

AMITAV GHOSH'S THE HUNGRY TIDE: AN ECOCRITICAL READING

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Abstract

Piyali, a marine cetologist, who came to the tidal land of the Sundarbans as a part of her research on rare dolphins. Kanai Dutt, who has his business venture in Delhi reached to the shore of the tidal country, to visit his aunt Neelima. Kanai Dutt act as a translator between Piyali and Fokir, the inhabitant of the tidal land. The Novel portrays the encounter between the nature and the human beings. The entire plot of the story intertwined with the alternate movement of the tide and the myth of the tiger goddess. Fokir sacrifice his life to rescue the life of Piyali. Piyali and Kanai Dutt atleast dedicate their whole life to serve the tidal country. All human beings, animals and nature are interconnected to each other as in a chain. If any part of the chain breaks the entire ecological balance gets destroyed.

Keywords

- 1) Bonbibi Myth
- 2) Cetologist
- 3) Ecocriticism
- 4) Mangrove Forest
- 5) Morichjhanpi
- 6) Orcaella brevirostris
- 7) Sahara Project
- 8) Sundarbans

9) Tiger Reserve

Man evolved on the earth as a part of the ecological balance. But as he began to populate, his greed and hunger grew. Nature too reacted man's greed by showing its vicious side. The Hungry Tide, as the name suggest, is a fascinating novel by Amitav Ghosh in which he portrays the life of the people in the Sundarban, twisted and curled by the tide. These unexpected tide forms the basic plot of this novel where the lives of different worlds collide. The corpus of Ghosh's fiction expands while planning through wide angle lenses of topics.

Ecocriticism, one of the revisionist moments in the area of literary and cultural studies, deals with the relationships between human, culture, society and the natural world. Many ecocritics date the birth of the word "ecocriticism" to WilliamRueckert, the renowned ecocritic, in his 1978 essay "Literature and Ecology: An experiment in Ecocriticism". According to him ecocriticism entails "the application of ecology and ecological concepts to study of literature".

The Hungry Tide is noted for the element of eco – criticism in it, though Indian fiction is never away from this idea. A great attempt has been made to use nature as a backdrop of the novel. Ghosh has serious concerns for ecology. This novel is mainly about one of the wonders of the ecological systems of the world Sundarbans. The novel also objects the antagonism of nature against human beings.

The Hungry Tide gives us a real journey through the Sundarbans. Between the sea and the plains of Bengal on the eastern most coast of India, lies an immense archipelago of islands in which some are vast and some no larger than sandbars. These are the sundarbans where there are no borders to divide fresh water from salt, river from sea, even land from water.

Piyali Roy is a young marine cetologist who is in search of a rare endangered river dolphin orcaella Brevirostris. Though she does not know Bengali, she reaches there alone for the search. On her expedition to find out the species, Piya's destiny collides with that of Fokir, in the novel is a forest guide whose duty is to accompany the wood cutters and hunters on their exploration to the forest. He gives more importance to the safety of the outsiders. Amitav Ghosh presents to Fokir as a person who has close intimacy with the tide country and the

creatures like man eating Tigers, sharks, crocodiles and snakes. Fokir is the epitome of an ecological forerunner. Piya was thrown out from the boat by the guards who were taking her to the inland river. The exploitation of a foreigners by the guards is well shown where Piya has to give lot of money to get her lost backpacks.

The novel alternates the life of Piya with that of Kanai Dutt, a reputed business man as well as a good translator. He was forced to come to Luisibari, where his aunt, Nilima wanted to hand over him a package given by her husband before his death. Nilima could only discovers this package of Nirmal, now, twenty years after his death.

Ghosh's novel consists of two parts – a) The Ebb: Bhata which means low tide and b) The Flood: Jowar which means high tide. The novel is a mixing and merging of myth and legend along with real human challenger. The exotic beauty of Sundarbans is fascinating and at the same time the people attracted to this beauty is devastated by the hungry tides. It is said that during the tide the entire island is submerged under water. Only when the tide lowers, the forest gives birth.

The story attains its pace when Kanai meets Piya and offers to be her translator. She needs Kanai's help to reveal the story of the Irrawaddy dolphins. For the people of the tide country, dolphins are BonBibi's messengers. Amitav Ghosh has highlighted the local myth of BonBibi, the tiger goddess of the tide country people. There is a scene where Kanai is attacked by a tiger and he gets a narrow escape. The villagers set fire to the tiger alive. The Sundarbans is well known for its tiger reserve forest.

