
**Ecosophical Proximity and Planetary Intimacy in Shubhangi Swarup's
Latitudes of Longing**

**Author: Menika Kumari
Dr.Soni Joseph**

1. **Menika Kumari**
Research scholar
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences MNNIT Allahabad Prayagraj
2. **Dr.Soni Joseph**
Assistant professor
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, MNNIT Allahabad Prayagraj

Email: menika.2024rhu01@mnnit.ac.in
sonij@mnnit.ac.in

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Abstract

Ecosophical proximity is an ethical and emotive attunement to the world beyond humanity. In contemporary Indian literature, ecosophical proximity expresses an ethics of intimacy between human subjectivity, nonhuman nature, and location, frequently through longing-filled narratives .This paper explores ecosophical proximity in contemporary Indian literature through Shubhangi Swarup’s novel *Latitudes of Longing* (2018).The study uses Swarup's *Latitudes of Longing* as a primary point of reference, interpreting "*Latitudes of Longings*" as emotional and geographical zones where dispossession, memory, and the need for belonging interact. The paper’s primary contribution lies in analysing how ecosophical proximity in *Latitudes of Longings* redefines proximity as an ethical and affective closeness between human and non-human entities, moving beyond mere physical or geographical nearness. This study explores how the novel reimagines planetary relations over deep time and varied ecosystems in South Asia such as the Andaman Islands, the Himalayas, and urban spaces, which constructs an intricate web of interconnections that collapse boundaries between body, landscape, memory, and time. This paper addresses the extent to which the porousness in the novel produces a distinctive form of ecosophical proximity. How humans, animals, spirits, and landscapes become collaborators in a single restless planetary story. By

analysing the text this research contends how *Latitudes of Longing* fosters ecosophical proximity by emphasizing ecological consciousness, emotional attachment, and sensory experience. The Earth is portrayed in the novel as an active, sentient entity that remembers, dreams, and molds human lives rather than as a passive backdrop. Swarup challenges anthropocentric viewpoints and emphasizes planetary memory and vulnerability by using a geological feature as the story's central theme. In place of anthropocentric hierarchies, the story portrays nature as an active, agential force that moulds human subjectivity. The novel challenges linear temporality and spatial fixity through its fractured structure and shifting views, inspiring readers to view ecological relationships as dynamic and intricately intertwined.

Keywords: Ecosophy, ecosophical proximity, planetary intimacy, Latitudes of Longing, Anthropocene, Contemporary Indian English fiction.

1. Introduction

Ecological crises have converged in the twenty-first century in an unprecedented manner, and the relationship between humans and the more-than-human world has changed fundamentally. Climate change, loss of biodiversity, extinction of species, degradation of the oceans, deforestation and mass environmental displacement have revealed the limitations of the anthropocentric paradigms that have historically portrayed nature as a passive resource for human progress. Environmental scholars are increasingly stressing that these crises are not just scientific or political issues, but ethical and imaginative ones as well, requiring new ways of thinking about coexistence, belonging, and responsibility. Literature has thus become a key space for re-imagining such relationships by bringing into visibility the entanglements of human lives with geological, biological and planetary processes. In modern environmental fiction, more and more the Earth is depicted as an active agent in the creation of history, memory, identity, and affect, rather than as a picturesque setting or symbolic landscape. This conceptual shift has helped fuel a renewed interest in the environmental humanities in such concepts as multispecies cohabitation, posthumanism, planetary thinking, deep time, and ecological ethics. A number of academics have challenged the idea that humans have a privileged position outside of ecological systems, including Arne Naess, Felix Guattari, Timothy Morton, Donna Haraway, Ursula Heise, and Dipesh Chakrabarty. Their work advocates for an ethical reorientation that recognizes the

interdependence of nonhuman and human existence and the interdependence of the temporal and spatial scales at which ecological catastrophes occur. These theoretical developments have also revolutionized literary criticism, challenging scholars to explore how stories envision relations between humans, animals, landscapes, oceans, mountains, and geological formations beyond conventional boundaries.

