

Environmental Narratives Across Cultures: A Comparative Analysis of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*

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Abstract: The crux of introducing these two famous novels Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* is to project different cultural, historical, and political environments give shape to people's awareness and actions in relation to ecology. Ecocritical and postcolonial perspectives help us to find out how both these works, through the characters' use of indigenous and local knowledge, show the relationship of humans to their environment.

Achebe gives us a picture of the Igbo world in times before colonization, which is an ecologically balanced society living in harmony with nature through shared land, usage, use of agrarian cycles and spiritual beliefs. Achebe's novel highlight how the colonization of the Europeans after their arrival has upturned the natural life of the Igbo tribesmen. Ghosh, however, shows the Sundarbans as a place of nature that can be easily destroyed and is always in the middle of a conflict; where local knowledge, scientific rationalism, and the politics of conservation meet. Through a comparative study of the two literary works, this paper explores the ways in which environmental stories serve as a vehicle to express the relationships between power, different systems of knowledge, and the moral position of humans to animals. Both the narratives subvert the mainstream anthropocentric and colonial environmental paradigms and thus argue for the need for multiple and locally grounded ways of ecological knowledge.

Key words: Comparative study, environment, narrative, cultural paradigms, different approaches

Introduction

Environmental narratives, in literature are not just background for action; environmental narratives show the ideas about the nature, the community and power. Across the world stories about the environment show how the different societies see their place in the ecosystems and how the societies react to the change. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2004) put forward the linked sensibilities. While Achebe's novel shows a way of caring for nature the bond that is broken by the arrival of colonizers.

Ghosh's contemporary narrative shows the complex ways people and the environment interact in a place that is, at risk from climate change. In such a case, science, local wisdom and politics all mix. Achebe's novel and Ghosh's contemporary narrative both tell narratives across cultures. Both the novels portray that local ecological knowledge is key, to the identity of a community. The force of how external forces upset the balance of nature is clearly evident in these novels. Narratives of nature meet power, colonialism and modern life. Theoretical concept of the ideas of wisdom and cultural ecology are explored in this paper (Buell 1995; Merchant 1992). Ecological wisdom and cultural ecology stress that ecological narratives need to be read with systems not as environmental themes in unravelling ecocriticism (Garrard 2012).

Postcolonial ecocriticism is also applied which helps to look at how colonial narratives change the way people relate to land and sea. Ecocritical theory and postcolonial ecocriticism help to analyse that Achebe and Ghosh show narratives as more, than settings. Environmental narratives act as forces that shape and are shaped by human communities.

Methodology

This research implements a qualitative method, based on ecocriticism and postcolonial theory. There is also a comparative literary analysis of the environmental themes in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*. It comprises a detailed textual evaluation of the two novels with emphasis on how the writers showcase the elements of land, water, flora and fauna, and the relationship between man and environment. The study selects these novels to demonstrate how ecological awareness is reflected in the cultural traditions, and the narrative of the stories. It utilizes ecocritical ideas, symbolically as the portrayal of nature as a living entity, the mutual interdependence of humans and other living beings, and the concept of ecological ethics (Buell; Garrard), to reflect on the different environmental discourses that the two works justify.

Moreover, the paper utilizes a comparative study to elicit the similarities and differences in the two literary works against the backdrop of their respective cultural and historical milieus. Postcolonial ecocriticism shapes the discourse signifying the impact of colonial and postcolonial paradigms on environmental behaviour patterns and ways of knowing human and non, human nature. The study also consults secondary literature, mainly critical essays and theoretical writings, by scholars such as Buell, Cronon, Merchant, and Kimmerer to support and justify the interpretive insights. Such a methodological stance provides a multi, faceted perspective on environmental narratives, recognizing them as deeply embedded in specific cultures, as products of unique historical circumstances, and as artful creations of human imagination.

Ecological Knowledge and Cultural Identity

The novel *Things Fall Apart* tracks the Igbo community and its interaction with the environment through knowledge, spiritual belief and practical stewardship. The land is not just a resource but a part of life in fact, ritual life. Yam cultivation is a farming, traditional activity. The yam cultivation is tied to expectations and seasonal rituals. Achebe shows that the farmers respect the rhythms of nature. The farmers understand soil quality. The farmers understand rainfall patterns and crop cycles. The farmers use that knowledge as part of their expertise (Achebe 45). This establishes the link, between the land and the Igbo community and one can feel how the yam cultivation ties everything together. The yam is called the “king of crops.”

Yam shows how we get food and how we celebrate our culture. The yam links our identity to the health of the land. Achebe shows the forests and the rivers as places guided by belief. The villagers, set the evil forest apart for rituals and fear the forest as a home, for spirits. The evil forest reflects ideas about the world that mix nature events with meaning (Achebe 12).

Sacred designations as environmental thinker Thomas Berry says, are ways for building respect for life in everyday practice. The Igbo worldview ethical engagement with land comes from dependence, not control. In contrast, *The Hungry Tide* situates ecological knowledge in the Sundarbans’ interstitial spaces — tidal zones where human life coexists with unpredictable waterways, mangroves, and wildlife. Ghosh’s characters demonstrate highly localized environmental wisdom. The natives understand tides, seasons, and weather patterns in ways that defy Western scientific categorization. Ghosh writes: “Piyali saw how the tides worked here... this was a place of rhythms the eye could not immediately discern but the body felt” (Ghosh 58).

This proves that ecology is balanced through a lived ecological intelligence that is communally established and relative to nature. The novels challenge the idea of a universally rational comparison of nature to human existence. As David Abram has explained in *The Spell of the Sensuous* that all environmental knowledge is sensory, and dependent on place and culture (Abram 72). The novels of these writers confirm that cultural affiliations and knowledge of the environment can’t be separated. Local communal knowledge is more relational and ethically bound.