On the larger part of the narrative, many events happen that include Kanai's reading through Nirmal's journal in which Nirmal has planned his severe love for Bangladeshi refugees who were trying to establish their own settlement in a small uninhabited island of Sundarbans called Morchjhapi. Nirmal's love for these refugees is triggered partly by the socialist ideologies of his youth and partly by the inspiring life of a girl named Kusum whom once Nilima had given shelter in her trust premises. As the novel develops, the main text keeps moving with Kanai, Fokir, Piya, Nilima and Moyna and their encounters with the ecological and cultural layers of the tidal land. The diary reveals that Nirmal envies Nilima for she had proved herself to be an active social activist. The Badabon Trust formed by

her initiative was a hope to the whole village. The hospital was a comfort for them. The gratitude and respect Nilima got where those that Nirmal could not earn in his whole life.

The novelist tries to compare the implications of ecologists and environmentalists regarding the disturbances of ecosystems by human influence with the presence of human traces in natural ecosystem. It is to be doubted that as the era passes if these understanding have faded. Now man does not take nature's sign or warnings seriously. Instead he has become master of his own world and want to rule it. Anything that hinders his rules are destroyed. The idea of understanding and balance is not attained. In the later part of the novel, when Fokir and Piya reach Garjontola to study the dolphins a second time, they observe that the motorboat of the forest department has ruthlessly killed a baby dolphin. Even Piya's life in the Sundarbans and her equations with Fokir make a kind of "ecological balance". While, for Fokir the tidal land is a part of his very "being and his existence", for Piya the Sundarbans is a natural ecosystem which she has to "study" as a part of her research and then return to the cityscape to which she originally belongs. Piya's affinity to Fokir to his life is mainly because his life's rhythm matches the nature and environment. She loves nature through Fokir's eyes and his approaches towards the tiger burning incidents is an antonym. Earlier times man had forseen the natural catastrophes even without the aid of any modern equipments or technologies. Fokir comprehends the location of the dolphins and the force of the tides better than the GPS of Piya. A subtle irony is devised through this eco - friendliness of Fokir.

Each time the tide rises, the people has to shift their houses and they become wanderers. They can return only when the tide lowers. The vicious face of nature is depicted evidently here. Man is helpless to fight against nature even in the most advanced stage of technology and progress. The Hungry Tide gets a twist in the climax scene. The lives of main characters change by the cyclone episode. Piya and Kanai decides to reconstruct their experiences from their memories. Piya got the track of GPS to fulfill her mission. She even plans to learn Bengali and stay in Lusibari. In the storm, Fokir dies and Piya becomes the sole survivor. So Piya wants to build a memorial for Fokir and to help his wife, Moyana and son, Tutul. Kanai too decides to shift his residence to Sundarbans from Delhi, so that he can visit the tide country often.

As the novel comes to an end we can see there is a new hope merging. Even though nature shows its anger; it is human will that makes him survive and build upon whatever has been destroyed. Amitav Ghosh's novel depicts the destruction of the ecosystem and human survival. We cannot make a sole choice between the two. Once the reader starts reading, he is familiar with the nook and corner of tide country. It is as if one has completed a strangest journey through the land. The author highlights the importance of conservation of nature. The Sundarbans, which is famous for its mangrove forest, the tiger reserve, the rarest dolphin species provide the main themes for the novel.

A special prominence has been given to the tiger in the novel. Presently, most development projects, promoters seeking diversion of forest land for a non- forestry purpose have to identify and equivalent area of non-forest land. Sundarbans can be described as an exotic place where anyone is possible to be consumed by its beauty and anger. It provokes man to invoke his greed and at the same time replies to his greed through natural tide rise.

Man explores nature, satisfies his needs, builds and populates for his survival. When man's intervention is uncontrollable, nature reacts furiously, that too for nature's survival. To cite an example, mangroves is generally destroyed by man. The mangroves, which grow along the banks of lakes and rivers play a key role in maintaining ecological balance. The roots of these plants retain and purify water and it protects sand from erosion. Recently large quantities of sewage and plastic wastes are deposited in the lakes which ultimately lead to the destruction of such plant species. Plastic waste obstructs the natural breathing system of the earth. In order to expand the tourism industry in India, Sahara Project suggests to take over vast areas of Sundarbans. This project initiates the construction of floatels, shops, business centres, restaurants and theaters in the Sundarbans which in turn will destroy the equilibrium of the ecosystem. Ghosh's novel *The Hungry Tide* opposes the Sahara Project in the name of conservation. The novel depicts how the ecological troubles and conservations are related to political agenda. This novel plays an important role in garnering world wide support against the Sahara Project, which led the Central Ministry of Environment and Forests to terminate the project.

Latest world scenario offers a dismal picture of nature. The Hungry Tide raises both national and global awareness about the history of violence inscribed in Sundarbans. Even proclaimed as a national heritage site by United Nations Organisation, the Sundarbans is often vulnerable. The waterscape often alternates between subject and object, victim and victimizer and hero and villain. More than being a passive recipient of both social and physical changes the tides exercise its potential to transform physical space and intend to alter the social order.

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