

Food, Memory, and Ecological Knowledge in Amitav Ghosh's *Ghost-Eye*: A Gastro critical and Decolonial Reading

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Abstract

Food is not just food but also a part of our culture, history, economy and environment where we live. The article is read by me as an analysis of Amitav Ghosh's *Ghost-Eye* from a gastro criticist perspective and decolonial ecocritical standpoint, particularly regarding Varsha Gupta's strange affinity for fish despite being raised as a vegetarian. The longing to eat fish and rice is connected by her body experiences with memories, livelihoods, places, and waters around Sundarbans. Based upon Anke Klitzing's concept of Gastrocriticism this paper analyses food not just as an object but also as a form of material culture within stories. The concept of "gastro-colonialism" by Gaia Cottino is related to issues like food security, ecology, communities, and power relations between them. Heather Davis' research by Zoe Todd and Kyle Whyte is an example for decolonizing ecology studies. Fish is an important source of nutrition for humans; it also serves as a means to learn about history through memories and culture while being used by people living in different places around them. With food, Ghosh brings an environmental crisis to life through it.

Keywords: Gastrocriticism, Gastrocolonialism, food sovereignty, Sundarbans, decolonization of Anthropocene ecology, ecocritique, ecology knowledge, food memory.

Introduction

Food plays a role in our lives as it goes beyond just being food; it also includes geography, history, culture, religion, economy, labor force and environment. People's diets and cooking methods depend on what is available to them within a given society or environment. Thus, food is a point where biology meets culture and ecology. Literary criticism is connected to food studies as well as issues like politics, history, identity, rituals, and societal change. Gastrocriticism is an effective tool to analyse how food plays a role within literature. According to Anke Klitzing's book "Reading Food in Literature, Film and Other Imaginative Texts," food is more than just a mere backdrop for stories; it plays roles such as character development, physical description of characters' bodies, representation of culture, identity, history, symbolism within those works. It applies especially to Amitav Ghosh's novel "*Ghost-Eye*," as it deals with how people relate themselves with nature via

food consumption. Three years old Varsha Gupta is introduced by this book as coming from an exclusively vegetarian family yet she suddenly wants some fish and rice.

Despite not having ever eaten any fish during this lifetime, she talks about it like a native speaker would. Knowledge about fishes, cuisine and rivers is connected to memories, identities places and environmental experiences by Ghosh. The interest of Varsha to know fishes is significant as it raises issues regarding whether knowledge and memories are possible outside a person's immediate culture. It isn't just children's interest in new foods but also shows some knowledge of past ecology and culture. David E. Sutton's work on food and memory demonstrates how taste, smell, cooking practices, and meals can preserve and communicate experiences of the past (Sutton). However, memory is much more complicated for *Ghost-Eye* as she seems to recall events from another time period than hers.

Thus fish is an instrument for exploring issues about identity and memory. It has an environmental importance as well. Fish are part of a river ecosystem but also serve as food source for humans, means of livelihood, an aspect of culture and an economic resource. Fish are related to rivers, laborers' work on them for food preparation by humans. The Iovino-Opperman material ecocriticism theory helps us by focusing on human-non-human relationships between objects and narratives instead of viewing nature just as an allegory like that proposed by Iovino and Oppermann.

In a similar way to Stacy Alaimo's theory about trans corporeality which explains that there is an interconnection between humans' body space and nature. Waterborne fish are produced by aquatic organisms that form a link between ecosystems and humans via their diet. Therefore food is an interconnection of people, animals and ecosystems (Alaimo).

Food has an ecological and cultural importance to *Ghost-Eye*, which could also be explained by concepts such as food sovereignty and decolonization. Gastro-colonialism and food sovereignty are discussed by Gaia Cottino as they relate to food system relations with ecological issues, livelihood concerns, and power structures. While Cottino's model is not specifically applicable to the Sundarbans region's history or ecology; however, it offers an insightful way to study relationships between agriculture, consumption patterns and ecological dependencies as well as socio-cultural aspects (Cottino).

Similarly, Heather Davis and Zoe Todd argue that environmental discussions must acknowledge colonial histories, dispossession, and Indigenous forms of ecological knowledge (Davis and Todd 761-80), while Kyle Whyte emphasizes place-based knowledge and histories of environmental change (Whyte 153-62). This is relevant for *Ghost Eye* as it has an unusual understanding about fishes which relates memory, location, culture, ecology.

