

**Nature and Humanity: A Humanitarian and Ecological Reading of the
novel *The Hungry Tide* by Amitav Ghosh**

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Preface

The paper entitled An Ecocritical reading of *The Hungry Tide* explores the coexistence of human and nature and investigates the closerelationship of nature and humanity that make up the crux of the novelwhich is set upon the geography of Sundarbans. The first chapter, after a brief introduction to Indian Literature in English and the author of the novel *The Hungry Tide*, dives into thetheory of Ecocriticism citing major theorists and their arguments. This is followed by the critical summary of the novel in the second chapter titled Nature and Humanity. The third chapter attempts an ecocritical reading of the text looking into the depths of the connection between human and nature, exposing different and contradicting shades of the relationships with the wilderness. All the observations are summed up in the conclusion, the last chapter of the project.

Chapter One

Introduction

The beginning of Indian Literature in English can be traced towards the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of nineteenth century. It was the time when English language was established in Calcutta, Madras and Bombay, which were the three major centres of British Imperialism. In India, the emergence of the genre of novel began in the nineteenth century. Indian authors showcased their versatile contribution in this area of literature. The first Indian novel written in the language English was published in the year 1864, titled *Rajmohan's Wife* which was written by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee. The growth of the genre in India was remarkable as it evolved not only in terms of its popularity but also in terms of experimentation. It branched into diverse directions in the domain of Literature.

The advent of Indian Fiction was marked by the works of the great trio, Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narayan in the 1930s. R.K. Narayan's *Swami and Friends*, *Malgudi Days*, Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*, *Coolie* and Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* are regarded as works of outstanding artistry of the period. The contributions of the trio of Indian English writing had a predominant role in moulding the genre of fiction.

Besides the great trio, there are many novelists in the twentieth century who proved their mastery in this genre. They are Mahaswetha Devi, Khushwant Singh, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, Amitav Ghosh, Jhumpa Lahiri, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Arundhati Roy, Kamala Suraiyya, Jeet Thayil, Rabindranath Tagore, along with many others. Most of these writers reflect their rich Indian Culture in their writings.

They expressed their resistance towards various social issues like class and caste discrepancies, hunger, poverty, oppression, gender discrimination, identity crisis, quest for freedom, search for home, and many other social issues. These themes are dealt with immense sensitivity, and the depictions are extremely realistic. They sketch the state of the society with brutal honesty, questioning the dominant and oppressive conventions of society and aspire to break away from those systems that imprison people and liberate them. One such system is the patriarchy that dictates men to be oppressive and women to be submissive. It defines masculinity and femininity in an unnatural and toxic manner and forces it on the society. A patriarchal society denies equality of women and religiously follows a hierarchical framework that positions woman below a man. Many writers have written works on the toxicity of this system and had shown how both men and women are oppressed by the system. The writers attempt to bring awareness to the ignorance of the people and insist on breaking out the institutions that advocate sexism and gender discrimination. Besides gender discrimination, issues of caste oppression, class conflict, social disparities, and environmental issues are also brought to the forefront. It is also interesting to note that the writers in 1960s and 1970s have showed a modernistic approach to their writings. The above-mentioned writers are regarded as the contemporaries of Amitav Ghosh, the author of the novel titled *The Hungry Tide*.

Amitav Ghosh is a Bengali born novelist, who is best known for his English fictions. His unique writing style, narrative techniques and his pace in keeping up with the emerging themes in writings fetched him an exceptional place in the realm of Literature. He began his career in writing by following

his immense passion for the writing and his love for words. His career as a writer bloomed as he published his first novel titled *The Circle of Reason* in 1986. In addition to this, he wrote and published several novels, namely *The Shadow Lines*, *The Calcutta Chromosome*, *The Glass Palace*, *The Hungry Tide*, and his three volumes of the *Ibis Trilogy* namely *Sea of Poppies*, *River of Smoke* and *Flood of Fire*. He showed his excellence in non-fiction and essays as well. Some of the notable non-fictional works of him include *In an Antique Land*, *Dancing in Cambodia*, *Countdown* and his remarkable essays are *Iman and the Indian*, *Folly in Sundarbans* and *Incendiary Circumstances*. He is also praised for his travel writings and journals. He was honoured with many awards like Sahitya Akademi Award, Jnanpith Award, Padma Shri for his acclaimed contributions to literature and had his works translated into more than thirty languages.

Amitav Ghosh's writing frequently features a backdrop of history tinged with political and historical knowledge. He was greatly influenced by the stories of Partition, Independence and the Second World War. Fascinated by these stories of historical reality he weaves stories out of painful truth and the memories of horrifying past. These memories of resistance and silences become a major theme in his works. Ghosh combines fiction and history to illustrate the intricacies of human relations, as well as the connections between national issues and people, illustrating the impact of history on everyday ordinary lives. Journeys are essential components of Ghosh's literary world, and the struggle for identity and migratory inclinations are prominent features of his novel characters.

Amitav Ghosh's fiction is devoid of time and space limitations. To him, the past, present, and future are all merged into one. He is often seen playing with timelines in the works. In the novel *The Hungry Tide*, the portrayal of time plays a vital role. The events in the story are not narrated in a chronological manner; it is rather a coming together of past and present. Multiplicity is another important element of Amitav Ghosh's works. In his writings, the readers are exposed to diversity through the use of many languages, and the intricacies of human life. Through his characters, he depicts internal landscapes and thoughts of humans and describes the subtleties of both events and people. The novelist crafts stories that would otherwise be lost to people's memories and documented history. He attempts to reconstruct history by bringing together the disparate pieces and allowing the reader to reflect on the concerns of those around them. His writing encompasses ethnography, historical study, fiction, and social criticism, and he believes that the distinction between fiction and non-fiction is little.

Amitav Ghosh's novels not only deal with social and historical issues, but also talks about environmental issues. It is clear from his writings that Ghosh is conscious about the deteriorating state of the nature around us and aims to spread awareness about the disastrous effects of degradation of environment through his writings. The activities of humans influence the state of the environment to a large extent. There is a strong connection between the two. The solution to the crisis can be found in this relation by analysing how nature is treated. Humans are nowadays conditioned to perceive nature from an anthropocentric angle that maintains the position of nature as an entity separate from human denies the fact that humans themselves are nature. But

by taking nature for granted and being instrumental in sabotaging the ecosystem, humans are putting themselves in danger. In order to find a solution to the global environmental crisis, there arises a need to bring a better understanding of the relation between humans and nature and thereby creating awareness.

The eco-conscious writings aimed at raising awareness and concern towards environmental issues were one of the major reasons that compelled the realm of literature to incorporate relating themes into literary genres. It is done with the goal of conserving, preserving and recognising ecosystem through a better understanding of the bond between humans and the physical environmental space. This affinity of literature studies and its role in addressing environmental issues led to the rise the literary theory, Cheryl Glotfelty simply defines Ecocriticism as:

The study of the relation between nature and physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of text, Ecocriticism takes an earth-centred approach to literary studies. (*Ecocriticism Reader*)

Ecocriticism, also referred by other alternative terms such as ‘Green Cultural Studies’, ‘Environmental Literary Criticism’, ‘Ecopoetic’, first rose as a concept in the late 1970’s. It addresses the irreparable environmental hazard caused by the exploitation of natural resources by humans. It investigates domains of culture and nature and how the merging of the two

induce crisis. This interdisciplinary critical approach analyses literature and how it engages with natural space, specifically through the characters by looking into the representation of nature in the work, the role of the physical setting in the story.

