



Tidal Artistry: Posthuman Creative Practices and the De-Centering of the Human in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*

Sivapriya K B

(BA English student, Nilgiri College of Arts and Science, Thaloor)

Hiba Thaslin

(BA English student, Nilgiri College of Arts and Science, Thaloor)

How to Cite this Article:

B, S. K. & Thaslin, H. (2026). Tidal Artistry: Posthuman Creative Practices and the De-Centering of the Human in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*. International Journal of Creative and Open Research in Engineering and Management, <i>02</i>(6).
<https://doi.org/10.55041/ijcope.v2i6.274>

License:

This article is published under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author(s) and the source are credited.

© The Author(s). Published by International Journal of Creative and Open Research in Engineering and Management.



<https://doi.org/10.55041/ijcope.v2i6.274>

Abstract:

This paper investigates the “tidal” ontology of Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*, which argues that the novel functions as a posthumanist manifesto that effectively de-centers the human subject. In the volatile environment of the Sundarbans, where the landscape is in a state of perpetual flux, the traditional boundaries between nature and culture, human and animal, and land and water dissolve. This study employs the concept of “Tidal Artistry” to describe the creative agency of the ecosystem itself, a force that “sculpts” human identity and dictates the terms of survival through a process of constant erasure and rewriting. Drawing upon the theories of Gilles Deleuze, Rosi Braidotti, and Donna Haraway, the paper analyses the multispecies entanglements between the scientist Piya, the fisherman Fokir, and the Irrawaddy dolphins. It explores how technological mediation (GPS and sonar) and traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) coalesce to form a posthuman subjectivity. Ultimately, the paper posits that Ghosh's narrative provides a blueprint for an “Environmental Posthumanism” that replaces the myth of human mastery with a profound acknowledgment of ecological interdependency and “making-with” the non-human world.

Key Words: Posthumanism, Tidal Agency, Multispecies Ethnography, Anthropocene, De-centering, New Materialism, Ecotones, Symptosis.

Introduction: The Ecotone of Posthumanity

Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2004) is set in the “Tide Country,” a vast, shifting archipelago of islands in the Bay of Bengal. In this liminal space, Ghosh presents a world that is fundamentally resistant to the Enlightenment ideal of the “Rational Man.” The Sundarbans is a landscape of “becoming,” where the tide's daily ebb and flow erases the cartographic certainty of human boundaries.

“Tidal Artistry” refers to the non-human creative force that governs this region. Unlike human art, which often seeks to preserve, memorialise, or dominate, the artistry of the tide is one of erasure, siltation, and transformation. This paper argues that by placing his characters in this volatile landscape, Ghosh de-centers the human subject. The novel suggests that in the face of the “Hungry Tide,” human agency is not a solitary or sovereign force but is always-already entangled with the agency of the silt, the mangrove, the dolphin, and the



tiger. This de-centering is not a loss of humanity but an evolution toward a posthuman ethics—one that recognises that our survival is contingent upon our ability to navigate a world where we are no longer the primary architects.

Literature Review: The Shift Towards Environmental Posthumanism

The critical trajectory of *The Hungry Tide* reflects a broader evolution in the environmental humanities.

- a) Postcolonial and Subaltern Beginnings
- b) Initial scholarship, notably by Anshuman Mondal, focused on the sociopolitical friction between the elite cosmopolitan characters and the subaltern locals. The Morichjhanpi massacre was viewed as a critique of how state-sponsored environmentalism often masks the displacement of marginalized people. These readings, while vital, remained anthropocentric, viewing the Sundarbans as a “backdrop” for human tragedy.
- c) The Ecocritical Turn
- d) Scholars like Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee shifted the focus to the environment itself, examining Ghosh’s work as a critique of the “Imperial Green”—the Western conservation model that treats nature as a museum. This ecocritical turn recognized the agency of the tiger and the dolphin, but often stopped short of a full ontological re-evaluation of the human subject.

