INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE, LITERATURE AND TRANSLATION STUDIES (IJELR)
A QUARTERLY, INDEXED, REFEREED AND PEER REVIEWED OPEN ACCESS INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL
http://www.ijelr.in (Impact Factor: 5.9745) (ICI)

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Vol. 13. Issue 1. 2026 (Jan-March.)

INTERNATIONAL STANDARD SERIAL NUMBER INDIA
2395-2628(Print):2349-9451(online)

Postcolonial Ecofiction and Climate-Induced Displacement: Reading Kamala Markandaya and Amitav Ghosh

T. Deepika[1], Dr. Babi Duli[2]
[1] Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of English, Anurag University, Hyderabad, India
[2] Assistant Professor, Department of English, Anurag University, Hyderabad, India

doi: 10.33329/ijelr.13.1.7

Article information
Article Received:19/12/2025
Article Accepted:10/01/2026
Published online:15/01/2026

Abstract

The paper talks about the concept of ecological changes in the postcolonial perspectives, focusing on the works of Kamala Markandeya and Amitav Ghosh. Ecological issues are more of a social concern rather than a theoretical concept. This article explores how ecological concerns and climate-induced disruptions are portrayed in literary works, focusing particularly on the theme of displacement—both of people and the world. Through the writings of Kamala Markandaya and Amitav Ghosh, it delves into how storytelling becomes a means of bearing witness to environmental crises and human vulnerability, while also offering insight into our shared ecological future.

This study focuses on *The Coffer Dams*, *The Hungry Tide*, and *Gun Island*, using an ecocritical lens to explore how environmental degradation is deeply entwined with histories of exploitation and unequal power structures. These works bring to light the often-overlooked voices of marginalised communities—fisherfolk, rural farmers, tribal groups, and women—whose lives are directly impacted by ecological disruption and environmental conflict. Through their stories, the novels reveal how climate change is not just a scientific crisis but a lived reality for those on the frontlines. The analysis has been structured in different dimensions, considering the basic ecocritical theory, which extends to theories like Anthropocene, slow violence, eco-justice, and even displacement. The socio-ecological concerns, narrative structure, and thematic factors are also considered for the analysis.

The common intersections of the three novels are aspects like the relationship of environment with human beings in the age of environmental degradation, displacement due to ecological changes, and storytelling as a resistance. The mainstream and marginalised voices are also a part of the analysis.

Key words: Ecological disruption – Eco-justice - Power structure – Climate issues.

Introduction

Post colonial literature raises the concerns of ecological exploitation and its sustainability over a wider range. It has established an identity with the theme of ill-treatment and cultural displacement through the social narratives. Post coloniality often thematises these different levels of exploitations like colonial exploitation, labour exploitation, gender exploitation and even religious, caste based and community based exploitation at different levels. The literary explorations of post colonial literature interrogates nature, culture relationships often foregrounding the ethical, political and the cultural dimensions.

This article explores how ecological concerns and climate-induced disruptions are portrayed in literary works, focusing particularly on the theme of displacement—both of people and the natural world. It talks about the concept of ecological changes in the postcolonial perspectives, focusing on the works of Kamala Markandeya and Amitav Ghosh. Amitav Ghosh's writing, while spanning historical and contemporary settings, consistently engages with the global and ecological dimensions of postcolonial experience. His fiction often examines how historical trade, migration, and colonial exploitation shape present-day social and environmental realities. Sarbani Mukherjee and Soumitra Roy view that Ghosh often discusses themes like oriental representations of ecological consciousness, environmental evocations and its postmodern creations (6). The authors focus on the cultural connect of Ghosh which led him to constantly weave ecology and culture together. Myths, legends and even folklore become a part of the ecological ethics often becomes thematic exploration in Ghosh's works. The themes of cultural erasure and environmental destruction go hand in hand as far as Indian literature is concerned. The ecological imprints often reflect an indigenous perspective through a co-existence with nature. The dialectics of nature-culture often gets merged in the novels of Ghosh through sustainable themes in his novels.

