



Ecology, Displacement, and Human-Nonhuman Relations in Amitav Ghosh's The Hungry Tide

Madhab Prasad Bhattarai

Institute of Advanced Communication, Education, and Research (IACER)

Pokhara University, Pokhara, Nepal

madhabpbhattarai@iacer.edu.np

<https://orcid.org/0009-0000-0515-6387>

Nabin Bahadur Khatri

Institute of Advanced Communication, Education, and Research (IACER)

Pokhara University, Pokhara, Nepal

nabinbkhatr@iacer.edu.np

<https://orcid.org/0009-0002-1529-7102>

Received: June 22, 2026

Revised & Accepted: August 19, 2026

Copyright: Author(s) (2026)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/).

Abstract

Background: This paper examines Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* through an ecocritical lens to explore the intertwined themes of ecology, displacement, and human–nonhuman relations. Amitav Ghosh, a prominent Indian English-language novelist known for postcolonial and environmental concerns, published *The Hungry Tide* in 2004. The novel is set in the Sundarbans, a vast mangrove forest where tides reshape islands daily, and humans, tigers, and dolphins coexist in fragile tension.

Methods: Using qualitative textual analysis grounded in ecocriticism, especially drawing on the theoretical insights from Lawrence Buell's *Environmental Imagination* and Rob Nixon's *Slow Violence*, this paper addresses five research questions: how the Sundarbans is represented as an active agent; how human–nonhuman interdependence is depicted; how marginalized communities are affected by ecological vulnerability and state politics; how Ghosh critiques conservation practices that justify displacement; and whether the novel proposes an alternative ecological ethics.

Results: This article finds that Ghosh redefines nature as an active, agentic force; exposes ethical ambiguities in human-nonhuman relations; reveals the Morichjhapi massacre as an example of slow violence; contrasts Western science with indigenous knowledge without



romanticizing either; and proposes an ecological ethics based on humility, interdependence, and care.

Conclusion: This article attempts to contribute to ecocritical scholarship by foregrounding nonhuman agency, an underexplored dimension in Ghosh's existing criticism.

Novelty: This paper offers insights into contemporary debates on climate change, Indigenous knowledge, and environmental justice, foregrounding nonhuman agency in *The Hungry Tide*.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, Environmental justice, Nature-culture binary, Slow violence, Indigenous knowledge

Introduction

Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* embodies diverse literary traditions. First, it is a work of environmental literature that vividly describes the Sundarbans' unique mangrove ecology. Second, it focuses on the narratives of immigrants, fishermen, and marginalized communities through a postcolonial lens. Finally, it is also an early work of climate fiction, featuring cyclones, rising seas, and extinct species. Still, the novel goes deeper, blending these literary traditions. It uses their intersection to address a tough question: What happens when saving the environment seems to involve harming poor people? Ghosh refuses to choose between human welfare and nonhuman survival. Instead, he depicts how the two are irreducibly interwoven. This tension plays out most evidently in the landscape itself. *The Hungry Tide* (2004) reflects the Sundarbans not as a passive setting but as an active, dynamic force. Tides change islands regularly. Mangroves erase time. Cyclones kill thousands of humans and nonhuman lives. The river dolphins and the Royal Bengal tigers are not only vulnerable species; they are essential characters whose fortunes are associated with the lives of refugees, fishermen, and scientists. Ghosh contends that the nonhuman world has agency—it acts, destroys, withdraws, and haunts. Moreover, the novel opposes ecological sensitivity as a pretext for violence against the marginalized. The 1979 Morichjhapi massacre, in which the West Bengal government evicted and killed hundreds of Bengali immigrants to safeguard a tiger reserve, is the novel's historical and ethical foundation. Through Kusum's agonizing query about the existence of "those people who love animals so much that they are willing to kill us for them" (Ghosh, 2004, pp. 261-262). Here, Ghosh exposes the false dichotomy that presents a choice between human welfare and animal conservation.

Conversely, the novel connects Piya, a cosmopolitan American cetologist, and Fokir, an illiterate fisherman who knows the river intimately, revealing that ecological knowledge is not the monopoly of science. Working together with Piya without a shared language, using a GPS and a crab line, they map the dolphins' movement patterns. Yet the novel is not utopian. Fokir dies during the cyclone, sheltering Piya with his own body. His death illustrates that even the deepest ecological understanding cannot guarantee survival. What it can do is create purpose, togetherness, and remembrance, which may be enough.

Building on Ghosh's larger concerns with history, marginalization, and ecology, this paper also explores how *The Hungry Tide* develops these themes through three specific lenses: the



representation of the tide country as an active ecological agent, the depiction of displacement as both a human and nonhuman condition, and the entanglement of human and animal lives in the mangrove forests of the Sundarbans. Through Nirmal's notebook, Ghosh asserts that the tide country is "skilful in silting over its past" (Ghosh, 2004, p. 69). The same can be said for official history, too. *The Hungry Tide*, therefore, is an excavation, digging through the silt of forgetfulness to recover what has been buried. He does not do it through grand narratives but in intimate character-driven stories. History is not a series of dates and treaties for Ghosh. Rather, it is the memory of a mother who saw her husband killed by a tiger. It is the notebook of a retired schoolmaster who chose to die with the refugees. It is an illiterate fisherman's GPS data, drawn by the tides.

Similarly, Ghosh writes history as memory, trauma, and resistance, not as a chronicle of the powerful. Ghosh does not portray marginalized people as passive victims. They are not merely acted upon by history. They act, resist, survive, and sometimes fail. Kusum walks back across India with her child to the tideland. Horen lived through the cyclone of 1970, which killed almost 300,000 people. Moyna faces complexities in educating her son and becoming a nurse herself. Fokir sacrifices his life to save Piya. Hence, these are not stories of powerlessness but of constrained agency and struggles. Furthermore, Ghosh does not romanticize poverty. He shows its inhumanity. The certainty of death is such that the women of Lusibari dress up as widows before their husbands die. They eat wild leaves, and the refugees have dysentery. Fokir's family has no money, food, or security. Ghosh's sympathetic eye is not sentimental; he centres marginalized voices without romanticizing suffering, showing both agency and vulnerability.

On the contrary, the Sundarbans is not just a setting of *The Hungry Tide*. It is the organizing principle of the novel, its protagonist, and its firm voice. The large mangrove ecosystem, covering the delta of the Ganga, Brahmaputra, and Meghna rivers, is unlike any other landscape on Earth. It is half water, half land. The tides reshape the landscape twice a day. It is home to the Royal Bengal Tiger, the crocodile, the Irrawaddy dolphin, and millions of people living on the fragile margins of survival. These factors make the Sundarbans an ideal place to study ecological vulnerability not as an abstract concept, but as a daily, lived reality. The novel depicts this distinctive feature as:

The tides reach as far as three hundred kilometers inland, and every day thousands of acres of forest disappear underwater, only to re-emerge hours later. The currents are so powerful as to reshape the islands almost daily— some days the water tears away entire promontories and peninsulas; at other times it throws up new shelves and sandbanks where there were none before (Ghosh, 2004, p. 7).

