

Nature, Survival, and Posthuman Anxiety: An Ecocritical Comparative Study of The Hungry Tide and Earthlings

Dr. Hemantkumar Babubhai Pargi

Assistant professor, Growmore Institute of Commerce and Art's, Himatnagar, Gujarat

Abstract:

This study examines The Hungry Tide by Amitav Ghosh and Earthlings by Sayaka Murata through the perspectives of ecocriticism and posthumanism. The research focuses on the growing ecological instability, emotional alienation, and crisis of human identity reflected in contemporary literature. Although environmental concerns have become increasingly important in literary studies, comparatively little attention has been given to the ways contemporary Indian and Japanese fiction represent ecological vulnerability, survival anxiety, and the changing relationship between humans and the non-human world. The study mainly aims to explore how the selected novels portray ecological crisis and human survival while also questioning anthropocentric ideas of civilisation and identity. The research follows a qualitative and analytical approach based on close textual reading and comparative literary analysis. Ecological imagery, symbolic patterns, psychological fragmentation, and representations of survival have been examined with the support of ecocritical, posthumanist, and environmental humanities perspectives. The analysis reveals that The Hungry Tide presents the Sundarbans as a powerful ecological space where human survival depends upon coexistence, adaptation, and environmental awareness. In contrast, Earthlings explores psychological alienation and emotional instability within a mechanised and socially oppressive modern civilisation. Despite their different narrative structures and cultural settings, both novels expose the fragile condition of human existence and challenge the assumption of human superiority over nature. The study further suggests that ecological crisis extends beyond environmental destruction and increasingly affects emotional life, social relationships, and human consciousness. Through ecocritical and posthuman perspectives, the novels ultimately emphasise the need to reconsider rigid human-centred worldviews and recognise the interconnectedness between humanity and the natural world.

Keywords: Natural, Survival, Posthuman, Anxiety, Anthropocene, Psychological Alienations, Comparative Literature, Ecological Consciousness, Contemporary Asian Fiction, Ecocritical, Hungry Tide, Earthlings

1) Introduction:

The growing ecological instability of the contemporary world has significantly transformed the concerns of modern literature. Climate change, environmental destruction, displacement, and the gradual collapse of ecological balance have become central to literary imagination across cultures. Contemporary writers increasingly portray nature not as a passive background to human activity, but as a dynamic force capable of influencing identity, survival, and social existence. As environmental crises intensify, literature has also begun to question long-standing assumptions regarding human superiority and the belief that civilization exists independently from the natural world. Ecocriticism has emerged as an important theoretical approach for examining these changing literary representations of nature and environmental consciousness. By analysing the relationship between literature and ecology, ecocriticism challenges anthropocentric perspectives that place human beings at the center of existence. Similarly, posthumanism questions traditional definitions of humanity by emphasizing the interconnectedness between humans, animals, technology, and ecological systems. Together, these theoretical perspectives reveal how environmental instability produces not only physical vulnerability but also psychological and existential anxiety.

Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* presents the fragile ecological reality of the Sundarbans, where tides, storms, rivers, and wildlife continually shape human survival. The novel explores migration, displacement, ecological conflict, and the precarious coexistence between human communities and the natural environment. Ghosh repeatedly destabilizes anthropocentric assumptions by portraying nature as an unpredictable and powerful force capable of resisting human control. The dangerous ecology of the Sundarbans ultimately challenges the illusion of human dominance and reveals the vulnerability of human existence within larger environmental systems. While Ghosh represents ecological precarity through the unstable geography of the Sundarbans, *Earthlings* by Sayaka Murata approaches posthuman anxiety through psychological alienation and social estrangement. Although the novel is not conventionally categorized as climate fiction, it symbolically critiques the emotional and existential consequences of a civilization increasingly detached from ecological and humane relationships. Murata presents modern society as emotionally mechanical and deeply oppressive, forcing

individuals into rigid structures of conformity and social performance. The novel therefore raises disturbing questions regarding the meaning of humanity, identity, and survival within a dehumanized modern world.

Despite their different narrative styles and cultural contexts, both novels examine the fragile boundaries between humanity and the non-human world. They reveal how ecological uncertainty, social fragmentation, and existential anxiety reshape human consciousness in contemporary society. Through a comparative ecocritical reading of *The Hungry Tide* and *Earthlings*, this paper explores how environmental instability and posthuman anxiety challenge conventional understandings of civilization, identity, and survival in contemporary Asian literature.

