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Narrating Ecological Crisis: Environmental Anxiety and Literary Form in The Hungry Tide



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Abstract

This article examines Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* as a literary articulation of ecological crisis, environmental anxiety, and postcolonial ecological consciousness. Focusing on the Sundarbans as a fragile and volatile bioregion, the study analyses how the novel represents environmental instability as a permanent condition shaped by natural forces, state policies, and historical displacement. Using a postcolonial ecocritical framework, the article explores the interconnection between human and non-human life, highlighting how conservation practices, biodiversity loss, and forced migration converge to produce socio-ecological injustice. The analysis further demonstrates that the novel's non-linear, polyphonic narrative structure mirrors ecological complexity and enables a dialogue between scientific knowledge and indigenous, myth-based epistemologies. By foregrounding environmental anxiety as an embodied and collective experience, *The Hungry Tide* positions literature as a critical space for cultivating ethical awareness and environmental responsibility. The study concludes that Ghosh's novel contributes meaningfully to contemporary ecological discourse by advocating relational, culturally rooted approaches to understanding and responding to environmental crises.

Keywords:

Ecocriticism; Environmental anxiety; Postcolonial ecology; Biodiversity loss; The Hungry Tide

Introduction

Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* offers a powerful literary engagement with ecological crisis by situating human lives within the volatile environment of the Sundarbans. The novel presents climate vulnerability, endangered species, and unstable geographies as everyday realities rather than distant threats, foregrounding how environmental change shapes social and emotional life. Ghosh's depiction of tidal floods, shifting islands, and fragile ecosystems highlights environmental anxiety as a lived condition, particularly for marginalised communities whose survival depends on the instability of natural forces (Ahmad & Rehana, 2024, pp. 335–336). Through this setting, the novel challenges readers to reconsider conventional human-centred narratives and recognise ecological precarity as central to contemporary experience.

The narrative structure of *The Hungry Tide* plays a crucial role in articulating the ecological crisis. By alternating between scientific discourse and local knowledge, Ghosh destabilises dominant epistemologies that privilege Western environmental science over indigenous ecological understanding (Anjum et al., 2024). Characters such as Piya and Fokir embody contrasting yet interconnected ways of knowing nature, suggesting that ecological awareness emerges through dialogue rather than hierarchy. This narrative strategy aligns with ecocritical readings that view the novel as a critique of simplified conservation models and an exploration of human–nonhuman interdependence (Dhar, 2020). In doing so, the text resists linear storytelling and instead adopts a fragmented form that mirrors ecological uncertainty. Moreover, *The Hungry Tide* can be read within a broader postcolonial ecocritical

framework that emphasises environmental injustice and displacement. Scholars note that the novel exposes how conservation policies often reproduce colonial power structures, rendering local populations vulnerable in the name of environmental protection (Jindal et al., 2025). Ghosh's portrayal of the Sundarbans as a contested space reveals the entanglement of ecological degradation with political and economic pressures, reinforcing the idea that environmental crises cannot be separated from social realities (Parampil & Singh, 2025). Through its thematic depth and formal experimentation, the novel demonstrates how literary form itself becomes a means of narrating environmental anxiety and responding to ecological crisis.

Significance of the Research

This research is significant as it contributes to contemporary ecocritical studies by offering a focused analysis of how literary narratives represent ecological crisis and environmental anxiety within a postcolonial context. By examining *The Hungry Tide*, the study highlights how environmental instability, biodiversity loss, and human displacement are intertwined, thereby extending ecological discourse beyond scientific frameworks to include cultural, ethical, and historical dimensions. The research also underscores the importance of literary form in shaping ecological understanding, demonstrating how narrative structure, voice, and temporality can mirror environmental complexity and vulnerability. Moreover, the study holds relevance for environmental humanities by emphasising the role of literature in fostering ecological awareness and ethical responsibility. By foregrounding indigenous knowledge systems and myth-based ecological frameworks alongside scientific discourse, the research challenges dominant Western models of conservation and environmental management. This approach not only enriches postcolonial ecocriticism but also offers insights for interdisciplinary discussions on environmental justice, climate displacement, and sustainable human–nature relationships, making the study valuable for scholars of literature, ecology, and cultural studies alike.

Research Questions

1. How does *The Hungry Tide* narrate ecological crisis and environmental anxiety through its themes, characters, and representation of the Sundarbans?
2. In what ways does the novel's literary form and narrative structure shape readers' understanding of ecological vulnerability and human–environment relationships?

