

# Exploration Of Nature Narratives And Eco-Encounters In Amitav Ghosh's The Hungry Tide

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The definition of ecocriticism and its literary applications are covered in this article. It demonstrates how reading an Indian novel—specifically, *The Hungry Tide* by Amitav Ghosh—can help one to understand the concept of ecocriticism. As a result, it uses a theoretical method to improve how humanity's ethical framework functions. Even while anthropocentric, historical, postcolonial, and cross-cultural analyses of Ghosh's novels are common, it is obvious that much more work has to be done to examine his novels via an ecocritical lens. The paper's main objective is to examine how nature affects the protagonists of the novel, their battles against the ferocious forces of nature, and how nature controls their life. It also draws attention to the predicament of the uprooted refugees in Morichjhapi, who encounter insurmountable obstacles in their quest for identity. The Sundarbans, or "beautiful forests," are the setting for the story. It regularly experiences famine, floods, and storms. Orcaella, the gangetic dolphins, and the Royal Bengal White Tiger call it home. The Morichjhapi episode shows how the impoverished are impacted by environmental conservation initiatives. The story informs the reader on the need of pursuing human and environmental coexistence in a peaceful manner. It highlights how important it is to protect the environment and how important it is to work towards a harmonious coexistence of humans and nature.

**Keywords:** ecocriticism, environmentalism, humanity, nature, Social justice.

## Introduction

Amitav Ghosh's novels tackle topics such as home, environmental change, transcultural communication, rural-global dynamics, the sublime in a postcolonial context, and humanity's fundamental relationship with nature. The novels illustrate the intricate relationships between persons from various origins, balancing unique identities and common humanity. They also highlight the difficult balance between local and global reality, as characters face issues affected by larger global influences. The narrative questions the traditional concepts of awe-inspiring nature, weaving historical and colonial legacies with environmental issues. The human-nature connect is important, with natural forces taking on personalities of their own,

representing the delicate balance between nature's richness and its severe temperament. Beyond interpersonal connections, the novel investigates some bigger ecological concerns on a global scale, including climate change, habitat loss, and the interconnectivity of human activities. Ghosh's depiction of man-woman interactions deepens the investigation of interpersonal dynamics under the Sundarbans' difficult ecological settings. The tale encourages readers to consider how cultural and environmental factors shape human interactions amidst the intricacies of nature, culture, and society [1].

The Hungry Tide, a novel by Amitav Ghosh, tackles the themes of natural beauty, humanism, and human-nature interaction. The novel focuses on environmental and social justice, emphasising that all humans have an equal right to safeguard nature [2]. Environmental justice recognises that environmental degradation, climate change, and the loss of natural resources disproportionately harm poor and indigenous peoples. It accepts that everyone, regardless of colour, nationality, or financial class, is responsible for maintaining a clean and healthy environment [3].

The novel sets in the Sundarbans, a large mangrove forest region in the Bay of Bengal delta. The novel follows the lives of two major characters: Piya Roy, an American Indian marine biologist, and Kanai Dutt, an Indian businessman [4]. Piya travels to the Sundarbans to research endangered river dolphins, where she befriends Fokir, a local fisherman who becomes her guide. Kanai travels to the region to accomplish his late uncle's request of dispersing his ashes in a rural community [5]. Piya and Kanai's paths cross, and they get involved in the lives of the Sundarbans' people. The novel delves into issues including ecology, human resilience, and the complex interaction between humans and nature. The protagonists struggle with their own wants, anxieties, and relationships to the natural world as they navigate the harsh and unpredictable nature of the Sundarbans [6]. As Piya goes deeper into her studies, she encounters environmental and local political problems. Meanwhile, Kanai uncovers disturbing details about his uncle's background and the impact of human activities on the Sundarbans' delicate ecology [7].

Ghosh's descriptive writing and rich narrative create a devastating portrayal of life in the Sundarbans, where storms and rising sea levels loom large. "The Hungry Tide" is a touching study of the intricacies of human life and the critical necessity for environmental stewardship in the face of ecological crises [8]. The current analysis of The Hungry Tide is predicated on the idea that both novels offer an amalgam of human understanding and historical context via ecological considerations. History is no longer a static concept that is restricted to a single nation, region, or period of time [9].

Fantasy novels and nature in particular provided the voice of the ordinary man—his hardships and sacrifices that were overlooked in the chronicles of history—a prominent position [10]. Its effect is evident in the way that Ghosh's eco-criticism highlights the misery of the oppressed and disadvantaged while praising the political, cultural, social, and economic policies of centralised power institutions. The novel The Hungry Tide is being studied in this research because it reflects both profound ecological viewpoints and an inherent exposition of social

ecology, highlighting the various problems that are communicated via the novel's various characters and images [11].

