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Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*: An Ecocritical Text

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ABSTRACT

Modern literature has recently focused on the long-ignored powerful interaction between people and the natural world. The relationship sheds significant light on ecological research and ecocritical literature. Literary writers today concentrate on the most important environmental issues in their literary writings to draw attention to ecosystem and natural issues. Some of them is Amitav Ghosh. His novel *The Hungry Tide*, set in the Sundarbans, also known as the 'Beautiful Forest,' and covering an area of more than 10,000 square kilometers, offers the narrative of the forced evaluation of refugees from the island of Marichjhapi. The major themes of the novel are environmentalism and destabilization.

Keywords: *Sundarbans, environmentalism, destabilization, migration, geography, etc.*

FULL PAPER

INTRODUCTION

Amitav Ghosh is a well-known writer of the present who challenges the historical discourse and writes on the effects of colonialism. He subtly criticizes the establishment of numerous borders that divide people from people, cultures from cultures, and so forth. Politicians' and revisionists' historical perspectives, the instability of boundaries, and voices from the frontier that are silenced by the dominant ideology all point to Ghosh's particular method of identity exploration. Since we inevitably become molded by our political, social, and cultural activity, identity cannot simply be wished away. An individual's social position significantly influences how his identity is formed. Any identity is divided into categories based on its class, gender, and race.

Eco-criticism is an area of literary studies that looks for concrete connections between the natural world and literature. One of the most important problems facing today's generation is the environment. It can be divided into two phases: the first focuses on nature writing, nature poetry, and wilderness fiction. The second is eco-criticism. Eco-criticism leans towards topics of social criticism and urban issues while promoting environmental justice. The primary goal of ecocritical studies is to demonstrate how the literary works are supportive of pressing ecological issues consciously.

Study of An Ecocritical text:

The novel *Hungry Tide* published in 2004, is divided into two plots: first, it examines the predicament of a community of refugees from Bangladesh, and second, it deals with the issue of how people coexist with animals in a complex and harmful ecology. It focusses on the environment and environmental issues. Moreover, it is a modern tale of conflicts, reversals, and instability. The ecological novel is a well-known topic. Under the guise of English fiction, the novel blends anthropology, environmentalism, migration, travel, ethnography, and geography. Its small cast of characters makes it more enticing to readers.

There are no borders here to divide fresh water from salt, river from sea. The tides reach as far as three hundred kilometers inland and every day thousands of acres of forest disappear underwater, only to re-emerge hours later. The currents are so powerful as to reshape the islands almost daily-some days the water tears away entire promontories and peninsulas; at other times

it throws up new shelves and sandbanks where there were none before. (Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide* 7)

Through these expressions, Ghosh introduces the reader to the strength of Nature. He attempts to capture the clash between man and nature in this book. Sometimes nature triumphs over man, and other times man is subjugated by nature. Man approaches nature like a Helot. Since man has long believed that nature existed to satisfy their needs, people have broadened their use of the natural world. As depicted in the book, the Marichjhapi people destroy natural resources to feed themselves and construct homes. Climate change and the decline of natural resources in Marichjhapi were caused by environmental misuse.

It is believed that if we overuse natural resources, there won't be any left for future generations, and that man-made hazards result from the depletion of the environment. Typhoons, cyclones, hurricanes, earthquakes, slides, and other natural disasters are examples of how nature exacts punishment on humans. Like the story, we see a powerful cyclone that kills Fokir. The natural world has begun to assert its rights severely. Humans must acknowledge that they and nature are two sides of the same coin and that neither is more important than the other to remodel their bond with nature.

The novel is set amid nature. The mangrove forests known as the Sundarbans, located between the lowlands and the Bay of Bengal, have ecological difficulties that the novel is aware of. Due to human activities in the contemporary era to sustain themselves and their families, the biodiversity of the Sundarbans is slowly becoming out of balance. As in the book, Moyna describes Nilima's perspective on the new nylon nets being used to catch tigers in the Sundarbans.

These new nylon nets, which they use to catch chingirmin - the spawn of tiger prawns. The nets are so fine that they catch the eggs of all the other fish as well. Mahima wanted to get the nets banned, but it was impossible. (Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide* 134)

The above words perfectly capture the downside of technological growth, which is to some extent beneficial for men but harmful to biodiversity. The rich and well-balanced natural resources of West Bengal's (India) Sundarbans are strongly influenced by the island's ignorant poor people. They believe that natural resources belong to them alone, and they are free to use them. Therefore, the government must move decisively to expel them from the island to preserve the bounty of nature and to maintain the Sundarbans' proper cycle of biodiversity. As Nilima say:

Some refugees have occupied one of the islands in the forest. There was a confrontation with the authorities that resulted in a lot of violence. The government wanted to force the refugees to return their resettlement camp in Central India. they are put in the truck and buses and taken away... (Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide* 26)

Further, Ghosh aims to show the order and law of nature. He makes fun of humans, who are thought to be the most intelligent creatures on earth, by saying that they do not obey any laws unless they feel that they are necessary for their appropriate upbringing. However, nature always performs its duties.

