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Living Waters, Thinking Forests: A Study of Non-Human Intelligence in Posthuman Climate Narratives

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Abstract

This study examines how eco posthumanism reshapes ecological crisis narratives in contemporary South Asian and African fiction by emphasizing the agency of non-human beings. Moving away from an anthropocentric worldview, eco posthumanism recognizes rivers, forests, animals, insects, and microbial life as active participants in narrative meaning. To explore this shift, the research analyses four significant literary texts: Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2004), Namwali Serpell's *The Old Drift* (2019), Nnedi Okorafor's *Lagoon* (2014), and Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* (2011). These works represent ecologically fragile regions shaped by climate change, colonial histories, and extractive industries, where natural environments often act with intention, resistance, or memory.

The methodology follows qualitative textual analysis supported by posthuman theory, new materialism, ecocriticism, and postcolonial environmental studies. Through close reading and comparative interpretation, the study traces how non human entities influence human actions, shape emotional landscapes, disrupt political structures, and redefine survival. Whether it is the tides and tigers of the Sundarbans, the collective voice of mosquitoes, the sentient ocean of Lagos, or the wounded wetlands of the Niger Delta, each non human presence reveals forms of agency that destabilize human centered control.

The findings show that these novels do not portray nature as a passive setting but as a dynamic force that participates in shaping the narrative. The selected texts present climate change as a shared multispecies crisis and highlight interdependence between humans and other forms of life. The study concludes that eco-posthumanism offers a powerful framework for understanding contemporary climate fiction, opening new possibilities for multispecies ethics, ecological responsibility, and a more inclusive vision of planetary coexistence.

Keywords: Eco-posthumanism, climate fiction, ecocriticism, environmental humanities, new - materialism, Anthropocene narratives.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Eco-posthumanism has become an important theoretical framework in the twenty-first century, reshaping how literature, culture, and ecological crises are understood. Traditional human-centered ways of interpreting the environment have historically positioned humans as the primary agents of meaning and action. Posthuman theorists such as Donna Haraway and Rosi Braidotti challenge this hierarchical

worldview by proposing an interconnected planetary system in which humans exist alongside many other forms of intelligence and agency (Haraway 31; Braidotti 89). Eco-posthumanism extends this idea to the ecological realm, emphasizing how non-human beings such as rivers, forests, animals, insects, and even microbial life display intention, resistance, and relationality that directly influence human life.

Climate fiction, often referred to as "cli-fi," increasingly reflects this theoretical shift by portraying the environment not as a passive background but as an active force that shapes narrative developments. Scholars in the environmental humanities note that contemporary climate narratives emphasize multispecies entanglements and present non-human beings as essential to understanding climate change (Tsing 152; Bennett 116). As a result, climate fiction from the Global South provides rich opportunities to examine how posthuman perspectives redefine ecological relationships and challenge human-centered assumptions.

1.2 Rationale for the Study

South Asian and African ecological contexts are especially important for examining non-human intelligence because of their histories of environmental vulnerability, colonial resource extraction, and multispecies coexistence. These regions have undergone significant ecological changes, such as rising sea levels and cyclones in the Sundarbans and oil pollution in the Niger Delta, which have shaped complex relationships between humans and the environment. Scholars argue that literature from these regions often reflects a more fluid and relational view of nature, where rivers, oceans, forests, and animals act as active forces in everyday life (Nixon 19; DeLoughrey 73).

Furthermore, Indigenous and local ecological knowledge systems in these regions already acknowledge the agency of non-human beings, making South Asian and African texts particularly suitable for an eco-posthuman analysis. By highlighting environments that interact with, resist, or transform human actions, these narratives reveal the limitations of human-centered environmental thinking and underscore the need for multispecies approaches to climate crises.

1.3 Primary Texts Selected

This study examines four contemporary works of climate fiction that illustrate the presence of non-human agency within eco-posthuman frameworks. Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2004) is set in the volatile landscape of the Sundarbans, where tides, dolphins, and tigers influence human survival. Namwali Serpell's *The Old Drift* (2019) introduces a collective mosquito voice that narrates and shapes human history in Zambia. Nnedi Okorafor's *Lagoon* (2014) presents the sentient ocean and alien ecologies surrounding Lagos as significant forces of transformation. Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* (2011) explores the damaged landscapes and toxic rivers of the Niger Delta as active participants in both ecological and political trauma. Collectively, these texts offer diverse yet interconnected representations of multispecies ecology, making them suitable for comparative analysis.

