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**Reimagining Human–Environment Relations: Eco-criticism and Green Thought in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide***

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**Abstract:**

This paper examines Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2004) through the critical framework of eco-criticism and green thought, foregrounding the novel's reconfiguration of human–environment relations in the fragile ecosystem of the Sundarbans. Moving beyond anthropocentric literary paradigms, the study conceptualizes ecology as an entangled assemblage of human communities, nonhuman agencies, tidal landscapes, and historical forces. The novel challenges dominant conservationist and developmental discourses by juxtaposing scientific rationality with indigenous ecological knowledge, thereby exposing the ethical tensions between environmental preservation and human survival. The paper analyses how Ghosh represents slow environmental violence, climate precarity, and ecological displacement. Particular attention is paid to the agency of nonhuman entities rivers, tides, mangroves, and dolphins which actively shape narrative outcomes and destabilize human mastery over nature. By situating environmental crisis within postcolonial histories of marginalization and state violence, *The Hungry Tide* articulates a vision of green thought rooted in relational ethics and ecological responsibility. The study contributes to contemporary eco-critical scholarship by demonstrating how Ghosh's novel advances a posthuman ecological imagination that calls for a rethinking of coexistence in the age of climate crisis.

**Keywords:** Eco-criticism, Green Thought, Posthuman Ecology, Nonhuman Agency, Environmental Justice.

## **Introduction**

The twenty-first century has witnessed an unprecedented convergence of ecological crisis, climate instability, and socio-political inequality, compelling scholars to rethink humanity's relationship with the natural world. Accelerating climate change, rising sea levels, biodiversity loss, and recurring environmental disasters have exposed the limitations of human-centred frameworks in addressing contemporary ecological realities. Within the humanities, eco-criticism has emerged as a vital interdisciplinary approach that examines how literary texts represent nature, articulate environmental ethics, and challenge anthropocentric assumptions that position humans as dominant over a passive environment. In recent years, this field has expanded through green thought and posthuman ecological perspectives, which emphasize interconnectedness, relational ethics, and the agency of nonhuman actors. Amitav Ghosh occupies a central position in contemporary environmental writing, particularly within postcolonial contexts. His works consistently reveal the entanglement of ecology with colonial history, modernity, and structures of power, challenging dominant narratives of progress and development. *The Hungry Tide* (2004) represents one of Ghosh's most sustained engagements with ecological concerns, offering a nuanced literary exploration of environmental precarity and human–nonhuman interdependence within the fragile ecosystem of the Sundarbans. Set in the tidal landscape of the Bay of Bengal, the novel portrays an environment marked by instability and constant transformation, where shifting rivers, eroding islands, and unpredictable tides shape human existence. The Sundarbans function not merely as a setting but as an active ecological force that governs social relations and ethical dilemmas. By attributing narrative agency to rivers, tides, mangroves, and nonhuman animals, Ghosh destabilizes anthropocentric notions of control and foregrounds human vulnerability within ecological systems.

Eco-criticism and green thought provide a productive framework for understanding this reimagining of human–environment relations. Green thought, in particular, emphasizes ecological interconnectedness, sustainability, and relational ethics, evident in the novel's juxtaposition of scientific rationality and indigenous ecological knowledge. Through characters such as Piya and Fokir, the narrative challenges epistemological hierarchies and affirms alternative modes of ecological engagement. The novel also critiques exclusionary conservation and developmental paradigms, most notably through its representation of the Morichjhapi massacre,

which exposes the ethical contradictions of state-led environmental governance. By foregrounding slow environmental violence and ecological displacement, *The Hungry Tide* situates climate vulnerability within postcolonial histories of marginalization. Despite existing scholarship on Ghosh's environmental concerns, limited attention has been paid to the novel's articulation of green thought through a posthuman ecological lens. Addressing this gap, the present study examines *The Hungry Tide* through eco-criticism and green thought to argue that the novel advances a posthuman ecological imagination grounded in ethical coexistence and shared responsibility in the age of climate crisis.

