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The Silent Language of Nature: Slow Violence, Vibrant Matter, and Ecological Silence in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* and *The Glass Palace*

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ABSTRACT

This paper will discuss the ways in which *The Hungry Tide* by Amitav Ghosh and *The Glass Palace* conceptualize what this paper is conceptualizing as the 'silent language of nature', a method by which the natural world speaks agency, memory and resistance through material processes, time and ecological impact not through human language. As an active and interactive object, foregrounding nature is a subject that questions the readings which objectify the environment as a background or symbolic asset. The paper is based on the work of Rob Nixon on the issue of slow violence, Jane Bennett on the theory of vibrant matter, and Christopher Manes on the silencing of nature in the discourse of the West, and to explain why the landscapes of Ghosh, tides, mangrove forest, unstable islands, and exploited teak plantations, can be viewed as an instance of environmental resistance. In *The Hungry Tide*, the expression of resistance is vivid as tides and storms disturb human dominance in order to overcome it whereas in *The Glass Palace* it is seen in a sense of environmental depletion and material residues of colonial removal. The paper develops more-than-human conceptions of voice, agency, and resistance through close reading, which is part of postcolonial ecocriticism.

Keywords: Ecocriticism; Postcolonial Ecocriticism; Slow Violence; Vibrant Matter; Nature's Agency; Material Ecocriticism; Amitav Ghosh; Environmental Justice

INTRODUCTION

The late twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century have seen an unparalleled combination of ecological destruction and human culture experiencing anxiety over the connection between man and the non-human world. Climate change and biodiversity loss, the build-up of toxic waste, and desertification of previously fertile areas have been some of the most basic challenges to the intellectual foundations of modernity especially the idea that nature presents itself as a passive resource that can be extracted and used indefinitely. Ecocriticism, in turn, has developed as a crucial form of literary and cultural criticism, which acknowledges the ability of literature to communicate ecological affiliations and thus to reveal the ideological presuppositions of environmental degradation and to envision other ways of being-in-the-world. According to Cheryle Glotfelty, in *The Ecocriticism Reader*, ecocriticism introduces the earth-centredness of literary studies where the question is not how nature is represented in writing, but how narratives are formed to inform us about the wilderness, agency and responsibility to the environment.

However, the ecocriticism cannot be enough in the situation when it comes to the specific snarl of the environmental annihilation with the histories of imperialism, colonialism, and developmental violence. The field of postcolonial ecocriticism that introduces ecocritical understanding to the discussion with postcolonial theory has developed as a way to fill this very gap. It is quite evident that colonialism, just like Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin illustrate, was an environmental project besides being a political and cultural project. European conquest and settlement were based not solely on the dispossession of the aboriginal population but also on the ecological imperialism of the colonized territories through the introduction of the alien species, exploitation of natural resources, and the dictation of Western economic principles according to which nature is pure commodity. More importantly, this kind of environmental imperialism did not end with formal decolonization: modern development discourses, as Arturo Escobar suggests, are still recreating postcolonial landscapes and societies according to the model of extraction and dispossession under different titles. This is

a major political and ethical challenge to understand how literature documents this intersection of ecological and imperial violence.

Amitav Ghosh is one of the most important modern voices, which express the entanglement of the environmental crisis, imperialism legacies, and postcolonial consciousness. His fiction consistently revisits the issue of how landscapes and ecosystems witness the histories of violence, uprooting, and extraction how, in other words, non-human nature is implicated in, opposes to, and is ultimately haunted by human histories of power. *The Hungry Tide* (2004) and *The Glass Palace* (2000) are two related studies of this theme, in which each of them is framed by geography that is both historically related and geographically precarious, and which is marked by remnants of imperial control.

The Hungry Tide plunges the readers into the world of Sundarbans, the large mangrove tidal delta which covers the border of India and Bangladesh. The tidal rhythms, influenced by cyclonic storms, and inhabited by tigers whose predatory existence is not symbolic or peripheral but central to the ecology of the novel get the novel moving. The Sundarbans provides Ghosh with a landscape in which the agency of nature is too evident: tides rise and fall, twice per day, transforming the land; storms bring destruction upon it; the tiger preys on people just as much as it preys on deer, putting human beings in the structural position of prey, not of sovereign objects. Piya Roy, the protagonist of the novel, is an American cetologist who goes to the Sundarbans with the aim of observing Irrawaddy dolphins scientifically and employing a scientific approach to the research. But the landscape as such with its tidal power, its animal caprice, its irreplicability in the hands of human beings, slowly tells of the inadequacy of such constructs, of how knowledge is developed not by looking out at the landscape but by the living experience of the land itself, which has a logic of its own.

