

Action knowledge and Amitav Ghosh**Hemanta Sarmah Tamuly**Research scholar, Dept. of Folklore Research
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The Orient has always been described by the West as savage. They stereotypically considered their culture as standard one to judge the other culture from their perspective. The West ‘looks at other culture as a phenomenon to be explained rather than as a practice to be learned.’(Dharieswar, 217). They considered themselves superior because of their concept of own world without the knowledge of “other”. Western process of producing knowledge on certain culture cannot cover all the aspects the culture. In such a way very stereotypically the West always presents “other” in a wrong way. Therefore, Dharieswar rejects the West not because they are West but because they cannot comprehend other culture. While using Western methodology in research there remains a gap between our experience and writings. Dharieswar says that we should first understand the experience before writing. To have a true and faithful representation, he proposes “Action knowledge”. “Action knowledge is not knowledge about action but ability to act in order to know” (Dharieswar, 218). It is knowledge based on participation and experience. Dharieswar is in the view that while writing on particular culture we should first understand the experience through participation before using theory. Western theory or methodology might not be applicable to all. The objective of the paper is to examine the relevance of action knowledge with reference to **The Hungry Tide** by Amitav Ghosh.

Key words: Action knowledge, the west, the orient, theory, methodology

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Vivek Dharieswar's "valorising the present" is a critique of Western intrusion in writing history. West has always been described the orient as savage and then they start writing history. They stereotypically considered their culture as standard one to judge the other culture from their perspective. In doing so the West "looks at other culture as a phenomenon to be explained rather than as a practice to be learned." (Dharieswar, 217). They considered themselves superior because of their concept of own world without the knowledge of "other". Western process of producing knowledge on certain culture, society is their reading of knowledge which cannot cover all the aspects the culture. In such a way very stereotypically the West always presents "other" in a wrong way. Therefore, Dharieswar rejects the West not because they are West but because they cannot comprehend other culture. Each culture has its own language, tradition, values etc. But the West is not aware of it. So, he requests the scholars not to follow the West blindly. While using Western methodology in research there remains a gap between our experience and writings. Dharieswar says that we should first understand the experience before writing. We must approach a research without Western methodology if necessary. To have a true and faithful representation, he proposes "Action knowledge". "Action knowledge is not knowledge about action but ability to act in order to know" (Dharieswar, 218). It is knowledge based on participation and experience. Dharieswar is in the view that while writing on particular culture

we should first understand the experience through participation before using theory. Because no theory can explain a culture. Before producing knowledge on a particular culture we must study and understand the experience and in this respect Dharieswar urges to approach a research without any methodology. It is because , Western theory or methodology might not be applicable to all. Dharieswar is rejecting West because they are suffering from fixity. East is always shown as primitive. The West always imposes rules on East and the East always follows them. Thus it has always been fixed and nothing new in human science. In Dharieswar's opinion it is possible to study culture, tradition without rules. In simple words action knowledge means to approach culture, tradition without theory. Renowned Indian novelist Amitav Ghosh also supports the argument offered by Vivek Dharieswar. To understand how action knowledge works, we should discuss with the novel **The Hungry Tide** by Amitav Ghosh.

Amitav Ghosh's **The Hungry Tide** is a novel on the incidents of Morichjhapi through which Ghosh questions the issues of home, homelessness, and border. Parallely, the novel also deals with the journey of Piya to the Tide country for her research on mammals. Piya was born in Calcutta but had moved to United States when she was just one year old. She did not know Bengali but she recalls that this is the knowledge in which her parents talked and argued. In the course of her research, in the novel she is coming to the tide country. Taking the character of Piya, Amitav Ghosh very clearly criticises the incapability of the "Western knowledge of writing history and pre-requisite methods of research on the 'other'. Piya is a graduate student in cetology at Scripps Institution of Oceanography in California and now doing her research on marine mammals. Through the character of Piya, Ghosh applies what

Dhareswar has opined about research methodology and conveys to the readers the necessity of “action knowledge” proposed by Dhareswar.

In her journey to Sundarban for her research, Piya faces difficulties in each step such as environment of the place, language, local people etc. Her knowledge of ‘modernity’ and familiarity with Western stereotype research methodology has completely failed in her this particular project on mammals. On the other hand, through the research of Piya, Ghosh also challenges the idea of guide.

The first problem that Piya faced in the tide country is the environment and ecology of the place. Using internet, books, journal in air conditioner room for research paper are failed on the part of Piya in the tide country. In Sundarban, previous notion of research is challenged because the ecology of Sundarban is unwelcome one; it is flux; it is always shifting, unpredictable with its appearing and disappearing due to the tides. Roads, borders, map of Sundarban change with the sudden change of the environment. On the other hand, nature of this land is threatening to the life of people. Apart from water, wild animals--- the crocodile, the snakes, the tiger----kill a large amount of people. According to official record, people over a hundred are killed by tiger in the tide country each year. Even boats on the water are not safe from the tiger. Whatsoever, in this novel a Western educated scholar is present in the land for her research. Undoubtedly, her previous knowledge and experience cannot work in the tide country. She cannot prepare her research based on the so called Western stereotype method of the West as used by general scholars. Western ideas of modernity with its technological, scientific development are incapable to define the life of Sundarban along with its people, culture, everyday life etc. But, in general, what the scholar

does is that they judge other culture without bothering to understand it and narrates it from the point of view of the West. And in this respect, the idea of action knowledge is only applicable device for a fruitful research and representation. Amitav Ghosh leads his character Piya through the way of action knowledge. Because instead of writing on a place or culture without proper knowledge and understanding of it, Piya tries to understand the land, its people, and everyday lifestyle of Sundarban. Through a kind of proper participation, Piya undergoes to the kernel of the place.