Piya remembered a study that had shown there were more species of fish in the Sundarbans than could be found in the whole continent of Europe. This proliferation of aquatic life was thought to be the result of the unusually varied composition of the water itself. The waters of river and sea did not intermingle evenly in this part of the delta; rather, they interpenetrated each other, creating hundreds of different ecological niches, with streams of fresh water running along the floors of some channels, creating variation of salinity and turbidity. (Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide* 125)

In general, we believe that natural disasters like hurricanes, cyclones, earthquakes, and al-nil-lo are part of our ecosystem's natural processes, however this is untrue. These instances constitute nature's fury or, more accurately, Nature's opposition to man, who attempts to eradicate nature for own profit without considering the consequences.

Ghosh incorporates complex relationships between Piyali, Fokir, and Kanai in addition to ecological challenges, language problems, and a love story. The dramatic conclusion of the novel, where a storm kills Foir while sparing Piya's life, he deftly resolves these confusing relationships. Amitav Ghosh is a master of the 'fictionalized thesis' genre, as M. Abhijit Dhakuria comments. He deserves this compliment for his outstanding contribution since he is a keen observer of nature, attempting to demonstrate how humans and other living things, including dolphins and tigers, coexist in a challenging ecosystem.

Ecosystem of Marichjhapi Island is at alarming level due to misbalance in ecology of the Sundarbans, which lead to dangerous conditions. Submersion of Islands is real ecosystem are the prominent part of the environment. Due to climatic disorder in the Sundarbans environment, rare species of dolphins and other fishes are languishing.

Some kind of crabs laundered the mud they lived in, scrubbing it grain by grain. Their feet and their sides were lined with hairs that formed microscopic brushes and spoons. They used these to scrape off the diatoms and other diable matter attached to each grain of sand. They were a sanitation department and a janitorial team rolled into one: They kept the mangroves alive by removing their leaves and litter; without them the trees would choke on their debris. Didn't they represent some fantastically large proportion of the system's biomass? Didn't they outweigh even the trees and the leaves? Hadn't someone said that intertidal forests should be named after crabs rather than mangroves since it was, they – certainly not the crocodile or the tiger or the dolphin – who were the keystone species of the entire ecosystem? (Ghosh *The Hungry Tide* 142)

So Kusum's mother prepares veggies, dal, and rice. But when it was time to boil some fish, there was no more firewood. When he learned that they had run out of firewood, his father became irate. He afterwards stormed outside and proceeded to get some firewood. Here, Amitav Ghosh illustrates how a man's unwillingness to make concessions can have negative effects on their quality of life. When Kusum's father went to bring simply some firewood, it was while he was dying.

Ghosh aims to highlight the strength of both humans and animals. Humans have occasionally risen to power, and occasionally, men have trampled on animals, but both have been lost. The human being is regarded as the most intelligent creature on earth, and as such, they should consider the balance of ecosystem and respect the fact that animals also have feelings and emotions and follow their natural tendencies. The issue is that despite knowing everything, humans choose to ignore it. In a furious temper, Kusum's father went to fetch firewood but didn't realize the gravity of the situation, which led to his demise. Ghosh writes:

The animal was in the trees that lined the shore, and from the direction of its advance she knew it had watched the boat as it came across the river. At Kusum's first scream her mother and many others from the hamlet ran up to embankment. But her father, for whom the shout of warning had been intended, didn't hear for the wind was blowing in the wrong direction. Within moments dozens of people had joined her on the embankment and all saw what she had seen: The animal was stalking her father." (Ghosh *The Hungry Tide* 108)

According to the ideas of the author, animals are also capable of feeling emotion, but because humans are so selfish, this causes them to

experience distress and occasionally attack us out of fear or to defend themselves before eating us as food. Nobody wants to offend people who are in his territory. Hence, animals also wish to live freely there. Humans intentionally destroy the forest to build their homes due to overpopulation. These activities have an impact on animals' emotions since forests and caverns are safe places for them and places where they can readily get what they need to survive. Animals utilize their strength to safeguard their lives and occasionally turn humans into food because they feel helpless and enraged when they see their opponent in the guise of a person and they believe that they are coming to kill them or ruin their territory. Here, Ghosh explores the sentiment and prognostication of animals.

The animal to was upwind of its prey and they could see its coal flashing as it closed in; because of the distinctiveness of its own odor, it was skilled in dealing with the wind and it knew that the people on the other bank were powerless against these gusts. (Ghosh *The Hungry Tide* 108)

Ghosh illustrates the cycle of nature in the novel. He describes the 1970 episode in which a significant cyclone occurred, and how Fokir, Piya, and other island residents are currently experiencing the same cyclone that caused enormous devastation and unrest in the Sundarbans. He is trying to warn people that if we don't change our way of life, nature would exact punishment in this way. He further aims to raise awareness among the people about impending environmental disasters that would be brought on by human karma. As he states:

It was in 1737. The emperor Aurangzeb had died some thirty years before and the country was in turmoil. Calcutta was a new place then—the English had seized their opportunity and made it the main port of the east.

Conclusion

Thus, in a nutshell, the setting is crucial for shaping the framework of storylines, but it also brings attention to the enigma and fate of a person's existence even when they are surrounded by a beautiful but dangerous natural environment. The myths and stories about Mother Nature are unique to the cultures of those who live near to the natural world. The concept of the Jungle is a distinctive paradigm that highlights the differences between the civilized and uncivilized people. Thus, Ghosh has illustrated how nature defies society's rigid categorization and oppression. It is obvious that Nature operates according to principles that are independent of human control.

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