Tidal Histories: Environmental Displacement and Subaltern Ecologies in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*

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Abstract:

This article studies Amitav Ghosh's The Hungry Tide as a critical intervention in postcolonial environmental historiography, with a focus on the environmentally and politically contested Sundarbans. The territory, shaped by colonial cartographic violence, post-independence conservation regimes, and ongoing climate disasters, acts as a palimpsest of erasure and resistance. Ghosh reanimates this territory with a multidimensional narrative that uncovers hidden histories and challenges prevailing paradigms of ecological management. Using frameworks from postcolonial historiography (Said, Spivak), subaltern studies (Guha, Spivak), postcolonial ecocriticism (Nixon, DeLoughrey), environmental justice (Martínez-Alier, Shiva), and new materialism (Bennett, Latour), this article examines how The Hungry Tide prioritizes alternative epistemologies and subaltern environmental agency. The story highlights the Morichjhāpi massacre, an act of state-sanctioned ecological displacement that constitutes a significant historical rupture. Ghosh's depiction of riverine life and the role of nonhuman actors, particularly the Irrawaddy dolphin and tidal currents, challenges anthropocentric and technocratic perspectives on the environment. The study also critiques the neocolonial operations of conservation NGOs, scientific expeditions, and ecotourism as extensions of global development ideals. Through the character of Fokir, a marginalized fisherman with indigenous ecological knowledge, Ghosh imagines a counter-discourse based on proximity to the environment rather than control over it. Finally, this study advocates a transdisciplinary strategy that combines literary and scientific research to better address questions of ecological justice, historical memory, and the future of sensitive ecosystems like the Sundarbans.

INTRODUCTION

The Sundarbans, the world's largest contiguous mangrove habitat, lies at the confluence of the Ganges, Brahmaputra, and Meghna rivers in India and Bangladesh [1], [2]. This region is environmentally important because it acts as a powerful barrier against storm surges and cyclones, a vast carbon sink, and a habitat for endangered animals such as the Royal Bengal tiger, the Ganges river dolphin, and the masked dolphin [3], [4]. Over 3.5 million people in the region depend on its ecological services for their livelihoods, such as agriculture, fishing, honey collection, and timber, making it a vital socio-ecological landscape [2], [5]. Despite its global significance, the Sundarbans has long been a contentious region, influenced by colonial cartography, post-colonial conservation efforts, and an expanding climate disaster. The current environmental narrative of this region cannot be understood without first studying its historical and political roots.

Colonial Cartography and Territorial Transformation

European imperialist ambitions began to affect the Sundarbans in the late 18th and 19th centuries. The British administration carried out intensive surveys and mapping, resulting in demarcated plots and zones, such as the Dampire-Hodges Line, to impose administrative control and promote resource

extraction [6]. The delta was once considered a natural frontier, but soon became open to exploitation for profit, such as mangrove clearance, farmland construction, and settlement development [6, 7]. Colonial authorities also built levees and used hydraulic interventions to stabilize rivers and protect communities, altering sedimentation patterns and mangrove regeneration [5], [8].

The colonial emphasis on government intervention transformed the Sundarbans from a polycentric ecosystem created by local dynamics to a confined and governable zone. This shift redirected ecological flows, imposed bureaucratic sovereignty, and established legal categories such as "forest reserves" with discriminatory connotations [6, 7]. These colonial legacies persist in modern conservation regimes, reinforcing patterns of anthropogenic sedimentation and state ecological control.

