

The Implications of Ecology and Ecofeminism in Amitav Ghosh's

The Hungry Tide

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Abstract

This study deals with climate change in Amitav Ghosh's use of ecofeminism along with the mythological folklore in *The Hungry Tide* as depicted in the Bangladeshi Sundarbans and their reference with wilderness and civilization. It reveals that the phenomena of global movement of refugees and climate change are correlated as being cause and effect. This paper throws light on Ghosh's use of old legends that prompts one to think about the cataclysmic effects of climate change. The theoretical framework of the myth and folklore in Ghosh's novel reflects on climate change, migration and the cultural divide. In *The Hungry Tide*, the myth of Bon Bibi is closely analyzed in the framework of ecological and ecofeministic theories to explain climate crisis.

Keywords: ecocriticism, ecofeminism, environment, nature, ecology.

المخلص:

تتناول هذه الدراسة التغير المناخي في استخدام الكاتب الهندي (أميتاف غوش) للنسوية البيئية والفولكلور الأسطوري في رواية "المد الجائع" كما تم تصويرها في الغابات البنغلاديشية الجميلة وما تشير إليه من دلالات لعالم البرية والحضارة. من الأمور التي تكشفها هذه الدراسة هي أن ظاهرة الحركة العالمية للاجئين وتغير المناخ يرتبطان كونها سبب ونتيجة. أن هذا البحث يسلط الضوء على استخدام الكاتب الهندي غوش للأساطير القديمة التي تدفع المرء إلى التفكير في الآثار الكارثية لتغير المناخ حيث أن الإطار النظري للأسطورة والفولكلور في رواية غوش ينعكس على تغير المناخ والهجرة والانقسام الثقافي. وبالحديث عن أسطورة (بون بيبى) فقد تم تحليل هذه الأسطورة في رواية "المد الجائع" عن كثب في إطار النظريات البيئية والنسوية البيئية وذلك من أجل شرح أزمة المناخ.

Introduction

Ecocriticism is a critical discipline in modern literary theory studying the relationship between nature and literature considering human beings as elements of environment. An ecocritical viewpoint helps assess works of literature in order to achieve justice to the environment. Undoubtedly, there is a mutual bond between man's life and literature, each of which influences the other. And, the role of ecocritical approach is to relocate the relationship of human beings with the physical surroundings. Inferentially, this modern literary is highly significant in shaping people's awareness towards the world ecological topics in dispute. Ecocriticism, therefore, adopts a nature- centred discipline to literature with the aim of taking care of earth.

Undeniably, the purpose behind the emergence of ecocriticism was basically to stir the people's awareness of the ecological disasters and find solutions to the environmental issues, such as air pollution, desertification, deforestation and global warming. As a term, 'ecocriticism' was invented in 1978 by William Rueckert in his essay *Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism*. Donald Worster raised this serious ecological issue in his book, *Wealth of Nature: Environmental History and the Ecological Imagination* suggesting that, "We are facing a global crisis today, not because of how ecosystems function but rather because of how our ethical systems function. [To overcome this crisis] requires understanding our impact on nature as precisely as possible, but even more, it requires understanding those ethical". (27) Ecocriticism is currently becoming a very blooming and systematic approach in the literary studies.

Ecocriticism in Indian fiction

Ecocriticism in Indian fiction explores the relationship between humans and nature, highlighting the deep connection between humans and the environment. Indian writers explore topics like deterioration, ecological imbalance, and industrial progress's consequences, raising awareness and care. Also this literary genre emphasizes nature as a central character in narratives, highlighting the connection between humans and nature. It explores spiritual and socio- cultural dimensions, examining cultural beliefs and traditions.

As such, Indian writers emphasize peaceful coexistence with nature, inspired by ancient religious philosophies like Vedas and Buddhist codes.

The novels of prominent writers like Amitav Ghosh, Arundhati Roy, and Mahasweta Devi have significantly influenced Indian ecocriticism. Ghosh's novel *The Hungry Tide* intricately, for instance, deals with the ecological problems underwent in the Sundarbans area, creatively connecting human lives and the ecosystem. Roy's *The God of Small Things* emotionally reveals the consequences of industrialization upon people and nature as a whole. Devi's stories stress the mistreatment which the marginalized local people endure and the misery of their environment.

Basically Indian ecocritical novels promote ecological awareness and the interconnectedness between humanity and nature. They highlight India's environmental challenges and encourage readers to analyze their actions towards the environment. Academic circles appreciate ecocritical publications like Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*, which explores the consequences of climate change and political struggles in the Sundarbans jungle. These novels emphasize the importance of addressing environmental issues.

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* is another Indian novel addressing ecological issues. Her novel also examines the intimate connection between man and nature. Roy depicts the catastrophic results of industrialization on the ecosystem of Kerala.

Vandana Bhatia's *Ecofeminism and Indian Women Writers* is another notable ecocritical article that tackles interconnection of ecofeminism and the Indian female authors. Ecofeminism is simply a socio- ecocritical doctrine in Indian narration that highlights the connection between the female suppression and degradation of nature. In this article, Bhatia uses an ecocritical discourse to inspect the manner in which the Indian female writers approach the feminist and environmental issues in their works so that they would explore the masculine supremacy, ecological degradation, and the mistreatment of women and environment.