2) Research Problem:

Contemporary society is increasingly shaped by ecological instability, environmental anxiety, and psychological alienation, yet many literary studies continue to examine human experience from an anthropocentric perspective. There remains limited comparative research on how contemporary Indian and Japanese fiction represent the relationship between ecological crisis, survival, and posthuman identity. *The Hungry Tide* and *Earthlings* reveal different yet interconnected forms of ecological and existential vulnerability, making it necessary to explore how these texts challenge conventional ideas of humanity, civilisation, and human dominance over nature.

3) Research Objectives:

- ✓ To explore how *The Hungry Tide* and *Earthlings* portray ecological crisis and its impact on human survival.
- ✓ To examine how the selected novels question human-centred thinking and represent posthuman anxiety through the relationship between humanity and nature.

4) Research Methods & Tools:

This research is qualitative in nature and is based on close textual reading and comparative literary analysis. The study primarily examines *The Hungry Tide* by Amitav Ghosh and *Earthlings* by Sayaka Murata to understand how contemporary literature responds to ecological crisis, survival anxiety, and changing ideas of humanity. Relevant books, research articles, and critical

works related to ecocriticism, posthumanism, and environmental humanities have also been consulted to support the analysis. The research mainly uses ecocriticism as its theoretical framework while also drawing upon ideas from post humanist and Anthropocene studies. Through close reading, the study analyses ecological imagery, symbolic elements, narrative patterns, and representations of alienation and survival in both novels. A comparative approach is used to identify the similarities and differences in the ways Indian and Japanese contemporary fiction portray the relationship between humans and the natural world.

5) Ecocriticism and Posthuman Anxiety:

Growing environmental crises have significantly influenced contemporary literary studies, leading scholars to reconsider the relationship between human beings and the natural world. Ecocriticism developed from this ecological awareness and focuses on how literature represents nature, environmental destruction, and ecological relationships. Rather than treating nature as a silent background to human activity, ecocritical thought recognises the environment as an active and influential force within human life and culture. For a long time, dominant human-centred ideologies promoted the belief that nature existed primarily for human benefit and control. Ecocriticism challenges this assumption by emphasising ecological interconnectedness and the dependence of human survival upon environmental balance. In many contemporary literary texts, nature no longer appears passive or subordinate; instead, it possesses agency, unpredictability, and transformative power capable of reshaping human existence.

Posthumanism further complicates traditional ideas of identity and human superiority. It questions the belief that humans occupy a stable and exceptional position within the world and instead highlights the fragile boundaries between humans, animals, ecology, and other non-human systems. As environmental uncertainty increases, literature increasingly portrays individuals confronting feelings of vulnerability, alienation, and existential instability. This condition can be understood as posthuman anxiety, which emerges from the recognition that human beings are neither fully autonomous nor separate from ecological realities. In contemporary fiction, posthuman anxiety often appears through fractured identities, emotional isolation, ecological fear, bodily vulnerability, and the collapse of stable social structures. The *Hungry Tide* and *Earthlings* reflect these concerns in different yet interconnected ways. Ghosh examines ecological vulnerability through the dangerous and unpredictable landscape of the Sundarbans, while Murata presents psychological alienation and social estrangement within a

mechanised modern society. Together, the novels reveal how ecological instability and the crisis of modern civilisation continue to reshape human consciousness in contemporary literature.

6) Ecological Landscape and Human Vulnerability in The Hungry Tide:

Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* is closely connected with the ecological reality of the Sundarbans, a region marked by unstable tides, dense mangrove forests, dangerous waterways, and constant environmental uncertainty. In the novel, the landscape is not merely a background setting. It functions as a living and unpredictable force that shapes the lives, fears, and survival of the people who inhabit it. Human existence in the Sundarbans depends less on control and more on adaptation to the rhythms of nature. Throughout the narrative, Ghosh presents the natural world as powerful and often uncontrollable. Cyclones, floods, shifting river channels, and tiger attacks repeatedly expose the fragility of human life. The novel challenges the modern belief that nature can be fully mastered through science or development. In the Sundarbans, human authority remains uncertain because the environment itself possesses agency and destructive power.

