

Ecologies of Memory and Displacement in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*

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Abstract

This paper critically examines Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* through the intersecting lenses of memory studies, ecocriticism, and eco-postcolonial theory, highlighting the complex relationships between the displacement, ecology, and ethical responsibility. This paper focuses on the ecologically fragile Sundarbans; the novel presents the landscape not merely as a physical background but as a living archive that bears witness to the silenced histories of resetting, state violence, and marginal survival. The study asserts that Ghosh reconceptualizes nature as an active agent in preserving cultural memory, particularly in the erased history of the Morichjhapi massacre, which lives through oral narratives, ecological traces, and embodied knowledge rather than official historiography.

The novel explores ecology as a site of remembrance, the paper shows how environmental spaces challenge linear and the state-sanctioned historical narratives. Displacement in *The Hungry Tide* is shown to employ on multiple levels cultural, physical

,psychological, and epistemological moving fisherfolk, refugees, and indigenous communities whose exist are rendered precarious by exclusionary conservation of policies. The novel interrogates human–nonhuman relationships and complicates ethical binaries by representing rivers, animals, and tides as contributors in shared ecological existence. Through the characters such as Fokir and Piya, Ghosh variations indigenous ecological knowledge with technocratic environmentalism by exposing the moral limitations of discussion models that ignore social justice.

The paper contends that *The Hungry Tide* advances an moral ecology rooted in interdependence, coexistence, and historical accountability. By combining ecological consciousness with memory and displacement, the novel appears as a significant eco-postcolonial text that resonates with contemporary discussion surrounding environmental injustice, climate change, and forced migration., The study affirms literature’s capacity to recover the silenced pasts and to remake more inclusive and the humane ecological futures.

Keywords: Displacement, Ecocriticism, Memory, Sundarbans, Ethical Ecology

Introduction

Amitav Ghosh *The Hungry Tide* (2004) takes a central place in modern Indian English literature due to its rich memory, ecology, and the life of the marginalized. The novel is predictive of an increasingly enacted and uncertain landscape of human and nonhuman interacting forces set as a background, the Sundarbans, one of the most dynamic and tricky deltas of the world. Ghosh reindigenizes the Sundarbans as a living archive, in which the rhythms of the tide, the islands, and forests of mangroves bear evidence of human predicament, displacement, and muted histories, the Morichjhapi massacre, events that had been strategically omitted in the official history of environmentalism. Ghosh reorganizes social justice and technocratic environmentalism, laying between the idea of the Sundarbans as a living archive. Displacement in the story comes not solely as a corporeal or geographical state, but also as a

cultural, epistemological, and psychological event. The way disadvantaged communities are made vulnerable by the policies of the state, colonialism, and ecological insecurity. Using characters like Fokir and Piya, Ghosh discusses interspecies ethics that stretch over relationships, and talks about interdependence, co-existence and moral obligations inherent in ecological systems. Located at the integration of ecocriticism, memory studies, and eco-postcolonial theory, this paper argues that the novel, *The Hungry Tide* challenges anthropocentric structures, reclaims silenced histories, and gives an ethical vision of human/nonhuman co-existence. The novel has become an imperative literary work that brings environmental awareness to the realms of historical and social responsibility.

Ecology as a Living Archive in *The Hungry Tide*

This novel repurposes ecology and makes it an archival place where histories of human struggle, displacement, and life beyond the boundaries of written history are chronicled. The Sundarbans has shifting islands, rivers inundated by the tides and thick forests of mangrove is not just a geographical place but a place of active memories. The scenery inherits and maintains the remnants of human activity, migration, labour, violence, and loss. which makes nature as a witness to the past themselves. which was marginalized or swept under the official historiography. In this representation, Ghosh disrupts conception of history produced anthropocentrically but prefigures an ecological form of memory based on place and experience(Ghosh65-67).