This paper examines ecosophical proximity, understood here as an ethical and affective attunement between human subjectivity, nonhuman nature, and location, in Shubhangi Swarup's debut novel *Latitudes of Longing* (2018). Drawing on Arne Naess's concept of ecosophy, Félix Guattari's three ecologies, and affective and material strands of ecocriticism, the paper argues that Swarup's novel reconfigures proximity as an intimacy that exceeds physical or geographical nearness. Moving across the Andaman Islands, Burma, Nepal, and the Karakoram – Ladakh region, the novel constructs a porous planetary fabric in which humans, ghosts, animals, glaciers, and fault lines become co-narrators of a single restless story. The analysis shows how Swarup's fractured, multi-generational structure destabilises linear temporality and anthropocentric hierarchy, positioning the earth as a sentient, remembering, and dreaming entity rather than a passive backdrop.

This study central contribution lies in showing how ecosophical proximity in *Latitudes of Longing* redefines proximity as an ethical and affective closeness between human and nonhuman entities, one that moves beyond mere physical or geographical nearness. The novel reimagines planetary relations across deep time and across the varied ecosystems of South Asia – the Andaman Islands, the Himalayan and Karakoram highlands, and the intervening urban and political landscapes of Burma and Nepal – constructing an intricate web of interconnection that collapses the boundaries between body, landscape, memory, and time.

This paper asks to what extent the porousness that structures the novel produces a distinctive form of ecosophical proximity: how humans, animals, spirits, and landscapes become collaborators in a single restless planetary story. Through close analysis of the text, the paper contends that *Latitudes of Longing* fosters ecosophical proximity by emphasising ecological consciousness, emotional attachment, and sensory experience. The earth is portrayed as an active, sentient entity that remembers, dreams, and shapes human lives rather than as inert scenery. By making a geological feature – the fault line running beneath the subcontinent – the organising figure of the narrative, Swarup foregrounds planetary memory and vulnerability and displaces anthropocentric

hierarchy with an image of nature as an agential force that moulds human subjectivity. The novel's fractured structure and shifting points of view further challenge linear temporality and spatial fixity, inviting readers to apprehend ecological relationships as dynamic, intergenerational, and deeply intertwined.

2. Theoretical Framework: From Ecosophy to Ecosophical Proximity

The term ecosophy, a combination of “ecological” and “philosophy” (or wisdom), was introduced by the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess in his account of deep ecology, where it denotes a personal philosophy of ecological harmony rather than a single, universal doctrine. Naess's ecosophy insisted that the nonhuman world possesses intrinsic value independent of its usefulness to human beings, and that human flourishing is inseparable from the flourishing of the wider biotic community.

Félix Guattari extended this line of thought in *The Three Ecologies*, arguing that environmental, social, and mental ecologies are inseparable registers of a single ethico-political problem, and that any adequate response to ecological crisis must also transform subjectivity itself. Read together, Naess and Guattari suggest that ecosophy is as much a mode of feeling and relating as it is a set of environmental commitments – a point of departure for the idea of ecosophical proximity developed in this paper: an intimacy that is simultaneously ethical, affective, and spatial.

This framework is further inflected by affective and material ecocriticism. Stacy Alaimo's notion of transcorporeality describes the human body as always already permeable to the substances, forces, and temporalities of the more-than-human world, while Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann's material ecocriticism reads matter itself – rock, water, ice – as a site of narrative agency and storied meaning. Timothy Morton's account of hyperobjects, entities such as climate or planetary geology that are massively distributed in time and space, offers a further vocabulary for describing how a novel might render the fault line or the glacier as an agent whose temporality exceeds any single human life. Rob Nixon's concept of slow violence, describing environmental harm that unfolds gradually and often invisibly across generations, and Ursula K. Heise's discussion of the tension between a sense of place and a sense of planet, complete the theoretical scaffolding through which this paper reads Swarup's novel. Ecosophical proximity, as used here, names the point at which these strands converge: an affective and ethical nearness to the nonhuman that is produced through narrative form rather than merely asserted as theme.