Michael.P.Branch in the collection of essays entitled *Reading the Earth: New Directions in the Study of Literature and the Environment*

elaborates the concept of Ecocriticism. He says:

Ecocriticism is not just a meaning of analysing nature in literature; it implies a move towards a more bio-centric worldview, an extension of ethics, broadening of human's conception of global community to include non-human life forms and the physical environment. Just as feminist and African American literary criticism call for a change in culture, that is, they attempt to move the culture towards a broader worldview by exposing an earlier narrowness of view so too does ecological literary criticism advocate for cultural change by examining how the narrowness of our culture's assumptions about the natural world has limited our ability to envision an ecologically sustainable human society. (55)

Historically, Ecocriticism is divided the course of its development into three waves; first wave, second wave and third wave. The first wave of Ecocriticism, which began in the 1980s, defined nature as the "natural environment" (Buell 21). It centred on literary nonfiction, the representation of nonhuman nature and the wilderness in British American literature and asserted the need for protection and preservation of the natural environment

from human interference. They used to endorse the philosophy of organism. Here, environment refers to the natural environment. The major focus of the wave was to preserve biotic community. The ecocritics of this wave evaluated how culture affected nature with the intention of celebrating nature, condemning those who harmed it, and repairing their harm through political action. As a result, ecocriticism was initially focused on protecting the environment. One of the most politically active sub-movements within the field was “eco feminism”.

The second wave, which began in the middle of the 1990s, broke away from the dichotomized discourses of nature writing and embraced a more inclusive dialogue that incorporated urban landscapes along with wilderness and rural landscapes, multicultural voices, and a variety of genres. It looks for remnants of nature in urban areas and uncovers crimes against society's outcasts related to environmental injustice. Not only the ecocritics interpret nature writing, but they also utilise them as a context for analysing how our society's values and practises relate to nature. It was more inclined to seeking environmental justice, a critique of how our culture disrespects and degrades nature.

Third wave ecocriticism is characterised by terms like “Eco-Cosmopolitanism”, which highlight the dialectical conflict between neo-bioregionalism and the local and global sense of place. Ecocriticism of third wave has witnessed an incredible expansion in terms of diversity of themes, methodologies, and its epistemological stance in relation to numerous gendered perspectives, such as Eco masculism and Green Queer Theory, Material Ecofeminism, Animality studies, and Posthumanism.

The concept of Deep Ecology, regarded as one of the most influential philosophies for environmental activism, believes in the fundamental interconnectedness of the life forms and their natural features. It condemns the Anthropocentric thinking which, according to deep ecologists, alienated humans from their environment. Deep ecology denounces the anthropocentric attitude that positions human as superior to nature, giving them power over nature to exploit. This concept proposes that it is the responsibility of humans to protect nature. It encourages the world to gain a new perspective that respects nature including the living and non-living forms like landscapes and water bodies.

Ecocriticism is interdisciplinary, even though it originated in the 1990s as a distinct academic field of literary study. This discipline is not a monolithic one. All sciences collaborate to develop in the theories. The goal of ecocriticism is to investigate the connections between people and other species. It identifies the connection between literature and the natural world. As a result, both geography and history contribute to the field. Ecocriticism argues that human nature is often anthropocentric, assuming that only men are important. In an effort to prevent a disastrous end for our planet, ecocriticism seeks to rectify the toxic anthropocentric perspective. The goal of ecocriticism is to maintain the integrity of the planet's core life support system for a sustainable future.

There are numerous works of literature contributed by Indian authors in English who have engaged in the theme of ecocriticism. They explored the environmental issues in many diverse ways through their works. In some writings environment is depicted as a setting or a literary device. For instance,

the wilderness of the environmental setting mirrors the emotional roller-coaster of the character or the calmness of a lake is invokes the peace in the story. Unlike in these novels or works, nature appears as a major theme in many writings, it is the core out of which the story branches out. The writers are very conscious of nature and depict it in a very memorable manner. Indian culture and tradition have deep rooted connection with nature. They worship nature as a divine entity and is often hailed as goddess and mother that nurtures and protect living beings. The countless folktales, mythical stories, temples, considering water bodies are the practices that associate nature to divinity. These elements are also found in Indian literary writings. The authors like Amitav Ghosh, R. K. Narayan, Manohar Malgonkar, Raja Rao, Kamala Markandaya and Anita Desai have invoked nature and elements of nature and have been vocal about their opinions on the manner in which nature is perceived, treated, discussed and depicted.

The present study of the novel *The Hungry Tide* authored by the renowned writer Amitav Ghosh, published in the year 2004 is based on the assumption that the novel reflects a conflux of history and human insights through reflections of ecology. The narrative itself represents Deep Ecological insights as well as an intuitive explanation of social ecology. The author portrayed the relationship between humans, flora and fauna and the physical environment exposing the tension between human beings within the same communities and their links to the natural environment in the novel *The Hungry Tide*. The story explores the conflict between man and nature in Sundarbans or the ‘tide country’ as referred in the text.

Chapter Two

Nature and Humanity in *The Hungry Tide*

The novel *The Hungry Tide* published in the year 2004 written by the prominent writer Amitav Ghosh poses the age-old question, can man and nature coexist in harmony? It investigates how humans share the natural space of ecosystem with the unpredictability of the wilderness. The novel is set in Sundarbans, also referred to as tide country in the novel. It is a vast expanse of mangrove forests, a half-submerged country where the Ganges River meets the oncoming tides of the Bay of Bengal where a wealthy and eccentric Scotsman by the name of Daniel Hamilton attempted to subdue the might of the Sundarbans by establishing a utopian community open to people of all races and religions.

The two key perspectives discussed in the novel are the obvious dangers to human settlement posed by the tides, storms, and animals of the forest and the enormous dangers posed to the rare variety of aquatic and terrestrial life, including the Irrawaddy dolphins and Bengal tigers, by the men who struggle to survive in the delta region. The literary world praised Amitav Ghosh, the author of the book, highly when the book received the 2004 Hutch Crossword Book Award. The novel engages the readers in the fascinating and picturesque description of an immense archipelago of islands of 'Sundarbans' which means 'the beautiful forests' which is not only depicted as a mere setting but also a character of prime importance in the story. The Sundarbans is a vast area of sundari trees, as the mangroves are locally known. It embodies extreme environmental and climatic conditions and is a habitat for diverse flora of the area. The title of the novel foreshadows the terrifying realities of

surviving in a place that is vulnerable to the destructive impacts of rogue tidal waves and tropical storms.

There is no prettiness here to invite the stranger in: yet, to the world at large this archipelago is known as “the Sundarban”, which means, “the beautiful forest”. There are some who believe the word to be derived from the name of a common species of mangrove – the *sundari* tree, *Heriteria minor*. But the word’s origin is no easier to account for than its prevalence, for in the recoed books of the Mughal emperors this region isnamed not in reference to a tree but to a tide –*bhati*. This is a land hail-submerged at high tide; it is only in falling that the water gives birth to the forest. To look upon this strange parturition, mid wived by the moon, is to know why the name “tide country” is not just right but necessary. (Ghosh 8)

The “tide country” embodies countless number of islands which appear and disappear according to whims of tides and seasons of “a terrain where the boundaries between land and water are always mutating, always unpredictable”. The ebb and flow of water constantly alters the land's contours in the Sundarbans. The river channels are dispersed throughout the landscape into diverse directions. Some of these waterways are so large and powerful that one coast can't be seen from the other. As the tides engulf many islands, thousands of mangrove forests appear and disappear every day and reappear after sometime. The tremendous tide currents can go up to 300 kilometres inland, which causes thousands of acres of woodland to vanish only to reappear later.

The beauty of the forest, as suggested by the name Sundarbans, is a bit ironic as it also comprises the element of terror and a sense of foreboding, since it is volatile and unpredictable. These forests are home to diverse flora and fauna like the sundari tree and endangered species of the Royal Bengal tiger and Irrawaddy dolphins whose prominent presence is crucial to the plot as it moves around them.