Nature is endowed with the same inherent rights and moral standing as humans. The first method utilised to analyse the environmental issues in the novel is called Deep Ecology, and it focuses on promoting equality among humans towards all living things, not only those that are part of the ecosphere. Every living thing, be it a single bird, a river, a species as a whole, a unique environment, or an ethnic community, should be treated equally, regardless of whether it is sentient or not [12]. This is also depicted in the novel *The Hungry Tide*, when Piya's preservation of a specific dolphin species is encroached upon by the wider conservation of other human groups and animals.

Man is restless, unrooted, and uneasy; he seeks solace, calm, and a place to live since the contemporary world has disrupted his feeling of belonging. The joy of liberty has vanished. All that remains of life are pauses and silences devoid of purpose or harmony. The world and the word are very different from one another. Gaps, absences, and smooth silences create a tumultuous environment that compels Ghosh to create his novels, which feature victims of history [13]. Shobha Tiwari in her books *Amitav Ghosh: A Critical Study* comments:

Ghosh questions the very basis of modern nation states. It does not matter how many states exist in a continent or sub-continent. It does not change the well being of its people. Nationhood itself is a mirage because it is not based on any logic. When nature draws line in the form of mountains, oceans, rivers, it is real. But manmade borders are shallow and unjustifiable (36).

One such writer from the post-colonial age is Ghosh, who illustrates nature, the environment we live in, and how humans interact with it via the use of myths, stories, and history. Ghosh is a symbol of the value of location and environment, both of which are connected to human civilization [14]. The ecosphere as a whole is very important; the foundation of ecocriticism is the connection between man and environment that gives rise to thoughts and energy. His works delicately include human insights and the unrecorded history of everyday people [15].

### **Representation of virulent nature**

Amitav Ghosh's *"The Hungry Tide"* is a riveting environmental exploration set in the Sundarbans, a region where the Bay of Bengal meets ancient mangrove forests. The novel challenges us to consider the way of interaction with the nature, such as how to navigate the boundary between civilization and wilderness, our responsibilities to ecosystems, and the repercussions of ignoring the delicate balance of life that maintains our planet. Ghosh's story is a profound meditation on the critical need for environmental stewardship, asking us to examine our role in the complex web of life and recognise that our decisions today will impact the fate of future generations. Man's interaction with nature has resulted in enormous advancements, yet this method frequently hides the risk of catastrophe.

Ghosh has presented another aspect of human existence here, exposing the same selfishness that exists in the human world. Piya witnesses the savage slaughter of fish, crabs, and prawns while searching for the *Orcella* population. The rivulets there provide a rich supply of fish and crabs, which are quite profitable in terms of commerce. Humans have always been interested in making a profit, and this is no exception. Ghosh speculated,

" ... because there is a lot of money in prawns and the traders had paid off the politicians. What do they care -- or politicians for that matter? It's people like us who're going to suffer and it's up to us to think ahead" (134).

The novel explores environmental challenges in Morichjhapi via Nirmal's diary. The document includes Nirmal's personal life history. The government picked Morichjhapi as a location for a tiger preservation initiative. The area was populated and inhabited by East Pakistani refugees. They discovered enormous territory in the Sunderbans and established their living. Ghosh effectively summarises events in Morichjhapi in 1979 using Nirmal's perspective. The evacuees were forced to leave the island when it was designated as a tiger reserve.

However, "The Hungry Tide" urges us to address environmental degradation and climate change with compassion and foresight, highlighting the delicate balance of life on Earth. It calls for environmental stewardship, as our choices today will have long-lasting effects.

### **Ecological consciousness**

The intersection of historical and ecological views is the focus of an ecocritical interpretation of Ghosh's novel. The past is no longer an immutable concept. Life itself is sustained by natural ecosystems, therefore it is necessary to recognise our reliance on them as "nature." This novel examines harmful environmental policies that ignore the physical terrain and the lives of the socially and economically disadvantaged groups, such as tribe members, nomads, indigenous people, and forest dwellers. The characters Piya and Nilima are used to study this novel from a profound ecological point of view, while the social ecocritical viewpoint explores the significance of preserving local people and their culture in tandem with the ecology. The novel's other social ecology approach concentrates on issues that are intrinsic to humanity as a whole, highlighting issues that people believe are pertinent to human structures, institutions, and cultural practices that uphold the idea that all elements are necessary to maintain the balance and sustainability of life on Earth.

The study of social ecology looks at how environmental categories like forests, water, and social interactions with societal categories like culture, government, social structure, and economics. The *Hungry Tide*'s anticipated social-ecological element identifies the underlying human-environmental predicament. The forest department's personal interests are served by the funds that various environmental organisations have provided for the Tiger Conservation project.