This description, central to Ghosh's project, implies that the Sundarbans is not a stable backdrop. It is a dynamic, shape-shifting system that resists human control. This is ecological vulnerability at its most fundamental level.

Additionally, mangroves are not ordinary trees. They can live in salt water. Their roots trap sediment, creating new land. They serve as a barrier against cyclones and storm surges. They



are nursing dishes for fish and crabs. In the Sundarbans, they are the foundation of the ecosystem and the local economy. “The specialty of mangroves is that they do not merely recolonize land; they erase time. Every generation creates its own population of ghosts”(Ghosh, 2004, p. 50). This exemplifies that mangroves are agents of historical amnesia. They cover over what came before: abandoned villages, dead bodies, failed settlements. This is ecological vulnerability as erasure. The tide-covered country does not preserve the past; it buries it.

Objectives

This paper explores Ghosh’s representation of the Sundarbans as an active ecological agent, the predicament of human and nonhuman lives, and the assessment of conservation practices that sideline human suffering. Most scholars have examined the novel from postcolonial or human-centered viewpoints, but they have not adequately reflected it through the interconnected lenses of ecology, displacement, and human-nonhuman relations. To address this gap, this paper formulates the following research questions:

- i. How does *The Hungry Tide* represent the fragile ecology of the Sundarbans as an active agent rather than a passive backdrop?
- ii. In what ways does the novel depict human-nonhuman interdependence through the entangled lives of humans, tigers, dolphins, and crabs?
- iii. How are marginalized communities—refugees, fishermen, widows—affected by the convergence of ecological vulnerability and state politics in the novel?
- iv. How does Ghosh critique conservation practices (such as Project Tiger) that ignore human suffering and justify displacement?
- v. Does the novel propose an alternative ecological ethics, and if so, what are its key features?

Though ecology and displacement are paths alike leading toward a reimagining of justice, true ecological justice is possible only when one acknowledges that human suffering and ecological vulnerability are intertwined. Giving up the anthropocentric hypothesis that nature exists merely for human use creates space for a more balanced, interdependent understanding of the world. Therefore, this study aims to discover the themes in Amitav Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide* through the novel’s ecological foregrounding—the tides, mangroves, rivers, cyclones, and the intertwining lives of humans and non-humans. The novel allows the reader to experience ecological vulnerability firsthand, moving beyond theoretical abstraction. Similarly, its depiction of human-nonhuman encounters reflects how attentiveness to the nonhuman world provides a linear way to understand the limits of anthropocentric intelligence. This study interprets ecology as a call for humility and interdependence, while witnessing ecological violence is an experiential process that nurtures ethical reflection and transformation. Therefore, it scrutinizes how the Sundarbans’ fragile ecosystem and refugee displacement are not separate crises but one entangled crisis. In essence, this study analyzes the novel’s perseverance on ecological agency and its critique of preservation-as-displacement as a path toward a more just and ecologically attuned ethics.

Literature Review



Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2004) has received extensive critical attention. Many scholars have studied, analyzed, and interpreted the novel through ecocriticism, postcolonial theory, slow violence, environmental humanities, and subaltern studies. Earlier studies mainly focused on the Morichjhapi massacre, refugee displacement, and state violence. Recent research has been tilting towards ecological issues. They examine the Sundarbans as an active agent of the narrative rather than as a simple passive background.

Contemporary critics have also explored the interconnectedness between humans and the nonhuman world. The tides, rivers, forests, animals, and climate impact human life in the novel. This challenges human-centered views of nature. Scholars have also examined conservation policies and their effects on local and displaced communities. The concept of slow violence is important in this context. Environmental destruction, poverty, displacement, and political oppression often develop gradually. These forms of violence affect both human communities and the natural environment. However, a research gap remains. Many studies examine ecology, displacement, conservation, and violence separately. Few studies bring these issues together through a sustained focus on nonhuman agency and its ethical implications. This paper addresses this gap. It examines how nonhuman forces shape human life, conflict, and ethical choices in *The Hungry Tide*. It focuses on the interrelationship between ecology, displacement, and human-nonhuman relations.

Ecological Crisis, Environmental Anxiety, and Narrative Form

A central focus of recent criticism has examined the novel's articulation of ecological crisis and environmental anxiety through its narrative structure and formal innovations. Yousafzai and Maryam (2026) examine how *The Hungry Tide* represents ecological crisis through its themes, characters, and depiction of the Sundarbans. They argue that the novel presents climate vulnerability, endangered species, and unstable landscapes as everyday realities (Yousafzai and Maryam, 2026, p. 2). The novel's floods, shifting islands, and fragile ecosystems create environmental anxiety, especially among marginalized communities (Yousafzai and Maryam, 2026, p. 2). Its non-linear and multi-voiced narrative also connects scientific and indigenous knowledge (Yousafzai and Maryam, 2026, p. 2). This anxiety is both personal and collective and is intensified by displacement and political insecurity (Yousafzai and Maryam, 2026, p. 12).

Slow Violence and the Politics of Displacement

Another major aspect of recent criticism has focused on the Morichjhapi episode as the novel's most critical commentary on environmental politics and state violence, framed through Rob Nixon's concept of slow violence. Martina and Paul (2026) provide a comprehensive analysis of how *The Hungry Tide* exemplifies Nixon's theoretical lens of *Slow Violence* by depicting the gradual, often invisible forms of violence that unfold over extended temporal scales and disproportionately affect marginalized populations. They argue that the novel's representation of the Morichjhapi massacre reveals how environmental governance produces what can be understood as slow, gradual violence, generating an atmosphere of uncertainty and fear for displaced communities. The refugees survive under the knowledge that they are expendable,



living “as refuse to be swept away in the name of the tiger and the mangrove”(Martina and Paul, 2026, p. 976), highlighting how ecological and political anxieties come together. Nirmal’s diary reconstructs a neglected episode of postcolonial history, exposing how the rhetoric around conservation served to legitimize the takeover of land and natural resources.

Biswas and Channarayapatna (2022) provide a detailed analysis of this connection, directly linking the marginalization of the Marichjhapi refugees to ecocritical approaches. They argue that “the refugees that were displaced in the Sundarbans have been erased from the social and political narratives. Their existence has been made to be inaudible, invisible, and powerless” (p. 172). Their work demonstrates how Ghosh and other writers expose the human cost of environmental policies, revealing that conservation rhetoric can be weaponized against dispossessed populations. However, they also offer a significant critical reading, challenging Ghosh’s perpetuation of a Bhodrolok-centric narrative that keeps Dalit voices in the margins and obscures the caste violence innate in the Marichjhapi massacre. They argue that Ghosh chose his poor and afflicted characters as locals, such as Fokir, Kusum and Horen, and his saviors as upper-caste Bhadroloks, such as Piya, Kanai, Nirmal and Nilima” (p. 173), in that way favoring the upper-caste perspective in Dalit refugee narratives.

