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Editorial

The Poetics and Politics of Climate Change in Sri Lanka

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Climate change is a complex phenomenon with multiple causes and far-reaching consequences. Reflecting the interplay between nature and culture, its drivers and impacts can be observed at local, regional, and global levels. Over time, it has become a discursive reality constituted through various narratives, rituals, and sense-making processes that infuse moral and spiritual logics into environmental phenomena (Barnes et al., 2013; Crate, 2011). Responsibility for climate change is attributed in different ways, often shaped by interactions between humans, between humans and the environment, and between humans and supernatural beings. For instance, it can be linked to supernatural test or punishment, or anthropogenic factors such as local land-use practices, state policy failures, or distant industrial emitters, which reveals power asymmetries and environmental injustices at multiple scales. People perceive causes and consequences of climate change not only in physical terms such as crop losses and health risks, but also as sociocultural disruptions, altered livelihoods, loss of traditional knowledge, threats to heritage sites (Crate, 2011; Pearson, Jackson, & McNamara, 2023). People's actions and reactions to climate change often depend on the explanations they receive. Focusing on threat perception, vulnerability, adaptive capacity, and resilience in Galle—a southern coastal region of Sri Lanka—van den Berg and Mallick (2024) found that perceived threats can motivate adaptive responses, thereby enhancing livelihood resilience. From this perspective, local sense-making plays a vital role in engaging with local measures of resilience.

As climate change reshapes the contours of daily life across the Global South, Sri Lanka also stands at a critical intersection of ecological vulnerability, sociocultural and political complexity (Galappaththi, Ford, & Bennett, 2020). The country is highly

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vulnerable to adverse climate effects: drought caused by unexpected temperature increases, floods resulting from rainfall variability, sea-level rise, and extreme weather events, all of which pose significant challenges to agriculture, water resources, and livelihoods across different geographical locations such as wet zone, dry zone, coastal areas, and hill country. From dramatically shifting coastlines and unpredictable monsoons to contested landscapes shaped by development and displacement, the climate crisis in Sri Lanka is not merely a scientific or policy concern—it is profoundly sociocultural, historical, and even poetic. The case of climate change reveals the deep interconnectedness of 'biosocial' worlds. Therefore, one can employ a multidisciplinary approach, which may benefit from anthropology, environmental sciences, economics, geography and public health.

This editorial is both an invitation and an effort to reflect on the poetics and politics of climate change in Sri Lanka. It encourages scholars to explore how environmental narratives are constructed, circulated, and contested within the country's broader sociocultural and ecological context—and in relation to global dynamics. In a nation shaped by colonial legacies, civil conflict, and spiritual connections to the natural world, climate discourse becomes a site of struggle over meaning, memory, and justice. We ask: whose voices shape the climate imagination, and whose are silenced? How do literature, folklore, and ritual articulate ecological grief or resilience? And what might a decolonial, locally rooted approach to climate justice looks like in the Sri Lankan context?

By analyzing literature, folklore, environmental activism, state discourse, and everyday narratives, the authors should reveal how climate imaginaries are formed, politicized and negotiated. The authors may illustrate the role of poetry, religious metaphors, and oral storytelling in expressing ecological grief, resilience, and dissent, especially among coastal communities, Indigenous groups, and women. Furthermore, studies should pay attention to how political actors instrumentalize environmental narratives for state-building, tourism, or suppression of dissent under the guise of "green development." These studies can also take a decolonial approach to climate discourse that foregrounds local knowledge systems, ecological ethics, and narrative resistance. Through this lens, they should aim to reimagine climate justice in Sri Lanka not just as a policy issue, but as a cultural and political struggle over meaning, memory, and survival.

These studies should focus on how four major religious communities in Sri Lanka: Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, and Christian, define and interpret climate change within their local or Indigenous (or traditional) ecologies. One can explore the explanatory logics e.g., spiritual, moral, ecological, attributions of agency and responsibility that range from individual practices to global emitters, perceived consequences including physical, sociocultural, and economic, and community-driven solutions such as traditional land management, indigenous knowledge and grassroots adaptation strategies. It is pivotal to map a typology of local ecological knowledge, elucidate moral and spiritual underpinnings of climate narratives, and generate culturally grounded policy recommendations for inclusive climate adaptation strategies.

To explore these unique patterns and perspectives on various explanations and implications of climatic changes, we invite multidimensional studies, which adopt a multidisciplinary approach to address one or more than one research gap: (1) evidence or empirical gap; (2) knowledge or practical knowledge gap; (3) methodological gap; (4) population gap; and (5) geographical gap (Ali, 2025).

To examine the multiple dimensions and complexities of climate change, its causes and consequences various theoretical frameworks can be useful. First, the "Syndemics Framework" can be useful, which emphasizes the synergistic interaction and co-occurrence of multiple health conditions and social determinant within specific populations, particularly under conditions of social inequality and environmental stress (Ali, 2021; Ali, Singer, & Bulled, 2024; Singer, Bulled, Ostrach, & Mendenhall, 2017). Applying this lens will help study how climate change results from the interaction of biosocial worlds, and how it, in turn, affects these worlds creating vulnerabilities such as poverty, displacement, conflict and limited access to healthcare that ultimately leads to compounded health outcomes. For instance, in Sri Lanka, climate-induced disruptions can intensify nutritional deficiencies, mental health issues, and the spread of vector-borne diseases, especially among socio-culturally marginalized communities. Understanding these interactions can inform targeted interventions that address both the environmental and social determinants of health.

The second useful framework is "One Health". Since it recognizes the interconnectedness of human, animal, and environmental health (Destoumieux-Garzón et al., 2018), it will be particularly helpful for a country such as Sri Lanka, where communities maintain close interactions with their natural environments. For example, changes in land use and agricultural practices influenced by religious beliefs can impact zoonotic disease transmission and ecosystem health. In Sri Lanka, traditional Buddhist beliefs about non-violence (*ahimsa*) and reverence for all living beings often discourage the killing of animals and influence land use practices, such as maintaining forested temple lands (*aranya*). However, in some cases, shifts toward commercial farming or land clearing near sacred groves, driven by religious or economic priorities, can increase human–animal interactions, potentially facilitating zoonotic disease transmission (e.g., leptospirosis or rabies) and disrupting local ecosystems. In Sri Lanka, there is also a growing trend within the Buddhist belief system to establish temples or *aranyas* (Buddhist monasteries) in remote mountains or forested areas. This practice breaks natural boundaries between humans and animals, fostering closer interactions between humans and wildlife. For instance, in places like *Kuragala*, *Monaragala*, and *Ampara*, religious settlements are located near or within wildlife habitats, increasing the likelihood of encounters with species such as monkeys, wild boars, and snakes. These interactions can potentially lead to human-wildlife conflict and the transmission of zoonotic diseases, highlighting the importance of integrating religious practices into public health and environmental planning under the "One Health" framework. By incorporating "One Health" principles, studies can explore how traditional practices, and religious rituals contribute to or mitigate health risks associated with climate change.

Briefly, these studies can benefit from both qualitative as well as quantitative research methodologies such as ethnographic approaches (Barnes et al., 2013) using local research methods (Ali, 2022) and surveys in order to capture the local perceptions and practices related to climate change in Sri Lanka: a uniquely diverse country with multiple cultural traditions. We strongly believe that these in-depth studies will contribute meaningfully to the global body of knowledge on climate change and play a vital role in deepening our understanding of the phenomenon at local, regional, and global levels.

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