

A Comparison of the Reflection of Climate Concern in the Works of Janice Pariat and Amitav Ghosh

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Abstract - Climate fiction (cli-fi) is an emerging genre in contemporary literature, focusing on the consequences of climate change and ecological degradation. Both Janice Pariat and Amitav Ghosh, two prominent Indian authors, engage with these themes, though in different ways. Pariat's works often focus on individual emotions and personal landscapes, while Ghosh's narratives provide a broader canvas, often integrating historical, socio-political, and environmental dimensions. This paper seeks to compare and contrast the treatment of climate fiction in the works of Pariat, specifically *The Nine-Chambered Heart* (2017), and Ghosh, particularly *The Hungry Tide* (2004) and *Sea of Poppies* (2008). By examining their narrative strategies, character development, and environmental concerns, this paper explores how these authors represent climate change and environmental issues, both as immediate concerns and as complex, multi-layered phenomena. Through textual analysis, the paper highlights the subtle yet powerful ways in which both authors engage with the looming environmental crisis and how their respective works offer rich insights into the human condition in the face of such challenges.

I. INTRODUCTION

The urgency of climate change has made its way into various literary forms, with climate fiction (cli-fi) emerging as a significant genre in contemporary literature. Authors around the world are exploring the intimate connections between human lives and the environment, often using fiction as a tool to discuss the complex issues of global warming, ecological decline, and social injustice. In South Asia, Janice Pariat and Amitav Ghosh stand out as two voices whose works grapple with environmental themes, although in distinct ways.

While Pariat's fiction is more subtle in its engagement with environmental issues, focusing on emotional landscapes and personal interactions, Ghosh's works provide an expansive narrative scope that critiques colonialism, global trade, and the interconnection between humanity and the natural world. This paper delves into their contributions to the cli-fi genre, comparing their respective approaches to environmental issues, narrative style, and thematic concerns. By analyzing *The Nine-Chambered Heart* (2017) by Janice Pariat and *The Hungry Tide* (2004) as well as *Sea of Poppies* (2008) by Amitav Ghosh, this paper seeks to understand how both authors employ climate fiction to reflect on the human relationship with nature and the devastating effects of climate change.

Janice Pariat's Environmental Reflections Through Emotional Landscapes

Janice Pariat's *The Nine-Chambered Heart* is a novel that defies conventional genre classifications. While not a traditional cli-fi work, it incorporates environmental elements that underscore the emotional landscapes of its characters. Pariat's storytelling

approach is deeply personal, focusing on the connections between human emotions and the natural world. Her writing engages with the idea that nature, in all its forms, reflects the turbulence of the inner human world. In her exploration of climate change, Pariat uses nature not merely as a backdrop but as an active participant in the psychological and emotional development of her characters.

In this novel, nature is often depicted as a realm of transformation and instability. The protagonist's journey is intertwined with the changing landscapes around her, a dynamic that mirrors the volatility and unpredictability of the world. For instance, when the protagonist is wandering through a coastal landscape, Pariat describes:

The air was thick with the smell of the sea, salt, brine, a distant sweetness. The waves kept rolling in, one after the other, the scent of the ocean wrapping itself around her like an embrace, both comforting and suffocating. It was as though the world itself was unstable, shifting with every breath she took. (Pariat: 94)

Here, the sea becomes a metaphor for the unpredictable emotional state of the protagonist, who finds herself in a personal crisis. The environmental setting is deeply interwoven with the psychological and emotional states of the characters, suggesting a broader reflection on human vulnerability in the face of an unpredictable natural world. Pariat's delicate and nuanced portrayal of nature evokes a sense of personal responsibility and awareness, even if not explicitly tied to the global discourse on climate change.

Furthermore, in Pariat's works, nature is not only an external force but also an internalized reality for the characters. This is reflected in how the shifting landscapes mirror the tumult of human emotions and the moral dilemmas faced by the characters. The connection between the characters' personal lives and their physical surroundings provides a compelling argument for considering the environment as a key player in human emotional and social experiences.

Amitav Ghosh's Broader Environmental and Historical Scope

In contrast to Pariat's more intimate approach, Amitav Ghosh's works, particularly *The Hungry Tide* and *Sea of Poppies*, present a broader, historical, and more explicitly political engagement with environmental issues. Ghosh's approach to climate fiction is more directly engaged with the socio-political dimensions of environmental change, such as colonialism, global trade, and their intertwined effects on the natural world. *The Hungry Tide* is set in the Sundarbans, an ecological region known for its fragile ecosystems and vulnerability to climate change. Ghosh explores the intersection between environmental degradation, human existence, and social inequities. In this novel, the effects of climate change are not

merely abstract; they are intimately felt by the people of the region, whose livelihoods and very existence are tied to the land and water. The novel's protagonist, Piya, a marine biologist, navigates the delta's complex ecosystem, encountering both the beauty and danger of this endangered environment.