Secondly, Piya's intuitional education and whatever methodology she learnt also failed in the tide country. Amitav Ghosh challenges such knowledge because they did not teach her how to deal with new people, new place etc. The second problem she faced in the land is the problem of local people or cheat. Soon after she arrives, Piya hires a dubious guide and even more dubious a forest guard impose by governmental functionaries. Due to the lack of information and knowledge of the place, Piya could not judge a considerable fare of the launch offered by the guide. 'She knew that this was a set up and she was being cheated' (Ghosh, 31). She could not find other boat because the sight of Mej-da, the guide and the guard scares them off. Therefore, the two men soon became a threatening to the lonely young woman. In this respect Ghosh again points out how Western stereotype methodology can be of no use in all cases. It is a challenge to the West to avoid superior feeling and Ghosh is offering a way to go through action knowledge.

In Sundarban, Piya had to deal with the hurdle of communication. The third problem that creates a wall on her way is language. When Piya comes to the contact of the guide and

guard, there was a communication gap between the two sides to discuss the arrangement of her tour. “Neither he nor the guard spoke English but it was explained to her through intermediaries that Mej-da owned a launch that was available for hire: he was a season guide who knew the area better than anyone else” (Ghosh, 31). Piya brought with her pictures of two species of river dolphin because sometime such picture had been great help in gathering information. Piya shows the cards to them and asks question about sighting, abundance, behaviour and so on. As there was no one to translate, she holds up the cards and waits for a response. First Mej-da turned the card around and looked at the picture upside down. Then, pointing to the illustration of the Gangetic dolphin he asked as if it were a bird.

On the other hand, the communication gap again arises during Piya’s company of Fakir. They had to manage their communication by means of bodily kind of gestures. Fakir did not know English and Piya the local language. While introducing, Fakir only sounds his name pointing his finger towards him. When Fakir offered Piya a plateful of rice she declined it bobbing her head. When night falls, “unfurling a second mat next to the boy Fakir made a sign to Piya indicating that this was to be her place for the night” (Ghosh, 97). Bringing out complexity in the way of communication, Ghosh again points out the incompleteness of the Western stereotype. And in this respect only participation that is action knowledge helps Piya in pursuing her research. Because, only being close to Fakir, her observation on him, and her attempt to understand him help her to communicate to Fakir. Her eagerness to know more about Fakir, her effort to read fakir’s smile and face are some of the results of her action knowledge in such situation.

Through the relationship between Fakir and Piya, Ghosh shatters the stereotype notion of the relationship between scholars and guide and looks at it from a different perspective. In **The hungry Tide**, the guide of this scholar is not a university professor with various academics degrees and the scholar is not preparing her research by sitting and reading books, theories prepared by other. Piya goes to the tide country for her research on mammals available in the land. In such field no university guide, who is not familiar to such place, would assist her in her research. Therefore, she has to have a guide who is accustomed to the environment. In this project, Fakir is almost a perfect guide. He is so expert in the land that “it astonished her that fakir could steer in such bad light: clearly, he knows this stretch of water well enough to feel his way along the river” (Ghosh, 112). There was reciprocal participation on each part to other. When Piya tried to read Fakir’s face, on the other hand, Fakir was conscious about the modesty of a lady like Piya. Therefore, he had created “an enclosure to give her the privacy to change her wet cloth” (Ghosh, 71). When Piya refused Fakir’s offer of meal, he accepted her refusal with a readiness because he thought that it might be “mysterious reason of caste or religion that she refused to eat his food” (Ghosh, 63). In such a way, Fakir tried to anticipate her mind without having a common language. At the same time Piya also acquired a basic notion of his anticipation and therefore, she acted out a little charade of her internal suffering as a reason for the decline.

Apart from above major challenges that appeared in front of Piya, there are some minor challenges too such as food, lodge, transportation etc. As Piya had been there in Sundarban for several days, so she had to adjust with the local foods like rice, chapatti etc. She had to stay on the boat for days together. Moreover, there was no train, no bus, no

aeroplane to travel apart from those boats and bhotboties those were the only available transportation. But Piya successfully overcome such challenges through action knowledge that means she participated with all such situations which enabled her to overcome hurdles.

As Western ways of writing history or research methodology are incapable of presenting a truthful picture, Vivek Dhaireswar theoretically proposes ‘action knowledge’. His theory of action knowledge is very artistically ‘visualised’ in **The Hungry Tide** by Amitav Ghosh. He portrays the challenges that a researcher might face while presenting ‘other’ and shows a way of approaching a research project through action knowledge.

References :

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