



Nature, Memory and Resistance: Towards a Green Humanities Framework for Eco-Poetics in Indian English Poetry

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Abstract- Indian English poetry offers a distinctive field for developing an eco-poetic framework in which nature is not merely represented as landscape or aesthetic ornament but functions as a repository of cultural memory, traditional knowledge, ethical relationships and resistance to dominant structures of power. This paper proposes a critical framework for reading Indian English poetry through the interdisciplinary lens of the Green Humanities, particularly by bringing ecocriticism into dialogue with postcolonial studies, indigenous epistemologies, cultural memory, ecofeminism and the study of more-than-human agency. The poetry of A.K. Ramanujan, Dom Moraes, Ranjit Hoskote and Tishani Doshi demonstrates an important intergenerational movement: from nature as a culturally embedded field of memory and human experience to nature as an active participant in questions of displacement, ecological violence, climate anxiety and cultural resistance. Ramanujan's "Ecology" and "A River" expose the relationship between traditional cultural imagination and ecological perception; Moraes's landscape poetry connects nature with memory, estrangement and belonging; Hoskote transforms ecology into an archive of histories, migrations, architecture and climate crisis; while Doshi's *Girls Are Coming Out of the Woods* and *A God at the Door* connect ecological vulnerability with gender, embodiment, violence and planetary precarity. The paper argues that Indian eco-poetics should therefore be understood not simply as poetry "about nature" but as a form of cultural knowledge in which the natural world becomes a site for recovering suppressed histories and challenging anthropocentric and colonial ways of understanding the environment.

Keywords- Indian English poetry, eco-poetics, Green Humanities, environmental humanities, ecological consciousness, cultural memory, traditional knowledge, cultural resistance, postcolonial ecocriticism, A.K. Ramanujan, Dom Moraes, Ranjit Hoskote, Tishani Doshi



I. Introduction

The environmental crisis has increasingly compelled literary studies to reconsider the relationship between human culture and the more-than-human world. Literature does not merely describe environmental destruction; it also participates in shaping the cultural imagination through which societies understand land, water, animals, plants, climate and ecological responsibility. The emergence of the Environmental Humanities has consequently expanded literary approaches to the environment by bringing questions of ethics, history, culture, politics, justice and knowledge into conversation with ecological concerns. Environmental Humanities scholarship specifically challenges the assumption that environmental problems can be separated from questions of culture and human value, arguing instead that human and non-human worlds exist within complex networks of entanglement (Rose et al., 2012).

Within this broader field, the Green Humanities provides a particularly productive framework for literary studies because it recognises the capacity of poems, stories, visual art and other cultural forms to influence public consciousness and ecological engagement. The Green Humanities explicitly emphasises the power of humanities-based cultural production to contribute to ecological debates and sustainable futures. Such an approach is especially relevant to Indian English poetry because the ecological imagination of the subcontinent cannot be adequately understood through an exclusively Western environmental framework.

Recent scholarship on Environmental Humanities in India has pointed out that ecological thought in the Indian context needs to engage with indigenous, folk, spiritual and literary forms of environmental knowledge. Indian environmental humanities therefore provides an opportunity to question the assumption that ecological consciousness necessarily begins with modern Western environmentalism. Instead, ecological relationships have long been embedded in local cultures, oral traditions, religious practices, agricultural knowledge and community relationships with land and water (Biswas, 2025).

This distinction is important for the study of Indian English poetry. Nature in Indian poetry is frequently more than scenery. Rivers carry cultural memory; trees become genealogical and familial presences; landscapes preserve histories; animals challenge human hierarchies; and ecological destruction can simultaneously represent the destruction of cultural memory. Nature consequently becomes a repository of traditional understanding and a site of cultural resistance.



The present paper develops this argument through an intergenerational reading of A.K. Ramanujan, Dom Moraes, Ranjit Hoskote and Tishani Doshi. These poets belong to different historical and aesthetic moments, yet their poetry collectively demonstrates a movement from personal and cultural encounters with landscape towards increasingly explicit ecological, political and planetary consciousness. Such a reading also complements recent scholarship identifying these four poets as part of an intergenerational transformation in which ecological consciousness moves from personal experience towards broader civilizational and environmental concerns (Pandey and Kumar, 2026).

