

Ecologies of Justice: Convergences and Contrasts in Indian and Southeast Asian Literature

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Abstract

In this paper, the intersections between ecological justice, cultural identity, rights of Indigenous peoples, and displacement through selected literary texts from India and Southeast Asia is explored. Specifically, literary works such as “The Felling of the Banyan Tree” by Dilip Chitre, *The Yearning of Seeds* (2011) by Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, and *The Hungry Tide* (2004) by Amitav Ghosh are analysed. In all these works, there is an interrelation between the ecological transformation that takes place in particular regions and the broader context of the struggle between different aspects of human life: memories, sense of belonging, power and survival of humanity. In “The Felling of the Banyan Tree,” there is a powerful metaphor of the felling of a tree used to represent familial displacement and the separation from ancestry. In Nongkynrih’s poetry, there is a description of the ecological and cultural transformations that have been taking place in the Khasi area.

This paper analyses the correlation between conservation policies and the problems of human security and sovereignty in the Sundarbans area, where socially and politically marginalized people live. By adopting an ecocritical comparative methodology, the paper examines the way in which these texts question anthropocentric approaches to development and highlight the injustices associated with uneven distribution of environmental hazards and assets. The paper posits that ecological justice involves much more than the safeguarding of nature and includes issues of cultural preservation, social justice, indigenous wisdom, and the right to live in ancestral territories.

Keywords: Ecological Justice, Comparative Ecocriticism, Indigenous Knowledge, Environmental Displacement, Cultural Identity.

1. Introduction

Environment justice has become a relevant issue in contemporary literary studies in the wake of climate change, deforestation, industrialization, resource extraction, ecological displacement and its effect on vulnerable communities. This problem allows understanding the environmental crisis not only in terms of science and economy but in terms of social inequality, culture, human rights and ethics by means of literary studies. The idea of environmental justice involves inequality in distribution of environmental burdens and benefits, exclusion of marginalized groups from decisions about their environment and recognition of diverse relationships with the environment. Hence, Indian and Southeast Asian literature is a good

platform for analysis of representation of ecological degradation and struggle of communities that are tightly connected with natural environment in terms of their livelihoods, memories and identity.

Indian literature presents diversity of ecology of the region, including Himalayan forests, Indigenous lands, agriculture, urban environment and rivers. Authors often reveal contradictions between development and sustainability, exposing the influence of industrial growth, deforestation, displacement and exploitation on environment and vulnerable communities. “On Killing a Tree” by Gieve Patel reveals that nature cannot be easily killed in such simple manner as by killing a tree.

Dilip Chitre’s poem “The Felling of the Banyan Tree” equates tree felling to memory and displacement of families and their loss of ancestral ties. In the poetry of Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, especially the book *The Yearning of Seeds* (2011), ecological transformation in the Khasi region of Northeastern India, is indistinguishable from cultural transformation as well as the imposition of development priorities on Indigenous landscapes. Likewise, in *The Hungry Tide* (2004) by Amitav Ghosh, the interrelationship between conservation of nature, survival of humans and state authority in the Sundarbans of Bangladesh and India are explored, proving that conservation could be controversial, depending on the neglect of the needs and rights of local communities.

There are similar themes in Southeast Asian literature involving the region's tropical forests, archipelagic geography, deltas, coastal communities and multicultural indigenous populations. In the Philippines, for example, ecological literature involves deforestation, storms, coastal hazard and environmental inequality. In Vietnam, there is literature about bamboo trees, rivers and landscapes that can link environmental adaptability to the nation’s history and collective identity. The literature in Indonesia provides valuable opportunities to examine the destruction of the forest, plantation economy, resource extraction and the impact of environmental degradation on rural and indigenous communities.

Despite these literary traditions being informed by different historical and political circumstances, the theme of inequality in human relations with each other and the natural environment is common in both. In this article, the convergences and divergences of Indian and Southeast Asian literature with regard to the theme of environmental justice are explored. It discusses how the Indian and Southeast Asian literary traditions critique the idea of nature as an object for exploitation and expose the fact that the damage inflicted upon the environment often reinforces already existing social injustices. At the same time, the paper demonstrates how these traditions of literature differ in their literary approaches due to particular regional, historical and political factors.

