



Harrowed Terrains: A Study of the Ecogothic Narratives in South Asian Literature.

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Abstract: The term "Ecogothic" merges ecological concerns with gothic elements, creating a narrative space where the haunting of landscapes reflects environmental anxieties. In South Asian literature, this genre emerges as a crucial vehicle for expressing the complex interplay between cultural identity and ecological crises. Authors such as Deepa Anappara, Roma Tearne, Patricia Weerakoon, and Amitav Ghosh utilize gothic motifs to deepen the understanding of environmental issues in their narratives, offering readers both a critique and an insight into the contemporary ecological landscape. Through the ecocritical lens, South Asian Gothic literature exposes the consequences of human actions on nature and how these dystopian visions and haunted landscapes serve as metaphors for this devastating impact.

Keywords: Ecogothic, South Asian Literature, Haunted Landscapes, Environmental Degradation, Colonial Legacies, Urban Decay.

I. Introduction

The "Ecogothic" merges environmental concerns with the gothic's exploration of fear and the uncanny, providing a potent lens for examining the haunting landscapes in literature. The genre reveals how environmental degradation, colonial legacies, and human interaction with the natural world imbue these landscapes with dread and mystery. Through the lens of ecocriticism, South Asian Gothic literature exposes the consequences of human actions on the natural world, including deforestation, pollution, and climate change. These texts often feature haunted landscapes, supernatural creatures, and apocalyptic visions, which serve as metaphors for the devastating impact of human activities on the environment. These landscape tropes are molded by the writers as gothic spaces to share their ecological concerns. Furthermore, it highlights the ways in which marginalized communities are disproportionately affected by environmental degradation, revealing the intersections between ecological and social justice.

The Ecogothic, provides a nuanced understanding of enacted violence and spatial disorientation, connected with the gothic genre, offering insights into the region's unique environmental challenges and cultural responses to them. This study examines the works of Deepa Anappara, Roma Tearne, Patricia Weerakoon, and Amitav Ghosh, by

exploring the darker aspects of human-nature interactions and how Gothic literature provides a powerful tool for ecological critique and activism.

II. Statement of Problem

The intersection of ecological concerns and gothic elements in literature, referred to as the “Ecogothic”, is increasingly relevant in the context of climate change and environmental degradation. South Asian literature, with its rich cultural and historical tapestry, offers a unique lens through which to explore these themes. However, the specific manifestations of the ecogothic in the works of contemporary South Asian authors remain under-explored. This research seeks to fill this gap by analyzing how Anappara, Tearne, Weerakoon, and Ghosh incorporate ecogothic elements to address environmental crises and societal issues.

III. Research Objectives:

1. To analyze the thematic representation of nature and the environment in the selected works of Deepa Anappara, Roma Tearne, Patricia Weerakoon, and Amitav Ghosh.
2. To explore the use of gothic elements in these authors' narratives and how they enhance ecological themes.
3. To investigate the cultural and socio-political contexts that shape the Ecogothic narratives in South Asian literature.

IV. Research Questions:

1. How do the selected authors depict the relationship between humans and nature within an Ecogothic framework?
2. How do gothic elements function to critique environmental degradation and societal issues in South Asia?
3. What cultural and historical contexts influence the representation of Ecogothic themes in the works of Anappara, Tearne, Weerakoon, and Ghosh?

V. The Uncanny in Anappara’s “Djinn Patrol on the Purple Line”

Deepa Anappara’s debut novel *“Djinn Patrol on the Purple Line”* (2020) juxtaposes the innocence of childhood with the haunting specter of urban decay. The sprawling slums or “basti” where the story unfolds are symbolic of a haunted landscape, overflowing with garbage, noise, and despair. Anappara uses the child narrator Jai and intertwines the gothic tropes of “Bhoot”, “Djinn” and “smog” with real-world fears of environmental neglect and socioeconomic disparity.