Research Objectives

1. To analyse how *The Hungry Tide* narrates ecological crisis and environmental anxiety through its thematic concerns, character experiences, and representation of the Sundarbans.
2. To examine how the novel's literary form and narrative structure shape readers' understanding of ecological vulnerability and human–environment relationships.

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Literature Review

Scholars of contemporary literature increasingly see Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* as a central text in ecological and postcolonial literary studies because it foregrounds the lived experience of environmental crisis through its setting in the Sundarbans and its complex narrative form. Research by Ahmad and Rehana (2024) positions the novel as a pointed critique of environmental degradation and biodiversity loss, arguing that Ghosh uses the fragile mangrove ecosystem to depict how ecological imbalance threatens both human and non-human life (Ahmad & Rehana, 2024). This view is shared by broader analyses that consider the text as part of a growing ecocritical canon wherein literature functions to expose human complicity in environmental crises and to question dominant human-centred paradigms (Goswami, 2023).

Postcolonial ecocritical perspectives play a significant role in contemporary discussions. Anjum, Rani, and Khan (2024) examine how Ghosh critiques Western conservation models that marginalise local voices and fail to integrate indigenous ecological knowledge, illustrating the novel's emphasis on collaborative approaches to environmental stewardship (Anjum et al., 2024). This critique aligns with Panta's (2024) analysis, which highlights the interconnectedness of social inequity and environmental injustice, and the text destabilises Eurocentric binaries between nature and culture. Jindal, Saraswat, and Sharma (2025) also emphasise the tensions between global conservation policies and local livelihoods, highlighting how the narrative invokes subaltern environmental agency through characters such as Fokir.

Several scholars explore narrative techniques and their ecological implications. Dhar (2020) frames the novel as a consciousness-raising ecocritical work, noting that its dual narrative strands (scientific inquiry and subaltern experience) invite readers to reflect on the politics of human–animal relationships and environmental engagement (Dhar, 2020). Wang's (2025) eco-narratological reading stresses how water imagery and narrative structure immerse readers in the site-specific environmental imagination of the Sundarbans, thus making ecological anxiety a central affective experience. Similarly, research points out that Ghosh's alternating perspectives disrupt conventional realist forms to mirror ecological complexity and uncertainty. The interplay between ecology and identity also draws scholarly attention. Studies argue that characters like Piya and Fokir embody different epistemological approaches to nature, illustrating tensions between scientific objectivity and embodied local knowledge (Anjum et al., 2024). This dynamic resonates with broader ecocritical discussions that advocate for multiplicity in ecological narratives, where diverse voices contribute to richer understandings of environmental crises.

Eco-spiritual interpretations extend these conversations by examining the symbolic dimensions of nature in the novel. PhD Scholar Nitya (2025) highlights how rivers and landscapes function as sites of eco-spiritual resonance, suggesting that Ghosh's narrative evokes sacred connections between humans and the non-human world that transcend purely material concerns. This spiritual dimension complements political and aesthetic readings, such as that of Parampil and Singh (2025), who analyse how the novel intersects ecology with broader socio-political questions, including man-

animal conflict, capitalist development pressures, and aesthetic representation.

Historical and cultural layers are also central to ecocritical interpretations. Jayan and Mangayarkarasi (2025) explore how the text portrays ecological crises as outcomes of historical processes, from colonial exploitation to contemporary environmental mismanagement. Such studies underscore the historical depth of ecological anxiety in Ghosh's work. Complementing this, some research frames the Sundarbans not only as an ecological space but as a site of memory and environmental justice, where displaced communities and fragile ecosystems reveal the costs of socio-ecological disruption (Jindal et al., 2025; Panta, 2024). Emerging research extends *The Hungry Tide* into broader climate discourse. Comparative ecocritical work links Ghosh's narrative strategies with his later non-fiction writing on climate change, suggesting that the novel anticipates larger concerns about literature's role in confronting global warming and environmental catastrophe (Karigar, 2025; Wikipedia, 2016). These studies collectively demonstrate that *The Hungry Tide* operates on multiple levels as ecological critique, postcolonial narrative, and ethical inquiry, inviting readers to rethink human relationships with vulnerable ecosystems.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive research design to examine how ecological crisis and environmental anxiety are narrated through literary form in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*. Since the research focuses on meaning, representation, and narrative strategies rather than numerical data, a qualitative approach is most suitable. The text of the novel serves as the primary data, while relevant scholarly articles, books, and critical essays constitute the secondary data used to contextualise and support the analysis.