Postcolonial Conservation and Preservation Policies

Following independence in 1947, the Sundarbans received renewed attention from the government and conservation organizations. In the 1970s, India initiated "Project Tiger", which culminated in the declaration of the Sundarbans as a Tiger Reserve and UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1987 [2], [3], [6]. By 1989, the Indian section had been designated a Biosphere Reserve under UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Programme, indicating an ambitious conservation strategy, but with strong enforcement controls [2], [9]. However, these conservation programs often ignored the realities of Sundarban residents. Measures aimed at protecting biodiversity often restricted traditional livelihoods such as fishing, honey harvesting, and small-scale farming, forcing populations to leave protected areas or face legal consequences [5], [10]. Conservation thus became a mechanism for social exclusion, prioritizing state-defined ecological values over Indigenous rights and environmental justice.Climate Crisis and Displacement Dynamics, An unfolding climate crisis, exacerbating ecological fragility, is rooted in colonial and conservation history. Every decade, the Sundarbans archipelago loses around 200 km² of land due to sea level rise, saline intrusion, coastal erosion, and violent cyclonic storms [4], [11]. Cyclones such as Amphan and Remal have destroyed both human habitations and ecological infrastructure, highlighting the region's fragile resilience [3], [12]. The challenge is both environmental and socioeconomic: as salinity levels rise, freshwater streams and agricultural lands deteriorate, endangering food security and public health [4], [11], [13]. Anthropologists highlight that saltwater intrusion is felt not only ecologically, but also physically, through disease and disruption of livelihoods [14]. These trends intensify environmental injustice, disproportionately harming subaltern communities with limited adaptive resources and social capital. *The Hungry Tide* as an Ecological and istoriographical Intervention, *The Hungry Tide (2004)* emerges as a critical text. The novel, set in the Sundarbans, combines ecological, political, and historical concerns to challenge dominant narratives about environmental management, conservation, and development [15]. Ghosh's story is structured around two counterpoints: formal scientific voyages, represented by the American cetologist Piya, and oral, local ecological knowledge, represented by the fisherman Fokir. This dual approach allows for a polyphonic historiography: a reimagining of the Sundarbans as a shared, contested, and living environment [15]. Ghosh highlights the Morichjhāpi incident (1979–1980), in which thousands of Bengali migrants were forcibly relocated from a temporary colony in the Sundarbans and subjected to official violence, all under the pretext of conservation (15). By fictionalizing this catastrophe, the novel uncovers a long-buried chapter of ecological displacement and subaltern disaster, repositioning it within the context of broader arguments about human rights and environmental justice. Beyond human voices, *The Hungry Tide* recognizes nonhuman actors such as tides, rivers, and dolphins as narrative and material agents. The tide becomes the story; the Irrawaddy dolphin the interlocutor; and the forest the archive. This non-anthropocentric shift is consistent with emerging materialist and ecocritical theories that explore the agency of matter and environment [16], [17].

SUNDERBANDS AS A POSTCOLONIAL PALIMPSEST

The Sundarbans, with its incessant tides and fluctuating geology, serve as a postcolonial palimpsest, a landscape constantly overwritten by histories of colonial cartography, mythic memory, and ecological violence. As Gui notes, the fluid terrains are constantly shifting, reconfiguring islands and erasing boundaries between water and land [18]. This physical mutability becomes an allegory for layered histories, in which colonial, Indigenous, and ecological narratives are inscribed, erased, and infrequently recovered.

Colonial Memory Engraved in Ecology

British colonial enterprises established top-down cartographic and administrative regimes in the Sundarbans, transforming dynamic deltas into survey plots, embanked districts, and forest reserves [6], [7]. These interventions resulted in the sedimentation of colonial power, as altered riverscapes became permanent sites on imperial maps, ignoring the vernacular rhythms of tidal life [8]. The official naming of the islands (Emilybari, Annbari) emphasizes the colonial presence by erasing indigenous place names and vernacular genealogy. Piya's linguistic knowledge in *The Hungry Tide* , which distinguishes between 'Calcutta' and 'Kolkata', reflects this colonial/national stratification in place names [19], [2].

Ghosh's novel challenges this colonial sedimentation by emphasizing oral histories and Indigenous geographies. Nirmal's notebook entries describe how geology and myth shape the mudbanks, including Bengali, English, Arabic, Hindi, and Arakanese languages. [19] This convergence of linguistic tributaries provides a counter-cartography in which colonial maps are deconstructed and rewritten using local epicenters of meaning. Gui argues that the layering of narratives enables a critique of colonial cartographic authority, showing "earlier material... still relevant to our understanding" (18).