3. Literature Review

Latitudes of Longing has attracted a growing body of ecocritical scholarship

since its publication in 2018. Gaana Jayagopalan's (2021, pp. 165–82) reading of the novel's "Islands" section draws on affective ecocriticism and on Zayin Cabot's multiple-ontologies approach to argue that Swarup's fiction generates an ecoaesthetics capable of widening the horizons of environmental engagement across geological spacetimes. Melba Sabu and Meghna Mudaliar (2023, pp. 181–90) approach the Andaman sections of the novel through postcolonial ecocriticism, examining how the Karen community and other migrant figures relate their own lives to the ecological environments they inhabit, and situating this relation within the history of the Andaman Islands as a colonial penal settlement. Kalyani Hazri's (2020, pp. 65–72) thematic study reads the novel as a discourse on love and desire that destabilises fixed notions of gender and nation, while also noting how the novel's central conceit – the memory of Pangaea and the drift of continents – organises its treatment of time and human meaning-making; Hazri (2020, p. 11) cites Girija Prasad's speculation that Pangaea once dreamt of being a million islands, and elsewhere (2020, p. 86) notes the novel's suggestion that the gap between generations widens into a gulf between people inhabiting different maps. Hossein Nazari and Reyhaneh Goudarzi (2024) situate the novel within a comparative postcolonial ecocritical frame alongside Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood*, examining how both novels represent capitalist reorganisation of land and its ecological consequences. M. Sruthi Sriee and M. Kannadhasan (2024, pp. 72–74) trace the novel's engagement with transnationalism and historical memory across its Indian, Burmese, Nepali, and Bangladeshi settings, arguing that longing in the novel is geographical as much as emotional. This study collectively confirms that *Latitudes of Longing* is broadly seen as an important text for ecocritical and affective readings of contemporary South Asian fiction. Existing scholarship, however, tends to focus on either a single section of the novel, most often "Islands," or on its ecological and postcolonial dimensions separately. This paper extends this scholarship by reading the novel as a singular four-part planetary narrative and by proposing ecosophical proximity as a framework capable of cohering its ethical, affective, and geological registers across all four sections.

4. Methodology

This paper follows a qualitative, text-centred methodology combining close reading with ecocritical and affective-theoretical analysis. The primary text, Shubhangi Swarup's *Latitudes of Longing*, is read section by section – "Islands," "Faultline," "Valley," and "Snow Desert" – with special attention to recurring themes of geological time, spectrality, sensory experience, and interspecies relation. The close readings are placed within a larger theoretical discourse through the use of secondary sources from

extant ecocritical scholarship on the novel as well as foundational texts in ecosophy, deep ecology, material ecocriticism, and postcolonial ecocriticism. In order to track how ecosophical closeness functions throughout the novel's changing places and generations rather than inside a single narrative strand, the study is arranged thematically rather than strictly chronologically.

5. Textual Analysis

5.1 Islands: *The Andaman Islands* as a Sentient Boundary

Throughout history, islands have raised unmatched curiosity and propagated “myth and lore” (Baldacchino 2018, xxi), mostly due to their bounded and isolated nature. Islands are also some of the first territories that interested colonial powers because of their strategic locations in the ocean and the treasure of resources they hold (Aldrich and Johnson 2018). The Andaman and Nicobar Islands, with a plethora of exotic flora and fauna, tropical forests and pristine beaches, and mysterious indigenous tribes have tempted, since antiquity, the curiosity of scientists, anthropologists, tourists, capitalists, and even slave traders. A remote archipelago in the Bay of Bengal, the Andamans lay significantly isolated and evaded until the British decided to claim the territory as part of colonial India in 1789 by building a penal settlement. The uniqueness of the islands is not merely the cohabitation of people across class, caste, and religion: descendants of colonial-era convicts (“local borns”), Mundas, Oraons, and Santals (tribal communities recruited as forest labor); Karens from Burma; “criminal tribes” Moplahs from Malabar and Bhandas from central India; Bengali refugees from East Pakistan; and the indigenous tribes of the Andamans. It is also how the spatial meaning of the islands has been continuously reconfigured by different discourses at various junctures of history. From a menacing wilderness, the Andamans were transformed into a penitential space with the establishment of the penal colony. In the nationalist discourse, it is a site of pilgrimage, with the Cellular Jail (which incarcerated many Indian freedom fighters) an icon of patriotic sacrifice. In recent developmental discourse, it is promoted as a tourist paradise (Vaidik 2010). Moreover in the text *Latitudes of Longings*, the opening section, “Islands,” establishes the novel's governing premise that the earth is an active participant in human affairs rather than a passive setting. Set in the Andaman Islands shortly after Indian independence, the section follows the forester and scientist Girija Prasad and his clairvoyant wife, Chanda Devi, whose capacity to converse with ghosts and trees immediately blurs the boundary between the animate and the inanimate, the living and the dead, the scientific and the mystical. Girija Prasad's professional attention to the