Kamala Markandaya's fiction primarily focuses on rural and urban India in the aftermath of British colonialism. Her novels explore the socio-economic and cultural dislocations caused by colonial and post-independence transformations. Set in post-independence India, Kamala Markandaya's *The Cofferdams* examines the conflicts between the demands of industrial development and traditional rural life. The term also works as a metaphor: the physical cofferdams symbolize developmental modernity and the conflict between technological progress and indigenous ways of life. The novel critiques how such projects, carried out in postcolonial India with Western expertise, often caused displacement, cultural erasure, and ecological disruption. The building of cofferdams, which is a metaphor as mentioned above for human attempts to manipulate and control nature, and the significant ecological and social upheavals these endeavours bring about, are central to the novel. In a recently independent nation, Markandaya depicts the uprooting of communities, the deterioration of traditional values, and the ethical quandaries that people encounter while negotiating a rapidly modernising society.

In *The Hungry Tide*, Amitav Ghosh brings the Sundarbans—a vast and fragile mangrove region straddling India and Bangladesh—to life, exploring the intricate connections between humans, wildlife, and their environment. The story follows Piyali Roy, a dedicated marine biologist studying river dolphins, Kanai Dutt, a translator caught between his corporate life and personal curiosity, and the local fishermen whose daily existence is shaped by the rhythms of the tides and rivers. Ghosh interweaves historical stories of refugee settlements with the immediate challenges of ecological crises, showing how floods, cyclones, and rising waters threaten human livelihoods. The novel also sensitively portrays interactions between people and animals, revealing how environmental fragility amplifies social inequalities and echoes the enduring impact of colonial histories.

In *Gun Island*, Ghosh takes readers on a journey with Deen Datta, a rare-books dealer from Kolkata, as he travels from Venice to the Sundarbans and on to California, tracing stories that link ancient legends with the pressing realities of modern ecological crises. Through Deen's encounters, the

novel explores the human costs of climate change, showing how environmental disruptions force communities to leave their homes and adapt to new realities. By weaving together folklore, historical trade networks, and contemporary environmental challenges, Ghosh emphasises the deep interconnections between past and present, and the shared responsibility humans have toward the natural world. The narrative carries a sense of urgency and intimacy, making the global issue of climate change feel immediate and deeply personal.

Literature Review

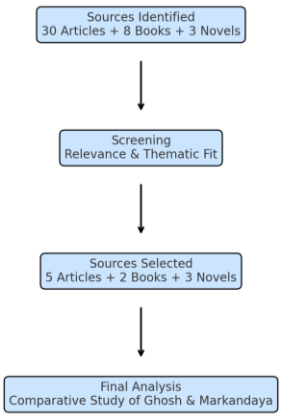
A review of the existing scholarship on Amitav Ghosh and Kamala Markandaya reveals a sustained critical engagement with the intersections of culture, ecology, and postcolonial identity. For this study, thirty peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters, and scholarly essays were initially surveyed. Out of these, 5 were selected for detailed analysis, based on their direct relevance to the ecological and cultural dimensions in the novels under consideration.

The scholarship on Amitav Ghosh has primarily focused on his engagement with the environment, migration, and the Anthropocene. Critics such as Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee (2010) emphasize Ghosh's contribution to postcolonial ecocriticism, particularly in The Hungry Tide, where indigenous ecological knowledge intersects with scientific discourse. Similarly, Jopi Nyman (2014) and Kavita Datla (2018) underscore how Ghosh situates environmental vulnerability within historical and cultural frameworks, linking local mythologies such as Bon Bibi to broader global crises.

On the other hand, the critical reception of Kamala Markandaya's works often situates her novels in the context of development, displacement, and ecological degradation under the guise of modernity. Meenakshi Mukherjee (1994) highlights how The Coffer Dams interrogates the violence of large-scale development projects, while K. M. George (2002) and Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan (1999) note Markandaya's exploration of the tensions between tradition and modernization, particularly how ecological imbalance results from cultural erasure.

A comparative reading of these critics reveals that both Ghosh and Markandaya frame the environment not as a passive backdrop but as an active presence in shaping cultural identities and ethical responsibilities. While Ghosh often turns to myth, folklore, and indigenous epistemologies as ecological signifiers, Markandaya critiques the ideology of progress and the disruption of harmonious relationships with nature.