Colonial and Modern Disruptions of Environmental Balance

The most common theme in both the novels is the disruption of balance in ecology, by forces. In Achebe’s text, the external force is power. In Ghosh’s text, the external forces are the state, the institutions and the global capitalism. In *Things Fall Apart*, the arrival of the authorities and the Christian missionaries breaks the Igbo social structures and also breaks the Igbo environmental practices. The colonial policies that

reshape land use and turn crops into market goods erode the stewardship that the Igbo people had. What once was a give and take relationship becomes a take system under the law.

The colonial law mirrors Aimé Césaire's critique. Aimé Césaire says colonialism imposes domination and colonialism controls people and nature (Césaire 1955). The missionaries cut down trees and force land ways. This act itself promotes an idea of knowledge violence that hurts stories, about the environment. The loss of nature's balance shows the breaking of community life. *Things Fall Apart* thus, shows the idea that colonialism changes both land and culture (Garrard 2012).

The disruption of balance comes from external forces. The outside force, in Achebe's text is power. The outside forces, in Ghosh's text are the state, institutions and global capitalism. In *Things Fall Apart*, the arrival of authorities and Christian missionaries breaks Igbo social structures and the Igbo environmental practices. Colonial power has reshaped land use and turns the produce into market goods, and those changes wear down stewardship. The reciprocal relationship becomes a system that takes resources under law.

Colonial law mirrors Aimé Césaire's critique that colonialism forces top-down control, over people and nature (Césaire 1955). Achebe shows the missionaries cut down trees and force land practices. The act stands for a knowledge violence. The knowledge violence pushes aside stories. The loss of balance matches the breaking of community life. *Things Fall Apart* shows the idea of ecocriticism. The main idea says that colonialism changes the land and also changes cultures. (Garrard 2012).

In the novel, *The Hungry Tide*, the environmental disruption does not come from nineteenth century colonial rule. The environmental disruption comes from twentieth century forces. These forces include state resettlement projects, conservation needs that come from scientific, political and economic neglect. The government tries to make a tiger reserve. The government displaces fishing communities. The government puts wildlife preservation ahead of survival. Ghosh looks at the politics of conservation. Ghosh shows how modern environmentalism can copy rules.

Modern environmentalism causes the displacement of communities, in the name of nature. Kanai is a thinker who shows gaps in knowledge and understanding unlike Nilima. Piya is scientist, a marine biologist who just relies on maps, data and official systems. Fokir knows the tides well. William Cronon, a historian says that Western stories often see nature as a show not as a place people live in (Cronon 1995). Ghosh says that modern science can hurt resilience and that science is far away from real knowledge and wisdom of the natural.

Human–Nonhuman Interdependence

One area where the novels are similar and different is how they show interdependence. In Achebe's view of cattle, crops and deities, nonhuman elements are part of the fabric. The yam's growth depends on labour, seasonal rain and soil fertility. A three-way dependence that matches the idea that ecosystems are networks where parts affect each other (Leopold 1949). The Igbo do not see nature as outside. The Igbo see humans as participants, in a community. Human–nonhuman interdependence appears in the way the story links the yam, the cattle and the rain. The relational worldview matches the ideas of Robin Wall Kimmerer (2013). Robin Wall Kimmerer points out that humans and nonhumans have a give and take relationship, in traditions.

Achebe's narrative shows that respect for nature makes social cohesion stronger. The relational worldview is the opposite of the worldview that turns nature into a thing to use. The colonial worldview reduces nature to a commodity. In Ghosh's Sundarbans region, the human and nonhuman dependence is both fragile and fierce. The Bengal tiger, the tiger reserves and the floods show that humans share ecosystems with agents. Ghosh writes about the tide's unpredictability: "Here the tide was the arbiter of life and all else bowed to the tide" (Ghosh 102). The tide itself acts as a force that shapes destinies. Animals, plants and weather are not backgrounds but actively influence choices.

While Achebe's seasonal rhythms seem relatively stable, the Sundarbans' ecology is dynamic and precarious. As a result of climate change, interdependence becomes even more fraught. Sudden storms, saltwater intrusion, and itinerant animals are just a few of the factors resulting in a volatile ecosystem.

These ideas reflect anthropogenic climate change which emphasizes nonhuman role in shaping landscapes.

Narrative Forms and Environmental Discourse

Achebe's linear community centered narrative mirrors the cycles of farm life such, as sowing, harvest, rituals and seasonal observances. The structured narrative reinforces the idea of continuity that is tied to cycles. Ghosh's novel uses layers in the narrative moving, from one character to another. Ghosh's novel mixes facts like naturalist notes with descriptions of water and wildlife.

Ghosh's novel builds a structure that shows how people and nature interact in the Sundarbans. Ghosh's novel matches the idea that stories, about the environment need voices to show how complex nature is (Buell 1995). Both authors use narrative technique not as a choice but to show thought process of natural coexistence. Achebe's continued focus, on voices shows how the story stays rooted in tradition. Ghosh's shifting points of view show how ecological spaces are disputed and shaped by history, power and uncertainty.

Conclusion

Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* both give pictures of environmental stories across cultures. These stories sit in identity in history and, in power structures. Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* see how indigenous ecological knowledge and spiritual connection to the land give stability and cultural unity until colonial forces disrupt that stability. Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* shows a landscape of change and modern pressures. It unravels the tension, between wisdom, scientific logic and conservation politics.

These novels show that environmental narratives are not the same across cultures. The history, the power and the way people think shape the narratives. The analysis of these novels projects that understanding of ecology comes from life experience that power changes the way we see the environment and that stories, about nature are also stories about culture. These narratives of nature zoom out and help to think past the ideas, about the environment and to see different voices and knowledge that shape our shared ecological future.

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