Myth, Violence and The Archive of the Tides

Long before colonial intervention, mythic traditions of the Sundarbans, such as the stories of Bon Bibi and Dokkhin Rai, codified human-wildlife connections, environmental ethics, and questioned power [20]. These myths, transmitted orally by fishermen like Fokir, provide an ecological ethic based on peaceful interspecies cooperation. The fable of Bon Bibi, which imparts guidelines for respectful coexistence with tigers, represents the intimate connection of human communities to this landscape [20]. These myths persist in the physical and narrative soils, defying colonial erasure.

Ghosh alludes to this "tidal archive," a submerged repository of layered mutability, memory, and myth. Gui highlights how Ghosh's narrative "makes translation a process of creating the contemporary or coeval" by bringing past narratives into the present through sedimentary storytelling [18]. Tides appear not only as a hydrological force, but also as metaphorical agents of wave-like histories, transporting strata of colonial memory, oral mythologies, and ecological violence. By narrating the tidal erasures and periodic forms, Ghosh portrays history as fluid, contingent, and constantly in transfer.

Violence Entangled in the Landscape

What the tides remake, they also see. Scenes of ecological violence, such as island erosion or bank failure, reflect the violence caused by human action. Gui's exhaustive analysis of the contact between crabs and tides (badh erosion) captures the interplay of natural and human forces: "decay and life, construction and destruction" [21]. Similarly, Gui demonstrates how Nirmal juxtaposes geological myth with scientific narrative: geology and mythic narratives intersect to reveal hidden currents of memory [21].

This interaction transforms the Sundarbans into a palimpsest, with numerous forces co-authoring the land, storms, tides, myth, and human history. Each erasure (a submerged island) contains references to previous layers—colonial, folkloric, and ecological—that could resurface through narrative excavation. The text creates an environmental archive that prioritizes sedimentary agonism and relational ontology over static cartographic narratives.

Decolonizing the Landscape Archive

The Hungry Tide performs a decolonial intervention by juxtaposing oral myth and sedimentary geological history with colonial inscriptions. It challenges imperialist and technocratic narratives about environmental control. By decentering the map and reintroducing oral and material palimpsests, Ghosh exposes the power dynamics embedded in cartography and nomenclature, revealing that even scientific nomenclature encompasses structural violence.

The narrative thus fosters an emotive and multispecies connection with the landscape: tides are not simply physical forces but also metaphors for historical continuity; crabs become agents of sedimentary epistemology; and myths mediate ecological cohabitation. Ghosh revolutionizes the colonial archive, showing history as a continuous and lived environmental negotiation, intertwined with tides and rooted in memory, a true postcolonial palimpsest.

SUBALTERN ENVIRONMENTALISM AND THE MORICHJAPI INCIDENT

The Sundarbans in *The Hungry Tide* are more than a region of natural wealth and legendary sediments; they are a territory contested by displacement, where environmentalism and governmental power collide to marginalize already vulnerable communities. The novel's depiction of the Morichjhāpi massacre, an eviction and execution of Bengali Dalit refugees in 1979 under the guise of environmental conservation, highlights the terrible paradoxes of econationalism. Ghosh's fictionalization of this historical horror emphasizes what might be called subaltern environmentalism, a narrative in which ecological survival is linked to political expropriation.

The Historical Context: Displacement and Denial

In the late 1970s, thousands of Bengali Dalit refugees from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) who were in Dandakaranya after Partition were forcibly relocated to the deserted island of Morichjhāpi in the Sundarbans. Citing ecological concerns, the Left Front administration in West Bengal proclaimed the island a protected reserve, thus criminalizing refugee settlement [6], [22]. What followed was a brutal state crackdown that included police blockades, starvation techniques, and eventually a massacre; all of these events have been erased from official records and are largely ignored in mainstream national historiographies. As Ross Mallick argues in his seminal analysis of the episode, environmental conservation was used to justify caste and class discrimination [22]. The state's portrayal of migrants as ecological invaders obscured the fundamental difficulties of a postcolonial nation reluctant to embrace its internal other. Morichjhāpi illustrates how ecological politics can be used for biopolitical violence, concealing social oppression behind the guise of environmental management [5, 6].

