

An Outlook of Ecoregionalism in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*

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Abstract

*The purview of this article is to promote the voices of Amitav Ghosh regarding the environmental issues. In *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh examines the landscape, the flora, the fauna and the tide people who settled in the Sunderbans, a reserved forest area. Except Lucibari and Garjontola, the other places such as Canning, Gosaba, Satjelia, Morichijihapi, Emilybari... etc are real one where a wide variety of rare species from the microscopic fish to the endangered man eating tiger live. The biotic life of the Sunderban is shaken by the invaded human beings. That leads to reduce the growth of the species. This height of ecological insanity creates a conflict between men and animals. Fear conquers the mind of the sunderbans. To survive in their allotted place, the animals struggle from the inhabitants. Tiger encounters, crocodile attacks, natural disasters... etc become common in that place. Nature as well as man function both as a preserver and destroyer. Ghosh creates an awareness among the readers about the ecology through Piyali Roy, the cetologist, who studies the dwindling breed of Irrawadoly dolphin. Unlike other naturalist, Ghosh shapes the ecoregion in new dimensions. He views the Sunderban region as a domain of consciousness. Thus, *The Hungry Tide* becomes a milestone of Ghosh to establish a new ecological ethics and environmental justice.*

Keywords: Biotic, ecoregionalism, ecological insanity, dwindling, cetologist.

Ecoregionalism is a philosophy that originated in the western America during the 1970's in response to the modern environmental crisis. 'Ecoregionalism' refers to the fullness of all earthly life existing in mutuality. Here, Regions are defined not by legislation, but by nature with a commonality of climate, geology, hydrology species and earth forms. From the perspective of ecoregion, it is a geographical area of similar climate where similar ecosystems and groups of species are found on similar sites.

Amitav Ghosh, the great genius in Indian literature, proved his talent of writing in his novels such as, *Sea of Poppies*, *River of Smoke*, *The Circle of Reason*, *The Shadow Lines*, *The Glass Palace*, *In an Antique Land*... etc. His biocentric vision is exemplified in his most famous novel *The Hungry Tide* which was published in 2005. In this novel, Ghosh portrays the biotic life in the Sunderban forest. The word 'Sunderban' means 'the beautiful forest' which derived its name from the common species of mangrove-the Sundari tree. A mangrove forests unique in nature and there are no giant trees, no ferns, no wild flowers and no chattering monkeys or cockatoos. The leaves in mangrove are laugh and leathery. A wide variety of species from the endangered Royal Bengal tiger to microscopic fish live in that Sunderbans.

In this novel *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh pictures Sunderbans as a densely populated archipelago of islands situated on the border between India and Bengal. The primary locations, in the novel, Lusibari and Garjontala are fictitious of the author. But the secondary locations such as Canning, Gosasa, Satjelia, Morichjhapi and Emilybari are real one.

In *The Hungry Tide* Piyali Roy, the cetologist, comes to the Sunderbans with an aim to study the dwindling breed of Irawaddy dolphin. She recounts the richness of the sunderban fauna. A mother and calf pair of dolphins swim in a 'corkscrew pattern surface frequently and shooting the water with their mouth. The 'spitting behavior' is characteristic of toss the fish into the air before catching that. Later, she discovers the presence of an underwater pool, where the dolphins are seen to herd fish and hunt them, "much like rabbits uprooting a harvest of carrots, the dolphins were picking the fish from the riverbed"(167).

Piya discovers that the dolphins adapt their behavior according to the ebb and flow of the water. As a committed cetologist. Piya wants to protect the dwindling species of river dolphins. But she has to face many hurdles like asking permissions from the higher officers to do any action for saving the dolphins. She has to fight for the sufficient funds from the Government. Piya loves her profession and spends her hours by watering the animals and she thinks, "It would be enough; as an alibi for a life, it would do. She would not need to apologize for how she had spent her time on this earth" (127).

Ghosh compares the past populated species with the present reducing one, through the character Piya. On seeing the Orcaella in the underwater pool, Piya recollects a past incident when two fishermen got a school of fish towards their boat in order to catch the dolphins. While prey the herd of fish, the fishermen caught the dolphins and sunk them in the soft floor of the river Piya wonders, "Did there exist any more remarkable instance of symbiosis between human beings and a population of wild animals?"(169).

In this novel, Amitav Ghosh traps the human inhabitants in the forest area. Kanai Dutta, a Delhi businessman comes to Lusibari to visit his aunt Nilima Bose. His uncle Nirmal Bose has leftsome papers for Kanai at the time of his death. In his papers, Nirmal wrote about his life in morichjhapi, a forestland. In this tide country, he became a close friend of Horen and often visited the house of Horen who lived with his wife Kusum and his son Fokir. Morichjhapi is a place where the Bangladesh refugees settled, but they were evicted the place by saying that it was a reserve forest to save tigers. "Morichjhapi was a protected forest reserve and they had proved unbending in their determination to evict the settlers" (119).

The poor settlers had a great attachment towards every species in the Sunderbans. They lived by interacting with the land, by fishing, by planting the soil and by loving the animals. While evicting the poor refugees, Kusum outburst with pain,

Who are these peoples... who love animals so much that they were willing to kill us for them... the whole world has become a place of animals and our faults, our crime was that we were just human beings. (262).

