

# Ecological Narratives and Cultural Encounters: Exploring Themes of Environment, Migration, and Identity in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*

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## Abstract

Anthropocentrism and the ecological resilience have been two constant intertwined issues, where on one side the belief is totally human centric and on another side is the ecological disbalance caused by the first. The dichotomy between the two, where human beings are part of this conducive atmosphere continuously impacting the ecological system. Various activities like deforestation, depleting environmental strata, pollution and many more leaves socio-ecological domain a wide area of concern. The social belief that human beings are superior, because of the intrinsic value system disbalances the entire eco-system, which indicates the instrumental view of nature. However, the traces of reputable ecological system have been evident in the history of such constant destabilisation. Literature has reiterated such interplay of nature and mankind in various forms. This study aims to analyse the ecological concerns and cultural encounters under the light of migration, identity issues, and environmental factors.

Amitav Ghosh in *The Hungry Tide* has portrayed two such varied plots. Firstly, it seeks to investigate displaced people and second is how humans share dangerous and complicated ecosystems with animals. Where they are contrasting elements of love, bond, emotional interdependence shared between humans and nature. *The Hungry Tide* (2004) has been acknowledged as one of the best novels in the similar concern. As the novel resonates with the contemporary story of dislocation, disjunction and destabilisation. This is a reputable ecological novel that blends environmentalism, anthropology, travel, migration, and anthropology.

**Keywords:** Displacement, Migration, Environment, Ecocriticism

## Introduction

*The Hungry Tide* (2004) depicts an earnest desire for home and settlement, characters in the novel were uprooted due to political and social upheaval and migrated to relocate themselves to Sundarban regions. The preoccupied issue of displacement is portrayed in this novel to highlight people's suffering<sup>1</sup>. Apart from that, this novel also portrays human encounters with nature and natural objects. The way human

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<sup>1</sup>Dubey, Sanjay Prakash. "Place and Displacement: Search for Eco-Cultural Identity in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* and *Sea of Poppies*." (p. 051)

existence is dependent on the environment is one important concern of this novel. It also presents the issues in which Piya is concerned with natural beings. However, people's anger against the governmental indifference towards the lives of the Sundarban people is also portrayed beautifully as they killed a tiger by burning it alive. In addition, their worship of Banbibi is another positive section to intervene the environmental concerns and seek protection from wild creatures, such as tigers and crocodiles. This study aims to analyse the ecological concerns and cultural encounters under the light of migration, identity issues, and environmental factors in *The Hungry Tide* (2004)

The objectives are to assess the environmental concerns and man-nature connection in *The Hungry Tide* (2004) and to related migration, cultural encounters, and identity crises in *The Hungry Tide* (2004).

Human civilisation and nature are interconnected; nature has given every creature to live in their own specific way. However, colonialism and migration adversely impacted nature, as well as created human suffering regarding homelessness and identity crises. Hence, it is required to assess these sections portrayed by Amitava Ghosh in his *The Hungry Tide* (2004).

The novel presents a connection and correlation between man and nature; man's existence and development of all-natural beings are associated with the development of the proper harmony between the presence of human beings and existing natural spheres. People in the Sundarban region are poor and marginalised, as the government has no concern for their benefit and safety. Furthermore, the government's conflict with refugee people was evident in promoting the preservation of wild animals<sup>2</sup>. Ghosh also presented that Piya wants to secure the wildlife, such as tigers, however at the cost of human beings. On the other hand, Sundarbans people are severely dependent on natural sources, such as fish, crabs, and honey for their earnings.

The migration of Bengali refugees in Sundarban areas was portrayed in this novel; they also struggled to save their lives in that new place. Culture and economy were encountered between the literate and illiterate people; city developers, hunter-gatherers, and sedentary farmers were connected within a good bond. The hunger strike among the migrants led to a short-term improvement, such as the increase in dole; however, all these aspects were led by natural events. refugee people could develop their areas and build their homes with the materials they found in tide areas:

“What had I expected? A mere jumble, perhaps, untidy heaps of people, piled high upon each other? [...] but what I saw was quite different from the picture in my mind's eye. Paths had been laid; the badh – the guarantor of island life- had been augmented: little plots of land had been enclosed with fences; fishing nets had been hung up to dry ... Such industry! Such diligence! Yet it was only a few weeks since they had come [...] suddenly it dawned on me that I was watching the birth of something new, something hitherto unseen” (Ghosh,171)

De (11) mentioned the colonial consequences of promoting a 'newer' identity, home and belonging; international migration resulted in increasing consequences of the factors for which multilingualism and

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<sup>2</sup>Basu, Swagatalakshmi. "Exploring the Bond between Man and Nature in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*." *International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences* 5.5 (2020): 1353-1355. (p. 1354)

multi-cultural shapes were intertwined. The transition of ‘Englishness’ among numerous Bengali people was portrayed clearly. The region of the most tide in Sundarban was named ‘tide countries’, where the refugees started to live. In fact, this place was named after “Bhatir Desh”<sup>3</sup>. The diasporic condition is also developed under the nationalist paradigm of African-American, Afro-Asian, and Afro-American.