The Glass Palace, in its turn, is based on the history of Burma (Myanmar) as the time of the British colonial expansion and its aftermath. The novel follows the simultaneous lives of three families in the course of the twentieth century, starting with the collapse of the Burmese royal court and the exile of King Thebaw to the postcolonial independence period and further. But the story woven through this human story is the systematic cutting of the teak forests of Burma by the British colonial companies, the massive ecological change which this cutting brought, and the ways in which landscapes had quietly and continually resisted imperial appropriations of everlasting possession. The woods that had rendered Burma economically useful during the

period of empire slowly wore themselves out; the land starts to restore what colonial violence had deprived it off. The opposition of nature in *The Glass Palace* is not dramatic: in the tidal agency of *The Hungry Tide*, nature confronts with its own tides; instead, it is becoming gradual, attritional, almost unnoticed in the clamour of human political rivalry.

The Silent Language of Nature

New critical vocabulary is required in both novels. In order to read them, we need a frame that is able to address non-human nature not as a background, icon, or environment, but as a subject that talks, opposes and continues beyond the discourses of human language and discourse. This paper speculates the theorization of this by what I refer to as the silent language of nature, a phrase which refers to those forms of non-verbal expression by which landscapes are agentic, damage-inflicting, and challenging to their anthropocentric subjugation. The term is based on the original criticism of nature by Christopher Manes that nature is forced to keep silent in the discourse of the West. Manes makes the point that western humanistic culture has actively silenced nature by giving the status of speaking subject to humans; nature is only seen as mute object, to be used and explained in an instrumental way. However, the framework suggested by Yves Manes is also essential, but it also bears the danger of viewing silence as nothing more than a lack of voice, as a dulling. The paper suggests rather than to interpret silence as a significant ecological signifier one by which nature speaks in material practices, temporalities, bodily influences and aftermaths that exceed the ability of human discourses to contain them. The silent language of nature functions according to a number of registers: according to the tides which shape everyday life in the Sundarbans, reminding human residents of the fact that they live in a rhythm that has not been created by them; according to the roar of the tiger which silences all other sounds, insisting on dominion through power and not through language; according to the storms which break human plans, regardless of whether they resist or not; according to the gradual disappearance of forests which are exploited by the colonialists, leaving traces of violence in the landscape long after the logging business is over. In both situations, nature does not speak, it acts in ways that cannot be shunned, evaded or retold without being left out.

Research Gap and Research Question.

As of now, the novels of Ghosh have been greatly ecocritical. His account of Sundarbans ecology has been studied by scholars, the novel has been discussed as one that criticizes developmental violence and environmental injustice, and how Ghosh predicts indigenous and marginalized environmental knowledges are. Nevertheless, there is still a very serious void: nature in such readings is usually treated as a backdrop, thematic concern, or symbolic register within which a play of human conflicts takes place. What has not been well studied is the fact that nature may well be a resisting and communicating entity that non-human agents may have their own agency, logic and modes of expression that are not dependent on how humans recognize and learn about them. The following research questions are used to fill this gap in this study:

1) In what ways do *The Hungry Tide* and *The Glass Palace* treat at different levels the agency of nature and why? The Sundarbans is an ecological agency with overt and dramatic manifestations: two times a day, tides redefine geography, storms blow down human edifices, tigers hunt humans with deliberate, calculating intelligence. The landscapes of *The Glass Palace* teak forests, degraded soil, post-imperial decay, also demonstrate this, but with less obviousness, in terms of attrition, slow transformation. What is the role of the landscape adopted in the novel in formulating theories of resistance of nature?

2) In what ways does the idea of slow violence by Rob Nixon help shed light on the form of silence that we can discern in these readings? Slow violence refers to violence that arises unnoticed over a long period of time and spread throughout space, usually not detected by the people who are not directly involved in it. Do we as a society learn about silence as a loss of a means of communication or do we learn about silence as the obliteration of some forms of violence that are mediated by the official discourse of narration and representation?

3) How can we leave behind anthropocentric conceptualizations of agency and voice through more-than-human frameworks (especially the vibrant matter of Jane Bennett and the nature and silence of Christopher Manes) Supposing that we accept that nature has its own forms of agency that do not necessarily coincide with human agency and are nevertheless constitutive and consequential how does this re-frame our view of Ghosh novels and of the ability of literature to write of non-human worlds?