### Review of Literature:

Eco-critical studies have increasingly foregrounded literature as a crucial site for interrogating ecological crisis, environmental ethics, and human–nature relationships. Since its emergence in the late twentieth century, eco-criticism has expanded from nature writing and pastoral studies to encompass postcolonial, feminist, materialist, and posthuman perspectives. Foundational scholars such as Cheryll Glotfelty, Lawrence Buell, and Jonathan Bate emphasize literature's role in reshaping environmental consciousness by challenging anthropocentric assumptions and foregrounding ecological interconnectedness. Buell's notion of the "environmental imagination" has been particularly influential in demonstrating how literary texts can render ecological issues culturally and ethically legible. Within postcolonial studies, eco-criticism has developed into a distinct subfield that examines how environmental degradation intersects with colonial histories, globalization, and social inequality. Scholars such as Rob Nixon have drawn attention to "slow violence," a form of environmental harm that unfolds gradually and disproportionately affects marginalized communities. Nixon's framework has been widely applied to postcolonial ecological texts, highlighting how ecological destruction is often inseparable from histories of displacement, state violence, and economic exploitation. This approach is especially relevant to literary representations of vulnerable ecological zones such as deltas, islands, and coastal regions.

More recent scholarship has begun to engage with posthumanist and material ecological perspectives in readings of *The Hungry Tide*. Drawing on theorists such as Donna Haraway, Bruno Latour, and Rosi Braidotti, critics explore how the novel destabilizes human exceptionalism by attributing agency to nonhuman entities such as rivers, tides, animals, and landscapes. These studies argue that Ghosh's narrative

presents ecology as an assemblage of interacting forces rather than a human-controlled system. However, while these readings acknowledge nonhuman agency, they often remain fragmented or secondary to human-centered analyses of ethics and politics.

Existing studies tend to address environmental themes, conservation politics, or nonhuman agency in isolation, without fully integrating these concerns into a holistic posthuman ecological reading. There remains a critical gap in examining how eco-criticism, green thought, and posthuman ecology together illuminate the novel's reimagining of human–environment relations. The present study addresses this gap by synthesizing eco-critical, green thought, and posthuman ecological frameworks to offer a comprehensive analysis of *The Hungry Tide*. By foregrounding nonhuman agency, ethical coexistence, and ecological interconnectedness within a postcolonial context, this research contributes to contemporary eco-critical scholarship and extends existing discussions on Amitav Ghosh's environmental imagination in the age of climate crisis.

### **Eco-criticism and Green Thought: Theoretical Framework**

Eco-centrism is an environmental philosophy and ethical framework that places ecosystems, nature, and the nonhuman world at the centre of moral concern, rather than privileging human interests alone. From an eco-centric perspective, humans are understood as one part of a larger ecological community, not as its masters or owners. This approach emphasizes interdependence, balance, and sustainability, arguing that ethical decision-making should consider the well-being of entire ecosystems rather than solely human benefit. Eco-centrism therefore challenges hierarchical human–nature relationships and advocates for practices that respect ecological limits and planetary health.

In literary and eco-critical studies, eco-centrism informs readings that foreground nonhuman agency, environmental ethics, and ecological interconnectedness. Texts analyzed through an eco-centric lens often depict nature as an active presence that shapes human life and moral choices, thereby destabilizing human exceptionalism. In the context of Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*, eco-centrism is reflected in the novel's portrayal of the Sundarbans ecosystem as a dynamic force and in its emphasis on ethical coexistence between human communities and the nonhuman world. Green thought is an environmental

philosophical perspective that emphasizes the deep interconnectedness of all life forms, the necessity of sustainable modes of living, and the cultivation of relational ethics between humans and the nonhuman world. It conceptualizes the planet as a network of interdependent relationships in which human survival is inseparable from ecological well-being. At the core of green thought lies the principle of interconnectedness, which recognizes that humans, animals, plants, landscapes, and climatic systems exist within a shared ecological web. Actions affecting one element of this web inevitably influence others, often in unforeseen ways. This perspective rejects the notion of human autonomy from nature and foregrounds vulnerability, mutual dependence, and ecological balance. In literary representations, interconnectedness is often conveyed through narratives that highlight human reliance on environmental rhythms and the agency of nonhuman forces.