islands' flora and fauna is repeatedly unsettled by Chanda Devi's perception of a landscape saturated with spirits – a doubling of scientific and spectral knowledge that models, at the level of narrative form, the kind of ecosophical proximity this paper describes: an intimacy that refuses to separate empirical observation from affective and even supernatural attachment to place.

The Andaman setting itself carries a double colonial history, having served as a penal settlement under British rule before becoming, in the novel's telling, a site of new beginnings for a newly independent nation. Scholars have read this doubled history as central to the novel's postcolonial ecocriticism, in which the islands' ecology cannot be separated from the history of imperial extraction and confinement that shaped them (Sabu and Mudaliar 2023, pp. 181–90). Within the terms of this paper, the islands function as a threshold space in which national, colonial, and geological histories converge, producing a proximity between human dispossession and nonhuman landscape that is at once historical and elemental.

A closer look at the texture of “Islands” shows how this proximity is built at the level of sentence and scene rather than asserted only as premise. Girija Prasad's scientific vocation as a forester positions him as a cataloguer of the archipelago's flora and fauna, yet the household he shares with Chanda Devi is, from the outset, a haunted one: a slaughtered goat's bleating disturbs the couple's nights, and it is Chanda Devi's own conversion to vegetarianism, and eventually Girija Prasad's, that quiets it, so that a domestic dietary choice becomes an act of ethical accommodation with a nonhuman – and moreover a dead – presence. When Chanda Devi rescues her husband from a crocodile earlier in their marriage, the moment functions less as adventure incident than as an inversion of expected agency: it is the wife's intimacy with the island's waters and creatures, not the scientist-husband's taxonomic mastery, that keeps them both alive. Reviewers have likewise noted that the couple's early married life is rendered through the island's own sensory registers – the sound of monsoon rain standing in for the silence between two near-strangers, the ocean's constant murmur described as indistinguishable from human breath (Goodreads reader reviews of the novel single out this passage as the emotional anchor of the section). Girija Prasad's occasional scientific musing that the supercontinent Pangaea might once have dreamt of breaking into a million islands, and that those islands might now dream of reuniting as one (Hazri 2020, p. 11), condenses the section's argument: geological drift and human longing are rendered as versions of the same restless desire for, and separation from, intimacy. Read together, these details

show “Islands” building ecosophical proximity cumulatively, through repeated small acts – a dietary concession to a ghost, a wife's rescue of her husband from a predator, a scientist's daydream about continental drift – rather than through any single declarative statement about nature.

5.2 Faultline and Valley: Migration, Displacement and, Political Landscapes

The novel's second and third sections, “Faultline” and “Valley,” relocate the narrative from island to mainland, tracing the story of Mary, the family's nanny, as she travels to Burma in search of her imprisoned son, and then the story of Thapa, a smuggler who accompanies her. Faultline” maps the reunion of the mother and son while also charting for the reader the remnants of the continental drift, the connections between the islands and the fault lines invisible to the naked eye.