The main methodology used in this study is close textual analysis, which is based on three theoretical complementary approaches namely: (1) concept of slow violence and environmental degradation dispersed through time proposed by Rob Nixon; (2) theory of vibrant matter and the distributed agency of non-human assemblages that are proposed by Jane Bennett; and (3) genealogy of nature silence in Western discourse that is suggested by Christopher Manes. These structures enable us to interpret the landscapes of Ghosh not as a backdrop, a location of the human practice but as a more-than-human conversation of resistance, persistence, and change. The next paragraph of the paper will continue with The theoretical foundations, where each of the three major concepts will be articulated and the combination in which they lend each other to help uncover the silent language of nature. Then the textual studies of the two novels as reading The Hungry Tide tidal and tempestuous landscapes as explicit registers of ecological force and The Glass Palace forests and post-imperial decay as less expressive but equally decisive means of resistance. An ecological comparison excavates how varying ecological settings the unstable Sundarbans and the depleted plantation of Burma produce various registers of silence and speech, though they are held together in their denunciation of the anthropocentric modernity. A conclusion finally restates the importance of reading nature as a speaking and protesting presence and reflects on the potential to apply implications to postcolonial ecocriticism, environmental justice and theories of voice and agency in literature more generally.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The idea of slowness of violence by Rob Nixon provides a critical theory to the temporality and invisibility of ecological harm in postcolonial situations. According to Nixon (2011), slow violence is a type of violence, which is not spectacular or instant, but rather gradual and largely unnoticed, where the poor populations of the world have contributed the least to ecological crises that endanger them. Contrary to sudden disasters that take the center-stage of the media and political action, slow violence is perpetuated over long periods of years, decades, even generations, and can only be attributed to a combination of causes, actors and choices. It is this time-based dispersion that makes slow violence rather non-existent in official discourses of development, progress, and modernity.

Slow violence is specifically fruitful in terms of comprehending environmental imperialism in Ghosh novels. Colonial forestry exemplifies slow violence: the fact that the teak forests of

Burma were being systematically exploited under British management was not a demonstration of violence but of good management of the resources, economic growth, and civilization of enterprise. The forests became depleted slowly; soils became eroded; biodiversity was destroyed gradually. Generations had elapsed before the carnality became noticeable, and the discourse transformed to one of postcolonial sovereignty and national development, as opposed to colonial guilt. In equal measure, the gradual process of human habitation, river damming and diversion of the streams in Sundarbans symbolize slow violence accentuated by climate change and rise in sea levels. This violence is recorded in the mangroves themselves as they strive to preserve themselves in more and more unfriendly environments. The disappearance of islands at a very slow pace, the salinization of soil over an extended period, the gradual eviction of fisher populations these are the material residues of slow violence that the official discourse of development dismisses as natural, as inevitable, or non-consequential to the issue of progress.

Important to slow violence is the association to the visibility and representation. According to Nixon (2011), slow violence "threatens to become a story only the poor tell themselves, in the shadows of the official narrative" (p. 2). The poor are bearing an unjust share of the environmental degradation, but without their voices being heard in the dominant institutions, where, to their credit, they are not paid or even listened to. It is exactly at this point of representational silence that Ghosh novels enter: they make visible through their narrative, through their attentive atonements to landscape and incarnated knowledge the sluggish, diffuse injuries concealed by development discourse. This intersection of slow violence and official invisibility can be seen in the Morichjhapi incident of *The Hungry Tide*, where the refugee settlers are trying to cultivate an island, but when they are displaced violently by the state, they become officially invisible. None of the environmental destruction caused by displacement, the health consequences of toxic exposure over the long term, the psychological trauma of permanent displacement of possessions is dramatic or even life-threatening but it is a continuum of violence and their results shape life and community. The ecological imagination of Ghosh serves to restore the visibility of what in most cases is made invisible by slow violence. In this method, nature perceives as itself even responding to gradual violence environmental loss, extinction, changes of tidal and climate cycles, and it is slow, diffuse, and hard to trace to any single cause. However, in the story by Ghosh, we can read these gradual

ecological changes as kinds of agencies, the inscription by nature of, and reaction to, colonial and postcolonial violence.