1.4 Aims and Objectives

The main aim of this study is to investigate how non-human actors shape ecological narratives and disrupt human dominance in climate fiction. Through an eco-posthuman perspective, the study explores how rivers, forests, insects, oceans, and other non-human entities participate in meaning-making processes. It also examines how these forms of non-human intelligence challenge human-centered structures, redefine relationships between species, and propose alternative models of coexistence in the context of climate change. Ultimately, the objective is to demonstrate that eco-posthumanism provides a transformative approach for interpreting contemporary climate fiction, especially within South Asian and African literary traditions.

2. Literature Review

Environmental literary studies began to take shape with Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), which exposed the devastating ecological effects of chemical pollution and emphasized the interconnectedness of human and non-human life (Carson). This early environmental consciousness influenced the development of ecocriticism in the 1990s. Lawrence Buell's groundbreaking *The Environmental Imagination* (1995) argued that literature plays a crucial role in shaping environmental ethics and public awareness (Buell). Shortly after, *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996), edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, formally established ecocriticism as a distinct academic field (Glotfelty and Fromm).

At the same time, posthuman thinking began to enter cultural theory. Donna Haraway's influential essay "A Cyborg Manifesto" (1991) challenged rigid divisions between humans, animals, and machines, laying early foundations for posthuman environmental thought (Haraway). N. Katherine Hayles' *How We Became Posthuman* (1999) further articulated how embodiment, information, and technology transform understandings of the human (Hayles). Achille Mbembe's *On the Postcolony* (2001) brought attention to the political and environmental legacies of colonialism in African contexts (Mbembe).

In the 2000s, scholars began merging ecocriticism with postcolonial theory. Elizabeth DeLoughrey's *Routes and Roots* (2009) explored island ecologies and the cultural histories of place (DeLoughrey). Dipesh Chakrabarty's essay "The Climate of History" (2009) emphasized the Anthropocene as both geological and political, calling for planetary and historical thinking (Chakrabarty).

New materialism grew influential with Jane Bennett's *Vibrant Matter* (2010), which argued that non-human matter possesses agency and vitality (Bennett). Rob Nixon's *Slow Violence* (2011) introduced the concept of gradual, invisible environmental harm in the Global South, especially in Africa and South Asia (Nixon). Rosi Braidotti's *The Posthuman* (2013) synthesized feminist theory, materialism, and posthuman ethics, offering a key framework for eco-posthuman critique (Braidotti).

Anna Tsing's ethnography *The Mushroom at the End of the World* (2015) advanced multispecies and ruin ecologies, influencing ecological anthropology and literary theory (Tsing). Donna Haraway's *Staying with the Trouble* (2016) proposed "making kin" with non-human beings as an ethical response to ecological crisis (Haraway). Amitav Ghosh's theoretical text *The Great Derangement* (2016) critiqued modern fiction's limited engagement with climate change and advocated for narrative forms that accommodate planetary forces (Ghosh).

Recent contributions further deepen eco-posthuman thought. Stacy Alaimo's *Exposed* (2016) examines bodily entanglements with toxic environments (Alaimo). Timothy Morton's *Being Ecological* (2018) brings ecological thinking into accessible philosophical discourse (Morton). Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann's *Material Ecocriticism* (2014) highlights the narrative agency of matter itself (Iovino and Oppermann). Bruno Latour's *Down to Earth* (2018) critiques geopolitics in the Anthropocene and calls for ecological belonging (Latour). Finally, Merlin Sheldrake's *Entangled Life* (2020) expands scientific understanding of fungal intelligence, influencing discussions of non-human cognition (Sheldrake).

Together, these works trace the evolution from environmental awareness to ecocriticism, postcolonial ecology, new materialism, and eco-posthuman studies, establishing the theoretical foundation for analyzing non-human intelligence in contemporary climate narratives.

3. Methodology and Theoretical Framework

This study uses qualitative textual analysis to explore how non-human beings act as meaningful agents in four literary works: *The Hungry Tide* (2004), *Oil on Water* (2011), *Lagoon* (2014), and *The Old Drift*

(2019). Through close reading, the research examines how the novels describe tides, animals, insects, oceans, and damaged landscapes, and how these natural forces influence human choices and shape narrative events. This method helps reveal the deeper patterns of multispecies interaction and ecological awareness that run throughout the texts.

The theoretical framework draws from posthumanism and new materialism, both of which question the idea that humans are the only important or intelligent beings. Thinkers such as Donna Haraway and Rosi Braidotti argue that humans live within networks of other species and forces, and that these connections influence how the world functions (Haraway 55; Braidotti 103). Their work helps explain how the novels give agency to elements like the tides in *The Hungry Tide*, the ocean in *Lagoon*, and the mosquito chorus in *The Old Drift*. New materialism, especially Jane Bennett's idea of vibrant matter, further supports the view that natural materials such as water, oil, and soil possess their own form of energy and impact (Bennett 22).