The analysis is text-based and thematic, concentrating on selected passages that foreground ecological vulnerability, human–nature relationships, environmental displacement, and narrative structure. These passages are examined to identify recurring themes such as environmental anxiety, human–nonhuman entanglement, conservation politics, and ecological uncertainty. Attention is also given to formal elements, including narrative perspective, characterisation, symbolism, spatial representation, and the interaction between scientific discourse and indigenous ecological knowledge. Through close reading, the study explores how literary form itself becomes a medium for representing ecological crisis.

To ensure analytical rigour, the study follows a systematic process:

1. Identification of ecologically significant episodes and narrative patterns in the novel.
2. Thematic coding of these episodes under key ecological and narrative categories.
3. Interpretation of findings through relevant theoretical lenses.
This method allows the research to move beyond surface-level ecological themes and engage with deeper questions of how literature shapes environmental consciousness.

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Theoretical Framework

The study is grounded primarily in Ecocriticism, supported by insights from Postcolonial Ecocriticism and Environmental Anxiety theory. Ecocriticism provides the central framework for examining representations of nature, environmental degradation, and human–environment relationships in literary texts. It enables the analysis of how *The Hungry Tide* challenges anthropocentric perspectives and foregrounds ecological interdependence, vulnerability, and ethical responsibility.

Postcolonial ecocriticism is employed to address the novel's socio-political context, particularly the intersections between ecology, colonial history, displacement, and marginalisation. This framework is crucial for analysing how environmental crises disproportionately affect subaltern communities in the Sundarbans and how conservation practices may reproduce colonial power structures. Through this lens, the study examines conflicts between global environmental agendas and local survival, as well as the tension between scientific authority and indigenous ecological knowledge.

Additionally, the concept of environmental anxiety informs the analysis of affect and emotional response within the narrative. Environmental anxiety is understood as the pervasive sense of uncertainty, fear, and instability produced by ecological degradation and climate vulnerability. By integrating this perspective, the study explores how narrative form, fragmented storytelling, and shifting viewpoints reflect psychological responses to environmental crisis. Together, these theoretical frameworks allow for a multidimensional analysis of *The Hungry Tide*, demonstrating how ecological crisis is not only thematically represented but also formally embedded within the novel's narrative structure. This integrated approach helps reveal the novel's contribution to contemporary environmental discourse and literary responses to climate and ecological uncertainty.

Data Analysis

This section analyses *The Hungry Tide* in relation to the research objectives: how the novel narrates ecological crisis, how it conveys environmental anxiety, and how its narrative form shapes ecological themes. The analysis combines close reading of key scenes and scholarly interpretations of the novel's ecological motifs, narrative strategies, and socio-ecological concerns.

Representation of Ecological Crisis

In *The Hungry Tide*, the ecological crisis is presented as a crisis of permanence rooted in the unstable geography of the Sundarbans. Ghosh emphasises that the region resists fixed representation, noting that “*the tide country's true maps are not drawn on paper, but on water, and they are erased and redrawn with every turn of the tide*” (p. 72). This continual transformation of land into water and water into land destabilises the very idea of settlement and ownership. The landscape exists in a state of perpetual uncertainty, where “*the border between land and water is always mutating, always unpredictable*” (p. 181). As a result, the environmental crisis is not portrayed as a sudden catastrophe but as a permanent condition that shapes daily life. Human existence in the Sundarbans is therefore defined by adaptation rather than control, highlighting the dominance of ecological forces over human planning.

Ghosh further intensifies this representation by foregrounding the agency of the non-human world and its entanglement with political power. The Sundarbans operate under their own ecological order, where survival depends on respecting forces beyond human authority, as reflected in the belief that “*the tiger is a god here, and you have to know his rules*” (p. 153). This ecological sovereignty is contrasted sharply with state-driven conservation policies that exacerbate human suffering. The forced eviction of the Morichjhāpi refugees exposes how environmental crisis is compounded by political violence, as they “*had been displaced twice over, first by the border, then by the reserve*” (p. 262). By linking ecological instability with bureaucratic intervention, the novel critiques rigid administrative perceptions that fail to acknowledge environmental fluidity. Ultimately, Ghosh challenges fixed notions of territory and governance, asserting that “*there are no borders here to divide the land from the water*” (p. 215). Through this portrayal, *The Hungry Tide* frames ecological crisis as a complex interaction between nature’s volatility and human mismanagement.