Thus, the selected 5 articles along with the three primary sources converge in highlighting the cultural-ecological nexus in Indian English fiction, positioning Ghosh and Markandaya as key voices in narrating the ecological imprints of postcolonial modernity. Here's a visual comparison of the sources referred vs. selected for analysis across articles, books, and novels



Below is the review of some selected works based on Amitav Ghosh and Kamala Markandeya:

The paper entitled, "Eco-Critical Approach of Amitav Ghosh and Kamala Markandaya" written by Vinod Manoharrao Kukade, deals with the eco-critical approach of Amitav Ghosh and Kamala Markandaya in their selected novels. The focus is on finding the approach of Amitav Ghosh and Kamala Markandaya towards continuous devastation of the natural atmosphere and deterioration of the relationship between man and nature. Both the writers are called great environmentalists who criticize the inhuman behaviour and ill-treatment of the human beings towards the aspects of nature. The healthy atmosphere of the universe has been getting destroyed since long back by different illogical and unethical attitudes of the people towards one another and towards nature. Both the writers have highlighted in their novels the imperialistic tendency of the colonizers and growing modernization which devastated the healthy environment and broke the amicable relationship between man and nature. This paper studies the Sea of Poppies (2008) of Amitav Ghosh and The Coffer Dams (1969) of Kamala Markandaya. An analytical method is used to go through the study.

Another work entitled, "A Postcolonial Utopia for the Anthropocene: Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* and Climate-Induced Migration" written by B Jones, analyses Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* represents the impact of climate change and the Anthropocene on climate-induced migration in South Asia. Environmental Consciousness and Displacement in Amitav Ghosh's Fiction: A Critical Exploration is another paper connected with the works of Amitav Ghosh with an ecocritical perspective. The interaction between humans and the natural world is a common theme in these authors' works.

The work begins from a social consciousness of ecological issues and the necessity to upbring the awareness through the analytical perspective of the literary text. It also deals with the human experiences and the mental, cultural and social effects of it through the depiction of different characters.

Theoretical foundation

Ecocriticism has been called by different names like green narratives, literary ecology, environmental humanities, eco-aesthetics, cli-fi and even more names. It has been called by different names and the concept remains the same. It also extends to the inter-disciplinary, cross-disciplinary and finally leading to a disciplinary nature. The movement from interdisciplinarity to cross-disciplinarity and finally towards a disciplinarity reflects a shifting understanding of how knowledge systems interact and evolve beyond traditional disciplinary boundaries.

Ecocriticism is an approach within literary and cultural studies that focuses on the relationship between literature and the physical environment. It questions anthropocentrism and emphasizes the intrinsic value of the natural world, seeking to understand how cultural texts represent, construct, or critique ecological realities. Emerging in the 1990s as part of environmental humanities, the field has since broadened into an interdisciplinary arena that connects literature, ecology, philosophy, cultural studies, and social justice. Scholars such as Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm laid its foundations with The Ecocriticism Reader (1996), which remains a landmark in articulating the scope of the discipline**. Lawrence Buell's** The Environmental Imagination (1995) further established ecocriticism by situating nature writing at the heart of American literary traditions, while Greg Garrard's Ecocriticism (2004) offered one of the first comprehensive introductions to the field.

In its development, ecocriticism has often been described in waves. The first wave was concerned largely with nature writing, Romantic poetry, and the celebration of wilderness. The second wave expanded to issues of environmental justice, urban ecologies, and intersections with postcolonial and feminist critiques, while contemporary approaches examine climate fiction, Anthropocene studies, Indigenous epistemologies, and ecofeminism. A key concern of ecocriticism is the representation of nature in literature—whether romanticized, commodified, or subjected to exploitation—and how such portrayals shape human understanding of ecological crises. This concern extends to the politics of

environmental justice, which highlights how marginalized and Indigenous communities are disproportionately affected by ecological degradation.