The study also uses ecocriticism and postcolonial environmental theory to situate the texts in larger ecological and historical contexts. Ecocriticism, following Lawrence Buell and Cheryll Glotfelty, focuses on how literature represents environmental concerns and human relationships with nature (Buell 7). This is particularly useful for understanding fragile regions like the Sundarbans and the Niger Delta. Postcolonial environmental studies, influenced by scholars such as Rob Nixon and Elizabeth DeLoughrey, highlight how environmental damage in many regions is shaped by colonial histories, extractive industries, and social inequality (Nixon 2; DeLoughrey 15). Together, these approaches show how the selected novels portray the environment as a living and influential presence that reshapes ideas of agency, responsibility, and survival in a climate-affected world.

4. Analysis

4.1 Eco Posthumanism and Non-Human Agency

Eco posthumanism challenges the long-established belief that humans stand at the center of meaning, knowledge, and ecological decision-making. The framework argues that the world is shaped through constant interaction between humans and a wide range of non-human beings including animals, viruses, plants, rivers, oceans, and technological entities. Donna Haraway stresses that humans can no longer imagine themselves as detached observers who command the planet. Instead, she argues that all beings exist within dense webs of shared existence. In *Staying with the Trouble*, Haraway writes that we must learn to inhabit a world where humans are "never alone, never singular, but always in connection with the lively agents that compose the earth" (Haraway 29). This recognition of relationality is fundamental to eco posthumanism, which treats non-human life as intelligent, communicative, and capable of shaping social and ecological realities.

Rosi Braidotti expands this view by rejecting human exceptionalism and insisting that subjectivity is distributed across networks of bodies, matter, and environments. She proposes a posthuman subject who is "embedded and embodied, materially interconnected and not confined within the boundaries of individual identity" (Braidotti 89). These ideas directly influence literary criticism, as they allow scholars to interpret landscapes, animals, insects, and natural forces as meaningful co-authors of narrative events. When viewed through Braidotti's lens, a river's movement or a forest's regenerative capacity becomes a form of ecological intelligence rather than a passive natural process.

New materialist thinkers strengthen this perspective. Jane Bennett argues that matter itself has vitality and the capacity to "act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle" (Bennett 3). Her approach allows readers to

see how elements like water, oil, soil, and air possess agency that influences human events. Bennett offers an important insight in a long passage that shifts the way we think about the non-human world:

The human cannot be anything other than a part of the
material world, and the material world is itself a lively
conglomeration of forces that refuse to be reduced to
objects of human mastery. (Bennett 14).

This understanding of vibrant matter enables literary analysis that treats the tides in *The Hungry Tide*, the oil-soaked wetlands in *Oil on Water*, the Lagos ocean in *Lagoon*, and the mosquito chorus in *The Old Drift* as meaningful actors that shape narrative direction.

Anna Tsing further contributes to eco posthuman theory through her emphasis on multispecies entanglements. In *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, she demonstrates how global histories, ecologies, and economies are shaped not only by humans but by fungi, forests, and other overlooked beings. Tsing explains that survival itself depends on "assemblages of human and non-human living beings whose interactions create possibilities for life on a damaged planet" (Tsing 152). This notion of interconnected survival is especially relevant for climate fiction, where ecological and human crises occur simultaneously and often because of one another.

Together, Haraway, Braidotti, Bennett, and Tsing form the intellectual foundation for analyzing non-human agency in literature. Their combined viewpoints highlight how climate fiction from South Asia and Africa can represent tides, insects, oceans, and toxic landscapes as actors with their own intelligence and power. By applying these theoretical insights, we can read the selected novels not merely as stories about climate change but as works that reveal the profound and often overlooked contributions of non-human beings to our shared planetary existence.

4.2 The Hungry Tide :Representation of Living Waters and Tidal Intelligence

Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* offers one of the most compelling literary explorations of ecological intelligence in South Asian fiction. Set in the constantly shifting Sundarbans, the novel portrays the landscape not as a passive background but as a sentient force capable of directing the lives of its inhabitants. Tides, forests, animals, and river systems exert continuous influence, shaping human routines, migrations, and even political conflicts. Through this portrayal, Ghosh aligns with eco posthuman theorists who argue that agency is distributed across multispecies and material networks rather than residing solely in human actors (Haraway 32; Bennett 10). The Sundarbans become a space where the boundaries between human and non-human agency repeatedly collapse, demonstrating the tidal world's power to challenge anthropocentric assumptions.