Fiction as a Counter-Archive: Nirmal's Testimony

Amitav Ghosh's depiction of Morichjhāpi in *The Hungry Tide* is neither didactic nor allegorical. Instead, through the disjointed notes in Nirmal's notebook, the novel creates a counter-archive, a narrative palimpsest that resurrects a long-forgotten event of state violence. Nirmal, a retired school principal and Marxist idealist, is moved by the revolutionary fervor of the migrants and recounts their misery as a personal political awakening. His notes serve as subaltern history, or marginalized documentation that defies state suppression. Weihsin Gui considers Nirmal's story as part of a broader technique in Ghosh's work of recovering hidden political memories through polyphonic and fragmented frames [18]. Nirmal's writing is incomplete, with ellipses, omitted dates, and inconsistent grammar, reflecting the archival brutality that fragments refugee experience in official documents. The text thus becomes an ethical act of witnessing, a narrative exhumation of "history from below," as Dipesh Chakrabarty defines it [23].

Subaltern Environmentalism: Ethics from the Margins

The Hungry Tide challenges prevailing environmental theories that neglect the poor and displaced, focusing on the ecological struggles of refugees. The evacuees' connection to the land—building dikes, planting crops, and fishing in the tides—represents a survival-oriented, rather than an abstract, ecology. This contradicts the bourgeois ecological vision, which often prioritizes nature over livelihoods and conservation over cohabitation. This perspective resonates with Rob Nixon's thesis of "slow violence," a type of gradual, invisible environmental damage that disproportionately affects the poor. [24] The forced eviction of the Morichjhāpi settlers exemplifies this brutality, which has class and caste underpinnings, even though it is justified by environmental concerns. Nixon observes that narratives such as " *The Hungry Tide"* are vital to making this delayed brutality comprehensible, transforming invisible pain into moral urgency. Furthermore, Ghosh deepens the dichotomy between conservationists and settlers by demonstrating how ecological ethics develop from subaltern epistemologies. Unlike technocratic experts, who view the Sundarbans as a vulnerable ecosystem that must be monitored, residents interact with the land through practical proximity and sustainable use. Their removal, consequently, represents a contradiction between dominant ecological narratives and vernacular environmentalism based on historical memory and survivalism [5], [25].

Conservation, Biopolitics and the Colonial Legacy

The novel links the displacement of the Morichjhāpi to colonial conservation initiatives that displaced indigenous tribes to establish protected forest areas [8], [6]. According to Rohan D'Souza, colonial forest policy generated a "system of exclusion" that has persisted in postcolonial environmental governance [26]. Colonial administrations criminalized indigenous ways of life to safeguard biodiversity, similar to the Morichjhāpi logging. This logic is evident in the discourse of the Sundarbans Tiger Reserve, where human presence is consistently presented as an ecological threat. As Sara-Duana Meyer notes, "State-backed relocation operations in the Sundarbans recreate the logics of colonial displacement under the guise of conservation" (5). Ghosh's account of eviction reveals a biopolitical contradiction: the state determines whose lives are worthy of mourning, whose deaths are justifiable, and whose survival is environmentally sustainable. The novel reveals the biopolitical sorting that conservation frequently entails. Tigers are venerated, while refugees are disposable. In doing so, Ghosh engages in what Jennifer Wenzel calls a postcolonial environmental ethic, which refuses to exclude human suffering from ecological concerns [27].

Ethical Testimony and Narrative Reparation

Ghosh creates a triangulated perspective on subaltern misery through Piya, Kanai, and Nirmal: Piya represents empirical detachment; Kanai represents urban privilege and literary nostalgia; and Nirmal is an idealist troubled by his inability to intervene. This triangulation results not in moral clarity but in an uncomfortable ambivalence that forces the reader to confront their own ethical culpability.