Jane Bennett's concept of vibrant matter provides a philosophical framework for recognizing non-human entities not as passive, inert objects but as active agents possessed of what she terms "thing-power" or "vital materiality" (Bennett, 2010). Bennett criticizes the Western philosophical original distinction between subjects (humans, with agency, interiority and status in the moral sense) and objects (all other things, which are treated as resources or scenery). Rather, she suggests that every material being animals, plants, minerals, weather systems, even trash and waste have their own possibilities of acting, influencing, and changing. Vibrant matter is sentimental, anthropomorphising nature is not; it is a serious engagement with the material force of non-human things to start, resist, shape the outcome, and engage in unpredictable unions with other players.

Applying to *The Hungry Tide*, the idea of vibrant matter essentially alters the way of reading the Sundarbans terrain. The tides are not only the backdrop or time frame of human drama; they are themselves actors and have their own power and logic. The tides form and redefine the land twice a day, dictating where the human will be able to live and where not, spreading resources and toxins, sowing seeds and debris over long distances. The tiger also has its own intelligence that it learns human behavior, differentiates between masks and faces, computations of risk and reward. Tiger is not a freak case, but it is a structural aspect of Sundarbans ecology, it is a predator, which stands at the top of the food chain where human beings are the prey (Ghosh, 2004). The dolphins, according to Piya are not facing the scientific direction to the north but they swim in embodied response to the rhythmic logic of the tidal landscape. The cyclone that kills off boats and kills Fokir is an exercise of atmospheric agency is not a metaphor of human vulnerability but an actual agent, which operates in its own thermodynamic logic, not concerned with human interests or moral claims.

Being aware of vibrant matter is to give up the temptation to reduce them to symbols or tools of human being meaning-making. Tiger is not a representation of the power of nature or even a divine retribution; it is an animal, having its own hunger, awareness and control. The mangrove forests, in *The Glass Palace*, are not metaphors of colonial exploitation, they are life systems that have their regenerative ability of gradually, persistently reclaiming land used by exploitation. This reclaiming is not the healing of nature (an anthropocentric metaphor that

suggests being restored to some previously existing condition) but rather a non-concern of the human claims of everlasting domination. Through attending vibrant matter in Ghosh novels, we read the ecological representation not as an allegory but as a document of existing non-human agencies, which transcend and are basic to the human designs, knowledge, and sovereignty.

Christopher Manes's genealogy of nature's silencing in Western discourse provides historical grounding for understanding how Western culture has systematically reserved the status of speaking subject for humans alone (Manes, 1992). Manes follows this repression of the Middle Ages Christendom, through Renaissance humanism, into the science of today: nature is the silent object, it can be interpreted, exploited and used as an instrument. Such silencing is not incidental but conceptual which makes it possible to construct the legal and conceptual fictions that make it appear okay to treat nature as property, as resource, as the backdrop of human history. The history of the silencing of nature then turns out to be a history of Western modernity itself, and has far reaching consequences on the ethics, law, and politics of the environment.

Nevertheless, the framework created by Manes runs the risk of being misunderstood as suggesting that we merely need to give voice to nature, and render it in a human language and representation. This paper hypothesizes to the contrary that the silent language of nature is not silence as nothingness to be filled in with human words but silence as a rich and fruitful register. Nature mute functions as material force, as repetitive rhythm, as embodied affect, as effects, which cannot be told away, denied. When the tiger cries it is not speaking human speech, it is making itself heard by means of sound, by the sound which makes all the other noise still, by the sound which makes them listen, by the sound which makes them hear, by the mere sound of it. By maintaining their existence in salty soil, the mangrove forests create a sort of resistance by altering the material, with the gradual build-up of biomass, by root systems to hold the sediment, and by evolutionary strategies to endure the hostile environment. The silence is not in vain but rather is full of meaning that cannot be absolutely expressed or represented in the words of humanity.

When we read *The Hungry Tide* with its landscapes being spoken (its tides, roars, and storms, which make themselves heard and felt in a material way) and *The Glass Palace* with its muted landscapes (its exploited landscapes, its post-imperial disintegration, its gradual reclamation) as places where the lack of sound is significant, we can no longer afford the anthropocentric

model. The silence of the forests of *The Glass Palace* is not the rightful silence, the silence of deposition, of enduring material change not subject to the histories of man. Here it is important to explicate that this application of the term silent language is not based on intercultural communication theory where silent language is a non-verbal communication system (gesture, proxemics, time) in human societies (Hall 1959). The register with which we apply the term works quite differently: it describes non-human manifestations and actions of nature beyond all the vocabulary of human language. By doing so, silence is no longer a lack to be filled, but an indication of the irreducibility of nature to human representation, knowledge or power.