II. From Ecocriticism to Green Humanities

Ecocriticism traditionally investigates the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Its fundamental concern is the manner in which literary texts represent nature and interrogate anthropocentric assumptions. However, contemporary ecological crises require a broader conceptual vocabulary. Climate change, biodiversity loss, environmental displacement, pollution and resource extraction are simultaneously ecological, political, economic, historical and cultural phenomena. This is where the Green Humanities becomes particularly significant.

Environmental Humanities scholarship has expanded beyond a narrow nature-versus-culture binary and instead examines the complex entanglement of human and non-human worlds. It asks how cultural narratives determine what societies consider valuable, disposable, sacred, exploitable or worth protecting. Environmental Humanities consequently incorporates literature alongside anthropology, philosophy, history, politics, media, cultural studies and ecology (Biswas, 2025).

For Indian English poetry, this interdisciplinary orientation is essential because ecological destruction cannot be separated from colonial histories, uneven development, caste and class inequalities, gendered labour, displacement and the erasure of traditional knowledge.

The Green Humanities framework proposed in this paper therefore consists of five interconnected dimensions:



Dimension	Central Question
Ecological memory	What cultural memories are preserved in landscapes, rivers, forests and non-human life?
Traditional ecological knowledge	How does poetry recover indigenous/local ways of knowing nature?
More-than-human agency	Does nature merely exist for human observation, or does it possess agency within the poem?
Ecological resistance	How does the representation of nature challenge colonial, capitalist or anthropocentric power?
Eco-ethical imagination	How does poetry imagine alternative relationships between humans and the natural world?

This framework allows Indian English poetry to be examined not simply as environmental literature but as ecological knowledge-making.

III. Nature as Repository of Traditional Understanding

One of the most important features of Indian eco-poetics is the relationship between nature and cultural memory. The river, tree, soil, animal or landscape frequently carries meanings accumulated across generations.

A.K. Ramanujan is particularly important in this regard. His poetry frequently places modern consciousness in conversation with inherited cultural structures. His poem "A River", for example, presents the river Vaigai not merely as a natural geographical entity but as a cultural object shaped by generations of poets, myths and memories. The poem ironically contrasts traditional poetic celebration of floods with the actual suffering caused by the river's flooding. Ramanujan therefore simultaneously invokes and questions inherited cultural representations of nature. Scholarship on Ramanujan's poetry similarly identifies "A River," "Ecology" and "Small-Scale Reflections on a Great House" as poems through which ecological vision intersects with myth, family and cultural memory.



The poem "Ecology" is even more significant for an Indian Green Humanities framework. The speaker's encounter with a flowering tree becomes inseparable from inherited family memory and religious-cultural associations. The tree is not an isolated botanical object. It participates in a network of memory, kinship, mythology and everyday life.

The title itself—"Ecology"—is significant. Ramanujan does not present ecology merely as a scientific category. Ecology becomes a relationship between humans, plants, memory, domestic space and cultural inheritance. His poem therefore anticipates a central concern of contemporary Environmental Humanities: the collapse of the rigid distinction between nature and culture.

In this sense, Ramanujan's poetry can be read as decolonial ecological memory. Nature becomes a medium through which knowledge existing outside formal Western scientific structures survives.

IV. Dom Moraes: Landscape, Memory and the Problem of Belonging

Dom Moraes occupies an earlier position in this intergenerational trajectory. His poetry is often associated with alienation, travel, exile, memory and psychological displacement. His debut collection *A Beginning* (1957) established him as an important voice in Indian English poetry at a remarkably young age. Contemporary accounts of the collection emphasise its intensely personal and sensuous character.

Moraes's relationship with landscape can be approached through the Green Humanities not because his poetry is explicitly environmental in the contemporary sense, but because landscape becomes intertwined with identity and belonging.

In poems such as "Landscape Painter", the landscape is aesthetically constructed but simultaneously psychologically charged. The natural environment becomes a surface upon which memory and perception are projected. This is significant for an eco-poetic reading because it demonstrates an early stage of the movement from landscape as aesthetic object to landscape as cultural and psychological space.