Panta (2024) further develops this perspective by framing the novel through a “post-colonial ecocritical” dynamic, showing how ecological vulnerability and state politics converge to affect the most vulnerable. He argues that the novel reveals how “the environmental argument for saving the species” can become a justification for state violence, exposing the hypocrisy of a conservation model that prioritizes abstract ecological ideals over marginalized human lives (Panta, 2024, p. 131). The Morichjhapi massacre, although reported in the Calcutta press at the time, has long since faded from public memory. Ghosh’s novel performs the crucial work of recovery, making visible the slow violence that official history would bury and giving voice to those rendered invisible within dominant socio-political narratives.

Postcolonial Ecocriticism and the Critique of Development

The novel is also examined through the lens of postcolonial ecocriticism, opposing Western models of development and conservation that sideline local communities and indigenous knowledge systems. Panta (2024) provides a detailed analysis of how the novel destabilizes and subverts the Universalist claim of Western superiority based on the false dichotomy between nature and culture. Drawing on the theoretical insights of Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, he argues that “the basic tenet of postcolonial ecocriticism is that social injustice is embedded in the injustice of nature and it sees equity in both by rejecting Universalist claims of Eurocentrism which sees nature and local communities as resources” (Panta, 2024, p. 126). This framework enables a reading of the novel that exposes how colonial practices of treating native people and the environment as resources continue to operate through contemporary conservation policies.

Ambika and Padmanaban (2023) support these postcolonial ecocritical perspectives by invoking Murray Bookchin’s research that environmental issues are, at their core, social issues. They outline that social class and social hierarchy essentially shape human-environment



relations. At the same time, the state—like the upper classes—concedes but fails to adequately protect marginalized communities, who are most vulnerable to ecological threats (p. 416). Though their concern with human-nature conflict is praiseworthy, their analysis and interpretation remain anthropocentric and overlook the agency of the nonhuman world, which Ghosh aims to foreground in the novel.

Jindal, Saraswat, and Sharma (2025) argue that *The Hungry Tide* operates as a critical intervention in postcolonial environmental historiography, challenging dominant narratives of conservation and development in the contested Sundarbans region (p. 318). Through its layered narrative structure and engagement with historical trauma, the novel exposes two interconnected crises that undermine conventional environmentalism. First, it reveals how state-backed conservation initiatives, ostensibly designed to protect biodiversity, function as instruments of biopolitical violence that displace and marginalize vulnerable communities, particularly Dalit refugees and fishermen (Jindal et al., 2025, pp. 321–322). Second, it privileges Indigenous and vernacular ecological knowledge—embodied, place-based, and rooted in generations of lived experience—as epistemologically superior to the technocratic expertise of Western-trained scientists and global conservation organizations (Jindal et al., 2025, pp. 323–324). Together, these arguments suggest that environmental justice cannot be separated from social justice, and that a decolonial ecological ethic must center the voices, knowledge systems, and survival needs of those most affected by both ecological degradation and state-sponsored displacement.

Human-Nonhuman Relationships and Ethical Ambiguity

A fourth major strand of recent criticism has focused on the novel's depiction of human-nonhuman relationships, particularly through its treatment of Irrawaddy dolphins and Royal Bengal tigers. Dhar (2020) provides a crucial intervention in this area by arguing that the novel's twin narratives—Piya's scientific quest and the refugees' story—are deliberately structured to raise the reader's ecological consciousness. He observes that “through the female protagonist Piya's protest against the killing of a tiger, the writer wants to tell that non-humans exist in nature with a right to their very existence” (Dhar, 2020, p. 2). However, Dhar importantly notes that “the environmental argument for saving the species suits Piya, for it is easy for her to save dolphins. But it is difficult to accept it in the case of tigers, partly because they are a different variety of animals and partly because she does not know them well enough as tidal tigers” (Dhar, 2020, p. 12). It is the highlight of the moral ambiguity Ghosh foregrounds rather than offering easy solutions, as tigers are presented as neither villains nor romantic icons but as ecological beings acting according to instinct.

Kumar (2024) applies conservation ecocriticism to *The Hungry Tide*, arguing that the novel challenges anthropocentrism by presenting non-human characters such as Sundari trees, the Royal Bengal tiger, crocodiles, and Irrawaddy dolphins. Through the protagonist Piya's protest against tiger killings, Ghosh emphasizes that non-human creatures have the right to exist in nature (Kumar, 2024, p. 84). Kumar further emphasizes the role of the Bon Bibi myth in fostering environmental awareness, stating that “ecology, nature, and myths act as motivators,



fostering fundamental convictions that sustain human efforts towards ecological responsibility” (Kumar, 2024, p. 84). He concludes that human existence is deeply intertwined with nature, and harmony is achieved when humans recognize that all their needs and forms of life are sustained by the natural world (Kumar, 2024, p. 85).

Devi (2025) employs ecocriticism to study *The Hungry Tide*, stressing the complex interrelation between human and non-human beings in the fragile ecosystem of the Sundarbans. She argues that the novel counters anthropocentric portrayals and presents nature not as a passive backdrop but as a protagonist in shaping human destiny (Devi, 2025, p. 403). Devi further contends that Ghosh’s narrative challenges readers to reconceptualize the environment as a living, dynamic force that requires ethical and responsible engagement. Nonetheless, while Devi’s analysis is worthy in its emphasis on non-human agency and indigenous knowledge, it does not adequately address the specific complexity of marginalized communities—particularly Dalit refugees, fishermen, and widows—who are affected by the convergence of ecological vulnerability and state politics (Devi, 2025, p. 405).

Indigenous Knowledge Versus Western Scientific Rationality

A fifth significant strand of recent criticism has examined the novel’s treatment of knowledge systems, particularly the contrast between Piya’s Western scientific methodology and Fokir’s indigenous ecological knowledge. Critics have argued that Ghosh does not simply oppose these two knowledge systems but reveals their asymmetrical interdependence and the limitations of each. Yousafzai et al.(2026) extend this analysis by arguing that the novel’s alternating focalization between Piya’s scientific worldview and Fokir’s embodied ecological knowledge dramatizes the limitations of singular modes of understanding. They observe that “Piya’s approach is grounded in data, classification, and global conservation discourse, offering precision but often lacking contextual sensitivity. In contrast, Fokir navigates the environment through experiential knowledge” (Yousafzai et al., 2026, p. 9). The narrative form compels these ways of knowing to intersect, ultimately revealing their interdependence.

Srija and Mahalakshmi (2025) use the framework of “Eco-Subalternity” to analyze Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide*, associating ecocriticism and subaltern studies. According to them, the novel illustrates how predominant ecological discourses, including conservation and climate policy, often silence those most impacted by environmental decisions. Their analysis of Fokir as an “eco-subaltern” who possesses deep ecological knowledge overlooked by those in power is central to their argument (Srija and Mahalakshmi, 2025, p. 2). Additionally, they criticize how conservation can be a “tool of state power that marginalizes and silences the subaltern” (Srija and Mahalakshmi, 2025, p. 2). They also discuss the Morichjhapi massacre as a crucial event, connecting environmental policy with the displacement of refugees. However, their analysis does not adequately address the specific agency of non-human entities like tides, tigers, and dolphins as active participants in the narrative.

