



A Study of Eco-Cosmopolitanism in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*

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Abstract

*This paper presents an eco-cosmopolitan reading of Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*, investigating how the novel engages with global environmental concerns through the lens of native ecological narratives. In the Sundarbans, a fragile and contested deltaic region in eastern India, *The Hungry Tide* portrays the interconnections between human and non-human life forms, reflecting a complex ecological consciousness. The novel challenges anthropocentric and Euro-centered paradigms by foregrounding transnational ecological solidarities, indigenous knowledge systems, and the ethical dilemmas posed by conservation. Through its depiction of tidal rhythms, endangered species, and socio-political conflicts, Ghosh's narrative advocates for an eco-cosmopolitan ethic—one that recognizes global environmental interdependence while being rooted in local specificities. This paper argues that *The Hungry Tide* not only highlights the ecological priority of marginalized communities but also calls for a reconceptualising of cosmopolitanism in the age of climate crisis.*

Keywords: eco-cosmopolitan, anthropocentric, solidarities, indigenous, transnational.

Introduction

The recent ecological crises, literary studies have increasingly embraced the environmental humanities to examine how narratives reflect, shape, and challenge human relationships with the natural world. Within this critical shift, the concept of **eco-cosmopolitanism**, introduced by Ursula Heise, has gained prominence as a transnational framework that emphasizes global ecological interconnectedness while honoring local specificity. Rather than approaching environmental issues from narrowly national or anthropocentric perspectives, eco-

cosmopolitanism urges a planetary consciousness that values diverse ways of knowing and living with nature. Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2004), set in the ecologically fragile Sundarbans of eastern India, offers a compelling narrative through which this framework can be explored. By portraying the entangled lives of humans and non-human species in a volatile deltaic landscape, Ghosh constructs an intricate ecological vision that questions dominant conservation ideologies and foregrounds subaltern ecologies.



The Hungry Tide centres on three main characters—Piyali Roy, a diasporic marine biologist; Kanai Dutt, a cosmopolitan translator; and Fokir, a local fisherman deeply attuned to the tidal rhythms of the Sundarbans. Their interactions bring into focus competing ecological worldviews shaped by science, indigenous knowledge, and lived experience. Through their convergences and tensions, *The Hungry Tide* explores critical themes such as environmental justice, conservation ethics, and epistemic pluralism. This paper argues that Ghosh's narrative enacts a form of **eco-cosmopolitanism** that is ethically grounded, culturally embedded, and attuned to both global interdependence and local ecological realities. In doing so, it calls for a reconceptualization of cosmopolitanism—one that acknowledges the uneven impacts of climate change and advocates for inclusive, place-based forms of environmental solidarity in the Anthropocene.

Background of the Study

The accelerating ecological crises of the 21st century have spurred a growing interdisciplinary convergence between literature and environmental studies, leading to the emergence of ecocriticism, environmental humanities, and postcolonial ecologies. These critical frameworks reimagine literature not merely as a reflection of human experience but as an active site for interrogating the evolving relationship between human and non-human life. As global concerns such as climate change, biodiversity loss, sea-level rise, and environmental injustice become increasingly urgent, literary texts that engage with these themes have garnered significant scholarly interest. Within this context, Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2004) stands out as a vital work that delves into the entangled dynamics of ecology, culture, and politics. Set in the Sundarbans—a vast and ecologically fragile mangrove region in the Bay of Bengal—the novel addresses themes of displacement, conservation, and survival through richly drawn human and non-human narratives. The Sundarbans, with its endangered species and marginalized human populations, becomes both a setting and a character

that disrupts human-centered storytelling and invites deeper reflection on environmental justice.

The critical scholarship on *The Hungry Tide* has explored it through lenses such as postcolonial ecocriticism, ecofeminism, and subaltern studies, limited attention has been given to reading it through the framework of eco-cosmopolitanism—a concept introduced by Ursula Heise that calls for a planetary environmental consciousness grounded in both global awareness and local specificity. Eco-cosmopolitanism critiques parochial or nationalistic approaches to environmental discourse and advocates for an inclusive ethic of ecological belonging that acknowledges interconnectedness across borders. This theoretical lens is particularly relevant to the Anthropocene era, in which localized ecological damage has far-reaching planetary consequences. Ghosh's narrative, with its characters spanning diasporic, urban, and indigenous identities, creates a dialogic space for diverse ecological perceptions to interact. Through its engagement with historical events like the Morichjhanpi massacre and its nuanced portrayal of environmental displacement, the novel reveals how conservation efforts can reproduce systemic injustices. By situating *The Hungry Tide* within the eco-cosmopolitan framework, this study aims to contribute to broader discussions about literature's role in fostering global ecological awareness, environmental ethics, and cross-cultural solidarity in an age of climate crisis.