Literary texts from across cultures provide fertile ground for ecocritical readings. In the Western tradition, Henry David Thoreau's Walden (1854) is often celebrated for its reflections on simplicity and communion with nature, while Rachel Carson's Silent Spring (1962) revolutionized public awareness of environmental hazards. In the Indian context, Kamala Markandaya's The Coffer Dams (1969) critiques developmental projects and their ecological consequences, while Amitav Ghosh's novels such as *The Hungry Tide* (2004) and Gun Island (2019) explore the entanglements of ecology, migration, and climate change. Ghosh's non-fiction work, The Great Derangement (2016), powerfully argues that modern literature has largely failed to grapple with the realities of the climate crisis. Writers like Mahasweta Devi have also drawn attention to tribal resistance against ecological exploitation, thereby linking environmental concerns with social justice. Through such contributions, ecocriticism has moved beyond a narrow study of nature writing to interrogate global ecological crises in relation to power, culture, and history. It foregrounds the urgent need to reimagine the human–nonhuman relationship in order to confront the challenges of environmental destruction and climate change. The major concept of green narrative connects the present discussions of eco criticism with the literary texts. Rather than a ece fiction, the literature gets elevated to the level of narration in different levels.

Green narratives are stories, poems, or other literary works that focus on the environment and the relationships between humans, animals, plants, and ecosystems. These works aim to raise awareness about issues such as environmental degradation, climate change, and sustainability, while also exploring the ethical and cultural dimensions of how humans interact with nature.

The study of green narratives is closely linked to ecocriticism, which examines the connections between literature and the natural world. According to Cheryll Glotfelty (1996), ecocriticism is the study of literature's relationship with the physical environment, showing how texts can help people think more carefully about ecological issues. Lawrence Buell (1995) adds that a literary work becomes ecological when the environment is treated not just as a backdrop, but as an active and morally significant part of the story.

In postcolonial and global contexts, scholars such as Rob Nixon (2011) have emphasized that environmental harm often occurs as *slow violence*—gradual, hidden damage that disproportionately affects marginalized communities. Ursula K. Heise (2008) points out that green narratives are not only concerned with local ecologies but also reflect global environmental crises, showing how ecosystems, cultures, and histories are interconnected. In short, green narratives are more than just stories about nature. They encourage readers to reflect on humanity's role in ecological systems, consider issues of environmental justice, and think about how cultural, ethical, and political factors shape our relationship with the natural world.

The climate crisis has unsettled the cultural imagination, demanding new modes of storytelling that grapple with ecological precarity, displacement, and survival. Emerging at the crossroads of literature and environmental humanities, green narratives foreground the entanglement between humans and nonhuman worlds, making visible the political, social, and cultural dimensions of ecological disruption. Within the postcolonial context, these narratives acquire sharper urgency: environmental degradation is not only a planetary phenomenon but also a deeply uneven one, disproportionately impacting communities in the Global South who are already negotiating histories of colonial exploitation, resource extraction, and structural inequities.

Postcolonial ecofiction thus becomes a critical lens through which to examine literary responses to climate change, particularly in regions where colonial legacies and neo-imperial capitalism shape ecological vulnerabilities. Writers from South Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean, for example, depict landscapes scarred by both colonial histories and climate disasters—plantations turned wastelands,

coastlines eroded by rising seas, or agrarian livelihoods uprooted by drought. Such works resist universalist "climate change" discourses that erase local histories, instead grounding ecological narratives in situated experiences of dispossession, resilience, and adaptation.

A central theme within these green narratives is climate-induced displacement, which increasingly defines twenty-first-century human mobility. Migration caused by rising sea levels, desertification, and extreme weather does not occur in isolation but intersects with caste, class, gender, and ethnic vulnerabilities. Postcolonial ecofiction addresses these dislocations not merely as environmental consequences but as lived realities where identity, belonging, and community are continuously renegotiated. Fictional accounts of displaced fisherfolk, flood-survivor communities, or drought refugees expand our understanding of climate migration beyond statistics, providing affective and ethical registers for comprehending loss, trauma, and survival.

By weaving ecological consciousness with postcolonial critique, green narratives challenge dominant paradigms of progress, development, and modernity. They unsettle anthropocentric hierarchies, foreground interdependence between human and nonhuman actors, and articulate alternative imaginaries of co-existence and resilience. Reading postcolonial ecofiction through the prism of climate-induced displacement thus offers a vital framework for grasping how literature mediates the uneven burdens of the Anthropocene, while simultaneously imagining more just and sustainable futures.