Ghosh's representation of the Sundarbans reflects the precariousness of this environment and the dangers posed by human encroachment and climate change. The river's tides, shifting landscapes, and the relentless advance of the sea are recurrent motifs that highlight the destructive effects of global warming. For example, Ghosh writes: "The Sundarbans were a place of contradictions—both perilous and beautiful, wild and dangerous. There were moments when it felt as if nature itself was on the brink of collapse" (132).

Here, the Sundarbans are not merely a geographical location but a living entity that embodies both the possibilities and perils of human-nature interaction. The region's vulnerability to rising sea levels is explored with a sense of urgency, highlighting the environmental impact of human activities. The novel also delves into the lives of the marginalized communities living in this delta, offering a critique of social inequality, colonial exploitation, and the environmental injustices faced by these communities.

In *Sea of Poppies*, Ghosh sets his narrative against the backdrop of the opium trade in the 19th century, exploring the environmental impact of colonial exploitation. The opium cultivation, which severely altered the landscape of the Indian subcontinent, is depicted not only as an economic activity but also as a force that disrupts ecosystems. Ghosh's portrayal of the colonial trade in opium emphasizes the lasting effects of imperialism on both the land and its people.

For instance, Ghosh writes, "The earth, as they were beginning to discover, was not a passive recipient of the things men did. It was an active and resisting force. What men did to the land could never be undone" (158). In this passage, Ghosh suggests that nature is not a passive entity but an active force that responds to the human impact on it. The colonial system's exploitation of the land and its resources is mirrored in the ecological degradation that follows. This passage speaks to the broader environmental critique that Ghosh weaves throughout the novel, addressing the historical roots of contemporary environmental crises and their lasting repercussions.

II. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

A key thematic similarity between Pariat's and Ghosh's works is the depiction of nature as both a source of beauty and danger. However, while Ghosh's narratives focus on large-scale environmental issues such as colonial exploitation, global trade, and the tangible consequences of climate change, Pariat's works focus more on the intimate, personal relationship individuals have with their environments. Pariat's treatment of nature is often indirect, using nature as a metaphor for emotional states and personal crises. Ghosh, on the other hand, presents a more direct engagement with the environment, exploring the historical, political, and ecological forces shaping human-nature relations.

In terms of narrative style, Pariat's work is fragmented and introspective, offering glimpses into the emotional lives of her characters. Her portrayal of nature is subtle and often metaphorical, allowing readers to interpret the connection between human experience and the natural world. In contrast, Ghosh's novels are more expansive, combining historical context, social commentary, and environmental concerns. His storytelling is multi-layered, weaving together the personal and the political, the local and the global.

Another key difference is the scale at which both authors operate. While Pariat focuses on personal stories and emotional landscapes, Ghosh's narratives operate on a much broader scale, incorporating historical and ecological contexts. Ghosh's novels often reflect on the deep interconnectedness of human history, politics, and the environment, suggesting that climate change and environmental degradation are not just modern problems but the consequences of historical actions.

III. CONCLUSION

Janice Pariat and Amitav Ghosh offer distinct yet complementary perspectives on climate fiction, with both authors addressing the intersection of nature, humanity, and climate change. Pariat's *The Nine-Chambered Heart* presents nature as a subtle reflection of the emotional and psychological states of her characters, emphasizing the personal experience of environmental change. Ghosh, through *The Hungry Tide* and *Sea of Poppies*, explores the historical, political, and ecological dimensions of climate change, highlighting the systemic and global forces that shape environmental degradation.

While Pariat's work is introspective and focuses on the individual's connection to the natural world, Ghosh's works provide a broader lens, incorporating colonial history, social inequality, and ecological destruction. Both authors, however, convey a powerful message about the fragility of the environment and the urgent need to reconsider human relationships with nature. Through their storytelling, Pariat and Ghosh challenge readers to think critically about the environmental challenges we face and the roles we play in shaping the future of the planet.

REFERENCES

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Author Profile

Dr Satyajit Patil is presently working in Pemraj Sarda College, Ahilyanagar (Maharashtra) as Professor of English. He received National Merit Scholarship on completing higher secondary education. He was University Topper at B. A. and Gold Medalist at M. A. (English). Dr. Patil cleared both the SET and NET in a maiden attempt. He was also selected for the Junior Research Fellowship by the UGC. He has 25 years of teaching experience at Undergraduate and Post Graduate Levels.

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