion.

Migration and Displacement

Both novels explore human movement but in different ways. In Roy's work, floods and environmental changes indirectly drive displacement, affecting family structures, social networks, and village life. The disruption to daily routines and natural spaces alters emotional and cultural experiences, emphasizing the social aspects of environmental change. In Ghosh's narrative, migration is directly connected to ecological challenges. Communities in the Sundarbans face relocation due to tidal floods, erosion, and changing landscapes. Migration serves as both a survival strategy and a cultural adjustment, highlighting the tangible link between climate, displacement, and human adaptation.

Contemporary Relevance:

The key focus in both novels connects strongly with current issues. Climate change, rising sea levels, floods, and cyclones now impact areas like Kerala and the Sundarbans in real life. The novels foresee these problems, stressing the vulnerability of marginalized communities and the value of ecological knowledge. Roy and Ghosh highlight human responsibility toward the environment. They show that understanding, respecting, and adjusting to nature is crucial for survival. Their works also contribute to global discussions on climate-related migration, environmental justice, and the preservation of cultural and ecological memory. Both novels show literature's ability to raise awareness, prompt reflection, and increase ecological consciousness in today's world by linking human experience with environmental change.

Conclusion:

This research has looked at how Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* depict the complex relationships between humans, nature, and memory in modern South Asian literature. Both novels illustrate that human life is connected to the environment and that ecological consciousness is an essential part of cultural and social identity. Through vivid images of rivers, floods, tides, and landscapes, Roy and Ghosh reveal that climate and environmental changes are not just natural events. They deeply influence human feelings, relationships, and survival. In Roy's work, the floods and rivers of Kerala shape family life, social structures, and cultural memory, show the emotional and symbolic effects of nature. In Ghosh's tale, the tidal floods, mangroves, and wildlife of the Sundarbans create real challenges for communities striving for survival, emphasizing adaptation, ecological knowledge, and resilience. Ecological memory is portrayed in complementary ways, in Roy's text it is emotional and cultural, linking nature to personal and collective histories. In Ghosh's text it is practical and communal, connecting people to generations of ecological knowledge and lived experiences.

In conclusion, *The God of Small Things* and *The Hungry Tide* together illustrate the profound ways literature can reflect human–nature relationships, explore ecological consciousness, and highlight the connections among climate, culture, and memory. This study shows that modern South Asian literature documents environmental realities and also encourages awareness, understanding, and reflection on the enduring and complex bond between humans and the natural world.

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