Ghosh's The Hungry Tide exemplifies ecofiction, blending narrative art with ecological consciousness. Set in the Sundarbans, a liminal tidal zone between land and sea, the novel foregrounds the precarious relationship between humans, animals, and the mangrove ecology. The novel's portrayal of this unstable landscape—constantly reshaped by tides, cyclones, and erosion—embodies what Ursula Heise terms eco-cosmopolitanism, situating local struggles within global environmental concerns.

The nonhuman world in the novel is not merely a backdrop but an active agent: tides determine the fate of villages, rivers redraw boundaries, and the endangered Irrawaddy dolphins remind readers of fragile biodiversity. The representation of nature in *The Hungry Tide* resonates with postcolonial ecocriticism, as it foregrounds how colonial histories of resource extraction and developmental interventions (such as embankment building) compound ecological fragility. Nature in the Sundarbans is thus inseparable from human histories of exploitation, survival, and resistance.

The Sundarbans in the novel also epitomize the lived realities of climate-induced displacement. Rising tides, cyclones, and eroding islands continually displace communities, leaving them in cycles of migration and resettlement. The fate of Morichjhãpi island—the site where thousands of marginalized refugees attempted to build lives, only to be violently displaced by the state in 1979—haunts the narrative as a political parable of ecological precarity and state violence. This episode illustrates how displacement is never purely environmental but deeply entangled with class, caste, and state power.

Fokir, the illiterate fisherman, lives a life at the mercy of tidal ecology, embodying the dispossession of marginalized communities. Piya, the diasporic marine biologist, represents a global ecological perspective, translating local vulnerability into a wider environmental discourse. The tiger attacks and recurrent storms highlight how survival in the Sundarbans is both an ecological and existential struggle. The Sundarbans thus become a literary microcosm of the Anthropocene's uneven burdens, where the poorest populations are most vulnerable to climate displacement. Ghosh's narrative anticipates twenty-first-century concerns about climate refugees, sea-level rise, and forced migration, making *The Hungry Tide* a seminal ecofictional exploration of climate displacement in South Asia. By weaving together ecological imagery, historical memory, and stories of displacement*, The Hungry Tide* bridges ecofiction and climate migration studies. It reminds us that climate-induced displacement cannot be abstracted from colonial histories, structural inequalities, and cultural imaginaries. As a green

narrative, it not only records ecological vulnerability but also provokes ethical reflection on resilience, justice, and coexistence in the age of climate crisis.

Kamala Markandaya's *The Coffer Dams* (1969) can be seen as one of the earliest instances of Indian English ecofiction, situating ecological disruption within the rhetoric of postcolonial development. The novel dramatizes the construction of a massive hydroelectric dam in South India, which is projected as a symbol of modern progress and technological mastery. Yet, beneath this narrative of national development lies the silenced story of displacement, as tribal communities are uprooted from their lands and rivers are violently reconfigured into reservoirs. The ecological world of forests and rivers is stripped of its cultural significance and converted into a resource for extraction, thereby replicating colonial logics of domination under the banner of modernization. Markandaya's work anticipates later ecocritical concerns by exposing the violence embedded in developmentalist discourse, highlighting that the costs of progress are disproportionately borne by the most vulnerable.

In *The Gun Island* (2019), Ghosh expands his ecological imagination beyond the Sundarbans into a transnational framework that connects South Asia with Venice and Los Angeles. Moving between myth and realism, the novel reworks the legend of the Gun Merchant to explore the global dimensions of climate change, extinction, and forced migration. The plight of the Sundarbans is linked to the Mediterranean refugee crisis and California wildfires, demonstrating how climate-induced displacement is no longer confined to vulnerable peripheries but reverberates across the globe. By fusing folklore with contemporary crises, Ghosh emphasizes both the deep historical roots and the planetary scale of ecological disruption in the Anthropocene.