2. Methodology

This research follows a qualitative comparison approach involving ecocritical and environmental justice theories as well as close reading. The focus will be on certain poems and literary pieces from India and Southeast Asia that represent recurrent themes of environmental pollution, social injustice, cultural dislocation and resistance. The major texts will be the poem by Gieve Patel, “On Killing a Tree”; the poem by Dilip Chitre, “The Felling of the Banyan Tree”; *The Yearning of Seeds* by Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih; and *The Hungry Tide* by Amitav Ghosh. In terms of Southeast Asian literature, Philippine Eco poetry, Vietnamese representations of bamboo and landscape, and Indonesian forest writing will be considered. The latter texts will be treated as individual literary works without belonging to homogenous national traditions.

The theoretical framework is informed by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm’s *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (1996) as well as Lawrence Buell’s *The Environmental*

Imagination (1995). The former sets the basis for the analysis of the interrelationship of literature and the environment whereas the latter analyses the literary portrayal of the physical environment. Rob Nixon's book titled *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011) gives another dimension to the analysis of environmental destruction that happens slowly and impacts mostly poor people. Environmental justice is analyzed from three perspectives which are related to each other – distributional, procedural, and recognitional justice. The use of recurring images, conflict, and representations of space and marginal communities is noted in the analysis.

The comparison also looks at the varying representations of environmental injustice within the selected texts. As both India and Southeast Asian regions, have different societies and ecologies, it is not correct to view either society as homogeneous. In addition, the research will distinguish between climate change and other environmental issues including pollution, habitat destruction, deforestation and extraction of resources. Furthermore, the discussion will dwell on the role that natural elements like trees, rivers, forest, coasts, etc., play as symbols of memory, survival, identity and resistance. Ecocriticism theory is the main theory to use in examining the connections among literature, pollution of the environment and social justice.

3. Literature Review

Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm's book *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (1996), defines the importance of studying literary depictions of nature and human society in connection with its physical surroundings. Lawrence Buell's work *The Environmental Imagination* (1995) elaborates on how literature can oppose anthropocentrism and make readers see the environment in a way beyond being a mere backdrop to human life. Rob Nixon's book *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011), continues this line of thinking by highlighting the ways in which environmental pollution takes place through slow processes and is mostly experienced by poor people.

All of these approaches to critical studies have much value for the book *Ecologies of Justice: Convergences and Contrasts in Indian and Southeast Asian Literature*, as they allow exploring the interaction of environmental damage and poverty, dispossession, cultural marginality and lack of access to natural resources. There are numerous examples of the interaction between Indian literature, environment and social injustice. Gieve Patel's poem "On Killing a Tree" shows the violence inherent in the destruction of a living organism, thus questioning the assumption that the nature can be easily manipulated by humans. Dilip Chitre's "The Felling of the Banyan Tree" describes the correlation between the changes in the environment, memory of ancestors, family displacement and sense of dislocation. Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih's *The Yearning of Seeds* provides an important insight into the interaction between Khasi landscapes, indigenous identity and development in modern times. Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2004), taking place in the Sundarbans, raises many issues related to the conflict between environmental conservation and social justice.

All these texts indicate the inseparability of environmental destruction from problems of cultural identity, inequalities in power relations and community rights for involvement in decision-making regarding their surroundings. Moreover, the destruction of forests, rivers and other natural habitats also suggest destruction of forests, rivers and other natural spaces can result in the erosion of traditional knowledge and place-based cultural practices.

In the context of Southeast Asian literature, too, environmental justice relates to indigenous knowledge, deforestation, community resilience and the vulnerability of coastal communities. The Vietnamese poem

“Tre Việt Nam” (“Vietnamese Bamboo”) by Nguyễn Duy uses bamboo to express a sense of community identity, resilience and continuity, illustrating how natural images can ensure relationships between the community and its landscape. Another relevant sphere of literary inquiry in this respect could be Philippine Eco poetry that involves issues related to environmental injustice, ecological vulnerability and the plight of communities affected by environmental catastrophes. Literary depictions of forests and rural landscapes in Indonesia can be studied in the context of the conflict of interests between commercial deforestation, ecological sustainability and the welfare of local communities. These literatures when examined comparatively will highlight common themes along with some differences: While Indian literature is often marked by themes of ancestral landscapes, displacement and conservation conflicts, Southeast Asian literature under consideration will add to this list tropical forests, archipelagic environment and coastal vulnerability among other things.