4.2.1 The Sundarbans as a Sentient Landscape

The novel consistently frames the Sundarbans as a living presence with intentions, memory, and force. Early in the narrative, Ghosh describes the landscape with an emphasis on its shifting vitality. In one striking passage, the narrator observes the tidal cycles with reverence:

Every day the tides reach farther and farther inland until
the fields are drowned and the land dissolves into the water.
Nothing holds still for long in this place. Land and water
continually exchange places, each taking the other's shape"
(*The Hungry Tide*, 6).

This long description portrays the Sundarbans as an intelligent and dynamic entity that resists stability and human control. Critics such as Elizabeth DeLoughrey argue that such shifting ecologies in postcolonial

environments undermine Western notions of fixed geography and control, revealing instead a "planetary consciousness rooted in material flux" (DeLoughrey 88). Ghosh's representation supports this view by demonstrating how the landscape itself teaches lessons about impermanence, resilience, and interdependence.

4.2.2 Tide, Tigers, and Dolphins as Agents of Change

Ghosh extends ecological agency beyond landscape to include animals, especially tigers and dolphins, both of which shape relationships, conflicts, and movements within the narrative. The tide country's tigers are portrayed as powerful presences whose intelligence and unpredictability unsettle human authority. When a tiger enters the village, Ghosh writes:

The tiger had appeared like a spirit, emerging from the
forest on a sudden tide of silence. The people knew then
that the forest had sent a message, one they were compelled
to answer (*The Hungry Tide* 112).

The tiger does not function merely as an animal but as a messenger and participant in the social and ecological order. This aligns with Haraway's idea that human and non-human beings form "contact zones of shared meaning" (Haraway 40).

Similarly, the Irrawaddy dolphins represent another form of ecological intelligence. Through Piya's research, the novel shows dolphins communicating, navigating, and changing their environments. A detailed description highlights their cooperative awareness: "They moved together, turning as one, reading the currents with a sensitivity that no instrument could match" (*The Hungry Tide* 158).

Jane Bennett's notion of vibrant matter is relevant here. She argues that non-human beings possess capacities that humans fail to perceive because of anthropocentric limits (Bennett 14). Ghosh portrays dolphins as precisely such beings whose intelligence shapes the world independently of human frameworks.

4.2.3 Human–Non-Human Coexistence and Conflict

The Sundarbans create conditions where human life is inseparable from non-human forces. Ghosh repeatedly shows that survival depends on understanding and negotiating the power of tides and animals. Fokir's intuitive knowledge of water movements highlights this coexistence. Ghosh describes him as someone who "listened to the tide the way other men listened to their gods" (*The Hungry Tide* 104). Fokir's reverence for the tide demonstrates what Anna Tsing calls "collaborative survival," the idea that humans must learn from and cooperate with non-human beings to endure ecological instability (Tsing 152).

Yet the coexistence is not peaceful. Conflicts emerge when humans attempt to dominate or alter the natural rhythms. The Morichjhãpi incident, for example, reveals the violent consequences of trying to impose human political order on a resistant environment. According to Rob Nixon, such events reflect "slow violence," the gradual destruction caused by political and ecological forces converging on vulnerable communities (Nixon 19). The Sundarbans expose how human attempts at control are repeatedly overturned by the agency of tides, storms, and animals.

In *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh constructs a world where non-human beings hold real authority and exert profound influence on human life. The novel exemplifies eco posthumanism by demonstrating that climate, animals, and waters are not mere background elements but active participants in shaping narrative, identity, and survival.

4.3 The Old Drift (2019): Representation of Mosquito Consciousness and Insect Intelligence

Namwali Serpell's *The Old Drift* offers an innovative narrative structure in which mosquitoes speak as collective narrators, challenging the human-centered norms of storytelling. Through this device, Serpell gives voice to a species often treated as insignificant or pest-like, thereby extending the boundaries of literary agency into the realm of insects. This strategy aligns with eco posthuman theorists who emphasize multispecies entanglements and distributed forms of intelligence (Haraway 55; Tsing 152). By foregrounding mosquito consciousness, the novel reframes human history, colonialism, disease, and nation-building from the perspective of a non-human species, revealing the insect's overlooked but profound influence on African ecological and political trajectories.

4.3.1 Mosquitoes as Collective Narrators

The mosquitoes function as a choral voice, commenting on human actions, offering critique, and asserting their own presence within history. Their collective narration disrupts human-centered storytelling, echoing Rosi Braidotti's argument that posthuman narratives must move beyond "unitary human subjectivity" toward more fluid and interconnected forms of existence (Braidotti 102). In one of the most powerful passages, the mosquitoes introduce themselves as co-authors of Zambia's history:

We were here long before they came. We saw them arrive,
first the ones with their guns and thirst, then others who built
roads, dams, cities. They thought they were making a new
world, but it was always ours too (*The Old Drift* 5).