The *Hungry Tide* is a novel in which environmental and ecological themes permeate the setting, the action, and the locations chosen. In every novel, Ghosh explores the lives of individuals who practise many religions, cultures, languages, and ethnicities rather than focusing on just one country and its inhabitants. The story takes place over a period of thirty to forty years, and unlike its predecessors, most of the action takes place in a single location. The *Hungry Tide*, takes place on West Bengal's stunning Sunderbans islands. The writing takes place in the context of the division of the former Pakistan into Bangladesh and Pakistan.

In the novel a Western scientist travels to the Bay of Bengal's Sunderbans archipelago to research endangered animals. The scientist Piya and their local informants, such as Fokir, build deeply felt ties. They both had a genuine love of existential struggles and the natural environment. The author's ideas for the story were driven by the political control over the populace and their poverty, particularly in light of the Morichjhapi tragedy. The changing link between persons and surroundings in a world becoming more globalised is reflected in large part in the act of existence itself. With his ability to blend the fictional with the true, Ghosh rewrites history. He places his fictional characters in competition with historical figures, giving them a different place. The narrative more successfully emphasises how people are hostile to both environment and animals, as seen by the destruction of rainforests and the slaughter of animals for profit.

The novel raises the question of whether environmentalism is a worthwhile cause or just another western hoax. The *Hungry Tide* adds to the discussion on the function of "place" in the natural ecosystem and Ghosh's perspective on the disparity in power between the wealthy and the impoverished, as well as those in positions of authority and those who lack it. Massey's "power geometry" of place may be used to discuss how humans intervene to get power and to hold people accountable for the unequal roles that human agency plays in relation to place, which is something that social ecology fervently promotes. In varying degrees, Ghosh has illustrated the socio-ecological and political-economic processes in the Sunderbans via several personalities. In certain ways, power manifests as fear and greed, and it also fosters exploitative, patriarchal, and class-based societal structures. The physical environment is made easier to appropriate, standardise, commercialise, and desacralize by such corrupt authority. Few environmentalists have advocated for the abolition of cars in favour of their more efficient usage in response to the oil crisis and rising pollution. Environmentalists backed by powerful political figures believe that using ever more advanced technology is the only way to solve the problems caused by technology, notwithstanding their ignorance of these issues.

### **Navigating the Nexus of Environmental Sustainability and Social Justice**

Two major narratives that center on protagonists Piyali Roy and Kanai Dutt's separate trips to the Sunderbans. The narrative is split between Piyali's expedition, which emphasises the value of protecting the environment, and the Morichjhapi incident, which illustrates social injustice. Researcher Piyali finds a unique kind of dolphin and investigates with help from the community. The Sunderbans are shown as an ecosystem and a battlefield where disputes between people and animals—based on ideas of dominance—occur. The intricate depiction of the mangrove forest highlights the conflict between protecting endangered species and

sustaining local economies by obfuscating the boundaries between people and wildlife. To represent the difficulties of people and animals on the island, the writer writes:

“Think of what it was like: think of tigers, crocodiles, and snakes that lived in the creeks and alas that covered the islands. This was a feast for them. They killed hundreds of people. So humans were killed that S’Daniel began to give out rewards to anyone who killed a tiger or crocodile”(55).

Since environmental justice addresses issues of politics, economics, class, and conservation, it is often linked to social movements. Even though it is known that environmental issues have an impact on social hierarchies, it shows people's awareness and comprehension of environmental degradation. In today's world, people are separated for a multitude of reasons, and the idea of dominance looms large in each person's mind. Social inequality must constantly be eradicated if environmental justice is to lead to equal rights for all. The two Sundarbans islands of Lusibari and Morichjhapi are assessed as distinct sites of social discrimination in the narrative.

Environmentalism Piyali Roy moved her boat to board Fokir's in the hopes that he may lead her to the site of the Irrawaddy dolphin. They are able to communicate through gestures despite their limited language skills, and Piya even offers him a picture of the Irrawaddy dolphin so he would always know what it is. Nature may be kind and harsh at the same time. During their journey, Piya falls into the river, but Fokir saves her. Because of the destruction of the environment brought about by wood smugglers cutting down the mangrove forest, the inhabitants must continuously deal with storms and floods. This causes nature to become unbalanced. On the other hand, over use of natural resources can harm the ecosystem and upend the food chain. Everyone should have equal access to natural resources, yet no one is in a position to distribute them fairly. In many places, these resources are distributed differently in practice.

All living species struggle in the Sundarbans to withstand natural disasters. This abundant site has turned into a tempting destination for capitalists who think that the natural resources are only available to humans. In the story, we see the extinction of many endangered creatures due to people's negligence. A healthy environment is always harmed by the extinction of a species because it upsets the balance of life. Eco-imbalance can only be avoided by conservation, which can only be accomplished if people act morally towards both living and nonliving things. A long-term environmental plan is necessary to preserve natural worth, and animals need to have the moral right to remain in the wild in their own manner.