NATURE AS AGENT AND COMMUNICATOR: READING TIDAL RHYTHMS, CYCLONIC VIOLENCE, AND ECOLOGICAL SILENCE IN THE HUNGRY TIDE AND THE GLASS PALACE

Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* positions the Sundarbans not as a setting for human action but as an active, intentional agent whose rhythmic and catastrophic communications structure all possibility. The novel opens with Kanai reading Nirmal's notebook, which establishes the foundational claim: the river "throws off its bindings" and "asserts its permanent dominion" over islands that humans imagine they control. This phrasing is crucial the water does not erode passively but exercises will. The tides reshape the landscape "almost daily," transforming terrain "thousands of acres of forest disappear underwater, only to reemerge hours later." This twice-daily metamorphosis is not incidental backdrop but the primary fact of existence: human settlement becomes conditional on tidal temporality.

The novel renders the tidal cycle as a form of articulate communication. As Bennett argues, vibrant matter possesses "thing-power" a capacity to act according to its own logic rather than human intention. The ebb tide (bhata) functions as midwife: "it is only in falling that the water gives birth to the forest. To look upon this strange parturition, midwifed by the moon, is to know why the name tide country is not just right but necessary." The mangroves respond immediately to tidal creation, gestating and spreading rapidly to cover new islands. Yet this generative capacity contains threat. The same water that creates can destroy. When mangrove forests establish, they express unmistakable hostility: "At no moment can human beings have any doubt of the terrains hostility to their presence, of its cunning and resourcefulness, of its determination to destroy or expel them." These are not metaphors for blind ecological process they describe the terrain as intelligent, calculating, and resistant.

The cyclone sequences demonstrate how tidal agency operates catastrophically. The approaching storm announces itself not through scientific warning but through atmospheric signs that only experienced observers can read. Horen, the boatman, recognizes danger through shifts in water behavior, animal patterns, and wind pressure embodied knowledge transmitted across generations. The storm itself arrives with apparent intentionality: "It was as if the wind had been waiting for this one unguarded moment it spun him around and knocked him sideways into the water." The conditional "as if" preserves plausible deniability while asserting observable agency. The cyclone is patient; it strikes at moments of human vulnerability. When the tidal wave approaches, it becomes apocalyptic "a city block...suddenly...begin to move...its crest reared high above, dwarfing the tallest trees." Water and wind merge into a single force that cannot be negotiated with, predicted fully, or controlled.

The cyclone's violence accumulates slowly and suddenly simultaneously. The 1970 storm killed 300,000 people a figure mentioned almost parenthetically, revealing how slow violence disperses across populations and time. The immediate deaths from drowning compound with secondary harms: starvation in the aftermath, disease, trauma, displacement. The landscape records this violence through permanent scarring. A 1970 storm tore away "a four-acre piece of land...In an instant it was gone, its huts, fields, trees were all devoured." The scar remains visible as a bite-mark on the shoreline, testament to waters' capacity to erase human habitation.

Importantly, the landscape does not offer moral judgement. The tiger that kills Kusums father is not evil it is an ecological agent operating according to its own predatory logic and territorial knowledge. The tiger understands wind direction, human limitation, and strategic advantage. When it kills, it exhibits knowledge: "The animal too was upwind of its prey...it was skilled in dealing with the wind and it knew that the people on the other bank were powerless against these gusts." The tiger's predation is not aberrant violence; it is structural to Sundarbans ecology. Humans occupy the role of available prey within the tidal landscape's hierarchy.

The embankment (bdh) that encircles inhabited islands symbolizes human resistance to tidal dominion, yet it simultaneously admits defeat. Nirmal teaches Fokir ecological philosophy by pointing to the embankment: "Look at it, my friend, look at the bdh. See how frail it is, how fragile. Look at the waters that flow past it and how limitless they are, how patient, how quietly they bide their time. Just to look at it is to know why the waters must prevail, later if not sooner." The embankment speaks involuntary confession human fortifications are temporary

impositions on a force that operates at scales beyond human time. Water's "quiet" patience contrasts with the embankment's fragile maintenance.

The novel's most powerful statement of tidal agency appears in Morichjhpi's narrative. When state authorities flood the island to displace refugee settlers, water becomes weaponized by colonial administration while remaining indifferent to human political categories. The settlers who had cultivated the island for years, who had built community and agricultural systems, are erased by the same tidal force that the novel has established as fundamentally sovereign. Morichjhpi's destruction reveals that human claims to land even claims based on years of labor, settlement, and care are provisional. The land, as Nirmal insists, belongs to the tide country, not to any human settler or state.