The changing ecology of Sundarbans does not support permanence, lineal structure and reflects its own fragmented histories. which occupy the Sundarbans are themselves fragmented Islands appear and disappear with the flow of the tide, rivers keep changing their direction, and human settlements are temporary. This environmental temporality sets the landscape into the form of a palimpsest, where layers of reminiscence coexist and overlap alongside each other with no definite specifications. Tides and mangroves described in greater detail by Ghosh that

the landscape of a country does not preserve the memory of events in the form of monumental constructions but in the form of natural rhythmic occurrences. This perception undermines traditional practices of archiving by taking the written record and state-approved histories as its primary priority, and rather giving eminence to ecological processes as a way of sharing collective memory.

Nonhuman components in the novel play the role of mnemonic agents. Rivers, dolphins, and even carnivorous creatures like tigers are a part of the memory about the previous experience between human beings and nature. The things arouse fear, reverence and survival instinct and remind communities of historical and adaptive ancestral knowledge. It is proximity between the Sundarbans dwellers and the environment that leads to an embodied memory, which is passed on not through an institutional archive but through the labour, ritual and oral storytelling. This ecological memory is especially important to marginalized communities whose history has been structurally disregarded by mainstream discourses.

The Sundarbans also has some history of violence and displacement documented in the living archive of Sundarbans, the most infamous incident being the Morichjhapi massacre. Though the incident is not much mentioned in the official history, its mark remains in the geographical landscape and in the minds of citizens. According to Ghosh the political governments can suppress memory but ecology cannot be completely suppressed or silenced. The environment itself speaks of mute testimony of suffering, and it is also in line with the eco-postcolonial critique, which reveals the ways through which the state power manipulates the territory and the past. In this regard, Sundarbans serve as a symbol of the so-called alternative archive, the one that records the memory in both its material and ecological continuity and not in terms of textual power (Nixon). Through the idea of imagining ecology as a living archive, *The Hungry Tide* re-conceptualizes the communication between the environment and past. Ghosh narrative demands to perceive that ecological spaces must not be divided into human

memory and ethical accountability. The novel therefore demands a resettling of environmental thinking which recognizes the environment as a presence in the memory of the past, as a witness to injustice, and as the possibility of surviving in an uncertain ecological future.(Ghosh 62;Assamann 41)

Memory, History, and the Silenced Past in *The Hungry Tide*

The novel preempts the conflict between the memory and the official past, showing the systematic silencing of some pasts in the process of postcolonial narrative of nationhood and development. Located in the ecologically unstable Sundarbans, the novel reveals the fact that the histories of displacement, state violence, and the sufferings of refugees are shut out of the mainstream historiography and survive instead through fragmented memories of the past, stored in personalities and in the geographical space. Ghosh opposes the power of written, state-approved history in giving more importance to memory as a form of knowing especially in the marginalized communities where their experiences are undocumented and inconvenient politically (Ghosh 118-121).

The core of this process involves the scrubbed out history of the Morichjhapi massacre, where refugee invaders were forcibly removed out of the Sundarbans in the name of having the environment. The event is still not recorded in official history, which is an example of how the state controls not only space, but also interpretations of the past. Morichjhapi reappears in the novel indirectly and deserted emotion instead of a hallucinatory exposition of history. This literary device is a reflection of the discontinuity of traumatic memory, highlighting its impact of violence that results in marks that cannot be fully erased. The act of memory therefore has become a resistance to retain what history wants to forget.

The landscape of Sundarbans is significant in supporting these repressed memories. Rivers, islands and mangrove forests are mnemonic spaces in which history is still audible. Ghosh implies that memory is not purely a part of a human mind but it exists in the material

world as well. The waves and shaky represent the shaky position of the subaltern pasts- they are constantly under threat of extinction and they are forever popping up. Such ecological inculcation of memory breaks the linear historical time, and a cyclical, place-based conceptualization of the past is produced.

The connection between memory and history in *The Hungry Tide* is also complicated by oral history and indigenous knowledge system. Characters like Fokir represent a sort of knowledge imbued with life experience instead of the written authority. The fact that he has such a deep familiarity with the rivers and the tides can be seen as a historical consciousness that is based on experience and survival. The embodied memory challenges the knowledge-power of the modern scientific and bureaucratic discourses through the detection of the way in which power delineates the kinds of the knowledge that are authorized and conserved.