Gendered Dimensions of Ecological Vulnerability

A sixth strand of recent criticism has explored the gendered dimensions of ecological vulnerability and displacement in the novel. Scholars have noted that displacement is not



merely geographical but also gendered and intergenerational, with women bearing disproportionate burdens of ecological risk. Dhar (2020) observes that Nilima states that “in the tide country, girls were brought up on the assumption that if they married, they would be widowed in their twenties—their thirties if they were lucky” (Ghosh, 2004, p. 80), indicating that women are trained from childhood to expect loss. The widow’s white sari and the absence of bangles mark a displacement not from land but from the future itself.

Devi (2025) directly engages with the “ecology of the margins,” exploring the intricate “human and non-human entanglements” that define life in the Sundarbans from a gendered perspective. She argues that Ghosh’s novel reveals how environmental vulnerability is experienced differently by men and women, with women often facing additional burdens of care work, social marginalization, and limited mobility. Srijia and Mahalakshmi (2025) also offer a powerful synthesis by proposing a framework where “ecocriticism meets subaltern studies,” using the Sundarbans as a lens to understand how ecological and social marginalization are intertwined. They argue that the novel demonstrates how the refugees who were displaced in the Sundarbans have been erased from social and political narratives, with women and lower-caste individuals facing the most severe consequences of conservation-induced displacement.

Conservation Practices and Environmental Justice

Kumar and Rachana (2024) focus on the “environmental consciousness and climate concern” that permeates the narrative, connecting the novel’s depiction of ecological vulnerability to contemporary debates about climate change and environmental justice. They argue that Ghosh’s work is prescient in its anticipation of the climate crisis, presenting the Sundarbans as a microcosm of the global environmental challenges facing coastal communities worldwide (Kumar and Rachana, 2024, p. 218). Dora and Islam (2025) contribute a regional perspective through their concept of “coastal ecoculture,” examining how the novel engages with the specific cultural and ecological dynamics of the South Asian littoral. They argue that Ghosh’s work is part of a broader tradition of coastal writing that challenges land-centric assumptions and foregrounds the agency of water.

Identification of the Research Gap

In synthesizing this recent literature, a clear trajectory emerges. Contemporary scholarship has moved decisively towards integrated, material, and subaltern-focused ecocriticism that sees human and nonhuman suffering as inextricably linked. Studies have explored the novel’s articulation of environmental anxiety, its critique of slow violence, its postcolonial ecocritical dimensions, its treatment of human-nonhuman relationships, and its engagement with indigenous knowledge systems. However, a significant gap remains. While scholars have increasingly attended to nonhuman agency and its ethical implications, this aspect remains underexplored in its full narrative and theoretical dimensions. Most studies have focused on either the human dimension of displacement or the ecological dimension of conservation, without fully integrating these perspectives. The interconnected lenses of ecology, displacement, and human-nonhuman relations have not been adequately reflected in a single, comprehensive analysis. Furthermore, the psychological and affective dimensions of



environmental displacement, particularly in relation to concepts such as climate grief and ecological anxiety, remain underexplored. This study directly addresses these gaps by specifically foregrounding nonhuman agency as a central analytical category, arguing that Ghosh's novel not only represents nonhuman agency but uses it to fundamentally challenge the nature-culture binary and propose an alternative ecological ethics grounded in interdependence and humility.

Hence, this literature review reveals that while scholars have studied, examined, and explored the novel's postcolonial, historical, and displacement-focused dimensions, the ecological foreground and the agency of the nonhuman world remain underexplored. Earlier studies primarily focused on the Morichjhapi massacre, refugee displacement, and the critique of state violence.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative approach based on textual analysis of the novel, focusing on themes of ecology, displacement, and human-nonhuman relationships. The primary source is the novel *The Hungry Tide*, while secondary sources are scholarly articles, literary critiques, and relevant theoretical works on ecocriticism, slow violence, and environmental imagination. For this study on ecology, displacement, and human-nonhuman relationships, the analysis will be grounded in the theoretical frameworks of Rob Nixon's *Slow Violence* and Lawrence Buell's *Environmental Imagination*. Even though Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* is set in the Sundarbans, these theoretical frameworks align with the novel's critique of anthropocentrism and its focus on the entanglement of human and nonhuman suffering. The frameworks help illuminate how Ghosh's representation of tidal agency, mangrove erasure, and conservation-induced displacement challenges readers and scholars to move beyond human-centered narratives and toward a more ecologically attuned idea of justice.

Theoretical Framework

This paper applies two main theories to examine ecology, displacement, and human-nonhuman relations in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*. First, Lawrence Buell's *The Environmental Imagination* (1995) helps analyze the Sundarbans as an active force, not just a passive setting. Second, Rob Nixon's concept of *Slow Violence* from *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011) helps explain how conservation policies can cause gradual and hidden harm to the refugees and the fisherfolk.

Buell's Environmental Imagination

Buell argues that environmentally oriented works must treat the nonhuman environment not "merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history" (Buell, 1995, p. 7). This criterion is central to Ghosh's project: the Sundarbans is not a backdrop for human drama but an active force whose tides, cyclones, and mangroves shape refugee movements, memory, and survival itself. Buell outlines four criteria for identifying such works:



1. The nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history. 2. Human interest is not understood to be the only legitimate interest. 3. Human accountability to the environment is part of the text's ethical orientation. 4. Some sense of the environment as a process rather than as a constant or a given is at least implicit in the text (Buell, 1995, pp.7-8).

Ghosh fulfills all these criteria. The Sundarbans' ever-shifting landscape erases human settlements and memory. Dolphins and tigers are treated as beings with their own interests, not mere symbols. The Morichjhapi massacre forces readers to confront human accountability to conservation policies. And the novel's tidal rhythms, ebb and flood, and creation and destruction embody environment as process.

Buell further contends that " environmental crisis involves a crisis of the imagination" (Buell, 1995, p. 2), requiring new ways of imagining nature and humanity's relation to it. *The Hungry Tide*, therefore, is precisely such a work of environmental reflection, challenging readers to imagine nature not as a resource or backdrop but as an ethical presence. The novel's formal hybridity, mixing science, myth, history, and testimony, enacts the imaginative crisis Buell identifies, refusing easy resolution while insisting on ecological accountability.

Finally, Buell introduces the concept of " Nature's Personhood," arguing that environmental texts often grant the nonhuman world a form of agency typically reserved for human characters. He observes:

One of the dramatic developments in postromantic thinking about nature has been the decline and revival of the kinship between nonhuman and human. Its metaphysics withered in the last half of the nineteenth century; high modernism announced its death; modern ecologism has brought it back... to engage the culturally variable issue of who counts as a witness (Buell, 1995, p. 182).

Ghosh, through his narrative, attempts to revive this relationship by granting personhood to the tide itself. He employs Nirmal to do so. Nirmal's journal reflects on the bādh (embankment) as " our abacus and archive, our library of stories" (Ghosh, 2004, p. 202)—a physical feature of the landscape that speaks, remembers, and generates narrative. The novel asks readers to witness not only human suffering but also ecological vulnerability, treating the Sundarbans as a witness.