This novel turns fish from an ordinary food source to something that connects people with their environment through water bodies like rivers and lakes as well as memories of past generations' lives along those waters. Thus a gastro critical reading treats food seriously within its own storyline instead of seeing it merely as some sort of incidental detail. Fish and rice are shown to be carriers of culture through their connection with ecology, history, society, and environment showing that they're part of this interdependence rather than being isolated from it.

Food Fish Memory Location

Food is important for us because of where we live. The idea of Trubek is about taste being a reflection on geography culture relations (Trubekes). The food has a history as to how it was made, cooked, sold out there for sale and eaten by people. The fish is more apparent due to its strong linkage with water as a matter of fact. Fish are found on meals due to their association with river systems, pond ecosystems, wetland habitats for aquatic animals during certain times of year; seasonal patterns among them. Varsha's memories about a house by the river and knowledge on fishing are, cooking it relate to food through landscapes (Ghosh). Knowing about fish in this context means knowing where they are located, how to catch them, how to prepare them, and when they're available.

Environmental Knowledge is discussed by Whyte for comparison purposes. The paper focuses on how knowledge is created by people living together for a long time and adapting to changes in their environment (Whyte 153-62). The issue is about indigenous climate change research rather than being equivalent to that particular specific history of the Sundarbans. Nevertheless, it has relevance for how this novel treats ecology through experience and place based knowledge. Knowledge about environment is not necessarily from an academic institution. Also it may be passed on by way of memories, livelihoods stories food practices and repeated interaction with land water. The information about Varsha's knowledge is strange since its origin is unknown. There is no easy way to explain why an orphan orphaned child would be so well acquainted with this novel. Uncertainty is a tool for knowledge acquisition of food.

Therefore it goes beyond "Who is Vars Redeva?" To "What survives as knowledge?" One solution to food is available. Recipes, tastes, preparation methods, names of species, fishing practices, and eating habits are sources for information that might not be found on paper records. While Mintz and Du Bois link food to memories and identities, Sutton focuses on how it helps us remember past experiences, Mintz and Du Bois, Sutton.

Thus fish is an object to for history which cannot be understood by current identities like those of Varsha herself. Also expands upon it as a part of culture history. Monuments, documents, rituals, oral history and archives are examples of cultural memories. Sensory and in addition to memory is food. Taste can connect an individual to a landscape, culinary practice can preserve community knowledge, and a food species can evoke an ecosystem. Therefore by Varsha's knowledge of fish should not be reduced to evidence for reincarnation. Also it is an approach to storytelling where Ghosh challenges those distinctions between body, memory, culture, and environment. Knowledge about places is preserved by food.

Sovereign Food System, Gastro Colonialism, and Environmental Dependence.

The idea of Cottino on gastro-colonialism extends beyond issues related to food and memory towards concerns about power. Cottino's novel "Decolonizing Moana Stomachs" is about changes to Oceanic cuisine due to colonization, military power structures and modern-day corporations' control over it. These processes may undermine local food sovereignty while increasing reliance upon outside sources for supply (Cottino).

Ghost-Eye benefits from this model as it focuses on its environment around food. Land, water, animal husbandry labor market technologies are available for food production.

These changes may have an impact on other parts of our food supply chain. Food sovereignty is an alternative concept that focuses on environmental sustainability, cultural relevance, local production practices, and grassroots management of food systems.

Food Sovereignty is defined by the Nyéléni Declaration as a right for people to produce nutritious foods that are suitable for them within an environmentally friendly way while also having control over how they grow crops or raise animals (Nyéléni Declaration). Thusly it relates to food, freedom of choice; culture; environment; and economy.

This model shows more clearly how important they are for *ghost-eye*. The fish is part of an organism which starts prior to feeding behaviour. Availability is dependent upon water resources, aquatic ecosystems, fisheries management skills of fishermen; labor force; seasonality; and cultural traditions within communities. As aquatic ecosystems are affected by changes they can have impacts on biodiversity as well as food security, livelihood opportunities, cultural traditions and community identity. Water is related to fish, which are then connected by food and living conditions that support a community. One problem may have an effect on other problems too. The environmental degradation may lead to a decline of fisheries which would impact on people's livelihood through loss of income from fishing activities as well as change over time due to altered dietary habits resulting from such losses.