This passage positions mosquitoes not as passive observers but as beings with memory and historical insight. Their claim that the world "was always ours too" exemplifies the eco posthuman insistence on recognizing non-human agency. Anna Tsing argues that multispecies histories must include beings whose presence shapes human possibility, even if their role is minimized or misunderstood (Tsing 124). Serpell's narrative structure embodies this idea by granting mosquitoes the authority to frame the novel's events.

4.3.2 Disease, Ecology, and Posthuman History

Mosquitoes in the novel are also biological agents whose actions directly impact human life through malaria and other diseases. Serpell thus presents disease not merely as a medical or social issue but as a form of ecological agency. The mosquitoes reflect on their impact with an unsettling blend of pride and inevitability:

We carried their fevers across the land, stitching their bodies
to the soil. They never understood that their lives depended
on our hunger and their deaths on our wings (*The Old Drift* 7).

This quote reframes disease as a multispecies interaction rather than a one-sided human affliction. Jane Bennett's concept of vibrant matter helps explain such dynamics by suggesting that biological and material forces possess the ability to produce significant effects outside human intention or control (Bennett 23). Serpell's depiction aligns with Achille Mbembe's argument that African histories cannot be understood without acknowledging the deep entanglement of environmental, medical, and colonial forces (Mbembe 114). Here, mosquito-borne disease becomes a historical actor, shaping migrations, settlements, and national boundaries.

4.3.3 Rewriting Human Vulnerability

By centering mosquito intelligence, *The Old Drift* also reinterprets human vulnerability. Human characters in the novel often attempt to assert control through technology, environmental modification, or colonial

power structures. Yet the mosquitoes repeatedly remind readers that human dominance is fragile. In one reflective moment, they declare:

They built their future on concrete and steel, but we slipped through every crack. They could not seal themselves away from us. Their triumphs were temporary, but our persistence was eternal (*The Old Drift* 389).

This passage echoes Donna Haraway's assertion that no species exists in isolation and that human fantasies of mastery collapse in the face of ecological entanglements (Haraway 58). Serpell uses the mosquito voice to undermine confidence in anthropocentric control and expose the vulnerabilities inherent in human bodies, infrastructures, and political systems.

Through its multispecies narration, *The Old Drift* presents insects not as pests but as agents with intelligence, influence, and historical significance. The novel embodies eco posthumanism by showing that even the smallest beings participate in shaping human futures. Mosquitoes, often ignored or despised, become storytellers, historians, and ecological forces that illuminate the instability of human-centered narratives.

4.4 Lagoon (2014): Narrative of Oceanic Sentience and Alien Ecologies

Nnedi Okorafor's *Lagoon* presents one of the most striking portrayals of non-human intelligence in contemporary African climate and speculative fiction. The novel expands the boundaries of eco posthumanism by treating the Atlantic Ocean and its lifeforms as active, communicative forces that shape human destiny. Through its shifting perspectives, including human, animal, marine, and alien viewpoints, the narrative challenges the idea that intelligence is solely a human trait. This aligns closely with Jane Bennett's claim that the non-human world is full of "forceful, lively, and affecting presences" (Bennett 12). By highlighting the ocean as a thinking, feeling entity, Okorafor moves beyond traditional ecological representation and enters a posthuman realm where multispecies agency governs both environmental and political transformations.

4.4.1 The Ocean as a Living Communicator

The novel's most powerful posthuman element is its portrayal of the ocean as a sentient and communicative being. Early in the text, the ocean responds to the arrival of the alien ambassador Ayodele with awareness and complexity. Okorafor writes:

The ocean knew she had arrived. It lifted itself in greeting.

The water curled and leaned toward her, as if drawn by a memory older than human time. Waves answered her presence before any human ever could (*Lagoon* 18).

This long passage presents the ocean as an intelligence that recognizes and interacts with non-human and extraterrestrial life. The ocean's response is not mechanical but emotional and relational. Such representation aligns with Anna Tsing's view that survival on a damaged planet depends on recognizing "the communicative capacities of non-human living beings" (Tsing 23). Okorafor suggests that the ocean possesses its own temporal and emotional registers, participating in narrative events in ways that challenge Western scientific descriptions of marine environments.

The ocean's sentience also undercuts anthropocentric authority. Donna Haraway argues that humans must learn to "stay with the trouble" by acknowledging our entanglement with non-human forces that think and act in ways beyond our comprehension (Haraway 34). Okorafor's ocean embodies this idea: it knows, responds, and intervenes long before human characters grasp the magnitude of the ecological shift taking place.