Moraes's poetry can therefore be positioned at the beginning of the proposed trajectory:

Landscape → memory → alienation → belonging



Nature in Moraes does not yet function primarily as climate activism or environmental protest. Instead, landscape participates in the construction of the displaced self. His ecological significance consequently emerges through the relationship between place and identity.

This is important from a postcolonial perspective. Colonial modernity frequently produces forms of cultural dislocation in which the individual experiences a fractured relationship with home. Moraes's landscape can consequently be read as an unstable site of belonging. The natural environment is not simply "beautiful"; it becomes implicated in the question: Where does the displaced subject belong?

Recent intergenerational scholarship similarly identifies Moraes's poetry with an early form of alienation and cultural estrangement, contrasting this inward displacement with the broader ecological and civilizational concerns of later poets (Pandey and Kumar, 2026).

V. A.K. Ramanujan and the Recovery of Ecological Memory

If Moraes represents landscape as a site of psychological belonging, Ramanujan moves the discussion towards cultural ecology. His poetry repeatedly refuses to isolate the individual from family, community, tradition and non-human life. In "Ecology", the tree becomes a powerful example of how botanical existence can become embedded within domestic and cultural memory. In "A River", the river simultaneously represents nature, cultural mythology and human suffering.

This makes Ramanujan especially important to the proposed framework because his poetry exposes the limitations of a purely aesthetic conception of nature. The river is beautiful, but it also floods. The tree is beautiful, but it is also embedded within structures of memory and inheritance. The natural world therefore contains contradiction. It cannot be reduced to the romantic idea of nature as harmonious and healing.

Ramanujan's ecological consciousness is consequently critical rather than sentimental. He asks readers to notice how cultural traditions represent nature and, simultaneously, how those representations may conceal actual ecological and human suffering.

His poetry can therefore be interpreted through three Green Humanities categories:

- Nature as cultural archive
- Nature as relational entity



- Nature as a critique of anthropocentric representation

This is one reason why Ramanujan remains central to contemporary ecological readings of Indian English poetry. His poems are frequently included in courses explicitly concerned with literature and environment, including "Ecology" as a representative text for ecological literary study.

Ranjit Hoskote: Ecology, History and the Anthropocene

With Ranjit Hoskote, Indian eco-poetics enters a markedly more expansive and contemporary terrain.

Hoskote's poetry refuses to isolate ecological questions from history, migration, architecture, politics and cultural memory. His collection *Hunchprose* brings together history, mythology, ecology, architecture and climate crisis, demonstrating how ecological consciousness can operate across apparently separate fields of knowledge (Ray, 2021).

This is particularly significant for the Green Humanities because the field itself is interdisciplinary. Hoskote's poetic method resembles the Green Humanities methodology: different systems of knowledge are placed into conversation rather than maintained as isolated disciplines.

His ecological imagination is consequently archival. Rain can become history. The city can become ecology. Architecture can become environmental memory. The ocean can become a record of colonial and contemporary violence. Recent research on Indian Ocean poetics identifies Hoskote's "Return" as a poem in which rainfall functions as an archive of slow violence, while the sea itself becomes a site of ecological trauma and cultural memory (Indi, 2025). This interpretation is particularly valuable because it connects Hoskote with Rob Nixon's concept of slow violence—forms of environmental harm that occur gradually and often remain invisible until their consequences become catastrophic.

Hoskote consequently transforms ecological representation into historical investigation. His poetry asks readers to recognise that environmental destruction is rarely an isolated contemporary event. It is embedded within longer histories of migration, urbanisation, colonialism, extraction and unequal development.

Thus, Hoskote's eco-poetics can be represented as:

Nature → history → violence → memory → resistance



His poetry therefore moves ecological consciousness beyond the picturesque landscape and towards the politics of the Anthropocene.

Tishani Doshi: Ecological Vulnerability, Body and Ecofeminist Resistance

Tishani Doshi extends this trajectory by bringing ecological crisis into intimate relationship with body, gender, violence, displacement and planetary vulnerability. Her collection *A God at the Door* (2021) repeatedly moves between the microscopic and the planetary. The collection draws upon the "minutiae of nature and humanity" while confronting injustice, political violence and contemporary anxiety. This is particularly important because Doshi refuses to separate ecological crisis from embodied experience.