Taken together, these three works chart the trajectory of postcolonial ecofiction in Indian writing. *The Coffer Dams* foregrounds the displacement caused by state-led development projects, *The Hungry Tide* situates ecological precarity within a local yet historically burdened landscape, and *The Gun Island* situates South Asian vulnerability within a global narrative of climate migration. What unites them is the insistence that ecological transformation and human displacement are inseparable, and that the costs of environmental change are distributed unequally across lines of class, caste, and geography. Through their depictions of disrupted landscapes and uprooted lives, Markandaya and Ghosh interrogate dominant narratives of progress, modernity, and globalization, offering instead a literary archive of resistance, survival, and ecological consciousness.

The characters and metaphorical images of the three works also focusses on teh ecological attitude which is prominent as a theatic study. The entanglement of literature and ecology finds compelling expression in Amitav Ghosh's The Gun Island and The Hungry Tide, alongside Kamala Markandaya's The Coffer Dams. These novels foreground the tension between development, myth, displacement, and environmental precarity. Characters within these works become vehicles through which the writers articulate ecological crises, human resilience, and cultural imaginaries. Examining the characters' attitudes toward ecology reveals how literature weaves together environmental realities and metaphorical landscapes, reflecting both South Asian ecological thought and the broader global crisis.

Amitav Ghosh's The Gun Island presents a globalized ecological narrative that ties together myth, migration, and climate change. At its center is Deen Datta, a rare book dealer whose skepticism towards myth transforms into ecological awakening. Initially reluctant to confront environmental issues, Deen is compelled by the legend of the "Gun Merchant" (Bonduki Sadagar) to explore connections between human migration and ecological collapse. His attitude evolves from detached intellectualism to direct ecological consciousness. Deen becomes a symbolic figure of modern humanity—educated, skeptical, yet ultimately forced to recognize the urgency of climate crises.

Other characters reinforce the ecological fabric of the novel. Piya, a marine biologist returning from The Hungry Tide, carries forward her scientific sensibility, underscoring how climate shifts

displace both humans and animals. Her work with cetaceans embodies a deep ecological ethos, suggesting kinship between species. Meanwhile, Cinta, the Venetian scholar, anchors ecology within cultural memory. Her narratives reveal that myth is not mere superstition but a repository of ecological wisdom encoded in metaphor.

Metaphorically, The Gun Island employs the figure of the Bonduki Sadagar as a symbol of humanity's restless drive for expansion, trade, and exploitation. The snake goddess Manasa, who curses the merchant, embodies ecological retribution—a force resisting human hubris. Storms, wildfires, and refugee boats serve as recurring images of ecological catastrophe, representing both natural upheaval and human displacement. The novel insists that climate change is not only scientific fact but also mythic truth—an inheritance passed through culture, haunting present ecological consciousness. Amitav Ghosh's *The Gun Island* presents a globalized ecological narrative that ties together myth, migration, and climate change. At its center is Deen Datta, a rare book dealer whose skepticism towards myth transforms into ecological awakening. Initially reluctant to confront environmental issues, Deen is compelled by the legend of the "Gun Merchant" (Bonduki Sadagar) to explore connections between human migration and ecological collapse. His attitude evolves from detached intellectualism to direct ecological consciousness. Deen becomes a symbolic figure of modern humanity—educated, skeptical, yet ultimately forced to recognize the urgency of climate crises.

Other characters reinforce the ecological fabric of the novel. Piya, a marine biologist returning from The Hungry Tide, carries forward her scientific sensibility, underscoring how climate shifts displace both humans and animals. Her work with cetaceans embodies a deep ecological ethos, suggesting kinship between species. Meanwhile, Cinta, the Venetian scholar, anchors ecology within cultural memory. Her narratives reveal that myth is not mere superstition but a repository of ecological wisdom encoded in metaphor.

The Gun Island employs the figure of the Bonduki Sadagar as a symbol of humanity's restless drive for expansion, trade, and exploitation. The snake goddess Manasa, who curses the merchant, embodies ecological retribution—a force resisting human hubris. Storms, wildfires, and refugee boats serve as recurring images of ecological catastrophe, representing both natural upheaval and human displacement. The novel insists that climate change is not only scientific fact but also mythic truth—an inheritance passed through culture, haunting present ecological consciousness.