The present study expands on such critical approaches through the comparison of selected representations of environmental injustice, cultural displacement, and ecological resistance in the literature of India and Southeast Asia, showing that environmental justice necessitates not only the preservation of natural environments but also the recognition of cultural diversity and the rights of indigenous people.

4. Discussion

Nature, memory and cultural identity

One of the most important commonalities found in the literature of India and Southeast Asia is the portrayal of nature as a storehouse of culture and collective memory. Nature – in the form of trees, rivers, forests, or agricultural lands – represents much more than just an object with some practical significance. Its destruction entails both ecological and cultural losses.

One poem from the Indian subcontinent which demonstrates how environmental destruction leads to cultural uprooting is “The Felling of the Banyan Tree” by Dilip Chitre. The banyan tree in the poem is seen as symbolic of memories of ancestors as well as the continuance of life in a family. The felling of the banyan tree is symbolic of the relocation of the family from an environment that is familiar to them. As a result, urban development takes place not only through spatial transformation but also through the transformation of individual identities. In Gieve Patel’s poem, “On Killing a Tree,” the killing of a tree takes place through a prolonged and violent process and the poem rejects the assumption that nature can be controlled by humans.

Similarly, another literary principle found in *The Yearning of Seeds* is that of ecological imagery as an expression of cultural identity. Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih writes poems that deal with the Khasi landscape and the effects of modernization on it, and the conflicts between indigenous ways of being in relationship with nature and the growth of industry or commerce. Here too, ecological destruction implies cultural dispossession, since there is a cultural attachment to the destruction of trees, hills, and rivers. In Nguyễn Duy’s Southeast Asian Vietnamese poem “Tre Việt Nam” (“Vietnamese Bamboo”), the image of bamboo represents cultural resilience and continuity.

What can be observed is that there are literary principles that operate in many texts across different literary traditions. One is ecological imagery representing cultural attachment and cultural dispossession through destruction of the environment. The other is that there are differences in the symbolism of natural features depending on the literary tradition, such that for example, the banyan tree in Chitre, is a symbol of displaced memory, while the landscape in Nongkynrih is a symbol of Indigenous identity and the results of development.

Environmental injustice, development and unequal power

The second significant convergence relates to unequal distribution of the environmental burden. Economic growth is usually perceived as an opportunity for modernization, employment and economic welfare. In literature, it becomes clear that there are many contradictions related to this idea – development may help companies and urban people but may also put environmental costs on rural residents, indigenous people and underprivileged populations.

An example of the Indian convergence is the work by Amitav Ghosh *The Hungry Tide*. This story describes the environmental complexities of the area where people's life depends on tide water, mangroves, and dangerous animals. By the experience of people living there, especially of Fokir and Moyna, the author demonstrates the problems that arise due to the contradictions between the policy of conservation and the needs of people dependent on nature. The work shows that the conservation of the environment is not always right. It preserves biodiversity but when local people are denied participation in the process of making decisions and using natural resources necessary for their life, it perpetuates social inequalities.

Similar issues are raised in the environmental literature of Southeast Asia, especially literature dealing with the problems of forest clearance, plantation growth, mining, and vulnerability along the coasts. In the Philippines, there has been increasing focus through the development of Eco poetry and environmental literature on the uneven impact of ecological degradation and natural disasters on poor people lacking economic and political clout. In Indonesia, the portrayal of forests and rural life provides a basis for analyzing the conflicts between commercial exploitation and the ecological and cultural importance of forests. Representations of these kinds are important in areas where the subsistence of rural and Indigenous peoples depends on land, forests, and the sea.

The concept of 'slow violence' developed by Rob Nixon can be used for analyzing such representations in literature. Nixon in his book *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011) analyses cases of environmental destruction which occur slowly and cannot be easily described since the consequences of the damage spread over long periods of time and distances. Pollutants, deforestation, the exhaustion of resources and gradual environmental degradation do not necessarily lead to dramatic events, but their overall effect can be dangerous for health, livelihood and culture. Indian and Southeast Asian literature makes these less visible forms of violence more perceptible by representing the suffering of communities and the gradual transformation of their environments.