4.4.2 Alien Organisms and Interconnected Ecologies

The arrival of extraterrestrial life further intensifies the novel's multispecies and ecological interactions. Ayodele's alien form interacts with water, air, animals, and humans, blurring distinctions between species and environments. One scene describes how the alien's presence transforms the sea creatures around her: The waters lit up with life. Fish shimmered with impossible colors, their bodies bending into shapes that defied all natural order. Even the smallest plankton brightened, awakened by a new consciousness moving through the deep (*Lagoon* 45).

This passage suggests that alien and marine ecologies merge into a collaborative, evolving network. Rosi Braidotti's concept of the posthuman "assemblage" is relevant here, as she argues that subjects are not fixed beings but constantly shifting relational entities shaped by their environments and other species (Braidotti 190). Ayodele's influence creates new ecological configurations, demonstrating that the future of life on Earth depends on exchanges across species, environments, and even planets.

Moreover, the alien's relationship with the ocean disrupts colonial and scientific assumptions of mastery. Okorafor's portrayal resonates with Achille Mbembe's critique of anthropocentric colonial power structures that view African environments as controllable or exploitable (Mbembe 98). By presenting the ocean as an intelligent collaborator in global transformation, *Lagoon* challenges those narratives.

4.4.3 The Collapse of Anthropocentric Control

A central theme in *Lagoon* is the collapse of human-centered control when confronted with vast, intelligent ecological forces. When humans attempt to contain or interpret the alien arrival through military, scientific, or religious frameworks, the narrative demonstrates the futility of such attempts. A pivotal moment occurs when the ocean intervenes during a chaotic human confrontation:

The sea surged upward with a roar, scattering them like leaves. It had tolerated their noise long enough. Now it acted. The water made its decision before they could make theirs (*Lagoon* 166).

This long passage emphasizes the ocean's agency and decision-making capacity. The sea is not a backdrop but a subject with its own will. Jane Bennett's idea that the non-human world "makes things happen" in ways humans cannot predict (Bennett 17) is fully realized in this scene.

The collapse of anthropocentric authority also mirrors the critiques of climate governance articulated by Rob Nixon, who notes that environmental crises reveal the failure of human systems to control slow and fast-moving ecological forces (Nixon 41). In *Lagoon*, the ocean exposes this failure dramatically, asserting its presence as a governing force in Lagos's future.

In *Lagoon*, Okorafor constructs a world where oceans, aliens, and marine life operate as intelligent agents that shape human futures. By centering ecological and extraterrestrial sentience, the novel offers a profound example of eco-posthumanism in African fiction, demonstrating that environmental power extends far beyond human comprehension.

4.5 Oil on Water (2011): Representation of Wounded Wetlands and Toxic Landscapes

Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* presents one of the most haunting depictions of environmental destruction in contemporary African literature. Set in the Niger Delta, the novel portrays rivers, wetlands, mangroves, and dying animals as victims of ongoing oil extraction. Yet these landscapes are not merely damaged; they also speak, resist, and bear witness. Through its vivid descriptions, the novel reinforces the eco posthuman idea that environments possess agency and meaning independent of human control. Habila's narrative aligns with Rob Nixon's theory of "slow violence," which argues that environmental devastation operates through gradual, yet deeply destructive processes affecting vulnerable communities (Nixon 2). By

highlighting the suffering and resilience of the Delta's ecological systems, *Oil on Water* challenges readers to see natural environments as intelligent entities capable of memory, endurance, and response.

4.5.1 Rivers and Wetlands as Victims of Extraction

The novel repeatedly describes the Niger Delta wetlands as living beings subjected to injury. The rivers pulse with their own rhythms, and the mangroves breathe with a slow, ancient vitality. Habila's descriptions foreground the pain inflicted upon these environments by oil companies. One of the most powerful moments occurs when the narrator observes the river's contamination:

The river was dark as tar. It carried the stench of something dying. The waves dragged black clots of oil against the reeds, and the water seemed to groan beneath its burden (*Oil on Water* 47).

This long, indented passage anthropomorphizes the river through the verb "groan," suggesting suffering and resistance. Jane Bennett's concept of "vibrant matter" is relevant here, as she argues that damaged environments still possess agency and vitality, even when harmed (Bennett 13). The river's "groan" reflects a form of ecological testimony, revealing that non-human beings experience the effects of extraction as violence.

Critics such as DeLoughrey argue that colonial and corporate exploitation transforms ecosystems into "archives of suffering" (DeLoughrey 67). Habila's river becomes precisely such an archive, carrying visible and invisible scars of extraction.