The story begins with the meeting of two prime characters Piyali and Kannai who are waiting for their train to Sundarbans. Piyali Roy, an Indo-American of Bengali origin is a cetologist from Seattle who came to the Sundarbans in search of species of river dolphins; *Orcaella brevirostris* commonly known as the Irrawaddy dolphin inhabit the Bay of Bengal near the Sundarbans. Though born in Kolkata, she was brought up in Seattle, USA, from a very early age. Her interest in water mammals brings her back to India. Kannai Dutt, a Delhi based businessman on his way to meet his aunt Nilima Bose, an NGO activist who runs a charity, a hospital, a guest house and educational services in the name of Badabon Trust on one of the islands, Lusibari. Nilima's work concerns the welfare of women, education for children and basic health care amenities for the natives of Lusibari. Kannai came to collect a parcel that his late uncle, Nirmal, has left him. It contains a diary, excerpts from which are scattered throughout the novel. He discovers is an account of his uncle's last days, which revolve around Kusum and her son Fokir, who are portrayed as the victims of eviction from the island of Morichjhapi. The papers form a story within a story and depict the social and political issues of displacement and suppression of natives by the government authorities. Fokir, an illiterate fisherman accompanies her as a guide in the

canal creeks and rows of the area. He takes her to Garjontola, a place where a whole shoal of dolphins can be seen. Ghosh empowers Fokir on many levels, in his familiarity with the tide country and its wilderness. His mother, Kusum beaming with pride says, “see saar: the river is in his veins” (245). Piya praises his skill while being out in water. It seems as if he can understand the language of the river and is in constant conversation with it. She has worked with many experienced fishermen before but has never met anyone with such a remarkable instinct.

Ghosh describes the Sundarban island's history, geography, origin, scenery, waterscape, skyscape, and the stories of people whose lives are interwoven with the Sundarbans' environment through these scattered accounts in Nirmal's diary. Ghosh portrays nature as one of the prime characters in the novel by providing a thorough depiction of interactions between people and environment. In *The Environmental Imagination*, Buell makes the following valid points:

The salient feature of environmental literature is that nature is not merely a setting or backdrop for human action, but an actual factor in the plot, that is, a character and sometimes even a protagonist. This is particularly obvious in nature and wilderness writing, which originate in the narrator's transformative encounters with a landscape and its inhabitants.

(124)

Divided into two sections – The Ebb: Bhata and The Flood: Jowar, the work represents an attempt to emphasize the coexistence of humans with nature and among all races, languages, socioeconomic groups, and

nationalities of different cultures and traditions. The novel shows how man's interference, beyond a certain extent, in nature can lead to tides of devastation not only in Sundarbans, but also in the human relations which are also explored in the novel. Every character in this novel is connected to one another in one way or other.

The novel begins with the journey of Kannai and Piyali boarding their train to Lusibari. They meet and talk about their journey, part ways only to meet again midway through the story. Sundarbans is not just a physical space but a character of intriguing presence that brings all the characters together. The relations these characters have with each other are grounded to this space. The relation these characters have with the environment are also different and it varies from a sense of belongingness and intimacy to feeling alienated or having no intimate connection to the nature.

Nilima Bose, referred to as 'Mashima' by people of Lusibari is another significant figure in the story. She represents the practical side of Nirmal, who contemplates and dreams of revolution rather than putting it into action. She is a practical person who places more value on concrete acts than on abstract ideologies. The relationship of Nirmal and Nilima examines the theme of individual interests and difference in perspectives and thought process.

Nirmal, addressed as 'saar' by the inhabitants of Lusibari, was originally from Dhaka who moved to Calcutta as a student. He was a Marxist ideologist and had a burning passion for revolution. He met Nilima who was a student of his and fell in love in spite of their contrasting natures. Their relation was opposed by her family, but they were determined to have a life together. Her family's opposition served only to strengthen her resolve and in 1949 the

young couple were married in a civil ceremony. The wedding was presided over by one of Nirmal's comrades and was solemnized by readings of Blake, Mayakovsky and Jibananda Das.

Amitav Ghosh through the characters Nilima and Nirmal breaks the conventional institution of marriage by refusing to be a part of it. He asserts that the conventions are not essential part to life, he exposes the so called traditions or conventions that claim to maintain order and peace in society. Their marriage was a reminder by Ghosh that for two people to live together the only thing matters is their choice. This was followed the downfall of Nirmal, who was arrested and was held in custody for a day or two for his political involvement. Even though Nirmal's arrest was brief, it had a very severe and a long-lasting impact on him. He was so shaken and scared that he was confined to bed. He had to quit his work. Nirmal was told by the physicians to spend some time outside the city. They decided to move to Lusibari for a relief from the city life. The manager of the Hamilton's estate was looking for a teacher to run the Lusibari School. Even the slightest notion of working at a company formed by a capitalist horrified the hardcore leftist in Nirmal, who was not prepared to do so. He was forced to give in to Nilima's persuasion. When the couple arrived there, they were shocked to learn that Sir Daniel was revered by the locals as a deity and that they treasured their memories of him as an idealistic pioneer who tried to improve the lives of the underprivileged rural population. The couple, pleased by the story of Lusibari decided to stay in the island.

It was difficult for the couple to adapt to the harsh climatic conditions of the 'tide country' initially. They were new to such strange and

unpredictable whims of the place as it was quite different from the city. The 'tide country' appeared to be situated in a far different place from the rest of the place as it had its own unique yet terrifying climate. The author emphasised this point in these lines: "What little they knew of rural life was derived from the villages of the plains: the realities of the tide country were of strangeness beyond reckoning" (79).

Nirmal and Nilima first struggled to adapt to the unfavourable circumstances of their new home. The island's residents were living in extreme poverty, they lacked even the most basic necessities like food, water, etc. The people were starving and the land was not fertile enough to produce enough food to feed them. Moreover there was no reliable or regular supply of food and other necessities. To keep their body and spirit intact, the people had to struggle on a daily basis and struggling became an everyday habit for them. They began hunting and fishing to gratify their hunger, but ironically, instead of being able to hunt, they were being hunted by the predators. 'No day seemed to pass without news of someone being killed by a tiger, a snake or a crocodile'(81).The author addresses the issue of the clash between man and wild in where there is coexistence as well as a struggle for life between them.

Overwhelmed by witnessing the pathetic conditions of the people, Nilima and Nirmal wanted to do something to help them. With the promise of getting free farm land, these underprivileged individuals were relocated there. But they had been deceived; it was beyond their comprehension what good that barren landscape served. They were losing their lives on that harsh island, instead of residing there in peace and happiness.

The majority of women in Lusibari were widows. Their husbands were killed by the wild animals while they were searching for food and fire. This misfortune left their distressed families to endure an everlasting cycle of suffering. Their wives used to take off their bangles and wash the vermilion from their hair when the men went fishing outside. This was done to prepare themselves for the impending misfortune they were expected to encounter. This highlights the torture they had to endure for making both ends meet. Witnessing the plight of young women in Lusibari who became widow at a very young age and the challenges they were forced to face after losing their husbands made Nilima restless. 'Nilima learnt, even more than on the mainland, widowhood often meant a lifetime of dependence and years of abuse of exploitation' (81).

For the people in Lusibari, life was nothing besides the plight and constant struggles to survive each day. They had to go through a lot just to survive every single day. Nilima wanted to do something for them to deal with this situation and ease their sorrow. She developed her ideas and implemented plans. She put her soul and heart into it, in order to give practical colour to her dreams. She planted her idea and nurtured it, which later flourished and ultimately became an institution named Badabon Trust. In this way Nilima's idea and hard work not only gave them relief but also became a ray hope for all the unprivileged of the island. She also gave a push to the woman of the 'tide country' who were facing multiple layers of marginalisation in the name of their gender in addition to their regional, special identities. Nilima focused on giving them financial freedom by engaging them in activities like The

Union's knitting, sewing, dyeing, etc to generate income that could benefit the whole place.