The character of Piya represents scientific inquiry and ecological awareness. As a marine biologist researching river dolphins, she approaches the environment through observation and scientific method. Yet the novel gradually suggests that ecological understanding cannot emerge from scientific knowledge alone. Emotional experience, local memory, and cultural familiarity with the landscape also become important ways of understanding nature. Fokir's relationship with the environment reflects this deeper ecological intimacy. His knowledge of rivers, tides, and animal behaviour comes from lived experience rather than formal education. Through his character, Ghosh values indigenous ecological understanding and questions the assumption that institutional knowledge is always superior. The novel therefore presents local ecological consciousness as essential for survival within unstable natural conditions.

The Morichjhāpi episode further connects environmental space with politics and displacement. Refugees searching for shelter in the Sundarbans become victims of both state violence and ecological insecurity. Their suffering reveals how environmental landscapes are shaped not only by nature but also by power, exclusion, and social inequality. Survival in the novel becomes both a political and ecological struggle. Ghosh also explores the conflict between wildlife conservation

and human livelihood. Efforts to protect the environment often clash with the survival needs of local communities living within vulnerable ecological spaces. Rather than presenting simple moral divisions, the novel portrays ecology as a complex network of competing forms of survival, fear, and coexistence. Most significantly, *The Hungry Tide* challenges anthropocentric ideas of human dominance. The tides, forests, rivers, and animals repeatedly disrupt the belief that humans exist above nature. People in the novel appear not as masters of the environment but as vulnerable participants within a larger ecological system. In this way, Ghosh's narrative strongly reflects both ecocritical and posthumanist perspectives.

7) Psychological Alienation and Posthuman Identity in *Earthlings*:

Sayaka Murata's *Earthlings* presents a disturbing exploration of alienation, identity, and survival within modern society. Unlike conventional ecological narratives that focus directly on environmental destruction, the novel approaches crisis through psychological fragmentation and emotional isolation. Murata portrays contemporary civilisation as deeply mechanical, where social systems impose rigid expectations upon individuals and suppress emotional individuality. The protagonist, Natsuki, experiences alienation from an early age and gradually withdraws from socially accepted reality. In order to survive emotional neglect, violence, and social pressure, she creates an alternative imaginative world that separates her from ordinary human existence. Her repeated belief that she is not entirely human symbolises a deeper crisis of identity and belonging. The boundaries between humanity, animality, and psychological survival become increasingly unstable throughout the narrative.

Although *Earthlings* is not traditionally categorised as ecological fiction, the novel indirectly critiques a civilisation disconnected from natural and emotional forms of existence. Human society appears artificial, emotionally empty, and governed by systems of conformity. Individuals are valued mainly through productivity, reproduction, and social performance rather than emotional authenticity or personal freedom. Murata frequently employs images associated with machinery, consumption, and dehumanisation to reveal the psychological violence hidden within ordinary social structures. Human relationships often appear transactional and emotionally detached. As a result, the characters attempt to escape conventional civilisation and imagine alternative ways of existence outside socially constructed norms.

Nature in the novel does not appear romantic or comforting. Instead, it becomes connected with instinct, bodily survival, and the collapse of artificial social identities. The disturbing conclusion symbolically breaks down the boundaries between civilisation and primal existence, forcing the reader to confront uncomfortable questions about humanity itself. The novel also reflects several dimensions of posthuman anxiety, including fear of social control, rejection of normative identity, bodily vulnerability, and psychological fragmentation. Murata suggests that modern civilisation may itself become a source of emotional and existential destruction. In this sense, the violence embedded within social systems appears more psychologically damaging than the threats traditionally associated with the natural world.

Unlike *The Hungry Tide*, where ecological vulnerability emerges through environmental instability, *Earthlings* internalises crisis through emotional collapse and social alienation. The gradual destruction of meaningful relationships with nature and humanity ultimately reflects the fragmentation of modern human identity.

8) Comparative Analysis:

Although *The Hungry Tide* and *Earthlings* emerge from different cultural and literary traditions, both novels explore the fragile condition of human existence within unstable ecological and social realities. Their comparative importance lies in the way they question human-centred assumptions and expose the limits of human control, identity, and survival.

In *The Hungry Tide*, nature remains physically immediate and deeply influential. The unstable ecology of the Sundarbans constantly shapes the lives of the people living within it. Floods, tides, storms, and wildlife repeatedly remind individuals that survival depends upon coexistence with forces beyond human authority. Ghosh presents nature as active, unpredictable, and resistant to domination.