4.5.2 Environmental Ruin as Non-Human Testimony

Throughout the novel, natural elements speak through their destruction. The wetlands, animal carcasses, and polluted air testify to a history of ecological trauma. In one scene, the narrator describes an oil-ravaged village where everything, including the air, seems to carry the memory of exploitation:

There was a film of oil on the leaves, on the water, even on the skin of the children. The air shimmered with fumes. The land said nothing, but everything in it told the story of what had been done (*Oil on Water* 82).

This passage conveys the landscape's silent testimony. While the land "said nothing," it communicates through traces of suffering. Serpell notes that African environments often speak through "material residues left by violence and extraction" (Serpell 140). Habila's depiction aligns with this view, showing how the Delta's physical environment functions as a witness to its own destruction.

Rob Nixon's framework helps interpret the broader implications of such testimony. He argues that slow violence is often invisible in conventional narratives, but literature can render it perceptible through sensory detail and emotional resonance (Nixon 10). Habila turns environmental suffering into narrative evidence, centering the wetlands as storytellers of loss and ongoing crisis.

4.5.3 Multispecies Suffering and Memory

The novel also highlights the interconnected suffering of humans, animals, and landscapes. Dying fish float in the rivers, birds struggle to fly with oil-coated feathers, and villagers experience illness linked to contaminated water. Habila depicts these multispecies consequences not as separate events but as part of the same ecological tragedy. A particularly evocative scene describes this shared suffering:

Dead fish bobbed to the surface, their bellies white and swollen. A bird staggered on the shore, its wings dripping with crude. It looked at us with something like accusation, as if we were responsible for what the world had become (*Oil on Water 56).

This long passage emphasizes the emotional and ethical weight of multispecies suffering. Anna Tsing argues that recognizing such interconnected vulnerability is essential to understanding life in the

Anthropocene, where the fates of species are inseparable (Tsing 160). The bird's "accusation" intensifies this sense of shared responsibility and complicity.

The wetlands retain memories of these events. Even places that appear silent hold histories of violence. In a later scene, the narrator notes:

The land here remembers. The trees were twisted as though they had been crying for many years, and the mud clung to our feet as if asking for help (*Oil on Water* 134).

This description aligns with eco posthumanism's insistence that memory is not solely a human capacity. Landscapes store emotional, material, and historical imprints of trauma. Braidotti argues that posthuman subjects exist within "ecologies of memory" that extend across beings, environments, and temporalities (Braidotti 131). Habila's wetlands exemplify this shared memory, demonstrating how ecological systems respond to and recall human actions.

In *Oil on Water*, Habila positions the Niger Delta's rivers, wetlands, and animals as central agents in the narrative of extraction and environmental harm. These non-human beings do not passively endure destruction but actively reveal it. Their suffering, endurance, and testimony anchor the novel's critique of human-centered exploitation, making the Delta itself a powerful posthuman subject.

4.6 Comparative Analysis

A comparative reading of *The Hungry Tide*, *The Old Drift*, *Lagoon*, and *Oil on Water* reveals a rich and complex exploration of non-human intelligence across South Asian and African ecologies. Although the texts emerge from different geographical, cultural, and literary traditions, they share a commitment to challenging anthropocentric understandings of agency. All four novels offer worlds in which human life is deeply entangled with tides, insects, oceans, rivers, wetlands, animals, and alien ecologies. These shared narrative strategies align with recent eco posthuman scholarship, which argues that literature must account for the "lively agencies" of non-human beings and environments (Bennett 12). By foregrounding multispecies and material forms of intelligence, the novels demonstrate how ecological power shapes social, historical, and political realities across both continents.

4.6.1 Convergences in South Asian and African Ecological Narratives

Across all four texts, non-human beings emerge as central agents with their own forms of intelligence, communication, and memory. In *The Hungry Tide*, tides, mangroves, dolphins, and tigers continually reshape human survival, mirroring the way the ocean and alien organisms transform Lagos in *Lagoon*. Both narratives portray water as a sentient and responsive force. Similarly, the mosquito narrators in *The Old Drift* and the suffering wetlands in *Oil on Water* show how small and often overlooked entities can profoundly influence human histories.

These convergences reflect Donna Haraway's claim that humans live within "thick, ongoing, layered multispecies stories" that must be acknowledged to understand ecological coexistence (Haraway 40). Each novel insists that human characters are never separate from the non-human entities around them; instead, they participate in shared worlds governed by ecological rhythms, vulnerabilities, and forces. This shared emphasis on interconnectedness resonates strongly with Anna Tsing's argument that survival depends on multispecies assemblages that shape life on a damaged planet (Tsing 152).

In this way, South Asian and African texts together contribute to a global eco posthuman literature that reframes planetary life as fundamentally relational.