The pathway of the Andaman Islands in the Indian Plate intersecting with the Burmese plate is carried forward in the section “Faultline.” The narrator says “Once a proud continent, Burma was crushed between India and Asia. India pushed it to the north with its drift, Asia squeezed it to the east in defiance. A weeping eye was all that was left of the face, buried under the rubble” (Swarup 138). These sections foreground the slow violence, in Nixon's sense, of political repression, displacement, and hunger, situating human longing within landscapes shaped by the Burmese political unrest of the 1970s and the shifting borderlands between Nepal and India. Here ecosophical proximity operates less through mysticism than through the intimate entanglement of bodily need – hunger, desire, exhaustion – with the terrain the characters cross. The novel's attention to monsoon, opium cultivation, and mountain trade routes situates human political struggle within a wider ecological and geological fabric, so that the fault line that gives the section its title becomes as much a figure for fractured political history as for tectonic instability.

Another important location situated between the Indian and Eurasian plates is Kathmandu where we meet Thapa, he leads the third section of the novel *Latitudes of Longing* “Valley.” The portion describes the journey of Thapa, who identifies the past in the present and sees visions of the future, including his family trapped in the debris of the earthquake that strikes Kathmandu. This segment concludes with Thapa's expedition into the Mishmi village in pursuit of the Mishmi Chief's picture frame that the chief's granddaughter is holding on to.

The specific pairing of hunger and landscape across these two sections is worth dwelling on. Mary's history in “Faultline” turns on an act of desperation driven by extreme hunger, just as Bebo's attachment to the much older Thapa in “Valley” is figured as a

hunger – for food, but also for the bedtime stories he tells her. Swarup places both women's survival strategies within landscapes defined by scarcity and extraction: the opium economy that structures Thapa's smuggling route through Nepal is itself an agricultural relationship with land, one in which cultivation becomes a mechanism of political and personal entrapment rather than of nourishment. The novel's naming choices reinforce this fusion of political and geological register: Mary's son adopts the name “Plato” as a revolutionary alias, gesturing toward abstract philosophical idealism, even as his imprisonment for communist activity roots him firmly in the material history of 1970s Burma. “Faultline” thus operates on two registers of the same word – the geological fault line of the subcontinent, and the political fault lines of colonial and postcolonial state violence – without ever allowing readers to treat these as separate vocabularies. The closing movement of these parts in which Thapa carries Mary's story north into the mountains, performs in miniature the novel's larger structural principle: a human way of surviving grief becomes, simultaneously, a geographical traverse across a fractured terrain.

5.3 Snow Desert: Glacial Memory and Geological Intimacy

The concluding section, “Snow Desert,” set in the high-altitude of Karakoram borderlands between India and Pakistan, brings the novel's geological framing to its fullest expression. The elderly patriarch Apo's late-life courtship of Ghazala unfolds against a landscape of glaciers, prayer wheels, and disputed frontiers, while a scientist's study of the region's earthquakes ties human courtship and human conflict alike to the deep time of the earth's crust. The section's setting on contested, militarised terrain – a no-man's-land produced by the partition of the subcontinent – allows Swarup to read the trauma of Partition through the same geological register used to describe continental drift earlier in the novel: both are framed as ruptures whose effects continue to reshape human lives long after the initial event. This closing juxtaposition of glacial time and human political history exemplifies ecosophical proximity as this paper defines it – an affective closeness to the nonhuman that does not erase but rather deepens attention to specifically human histories of loss and displacement.

Two details from this section extend the analysis. First, Apo's habitual gesture of spinning a Tibetan prayer wheel while roaming the mountainside links devotional repetition to the region's own cyclical, tectonic restlessness – the human ritual of turning becomes a small-scale echo of the plate movements that the visiting scientist is simultaneously trying to measure. Second, the section's culminating appearance of Girija Prasad – by now dead, and appearing as a ghost from “Islands” to his grandson Rana –

folds the novel's opening section back into its ending, so that a single spectral figure travels the entire geographical and temporal span of the narrative, from the Andaman Sea to the Karakoram peaks. This return of a ghost across sections is the novel's most explicit formal device for enacting planetary intimacy: proximity is no longer bound to a single landscape or generation but is carried, quite literally, by a restless dead man who moves between the novel's four geographies as freely as tectonic plates move beneath them. The scientist's earthquake research and Apo's search for a companion are, in this sense, two versions of the same longing that the goat's ghost and the Pangaea daydream voiced in "Islands": a wish for reunion across a rupture, whether marital, generational, or continental.