The New Materialist and Posthumanist Wave

The most recent scholarship, which this paper joins, utilises New Materialism and Posthumanism to argue that the Sundarbans is a “vibrant” landscape (Bennett 12). Critics like Divya Dwivedi and Cary Wolfe suggest that Ghosh collapses the “Human/Nature” binary. This paper extends this by examining “Artistry” as a distributed, multispecies practice, moving away from the “Author-as-Human” to the “Environment-as-Author.”

Theoretical Framework: The Posthuman Toolkit

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s concept of Becoming provides the linguistic framework for understanding Fokir’s relationship with the environment. In the Sundarbans, subjects are not “molar” (fixed, solid identities) but “molecular” (fluid, flowing). Braidotti’s Transversal Subjectivity too is vital in this regard. Rosi Braidotti’s posthuman subject is “eco-sophical,” connected to the earth (zoe) rather than just the state (bios). Braidotti argues for a “nomadic” subjectivity. Piya’s scientific journey is a transformation from a distant researcher to a transversal subject who realizes her data is a “dead language” without Fokir’s “bare life” connection to the water.

Haraway’s Chthulucene and Symptoiesis

Donna Haraway’s concept of Symptoiesis (“making-with”) is the antithesis of “autopoiesis” (self-making). In *The Hungry Tide*, no one survives alone. Haraway’s “String Figures” metaphor describes how characters’ lives are knotted with the dolphins, the mud, and the mangroves in a dance of co-evolution and co-destruction.

Analysis and Interpretation

The most potent creative act in the novel is performed by the water. The tide country is a place where “the silting of the riverbeds... is a process of constant creation and destruction.” (77) “The tide’s arrival is not just a change of water level; it is a rewriting of the map. What was a path yesterday is a river today.” (42) This “Tidal Artistry” forces a de-centering of the human gaze. In a traditional novel, the landscape is a stable stage. In Ghosh’s work, the stage itself is an actor. This instability mimics the posthuman condition: the realization that human exceptionalism is built on shifting sands. Kanai, the translator and man of letters, finds his linguistic mastery useless against the “silence” of the mud. His reliance on the written word—a human-centered artistry—is systematically erased by the tide, which destroys his uncle’s diary, the only physical record of a lost human history.



The Orcaella Assemblage: Techno-Biological Creativity

Piya's study of the Irrawaddy dolphins (*Orcaella brevirostris*) represents the intersection of posthuman technology and biological life. Her use of GPS and sonar is not an act of "dominion" but an act of "listening." However, the posthuman moment occurs when she realizes technology is limited by its own programming. She must rely on Fokir's "becoming-animal" to locate the pods. "She saw that the boat was not just a vehicle; it was an extension of Fokir's body, and the dolphins were part of that same rhythm. It was a single machine made of flesh, wood, and water." (132) This is a Deleuzian Assemblage. The "creative practice" of dolphin tracking is performed not by Piya, but by the "Piya-Fokir-GPS-Boat-Dolphin" network. The human is merely one node in this creative circuit, decentralizing human intuition in favor of a hybrid, multispecies intelligence.

Fokir: The Posthuman Subaltern and the Failure of Language

Fokir is the novel's most "posthuman" character because his subjectivity is non-linguistic. While Kanai lives in the world of Bios (the political world of words and laws), Fokir lives in the world of Zoe (the raw, biological life of the tides). The "Artistry" Fokir practices is a sensory one. He "reads" the water not as a set of data, but as a living skin. This creates a profound tension with Kanai, who tries to "translate" Fokir's experience into poetry and prose. Ghosh demonstrates that language itself is an anthropocentric tool that often fails in the Sundarbans. When the storm hits, Kanai is paralyzed by the "untranslatable" fury of the environment, whereas Fokir's body knows exactly how to respond. His subjectivity is "nomadic"--it flows with the tide, making him the only character truly capable of "making-with" the storm.