This comparison shows another difference – the difference in the focus of attention. Some works by Indian authors highlight the connection between environmental injustice and the themes of displacement, conservation policies and the transformation of indigenous landscapes. Literary traditions of selected Southeast Asian texts, on the other hand, emphasize forest destruction, plantation economy, vulnerable coastline and the link between ecological changes and rural livelihoods. Of course, these are general comparative trends, not rigid boundaries; these concerns tend to be rather similar in both regions.

Indigenous knowledge, recognition and environmental justice

Environmental justice goes beyond merely allocating environmental goods in an equitable manner. There is a need to take into account the knowledge systems, culture and identities of communities whose connection to nature differs from that of the mainstream economy or administration. Indigenous knowledge may be developed through prolonged engagement with the environment, which includes the study of the seasons, conservation of biodiversity, agriculture, and community-based resource management. Literature may serve to preserve and convey such knowledge and to counter the marginalization of local communities.

The representation of indigenous landscapes is particularly notable in Indian literature in reference to works like *The Hungry Tide* and poems by Nongkynrih. Nongkynrih's poems reveal how the environment is related to the cultural identity of Khasis. In this case, the degradation of the environment threatens cultural heritage. Likewise, *The Hungry Tide* tells about the knowledge of people living and working in the Sundarbans. In Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*, the Sundarbans become the embodiment of a dynamic landscape where indigenous knowledge, cultural memory and human survival is indistinguishable from environmental processes. As one can see, the phrase, "It's only in films, you know, that jungles are empty of people" (Ghosh 15), confronts the traditional view of a wild territory as a space without humans and highlights the presence of communities that are closely associated with nature. Moreover, not only is the landscape a home for wildlife but also it is a source of survival, identity and indigenous ecological knowledge. Furthermore, as it has been noted, "Every generation creates its own population of ghosts" (Ghosh 43).

In other words, by mentioning the presence of ghosts in the forest, the author alludes to the history of displacement and trauma associated with the mangrove forests. Therefore, it can be stated that the metaphor of ghosts implies that while human settlements, memories and past relations to the land may be absent from the recorded history of the region, they continue to influence the community. Thus, it is possible to say that through these representations, Ghosh undermines the idea that environmental preservation and human history are separate from human history and local cultural knowledge. The novel thus pleads for the recognition of indigenous communities as conjugal participants in the ecological life of the Sundarbans rather than as outsiders to be othered from the local landscapes. The experience of Fokir, who is familiar with the tidal waters of Sundarbans and its ecology, is in sharp contrast with the knowledge systems of the visiting scholars. Unlike *The Sea of Poppies* where Ghosh discredits the scientific expertise, *The Hungry Tide* demonstrates the importance of dialogue of different types of knowledge.

Further, *The Hungry Tide* sheds light on the inequalities resulting from conservation policies where the emphasis on the conservation of wildlife is more significant than that of people living in economically disadvantaged conditions. The fishermen, Fokir, knows well the ways of the rivers, the tides, and the dolphins, which means that knowledge gained through the interaction with the environment is invaluable. Moreover, the problem with Kusum and the marginalized population of the Sundarbans indicates how dangerous conservation practices may become for people who do not receive any recognition and involvement into decision making processes. Therefore, Ghosh argues that it is necessary to think about environmental justice as about the process which involves the conservation of biological diversity and social responsibility and respect for local wisdom. According to the novel, environmental sustainability may be achieved only if there is communication rather than exclusion and violence between scientists, conservationists, and local communities. Thus, the novel, proves that environmental justice is also people's justice.

Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih's poetry, especially his collection *The Yearning of Seeds* (2011), delves into the intricate connection between indigenous identity, indigenous landscapes and ecology. The line, "Pines like filth are lifted from woodlands in truckloads" in the poem "Kynshi" is an example of the environmental degradation that comes about due to commercialization of the land (Nongkynrih 44). In this line, the poet uses a comparison of the pines to filth in order to show how the natural environment is being treated in a materialistic way. The Khasis' regard the forests not only as a source of timber but also as cultural memory, indigenous knowledge and indigenous identity. On the other hand, "Hills lose their summer green" in the same poem is an illustration of the negative effects of deforestation and exploitation

of the natural resources (Nongkynrih 44). In addition to representing the destruction of the indigenous lands, the phrase represents the breaking of the ecological connections. It is through such images that Nongkynrih criticizes the development initiatives where economic considerations are placed above ecology and people. Thus, through his poems, he draws attention to the fact that it is necessary to appreciate the indigenous ecological wisdom as a key source of knowledge.