Ghosh's earlier novel *The Hungry Tide* is a profound ecological meditation centered on the Sundarbans, a tidal archipelago marked by beauty and precarity. Its characters embody differing approaches to ecology. Piyali Roy (Piya), the American-Indian cetologist, represents the rational-scientific mode of engagement with ecology. Her work with the Irrawaddy dolphins is marked by rigor and empathy, seeking to understand non-human life beyond exploitation. Yet, her position as an outsider reflects a form of "ecological tourism"—her engagement with the Sundarbans is temporary, and her understanding filtered through Western science. In contrast, Kanai Dutt, a translator from Delhi, approaches the environment through language, history, and commerce. He initially embodies urban detachment, viewing the Sundarbans as a curiosity rather than home. His encounters with the land and its myths, particularly through Nirmal's journal, force him to confront the violence of ecological displacement and the vulnerability of marginalized communities.

Fokir, the illiterate fisherman, emerges as the novel's most profound ecological subject. His deep attunement to tides, currents, and animal movement exemplifies indigenous ecological knowledge. Fokir does not articulate ecology in scientific terms but lives it as embodied practice. His sacrifice during the storm symbolizes the vulnerability of subaltern ecological actors—those who protect the environment but suffer the most from its fury. The tide itself becomes the novel's central ecological image of the work. It embodies both sustenance and destruction, echoing the precarious balance between human survival and natural forces. The figure of the Bon Bibi, a forest goddess worshipped in

the Sundarbans, encapsulates a syncretic ecological spirituality where protection, myth, and livelihood intertwine. The dolphins serve as metaphors for cross-species kinship, urging readers to extend empathy beyond human life. Together, Piya, Kanai, and Fokir dramatize the intersections of science, myth, and lived ecology. Their differing attitudes highlight the plurality of ecological engagement, demonstrating that no single framework—scientific, mythological, or experiential—suffices alone.

Kamala Markandaya's *The Coffer Dams* situates its ecological narrative within the industrial project of dam construction in post-independence India. The novel dramatizes the clash between technological modernity and indigenous ecology, illustrating how "progress" displaces both people and ecosystems. Howard Clinton, the British engineer, represents the technocratic mindset that equates dams with development. His attitude towards ecology is marked by arrogance and instrumental rationality. For Clinton, the landscape is an obstacle to be conquered, and rivers are to be disciplined by machines. His colonial legacy resonates in his disregard for local communities and their knowledge.Mackendrick, his fellow engineer, embodies a more conflicted stance. While complicit in the project, he is uneasy about its human and environmental costs, reflecting the novel's critique of unexamined progress. On the other hand, Basu, the Indian engineer, occupies a liminal position. Torn between nationalistic pride in development and awareness of its consequences, Basu reflects India's own ambivalence during the Nehruvian era of modernization. His consciousness marks the transitional space between tradition and modernity, ecological reverence and industrial ambition. Women in the novel, particularly Helen Clinton, also reflect ecological sensitivity. Alienated from her husband's colonial arrogance, Helen perceives the destructive impact of the dam on both land and people. Her sympathy for the displaced villagers reveals an ecological ethic tied to care, compassion, and relationality.

The dam itself stands as the central image—a structure intended to tame nature but ultimately exposing human hubris. The submergence of villages under water symbolizes the erasure of ecological memory and community. Rivers, traditionally sacred in Indian culture, are rendered mechanical resources, reflecting the violence of anthropocentrism. When read together, these novels articulate a continuum of ecological consciousness within Indian English literature.

In *The Gun Island,* ecology is framed within the global climate crisis, with myth and migration illuminating planetary interconnections. Whereas *The Hungry Tide,* ecology is depicted intensely local, dramatizing how myth, science, and lived knowledge coalesce in the Sundarbans. The perspective of ecological consciousness is of a different method in The Coffer Dams. The ecology is mediated through development discourse, revealing the violence of modernization on traditional landscapes.

The characters' attitudes reveal shifting paradigms: from Fokir's embodied ecological intimacy, to Piya's scientific detachment, to Deen's reluctant awakening, to Clinton's exploitative arrogance. These differing postures reflect broader cultural negotiations with ecology—between myth and science, tradition and modernity, local survival and global mobility. The snake goddess, the tide, and the dam function as ecological emblems in the works during different situations. They illustrate how literature encodes ecological thought within cultural forms: mythic curses, tidal rhythms, and monumental structures become symbolic sites where human ambition collides with ecological reality.