Nirmal's final words, "I want to be present when history is made," ring cruelly hollow, expressing the futility of idealism in the face of structural state violence. Yet, by recording the refugees' memories in her notebook, she performs an act of narrative restitution. Despite its limitations, her testimony preserves the memory of the morichjhāpi dead. Ghosh's aesthetics of ethical witnessing is thus consistent with Gayatri Spivak's call to "let the subaltern speak," not through ventriloquism, but by observing structural silences and choosing to listen to the narrative remnants. [28]

NON-HUMAN AGENCY AND RIVER KNOWLEDGE

Animating the River: Beyond Anthropocentrism

In *The Hungry Tide* , the riverine ecosystem of the Sundarbans is portrayed as a conscious force that acts, responds to, and undermines human intention. The tidal river and its recurring ebbs and flows are

essential narrative components that influence not only the plot's development but also the philosophical direction. This depiction is consistent with Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory, which states that "nonhumans also have agency and circulate through webs of meaning" [17]. Tides have a substantial impact on human lives, modifying the geography of belonging and influencing the rhythms of subsistence and survival. The river's energy defies containment and represents what Jane Bennett terms "vibrating matter," a concept of diffuse agency in human and animal assemblages [16].

Ghosh challenges anthropocentric narrative control by emphasizing the unpredictability and power of the river. Shifting mudbanks, mangrove swamps, and labyrinthine rivers are depicted as living forces, not static settings. The reader is compelled to confront the fluidity of boundaries—not just geographical, but epistemic—between nature and culture, presence and disappearance.

Indigenous Knowledge Versus Technocratic Epistemology

Fokir, an uneducated fisherman, emerges as the novel's most insightful ecological thinker. He navigates the complex water systems of the Sundarbans without charts, instruments, or scientific expertise. His relationship with the river is one of intimacy rather than mastery, a kind of knowing based on years of local experience. This epistemological perspective is consistent with Vine Deloria Jr.'s concept of "indigenous spatiality," which argues that knowledge of place comes from embodied familiarity with ecosystems, rather than abstract representation [29].

Piya Roy, on the other hand, initially exemplifies the technocratic perspective. She possesses cetological expertise and GPS instruments. However, her reliance on modern techniques proves insufficient in tidal surveying, where only Fokir can understand minuscule environmental clues. This tension highlights the mismatch between Western science and vernacular environmentalism. As Deborah Bird Rose notes, "Indigenous ecologies are not just belief systems but practical philosophies grounded in ongoing attention to place" [31]. Fokir's knowledge is therefore not residual or folkloric, but an authentic kind of ecological intelligence, an epistemic counterweight to state-sponsored conservation research [7].

Non-Human Agency: The Dolphin as a Narrative Catalyst

The endangered Irrawaddy dolphin, which appears repeatedly in the narrative, serves both ecological and symbolic purposes. For Piya, the dolphin is a scientific curiosity; for Fokir, it is a spiritual cohabitant of the marshes. This dualism is consistent with contemporary ecocritical perspectives that emphasize animal consciousness and interspecies communication. Examining the difficulty of chronicling nonhuman life, Heather I. Sullivan emphasizes the need to "break down binaries between subject and object, knower and known" [30]. In "*The Hungry Tide*," the dolphin challenges reification by luring humans into dangerous seas, requiring cross-cultural collaboration and enabling moments of contemplation.

Furthermore, the dolphin's near-invisibility to formal scientific monitoring highlights the limitations of empirical reasoning in dynamic ecosystems.

The description of the dolphin in the novel thus opposes the extractive gaze, affirming an ontological parity between human and non-human actors, an important intervention in postcolonial ecofiction.

Riverine Memory and the Politics of Erasure

The river not only nourishes life, but also serves as a repository for hidden histories, including the repressed memory of the Morichjhāpi massacre, which left deep wounds in Bengal's political consciousness. [22] As Rob Nixon observes in Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor, ecological degradation and historical injustice can act through a "gradual, attritional violence that is neither dramatic nor instantaneous." [24] In Ghosh's story, the river represents this gradual violence: it ravages villages, erodes archives, and drowns memory itself.

Fokir's silent existence in these waters, and his death within them, reflect this suppression. His knowledge vanishes with his body, devoured by a river that has witnessed countless forms of silencing. Ghosh's representation of the tidal environment thus challenges prevailing historiographies that view these areas

as peripheral or dispensable. The river is not a passive observer, but an active actor in shaping and unfolding historical narratives.