Ghosh contrasts all three memories and historical memories to reveal the ethical aspect of historical silence. If we are curious to consider the novel as a contemporary issue with critical thought, the novel agrees with some critics that the act of forgetting is a political act whereby, more often than not, people want to justify their displacement and environmental injustice. According to Rob Nixon, the slow and structural types of violence often go unrecognized by history and end up leaving the communities who are impacted to lack a narration or redress. In response to this situation, *The Hungry Tide* is a text that attempts to re-write the suppressed past in the literary mind.

Finally, the novel concludes that historical justice could not have been achieved without memory. Not only does Ghosh critique what is excluded by the official history, but he also endorses memory as a potent tool of resisting erasure and asserting the existence of formerly marginalized individuals in an ecological and political periphery of the nation by recuperating marginalized pasts through narrative and ecology.

Displacement and Marginalized Communities in *The Hungry Tide*

The Hungry Tide by Amitav Ghosh presents an extremely sharp critique of displacement as a common and endemic situation of the minority communities that can settle on the ecologically vulnerable areas. The novel is located on Sundarbans, so the idea of displacement is not seen as a single event in history, but the process influenced by the past of colonial, postcolonial states and environmental instability. Refugees, fisher folk and indigenous settlers represent a vulnerable presence in the nation-state vulnerability based on both the forces of nature and the political choices, which focus on conservation and development rather than on the survival of humans. Ghosh places these communities at the cross-section of environmental danger and political omission, and the result of the analysis is displacement in the shape of structural violence in the organization of the environment(Ghosh118).

This novel is one of the examples of how marginalized people are constantly displaced in the name of the national interest, which is illustrated by the refugees of *The Hungry Tide*, especially those linked to the Morichjhapi settlement. These populations are struggling to survive and stabilize themselves in Sundarbans after they have escaped violence and poverty and are subjected to displacement once another by state officials enforcing wildlife protection laws. It is ironic that conservation policies meant to protect nature become a tool of exclusion and they deprive the vulnerable groups of their right to live and survive in the landscape. Ghosh reveals the ethical hypocrisy of this kind of policies, the way the field of environmental protection is very frequently working in a coercive mode, being detached of social justice.

Displacement in the novel is not solely physical eviction but it also has cultural and psychological aspects. Marginalized communities feel deprived of belonging, historical continuity and recognition. Their existence is largely disclosed in the hegemonic discourses on progress and environmental conservation. Such characters as Fokir represent such marginality,

although he has a certain part of the ecological knowledge needed to survive in the Sundarbans, he continues to be outside of the institutional power and scientific authority. His translocation is both epistemological and materialistic, in terms of the way systems of subaltern knowledge are undermined in favour of both modern and technocratic methods (Nixon 3).

Ghosh anticipates in his future on ecology aggravating the displacement of ecology. The Sundarbans due to its unpredictable geographic features such as erosion, flooding, and the wildlife posing threats, provide an environment of unending insecurity. Environmental vulnerability alone, as the novel makes it clear, does not explain displacement it is through official policy, which paths the ecological threat into the social disaster, rendered by human intervention, which undergoes this process. This is in line with the idea of slow violence introduced by Rob Nixon, Environmental and political damage is built up over time and mostly targets the poor and the marginalized whilst going unnoticed by the masses (Nixon 2).

The novel portrays displaced communities as central instead of peripheral to the story. *The Hungry Tide* corrects dominant literary and political discourses that see those communities as being expendable. The sense of urgency in Ghosh is about human and ecological crises as being inextricably linked. The novel ends by demanding an ethical reconsideration of the conservation and development, which is cognizant of the rights, memory and knowledge of marginalized people. This way, *The Hungry Tide* makes displacement no longer a silent state, but an experience that is necessarily contested and strongly human, and requires justice and acceptance.

Human–Nonhuman Relationships and Ethical Ecology in *The Hungry Tide*

In this novel Amitav Ghosh is an ethical ecologist of the human and nonhuman life among the delicate of an ecosystem and the Sundarbans. where nature is subservient to its human needs, the novel proposes an ecological order where human beings coexist with nonhumans through relationship systems of mutual susceptibility. Instead of depicting rivers,

tides, animals, and forests as the passive resources, Ghosh introduces them as active participants of human life, requiring an ethical re-evaluation of the human attitude to the natural world (Ghosh7).