In the context of Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*, green thought is articulated through the novel's representation of the Sundarbans as an entangled ecological space where human survival depends on tides, rivers, and nonhuman species. The narrative critiques unsustainable conservation and developmental policies while advocating ethical coexistence grounded in respect for ecological interdependence. By foregrounding interconnectedness, sustainability, and relational ethics, green thought provides a critical lens for understanding how literary texts can reimagine human–environment relations in the age of climate crisis.

### **Posthuman Ecology: Nonhuman Agency and the Decentering of the Human**

Posthuman ecology is a critical framework within environmental humanities that challenges human-centred conceptions of the world by decentering the human subject and foregrounding the agency of nonhuman entities within ecological systems. This perspective emphasizes that ecological processes emerge from interactions among humans, animals, plants, landscapes, technologies, and climatic forces, rather than from human action alone. Nonhuman entities such as animals, rivers, tides, forests, and even material forces like weather and terrain are understood as active agents that shape ecological outcomes and human experiences. Rather than serving as passive backdrops or symbolic representations, these entities possess the capacity to influence events, alter environments, and resist human control. In literary narratives, posthuman ecology attends to how nonhuman forces drive plot developments, challenge human intentions, and disrupt narratives of mastery and dominance.

Humans are positioned not as sovereign actors but as one species among many, subject to ecological constraints and environmental forces beyond their control. This decentered perspective encourages ethical frameworks that acknowledge the entangled existence of human and nonhuman life and advocate for modes of coexistence grounded in humility and responsibility. The Sundarbans ecosystem its tides, rivers, mangroves, and animal life functions as an active force that shapes human destinies, disrupts anthropocentric assumptions, and exposes the limits of human control. Through such representations, posthuman ecology offers a critical framework for reimagining human–environment relations in ways that are ethically responsive to contemporary ecological crises.

The application of eco-criticism, green thought, and posthuman ecology is particularly suitable for analysing Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* because the novel is structurally and thematically grounded in ecological interdependence, environmental vulnerability, and the destabilization of human-centred worldviews. Rather than treating nature as a passive backdrop, the narrative situates the Sundarbans ecosystem as a dynamic force that shapes human lives, ethical choices, and historical outcomes. Through its emphasis on ethical coexistence and shared vulnerability, green thought enables an interpretation of the novel as advocating a relational ecological ethic that resists extractivist and anthropocentric paradigms.

### **The Sundarbans as an Entangled Ecological Space**

In *The Hungry Tide*, Amitav Ghosh represents the Sundarbans not merely as a geographical backdrop but as a dynamic ecological force that actively shapes the narrative, characters, and ethical concerns of the novel. The tidal mangrove forests of the Bay of Bengal function as a living environment defined by instability, flux, and ecological unpredictability, challenging conventional literary representations of landscape as passive or inert. By foregrounding the material agency of the Sundarbans, Ghosh transforms place into a central narrative presence, thereby decentering human authority and emphasizing the interdependence of human and nonhuman life. The physical characteristics of the Sundarbans its shifting rivers, mutable islands, and relentless tides underscore the fragility of human attempts to impose permanence or control. Land is continuously eroded and reformed by tidal movements, making habitation provisional and survival contingent on ecological awareness. This unstable geography resists cartographic certainty and human mastery, reinforcing the novel's critique of anthropocentric assumptions. The Sundarbans thus

emerge as an ecological system that governs human existence rather than being governed by it.

The nonhuman life of the Sundarbans further reinforces its role as an active ecological agent. Rivers, tides, dolphins, mangroves, and tigers exert influence over human actions and narrative outcomes, often disrupting human intentions and expectations. Encounters with these nonhuman entities expose the limits of human knowledge and control, compelling characters to negotiate coexistence within a larger ecological assemblage. Such representations align with posthuman ecological perspectives that recognize nonhuman agency as integral to understanding environmental relations. By presenting the Sundarbans as more than a setting, *The Hungry Tide* reimagines landscape as a relational space shaped by ecological forces, historical violence, and ethical dilemmas. The region becomes a participant in the narrative, demanding recognition, respect, and responsibility. Through this portrayal, Ghosh challenges readers to rethink the relationship between humans and their environments, emphasizing that ecological spaces are not passive environments to be managed but active systems that shape human life and moral choice.