Towards a Decolonial Ecological Ethic

Finally, *The Hungry Tide* proposes a decolonial ecological ethic that recognizes the agency of nonhuman elements and the legitimacy of Indigenous ways of life. Ghosh destabilizes the Cartesian dichotomy of nature/culture, science/faith, and human/animal through a narrative structure that prioritizes relational ontologies. Kim TallBear argues that a feminist-Indigenous method of inquiry requires "being with" the nonhuman world rather than "talking about it" [32].

Fokir exemplifies this ethic poignantly, as his behaviors are motivated by an emotive connection to the tidal environment, rather than self-interest. His sacrificial death is more than an individual tragedy; it represents an epistemological loss: the silencing of a knowledge system that cannot be digitized or institutionalized. As Erin James notes, literature like Ghosh's can "express and represent alternative epistemologies that challenge the supremacy of empirical and technocratic frameworks" [33]. In this way, *The Hungry Tide* transforms our perspective on environmental knowledge from domination to kinship, from extraction to reciprocity.

POSTCOLONIAL ECOCRITICISM AND GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT

Conservation NGOs and the Continuation of Colonial Exclusion

The Hungry Tide demonstrates how conservation NGOs, even well-intentioned ones, frequently perpetuate exclusionary colonial practices. These organizations often impose frameworks that prioritize biodiversity over human lives, displacing populations from protected areas [5, 6]. This dynamic parallels Rohan D'Souza's critique of postcolonial environmental governance, which reproduces colonial "no-go zones" under new institutional guises [26]. Kanai's observation, "They talk about the dolphin, but not about us," expresses this gap. NGOs centralize conservation goals while ignoring livelihood techniques fundamental to local ecological knowledge.

Ecotourism and the Commodification of Nature

Ecotourism is presented in the novel as both an economic opportunity and a problematic form of commodification. While it appeals to urban and global audiences seeking authentic experiences, it frequently includes strict restrictions, guided tours, and high fees that exclude local participants [10], [12]. This type of tourism undermines the delicate balance of local ecosystems and shifts the emphasis from survival to spectacle. Guha and Martínez-Alier argue that this trend constitutes a kind of "environmental burden shifting," when marginalized populations bear the ecological consequences to sustain high-consumption lifestyles elsewhere [25].

Scientific Expeditions and the Logic of Domination

Piya's study tour is a technocratic foray into tidal landscapes, with field stations and equipment altering local spatial cycles. This reflects what Latour calls "scientific colonization," the imposition of standardized scientific frameworks on pluralistic ecosystems [17]. The novel demonstrates how scientific knowledge, while useful, can become tools of domination when detached from social context. As Muhammad Yunus notes in his critique of development paradigms, "scientific interventions without social grounding risk becoming agents of marginalization" [34]. Piya's growing awareness, guided by Fokir's practice, highlights the importance of combining scientific research with Indigenous knowledge systems for effective conservation.

Rhetoric of Global Development and Neocolonial Continuity

The Hungry Tide situates local ecological injustice within broader global development frameworks. The novel critiques global institutions, UNESCO, bilateral donors, and international NGOs for imposing

conservation agendas that prioritize carbon sequestration, endangered species, and mangrove restoration, while ignoring subaltern demands [9], [11]. Sara-Duana Meyer warns against conservation paradigms that encourage the "managed retreat" of human populations to achieve global environmental goals [5]. Ghosh uses the Morichjhāpi disaster to highlight the dichotomy between local tenure and global development. "They were here before us [...] but our maps show it belongs to the forest."

Towards an Inclusive Environmental Justice Framework

According to environmental justice researchers such as Martínez-Alier, Shiva, and Pellow, an inclusive ecological ethic prioritizes both just processes and environmental outcomes [25], [35]. Ghosh's story promotes equitable conservation methods that value vernacular science alongside formal research, consider community livelihoods as essential rather than disposable, and recognize that ecological justice is inextricably linked to social justice. As Vandana Shiva states, "True conservation is the preservation of livelihoods, not exclusion" [36]. *The Hungry Tide* contributes to urgent policy interventions by supporting a relational approach that connects polycentric governance, local knowledge, and global consciousness, bringing environmental research into a holistic, justice-based framework.