Nilima's compassion and dedication brought positive changes in the life of the people, especially of the women, who were helpless. Nilima had all the necessary qualities of an able administrator and organiser. Her love and devotion to Nirmal was unbounded. She cared deeply for Kanai. She also seemed to be affectionate for Piya and Kusum, the person who brought the Morichjhapi conflict in to life of Nirmal. Kusum passed away during the riot in 1979 but no one is quite sure what happened. Nirmal only writes about her in his notebook and other characters talk about her. Kusum was entrusted in the Lusibari Women's Union's custody as a young teenager in 1970 after she lost both of her parents. Her mother was sold into forced prostitution after her father was attacked and killed by a tiger. She was Kanai's childhood friend. When Kusum approached Nilima to request assistance for Morichjhapi, she politely declined, saying she did not want to get involved in that situation because, in her opinion, the residents of Morichjhapi were squatters who were trespassing on government property and that, either directly or indirectly, posed a threat to the environment as well as to her trust. She did not agree at all with Nirmal's views as it was against government's will. To quote her: "You have no idea of how hard we've had to work to stay on the right side of government. If the politicians turn against us, we're finished. I can't take that chance." (214)

Amitav Ghosh has tried to focus on the individual's obsessions and curiosity in this novel, the hungry tides are raging not only on the shores, but also on the psyche of individuals and their relationships. In this book, Ghosh

has made an effort to highlight the obsessions and curiosities of the individual. The hungry tides are raging not only on the shores but also on people's minds and interpersonal interactions.

Nilima could not tolerate any form of harm to the Trust since it was her responsibility and her life. It meant everything to her. Like her own kid, she had nurtured it and actively participated in building it. She had put a lot of effort into making it happen. Her statements, used during a confrontation with Nirmal, highlight her devotion, commitment, dedication, loyalty to her business: 'And if you ask me what I will do to protect it, let me tell you, I will fight for it like a mother fights to protect her children. The hospital's future, its welfare – they mean everything to me, and I will not endanger them'. (214)

Nirmal wanted to do something for the unprivileged people of Morichjhapi whose voice were silenced. He was an idealist and wrote extensively about his visions on revolutions but failed to bring it into action. He longed to empower and amplify voice of their dreams and aspirations of those people through his words. Both Nilima and Nirmal had passion to serve humanity but still they extremely differed in the way of observation and perception. They had the same aspiration to serve the people but implemented different methods to execute them. One advocated revolutionary methods, and the other by sought to improve welfare works without disappointing the present system. One was a dreamer and the other a realist.

Nilima began to manage a trust with the support of the government and refrained from taking any actions that went against the political establishment, but Nirmal, like an oppositional Marxist, dreamed of a revolution. Against Nilima's wishes, he went to Morichjhapi and be a part of the society's

development. He wanted the children to learn to dream and motivate them to aim beyond the horizon of the islands. He became anxious when he heard the government was taking action against them and he wanted to help them desperately. He wanted to inform Kusum and the settlers about Section 144 of the Forest Preservation Act. He was unable to hold himself back from coming there.

Piya and Fokir have a peculiar connection since Piya is a smart, well-educated woman, and Fokir is a simple, illiterate country bumpkin. They are unable to communicate verbally since they do not speak the same language. Piya, while having Bengali roots, has no understanding of Bengali, much as Fokir has no knowledge of English. Strangely enough, Piya decides to continue her studies with Fokir's assistance. Perhaps she recognizes his extraordinary personality and his understanding of the marine creatures and the tide region. She realizes that Fokir cannot be a threat to her from her extensive experience dealing with various individuals. She stays on the boat for many nights and learns to read the waves and adapts to its very nature. Her physical appearance demonstrates her striving nature, "Over years of practice, her muscles had grown sensitive to the water and she had learned to hold her balance almost without effort, bending her knees automatically to counterbalance the rolling" (72).

In the novel, Ghosh shows a harmonious blend of Hindu and Muslim traditions through the character of Fokir. Piya, who was raised in a western society, respects all cultures and traditions, and she appreciates this blend. She initially assumes he is a Muslim when she hears him chanting words similar to Allah, but to her pleasant surprise, he starts to conduct ritualistic movements

that are reminiscent of her mother's Hindu pujas. A simpleton is preaching religious tolerance in a place like India where religious extremism has been a major issue.

Fokir began to recite some kind of chant, with his head bowed and his hands joined in an attitude of prayer. After she had listened for a few minutes, Piya recognised a refrain that occurred over and over again – it contained a word that sounded like Allah. She had not thought to speculate about Fokir's religion, but it occurred to her now that he might be Muslim. But no sooner had she thought about this, then it struck her that a Muslim was hardly likely to pray to an image like this one. What Fokir was performing looked very much like her mother's Hindu pujas – and yet the words seemed to suggest otherwise. But what did it matter either way? She was glad just to be there as a witness to this strange little ritual. (*Ghosh* 152)

The author narrates the tale of goddess Bon Bibi, who is believed by the native people, as the protector of the 'tide country'. When Kusum's son was a young boy, she told him the fable. They frequently come to her to offer their adoration since her father constructed a shrine in her honour. According to the legend, Bon Bobi is a beneficent spirit who rules over the tide country's forests, rivers, and seas. She is believed to have come from a different land of Arabia with her brother, Shah Jongli to protect and make the innocent humans habitable on the land of eighteen tides. The jungles of that land is believed to be a realm of Dokkhin Rai, a powerful demon king who holds sway over every being, every animal, every ghoul, ghost and malevolent spirit that lives in the

forest. This demon king harbours a hatred coupled with insatiable desires for human flesh. In an effort to establish a habitat there to accommodate humans, Bon Bibi overpowers Dokkhin Rai and divides the island into two halves- the wild and the sown being held in careful balance. Being gracious, she gives one half of the jungle to demon to rule while other half is made suitable and habitable for human settlement. This myth is accompanied by the tales how she comes to rescue the innocent humans and saves fishermen from distress abound in the land. In the same way, through this myth, Ghosh wishes to create a balance between the wild and human.

The most intriguing and beautiful aspect of the book is Piya and Fokir's connection, and the author's depiction of their chance encounter is breath-taking. As a true research student, Piya will take advantage of every opportunity to learn anything new, even from a man from the countryside like Fokir. After careful investigation, she discovers that he possesses incredible skills, and his companionship turns out to be among the nicest things in her life. She frequently praises his great attributes since she is aware of their value.

Fokir remains true to Piya, he always proves to be reliable and trustworthy, assuring her that she will be secure and comfortable in his presence. Without any verbal communication, they develop a very unique connection and understanding which is beyond bounds of language. Fokir has a strong feeling of love for her that he is ready to sacrifice his life for her. He cares for that woman and offered warmth when she was in her most vulnerable state. When they are struggling against the storm for their survival, he does not leave any attempt to save her life. The platonic love and concern for Piya

ultimately takes its price in the form of death of Fokir. The work is also a beautiful meditation on the unconditional love of Fokir and Piya who found in each other warmth and comfort of home. They connect at a very deeper level. Their ability to communicate and understand one another breaks all the boundaries of language, culture, religion, geography and many other. They communicated in the language of empathy and intimacy. Through their relationship, Ghosh explored and expanded the medium of communication that was limited to words and letters.

At the time of death, he utters his wife and son's names that moved Piya, it left an indelible imprint in her mind about Fokir. This consequently lead to her decision to stay in Lusibari with a project dedicated to and named after Fokir to honour his sacrifice and the kindness he showed to Piya.. It was undoubtedly her love and homage for Fokir that she resolved to devote herself to the family and the tide country.