Finally, the settlers of Morichjhapi were overpowered, huts burnt, women raped and thrown to the water by the forest officers. In contrast, the rich and powerful Scotsman, Sir Daniel Hamilton bought thousand acres of the Sunderbans with an aim to establish a society. The Government encouraged his activities and supported his schemes. This unequal justice promotes the novel to have the central issue-man-animal conflict. "Not a day passed without the news of someone being killed by a tiger, snake or crocodile" (79). In the Island of Lusibari, the silence of the night was broken by the growl of the Tiger. So Nilima states with fear:

I know that in this day and age in the twenty first century, it is difficult for you to imagine yourself being attracted by a tiger. The trouble is that over here it's not in the least bit out of the ordinary. It happens several times each week. (240).

Every day, Man has to struggle for survival from the animals and the animals have to struggle for survival from the human beings. Man killing the animals and the animals killing the men are often happening scenes in the Sunderban. The mind of the people is always haunted with the fear of animals.

In the novel *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh presents the physical and psychological fear of the people about the forest clearly. Though the characters of the novel, Ghosh makes the readers to feel the fear. In order to stimulate the fear of Kanai, the native fisherman Horen says, "Because it's the fear that protects you, saar, it's what keeps you alive. Without it the danger doubles" (244). In the visual hallucination, Kanai sees the tiger, "The upper parts of its coat were of a colour that shone like gold in the sunlight, but its belly was dark and caked with mud" (329).

According to the belief of the village folk in the Sunderban, to see a tiger is to be as good as dead. All the deaths that happen by tiger attacks occur only in the off stage of the novel expect the death of Kusum's father. While searching for firewood, Kusum's father rowed across the river and he was unable to see the tiger hiding in the trees. On seeing the tiger, Kusum, who stood on the bank, cried and gathered the villagers to catch the attention of her father. But all her efforts failed because of the blowing of wind in the wrong direction. The tiger killed her father in front of her and dragged the corpse into the forest. The family couldn't claim any compensation as it was a reserved area.

J. Fayrer, the English naturalist, who coined the term 'The Royal Bengal Tiger', states that in a six years period between 1860 and 1866, 4,218 people were killed by tigers in the West Bengal. Ghosh in this novel enumerates the reasons for tiger attacks. The foremost reason is the human settlement in the forest area. Secondly, due to the shortage of the fresh water, the tigers prefer human flesh. Though the forest department provides pools of fresh water that make no difference. As a conservationist, Piya voices for the wildlife protection without concerning the human beings. So Kanai raises his voice by saying,

If there were killing on that scale anywhere else on earth it would be called a genocide, and yet here it goes almost unremarked: these killings are never reported, never written about in the papers. And the reason is just that these people are too poor to matter. We all know it, but we choose not to see it. Isn't that a horror too—that we can feel the suffering of an animal, but not of human beings? (301).

But everyone in the Sunderbans fails to accept the truth of their settlement in the dwelling place of animal. Ghosh presents the geological description about the Ganges that flows into the forest. It's a place of the crocodiles which drag their prey including the human beings into the underwater. "A crocodile, it's said, will keep you alive until you drown; it won't kill you on land; it'll drag you into the water while you're still breathing. Nobody finds the remains of people who're killed by crocodiles" (328).

The novel sprays some details about the cyclones that make the people to lose their lives. Human beings and animals are suffered by the natural calamities like the Storms, Tsunami, high temperature, flood... etc. the nature also taking revenge against the habitants for swindling the peace of the forest. When Piya faces the dangerous cyclonic attack, she prays, "Let it be on land, whatever happens, let it be on land, not the water please. Not the water" (372). Ghosh succeeds in showering the idea that the nature is the preserver as well as the destroyer.

In this novel, Ghosh makes awareness to the tide country people through the cetologist Piya with a great pleasure; she has to quit the place for submitting the current condition of the Irrawaddy dolphin to the higher authorities. With a voluminous hope of returning to Lusibari to do project with the funds from conservation and environmental groups, Piya advises the population to project the wild' life. Dolphins become victims in the trade market because, "These dolphins were hunted

with rifles and explosives and their carcasses were hung up in the sun so that their fat would drip into buckets. This oil was then used to run boats and motorcycles” (306). The fast moving motor-boats hit the dolphins that lead to death in dolphin habitats. All kinds of fish dwindle because of the use of nylon nets that drag the eggs too. As the result of these activities, the river is polluted and mass of fish disappear. So the entire ecosystem becomes shapeless.

Nirmal records the ecological changes in the Sunderban-once the sky was crowded by the flock of birds at sunset, and the mud banks were filled with the swarming crabs. But now the entire glory visions start to fade. “That colour began to fade long ago and it is never seen any more. Where had they gone, I wondered, those millions of swarming crabs, those birds” (215).

Acknowledging its biodiversity, the Sunderbans has been identified as a world Heritage site by the International Union for the conservation of nature. Yet, illegal activities like deforestation, poaching the animals, destroying the various species of fish, polluting the water, swindling the land...etc lead the food chain of the ecosystem to breakup step by step. For sustaining their livelihood in the forest area, everyman with his monstrous ego believes that no other species is more superior to him. Finally, nothing will be left to him. Once he starts to kill all the species that paves his way to kill another man. Morality becomes weaker.

Thus, in this novel *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh directs the human mind towards eco-consciousness. The novel is a milestone which establishes the new ecological ethics and environmental justice.

Works Cited

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