Nixon's Slow Violence

Nixon (2011) defines slow violence as violence that " occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all" (Nixon, 2011, p. 2). He elaborates:

By slow violence, I mean a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all. Violence is customarily conceived as an event or action that is immediate in time... we also need to engage the representational,



narrative, and strategic challenges posed by the relative invisibility of slow violence (Nixon, 2011, p. 2).

The Morichjhapi massacre in the novel exemplifies slow violence. The refugees were not killed in a single spectacular event but through bureaucratic neglect, starvation, and the gradual erosion of their right to exist. As Kusum reflects, “The worst part was not the hunger or the thirst. It was to sit here, helpless, and listen to the policemen making their announcements, hearing them say that our lives, our existence, were worth less than dirt or dust” (Ghosh, 2004, p. 261). Ghosh’s novel performs the work Nixon identifies, making slow violence visible through narrative.

Nixon further argues that “the environmentalism of the poor” arises when impoverished communities mobilize resource extraction and conservation policies that displace them. He writes:

This book’s second, related focus concerns the environmentalism of the poor, for it is those people lacking resources who are the principal casualties of slow violence... It is against such conjoined ecological and human disposability that we have witnessed a resurgent environmentalism of the poor, particularly (though not exclusively) across the so-called global South. (Nixon, 2011, p. 4)

The refugees who settled in Morichjhapi were precisely such “disposable people” —Dalits and lower-caste Hindus displaced from East Pakistan, then from a government resettlement camp, who sought to create a home in the Sundarbans. Their crime was being “just human beings” in a landscape declared valuable only for its trees and tigers. Ghosh’s novel amplifies their voices, making visible the slow violence that official history would bury.

Finally, Nixon introduces the concept of “displacement without moving,” arguing that impoverished communities may become “refugees in place” when their land is stripped of its life-sustaining features. He explains:

What I wish to stress here, then, are not just those communities that are involuntarily (and often militarily) relocated to less hospitable environs but also those affected by what I call “displacement without moving.” In other words, ...a loss that leaves communities stranded in a place stripped of the very characteristics that made it inhabitable (Nixon, 2011, p. 19).

The refugees on Morichjhapi experienced both physical displacement and “displacement without moving” once the government declared their island a protected forest reserve. Even before the final eviction, they were made to feel that their presence was illegal, their lives worthless. Ghosh’s portrayal of Kusum’s anguish captures this doubled displacement: she has nowhere else to go, yet the place she inhabits is being systematically unmade as a home.

Textual Analysis and Discussion

The Sundarbans as a Living and Agentic Ecosystem

In *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh presents the Sundarbans as more than a passive geographical backdrop. Rather, the Sundarbans emerge as a dynamic force that constantly demonstrates its



causes and effects to shape human existence. From the outset, Ghosh emphasizes the dynamic nature of the environment, stating that the river channels are spread across the land like a fine-mesh net, creating terrain where the boundaries between land and water are always mutating, always unpredictable” (Ghosh, 2004, p. 7). The tide country is depicted as a place where “there are no borders here to divide fresh water from salt, river from sea” (Ghosh, 2004, p. 7). Nirmal elaborates on this idea, stating, “For the bādh is not just the guarantor of human life on our island; it is also our abacus and archive, our library of stories. So long as I had the bādh in sight, I knew I would not lack for something to say”(Ghosh, 2004, p. 202). These descriptions foreground the tension between land and water, ecological vulnerability, and undermine anthropocentric conventions of stability, ownership, and control.

The novel further describes the Sundarbans’ instability, showing it as a landscape that continually changes its shape. Nirmal’s journal clearly substantiates this argument, where he reflects, “Look at it, my friend, look at the bādh. See how frail it is, how fragile. Look at the waters that flow past it and how limitless they are, how patient, and how quietly they bid on their time. Just to look at it is to know why the waters must prevail, later if not sooner” (Ghosh, 2004, p. 205).

The novel repetitively highlights how the physical environment asserts its dominance over human intentions. Nirmal, in his diary entry, reflects, “But here, in the tide country, transformation is the rule of life here: rivers stray from week to week and islands are made and unmade in days. In other places, forests take centuries, even millennia, to regenerate, but mangroves can recolonize a denuded island in ten to fifteen years”(Ghosh, 2004, p. 224). The land’s constant erosion and regeneration reveal nature as an active historical force, shaping migration patterns, livelihoods, and collective memory. Human settlements are repeatedly erased by tides, suggesting that survival in this region depends on negotiation rather than domination.

Yousafzai et al. (2026) further reinforce this understanding by noting that the novel presents “the ecological crisis as a continuous and structural condition rather than a series of isolated environmental events”(p.12). The depiction of the Sundarbans as a critical and fragile bioregion where shifting tides, unstable lands, and the arbitrary nature of natural agents create permanent flux and vulnerability for both human and non-human life. Ecological crisis, therefore, is embedded in everyday life, shaping and reshaping the formats of settlement and survival. Furthermore, the novel clearly shows that environmental deterioration in the Sundarbans cannot be separated from historical, political, and administrative decisions, especially those connected to the conservation policies that sideline locals and refugees.

Human–Nonhuman Interdependence: Dolphins, Tigers, and Ethical Ambiguity

A notable aspect of *The Hungry Tide* is its sustained focus on human–nonhuman relationships through depictions of Irrawaddy dolphins and Royal Bengal tigers. These animals are not just symbols; they are ethical beings that raise ethical questions about conservation, survival, and coexistence. Using a Western scientific database, Piya’s study reflects the global conservationist view. It recognizes dolphins as an endangered species and urges governments



to provide urgent protection. It is described in the novel as: “In the afternoon, as the waters began to rise, Piya noticed that she was seeing fewer of the dolphins. This was confirmed by a glance at her data sheets: it seemed the animals had begun to disperse with the turning of the tide” (Ghosh, 2004, p. 123). Piya trusts “data sheets” to confirm what she has observed. This reflects her training as a Western scientist. She records, measures, and analyses, showing her attentiveness to nature and her reliance on scientific tools.

Additionally, this observation underscores ecological interdependence. Tidal rhythms regulate dolphin behavior, not individual agency. By presenting the tide as an active force, Ghosh destabilizes the nature-culture binary and reconstructs the Sundarbans as a dynamic mangrove site of everlasting negotiation among human and nonhuman actors.

The novel also explores the moral ambiguity of the tiger in the Sundarbans, arising from the gap between how the law sees it and how the locals understand it. Legally, the tiger is an endangered species, shielded by international conservation funding and Indian forest law. When a tiger kills a human, the animal is protected, while the victim’s family receives little or no compensation. Yet this legal framework says nothing about the tiger’s own experience. Fokir offers a different interpretation: “when a tiger comes into a human settlement, it’s because it wants to die” (Ghosh, 2004, p. 295). Where the law sees an endangered animal to be preserved, Fokir sees a suffering creature seeking its own end. Neither perspective is complete. The novel forces the reader to hold both simultaneously: the tiger as a protected commodity and the tiger as a tragic being.