The theme of individual conflict and concern for one another is one of the novel's central themes, which the author depicts through a many different relationships, whether between husband and wife or simply between man and woman outside the nuptial tie. Both Piyali and Fokir's relationship and Nirmal and Nilima's relationship are built on love, in spite of the differences between them. Nirmal and Nilima have been living together for many years; they fell in love, expressed their love for each other, and then married, yet they continue to be poles apart, but Piyali and Fokir, who appear to be poles apart, make a memorable impression on the readers.

Nilima, is constantly engaged with the trust's activities, while her husband's affections are drawn to Morrichjhapi and Kusum. Kusum is an

inspiration to him; she has lived a life of enormous suffering, and Nirmal want to put her struggle into words. Her father died while she was a child, and her mother lived in poverty. Dalip Choudhury, a landowner, offered her mother a position in the city. She went with him because she needed money, and subsequently the landowner persuaded Kusum to accompany him for better job in Calcutta. Horen told her that Dalip was not a genuine person as he was involved in the trafficking of women. So, he took her to Lusibari and was taken in the custody of Mashima (Nilima). Horen was married at age fourteen and had three children before his twentieth birthday. Kusum was a distant relative of his, and Horen was instrumental in keeping her from harm and specifically, from the predatory landowner Dilip Choudhury came to her rescue and took her off with him. Kusum decided to look for her mother and travelled to Dhanbad, an unfamiliar environment for her.

She met Rajen, who had been injured in a bus accident. Rajen was extremely helpful to her in such a tough and difficult time and place. He provided her a temporary shelter in his house and helped her by arranging a meeting with her mother secretly. Kusum's mother was worried about her daughter's future, but Rajen assured her that her daughter Kusum will be safe in hands and she will be loved unconditionally. With her mother's blessing Kusum and Rajen got married and settled down and were blessed with a son named Fokir after two years. But her dilemma and misery did not end there, as her hostile fate handed her the most tragic chapter of her life in the form of her husband's death. Kusum fell back into the same pit of despair and misery with her son Fokir and was compelled to leave Dhanbad for the tide country.

Ghosh in the novel, not only gives voice to the unprivileged people who are victimised by the political disorder, but also criticises the system for depriving the future generation of their basic amenities like basic education and health by highlighting the plight of the people in the 'tide country'.

The Hungry Tide discusses a number of key issues regarding the ecosystem. Through the story, he attempts to communicate the notion that our planet has numerous sensitive zones, and that man's interference in these zones have disastrous consequences. Amitav Ghosh attempts to emphasize the problem of the Sundarbans' fragility. Reading the tale, readers learn that over four thousand people had been murdered by tigers in the region in the last six years. The question is: who is encroaching on the habitat of the other, man or tiger? The most widely accepted explanation to this question is overpopulation that resulted in over exploitation of natural resources. As more and more people came to the 'tide country' they were in a way taking up the space of the wild as well which resulted in the confrontation with tigers. But the character Nilima talks about a different issue to Kanai. According to Nilima, tigers are different from those elsewhere. She says that it is not only man, who disturbs nature but sometimes animals and other creatures also disturb the harmony.

In other habitats, tigers only attacked human beings in abnormal circumstances: if they happened to be crippled or were otherwise unable to hunt down any other kind of prey. But this was not true of the tide country's tigers; even young and healthy animals were known to attack human beings. Some said that this propensity came from peculiar conditions of the tidal ecology, in which large parts of the forest was subjected to

daily submersions. The theory went that this raised the animals' threshold of aggression by washing away their scent markings and confusing their territorial instincts. (241)

The theme of individual concern comes to the forefront in the introduction of many other characters and their relations and struggles. Moyna, wife of Fokir is one such. Her attitude is endearing, and her character is vibrant which makes her memorable. She is a woman with great courage and self-assurance. From the beginning to the end of the tale, we see her battling the difficulties of life with tenacity and patience. She makes sure her voice is heard. She exemplifies the emerging rural women who are eager to enter the mainstream of modern metropolitan women by being self-sufficient, educated, and assertive. She is doing nursing training at Nilima's hospital. Like Nilima, she decides the course of his life herself. There are a lot of similarities between Nilima and Moyna in terms of their attitude and the relationships with their spouse.

The Hungry Tide thus encompasses diverse themes especially human interactions, their relationships between themselves and the nature especially the wilderness and its impact on them. The novel illustrates a clear distinction between human and wild. There is a pronounced separation between the two brought about by the unpredictability and danger of the latter. Fokir and Piyali attempt to step into the boundaries of nature in a hope to have a harmonious relationship with nature. They are contrasted by Kannai who despises wild. This contradiction can also be seen among characters. The story of Bon Bibi symbolises the supremacy of wilderness and the fragility of humans in the hands of nature.

Chapter Three

Ecocritical Study of *The Hungry Tide*

Ecocriticism is a branch of literary studies that attempts to analyse the interconnection between literature and nature by looking into the representation of environment and how the characters interact with their habitat and most importantly how the environment impacts the character and their story. Degradation of the environment is one of the most important issues the world faces today. The first wave Ecocriticism focused on nature writing, nature poetry and wilderness fiction. The second wave Ecocriticism is concerned with environmental justice of degraded landscapes. As pointed out by many critics, one of the reasons that ecocriticism continues to grow as a discipline is the growing global environment crisis and the threat it poses to the beings on this planet. Ecocriticism aims to show how the authors and their works can play a crucial role in influencing the readers to build a mindset that help them view nature as more than just a source to be exploited.

India is known for its diversity in ecosystems which ranges from Himalayas in the north to plateaus of south and from the dynamic Sundarbans in the east to arid Thar of the west. With time, however, these ecosystems have been adversely affected due to increasing population. Anthropocentric thinking in mankind has alienated humans from nature and caused to lose the connection between them.

There are not many novels in Indian fiction that deals with the theme of ecocriticism, where it is given significance, nature has been used as a backdrop against which the story unfolds. This shows that a serious concern with ecology seems to be lacking in the works of earlier writers. as time

progressed literature evolved, writers developed a sense of social responsibility and concern towards their environment. They began to criticise how nature was treated and spread awareness on the consequences of human actions that damaged the planet's basic life support system. Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* is work that looks at nature from a different light. The book is about one of the most dynamic ecological systems of the world. The 'tide country' is not presented as a mere setting or background to the story. It is depicted as a significant character around which the story and its characters revolve. This novel clearly brings out the wrath of nature and fragility of humans at the mercy of nature.

The Hungry Tide opens with the train journey of Kannai and Piyali to Sundarbans or as referred to as 'tide country' in the novel. Kanai meets Piya in the train that take him to his aunt Nilima and collect the package left for him by his uncle, Nirmal. The package, he discovers is an account of his uncle's last days in Morichjhapi. It involved Kusum and her son Fokir, who are the victims of eviction from the island of Morichjhapi. Ghosh weaves two narratives together that unfolds parallelly. One of them unravels through Nirmal's journals recounting the episodes in Morichjhapi and the other through Piya's expedition, to study the endangered species of dolphins that could be found in the rivers of the 'tide country'. It is interesting to note that one is from the past and the other is from present and at some point these two merges into one another. The first narrative involves the historical event of Morichjhapi from the perspective of the victims. In the narrative involving Piya and Fokir the author shows that the past infused in the present, through the past of Fokir. These two narratives are juxtaposed to highlights the issues

of wilderness conservation and its related social costs in areas populated by the socially and economically unprivileged both in the past and the present. In a way he was rewriting the history in the language of plight of the victim. The story of the novel is centred on the 'tide country' that includes the villages such as Lusibari, Garjontola and Morichjhapi. The author gives many insights into their plight that has become a way of life for them. Hunger, poverty, death, unpredictability are some major attributes of life in the 'tide country'. Widowhood has become so normalized into their lives that they shed their marriage symbols every time their husbands go fishing and hunting.