Table:1 Comparative Analytical Framework

Analytical Aspect	The Hungry Tide	Earthlings
Ecological Setting	Sundarbans ecosystem and environmental instability	Symbolic and psychologically fragmented modern society
Nature–Human Relationship	Coexistence and ecological dependence	Alienation from natural existence
Representation of Survival	Physical and environmental survival	Psychological and existential survival
Posthuman Anxiety	Human vulnerability before ecological forces	Collapse of stable human identity
Critique of Civilisation	Ecological exploitation and displacement	Social conformity and mechanised existence
Narrative Focus	Environmental coexistence and migration	Alienation, trauma, and dehumanisation
Theoretical Relevance	Ecocriticism and environmental ethics	Posthumanism and existential anxiety

Source: Author's Analysis

Earthlings, however, approaches crisis from a more psychological direction. Instead of external environmental danger, Murata focuses on emotional isolation, social conformity, and the breakdown of stable human identity. Modern civilisation in the novel appears emotionally mechanical and disconnected from natural forms of existence. This separation gradually produces alienation, violence, and psychological collapse. Despite these differences, both novels challenge the belief that civilisation guarantees stability or superiority. Ghosh reveals humanity's vulnerability before ecological systems, while Murata exposes the emotional and existential damage hidden within modern social structures. In both narratives, survival becomes uncertain and deeply fragile.

The idea of survival itself also takes different forms in the two texts. In *The Hungry Tide*, survival is closely linked with environmental adaptation, local ecological knowledge, and communal coexistence. In *Earthlings*, survival becomes psychological resistance against oppressive social expectations and dehumanising systems of conformity. Their treatment of nature further reflects distinct literary and cultural perspectives. Ghosh presents ecology as materially connected with history, migration, labour, and community life. Murata, on the other hand, uses symbolic and psychological representations of nature to critique artificial modern existence and emotional detachment from the non-human world.

At a deeper level, both novels destabilise rigid boundaries between the human and the non-human. Human identity no longer appears stable, autonomous, or superior. Instead, both writers portray individuals as vulnerable beings shaped by ecological forces, emotional instability, and

social pressures. This recognition produces a strong sense of posthuman anxiety throughout the narratives. The comparison also reflects broader concerns within contemporary Asian literature. Increasingly, writers from different cultural backgrounds are responding to environmental crisis, technological modernity, emotional fragmentation, and existential uncertainty. Through different narrative methods, both Ghosh and Murata reveal how ecological instability continues to reshape human consciousness in the contemporary world.

8) Human Survival and the Crisis of Civilization:

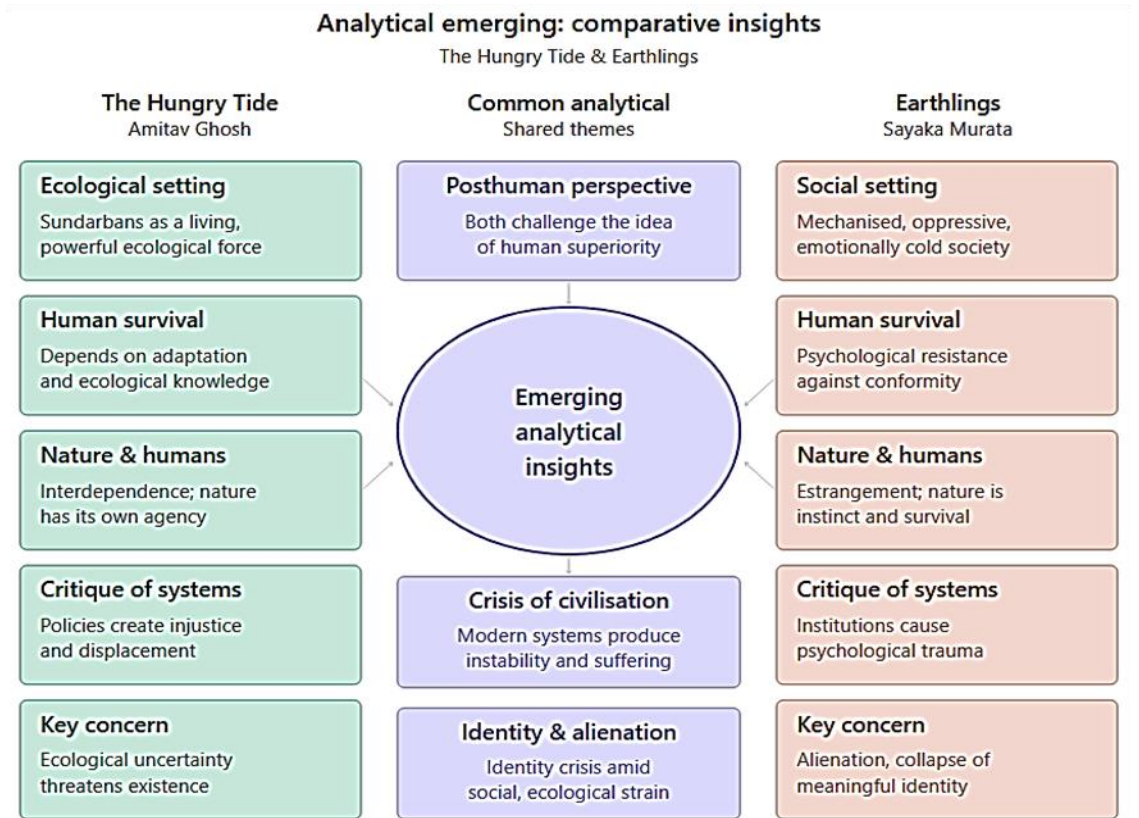
One of the major concerns in both *The Hungry Tide* and *Earthlings* is the growing crisis within modern civilization. Industrial modernity often presents technological development, social order, and human progress as signs of advancement and stability. However, both Ghosh and Murata question these assumptions by exposing the insecurity and vulnerability hidden beneath modern systems. In *The Hungry Tide*, ecological instability constantly threatens human life and livelihood in the Sundarbans. Floods, storms, shifting tides, and dangerous wildlife repeatedly disrupt the idea that nature can be completely controlled through science, administration, or development. The novel suggests that survival depends less on domination and more on ecological understanding, coexistence, and adaptation to environmental uncertainty.