The same ethical conflict is depicted in the novel through Kusum’s desperate question:

Who are these people who love animals so much that they are willing to kill us for them? Do they know what is being done in their name? Where do they live, these people? Do they have mothers, fathers? As I thought of these things, it seemed to me that this whole world has become a place of animals, and our fault, our crime, was that we were just human beings, trying to live as human beings always have, from the water and the soil (Ghosh, 2004, pp. 261-262).

These queries expose the human cost of wildlife conservation in the Sundarbans. Through this episode, Ghosh argues that environmental protection should not come at the expense of marginalized human lives.

Indigenous Ecological Knowledge vs. Western Scientific Rationality

The contrast between Piya and Fokir serves as a central narrative strategy through which Ghosh critiques Western epistemic dominance. Piya’s ecological knowledge is data-driven, institutional, and mediated through technology. Fokir’s knowledge, by contrast, is embodied, intuitive, and rooted in generations of lived experience with tides, currents, and animal behavior in the Sundarbans. Ghosh places Piya’s scientific method and Fokir’s local ecological knowledge side by side to show that each forms a different but equally meaningful way of understanding the Sundarbans.

Piya’s work depends on instruments and measurement. Ghosh asserts, “The first and most important of these was the hand-held monitor that kept track of her location through the Global



Positioning System” (Ghosh, 2004, p. 73). Fokir’s knowledge, in contrast, is embodied and practical. This is a clear reinforcement of Ghosh’s central idea that Western science observes nature through devices and data, while indigenous knowledge reads it through lived attention, memory, and intimate familiarity with place. Rather than treating one as superior, the novel suggests that scientific rationality and local ecological wisdom must be the subject of dialogue to understand the essence of the Sundarbans.

Piya and Fokir communicate despite sharing no common language. She searches for dolphins; he knows where they are. She reflects, “It was surprising enough that their jobs had not proved to be utterly incompatible... one required a geostationary satellite while the other depended on bits of shark bone and broken tile” (Ghosh, 2004, p. 118). Piya’s scientific knowledge does not alienate her from Fokir; rather, it helps her relate to him. His embodied, intuitive knowledge and her data-driven methods intersect. Neither is superior. Ghosh suggests that genuine ecological understanding requires dialogue between these ways of knowing, not the dominance of one over the other.

Fokir’s honesty is illustrated when Piya attempts to pay him for his lost income after a corrupt forest official fines him: he “examines them in disbelief” and then “takes a single note and returns the rest to her,” refusing to take more than he feels he deserves (Ghosh, 2004, p. 145). This moment reflects the dignity and integrity of Fokir’s character, contrasting with the corrupt systems that surround him.

Morichjhapi and the Politics of Ecological Displacement

The Morichjhapi episode constitutes the novel’s most critical commentary on environmental politics and state violence. Ghosh uses Nirmal’s journal to narrate the story of how the government forcibly evicted and killed the refugees who had settled on Marichjhapi Island in the late 1970s. These refugees, mostly lower-caste Hindus who were displaced from East Pakistan, now Bangladesh, during the 1971 war of independence, ended up seeking refuge in the Sundarbans as they were denied land in other places. Besides, *The Hungry Tide* reveals how displacement is being used as a cover for state policy by showing environmental protection. Moreover, *The Hungry Tide* exposes displacement as deliberate state policy disguised as environmental protection. Nilima points out that “the authorities had declared that Morichjhapi was a protected forest reserve, and they had proved unbending in their determination to evict the settlers”(Ghosh, 2004, p. 119). Ecological rhetoric becomes a weapon against the poor. Refugees are not moved because there is no land available; they are moved because the government has changed the classification of their area to meet the requirements of international conservation.

The novel powerfully conveys the refugees’ plight through Kusum’s voice. After water and food supplies are cut off, she reflects: “The worst part was not the hunger or the thirst. It was to sit here, helpless, and listen to the policemen making their announcements, hearing them say that our lives, our existence, were worth less than dirt or dust”(Ghosh, 2004, p. 261). She continues, “This island has to be saved for its trees; it has to be saved for its animals. It is a part of a reserve forest; it belongs to a project to save tigers, which is paid for by people from all



around the world”(Ghosh, 2004, p. 261). This is sufficient to expose the cruel irony that international preservation funding directly enabled state violence against the poor.

Therefore, displacement is not merely geographical but also gendered and intergenerational. Nilima states that “in the tide country, girls were brought up on the assumption that if they married, they would be widowed in their twenties—their thirties if they were lucky” (Ghosh, 2004, p. 80). Women are trained from childhood to expect loss. The widow’s white sari and the absence of bangles mark a displacement not from land but from the future itself.

Panta (2024), in his article, argues that “social inequality and injustice in nature must be eradicated so as to liberate both”(p. 126). The refugees who settled in Morichjhapi were not environmental thugs; they were the real survivors seeking nothing more than a permanent home. Yet their lives were deemed expendable in the name of protecting some rare species. Kusum’s agonizing question hangs in the air, unanswered. Ghosh cleverly leaves this question suspended, turning a character’s wail of despair into a challenge directed at the reader.

Ecological Responsibility and Ecological Imagination

Gender plays a pivotal role in the novel’s ecological ethics. Nilima and Piya embody care-based engagement that contrasts with Western scientific approaches. Nilima’s work through the Badabon Trust focuses on healthcare, education, and social welfare for the displaced, an ethic of care rooted in long-term commitment. Nirmal builds a cyclone shelter that saves hundreds of lives, yet Nilima calls him “an unrealistic dreamer who misses out on his chance to do good on a small scale” (Ghosh, 2004, p. 150). The shelter, however, was “probably the most important thing he did in his whole life” (Ghosh, 2004, p. 388). Together, they show that cosmopolitan concern must be translated into local, material practices of care.

This care-based engagement is reflected in Piya’s transformation. Initially committed to scientific objectivity, she becomes ethically invested in the human consequences of conservation. She says to Nilima: “I’ve had several offers of funding from conservation groups. But I did not want to go ahead without talking to you first... so the local fishermen can be involved” (Ghosh, 2004, p. 397). Moyna’s response to Kanai is, “You’re not a woman, and you don’t know him. You won’t understand” (Ghosh, 2004, p. 156). This suggests that embodied, gendered experience shapes ecological understanding beyond data or language.

Ghosh’s narrative structure mirrors his ecological vision. Shifting perspectives between Piya, Kanai, Fokir, and Nirmal resist linear storytelling, reflecting the complexity of ecological systems. Scientific discourse coexists with myth, memory, and oral history. The myth of Bon Bibi represents, as Basu observes, “a shaping tool of an environment-aware unconscious for indigenous communities” (Basu, 2020, p. 3). The narrative itself follows tidal rhythms, ebb and flow, revelation and concealment, resisting linear progression. Ghosh thus does not merely represent ecological interdependence; he enacts it formally.