Here we discuss how gastro criticism and ecocriticism overlap. Ecological relationship is shown through food consumption by people today. The environmental crisis isn't just an issue for other planets. This issue may arise as to what kinds of foods are available for consumption by humans; who has access to them; their origin; and how they affect ecosystems if destroyed or degraded. The idea of "slow violence" by Rob Nixon applies here. Environmental violence is described by Nixon as slow, widespread, and hard to see since it accumulates over a period of time (Nixon). Damage to aquatic ecosystems may seem far away from us if we just look at it scientifically; however, its effects are felt by those who catch, prepare, sell, and eat them.

However, Cottino's model should still apply comparably instead of being used directly. Oceanian context is historical/cultural difference compared to that of Sundarbans area. This paper's contribution is to show how foodways are places where ecology meets livelihoods, culture and power.

Ecology of Food as an Ecological Knowledge and the Decolonial Anthropocene.

Anthropocene is a significant concept for studying environment literature as it focuses on how humans impact our planet. While eco critics study how literature relates to nature, newer theories focus on capitalism, colonialism, industrialization, and inequality of ecological resources, Glotfelty and Fromm, Buell.

The Davis-Todd account complicates universal accounts of the Anthropocene through its focus on colonial history, dispossession, and indigenous knowledge. The environmental transformation is not an entirely separate phenomenon from previous history of colonialism and ecological changes (Davis and Todd 761-80). Also, it questions whether everyone has made an equal contribution towards planetary change.

Ghost-Eye has this relevance since it doesn't limit ecological information by traditional means of science. Knowledge about fishes comes from eating them, remembering them, knowing their bodies and places. It doesn't fit well as an easy dichotomy of rational versus irrational knowledge.

Similarly, Whyte also focuses on lived experience of environment and history of environmental changes (Whyte 153-62). It highlights how knowledge is acquired by means of memory, adaptation, culture practices, and prolonged relationship with environment. The information of Varsha also leads me to ask about how things are done if they do not fit within our usual ways for acquiring knowledge. There is no apparent pathway to education or family history for Varsha that would allow her access to information about fishes. On the other hand, it is found on food. Significance does not lie in proving or disproving reincarnation. The literature is significant because it has an uncertain origin for its information. Through food as an initial manifestation to unfamiliar yet familiar things, Ghosh challenges conventional notions about what is known. Thus food is a kind of knowledge. To know fish can involve knowledge of water, seasons, habitats, species, fishing methods, preparation, preservation, and availability. Ecological knowledge is also culinary knowledge.

Environmental critique by Buell is helpful since it highlights literature where nature plays an active role rather than being just a backdrop to human activities (Buell). The aquatic ecosystem is involved with forming food, memories, livelihoods and identities within *Ghost-Eye*. The novel "Postcolonial Ecologies" by DeLoughrey and Handley shows how to read environmental representations from colonialism, migration, imperialism, and inequality between nations' ecosystems (DeLoughrey and Handley). It avoids treating this issue of *Ghost-Eye* as an isolated environmental problem that is not historical. Sundarbans is an ecologically sensitive area because of human dependence on it by people living there.

Environmentalism of Ghosh is in line with his philosophy. The Great Derangement states that climate change is a problem for literature since it goes beyond traditional storytelling limits (Ghosh). *Ghost-Eye* is a huge problem that affects people on an individual level through their families' lives, food consumption habits, memories, and physical existence.

Ecological archive of fish.

An ecological archive is a collection that contains these articles' main points. A record can be defined by an archive which contains records for historical purposes. This concept can be developed through *Ghost-Eye*. Past traces are found on people's bodies, their taste preferences, animal species' behaviours, landscape features, and culinary traditions. Also this is consistent with Alaimo's focus on material relations among people and places (Alaimo's). Ecological process does not exist independently of bodies. Formed by means of contact with food, water, animal lifeforms, landmasses and various types of substances. This is evident through eating as it shows how outside things become inside stuff. An animal which used to live in water is now inside our human bodies.