Conclusion

The Indian version of ecofiction establishes a close connection with culture, which distinguishes it from the Western theoretical context where ecological narratives are often framed more in terms of universal environmental ethics than localized cultural traditions. Kamala Markandaya's *The Coffer Dams* highlights how big development projects, celebrated as progress, often destroy communities and displace the poor. Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* and *The Gun Island* take this further, portraying both the fragile ecology of the Sundarbans and the wider global crises of climate migration. Together, these novels remind us that climate change is never experienced in the same way by everyone—it falls

most heavily on those who are already vulnerable because of class, caste, gender, and geography. Reading these works through postcolonial ecocriticism helps us see that the climate crisis is not only about rising seas or disappearing species, but also about justice, inequality, and power. As Huggan and Tiffin note, environmental concerns cannot be separated from political and social questions. Rob Nixon's idea of "slow violence" also helps us understand how climate change and ecological damage often happen gradually but cause lasting harm to marginalized communities. Ghosh himself has pointed out in *The Great Derangement* that literature has often failed to capture the urgency of the climate crisis, even though his own novels show how stories, myths, and memories can open up new ways of imagining our relationship with the natural world. Ultimately, Indian ecofiction challenges the idea that climate change is a single, universal experience. Instead, it emphasises uneven vulnerability and the lived realities of displacement. These works question dominant ideas of progress and modernity and call for stories that stress interconnection, resilience, and justice. By rooting environmental questions in histories of colonialism, migration, and inequality, Indian writers contribute to a global body of ecofiction that speaks both from local contexts and to shared planetary concerns. In doing so, they not only record ecological loss but also imagine possibilities for more just and sustainable ways of living in an era of climate crisis.

References

Primary sources

Ghosh, A. (2004). *The hungry tide*. HarperCollins.

Ghosh, A. (2019). *Gun island*. Penguin Random House.

Markandaya, K. (1969). *The coffer dams*. Penguin.

Secondary sources

Bate, J. (1991). *Romantic ecology: Wordsworth and the environmental tradition*. Routledge.

Bharucha, R. (2007). Whose voice? The question of representation in the Sundarbans. *Interventions, 9*(1), 87–98.

Buell, L. (1995). *The environmental imagination: Thoreau, nature writing, and the formation of American culture*. Harvard University Press.

Buell, L. (2001). *Writing for an endangered world: Literature, culture, and environment in the U.S. and beyond*. Harvard University Press.

Carson, R. (1962). *Silent spring*. Houghton Mifflin.

Common ecological themes infographic. (2025, September 1). Image generated by OpenAI's DALL·E.

DeLoughrey, E. (2019). *Allegories of the Anthropocene*. Duke University Press.

Garrard, G. (2012). *Ecocriticism* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Ghosh, A. (2016). *The great derangement: Climate change and the unthinkable*. University of Chicago Press.

Glotfelty, C., & Fromm, H. (Eds.). (1996). *The ecocriticism reader: Landmarks in literary ecology*. University of Georgia Press.

Heise, U. K. (2008). *Sense of place and sense of planet: The environmental imagination of the global*. Oxford University Press.

Huggan, G., & Tiffin, H. (2015). *Postcolonial ecocriticism: Literature, animals, environment* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Mukherjee, U. P. (2010). *Postcolonial environments: Nature, culture and the contemporary Indian novel in English*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Nixon, R. (2011). *Slow violence and the environmentalism of the poor*. Harvard University Press.

Rai, A. S., & Nair, R. B. (Eds.). (2005). *Postcolonial theory and literature: A reader*. Oxford University Press.

Rao, V. N. (2001). Nature, ecology, and environmentalism in Indian literature. *Indian Literature, 45*(2), 145–158.

Shiva, V. (1989). *Staying alive: Women, ecology, and development*. Zed Books.

Trexler, A. (2015). *Anthropocene fictions: The novel in a time of climate change*. University of Virginia Press.

Williams, R. (1973). *The country and the city*. Oxford University Press.