The novel's metaphor of "silent language" operates through this tidal communication. Nature does not speak in human words; it speaks through rhythm, through constraint, through destruction and regeneration. The rhythm of the tides governs when dolphins congregate, when settlements can expand, when movement becomes impossible. Piya's scientific instruments GPS monitors, binoculars cannot fully translate this language because it operates at temporal and spatial scales that exceed technological measurement. Fokir's knowledge, inherited from his mother and accumulated through embodied practice, reads the landscape directly: "He knew this stretch of water well enough to feel his way along the rivers edge." His body knows what instruments cannot measure.

If *The Hungry Tide* depicts nature speaking through overt force, *The Glass Palace* represents nature systematically silenced under colonialism yet silence itself becomes a form of eloquent testimony. The novel traces how imperial extraction transforms Burma's teak forests from integrated ecosystems into industrial resources through a process so gradual that devastation becomes invisible. The killing of teak trees exemplifies this slow violence: trees are girdled with incisions at "a height of four feet and six inches off the ground teak being ruled, despite the wildness of its terrain, by imperial stricture in every tiny detail." The verb "ruled" is crucial colonialism doesn't merely exploit nature; it imposes rational administrative control that extends "in every tiny detail." The girdled trees are left "to die where they stood, sometimes for three years or even more," creating a rationalized timeline of death that makes extraction economically calculable. This is slow violence precisely because the killing occurs according to schedule, normalized through routine.

The landscape's response to extraction is registered as scarring and absence. The "initial felling of the forest was done by elephants, with the result that the clearings were invariably scarred with upturned trees and ragged pits." Scarring is the landscape's form of testimony it cannot articulate what has been done to it, but it bears visible marks. These scars accumulate across time and space as extraction fronts advance "higher and higher up the slopes," exhausting lower elevations and forcing camps to migrate perpetually. By the time ecological devastation becomes fully apparent, entire regions have been transformed. The village of Huay Zedi emerges from extraction's wake a permanent settlement established where teak camps had once been temporary. The landscape's capacity to be industrially exploited becomes the foundation for new human settlement, creating permanent populations dependent on continued resource depletion.

The transition from teak extraction to rubber plantations represents re-colonization rather than recovery. When Elsa visits the Morningside Estate initially, it appears as a plague site: "huge stretches of land were covered with ashes and blackened stumps." Yet on her second visit, "the transformation was again so great as to appear miraculous...the blackened tree-stumps had been removed and the first saplings of rubber had begun to grow." This apparent miracle masks a fundamental continuity: the landscape's regenerative capacity is immediately re-appropriated. The "fresh garden" is a monoculture plantation designed for mechanized harvesting, where "orderly rows of saplings, all of them exactly alike, all of them spaced with precise, geometrical regularity" replace the "heady profusion of the jungle." The landscape's silence its inability to resist commodification renders it perpetually available for new cycles of extraction.

Sacred spaces erased under colonialism constitute another form of muted violence. When the British occupy Mandalay Palace, "the gardens had been dug up to make room for tennis courts and polo grounds; the exquisite little monastery in which Thebaw had spent his novitiate had become a chapel where Anglican priests administered the sacrament to British troops." Landscapes of spiritual and political significance are not incorporated into colonial order they are obliterated, their previous functions erased. The palace itself, which had concentrated Burmese royal authority, is transformed into imperial recreation space. This erasure is absolute: the landscape speaks its violation only through the absence of what it once contained.

The slow ecological death that accompanies rapid extraction unfolds across decades of accumulation. Nirmal observes the disappearing Sundarbans ecosystem: "I remembered how,

when I first came to Lusibari, the sky would be darkened by birds at sunset. Many years had passed since I'd seen such flights of birds...I remembered a time when at low tide the mudbanks would turn scarlet with millions of swarming crabs. That color began to fade long ago and now it is never seen anymore." This passage models slow violence precisely species disappear so gradually that their absence becomes apparent only retrospectively. "Age teaches you to recognize the signs of death. You do not see them suddenly you become aware of them very slowly over a period of many, many years." Ecological death accumulates so slowly that no single moment announces catastrophe; yet by the time loss becomes undeniable, entire biological communities have vanished.