The wave is frequently utilised throughout the novel to illustrate the contrasts that the people of the island face. The residents' main sources of food are fish and crabs, therefore they rely greatly on the river for their survival. The author expresses discontent with how people and the environment conflict and a desire to inculcate moral principles into people's minds. Animals are suffering because of the destruction of forests to make way for new habitats

brought about by overcrowding. The people of Lusibari consider "Bon Bibi" to be "the goddess of their forest," ruling over the Sunderbans' fauna. They think that the kind 'Bon Bibi' will keep natural calamities from destroying their life. The author illustrates the gullible attitude of the peasantry with a fictitious case. But the mangrove forest's water offers a home for living things like tigers, crocodiles, snakes, and so on. It continuously keeps the region safe from cyclones, natural calamities, and deforestation. In the backdrop of expelling inhabitants, the author addresses the struggle between the island's natural and human inhabitants for the preservation of the marine life and tiger population in the Sunderbans. He was shocked to see the suffering endured by native people who were compelled to flee their island due to colonial forces. There is a social injustice between the demands of locals and the significance of wildlife conservation as a result of the postcolonial political conflict. Many countries are creating new legislation to protect wildlife and natural resources, but this can only be accomplished if people's consciences are raised. The exploitation and oppression of people, land, cultures, and other living things is always challenged by environmental justice.

Because of their situation and struggle to survive in a delicate ecosystem, the villagers are forced to kill wild animals. Due to Kusum's assertion that humans have always interacted with the ground, cultivating and cleaning it of impurities, people may attain harmony between themselves and the environment. The author presents the experiences of three different witnesses to the tiger slaughter in diverse voices. Deeply concerned about the environment, Piya wishes to protect the tiger no matter what the situation in the people is. One of the villagers, Fokir, encourages his group to kill the tiger since he knows that if it were released right now, one of them would suffer a harm. Kanai starts to show consideration for the tigers' victims. In this narrative, Ghosh presents three different perspectives on the world's divergent views on the fight for environmental justice. Because they are considered victims of environmental justice, the government does not even provide compensation to the victims. Ghosh uses his writing to draw attention to how awful their situation is.

It happens every week that people are killed by tigers. How about the horror of that? If there were killings on that scale anywhere else on earth it would be called genocide, and yet here it goes almost unremarked: these killings are never reported, never written about in the papers. And the reason is just that these people are too poor to matter. We all know it, but we choose not to see it. Isn't that a horror too—that we can feel the suffering of an animal, but not of human beings? (325)

Although the author educates readers on the need of animal preservation, human lives shouldn't be sacrificed for it. Environmentalists are still in favour of a mutually biocentric, holistic state because they believe it will lead to the advancement of environmental justice. Morality and humanity combine to form our consciences, which enable our brains to make ecocentric choices about the preservation of natural resources. While environmentalists place a strong focus on safeguarding threatened species, humanists work to uphold mankind by eradicating all types of discrimination. At the conclusion of the narrative, we learn that Piya travels to Garjontola with Fokir in order to gather information on the Irrawaddy dolphins.



While there, they come across a horrific hurricane that destroys all life. Deforestation, which happens when smugglers chop down a lot of trees in the forest and smuggle lumber for profit, is the cause of natural disasters. When people cut down trees, they are unintentionally hurting themselves, and nature is reacting negatively to that. Ecologists aim for harmony between people and nature, whereas advocates of equality or justice use these concepts as a justification for environmental injustice. Beyond only imparting values and ethics, environmental justice creates the foundation for environmental integrity.

## **Conclusion**

By integrating various storylines, the novel *The Hungry Tide* raises readers' suspicions about state politics and their alleged growth plans. The combination of ecological and theoretical statements is known as ecocriticism. It studies the interdependence of man and nature and seeks to comprehend its breadth. The novel demonstrated how dishonest and misleading the state's rhetoric on development is. If it serves any function at all, it is to collaborate with established authorities while ignoring possible human-land interactions. Ghosh employs a number of postmodernist techniques, including pastiche and historical fiction. These techniques contribute to the novel's ecological setting. The study serves as a grim reminder to humanity that long-term exploitation of nature will end in an outburst of nature. Many authors have used pictures of nature to express their characters' aims, weaknesses, and emotions. Both critical animal studies and ecocriticism seek to redefine humanity's connection with other animals. Unlike ecocritics, who tend to focus on systemic and frequently unintentional harms to other species, including a wide range of both animals and plants, animal studies have prioritised higher animals' social, cognitive, and emotional abilities, as well as humans' conscious infliction of violence against them. These two view points differ in certain cases, but they conflict when ecocritics permit the slaughter of individual organisms or species in the name of conserving ecosystem function.

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