The ecosystem of Sundarbans in the novel is characterised by a continuous relation between human societies and nonhuman animals especially tigers and river dolphins. Such creatures are not romantic or demonized but introduced as the subjects who make an ecosystem whole. Human crimes done by tigers such as attacking people are never discussed in the light of savagery but due to the lack of shared and contested space. Ghosh goes ahead and frustrates the traditional moral judgments by indicating that human encroachment, on the basis of survival and displacement of the state, tends to initiate this kind of conflict. This literary style creates instability between victim and aggressor, asking readers to acknowledge ecological confrontation as a consequence of structural and historical emergence as opposed to individual blame.

The moral conflicts between scientific conservation and ecological life and reality are manifested by the character of a marine biologist, Piya, a researcher of river dolphins. Although her scientific activity is aimed at preserving the nonhuman life, at first, it does not connect with the socio-economic situation of the communities. The knowledge of rivers held by Fokir, on the contrary, reveals the ethics of coexistence and respect instead of controlling. His non-rational interactions with the environment point to the other ecological ethic, which is more ecological and less domineering. Ghosh critiques environmentalism that follows a technological path where nature preservation does not interact with human justice through this contrast.

Ethical ecology in the story of *The Hungry Tide* also questions the conservation policies that favour wild animals at the disadvantage of marginalised human beings. The fact that refugees move to protect forests and animals creates the moral hypocrisy of exclusionary

conservation models. Ghosh connects this criticism to much more general environmental colonial issues, exposing environmental protection as a kind of power, creating new forms of colonial structures of control. These practices, according to Rob Nixon are the examples of environmental injustice and as he refers to the vulnerable groups of people, suffering the negative impact of policies formulated without their involvement or even consent.

Finally, the paper promotes a relationality and humility ethical vision. The novel is a call to an ecological ethic that recognizes the risk and co-existence with nonhumans through foregrounding. Ghosh indicates that to have sustainable coexistence in vulnerable environments, there is a need to hear the minor voices of humans and acknowledge the nonhuman agency. The Sundarbans as the place in which ethical boundaries are being continuously negotiated, the novel asks the readers to stop and reconsider the prevailing environmental paradigms and adopt a more inclusive and justice-oriented ecological consciousness that acknowledges the complexity of relationships between humans, animals and landscapes

Conclusion

This paper shows a literary work that provides a philosophical insight into the relationships of multiple processes in ecology, memory, displacement and moral obligation. Placing the story against the background of the unstable Sundarbans, Ghosh breaks the anthropocentric and state-centric tradition of understanding nature by presaging ecology as a new agent of history and human life. The novel proves that ecological spaces are not a passive backdrop, but a living archive that contains suppressed histories of violence, migration and survival. To retrieve the marginalized memories, especially those that relate to the topic of displacement and environmental injustice, Ghosh confronts the mainstream historiographies that emphasize writing and official accounts more than lived experience.

It has been revealed that in that novel, displacement takes place on different levels physical, cultural, psychological, and epistemological. Exclusiveness to marginalized communities is due to the system of environmental precarity as well as unequal power relations and the policy of exclusionary conservation. The novel provides an ethical ecology based on coexistence, interdependence and humility via its subtle treatment of human-nonhuman relations. The fact that Ghosh did not prioritize either human or nonhuman life promotes the moral ambiguity of ecological decision-making in delicate environments.

In the end, it can be argued that *The Hungry Tide* is a vital eco-postcolonial text that will appeal greatly to the modern issues confronting the world like climate change, sea-level-rise, and environmental displacement. The revisiting of conservation, development and progress in the novel is being shot through the prism of environmental justice and historical responsibility. In this novel it shows the awareness of the environment with memory and morality, the narrative created by Ghosh propagates the fact that literature can be said to witness the memory which has been suppressed and visualise the future, as the man will become more compassionate and respectful. The discipline of the ecocritical discourse is provided not only with a broader meaning, but a fairer and more responsible attitude towards nature and its most vulnerable inhabitants is requested.

Conflict of Interest: The corresponding author, on behalf of second author, confirms that there are no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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