Moreover, Nongkynrih sees the link between the destruction of nature and the destruction of culture and its practices. The poem “Only Strange Flowers Have Come to Bloom” mentions the line “Like them we shed our old ways” (Nongkynrih 6), which reveals the process of forgetting the traditional practices and values as the result of changes in society and economy. Unusual flowers symbolize new cultural tendencies that could replace indigenous ones. Such change becomes especially important when the traditional knowledge, community practices, and ecological responsibility become insignificant under the pressure of modernization. It should be mentioned that the poet's interaction with the Kynshi River allows to highlight the importance of natural resources preservation as the part of cultural heritage.

Nongkynrih's poems when read next to Amitav Ghosh's novel *The Hungry Tide*, generates the idea that environmental justice not only implies the protection of forests, waterways, and biodiversity but also implies the respect for indigenous peoples and their participation in decision-making regarding their land. Thus, both authors oppose the exploitation of nature and promote an environmental ethic based on the principles of cultural recognition and social justice.

The work of Nongkynrih focuses on the relationship between the cultural identity of Khasis and the environment, as the transformation of land can also pose a threat to the preservation of indigenous heritage and tradition. Similarly, the theme of *The Hungry Tide* includes the knowledge of those living in the Sundarbans and depending on them. The knowledge that Fokir has about the tidal rivers and the ecosystem of the Sundarbans differs from the knowledge of visiting scientists. However, Ghosh does not criticize their knowledge at all.

Comparable questions arise in Southeast Asian literature, where indigenous and rural communities are often represented in relation to forests, rivers and coastal environments. Such writing can challenge the idea that landscapes are empty spaces available for development, showing instead that they are inhabited, remembered and culturally interpreted places. Environmental decisions that ignore these relationships may cause both material harm and the erasure of community knowledge.

The recognition of Indigenous knowledge must not, however, lead to the romanticisation of Indigenous communities as naturally or uniformly ecological. Communities are internally diverse, and their environmental practices are shaped by historical, economic and political circumstances. A justice-oriented reading should therefore examine who speaks, whose knowledge is represented, and whether affected communities have meaningful authority over decisions that shape their futures. It is noteworthy that the depiction of indigenous landscapes in the literature of Northeast India is important.

Climatic crisis, vulnerability and literary resistance

Climate change exacerbates many already existing forms of environmental inequality in that the effects of climate change are not evenly distributed. Coast inundation, natural disasters, shifts in rainfall distribution, and heat and ecological stress can adversely affect those with limited ability to defend against or recover from environmental dangers. Literature helps to understand such environmental inequality in linking environmental change to people's experiences, memories, and political accountability.

Literature written about Indian and Southeast Asia depicting their rivers, forests, coasts, and changing weather may help understand how climatic vulnerability is related to poverty, dislocation, and uneven

development. For instance, in *The Hungry Tide* by Amitav Ghosh, the Sunderbans region can be considered as ecologically vulnerable, where life for humans depends upon the uncertain borders between earth and water. The environmental setting in the story makes the reader think of vulnerability of coastal life, though all environmental conflicts in the story do not have to be linked to climate change. Both Amitav Ghosh and Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih address the issue of unequal suffering caused by environmental deterioration in “marginalized” populations.

In his novel *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh describes the disappearance of the bird population, fish, and gradual submerging of the Sundarbans, noting that “The birds were vanishing, the fish were dwindling and from day to day, the land was being reclaimed by the sea” (Ghosh 215). It is a prediction of the current discussions of the rising sea level, vulnerability and climate-induced displacement of people living on the coast. The concept of ‘slow violence’ by Rob Nixon becomes especially pertinent in this case because Nixon describes the way of slow environmental destruction and its disproportionate effect on poor and politically marginalized population (2-4). Likewise, Nongkynrih’s *The Yearning of Seeds* presents the destruction of the Khasi hills due to deforestation, exploitation of resources, and cultural disconnection. Ghosh’s novel, according to Sayantan Chakraborty, is indicative of the increasing gap that exists between Khasi culture and its natural environment due to the reckless exploitation of the natural resources (Chakraborty, 2020). While Ghosh’s fiction captures the vulnerability of coastal communities, Nongkynrih focuses on the impact of capitalism on indigenous landscapes. This environmental literary resistance involves the representation of environmental damage, contesting the development frameworks that fail to recognize the plight of local communities, and emphasizing the significance of indigenous knowledge about ecology. Reading their works in the light of Nixon’s environmentalism of the poor, one can see that climate justice should not only concern ecosystem destruction but also the uneven distribution of environmental dangers, displacement, and cultural identity.