Toward Alternative Ecological Ethics

Ultimately, *The Hungry Tide* does not offer simple solutions to ecological conflict. Instead, it proposes an alternative ecological ethics grounded in humility, coexistence, and recognition of



vulnerability. Humans are neither masters nor mere victims of nature; they are participants in a fragile ecological web where survival depends on coexistence rather than domination. The novel's climactic scene embodies this ethic. During the cyclone, Fokir and Piya take refuge together. Ghosh asserts, "Their bodies were so close, so finely merged, that she could feel the impact of everything hitting him... it was as if the storm had given them what life could not; it had fused them together and made them one" (Ghosh, 2004, p. 390). Fokir dies while sheltering Piya from the storm's fury. The novel's conclusion: Kanai proposes to Piya, but she tells him that she prefers to remain single and single-minded in her dedication to her science. Piya recalls:

[T]he promises she had made to him in the silence of her heart and how, in those last moments, with the wind and the rain still raging around them, she had been unable to do anything for him other than to hold a bottle of water to his lips. She remembered how she had tried to find the words to remind him of how richly he was loved — and once again, as so often before, he had seemed to understand her, even without words (Ghosh, 2004, p. 393).

Hence, Piya's scientific knowledge could not save Fokir. Her words could not reach him. But her presence was enough. Therefore, for Ghosh, ecological ethics means shared vulnerability, not control. In the tide country, survival is remembrance, not triumph.

Furthermore, Piya's decision to make Lusibari her home "home is where the Orcaella are, so there is no reason why this couldn't be it" (Ghosh, 2004, p. 400) exemplifies a chosen attachment. Piya raises funds for more research and takes up residence with her aunt in the Sundarbans, representing an eco-cosmopolitanism that combines global scientific resources with local participation and care.

Yousafzai et al. (2026) conclude that "the novel ultimately places literature as a powerful device for expressing ecological injustice and promoting the ethical awareness required to counter and respond to contemporary environmental crises" (p. 12). The novel integrates cultural mythology, traditional ecological knowledge, and Western science into its environmental vision to justify that a sustainable ecological future is dependent on narrative, ethical, and relational frameworks as much as scientific intervention. Similarly, Panta (2024) argues that the novel successfully explores the issues of bioregionalism and environmental conservation to paint a picture of the realization of human beings in the environment and the ecology itself (p. 133).

Findings

A close study of the novel and scholarly research articles reveals that *The Hungry Tide* effectively illustrates the concept of "slow violence" by demonstrating how environmental degradation and political marginalization conspire to inflict profound suffering on human lives. The novel exposes how conservation policies—ostensibly aimed at environmental protection—can function as mechanisms of exclusion that disproportionately affect marginalized communities. It also highlights the role of literature in bringing to light



suppressed histories and giving a voice to those rendered invisible within dominant socio-political narratives. Furthermore, the text anticipates contemporary challenges related to climate change and migration, thereby positioning itself as a prescient commentary on present and future environmental crises.

The analysis reveals that *The Hungry Tide* represents ecological crisis as an ongoing structural condition rather than a series of isolated environmental events. The Sundarbans are depicted as a fragile bioregion where shifting tides, unstable landforms, and unpredictable natural forces create a permanent state of vulnerability for both human and non-human life. This instability foregrounds the idea that ecological crisis is embedded in everyday existence, shaping patterns of settlement, livelihood, and survival. The novel demonstrates that environmental degradation in the tide country cannot be separated from historical, political, and administrative decisions, particularly those linked to conservation policies that marginalise local populations.

The findings further indicate that environmental tension operates as a recurring emotional and psychological condition in the narrative. Characters internalize fear as a survival mechanism, resulting in extreme attentiveness and adaptive behavior. This anxiety is not limited to natural threats such as storms or predators but is intensified by socio-political insecurity, especially the threat of displacement and state violence. The convergence of ecological uncertainty and political abandonment produces a form of collective anxiety that structures community memory, belief systems, and daily practices. The novel shows how this anxiety becomes culturally encoded through myths and oral narratives, transforming fear into an organizing principle for survival.

Another major finding addresses the relationship between narrative form and ecological meaning. The novel's non-linear, multi-voiced structure mirrors the ecological diversity of the Sundarbans, emphasizing interdependence, multiplicity, and fluidity. By juxtaposing scientific discourse, mythic storytelling, and lived experience, the text destabilizes singular or authoritative modes of environmental knowledge. This formal strategy allows the narrative to stage a dialogue between Western scientific rationality and indigenous, embodied ways of knowing, suggesting that ecological understanding emerges from their interaction rather than their opposition.

The study also finds that *The Hungry Tide* advances a postcolonial ecocritical perspective by challenging the nature-culture divide commonly embedded in Western environmental thought. The novel portrays nature as an active agent that resists human control and exposes the ethical limitations of conservation models rooted in colonial logic. The Morichjhapi episode emerges as a central example of environmental injustice, where ecological protection is enforced through the exclusion and erasure of vulnerable human communities. This representation highlights how environmental policies, when detached from social realities, can reproduce colonial forms of violence.

Finally, the findings demonstrate that the novel contributes to emerging ecological discourse by foregrounding themes of biodiversity loss, ecological displacement, and ethical responsibility. By integrating cultural mythology and traditional ecological knowledge into its



environmental vision, *The Hungry Tide* suggests that sustainable ecological futures depend on narrative, ethical, and relational frameworks as much as scientific intervention. The text positions literature as a critical space for cultivating environmental awareness, empathy, and moral accountability in the context of the global ecological crisis.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* fundamentally redefines nature not as a passive resource but as an active, ethical force that shapes human lives and histories. Throughout the novel, Ghosh systematically dismantles the rooted nature–culture binary that has long dominated Western ecological thought. Instead of a static backdrop, the Sundarbans emerges as a dynamic protagonist—a tidal archipelago that inhales and exhales, shifts, and asserts its own sovereign logic. Nirmal observes a similar concept in his journal: “The tide country is not a place that has ever been mastered by anyone” (Ghosh, 2004, p. 8). Human attempts at control, whether through technology, law, or violence, are ultimately revealed as illusions. The water and the land of the Sundarbans continually reshape themselves beyond human authority, indifferent to borders, policies, or plans.

The novel further enriches this ecological vision by highlighting the profound connections between human and nonhuman beings. Ghosh refuses to romanticize these relationships or reduce them to simple moral allegories. The Irrawaddy dolphins that Piya studies are neither innocent symbols nor mere data points. They are unique, sentient beings whose existence demands ethical recognition. Piya's acknowledgment of dolphins as subjects rather than specimens seems to be her transition from scientific detachment to ethical involvement. Similarly, the Royal Bengal tiger is neither villain nor tragic victim alone. It is a powerful, amoral presence that commands respect and fear. The novel refuses easy moral judgments about the tiger's killings, insisting instead on the tragic reality of coexistence in a fragile tide-country.