Discussion

Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* is a versatile narrative that brings together ecological, cultural, and political concerns, reflecting the entangled realities of a globalized world in ecological crisis. Through its characters, narrative structure, setting, and thematic concerns, the novel invites an eco-cosmopolitan reading—one that recognizes environmental interdependence, values multiple knowledge systems, and foregrounds ethical engagement across cultures and species. This section undertakes a detailed analytical discussion of the novel through the lens of eco-cosmopolitanism, exploring how Ghosh navigates the tensions between global and



local, science and folklore, human and non-human, and justice and conservation.

Findings

In *The Hungry Tide*, the Sundarbans are more than a mere geographical setting—they are portrayed as a living, dynamic presence that actively shapes the narrative and its characters. This volatile estuarine region, characterized by shifting tides, dense mangroves, and unpredictable storms, mirrors the uncertainty of the Anthropocene. The landscape defies rigid boundaries, blurring distinctions between land and sea, human and non-human, safety and threat. Ghosh presents the Sundarbans as an ecological space that resists Cartesian binaries and invites a more relational, fluid understanding of place. In this way, the region becomes a symbol of planetary flux and coexistence, foregrounding the novel's engagement with eco-cosmopolitanism—a framework that emphasizes the interconnectedness of all life forms and ecological systems.

Ghosh's vision of the Sundarbans accommodates a plurality of narratives and epistemologies, making it a cosmopolitan space in both cultural and ecological terms. The legend of Bon Bibi, a local deity revered by both Muslim and Hindu communities, represents a form of indigenous ecological justice rooted in balance rather than domination. Her myth—where she protects humans from the tiger Dokkhin Rai without destroying him—underscores the region's syncretic cultural fabric and promotes coexistence over conquest. The cohabitation of myth, science, religion, and oral history in the novel reflects the inclusive spirit of eco-cosmopolitanism. Rather than privileging Western scientific frameworks, Ghosh validates the ethical and epistemic value of indigenous worldviews, presenting them not as romanticized relics but as living alternatives for reimagining human-nature relationships.

This ethical plurality is further reflected in the novel's narrative structure and language. Ghosh employs a non-linear, multi-voiced narrative that mimics the tidal movements of the Sundarbans

themselves. The story unfolds through overlapping perspectives—Piya's empirical scientific lens, Fokir's intuitive, embodied knowledge, Nirmal's reflective journal, and Kanai's interpretive voice—creating a layered ecological consciousness. The communication between Piya and Fokir, despite their linguistic barrier, highlights the power of non-verbal, affective collaboration. Their silent cooperation on the water embodies an alternative ecological relationship based on mutual respect and trust rather than institutional authority. Through his poetic prose, vivid environmental imagery, and incorporation of folklore, Ghosh immerses readers in the sensory reality of the Sundarbans. This narrative strategy encourages readers to cultivate ecological imagination—a key aspect of eco-cosmopolitan ethics—and to engage emotionally and ethically with both human and non-human vulnerabilities in an interconnected world.

Summation

Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* offers a rich narrative framework for exploring the concept of eco-cosmopolitanism. Set in the ecologically fragile and politically tense Sundarbans, the novel highlights the deep interconnection between human and non-human life, while addressing tensions between global scientific knowledge and local ecological wisdom. Through elements like the legend of Bon Bibi, Ghosh challenges dominant Western environmental paradigms and affirms the significance of indigenous narratives. The novel critiques environmental injustice—particularly through the Morichjhanpi eviction—revealing the human cost of exclusionary conservation efforts. Ultimately, *The Hungry Tide* promotes an inclusive ecological ethic that values diversity, alternative knowledge systems, and coexistence, contributing meaningfully to the global environmental imagination in the age of climate crisis.



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