The landscape of the Sundarbans functions as an active ecological agent rather than a passive backdrop. The shifting tides, mutable islands, and unpredictable rivers exert material force over human life, determining patterns of settlement, survival, and movement. This dynamic environment resists human control and undermines anthropocentric assumptions of mastery over nature. By attributing agency to the landscape, Ghosh portrays ecology as a living system that shapes narrative outcomes and ethical choices. The Sundarbans thus emerge as a co-actor in the novel, reinforcing a posthuman ecological vision in which humans exist as vulnerable participants within a larger, autonomous environmental assemblage.

### **Reimagining Coexistence: Green Thought and Ecological Ethics**

In *The Hungry Tide*, Amitav Ghosh articulates an ethical vision of coexistence grounded in the principles of green thought, particularly interconnectedness, relational ethics, and ecological responsibility. The novel resists simplistic moral binaries that privilege either human survival or environmental conservation, instead foregrounding the complex interdependence between human communities and the nonhuman world. Ghosh critiques conservation models that marginalize vulnerable populations while simultaneously exposing the ecological

consequences of unchecked human intervention. Through this nuanced portrayal, the novel advocates an ethics of coexistence that acknowledges shared vulnerability and demands mutual respect among humans, animals, and ecological systems. Coexistence, in this framework, is not idealized harmony but an ongoing negotiation shaped by ecological limits, ethical responsibility, and historical injustice.

Ghosh's literary imagination functions as a form of ecological intervention by reshaping how readers perceive environmental relationships and ethical responsibility. By animating the Sundarbans as a living, responsive environment and foregrounding nonhuman agency, *The Hungry Tide* challenges anthropocentric modes of thinking and invites readers to engage with ecological complexity. The novel transforms abstract environmental issues such as climate precarity, displacement, and conservation politics into lived experiences, thereby fostering ecological awareness and ethical reflection. Through narrative, characterization, and setting, Ghosh demonstrates literature's capacity to intervene in ecological discourse by offering alternative ways of imagining coexistence in an era of environmental crisis.

### **Conclusion**

This study has demonstrated that *The Hungry Tide* advances a distinctly posthuman ecological imagination by decentering the human subject and foregrounding the agency of nonhuman entities within the Sundarbans ecosystem. Through its portrayal of tides, rivers, mangroves, and animal life as active participants in shaping human experience, the novel challenges anthropocentric assumptions and reconfigures ecology as an entangled assemblage of human and nonhuman forces. Ghosh's narrative underscores the limits of human mastery over nature and advocates an ethical framework rooted in relationality, vulnerability, and coexistence. By doing so, *The Hungry Tide* contributes significantly to eco-critical discourse by offering a literary model of posthuman ecological thought that reimagines humanity's place within a shared and fragile environment.

The ecological concerns articulated in *The Hungry Tide* resonate powerfully with contemporary climate discourse, particularly in relation to climate-induced displacement, environmental injustice, and the uneven distribution of ecological risk. The novel anticipates current debates on rising sea levels, habitat loss, and the ethical challenges of conservation in vulnerable regions. By situating environmental crisis

within postcolonial histories and socio-political structures, Ghosh highlights the interconnected nature of climate change and inequality. The text thus serves as a critical intervention in climate narratives by emphasizing that effective ecological responses must integrate ethical responsibility, social justice, and respect for nonhuman life.

The eco-critical and posthuman frameworks applied in this study open up further avenues for research within environmental humanities and literary studies. Future scholarship may extend this approach by examining Ghosh's other works in relation to planetary ecology, climate migration, and environmental memory, or by undertaking comparative studies with other postcolonial climate fictions. Additionally, interdisciplinary engagements with geography, anthropology, and climate science could enrich eco-critical readings of literary texts. As ecological crises intensify globally, literary narratives such as *The Hungry Tide* offer vital resources for rethinking human-environment relations and for advancing eco-critical studies that respond to the ethical demands of the Anthropocene.

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