5.4 Ghosts, Yetis, and the Porousness of Ontological Categories

Across all the four sections, *Latitudes of Longing* populates its landscapes with ghosts, a yeti seeking human companionship, and a turtle who transforms into a boat and then a woman. These figures are not ornamental instances of magical realism so much as devices for dissolving the ontological boundaries that ordinarily separate human, animal, and spectral categories. A ghost that lingers in a forest, or an animal that becomes human, models at the level of plot the porousness that this paper identifies as central to ecosophical proximity: the refusal to treat species, embodiment, or even mortality as fixed boundaries rather than permeable thresholds. Read through Alaimo's transcorporeality, these figures suggest that human subjectivity in the novel is never self-contained but is continually remade through contact with nonhuman and even non-living matter – rock, ice, water, and the dead.

5.5 Narrative Structure as Planetary Temporality

The novel's division into four loosely linked novellas, connected by recurring characters and the recurring image of slootalgia for characters, landscape itself performs the kind of nonlinear, planetary temporality that Morton associates with hyperobjects. Rather than following a single protagonist across a continuous timeline, the novel passes its narrative between multiple generations and multiple regions, so that a character glimpsed in one section reappears, sometimes as a ghost, in another decades later. This structure resists the interpretive habit of locating ecological meaning in a single, bounded plot, instead asking readers to hold multiple times and places in view simultaneously; an approach to storytelling that mirrors the deep time of tectonic drift underlying the novel's geological imagery. In other terms, the novel's fracturedness is itself an ecosophical strategy: it enacts, rather than merely describes, an interconnection between body, landscape, memory, and time that exceeds the scale of any individual human life.

6. Discussion: Ethical-Affective Closeness as a New Definition of Proximity

All the four sections of *Latitudes of Longing* suggest that proximity, in Swarup's novel, is never simply a matter of physical nearness to a landscape. Characters can be intimate with a place they have never seen – as when a fault line felt only as tremor connects distant lives – while others remain estranged from landscapes they inhabit daily. What the novel offers instead is a model of proximity built from longing: the persistent, often unfulfilled desire for connection that binds human characters to lost homes, absent children, dead spouses, and to the earth itself. This longing is the affective mechanism through which ecosophical proximity is generated in the text, and it is this mechanism, rather than any single ecological theme, that gives the novel its distinctive contribution to Indian ecocritical fiction. Longing for loved ones along with longing for places they are or were connected with, is shown explicitly. Physical as well as emotional longing can be seen here. Moreover, this redefinition of proximity has implications beyond the single text. It suggests that ecosophical proximity in contemporary Indian literature more broadly can be seen not only through explicit ecological calamities like; deforestation, climate change, species loss – but also through the affective structures, such as longing, memory, and dispossession, that a narrative uses to bind humans and nonhumans together. *Latitudes of Longing* specifies that even a geological event as drastic as continental drift can be rendered intimate, and even a domestic longing as small as a mother's search for her son can be rendered planetary, once proximity is understood as an ethical and affective relation rather than a spatial given.

7. Conclusion

This paper has argued that Shubhangi Swarup's *Latitudes of Longing* produces a distinctive form of ecosophical proximity by treating the earth as a sentient, remembering, and dreaming participant in human history rather than as passive backdrop. Through its movement across the Andaman Islands, Burma, Nepal, and the Karakoram, its population of ghosts, yetis, and metamorphic creatures, and its fractured, multi-generational structure, the novel collapses the boundaries between body, landscape, memory, and time, producing a planetary story in which humans, animals, spirits, and landscapes appear as collaborators rather than as separate categories of being. Reading the novel through the combined lens of Naess's ecosophy, Guattari's three ecologies, and affective and material ecocriticism reveals that its central achievement lies not merely in its ecological subject matter but in the way its narrative form enacts an intimacy between the human and the more-than-human that is simultaneously ethical, affective, and geological. As such, *Latitudes of Longing* offers contemporary Indian

literary studies a resonant model for thinking planetary relations in the Anthropocene: one rooted in longing, dispossession, and the deep time of a restless, storied earth.

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