



Remembering Lost Landscapes: Eco-Memory and Environmental Violence in *Leila*

S. Kaviarasu

Research Scholar, Vels University, arasu.kavi86@gmail.com

Dr. S. Arun kumar

Assistant Professor, Vels University, arunkumar.sl@vistas.ac.in

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23766843>

ARTICLE DETAILS

Research Paper

Received: 25-08-2026

Accepted: 24-09-2026

Published: 20-10-2026

Keywords:

*Eco-memory,
environmental violence,
climate fiction, dystopia,
memory studies,
ecocriticism.*

ABSTRACT

This study examines the representation of eco-memory and environmental violence in *Leila* by Prayaag Akbar, exploring how memories of lost ecological landscapes function as a critique of environmental degradation, social inequality, and authoritarian governance. The paper investigates the relationship between memory, ecology, and power within the framework of contemporary Indian climate fiction. The study employs a qualitative textual analysis of *Leila*, drawing upon the theoretical perspectives of eco-memory, ecocriticism, environmental humanities, and cultural memory studies. Through close reading of the novel, it analyzes the portrayal of ecological collapse, social segregation, and the protagonist's recollections of the past. The analysis reveals that the dystopian world of *Leila* is characterized by environmental degradation, including polluted landscapes, water scarcity, and extreme urban fragmentation. These ecological crises are closely linked to systems of social exclusion and political control. The protagonist Shalini's memories of open spaces, communal life, and environmental balance reconstruct lost ecologies and expose the destructive consequences of authoritarian rule. The study further demonstrates that memory functions as a form of resistance by

Disclaimer: The opinions, interpretations, conclusions, recommendations, analyses, and statements expressed in this research article are solely those of the author(s) and do not reflect the views, policies, or positions of the Publisher, Chief Editor, Editors, Editorial Board, Reviewers, or their affiliated institutions. The author(s) are solely responsible for ensuring the originality, authenticity, and integrity of the manuscript and for ensuring that it is free from plagiarism, AI-generated content, copyright infringement, data falsification, and any other form of academic misconduct.



preserving alternative histories and challenging the regime's attempts to erase the past. The findings suggest that eco-memory serves as a significant narrative strategy in *Leila*, enabling the recovery of ecological histories and highlighting the interconnectedness of environmental and social violence. By foregrounding memory as both an archive of loss and a tool of resistance, the novel contributes to contemporary discussions in climate fiction and environmental humanities, emphasizing the importance of remembering ecological pasts in order to imagine more just and sustainable futures.

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary Indian climate fiction increasingly explores the relationship between environmental degradation and social inequality. One significant example is *Leila*, which presents a dystopian future where ecological collapse and authoritarian governance reshape everyday life. The novel depicts a society divided by walls, where purity laws, water scarcity, and toxic environments regulate human existence. "Water is tightly controlled by the authorities" (Akbar, 2017, p. 102). In this context, memory plays a crucial role in reconstructing the lost ecological past. The concept of eco-memory refers to the ways in which memories of landscapes, ecosystems, and environmental relationships are preserved in cultural narratives. By examining *Leila* through the framework of eco-memory, this paper explores how the novel represents environmental violence and the erasure of ecological history. It argues that the protagonist's recollections of the past function as a narrative strategy that critiques ecological destruction and social oppression.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Eco-memory emerges from the interdisciplinary field of environmental humanities, combining ecocriticism, cultural memory studies, and trauma theory. It refers to the remembrance of ecological environments and human relationships with nature that have been disrupted or destroyed. Scholars argue that literary narratives often preserve ecological memories that modern societies risk forgetting. In dystopian climate fiction, eco-memory becomes particularly significant because it contrasts a degraded future with memories of a healthier environment. These memories not only highlight environmental loss but also reveal how ecological damage is linked with political power and social exclusion.

Within climate fiction, environmental degradation is frequently represented alongside social and political inequalities. Eco-memory serves as a critical framework for understanding how narratives preserve



ecological histories and challenge dominant ideologies that erase environmental loss. In *Leila*, eco-memory operates through the protagonist's recollections of urban life before the rise of authoritarian control. These memories serve as reminders of environmental balance and social diversity that have been violently erased.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative textual analysis of *Leila* using the theoretical framework of eco-memory. Drawing on concepts from environmental humanities, ecocriticism, and memory studies, the analysis examines how the novel represents environmental degradation, ecological loss, and social inequality. Particular attention is given to the protagonist's recollections of the past and their role in reconstructing lost ecological landscapes. Through close reading of key narrative episodes, the study investigates the relationship between memory, environmental violence, and authoritarian governance in the novel.

RESULTS

ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION AND TOXIC LANDSCAPES

The world depicted in *Leila* is marked by severe environmental degradation. Air pollution, contaminated water, and extreme heat dominate the urban environment. The city is fragmented into enclosed sectors separated by massive walls that control movement and access to resources. These dystopian landscapes reflect the consequences of unchecked industrialization and ecological neglect.