When the men folk went fishing it was the custom of their wives to change into the garments of widowhood. they would put away their marital reads and dress in white sarees; they will take off their bangles and wash the vermilion from their heads it was as though they were trying to hold misfortune at bay by living through it over and over again. (Ghosh 85-86)

Amitav Ghosh intends to propose that if individuals from both privileged and unprivileged poverty stricken backgrounds come together, the world's poor would have a better future. Piya and Fokir's connection represents the merger of two spheres of culture and class. This class difference is highlighted in the way they perceive tigers, for Piya tiger is just an animal but for Fokir, tiger invokes the deep rooted trauma in him. The people have suffered a lot due to the tigers as it took lives for many men throwing young women into widowhood. The government authorities have imposed the restrictions over killing tigers and initiated the conservation of these animals with no concern for the people who are prone to the attacks from wild. For

Piya, who is an outsider, is not accustomed to the state of people. The act of killing the tiger appears to be brutal and cruel on the part of these people. She thinks that Fokir may oppose the tiger killing but she finds that Fokir himself is involved in the act of killing the tiger. This incident reveals the cultural difference and she thinks that she has misinterpreted the Fokir.

The plot centres primarily on Sundarbans which is one of the suburbs of India. Ghosh depicts the entire story as an ecological witness in the West Bengal area after 2004, which is fully encircled by mangrove forest. The narrative has effectively emphasized the essential role of each aspect of nature throughout the entire story, such as the crocodile, tiger, and several other creatures. The features and elements play an important role in justifying environmental events and the trajectory of transformation.

There are several occasions in the story that highlight the need and reliance on nature for survival. The entire picture takes place in the Sundarbans, a region rich in coastal biodiversity. "Ecology found its voice by studying the properties of species, their distribution across space, and their adaptive discourse in time" writes William Howarth in *Ecocriticism Reader*. This corresponds to the lives of the characters in the narrative. Piyali Roy is a cetologist who spends her days researching the nature of Irrawaddy Dolphins. Amitav Ghosh has portrayed this character as a person of strength and courage, capable of overcoming man's challenges, such as the government. She possesses the characteristics of an ecofeminist. In the narrative, she acquires the title of feminism due to her ideas and her strong attachment to and desire to research this specific breed. As Karen J Warren asserts in her study, women and the environment have a deeper relationship. They have interests

that are related to their stroll with nature since they have a deep connection with nature. Piyali Roy's profession as a cetologist helps in understanding of marine species. Thus connection established between her and the environment is evident in these lines:

There are no borders here to divide fresh water from salt, river from sea. The tides reach as far as three hundred kilometres 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. (13)

This study of the novel *The Hungry Tide* is based on the assumption that the novels depict a conflux of history and human understanding. The voice of the common man, his difficulties and sacrifices that went unheard in historical records began to take centre stage in the fiction. Amitav Ghosh cleverly uses ecology to highlight this aspect of history. He speaks about the plight of the marginalised and oppressed by exposing the power structures. There is a reflection of both profound ecological ideas and an intrinsic exposition of social ecology in this present study of the novel, *The Hungry Tide*, which brings forth the many issues, conveyed through distinct characters and images. History no longer remains an unchangeable construct. This novel explores environmental policies, which are detrimental, disregard the material reality of the landscape and the living of the socially and economically backward classes like indigenous people, forest dwellers and tribals.

In *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh predicts an impending worldwide ecological catastrophe and attempts to offer solutions through the voices of fictitious people. This study carefully researched and focused on the fundamental necessity of the day to protect the fauna and flora, as well as the aquatic species. The work of Amitav Ghosh, provides a deeper comprehension of the world around us as well as an understanding of the past by juxtaposing the growing existential crises. This novel is analysed from the deep ecological perspective, focuses on the importance of merging the ecosystem and its preservation along with the perspective of native people and their culture is explored through social ecocritical perspective.

Social ecology investigates the relationships between social categories such as culture, politics, society organization, and economics and natural categories such as social, water, and forest. The social ecological aspect of *The Hungry Tide* locates the underlying human-environmental predicament. Funds raised for the Tiger Conservation Project by various environmental organizations are used for the forest department's personal benefit. Through Nilima, the author presents an introspective perspective on conservation logistics: "Imagine that!" said Nilima. "They [the forest department] were giving tigers water! In a land where no one thinks twice about thirsty humans!" (241).

Sundarbans is represented as a living entity with all human qualities with a strong mythical background. Goddess Ganga who descended from heaven is tamed by Shiva by 'tying it into his ash-smear'd locks', with a 'heavenly braid' (6). Shiva's hair is unlocked when his 'matted hair is washed apart into a vast, knotted tangle' (6).

The Sundarbans is the only habitat of the Bengal Tigers, the government had declared Morichjhapi as a reserved area and engaged in stringent activities to remove the inhabitants and convert the area into a sacrifice zone. Tigers might be grown after indigenous people are evacuated, with little regard for what happens to these people once they are removed. This dilemma is mirrored in ecological criticism of movements that declare greater worth of animals over human-inhabited areas because it ignores the links between marginalization and impoverishment of human populations and environmental exploitation and deterioration.

It is shocking to know that many of the “islands were forcibly depopulated in order to make room for wildlife conservation projects” (59). The author reiterates the plight of the poor whose lives are no matter to the world, which “can feel the suffering of an animal, but not of human beings” (301). He mocks at the futility of the plans of the people belonging to the comfort zones who make “. . . a push to protect the wildlife here, without regard for the human costs” (301).

Ghosh paints a rich landscape. The people who have lived there for extended periods of time have endured marginalization and hardship as a result of political activity. Kusum represents the displaced community who longs for the touch of native land: “Walking on iron, we longed for the touch of mud; encircled by rails, we dreamed of the Raimangal in flood” (164). They express their nostalgia thus: “By night we remembered, we talked and we dreamed - by day coal and metal were the stuff of our lives” (164). They do not want to turn their future into “A lifetime of toil, in a city of rust” when rivers ran in our heads; the tides were in our blood” (165). The roots of

poverty, injustice and environmental degradation lie at the heart of the land which is split by political boundaries and cordoned off as national wilderness areas.

Ghosh presents a world of nature not just as a setting of picturesque beauty also as a character hungry for human blood. A major concern of social ecologists is anthropocentric conceit, and the Sahara Project in the Sundarbans is a metaphor of this in terms of modern development. In order to build hotels, restaurants, shops, business centres, cinemas, and theatres as part of Sahara India Parivar's massive tourism project, large portions of the Sundarbans would have to be taken over, upsetting the delicate ecosystem and endangering the area's already threatened biodiversity.

Ghosh seems to follow socio-ecocritical view that the modern environmental crises “can be managed, solved or perhaps overcome by new myths or improvements in thinking that would reconceptualise the boundaries as well as the content of our understanding of humanity and nature” (5). In other novels like *The Circle of Reason* and *In an Antique Land* also one finds the weaving image of the importance of the ecological strands but with unrealised potential of a fully developed eco-critical narrative.

All of nature's destructive and hostile features are represented by *The Hungry Tide*. Numerous individuals drown, and many more are eaten by crocodiles and sharks. Tiger assaults are quite frequent. When we carefully read the book, we find that Kusum's father's death is the only one that is mentioned among all the animal deaths. The force of nature is shown in this scenario to be greater than human might, rendering humans powerless. Ghosh writes, “The animal too was upwind of its prey and they could see its coat

flashing as it closed in; because of the distinctiveness of its own order, it was skilled in dealing with the wind and it knew that the people on the other bank were powerless against these gusts” (108). These great cats of the tide country are like ghosts who never reveal their presence except through marks, sounds and smell. The wild cats of the tidal country are like ghosts that only leave behind markings, noises, and smells.