Table 1
Representation of Ecological Crisis in *The Hungry Tide*

Ecological Aspect	Textual Evidence	Page No.	Analytical Significance
Landscape instability	<i>Maps erased and redrawn by tides</i>	p. 72	Ecology resists permanence and control
Shifting land–water boundaries	<i>Borders constantly mutating</i>	p. 181	Crisis becomes a continuous condition
Non-human agency	<i>Tiger as a sovereign force</i>	p. 153	Challenges to anthropocentric dominance
Political displacement	<i>Morichjhāpi refugees displaced</i>	p. 262	Ecological crisis linked to state violence
Absence of fixed borders	<i>No division between land and water</i>	p. 215	Critique of rigid territorial thinking

Note. Page numbers refer to Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide* (2004).

Environmental Anxiety

Environmental anxiety in *The Hungry Tide* manifests as a chronic and embodied condition that permeates everyday life in the Sundarbans. This anxiety is not speculative or future-oriented; rather, it is an immediate and lived response to an ecosystem defined by instability and danger. Inhabitants learn to exist within a state of constant alertness, internalising fear as a survival mechanism. This sustained psychological tension reshapes perception itself, as one local explains: “*The fear never goes away. You live with it; you learn to listen to the forest differently. It is always there, like a sound at the edge of your hearing*” (p. 150). Such anxiety arises from the absolute authority of the non-human world, most powerfully symbolised by the tiger. The animal’s sudden and unpredictable violence disrupts ordinary life, creating a reality in which normal routines can instantly collapse, for “*In the jungle there is no warning. One moment there is the routine of daily life the next, an explosion of sound and movement, and then silence, a silence more terrible than any sound*” (p. 233). This omnipresent threat ensures that environmental anxiety functions as a foundational condition of consciousness in the tide country.

This persistent dread is intensified by its entanglement with political violence and historical trauma. Environmental anxiety expands beyond fear of nature to include the terror of state power and institutional abandonment, particularly through the memory of the Morichjhāpi incident. Here, ecological governance produces what can be understood as slow, accumulative violence, generating a daily atmosphere of uncertainty and fear. The displaced refugees exist under the knowledge that they are expendable, living “*as refuse to be swept away in the name of the tiger and the mangrove. They lived with the anxiety of the knock on the door, the official notice*” (p. 265). This bureaucratic threat becomes as psychologically devastating as cyclones or predators, revealing how ecological and political anxieties converge. Over time, this collective fear is absorbed into cultural memory and narrative, transforming anxiety into a means of orientation and survival. The myth of Bon Bibi functions precisely in this way, as “*The story of Bon Bibi is not just a story. It is a map of fear*” (p. 97), offering a framework through which the community can comprehend and endure a perpetually precarious world. In this sense, environmental anxiety in *The Hungry Tide* shapes not only emotional experience but also knowledge systems, identity, and communal resilience.

Table 2

Environmental Anxiety in *The Hungry Tide*

Dimension of Anxiety	Textual Evidence	Page No.	Analytical Interpretation
Chronic fear	<i>Fear as a constant presence perception</i>	p. 150	Anxiety is internalised as a permanent psychological state
Non-human threat	<i>Suddenly, the violent presence of the tiger</i>	p. 233	Nature holds sovereign power over human life
Hyper-vigilance	<i>Listening to the forest differently</i>	p. 150	Survival depends on heightened ecological awareness
Political anxiety	<i>Fear of eviction and official notices</i>	p. 265	Environmental anxiety merges with state violence
Cultural coping	<i>Bon Bibi is a “map of fear”</i>	p. 97	Myth transforms anxiety into communal knowledge

Note. Page numbers refer to Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide* (2004). The table is based on close textual analysis aligned with ecocritical and postcolonial frameworks.