Equally, environmental hazards and the links to unequal security, housing and livelihood resources in literary works from Southeast Asian islands and coastal areas should be taken into account. The works written on the topic of typhoons, coastal vulnerability and disaster recovery in the Philippines can be used for analyzing these issues. At the same time, it is necessary to make a distinction between the short-term impact of particular storms and the overall effect of climate change in terms of increased sea levels and changes in the frequency of extreme weather.

However, it is crucial to understand that the significance of these texts is not in their power to substitute the science-based explanation of environmental processes but in their ability to uncover the social consequences of environmental hazards. By depicting human experiences of loss, uncertainty, displacement and resistance, literature unveils the unequal impact of these processes. In this way, literature can be used as a means of critique of development strategies which view the destruction of environment as its legitimate price.

5. Findings

The comparative analysis results in the identification of five main conclusions.

1. Ecological degradation also implies cultural degradation. In terms of the selected Indian and Southeast Asian literature, trees, rivers, forests and landscapes are viewed as memory and identity sources. Within the chosen Indian and Southeast Asian literature, trees, rivers, forests and landscapes act as sources of memory and identity. Thus, their destruction can imply severing ties to ancestors, traditional knowledge and identity of one’s community.

2. Literature analysis pays attention to the fact that the development, exploitation of resources, and environment destruction bring negative consequences to poor and marginalized people, while good effects can be achieved elsewhere.
3. Indigenous knowledge is essential for environmental justice. The inclusion of place-based knowledge refutes the idea that the management of the environment should necessarily depend on official bodies and institutions. Effective environmental decision making implies the participation of the affected communities.
4. Both areas have common problems but distinct priorities. Firstly, there are such issues as displacement, development dilemma, conservation, and indigenous culture preservation discussed in Indian literature. On the other hand, the literary context of Southeast Asia brings new perspectives to the discussion, namely forest exploitation, plantations economy, archipelagos and coastal risks. Yet, all the abovementioned aspects are rather relative since many of them are important for both regions.
5. Literature reveals the slow and complex impacts of environmental damage. The environmental consequences of degradation are made apparent through the use of symbols, conflict in literature, imagery and representation of experiences. Literature also defines environmental justice through its differentiation of environmental justice and conservation by asking who is actually being protected.

In summary, the study has shown that there is scope for productive discussions between Indian and Southeast Asian literature on the subject of environmental justice. The commonality in Indian and Southeast Asian literature is not only about protecting nature as an ideal but about creating relationships between humans and nature that are socially just, culturally respectful and environmentally sustainable.

6. Conclusion

This paper demonstrates how literature can be used to examine socio-cultural and ethical aspects of the environmental problem. Using images of trees, rivers, forests, coastlines and threatened groups, the texts in question highlight the tight link between ecology problems and issues of identity, displacement, inequality and power. Indian poetry by Gieve Patel and Dilip Chitre uncovers the connection between the environmental problem and cultural heritage, while Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih's poetry explores the links between environmental transformation and modernization processes in Khasi lands.

The novel *The Hungry Tide* by Amitav Ghosh introduces the concept of justice to the debate about environmental protection by emphasizing the necessity to conserve the environment by taking into account the needs and knowledge of the local population. Traditions of Southeast Asian literature, which include Vietnamese poetry and writings about environmental issues in Philippines and Indonesia, highlight the issues of cultural resilience, destruction of forests, coastal risk and ecological injustice. In spite of the differences in history, political context and ecology, all three types of literature have one common thing - rejection of the idea that nature exists just to serve economic development. Instead of undermining comparative analysis, these differences enrich it and prove that the issue of environmental justice will vary depending on the history and needs of local community.

The analysis of these three literatures suggests that ecological sustainability is impossible without social equity, recognition, and involvement of the communities. With the problem of climate change and environmental destruction increasing every day, literary works may serve to allow readers to consider alternative solutions to destructive economic development.

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