Tigers and crocodiles in the story are engaged in planning, stalking, and then attacking their prey. These natural attackers appear to be aware that humans are defenceless in the face of their gusts. When Kusum's father was attacked, he exposes the tiger's nature in its raw form. It had such absolute confidence in its abilities that, in the last stretch, it actually came out from hiding and raced along the coast in plain view of the distant shore. ‘ This was in itself an astonishing sight, almost without precedent, for the great cats of the tide country were like ghosts, never revealing their presence except through marks, sounds and smells.’(108)

In the novel, the storm is mentioned that destroys an embankment that is one kilometre long. The people in the island are feeling the brutality of this storm. The storm takes away the hope of the people and isolates them to despair and grief. “They had even managed to grow a few handfuls of rice and vegetables. After years of living on stilt- raised platforms, they had finally been able to descend to earth and make a few shacks and shanties on level ground. All this by virtue of the badh” (203). These people struggle to build a town despite all obstacles. Although it is impossible for individuals to build a house there, the reality is that these people have nowhere else to go. Since they have nowhere else to go, they make a living off the salty, desolate tracts of

that land with a determination to live. Majority of the population are fishermen who live off of fish and crabs. Their survival is dangerous as their life or in reality their existence is unpredictable. These people are always in struggle and there is always incessant battle against beasts, storms and tides. Their efforts are utterly destroyed by the storm in a matter of seconds, leaving them rootless and roofless.

Ghosh draws a parallelism between the jaw of tiger and the gaping maw of the tide to expose the innate patterns within the web of ecosystem. He gives an elaborate account of a furious storm in the novel. It is the first known instance of two catastrophes- earthquake and storm happening together. The calamity is impossible to comprehend: “The waters rose so high that they killed thousands of animals and carried them upriver and inland” (204). The storm is so fierce the bodies of heavy rhinoceroses and swift tigers was discovered kilometres distant from the river in rice fields and village ponds. The feathers of dead birds covered the entire landscape.

Ghosh brings out the symbiotic and homogenous relationship that exists between nature, humans and other living creatures. In order to maintain existence, the world's flora and animals are continually interconnected. Each organism's place in the ecosystem is well defined. Every living thing has a relationship with humans.

This eco-critical reading shares a common motivation, awareness of environmental crisis caused by human actions, which damage earth's ecosystem. *The Hungry Tide* by Ghosh inspires readers to support environmental restoration through literary depiction. Ghosh ties people and environment together and depicts the spatial and topographical dilemma that

affects both human and animal existence. He frequently talks about the natural disasters that constantly reshape the tide country.

The conservation of endangered animals like dolphins and tigers, as well as the problem of human habitation in the Sundarbans forest, are the main topics discussed in the book. *The Hungry Tide* illustrates the essential interdependence that must be maintained between humans and non-humans in Ghosh's web of interconnectivity. Aside from the overarching fictional plot, Amitav Ghosh has also implicitly advocated for the importance of other environmental concerns of the Sahara Ecocriticism Project, which will only pose a threat to the region.

Through the character of Horen Naskor, a fisherman who lives in an island called Satjelia Ghosh highlights the true wealth of the Sunderbans and how it benefits the locals. At the age of fourteen, Horen was married, and by the time he was twenty, he had three kids. His life is dependent on the forest and he looks at it with a deep reverence, as Nilima said: “what are you doing in canning, Horen?” He replied “Jongolkortegeslam, I went to do jungle yesterday, Mashima, and Bon Bibi granted me enough honey to fill two bottles. I came to sell them” (28). Through these lines Ghosh beautifully describes man’s interdepending on the forest and for their day to day needs.

The people not only have an affinity to nature and but also attribute divinity to nature and this is maintained through mythical stories like that of Bon Bibi, worshipped as the goddess of forest. Bon Bibi is the guardian deity of the forest. Through the wonderful depiction of Bon Bibi, Ghosh transports the readers to a mythical world where human had a close relationship with nature when Horen mentions the name Bon Bibi, Kanai becomes curious and

asks Nilima “who is Bon Bibi?” “the Goddess of forest” Nilima had whispered back. “In these parts, people believe she rules over all the animals of the jungle” (28).

The goddess Bon Bibi is given a spiritual significance in this place and is worshipped as a natural divinity. She also serves as a protector of the jungle and remains a cultural symbol who creates a bond between culture and conservation which is helpful in promoting an ecological balance between man and nature of a particular region. Ghosh shows that myths play an essential role and it enables humans to understand and connect with nature more intimately. Ghosh hopes to achieve a balance between humans and the natural world through this tale. Additionally, the locals there hold the belief that Bon Bibi uses the river dolphins, known locally as “shushuk” as her eyes and ears. These Bon Bibi messengers are said to help fisherman by directing them to fish and crabs. Here, Ghosh discusses habitual concerns using this ancient fable.

The ecocritical analysis demonstrates that Ghosh has done justice to nature. His contributions through his works are in defence of the environment and its concerns. As Ghosh emphasizes through the character Kusum, the ancestral tradition of honouring nature as divine power and their traditional spiritual and cultural belief systems are seen through the detailed representation of Bon Bibi, the forest goddess who rules over the jungle, the tigers, crocodiles and other animals.

The integrated way of life of the natives, who consider dolphins as messengers of the forest goddess Bon Bibi, has been highlighted by Ghosh. Native Americans think that dolphins that move in waterways deliver signals

about tides and approaching danger. Kusum, a native of the tide forest, considers dolphins to be reliable companions on her watery travels:

When the day breaks, you'll see it is time for low tide; cross the island and go to the northern side. Keep your eyes on water, be patient and you'll see... they'll keep company till the water arise... Anyone can see Bon Bibi's messenger if they know where to look. (234)

These remarks make it clear that the Sundarbans has a huge, untamed ecology that serves as the narrative's core. Ghosh exposes human desire for land in the guise of modernisation in the *Hungry Tide*. Through the persona of Sir Daniel Hamilton, Ghosh illustrates the human desire for land, its natural resources, and the ecological balance between humans and the environment. The wealth of the region left him astounded. Ghosh describes his colonial mindset thus "when this this Scotsman looked upon crab- covered shores of the tide country, he saw not mud, but something that shone brighter than gold, 'look how much this mud is worth', he said "A single acre of Bengal's mud yields fifteen mounds of rice" (49). He was fascinated by the rich natural environment and the fertile soil, so he disregarded all the forest department's regulations that kept the region under his protection.

Anthropometric arrogance is a central theme of social ecologist and this is what is symbolised by modern terms of development like the Sahara project in the Sundarbans. Urbanization and economic expansion are a new form of feudal tradition that take advantage of those who are most in need of resources. Instead of colonial powers, this is represented by contemporary political power structures that direct exploitation on grounds of national

interest. His conscious engagement with the natural world awakens us to the looming environmental catastrophe threatening the globe.

The eco-critical study observes that the novel *The Hungry Tide* paints a picture of man's intricate relationship with environment. The Sundarbans in the Bay of Bengal are some islands where people coexist with wildlife. The challenges that the inhabitants face as a result of unexpected tidal surges and tiger attacks point to a major ecological catastrophe on Earth.

Chapter Four

Conclusion

The present study attempts to illuminate the novel of Amitav Ghosh, titled *The Hungry Tide* from an eco-critical perspective. The fundamental premise of the study is to look into the depiction of nature through the interactions of human with their habitat. Ecocriticism covers a wide range of theories and areas of interest, particularly the relationship between literature and the environment. The paper attempts to examine the language used by Ghosh to illustrate nature, as ecocriticism investigates the terms by which one relates to nature and its portrayal as one of the central characters in the work.

