



## Ecological Threats in the Age of Anthropocene: A Study of Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*

Nazir Hasan<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Sanjay Kumar Sinha<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar (Department of English), Patna University, Patna  
Email: [nazir9888@gmail.com](mailto:nazir9888@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup>Professor of Patna College, Patna University, Patna Bihar, India

DOI: [10.33329/rjelal.13.1.1](https://doi.org/10.33329/rjelal.13.1.1)



Nazir Hasan

### Article info

Article Received: 04/12/2024

Article Accepted: 29/12/2024

Published online: 11/01/2025

### Abstract

The Earth is facing an ecological crisis that is recognized by lawmakers, environmentalists, scientists, and scholars globally. Even though information about these problems has been shared for many years, not much has been done to improve the situation. Humans have endangered the environment through many actions. These actions lead to environmental harm and shape the core of the Anthropocene, a time when human activities significantly affect the Earth's systems. A location that is unfit for human habitation. It is dangerous since it is swampy. It is a natural habitat for rare animals such as tigers, mangrove trees, and crocodiles, but their numbers are declining owing to human interference. Those who kill a tiger are rewarded. Morichjhapi is an example of an incident in which the government and settlers are at odds. Despite this, no one is ready to vacate the premises.

Amitav Ghosh is a well-known Indian writer who examines how people interact with the environment during the Anthropocene era. His books mix history, geography, politics, and ecology, showing the significant environmental changes of today. Ghosh's work emphasizes the links between human societies and nature, providing a deeper insight into how the Anthropocene influences both the Earth and human identities and cultures.

Keywords: Anthropocene, Ecology, Environmental Crisis, Nature, Morichjhapi

The Anthropocene is a term for a suggested geological time period that shows how much human actions have affected the Earth's systems. It merges "Anthropos," which means human, with "cene," from the Greek word for new, indicating a new era influenced

by people. The Anthropocene era is seeing major changes in climate, leading to the extinction of species and the destruction of habitats. Both humans and animals must move from one location to another to survive because of environmental disasters.

Man, like plants and animals, is a part of this planet. Man being a literary creature on this planet, so he considers his supremacy, forgetting that he is the only part. We, human beings, completely rest on nature to survive. Human civilization is inextricably linked to the physical universe. Literature has vividly and minutely depicted the close relationship between the human and non-human worlds. The man and physical environment have been a constant practice in art and literature for a long time. Cheryll Glotfelty in "The Ecocriticism Reader" establishes, "Ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and physical environment" (xviii). The way of representing the physical environment has been through significant alterations in style and exposure with the altering perceptions of the human mind. Ecology is the science of how living things interact with one another and with their surroundings.

In twentieth-century Indian writing in English, environmental issues were a major topic. Authors begin to consider the environment more and project the flaws in their works. Dipesh Chakrabarty, One well-known subaltern historian, noted that while global warming and globalization both started in the 1990s, globalization got more immediate focus. Fields like academics, literature, and international politics overlooked the gradual nature of global warming. This began to shift in the 2000s when people started to feel the effects of warming firsthand. Additionally, signs of the climate crisis became apparent, including wildfires, cyclones, melting ice caps, and rising sea levels. This created a need to update current theories, language, politics, economic policies, and literature. Chakrabarty states:

As the crisis gathered momentum in the last few years, I realized that all my readings in theories of globalization, Marxist analysis of capital, subaltern studies, and postcolonial criticism over the last twenty-five years, while

enormously useful in studying globalization, had not really prepared me for making sense of this planetary conjuncture within which humanity finds itself today.(199)

In *The Hungry Tide* (2004), Ghosh tells a story that highlights the impact of environmental damage, especially in the Sundarbans, an area at risk from rising sea levels, storms, and tree loss. The setting is the delta between India and Bangladesh, where human actions like deforestation and climate change are quickly changing the delicate ecosystem. Through his characters' experiences, Ghosh shows how humans and nature rely on each other in the Anthropocene and examines the results of our carelessness towards the environment. It is a novel set in the Sundarbans, which is also known as the tidal country in the novel. "This is a land half-submerged at high tide" (Ghosh 8). Tidal floods frequently change the island's appearance. The residents face the ongoing risk of eviction. The Indian government is working to protect the natural environment and save the endangered tiger, but local people disagree with these efforts. This situation sets the stage for the novel. Huggan and Helen claim, "*The Hungry Tide...* advocates the sensible policy of no conservation without local consultation and participation" (Huggan, 2011, p.105).