Thus *Ghost-Eye* is defined by four interrelated aspects. It is a kind of food that belongs to culinary practices and provides nutrition for our bodies. Also, it is memory that provides a link between past experiences of other lives and places. Thirdly, this relates to ecology as well as being linked by river systems, lakes or water bodies, wetlands, and climate changes. Fourthly, livelihoods are connected to ecology through economics and culture for community survival purposes. Therefore, it is very useful to read through a novel called "*Ghost-Eye*". The Klitzing model enables us to go past a mere symbolization of foods towards an understanding about their culinary practices, embodied forms, cooking

techniques, cultural significance, and storytelling roles (Klitzing). Fish isn't just an emblem of something else. A thing that exists as part of an interconnected system.

This method is applicable to ecological criticism as well. Instead of just asking about how a novel is an example for climate change, Gastrocriticism focuses on how environmental changes become part of food consumption patterns. Instead of asking 'what is an environmental metaphor?', it should be asked 'how do humans suffer due to threats against their food-producing system?'.

The environmental crisis can be depicted by big pictures like rising sea levels, extinction of species, severe storms, and deforestation. However, people can be affected by ecological changes due to minor material disturbances such as less food supply, changing species populations, destroyed livelihoods, changed seasons, and loss of traditional knowledge. The theory of Nixon's slow violence explains how these changes might be hard to detect as they accumulate over time (Nixon). Through linking fishes to memories of livelihoods and places, *Ghost-Eye* provides an embodiment for environmental transformation. Thusly it exists outside of novels and papers as well. Also it exists as part of culture, body image, geography and history.

Gastrocriticism and Human-Nonhuman Relations

Also, it blurs the line of difference between humans and animals. Food is usually viewed as an anthropocentric concept where animals are treated as resources, commodities, food items, or symbols. Ecological materiality focuses on how food is produced rather than being a separate concept from it (Iovino and Oppermann). It doesn't deny that fish is eaten by humans. Instead of this, it acknowledges that food consumption is a part of ecology. Humans are dependent upon other species for survival through their diet.

Human Body Human Fish Water Ecosystem Community. Reciprocity plays an important role as it involves mutual interdependence between ecosystems. While people rely upon aquatic environments for survival, humans may alter them through their activities. Environmental pollution, industrialization, global warming, deforestation, and overfishing may impact on living conditions of both aquatic life forms as well as humans.

Therefore, there is an ecological importance to eating as well as a personal aspect for humans. The food shows how things are related to each other between people, animals, plants and societies. The interdependency of this system fits within Ghosh's larger vision for an environmentally sustainable society. The novel questions how to separate human history from environmental history. The passage of time from individual memories to an environmental disaster is experienced by people via their diet within this storyline called "*Ghost-Eye*". A person's memory is of food, which reminds them of landscapes that reveal connections among humans and animals.

Conclusion

Ghost-Eye is a read from an anthropological perspective and postcolonial ecology to show how food serves as an important place for learning about nature and culture. The surprise to Varsha about being an expert on fishes questions our ideas of memory and self-identity. It is difficult for me to explain my knowledge from an ordinary background; however, it connects food with issues like knowledge, place, and ecology by means of a novel.

The decolonial perspective on the Anthropocene by Davis and Todd focuses on colonial history and marginalized forms of environmental knowledge (Davis and Todd 761-80). Similarly, Whyte's research focuses on living and place-based relationships to environmental change (Whyte 153-62). This helps place Varsha's understanding beyond an exclusively linear approach to learning.

Thus *Ghost-Eye* is not just an edible item but also has other uses. Water is connected to habitats, livelihoods, communities, and cultural memories. Food, memories of nature are also part of it. The importance lies in its relation to other things instead of just symbols.

Ecological crises are made real for us through everyday activities like eating, remembering, cooking, fishing, and living in a particular location. Thus an environmental issue isn't just some far-off planet problem anymore. The economy is based on people's needs for sustenance by means such as food production and management of natural resources like forests or rivers. Gastrocriticism is especially useful to write about ecology as it shows that ecological issues are a part of daily life. *Ghost-Eye* asks about food consumption as a matter of identity issues like belongingness, memories; livelihoods; ecology dependency. Therefore food isn't just sustenance. Also it serves as an intermediary for remembering and understanding relations among individuals, locations, creatures, societies, and ecosystems.

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