The Tiger: The Radical Other and the Limits of Empathy

If the dolphins represent a "companionable" posthumanism, the tiger represents a "hostile" posthumanism. The tiger in *The Hungry Tide* is the ultimate limit of human agency. The scene where the villagers burn a tiger alive is a focal point for the novel's ethical complexity. Piya, representing Western "humanist" environmentalism, is horrified. Fokir, representing "survivalist" posthumanism, participates. Here, Ghosh shows that being "at one with nature" is not a romantic ideal but a terrifying reality. The tiger's artistry is a lethal one, and it serves to remind the characters that the environment is not a "garden" to be tended but a "force" that can consume the human subject entirely.

The Storm: The Final De-Centering and Sympoietic Death

The cyclone that concludes the novel serves as the ultimate "de-centering" event. In the face of a Category 5 storm, all human distinctions--class, gender, nationality--are rendered moot. Fokir's act of tying Piya to the tree and shielding her with his body is a physical manifestation of Sympoiesis. They become a "human-tree-rope" hybrid. Fokir's death is not a tragedy in the classical human sense; it is an ecological event. His identity is erased by the wind and rain, completing his lifelong "becoming-tidal." He is literally absorbed into the environment, his flesh becoming the silt that will form the next day's island.

Kanai's loss of the manuscript during the storm is perhaps the most symbolic act of identity erasure in the novel. The manuscript, titled "The Tide Country," was a human attempt to capture and contain the Sundarbans in language. By destroying it, Ghosh suggests that the environment cannot be "contained" by human artistry. The "Tidal Artistry" of the cyclone is a more powerful narrator than the human poet. What remains at the end of the novel is not a book, but a memory--and a new way of living that Piya adopts, which is based on collaborative conservation rather than academic distance.

Conclusion: Towards an Ethics of Entanglement

The Hungry Tide is a radical exploration of what it means to live in a world that is not made for us. Through the concept of "Tidal Artistry," Amitav Ghosh shows that the most profound creative acts in our world are often non-human. By de-centering the human subject, Ghosh does not diminish the value of human life; rather, he relocates it within a broader, more ethical framework of multispecies kinship.



In the Anthropocene, where human activity has become a geological force, Ghosh suggests that we must adopt a posthuman subjectivity—one that is “fluid,” “nomadic,” and “attuned” to the non-human. The novel’s conclusion offers a blueprint for survival: not through the dominance of technology or language, but through the humble, difficult work of “making-with” the tides. We are all, Ghosh suggests, inhabitants of the Tide Country—and our identities are merely the silt that the tide allows us to keep for a moment before reclaiming it.

Works Cited

- Adamson, Joni. *American Indian Literature, Environmental Justice, and Ecocriticism*. University of Arizona Press, 2001.
- Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Duke University Press, 2010.
- Braidotti, Rosi. *The Posthuman*. Polity Press, 2013.
- Chakrabarty, Dipesh. “The Climate of History: Four Theses.” *Critical Inquiry*, 2009.
- Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. University of Minnesota Press, 1987.
- Ghosh, Amitav. *The Hungry Tide*. HarperCollins, 2004.
- Ghosh, Amitav. *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*. University of Chicago Press, 2016.
- Haraway, Donna J. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Duke University Press, 2016.
- Huggan, Graham, and Helen Tiffin. *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment*. Routledge, 2010.
- Latour, Bruno. *We Have Never Been Modern*. Harvard University Press, 1993.
- Mondal, Anshuman. *Amitav Ghosh: Contemporary World Writers*. Manchester University Press, 2007.
- Mukherjee, Upamanyu Pablo. *Postcolonial Environments: Nature, Culture and the Contemporary Indian Novel in English*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.
- Nixon, Rob. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Harvard University Press, 2011.
- Wolfe, Cary. *What is Posthumanism?* University of Minnesota Press, 2010.
- Morton, Timothy. *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*. University of Minnesota Press, 2013.