Rivers, storms, and cyclones are always a danger. Mangroves help protect against strong winds, waves, and rising tides. A single strong wind can ruin everything. The waves were massive, reaching over twelve meters tall. Nirmal's diary describes the storm's impact, revealing that it was actually a tsunami:

The waters rose so high that they killed thousands of animals and, carried them upriver and inland. The corpses of tigers and rhinoceroses were found kilometers from the river, in rice-fields and in the village pond. There were fields covered with feathers of dead birds. And as this monstrous wave was

travelling through the tide country racing towards Kolkata, something else happened-something unimaginable. (Ghosh 219)

His masterwork *The Hungry Tide* is regarded as one of the finest work of Indian English literature to boldly discuss ecological issues for the first time in India and to try to conserve the ecosystem. He illustrated the relationship between people, wildlife and flora, and the physical environment, and in doing so, he captured both the tragedy and the deception inherent in the Sundarbans' conservation efforts. It tells the narrative of the forced evaluation of refugees from the island of Morichjhapi, as well as several environmental and conservation difficulties, making it a popular topic for discussion in the context of environmental criticism.

Nirmal and Nilima who live in Sundarbans. Nirmal is a school teacher who aims to support the people of Morichjhapi island and advocates for their rights. On the other hand, Nilima, a social worker, shows little concern for the struggles faced by the people of Morichjhapi island. Hawley makes a valid point, "Nirmal and Nilima live side by side for years but are unknown to each other, divided by different dreams for their lives, and by a lack of respect for the other's way of embracing life" (Hawley, 2005, p. 132-133).

Morichjhapi is an island located in the mangrove forests of the Sundarbans in West Bengal, India. The Indian government has initiated efforts to protect endangered species and has designated Morichjhapi as a tiger conservation area. Today, it is often recalled for the Morichjhapi massacre that occurred in 1979, where many island residents lost their lives under the guise of wildlife conservation. Kusum asserts "who are these people, I wondered, who love animals so much that they are willing to kill us for them" (Ghosh, 2009, p. 261). The West Bengal government forcibly removed thousands of Bengali refugees from the island. Many

refugees died due to police violence, disease, and hunger. Nirmal and Kusum dedicated their lives to seeking justice for the refugees in Morichjhapi, sacrificing everything for the settlers. The environmental damage is linked to overpopulation.

The novelist exposed the conflict between human beings within the same communities and their ties to the natural world in *The Hungry Tide*. In the Sundarbans, the chafing between land and sea causes a constant rasping of plant and animal life. Regular human encroachment on the Sunderbans' ecosystems only adds to the chaos and tension between the natural forces.

Disturbances and deportation are common threats in this area, and tigers are also a common occurrence. "A hundred people are killed by tigers here each year" (Ghosh 258). The fiction chronicles the conflict between man and environment through the eyes of the Sundarbans in India and Bangladesh. Amitav Ghosh was constantly outspoken about mistreatment of nature and natural artefacts.

There are a few main characters: Piyali Roy, an American researcher who is following endangered dolphins; she is of Indian ancestry but has lived her entire life in America. Kanai Dutt is a Delhi businessman who is visiting his uncle's family. His uncle, Nirmal, was a political extremist who died unexpectedly in the aftermath of an uprising, and it is during this visit that Kanai Dutt also comes across this rare relic, his uncle's diary. And Fokir, a pivotal character, is an uneducated local fisherman who also serves as their guide.