In her poetry, the vulnerable body and the vulnerable environment mirror and illuminate one another. Women, animals, forests, oceans and endangered forms of life can enter the same ethical field. Her poem "Tigress Hugs Manchurian Fir", for instance, creates a striking forest environment through images of insects, fog, light and trees. The forest is not simply picturesque scenery; it becomes an unfamiliar world that unsettles the speaker's assumptions about human mastery and belonging.

Similarly, the collection's concern with women, violence and ecological vulnerability has been described through an ecofeminist framework in which women and girls are imagined as part of an ecological continuum rather than as subjects separate from nature. Doshi herself has described poems in *A God at the Door* as concerned with "our bodies, our universe, and our environment," demonstrating the deliberate connection she makes between corporeal and ecological experience.

Her poetry therefore produces an important Green Humanities insight:

- The destruction of the environment and the marginalisation of vulnerable bodies are not unrelated forms of violence; they can emerge from the same structures of domination.
- This makes Doshi's eco-poetics simultaneously environmental, feminist and political.
- Her relationship with the sea is particularly significant. Recent scholarship on Doshi identifies her work with Blue Humanities because the ocean becomes an active ecological and ethical presence connected with climate anxiety, historical violence and postcolonial coastal experience (Patel, 2025).

Nature as a Site of Cultural Resistance

The central proposition of this paper is that nature in Indian English poetry should be understood as a site of cultural resistance.



Resistance occurs because dominant systems of power often attempt to convert nature into something measurable, exploitable and controllable. Colonial and capitalist epistemologies can transform forests into timber, rivers into resources, land into property and oceans into economic zones. The Green Humanities challenges precisely this instrumental relationship.

Indian eco-poetics offers an alternative by representing nature as:

- memory rather than commodity;
- relationship rather than resource;
- community rather than property;
- knowledge rather than raw material;
- living presence rather than passive scenery.

This is where ecological consciousness becomes inseparable from decolonisation.

G.N. Devy's concept of cultural amnesia is useful here because the destruction of ecological environments can also mean the disappearance of cultural knowledge associated with those environments. Recent scholarship applying Devy's framework to Indian English poetry argues that ecological loss can entail the loss of traditional ecological knowledge (Devy, 1992).

Similarly, Bhalchandra Nemade's emphasis on Deshivad/nativism helps foreground the importance of rootedness and local cultural contexts. An ecological reading informed by Nemade therefore asks not only whether a poem represents nature but whose nature, whose knowledge and whose relationship to place the poem preserves. This produces an explicitly decolonial Green Humanities.

An Intergenerational Model of Indian Eco-Poetics

Reading these four poets together reveals an important transformation.

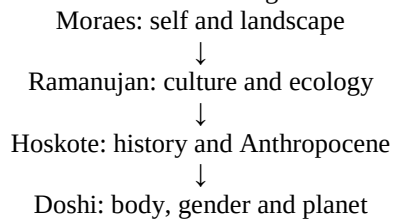
Poet	Ecological Mode	Nature Represents	Principal Resistance
Dom Moraes	Landscape poetics	Memory, displacement, belonging	Cultural alienation



A.K. Ramanujan	Cultural ecology	Tradition, family, myth, memory	Cultural amnesia
Ranjit Hoskote	Historical/Anthropocene ecology	History, climate, city, ocean	Ecological and colonial violence
Tishani Doshi	Ecofeminist/Blue Humanities	Body, ocean, animals, vulnerability	Gendered and planetary violence

The trajectory is therefore not a simple movement from "non-ecological" to "ecological" poetry.

Rather, it is a transformation in the scale of ecological consciousness:



This intergenerational development demonstrates that Indian English eco-poetics has become increasingly conscious of the political implications of environmental representation.

Towards a Critical Framework for Indian Green Humanities

On the basis of the four poets, this paper proposes the following Critical Green Humanities Framework for Indian English Poetry.