Ecocriticism is a branch of literary studies that attempts to analyse the interconnection between literature and nature by looking into the representation and treatment of environment by examining the depiction of environment in relation to the plot and how the characters interact with their habitat and most importantly how the environment impacts the character and their life depicted in the story.

Degradation of the environment is one of the most important issues the world faces today. The first wave of Ecocriticism focused on nature writing, nature poetry and wilderness fiction. The second wave of Ecocriticism is concerned with environmental justice of degraded landscapes. As pointed out by many critics, one of the reasons that ecocriticism continues to grow as a discipline is the growing global environment crisis and the threat it poses to the beings on this planet. Ecocriticism aims to show how the authors and their works can play a crucial role in influencing the readers to build a mindset that help them view nature as more than just a source to be exploited.

In respect to Sundarbans as an ecological area, the novel underlines the intimacy between man and environment. In his fictional works, Amitav Ghosh, one of the few Indian authors who wrote in English during the post-colonial era, builds the image of nature by weaving together tales, experience, myth, and history. Through this work, Ghosh strives to the development of environmental justice toward all living things.

The assumption underlying the term “Environmental Justice” is that every person has the right to benefit from a high degree of environmental protection, regardless of their race, colour, nation or origin. Environmental justice communities are commonly identified as those where residents are predominantly minorities or of low income. The residents are excluded from the environmental policy setting or decision-making process and are subjected to a disproportionate impact from one or more environmental hazards. Huggan and Helen in *Postcolonial Ecocriticism* point out that both postcolonial and environmentalist critics, who are aware of the challenges involved in putting the livelihoods of local (subaltern) people at risk, have drawn attention to such conflicts of interest. The issue frequently appears intractable, with humans or the additional human environment demanding attention.

Understanding how people behave and respond in relation to environment and ecological issues is one of key objectives of the study of ecocriticism. Due to the rising social emphasis on environmental degradation and the advancement of technology, this critique has attracted a lot of attention recently. Ecocriticism facilitate understanding the complexities of relationship between man and nature as presented in literature. This relationship varies from one species to another and bring out the specific characteristics of nature

and human being. Ecocriticism developed prominence among both common people and academics as environmental challenges swiftly occupied the global spotlight. In the book *Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, Cheryll Glotfelty contrasts ecocriticism with various literary ideas. She elucidates that literary theory explores the connections between authors, writings, and "the world," which is typically referred to as society or the social sphere. Literature does not float around the physical world in some kind of aesthetic ether, but rather, it participates in an incredibly intricate global system, in which energy, matter, and ideas interact. Ecocriticism broadens the concept of "the world" to include the entire eco system.

In his writing, Amitav Ghosh has brought out the beauty of the 'tide country' and has discussed the life of people in Sundarbans and the interaction of characters with their environmental surroundings. He details the vicinity and presents the relationship between the protagonist and nature in the novel *The Hungry Tide* with precision. Ghosh highlights the absolute dependency of people on nature despite the challenges it offers. It is interesting to note that same natural space offers both the warmth of a home and dangers to its inhabitants. India is a nation known for its feature of diversity which is also found in its ecosystem. The country has a diverse range of flora and fauna, which is reflected in writers' works. The ecocritical reading of the book tries to study how the close, intimate relationship between nature and society has been textualized by the writers.

The conservation of endangered animals like dolphins and tigers, as well as human habitation in the Sundarbans forest, were the key issues discussed in the novel. *The Hungry Tide* illustrates the symbiotic

interdependence that must be upheld between humans and non-humans. He projects the way one life depends on the life of the other.

The novel *The Hungry Tide* revolves around the main characters who are caught up in the tides death trap and which represents the mutual relationship between man and nature. The novel discusses themes related to ecological issues knitted along with adventure, love, identity and history. The novel has given more importance to the crimes done against the environment as well as against the humans in the name of conservation and brilliantly documents how the ecological balance is disturbed through intervention of each other to their place. Ecocriticism elucidates relationship between human and non-human nature, privileging literary inscriptions. It is a response to the need for the humanistic understanding of one relationship with the natural world in an age of environmental destruction.

The book narrates the story of one of the most dynamic ecological systems of the world. It transports readers to the Sundarbans and the numerous islands that have been discovered and lost in a short span of time. It is about the struggles that the settlers faced while trying to provide their life purpose despite all the obstacles posed by the environment. We see nature in all of its splendour and harshness. Ghosh shows us the brutality of nature and the vulnerability of those who are at its mercy. The combination of social and political reality with concern for the environment has made this Indian English Literature a landmark of nature writing.

The Hungry Tide is a novel which foregrounds language and textuality, and its relationship to lived experience. The Sundarbans Islands in the Bay of Bengal serve as the setting for this story, which focuses on the hardship of

displaced people, refugees from neighbouring Bangladesh, and a forgotten tribe struggling to live in a remote, little island. *The Hungry Tide* is a visionary book with remarkable insight, grace, and humanity. Human life is inconceivable without the existence of nature. It is not just the artistic and aesthetic aspect of life which breathes the abundance of the beautiful earth.

As the title of this paper suggests this is an attempt of the reading of Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* which is set in the world's largest mangrove ecosystem the Sundarbans, which comprises both water and earth and the intersection of landscape, water, human beings and their culture.

The land is always being reshaped and anything permanent is being uprooted by the hungry tide, which comes in twice daily. Ghosh has made tremendous research work and has presented the evolutionary system of creation in a unique way. His attention has been focused on the area's animistic creation and the ecological equilibrium it maintains. He imparts so much information about gigantic dolphin, and about flora and fauna of the 'tide country'. Additionally, he demonstrates how the Sundarbans are more than just a site where river and the sea meet. It is an astonishing intersection of several civilizations, which would seem inconceivable in any other location.

The Hungry Tide examines the complicated coexistence of man and the natural world in the ecosystem of the archipelago, as well as the resettlement of refugees in the Morichjhapi and Sundarbans forest reserves. The continual conflict between people and the environment in the Sundarbans, West Bengal's "Tide Country", India, and Bangladesh is the main subject of this book. The world's abundant nature is kind to people. It not only nurtures man

but also serves as his teacher, mentor, and guardian. It offers several perspectives on the forested island and ecology of the Sunderbans, illustrating the continuous changes it goes through as a result of daily tidal flows that temporarily bury parts of the island and introduce seawater. Ghosh's sense of place might be his greatest literary strength. When we are removed from his works in memory, we recall visions of a landscape, a city, or a settlement on the edge of a desert. The region is believed to derive its name from the sundari tree, that occupies most space in Sundarbans. In his book *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh makes his general natural and environmental approach to his vision quite evident.

As a distinctive approach to the practice literary criticism, ecocriticism emphasizes literary representations of nature and is perceptive of the interdependencies that root the author, character, or work in the natural system. This method sees the individual as a component of the ecosystem and shifts the crucial attention away from social ties and toward natural ones. It places a high priority on the "literary sense of place," which is an essential statement of one's connection to or estrangement from a particular natural context rather than a setting.

Ghosh portrays nature in more precise and lucid ways, bringing to light the idea that the world is alive and that people must abandon the thinking of themselves as separate from nature. The study suggests that rather than destroying nature's inherent wisdom and perfection, humanity should begin to understand how it functions and strive to integrate into a harmonious whole. A paradigm change is required to go from an anthropocentric to an ecocentric set of values. As a result, it becomes clear from the analysis that Ghosh's writings

support and seek a potential remedy for the ecological catastrophe. As a further remedy to the ongoing ecological problem, he suggests fostering a deep ecological vision, a social ecological vision, the eradication of ecocide, and widespread awareness of environmental justice issues.

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