

Wounded Landscapes: An Eco-Memory Reading of Human–Nature Violence in Select Indian Climate Fiction

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Received: 16/03/2026

Accepted: 17/04/2026

Published: 28/04/2026

Abstract: This paper explores how select works of contemporary Indian climate fiction engage with the intertwined histories of ecological trauma and human violence through the lens of eco-memory. Situated at the intersection of environmental humanities and postcolonial literary studies, the study argues that Nilanjana Roy's *Black River*, Prayag Akbar's *Leila*, Bijal Vachharajani's *Savi and the Memory Keeper*, and Shubhangi Swarup's *Latitudes of Longing* depict landscapes deeply scarred by climate change, extractive capitalism, and colonial legacies. At the same time, these texts animate memory as a vital force for ethical engagement, resistance, and potential regeneration.

Through qualitative textual analysis and theoretical grounding in trauma and memory studies, the paper demonstrates how each narrative situates violence at the intersection of environmental degradation, social injustice, and individual subjectivity. It further contends that eco-memory operates not merely as preservation but as an active, embodied archive inscribed in rivers, forests, wastelands, and urban ruins. By foregrounding silenced ecological histories and uneven climate experiences shaped by caste, class, and gender, these novels challenge anthropocentric frameworks and call for a rethinking of human–nature relations. Ultimately, the study positions Indian climate fiction as a critical literary site where storytelling becomes an act of witnessing, mourning, and reimagining more just and reciprocal ecological futures.

Keywords: *Eco-memory, Ecological Trauma, Environmental Degradation, Anthropocentrism, Climate Fiction, Memory and Landscape.*

Cite this article: Kaviarasu, S. & Kumar, S. A. (2026). Wounded Landscapes: An Eco-Memory Reading of Human–Nature Violence in Select Indian Climate Fiction. *MRS Journal of Arts, Humanities and Literature*, 3, 28-30.

Introduction

The accelerating environmental crises of the twenty-first century—ranging from climate change and biodiversity loss to water scarcity and pollution—have intensified scholarly interest in how literature represents ecological transformation. The concept of the Anthropocene, which denotes an epoch marked by significant human impact on Earth's systems, raises urgent questions about representation, responsibility, and memory. How does literature narrate landscapes that have been irreversibly altered by human activity? How are histories of ecological violence remembered, silenced, or reimagined? Indian climate fiction offers a compelling site for exploring these questions.

Rooted in specific socio-cultural and ecological contexts, these narratives often foreground the uneven distribution of environmental harm, revealing how climate change intersects with historical inequalities such as caste hierarchies, colonial exploitation, and economic disparity. This paper proposes an eco-memory framework to analyze how such texts narrate human–nature violence.

Eco-memory refers to the processes through which ecological and human histories—particularly those marked by trauma—are remembered, mediated, and embedded within

narrative forms. Unlike conventional memory studies that focus primarily on human experience, eco-memory expands the scope to include landscapes, ecosystems, and non-human agencies as carriers of memory. It emphasizes that environments are not passive backdrops but active archives of historical violence and cultural meaning.

This study focuses on four contemporary Indian climate fiction texts: Nilanjana Roy's *Black River* (2021), Prayag Akbar's *Leila* (2017), Bijal Vachharajani's *Savi and the Memory Keeper* (2022), and Shubhangi Swarup's *Latitudes of Longing* (2018). While differing in narrative style and thematic emphasis, these works explore how environmental degradation is intertwined with social injustice and how memory becomes central to understanding and responding to ecological crisis.

Methods

This research employs a qualitative, interpretive methodology grounded in literary analysis. The study integrates:

- Close reading of primary texts to examine narrative structure, imagery, and thematic concerns

- Theoretical analysis using frameworks from environmental humanities, trauma theory, and cultural memory studies
- Comparative approach to identify convergences and divergences across texts

The analysis is structured around three key dimensions:

1. Environmental Violence – Representations of ecological destruction, pollution, and climate-induced transformations
2. Social Violence – Intersections of environmental harm with caste, class, gender, and political power
3. Mnemonic Agency (Eco-Memory) – The role of memory in preserving, interpreting, and resisting ecological trauma

The study also draws on concepts from scholars such as Andreas Huyssen and Aleida Assmann, who emphasize the role of cultural memory in shaping collective identity. By extending these ideas to environmental contexts, the paper interprets landscapes as repositories of both ecological and social histories.