Ecological Memory

The first principle considers nature as an archive. Rivers, trees, forests, oceans and landscapes preserve stories that may not exist in official historical records. Poetry can recover these submerged memories. Ramanujan's river and tree imagery exemplify this process, while Hoskote's rain and oceanic imagery expands it towards histories of ecological violence.



Traditional Ecological Knowledge

The second principle recognises that ecological knowledge does not exist only in scientific institutions. Myths, rituals, oral traditions, agricultural practices and community relationships with land can constitute forms of ecological understanding. Ramanujan's engagement with Indian cultural traditions is particularly valuable for demonstrating this relationship.

More-than-Human Agency

The third principle rejects the idea that nature exists only as a background for human action. The river can act. The forest can transform perception. The ocean can remember. The tree can participate in cultural memory. Such representations destabilise anthropocentrism and align Indian eco-poetics with contemporary Environmental Humanities, which increasingly questions human exceptionalism and foregrounds entangled human/non-human relations.

Ecological Justice

The fourth principle asks who suffers when environments are damaged. Doshi's poetry demonstrates that ecological questions are also questions of gender, vulnerability and violence. Hoskote's work similarly connects ecological crisis with historical and political structures.

Thus:

Environmental justice cannot be separated from social justice.

Decolonial Resistance

The fifth principle understands ecological poetry as a challenge to inherited hierarchies of knowledge.

If colonial modernity privileged particular forms of scientific and economic knowledge, eco-poetry can recover alternative ways of understanding land, water and non-human life. Indian Green Humanities should therefore not merely "apply" Western ecocritical theories to Indian poetry. It should allow Indian literary traditions, indigenous knowledge, postcolonial history and local ecological practices to reshape the theoretical vocabulary itself.

Ecological Aesthetics

Finally, the framework recognises that ecological resistance is also aesthetic. These poets beautify nature without reducing it to beauty. Ramanujan's tree and river, Moraes's landscapes, Hoskote's rain and oceanic worlds, and Doshi's forests, insects,



birds and seas demonstrate that aesthetic pleasure can coexist with ecological anxiety. Beauty becomes politically productive when it encourages attention.

VI. Conclusion

Indian English poetry provides an important foundation for developing a Green Humanities approach grounded in cultural memory, ecological knowledge and resistance. The poetry of Dom Moraes, A.K. Ramanujan, Ranjit Hoskote and Tishani Doshi demonstrates that nature has never been merely decorative within the Indian poetic imagination. Rather, landscapes, rivers, trees, forests, oceans and animals become deeply entangled with memory, identity, history, gender and cultural survival. Moraes's landscapes reveal the psychological relationship between place and belonging. Ramanujan transforms natural objects into repositories of cultural and familial memory while questioning idealised representations of nature. Hoskote expands ecological poetry into the domains of climate crisis, history, architecture and oceanic memory. Doshi brings ecological consciousness into intimate contact with bodies, gender, violence, animals, forests and oceans, producing an ecofeminist and increasingly planetary imagination. The importance of these poets to the Green Humanities lies precisely in their refusal to maintain a rigid distinction between nature and culture. Their poetry suggests that environmental destruction is simultaneously a destruction of memory, identity, community and knowledge.

Consequently, Indian eco-poetics should be understood as a form of cultural resistance. Its resistance lies not simply in protesting environmental destruction but in changing the way nature is imagined. When a river becomes memory, a tree becomes inheritance, rain becomes history, and the ocean becomes an archive of violence, nature ceases to be a passive object. It becomes a participant in cultural meaning.

The proposed framework therefore moves beyond the conventional question, "How is nature represented in Indian English poetry?" It asks a more consequential question:

What forms of cultural knowledge, memory and resistance become possible when nature is recognised as an active repository of human and more-than-human histories? Through this question, Indian English poetry can make a significant contribution to the Green Humanities. It demonstrates that ecological consciousness is not simply a response to the contemporary climate crisis; it can also be a recovery of older relational ways of understanding the world. At the same time, contemporary poets such as Hoskote and Doshi transform this inherited ecological sensibility into a critical response to climate change, environmental violence, gendered vulnerability and



planetary precarity. The result is an Indian eco-poetics that is simultaneously aesthetic, cultural, political, ecological and decolonial.

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