CONCLUSION: LITERARY INTERVENTIONS AND EPISTEMIC PLURALITY IN ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORIOGRAPHY

The Hungry Tide constitutes an important literary intervention in the reimagining of environmental histories, particularly those of marginalized ecologies like the Sundarbans. Set at the intersection of myth, memory, violence, and biodiversity, the novel challenges linear, state-based narratives of conservation and development by emphasizing a palimpsestic environment in which human and non-human agencies co-create meaning. Ghosh's subtle depiction of the Sundarbans, which could be described as an "archive of tides," allows for a critical analysis of how colonial cartography, postcolonial politics, and global environmentalism intersect to displace subaltern lives and knowledges (Chakrabarti 2009 [6]; Spivak 1988 [28]; Nixon 2011 [24]). The novel gives visibility to marginalized voices, including those of displaced Bengali refugees in Morichjhāpi and riverine fishermen like Fokir. This behavior resonates with Dipesh Chakrabarty's call to "provincialize Europe" (2000 [23]) and to seek alternative epistemologies beyond the dominant Enlightenment narrative. Fokir's ecological literacy, based on somatic memory and attunement to the tides, challenges technocratic knowledge systems represented by researchers, NGOs, and ecotourism operators, which frequently replicate epistemic and material violence in the name of sustainability (Sampathkumar 2021 [10]; Bennett 2010 [16]; Latour 2005 [17]). In this context, the Sundarbans are more than a geographical area; they are also a contested discursive and ontological space, shaped by imperial heritage, postcolonial bureaucracy, and neoliberal conservationism. Rohan D'Souza (2006 [26]) and Vandana Shiva (2016 [36]) have shown that South Asia's environmental history is inextricably linked to its history of economic extraction and social exclusion. Thus, Ghosh's account contributes to what Rob Nixon calls "documentation of slow violence," bringing to light gradual, unspectacular, and systematically repressed forms of environmental destruction. At the same time, the novel suggests a higher ethic than the human one. The endangered Irrawaddy dolphin, along with the river and the tides, acts as an important actor rather than a symbol. Drawing on conceptual currents of new materialism and environmental humanities (Bennett 2010 [16]; TallBear 2014 [32]; James 2015 [33]), Ghosh invites the reader to rethink the ontological hierarchy between humans and non-humans, thus expanding the scope of environmental justice. This is in line with previous research highlighting the role of narrative empathy and storytelling in promoting environmental ethics and public engagement (Heise 2021; DeLoughrey and Flores 2020). Furthermore, the article critiques how "development" and "conservation" have become ideological tools used by modern nation-states and global NGOs to gain control over Indigenous territories and marginalized places. As Sara-Duana Meyer (2023 [5]) and David

Pellow (2018 [35]) have shown, contemporary environmental governance frequently reflects colonial paradigms, eliminating communities under the guise of ecological conservation. Ghosh's book challenges this logic by emphasizing the precariousness of such interventions and the agency of those affected.

Thus, The Hungry Tide goes beyond simply describing an environmental disaster; it also recounts environmental history from the perspective of the subaltern. It forces us to reconsider historiography itself: who speaks, what constitutes knowledge, and which voices and species are heard or silenced. In this way, the novel exemplifies what Erin James (2015 [33]) calls "econarratology," a narrative approach that destabilizes anthropocentric temporalities and offers alternative forms of knowledge. In short, the major challenges of our time—climate change, ecological loss, and environmental displacement—cannot be adequately understood through scientific data or policy models alone. Literary works such as " *The Hungry Tide*" illustrate the emotional, cultural, and historical components of environmental suffering, providing what Nixon calls "figurative tools" for conceiving justice (2011) [24]. The fusion of literary and scientific methodologies is therefore more than simply a methodological preference; it is an epistemological necessity. Guha and Martínez-Alier (1997 [25]) define the "varieties of environmentalism" as those rooted in the everyday realities of people experiencing poverty, displacement, and ecological vulnerability, which require integrative thinking in environmental study.

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