The landscape's suffering is paralleled by human subaltern silencing. The indentured laborers transported across the Indian Ocean in the ship's hold experience environmental degradation that mirrors ecological degradation: "The floor of the holding area was soon covered with vomit and urine. This foul-smelling layer of slime welled back and forth with the rolling of the ship, rising inches high against the walls." The contamination is gradual but inevitable waste accumulates, disease spreads, deaths occur incrementally over days. By the time the ship arrives, the human cargo has been partially depleted. Labor and ecology are inseparable forms of colonial exploitation: workers are reduced to resources to be transported and consumed, just as forests are reduced to timber to be extracted.

The resilience that appears most notably in post-colonial landscapes represents not recovery but refusal landscapes continue to exist despite colonial violence, but altered permanently. During the Japanese invasion and mass refugee flight through Burma, the landscape actively resists human movement. Soldiers and refugees traverse "tracks, rivers of mud, flowing through green tunnels of jungle," where "the mud had a strange consistency, more like quicksand than clay. It would suck you in, very suddenly, so that before you knew it, you were in thigh-deep." The mud, degraded by centuries of extraction and war, becomes lethal not through active hostility but through indifference. The landscape simply persists in damaged form, refusing easy traversal, trapping those who attempt movement.

Ghosh's representation of post-extraction landscapes refuses romantic recovery narratives. The forests do not heal; they persist in damaged form. The embankment systems decay when labor supply is interrupted: "The toilets had to be emptied daily of nightsoil by sweepers; water had to be carried up in buckets from a nearby stream. But with the outbreak of the plague, the

sweepers stopped coming." Infrastructure collapses not through dramatic violence but through the withdrawal of maintenance labor. The landscape reasserts itself through disease, through decay, through the sheer persistence of material processes that indifference renders lethal. This is the landscape's silence rendered most eloquently not through articulate resistance but through the refusal to remain stable, predictable, or controllable.

The contrast between *The Hungry Tide* and *The Glass Palace* reveals different modalities through which nature communicates resistance under imperial and postcolonial conditions. In *The Hungry Tide*, nature's voice is overt and eventful: tides reshape terrain daily, storms kill catastrophically, tigers hunt according to calculated predatory logic, mangroves assert territorial claims through impenetrable density. The landscape announces its presence through rhythmic recurrence and catastrophic interruption. Humans must learn to read this language not through instruments but through embodied attunement, through inherited knowledge transmitted across generations.

In *The Glass Palace*, nature appears largely overwritten, exploited, and silenced by colonial capital. Yet this apparent silence contains profound communication. The landscape testifies through scarring, through the accumulation of absence (vanished birds, depleted oil wells, shortened rivers), through the slow death of ecosystems under industrial extraction. The silence is not emptiness; it is the silence of materials speaking against their commodification, of landscapes persisting in damaged form, of ecological processes continuing indifferently to human desire for stability.

Both novels foreground non-human agency one through direct confrontation, the other through residual witness. Piya and Fokir cannot predict the cyclone's exact arrival, cannot control its violence, cannot negotiate with the tiger. Rajkumar and the colonial officers cannot prevent the landscape's degradation, cannot arrest the slow ecological collapse that accompanies extraction, cannot restore what has been destroyed. In both cases, humans are revealed as provisional occupants of territories governed by forces exceeding their comprehension or authority.

The novels' comparative treatment complicates any simple notion of "nature speaking." It suggests that ecological communication operates through multiple registers simultaneously through overt violence and through silent accumulation, through spectacular catastrophe and

through the imperceptible disappearance of species, through rhythmic recurrence and through irreversible transformation. Ghosh's "silent language of nature" names this multiplicity: the language through which landscapes register damage, persist in altered form, refuse complete domestication, continue processes beyond human interference.

This comparative vision contributes to postcolonial ecocriticism by revealing that nature's silencing under colonialism is not the absence of agency but its erasure from colonial representation. The landscapes of *The Glass Palace* speak continuously through decay, through disease, through the slow exhaustion of resources yet imperial discourse renders this communication invisible by naturalizing extraction as progress, by subordinating ecological knowledge to capitalist rationality, by treating the land as mere resource rather than participant in complex assemblages of human and non-human life.

The novels together suggest that ecological justice requires not merely the restoration of "nature" to representational visibility but a fundamental reorientation of how humans position themselves within ecological systems recognition that we are entangled with, not sovereigns over, the landscapes we inhabit; that the earth's communications precede and exceed our languages; that survival depends not on control but on learning to coexist with agentic forces whose purposes are indifferent to human projects.