Yet the novel is equally constant in its critique of how conservation initiatives can be weaponized against dispossessed populations. The Morichjhapi massacre, based on historical events, stands as the novel's most searing indictment of what Rob Nixon calls “slow violence.” State-sponsored tigers' conservation is revealed as a tool of displacement, exclusion, and even extermination. The refugees who settled on Morichjhapi were not environmental vandals; they were Dalit survivors seeking nothing more than a home. Yet their lives were deemed expendable in the name of protecting a charismatic species. Kusum's anguished question, “Who are these individuals that care for animals to the extent of being ready to kill us for them?” (Ghosh, 2004, p. 261) hangs in the air, unanswered. Ghosh deliberately leaves this question suspended, turning a character's cry of despair into a challenge directed at the reader. The novel's anti-colonial perspective is most vividly articulated through the juxtaposition of Piya's Western science and Fokir's indigenous knowledge. Ghosh does not simply oppose these two knowledge systems; he reveals their asymmetrical interdependence. Piya's scientific investigation would be impossible without Fokir's intimate familiarity with the tides and the river's creatures. Yet the novel refuses to idealize Indigenous knowledge. After Fokir's death,



Piya realizes, “ There was no way she could truly grasp what he understood” (Ghosh, 2004, p. 398). This admission is crucial: certain forms of ecological understanding are embodied, untranslatable, and fleeting. They cannot be captured in notebooks or replicated in laboratories. Such knowledge demands humility rather than appropriation.

The wider significance of *The Hungry Tide* extends far beyond its pages, speaking directly to contemporary debates in environmental justice and postcolonial ecology. The novel aligns powerfully with Nixon’s concept of “slow violence” —the attritional, often invisible harm inflicted on poor communities through exclusionary conservation. It also resonates with ecofeminist frameworks of care, which emphasize relationality and attention to vulnerability. By weaving these insights into a narrative, Ghosh establishes *The Hungry Tide* as a work of environmental justice advocacy. The novel insists that ecological duty cannot be separated from social duty. To care for the tiger or the dolphin is also to care for the refugee and the landless laborer. Any conservation ethic that ignores the suffering of the poor is not only unjust but incomplete.

Nevertheless, *The Hungry Tide* remains a significant contribution to literary and environmental discussion. In an era of accelerating climate breakdown and mass extinction, Ghosh’s novel offers no easy answers. Instead, it trains readers to inhabit uncertainty, respect complexity, and recognize that ecological existence is always a matter of negotiation, risk, and humility. “The Hungry Tide” will keep rising and falling, indifferent to our plans. The question is whether we can learn to live with it, and with each other, without resorting to the arrogant dream of mastery. In that lesson lies the novel’s lasting gift to environmental thought.

This study concludes that *The Hungry Tide* compels readers to rethink their relationship with the natural world. The ecological aspect in the novel is inseparable from history, ethics, and survival. Through its portrayal of the Sundarbans, Ghosh insists that human futures depend on recognizing the agency of the nonhuman world and the rights of those who live closest to ecological risk.

Data Availability Statement

No empirical data sets were generated for this research article. This work is solely dependent on textual and theoretical analysis of published sources.

Authors’ Contribution

The authors are entirely responsible for the conceptualization, theoretical framing, textual analysis, revision, and final approval of the article.

Transparency Statement: The authors confirm that this study has been conducted with honesty and in full adherence to ethical guidelines.

Funding: The study received no external funding.

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare there is no conflict of interest.



References

- Ağır, B. (2025). Tides of transformation: Storied waters and material narrativity in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*. *Moment Dergi*, 12(1), 100-125.
<https://doi.org/10.17572/mj2025.1.100-125>
- Basu, S.L. (2020). Exploring the Bond between Man and Nature in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*. *Journal of Indonesian Literature and Environmental Studies*, 5(5), 1–4.
<https://dx.doi.org/10.22161/ijels.55.3>
- Bhushan, V. (2021). An ecology and eco-criticism in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*. *The Creative Launcher*, 5(6), 133-141. <https://doi.org/10.53032/TCL.2021.5.6.18>
- Biswas, C., & Channarayapatna, S. (2022). Marginalization of Sundarbans' Marichjhapi: Ecocriticism approaches in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* and Deep Halder's *Blood Island*. *Literature*, 2(3), 169-178. <https://doi.org/10.3390/literature2030014>
- Buell, L. (1995). *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Devi, K. (2025). Ecology of the margins: Human and non-human entanglements in Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*. *International Journal of Humanities and Arts*, 7(1), 403-405.
<https://doi.org/10.33545/26647699.2025.v7.i1f.173>
- Dhar, T. N. (2020). Consciousness-Raising in Amitav Ghosh's Ecocritical Novel *The Hungry Tide*. *Journal of Indonesian Literature and Environmental Studies*, 1–14.
<https://doi.org/10.59817/cjes.v11i.45>
- Dora, A., & Islam, M. (2025). Coastal ecoculture in South Asia: A close reading of Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*. *South Asian Review*.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02759527.2025.2537494>
- Ghosh, A. (2004). *The Hungry Tide*. HarperCollins.
- Goswami, S. (2023). Literature, ecology, and environmental responsibility: Contemporary ecocritical perspectives. *International Journal of Literary Studies*, 8(3), 112-124.
- Jindal, P., Saraswat, R., & Sharma, K. (2025). Conservation, displacement, and postcolonial environmental injustice in South Asian literature. *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, 32(1), 318-327. <https://doi.org/10.64252/dgxyag48>
- Kumar, A. (2024). Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*: A study of eco-criticism. *International Journal of Humanities Education and Research*, 6(1), 83-85.
<https://doi.org/10.33545/26649799.2024.v6.i1b.76>
- Kumar, A., & Rachana. (2024). Environmental consciousness and climate concern: A study of Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*. *The Criterion: An International Journal in English*, 15(4), 213-221. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13684192>
- Martina J., & Paul P.S. (2026). Slow Violence in *The Hungry Tide*: An Eco-Critical Analysis. *Anusandhanvallari*, (1), 969-979. Available online at <https://www.psvmkendra.com>
- Nixon, R. (2011). *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Harvard University Press.



- Rajalingam, R., & Dharageswari, J. (2025). Harmony of Silence in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*. *JETIR*, 12(12), 1–5.
- Panta, P. (2024). Post-colonial ecocritical dynamics in Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*. *Dhaulagiri Journal of Contemporary Issues*, 2(1), 126-133. <https://doi.org/10.3126/djci.v2i1.67468>
- Parampil, A. J., & Singh, J. (2025). Ecology, politics, and aestheticism in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*. *Mindscape: A Journal of English & Cultural Studies*, 4(1), 15–22. <https://doi.org/10.3126/mjecs.v4i1.89970>
- Srija, D., & Mahalakshmi, K. (2025). Ecocriticism meets subaltern studies: A framework from the Sundarbans in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*. *International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences*, 10(4), 538-540. <https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.104.78>
- Yousafzai, T., & Maryam, G. (2026). Narrating Ecological Crisis: Environmental Anxiety and Literary Form in *The Hungry Tide*. *Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review*, 4(1). <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18555386>

Views and opinions expressed in this article are the views and opinions of the author(s), *NPRC Journal of Multidisciplinary Research* shall not be responsible or answerable for any loss, damage or liability etc. caused in relation to/arising out of the use of the content.