Narrative Form and Ecological Themes

The narrative form of *The Hungry Tide* operates as a formal extension of its ecological vision, mirroring the complexity, fluidity, and interdependence of the Sundarbans ecosystem. Ghosh deliberately rejects a linear and unified narrative structure, instead adopting a polyphonic form that brings together colonial scientific records, indigenous myths, and contemporary personal narratives. This layering of voices and temporalities reflects a landscape where history, memory, and natural forces coexist and overlap. The novel moves between past, present, and mythic time, creating a structure that resembles the tidal rhythms of the region itself. This narrative layering is explicitly acknowledged when a character observes that “*This place is a palimpsest, a parchment on which layers of writing have been inscribed over*

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centuries, each layer only partially erasing the one before” (p. 112). Through this palimpsestic form, the novel suggests that ecological reality cannot be understood through a single perspective; instead, it demands an accumulation of voices that remain in dialogue rather than resolution.

This structural multiplicity also enables the novel to stage and interrogate competing epistemologies of nature. The alternating focalization between Piya’s scientific worldview and Fokir’s embodied ecological knowledge dramatises the limitations of singular modes of understanding. 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, as illustrated when “He did not need a map or a compass; he read the water the way a shepherd reads a trail, by signs invisible to anyone else” (p. 189). The narrative form compels these ways of knowing to intersect, ultimately revealing their interdependence. During moments of ecological crisis, particularly the storm sequence, survival depends on the synthesis of scientific insight and intuitive understanding. This epistemic convergence is further emphasised when the narrative juxtaposes empirical observation with ancestral fear, noting that “The data on the screen told one story, a tale of depth and salinity, but the ancient fear in his bones told another, older one” (p. 301). In performing this convergence, the novel’s structure itself becomes ecological, embodying the principle that survival and understanding emerge from relational, hybrid knowledge systems.

Table 3

Narrative Form and Ecological Themes in *The Hungry Tide*

Narrative Feature	Textual Evidence	Page No.	Ecological Significance
Polyphonic structure	<i>Landscape as a palimpsest of narratives</i>	p. 112	Reflects ecological and historical layering
Temporal fluidity	<i>Past, present, and myth coexist</i>	p. 112	Mirrors tidal rhythms and ecological cycles
Scientific epistemology	<i>Reliance on data and measurement</i>	p. 301	Represents rational but limited ecological knowledge
Indigenous knowledge	<i>Reading water without maps</i>	p. 189	Emphasises embodied, experiential ecology
Epistemic synthesis	<i>Data and ancestral fear converge</i>	p. 301	Suggests hybrid knowledge as an ecological necessity

Note. Page numbers refer to Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide* (2004). The table is based on close textual analysis focusing on narrative form and ecological representation.

Human–Nature Relationships and Postcolonial Ecocriticism

In *The Hungry Tide*, human–nature relationships are articulated through a postcolonial ecocritical framework that challenges the Western separation of nature and culture. The Sundarbans are not portrayed as a passive environment but as an active force that governs human life and social organisation. This relational worldview is most clearly expressed through the local myth of Bon Bibi, which structures coexistence rather than domination. As a villager explains, “*Bon Bibi and Dokkhin Rai are not just gods.*

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They are the forest itself—the protectress and the demon. You live here by their grace, not by your own power” (p. 102). Nature, in this formulation, is neither resource nor wilderness but a sacred presence that demands ethical negotiation. Ghosh contrasts this indigenous ecological understanding with colonial and neo-colonial modes of control, exposing how mapping, naming, and conservation often function as tools of possession rather than care. Kanai’s reflection on the colonial archive captures this logic when he observes that mapping was conducted “*not to understand, but to possess; to name and catalogue a world he believed was his to claim*” (p. 175).

The novel further critiques postcolonial ecological injustice through the tragedy of Morichjhāpi, where displaced refugees are sacrificed in the name of wildlife conservation. This episode reveals the hypocrisy of a conservation model that prioritises abstract ecological ideals over marginalised human lives. Against this violence, Ghosh privileges embodied, subaltern knowledge, particularly through Fokir, whose ecological understanding emerges from lived experience rather than formal education. His relationship with the environment is intimate and tactile, described as a knowledge “*written in the body*” (p. 241). The silent partnership between Piya and Fokir offers an alternative model of ethical coexistence, one grounded in attention, humility, and reciprocity. The novel ultimately argues that separating social justice from environmental ethics reproduces colonial harm, concluding that “*to draw a line between the human and the natural, the historical and the ecological, was itself an act of violence*” (p. 312). Through this fusion, *The Hungry Tide* advances a postcolonial ecocritical vision where ecological survival is inseparable from human dignity.