CONCLUSION

In both *The Hungry Tide* and *The Glass Palace*, Amitav Ghosh develops a fantastic infrastructure where nature is not treated as passive setting or symbolic support but as a mind, speaking in varied, interlacing registers: temporal cycles, disastrous events, material limitations and silence itself. This communication operates both as a witness of colonial violence and as an opposition to anthropocentric histories, which place people in the center of historical agency. In the eyes of Ghosh, nature is a protagonist that has its own time, will and interests in the fight over land, resources and meaning.

The idea of slow violence created by Rob Nixon has allowed seeing colonial and developmental violence not as a sudden, obvious disaster but as a slow, diffused process that builds up over time and space and caters to the populations that are the least guilty of environmental devastation. In *The Hungry Tide*, when the 300,000 deaths of the 1970 cyclone are incorporated into a concept of slow violence by starvation, disease and displacement in the

post-cyclone period; in *The Glass Palace*, the process of teak extraction spreads over decades of girdling, desiccation and felling, becoming so usual that it takes away whole forest regimes. Slow violence as methodological change creates an alternative approach to the concept of postcolonial ecocriticism that focuses on the erosions of empire, but which are not dramatic narrative.

The idea of vibrant matter by Jane Bennett has enabled us to hypothesize the non-human agency in the non-metaphorical but literal sense of power. Tides, storms and forests have something in them which Bennett refers as the thing-power the ability to start, fight and change in a manner that they are not intended to do by humans. This framework dissociates agency with consciousness: the cyclone does not feel anger, but rather behaves like it had an intentional purpose; the mangrove does not contain human beings, but rather leaves them out with its density and aggressiveness. Vibrant matter makes the nature/culture dichotomy on which exploitation has long been based untenable, making visible instead distributed assemblages in which human beings are ensnared by non-human acts whose ends are not concerned with human projects.

The genealogy of nature silencing presented by Christopher Manes has been expanded into a metaphorical system of silent language a response that nature is not dumb in the representations of colonialism and imperialism, but instead the erasure of communication by the imperial-capitalist discourse perspective. Ghosh replenishes voice not by literal pronunciation (nature speaking human language) but by material energy: the landscape speaks with scars (*The Glass Palace*), with rhythmical repetition (*The Hungry Tide*), with the very continuance of processes that are not dependent upon human expectations to be controlled. The silence, in itself, is lyrical the silence of past ages (extinct species, exhausted resources) speaks just as loudly as the screams of the cyclones or the shouts of exiled people.

The primary contribution of the analysis is a change in the way we read environmental imagination of Ghosh. Instead of considering nature as thematic setting or symbolic structure of human drama, we acknowledge nature as main actor, communicator, and opposing object with its own time, logic, and irrevocable demands. This redefines the category of environmental novel: Ghosh does not write environmental novels but, instead, environmental agency is built into the structure of his work as a key determinist of storyline, character growth, and narrative potential. To be exposed to the non-human communications, human characters need to tune

into them, otherwise they will suffer catastrophe as a narrative logic that performs, at the form level, the reorientation that postcolonial ecological thinking requires.

In the case of postcolonial ecocriticism, it focuses on the idea that environmental justice is not possible by focusing solely on human subaltern voice; we have to make recognition of non-human agency and ecological knowledge systems as agents of struggle. Colonial violence works concomitantly on the basis of economic domination, political silencing, and ecological erasure the three can not be separated analytically.

In the case of environmental justice and climate discourses in South Asia, the framework presented by Ghosh provides a remedy to the many Western vocabularies of climate science that tend to exclude Indigenous ecological knowledge. Tidal communities, populations on islands, and peoples reliant on forests are the second line subjects of climate injustice; their embodied, generational experience of environmental cycles and sustainability should become a primary epistemology not a mere local color.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Such discussion can fruitfully be extended to Ghosh climate trilogy *Gun Island* and *Flood of Fire* to see how the explicit climate crisis discourses re-form the metaphor of silent language. Moreover, the comparative analysis of the Indian Ocean writing (Roy, Chambers, Presswala) would shed light on what is unique about the tidal temporality introduced by Ghosh and whether there is a framework movement across genre and geographical imaginaries. Lastly, the interaction between literary form and ecological knowledge systems could also be explored further: how does narrative fragmentation/diary insertion/layered authorship play out the epistemological problems of non-human agency representation and the recovery of erased ecological knowledge?

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