Murata's *Earthlings* presents a different but equally disturbing form of crisis. Here, civilisation appears psychologically oppressive and emotionally restrictive. Social systems impose rigid expectations regarding identity, behaviour, family, and productivity. Individuals who fail to conform to these norms often experience alienation, isolation, and psychological trauma. Through this portrayal, Murata questions whether modern civilisation genuinely protects human well-being or instead contributes to emotional destruction. Together, the novels reveal a deeper paradox within modernity. Human societies attempt to create order, security, and control, yet these same systems frequently produce ecological damage, emotional fragmentation, and existential instability. As a result, survival becomes increasingly uncertain even within structures designed to ensure safety and progress.

Both texts also challenge the traditional opposition between civilisation and wilderness. In Ghosh's narrative, nature remains dangerous yet essential for life and survival. In Murata's work, civilisation itself becomes a source of violence, repression, and dehumanisation. These

contrasting perspectives destabilise conventional beliefs about progress, superiority, and the relationship between humans and the natural world.

Fig:1



OVERALL ANALYTICAL EMERGING

Both novels reveal that human existence is deeply vulnerable to ecological forces and oppressive systems. They call for a rethinking of identity, survival, and our relationship with the more-than-human world

9) Conclusion:

The comparative reading of *The Hungry Tide* and *Earthlings* reveals how contemporary literature increasingly engages with ecological instability, emotional uncertainty, and the crisis of human existence. Although the two novels emerge from different cultural and narrative traditions, both question anthropocentric ideas and expose the fragile position of humanity within ecological and social systems. In *The Hungry Tide*, Amitav Ghosh portrays nature as a powerful ecological force

that continuously shapes migration, survival, and vulnerability in the Sundarbans. Human beings do not appear separate from the environment; instead, they remain deeply dependent upon unstable ecological conditions that resist human control. The novel therefore highlights ecological interdependence and challenges the illusion of human dominance over nature. Sayaka Murata's *Earthlings* approaches crisis through psychological alienation and social fragmentation. The novel critiques a mechanised civilisation that suppresses emotional individuality and disconnects people from natural forms of existence. Through disturbing representations of identity, conformity, and survival, Murata symbolically explores the emotional consequences of living within oppressive social systems. Here taken together, the novels suggest that ecological crisis extends beyond environmental destruction alone. It also affects human consciousness, emotional relationships, cultural values, and ideas of identity. Climate anxiety, alienation, and the weakening of human-centred worldviews have become important concerns in contemporary literary imagination. Both texts ultimately encourage a reconsideration of humanity's relationship with nature and with the non-human world. Through ecocritical and posthuman perspectives, the novels reveal that survival in the contemporary age depends not upon domination or control, but upon coexistence, ecological awareness, and a deeper recognition of human vulnerability within interconnected systems of life.

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