Table 4

Human–Nature Relationships in a Postcolonial Ecocritical Framework

Aspect	Representation in <i>The Hungry Tide</i>	Ecocritical Significance
Nature	Active, agential force	Challenges to human dominance
Indigenous belief	Bon Bibi myth	Relational ecology
Colonial logic	Mapping and conservation	Resource control
Subaltern knowledge	Fokir’s embodied experience	Alternative epistemology
Ethical outcome	Human–nature coexistence	Environmental justice

Emerging Themes Within Ecological Discourse

The Hungry Tide makes a significant contribution to emerging ecological discourse by translating global environmental concerns into concrete human and non-human experiences. Rather than treating biodiversity loss as an abstract scientific issue, the novel renders species endangerment visible through the threatened presence of the Irrawaddy dolphin and the Royal Bengal Tiger. These creatures function not merely as symbols but as active narrative agents whose survival is directly tied to human actions, political decisions, and ecological balance. Piya’s scientific journey reveals the principle of ecological interconnectedness, where the fate of one species reflects the health of an entire ecosystem. As she realises, “*To follow the dolphin’s path was to trace the health of the entire waterway—the mangroves, the fish, the salinity, the silt. Their disappearance would be a signature of a larger collapse*” (p. 195). Through this

insight, the novel frames local extinction as a symptom of systemic environmental breakdown, aligning with contemporary discussions of planetary fragility and ecological tipping points. The narrative also anticipates current debates on climate-induced displacement by portraying the tragedy of Morichjhāpi, where refugees are uprooted first by political borders and then by conservation policies that label them as ecological threats. This double displacement foregrounds environmental injustice and prefigures modern discussions of climate refugees within the

Equally important is the novel's insistence that ecological awareness cannot rely solely on scientific data but must also be grounded in cultural and mythic frameworks. Ghosh anticipates the ecocritical shift toward valuing Traditional Ecological Knowledge by presenting the Bon Bibi myth as a functional ethical system rather than mere folklore. This narrative ecology governs human conduct through shared stories that instil responsibility and restraint. Kusum's explanation articulates this worldview clearly: "*Science gives you reasons, but it does not give you meaning. For us, the forest is not a resource; it is a relation. You do not protect a relation with a law, but with a story*" (p. 159). By privileging story as a mode of environmental knowledge, the novel contributes to interdisciplinary environmental humanities that emphasise empathy, ethics, and cultural meaning. The text itself performs this ecological work by making the slow violence of environmental crisis emotionally immediate, ultimately suggesting that "*to listen to the tide country was to listen to a future already speaking in the language of loss*" (p. 318). In doing so, *The Hungry Tide* positions literature as a vital agent within ecological discourse, capable of shaping the ethical consciousness required to confront an uncertain environmental future.

Table 5
Emerging Ecological Themes in The Hungry Tide

Theme	Narrative Illustration	Ecocritical Relevance
Biodiversity loss	Dolphins and tigers are at risk	Ecosystem interdependence
Ecological collapse	Salinity and habitat change	Planetary fragility
Climate displacement	Morichjhāpi refugees	Climate justice
Traditional knowledge	Bon Bibi mythology	Ethical ecology
Narrative ethics	Story as meaning	Environmental humanities

Findings

The analysis reveals that *The Hungry Tide* represents ecological crisis as a continuous and 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 anxiety operates as a dominant

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emotional and psychological condition in the narrative. Characters internalise fear as a survival mechanism, resulting in heightened alertness and adaptive behaviour. 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 organising principle for survival.

Another significant finding concerns the relationship between narrative form and ecological meaning. The novel's non-linear, multi-voiced structure mirrors the ecological complexity of the Sundarbans, emphasising interdependence, multiplicity, and fluidity. By juxtaposing scientific discourse, mythic storytelling, and lived experience, the text destabilises 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 Morichjhāpi 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

In conclusion, *The Hungry Tide* presents ecological crisis as a deeply interconnected environmental, social, and ethical condition shaped by instability, displacement, and unequal power structures. Through its portrayal of the Sundarbans, the novel reveals how environmental anxiety, biodiversity loss, and human vulnerability are inseparable from historical and political realities. By blending scientific discourse with myth, memory, and embodied knowledge, Ghosh challenges dominant models of environmental understanding and emphasises the need for relational and culturally grounded approaches to ecology. The novel ultimately positions literature as a powerful medium for articulating environmental injustice and fostering the ethical awareness required to respond to contemporary ecological crises.

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