In the beginning of the novel, he describes how the flora and fauna intersect and the lives intersect, for example, the West Bengal Tiger is an endangered species in the Sundarbans, where the novel is set.

However, it continues to attack the villagers and tribals, and they do not have a very healthy relationship with the flora and

fauna of the area, despite the fact that we must understand that without the flora and fauna, they would not be able to sustain their livelihoods, which include fishing and collecting things in the forest. People like Fokir, on the other hand, can they have a healthy relationship with the environment and still function alongside it.

The social political turmoil has a significant impact on the environment, that is, how the government views the environment in terms of whether to protect it or whether to have it; thus, the novel's major conflict is whether to give the tribals more rights and allow them to live peacefully and do whatever they want.

Or is it to offer more rights to the current flora and wildlife in the area, there are two tales in this novel that clearly illustrate the importance of the environment. Of course, one is Nirmal's journal, and the other is Piya's expedition, and these two narratives implicitly highlight conservation issues in the novel; yes, there is a lack of consciousness among the people because they have not been able to develop because the environment is the only thing that matters in these kinds of places.

And because all human decisions are based on the environment, conservation is a theme that he explicitly addresses in the novel. When Fokir dies and Piya returns to Calcutta to reflect on her entire expedition and the nature of her trip, she decides that she must do something to justify her trip, so she returns and establishes an ecological foundation for the conservation of these dolphins as well as for the bees.

Nature's existence is unthinkable without human life. Man recognizes his reliance on the abundant flora and fauna. The riches of the lovely planet are not limited to the creative and aesthetic aspects of existence. It is a necessary prerequisite for survival. In the current climate of environmental concerns, ecological literary criticism.

Unlike other forests or jungles, a mangrove forest is its own cosmos. Every year, scores of people are killed by tigers, snakes, and crocodiles in the embrace of that deep jungle. The waves are dangerous here. The tides stretch many miles inland, and thousands of mangrove forests vanish every day, only to reappear hours later. Only the truly destitute and displaced, who are rejected and have nowhere else to go, dare to create a home there. They've moved in to make a life off the

desolate, unforgiving saline stretches of land. The males are usually fisherman who eat fish and crabs caught in the river and on the sand. As a result, each day of their life is uncertain, making existence on those islands, often known as "tide country," dangerous.

### Conclusion

This research paper serves as a warning to humanity that overt exploitation and abuse of environment over time will result in a natural upheaval. *The Hungry Tide* is a beautiful weave of human emotions reflected continuously via nature's elements. In an environmentally disturbed world, this novel aims to raise awareness of the man-nature relationship and the impact of the man-man relationship on the man-nature relationship. This is a nuanced depiction of humanity's condition, which is frequently defenseless and at the whim of powerful forces. Ghosh emphasizes two types of forces in this passage: natural forces and governmental forces. Man cannot deny that he cannot deal with this planet on his own; he is a part of nature and must live in harmony with it, and since human beings are at the top of the social intelligence scale, it is his responsibility to avoid vicious encounters between mankind and other organisms without harming any of them. Stopping catastrophic climate change and preserving biodiversity on Earth are urgently needed in order to create a future in which mankind and his surroundings can live in peace, maintaining an equilibrium with the

entire ecosystem, and banishing his human-dominating ego.

#### Reference

Glotfelty, Cheryll & Fromm Harold. *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996.

Chakrabarty, Dipesh. "The Climate of History: Four Theses." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 35, 2009, pp. 197-222.

Ghosh, Amitav. *The Hungry Tide*. Ravi Dayal Publisher, 2019.

Hawley, C John. "Amitav Ghosh: An Introduction". New Delhi: Foundation Books, 2005.

Huggan, Graham and Helen Tiffin. "Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment." *Critical Quarterly*. 53.1 (2011). 100-105. Print