These tropes are used to convey the traumatic experiences of the marginalized communities residing in the slum. The landscape, marred by pollution and industrialization, becomes a site of both physical and spiritual corruption, which evokes a distinctly Ecogothic sensibility, where the environment is both a witness to and a participant in the horrors faced by its inhabitants.

Jai as a narrator is used as a vehicle for social commentary on the neoliberalist developments in post-colonial India which have gravely impacted the “urban outcasts” of the slum. The deep contrast between the inherent innocence of the child and sinister urban world adds to the complexity required for the writer to address the intersection of issues of environmental degradation with human and non-human relationships.

VI. The Melancholics Seas in Tearne's "Bone China"

Roma Tearne's "Bone China" (2008) explores the ecological and historical wounds of Sri Lanka through its coastline. The sea, central to the novel, is portrayed as a simultaneously beautiful and menacing force. It reflects colonial exploitation and the trauma of civil war while serving as a backdrop for environmental devastation. Tearne's vivid descriptions of the encroaching sea evoke a sense of impending doom, blending natural forces with human despair.

This interplay highlights how South Asian writers use the Ecogothic to address not only environmental crises but also collective historical grief.

On a similar tangent, Tearne's "Mosquito," (2007) also explores the intersection of personal and environmental trauma through the lens of the Sri Lankan civil war. The lush landscapes become sites of horror, reflecting the devastation wrought by human conflict and ecological destruction. Her use of vivid imagery and gothic elements underscores the psychological impact of environmental loss, blending beauty with a sense of foreboding.

VII. Sacred Groves and Moral Decay in Patricia Weerakoon's Works

Patricia Weerakoon's narratives, influenced by her Sri Lankan heritage, delve into the tension between sacred landscapes and their desecration. Her works like "Empire's Children" (2015) often feature groves and forests imbued with spiritual significance, only to have their sanctity threatened by human encroachment. The Ecogothic emerges as the forests become both protectors and avengers, representing nature's resistance to exploitation. Weerakoon's treatment of these landscapes underscores the consequences of disregarding ecological balance, illustrating how the destruction of sacred spaces leads to moral and environmental decay.

In "The Last Mango in the Tree," Weerakoon delves into the tensions between tradition and modernity in the context of environmental changes in Sri Lanka. Her narrative employs gothic elements, such as haunting memories and spectral presences, to explore the legacy of colonialism and its impact on the land. The Ecogothic serves as a framework to critique the commodification of nature and the spiritual disconnection from the environment.

VIII. Ghosh's Sundarbans: A Living, Breathing, Gothic Entity

Amitav Ghosh's "The Hungry Tide" (2004) epitomizes the ecogothic through its portrayal of the Sundarbans, a mangrove ecosystem fraught with danger and beauty. These mangroves serve as a haunting backdrop and the landscape becomes a character in its own right, symbolizing both life and death; alive with the threat of tiger attacks, treacherous tides, and the spirits of the drowned. It narrates the history of the forced evacuation of refugees from the island of Marichjhappi through which Ghosh navigates the themes of displacement and environmental disaster.

Ghosh's depiction of the Sundarbans encapsulates the tension between humanity and nature. His incorporation of myth and folklore enhances the gothic atmosphere, positioning the landscape as an active participant in the characters' struggles.

The region's vulnerability to climate change adds a layer of contemporary relevance, emphasizing how ecological disruption transforms the environment into a site of gothic horror.

IX. Conclusion

The exploration of ecogothic themes in the works of Anappara, Tearne, Weerakoon, and Ghosh reveals a profound engagement with environmental issues in South Asian literature. This ecocritical approach towards gothic works provides a nuanced understanding of enacted violence and spatial disorientation connected with the gothic genre, offering insights into the regions' unique environmental challenges and cultural responses to them.

Through the integration of gothic elements, these authors illuminate the intricate connections between nature, culture, and identity. As climate change continues to pose existential threats globally, the ecogothic serves not only as a lens for literary analysis but also as a call to acknowledge and address the ecological crises that haunt our world.

X. References:

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