The scarcity of clean water becomes a powerful symbol of environmental collapse. Water is tightly controlled by the authorities, and its limited availability reinforces social hierarchies. The polluted and controlled environment illustrates how ecological destruction becomes a tool of political power. The novel therefore portrays environmental violence not merely as a natural crisis but as a socially constructed form of oppression.

MEMORY AND THE RECONSTRUCTION OF LOST ECOLOGIES

Memory occupies a crucial place in the narrative structure of *Leila*, functioning as a means of recovering and reconstructing ecological and social worlds that have disappeared under the authoritarian regime. "Air pollution, contaminated water, and extreme heat dominate the urban environment" (Akbar, 2017, pp. 78–79). The protagonist, Shalini, repeatedly recalls fragments of her past life—memories of open spaces, diverse neighbourhoods, and a society that once allowed interaction among different communities. These recollections contrast sharply with the rigid and oppressive dystopian world she inhabits in the present.



Shalini's memories often return to a time before the city was divided by walls and strict regulations. The past she remembers is marked by freedom of movement and environmental openness. Through these recollections, the narrative reconstructs landscapes and environments that have been erased by the new political order. Her memories of public spaces, flowing water, and communal life function as an archive of ecological history, revealing the extent of environmental change.

DISCUSSION

ENVIRONMENTAL VIOLENCE AND SOCIAL SEGREGATION

In *Leila*, environmental crisis is not merely a background condition but an integral mechanism through which social and political power is exercised. The authoritarian regime known as the Council enforces rigid purity laws that divide people according to religion, caste-like hierarchies, and cultural identity. These divisions are spatially reinforced through massive walls that fragment the city into isolated sectors.

The novel demonstrates how environmental resources and living conditions are distributed unequally, revealing environmental violence as both ecological and social. Access to clean water, habitable spaces, and healthier environments becomes a privilege reserved for dominant groups, while marginalized communities experience pollution, scarcity, and neglect. Environmental degradation therefore reinforces existing social inequalities and becomes a tool of political control.

MEMORY AS RESISTANCE

Despite the oppressive environment of the novel, memory becomes a subtle form of resistance. Shalini's recollections of her daughter, her family, and the past world preserve a sense of identity that the authoritarian system seeks to erase. These memories challenge the dominant narrative promoted by the regime, which attempts to normalize segregation and ecological destruction.

By remembering lost landscapes and relationships, the protagonist maintains a connection to an alternative vision of society. Memory allows the reconstruction of ecological and social worlds that have disappeared, preserving possibilities for coexistence and justice. Eco-memory therefore functions not only as a record of environmental loss but also as a source of resistance and hope.

The analysis reveals that environmental violence and memory are deeply interconnected. While the regime attempts to control both physical environments and historical narratives, memory disrupts this control by preserving knowledge of ecological harmony and social diversity. Through Shalini's recollections, the novel exposes the destructive consequences of authoritarian governance and environmental neglect.



CONCLUSION

Leila offers a powerful representation of how ecological collapse and authoritarian politics can reshape human societies. Through its depiction of polluted landscapes, water scarcity, and rigid social hierarchies, the novel highlights the interconnectedness of environmental and social violence. The concept of eco-memory provides a valuable framework for understanding how the narrative reconstructs lost ecological worlds through the protagonist's recollections.

These memories expose the destructive consequences of environmental neglect while preserving the possibility of resistance and change. By foregrounding the relationship between memory, ecology, and power, *Leila* contributes significantly to contemporary Indian climate fiction and environmental humanities. The novel demonstrates that remembering the past is essential for recognizing environmental loss, challenging systems of oppression, and imagining more just ecological futures.

REFERENCES

Primary Text:

Akbar, Prayaag. *Leila*. Simon & Schuster India, 2017.

Secondary Sources:

Assmann, Aleida. *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization: Functions,*

Media, Archives. Cambridge UP, 2011.

Assmann, Jan. *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination*. Cambridge UP, 2011.

Buell, Lawrence. *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination*. Blackwell Publishing, 2005.

Garrard, Greg. *Ecocriticism*. 3rd ed., Routledge, 2023.

Heise, Ursula K. *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global*. Oxford UP, 2008.

Huggan, Graham, and Helen Tiffin. *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment*. 2nd ed., Routledge, 2015.



Nixon, Rob. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Harvard

UP, 2011.

Roach, Catherine M. "Climate Change and the Humanities." *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature*, Oxford UP, 2019.

Trexler, Adam. *Anthropocene Fictions: The Novel in a Time of Climate Change*. University of Virginia Press, 2015.

Whitehead, Anne. *Memory*. Routledge, 2009.