Results

Black River: Fragmentation and Ecological Loss

Nilanjana Roy's *Black River* presents a dystopian vision of ecological collapse in India. The novel depicts contaminated rivers, scorched forests, and toxic urban spaces, all of which symbolize the consequences of unchecked industrialization and environmental neglect.

The narrative structure is fragmented, mirroring the breakdown of ecological and social continuity. Memory in this text functions primarily as a record of loss. Characters struggle to recall past environments—clean rivers, fertile lands, and seasonal rhythms—highlighting the disjunction between past abundance and present devastation.

Eco-memory emerges as an ethical imperative: remembering lost landscapes becomes a way of acknowledging responsibility and resisting total erasure. The absence of memory itself is portrayed as a form of violence, emphasizing how ecological destruction also entails cultural and historical loss.

Leila: Memory as Resistance

In *Leila*, Prayag Akbar constructs a dystopian society governed by rigid hierarchies and authoritarian control. Environmental degradation is intertwined with social oppression, as access to clean air, water, and safe living conditions is restricted based on caste and class.

The regime actively suppresses memory, erasing histories of diversity and ecological harmony. In this context, remembering becomes an act of resistance. The protagonist's search for her daughter parallels a deeper quest to reclaim suppressed histories and identities.

Eco-memory in *Leila* is insurgent—it challenges official narratives and exposes the mechanisms of power that seek to control both environment and memory. The novel demonstrates how violence operates not only through physical destruction but also through epistemic erasure.

Savi and the Memory Keeper: Memory as Survival

Bijal Vachharajani's *Savi and the Memory Keeper* offers a more grounded and intimate portrayal of climate crisis. Set in a drought-stricken landscape, the novel focuses on marginalized communities facing displacement and loss.

Here, memory functions as a survival strategy. Communities recall past ecological knowledge—monsoon patterns, agricultural practices, and cultural traditions—as a way of coping with present challenges.

The narrative emphasizes sensory memory, evoking the smell of rain, the texture of soil, and the sounds of nature. This embodied form of eco-memory resists abstraction and connects environmental issues to lived experience. Memory becomes a tool for resilience, enabling communities to preserve identity and imagine alternative futures.

Latitudes of Longing: Relational and Planetary Memory

Shubhangi Swarup's *Latitudes of Longing* expands the scope of eco-memory to a global scale. The novel interweaves multiple narratives across diverse landscapes, highlighting the interconnectedness of ecological systems.

Eco-memory in this text is relational and interspecies. It extends beyond human experience to include plants, animals, and even microorganisms. Landscapes function as archives of both human and non-human histories, challenging anthropocentric perspectives.

The novel introduces non-linear temporality, suggesting that memory operates across different scales and species. This broader conception of eco-memory emphasizes empathy and interconnectedness, encouraging readers to rethink their relationship with the natural world.

Discussion

The analysis reveals that eco-memory functions as both a thematic and narrative strategy in Indian climate fiction. These texts collectively demonstrate that environmental violence cannot be understood in isolation from social and historical contexts.

Eco-memory challenges anthropocentric frameworks by highlighting the agency of landscapes and non-human entities. It also exposes how systems of power shape what is remembered and what is forgotten. In dystopian settings like *Leila*, memory becomes a site of resistance, while in texts like *Savi and the Memory Keeper*, it serves as a foundation for resilience and survival.

Furthermore, eco-memory operates as an ethical practice. By recalling histories of ecological destruction and social injustice, these narratives compel readers to confront their complicity in systems of exploitation. At the same time, they offer possibilities for reimagining more just and sustainable futures.

The comparative analysis underscores that while each text presents a distinct vision, they all converge on the idea that memory is essential for navigating ecological crisis. Whether as loss, resistance, survival, or relational understanding, eco-memory provides a framework for interpreting human–nature relationships in a time of environmental uncertainty.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that eco-memory is central to understanding representations of human–nature violence in contemporary Indian climate fiction. Through the analysis of *Black River*, *Leila*, *Savi and the Memory Keeper*, and *Latitudes of Longing*, the paper highlights how memory connects ecological trauma with social histories.

These narratives reveal that environmental crises are not merely scientific or technical issues but deeply cultural and ethical concerns. By foregrounding wounded landscapes and silenced histories, Indian climate fiction transforms storytelling into an act of witnessing, mourning, and resistance.

Ultimately, eco-memory offers a powerful lens for rethinking human–nature relations. It encourages a move beyond anthropocentrism toward a more inclusive and ethical engagement with the environment. In doing so, it opens possibilities for imagining futures grounded in ecological justice, collective responsibility, and mutual care.

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