This novel also used eco-criticism theory to highlight environmental issues. Ecology focuses on the inexplicable relationship of living organisms with the natural environment<sup>4</sup> (Basu, 1353). The human and natural connection provides all creatures the right to live safely; environmental issues and their effect on mankind highlight the need to protect the environment.

This study has gathered secondary sources of information based on the research aim and objectives. To assess ecological narratives and cultural encounters and explore themes of environment, migration, and identity in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*, this study gathered information from articles and book reviews, which were published on governmental websites and authentic sites. This increased the validity of the research process; furthermore, qualitative thematic analysis is utilised here to strengthen the qualitative analysis<sup>5</sup>. Qualitative data is familiarised, and then initial codes are developed. After that themes are reviewed and named to present the final report.

In the beginning, *The Hungry Tide* (2004) seeks to explore the power of nature, as it portrays a conflicting picture between nature and man. Human thinks that nature is there to fulfil their desire only. In the novel, the people of Morichjhapi are destroying natural resources to fill their stomachs and also construct their houses out of natural resources<sup>6</sup>. In turn, nature took revenge through cyclones, hurricanes, earthquakes, and landslides. The novel has been set in the heart of nature. This novel deals with various ecological issues of the Sundarbans. Its biodiversity is getting imbalanced because of modern activities taken up by human beings to keep them alive. Ghosh seeks to reveal nature’s discipline in this novel.

Despite the love story, Ghosh brings language problems and ecological calamity importance. Ghosh strives to showcase the power of both animals and humans. Ideas of Ghosh have been that Animal also has emotion and they want to roam freely in their territory. However, human encroachment on the wild has wreaked havoc on nature. Due to overpopulation, people are destroying forests and this has limited food for wild animals<sup>7</sup>. Ghosh wonderfully depicts nature’s cycle very wonderfully. Through the novel, Ghosh wants to warn that if we harm nature will take revenge on us. The author wants to make people aware that most of the natural calamities are the handiwork of human activities. Ghosh made a brilliant intermingling of the ecological problems of Sundarbans with Indian myth. People in Sundarbans believe that Bonbibi is the goddess of animals in Sundarbans. If people harm nature, Bonbibi takes its revenge. The novel has been abundant in information relating to natural history.

<sup>3</sup>De, Asis. "Remapping the 'Bhatir Desh': Reflections on Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*." (2013). (p. 15)

<sup>4</sup>Basu, Swagatalakshmi. "Exploring the Bond between Man and Nature in Amitav Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide*." *International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences* 5.5 (2020): 1353-1355. (p. 1353)

<sup>5</sup>Braun, Virginia, and Victoria Clarke. "Conceptual and design thinking for thematic analysis." *Qualitative psychology* 9.1 (2022): 3. (p. 8)

<sup>6</sup>Bhushan, Vishwa. "An Ecology and Eco-Criticism in Amitav Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide*." *The Creative launcher* 5.6 (2021): 133-141. (p. 135)

<sup>7</sup>Sam, LekshmiPriya. "Nature and Humanity: A Humanitarian and Ecological Reading of the novel *The Hungry Tide* by Amitav Ghosh." (2022). (p. 25)

In the novel, *Hungry Tide*, the meaning of Sundarbans is a beautiful forest. Climate change has been affecting both animals and humans in Sundarbans and it is properly portrayed in the novel as they were sharing a common environment<sup>8</sup>. The increase in population caused deforestation in the mangrove. Sudden rise in water levels leads to tsunamis and floods in the area affecting both humans and wildlife. Moreover, this novel recounts the Morichjhapi incident depicting the exploitation that Bangladeshi refugees faced. As the government has taken steps to preserve the natural environment, it has led to a rise in confrontation with the people. In the novel, Ghosh tries to offer hints that globalisation has a far-reaching effect on uncivilised and backward people in Sundarbans. Ghosh portrays a negative scenario of the globalisation and lackadaisical attitude of urban people towards them.

### Conclusion

This study revealed the way uprooting and migration facilitate the suffering of homelessness and identity crises in a new land. Furthermore, the robust relationship between man and nature is another important concern for not only the novel's characters but also the common people in the real world. In this case, this novel highlights the need for both ecological concerns and balance, which can secure the future of human civilisation.

The governmental concern is required to develop the Sundarbans area; apart from policies for wildlife protection, the government needs to develop these areas by increasing employment opportunities, a financial contribution for these people, and protecting both wildlife and human habitats from natural disasters. It can focus on the educational development of people in this region so that they become aware of maintaining an ecological balance along with their secure lives.

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<sup>8</sup>Jose, Sheba Elsa. "Man, Nature and the World: An Ecocritical Interpretation of Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*." (2021) (p. 060)

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