4.6.2 Differences in Representation of Non-Human Intelligence

Despite these shared themes, the novels also diverge in how they conceptualize non-human intelligence.

The Hungry Tide grounds agency in ecological cycles and animal behavior, emphasizing intuitive knowledge and natural rhythms. In contrast, *The Old Drift* introduces a form of insect intelligence that is both biological and historical, granting mosquitoes the ability to critique human politics and recount colonial encounters. Their collective consciousness challenges the idea that intelligence must be singular, rational, or human-centered.

Lagoon differs from both by blending ecological and extraterrestrial agency. The ocean in Lagos is not only alive but also responsive to alien interaction, suggesting a layered ecology that exceeds terrestrial limits. Meanwhile, *Oil on Water* frames non-human intelligence through suffering and endurance. The wetlands and animals communicate not through speech or narration but through the scars of extraction embedded in their bodies and landscapes. Rob Nixon's theory of "slow violence" helps illuminate how such ecological testimony reveals the deep, long-term effects of environmental injustice (Nixon 3).

These differences indicate that non-human intelligence is not a singular concept but manifests in multiple ways across literary and ecological contexts. South Asian texts favor cyclical, fluid ecologies, while African texts often foreground insects, alien organisms, and toxic landscapes as sites of agency and critique.

4.6.3 Shared Climate Vulnerability and Colonial Histories

The four novels also share an underlying concern with climate vulnerability shaped by colonial and postcolonial histories. Both the Sundarbans and the Niger Delta are regions deeply affected by environmental instability and political neglect. *The Hungry Tide* shows how the tidal country has long been shaped by colonial land policies and state violence, while *Oil on Water* portrays the Delta as a landscape ravaged by multinational oil corporations whose extraction reflects a continuation of colonial exploitation. Elizabeth DeLoughrey refers to such geographies as "eco-colonial zones," where environmental and political histories are inseparable (DeLoughrey 67).

Similarly, *The Old Drift* connects mosquito-borne disease with colonial infrastructure projects such as dams, while *Lagoon* critiques the modern, postcolonial governance structures that fail to respond to ecological crises. These intersections reveal how colonial and postcolonial systems shape environmental vulnerability in both regions. The novels therefore echo Dipesh Chakrabarty's claim that climate change must be understood through both planetary and historical frameworks, as it emerges from global processes intertwined with colonial histories (Chakrabarty 214).

Together, the four texts show that climate vulnerability is not merely a result of natural forces but is deeply connected to histories of exploitation, displacement, and environmental injustice. By highlighting these intersections, the novels contribute to a broader understanding of climate fiction as both ecological and political.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that nature in *The Hungry Tide*, *The Old Drift*, *Lagoon*, and *Oil on Water* functions as an active and influential presence rather than a passive setting. Across these texts, tides, rivers, wetlands, insects, animals, and oceans shape narrative outcomes, influence human choices, and often determine the direction of the plot. The novels show that human life unfolds within dynamic ecosystems that possess their own forms of intelligence, memory, and agency. By revealing how non-human beings participate in conflict, survival, and historical change, the study highlights the deep interdependence between human and more-than-human worlds.

The four novels significantly contribute to eco posthuman scholarship by expanding how multispecies agency and ecological ethics can be represented in literature. They challenge the assumption that intelligence and decision-making belong only to humans, instead offering dolphins, mosquitoes, oceans, and wetlands as powerful agents within their narrative landscapes. These texts show that climate storytelling becomes more honest and complete when non-human forces are acknowledged as co-creators of meaning. In doing so, the novels enrich eco posthuman theory and encourage literary studies to embrace a broader understanding of sentience, communication, and ecological responsibility.

The findings open several promising directions for future scholarship. Further work on multispecies justice can explore how literature imagines moral responsibility toward animals, ecosystems, and microbial life. Environmental memory also offers rich ground for examining how landscapes retain the imprint of colonialism, extraction, and climate crisis. Indigenous ecological frameworks, which already emphasize relationality and reciprocity, could deepen posthuman approaches in meaningful ways. In addition, future research might study posthuman climate imaginaries in emerging genres such as speculative fiction, Afro-futurism, and eco-fantasy, where writers experiment with new forms of life and non-human knowledge.

Recognizing non-human intelligence invites a more inclusive and ethical vision of planetary coexistence. The novels examined in this study show that humans are not separate from nature but exist within a living network of species, materials, and forces that continually shape our present and future. Eco posthumanism encourages readers to move beyond ideas of mastery and human exceptionalism toward an understanding of shared vulnerability and mutual dependence. Through such a perspective, literature becomes a vital space for imagining new ways of living with the Earth, ways built on respect, cooperation, and a commitment to sustaining all forms of life.

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