Admittedly, environmental criticism in literary publications has gained a prominent status as it discusses issues such as the environmental awareness and deep relationships between local inhabitants and nature. The Indian ecological fiction introduces works that

motivate the intellects of human beings and highlight the issue of climate change in India. Furthermore, these literary works encourage a thoughtful awareness toward a worldwide environmental surrounding.

Amitav Ghosh

Amitav Ghosh, an Indian writer, explores themes like displacement, migration, gender consciousness, and climate change in his novels. His characters, often independent and intelligent, play crucial roles in the plot. In those novels, Ghosh uses folk as his cultural material to explain the uncanny and the magical in his novels. He draws heavily from the myths and tales he grew up hearing from his grandfather and, with logic and precision that would put the most analytical mind to shame, attributes the modern catastrophes and other social issues to the neglect of the values and meaning associated with the folklore and myth. Ghosh's approach is more culturally inclined, even when he heavily draws from history.

Ecofeminism

Ecofeminism emerged as literary movement in the early 1970s. It is one of the most important critical theories and an upcoming area of research and pedagogy. Ecofeminism is a powerful tool for a social change. Broadly speaking, ecofeminism examines the relation between the subordination and operation of women and nature. It encompasses in its scope a host of social issues that is essentially linked to feminine aesthetics. As the term suggests, ecofeminism embeds two critical viewpoints- ecology and feminism. The ecofeminist perspective, as Cecile Jackson puts it, is "ethnocentric, essentialist, blind to class, ethnicity and other differentiating cleavages, ahistorical and neglects the material sphere." (*Women/Nature or gender/History? A critique of Ecofeminist 'Development': 389*)

Ecofeminism concerns itself with issues related to preservation and protection of nature. Water preservation, waste management, pollution, climate change, folklore and culture which threaten existence at all levels are categorized under ecofeminism. As an academic movement, the objective of ecofeminism is to eliminate domination and reinforce interdependence of human life with nature. It has direct bearing with ecological consciousness and attempts to read literature through cultural materialism.

Women and nature continue to be the primary victims of violence, exploitation, and discrimination across every field of society. Writers like Ghosh adopt the concept of preserve nature and women to set the pace of existence right. Protection and exploitation of the earth and women are interconnected and related. Ecofeminism is not only about protecting trees, animals or soil because they are sacred, but because they are inevitable for the survival of people. As Y. King writes: “Yet this is not a sentimental movement. For most of the women of the world, interest in preservation of the land, water, air, and energy is no abstraction but a clear part of the effort to simply survive.” (*Healing the Wounds*: 118)

The Hungry Tide

The Hungry Tide throws light on the ecological disaster as a result of capitalism. In this novel, Ghosh makes use of mythical characters, subalterns, folklore and history to explain and to introduce solutions for the present environmental crisis. He merges all of the aforesaid elements with fiction to portray ecological as well as ecofeminist implications in *The Hungry Tide*.

To begin with, the post- industrial times witnessed science and technology making big advances, initiating the Anthropocene period of capitalism and globalization. In this era of human induced climate change, Ghosh, in his nonfiction *The Great Derangement Climate Change and the Unthinkable* quotes Dipesh Chakrabarty’s argument: “humans have become geological agents, changing the most basic physical processes of the earth.” (1^o) Of course, the world’s ecological crisis is escalating due to industrial, technological and scientific advancements at the expense of nature’s preservation. Urbanization and modernization have exacerbated the problem, leading to resource overconsumption, greenhouse gas emissions, pollution, and species extinction. Here, Amitav Ghosh warns of hunger, floods, environmental injustice, and climate change, emphasizing the urgent need for an immediate intervention to protect both human and nonhuman life. He recalls that primitive life styles did not pose a threat for the ecology and life was lived in harmony with nature. Politics and industrialization have consumed old practices and upset the delicate balance of harmony between human existence and nature. On one hand there is huge exploitation of resources,

and on the other it has made life increasingly difficult to live “as human beings always have”. And under the pretext of conservation human settlements are jeopardized. Kusum in *The Hungry Tide* says, “This island has to be saved for its trees, it has to be saved for its animals, it is a part of a reserve forest. It belongs to a project to save tigers.” The human “existence was worth less than dirt or dust.” (I262)

Ghosh emphasizes the need to have an ecological vision while framing policies to protect ecology. He asserts that it is not only the survival of human beings that hangs on the delicate balance of ecological equilibrium, but also the nonhuman world. The anthropocentric vision does not take into account either the views of the nonhumans or those of the marginalized. Man assumes sole authority over all the species and resources of the earth and does not deter from near- total exploitation of them, snatching away the right to existence of nonhumans. In their state of illogical reasoning, sometimes animals are protected at the expense of human casualties, while at other times nature is ravaged to make way for industries and factories. In the tiger-killing scene, Kusum asks, “Who are these people, I wondered, who love animals so much that they are willing to kill us? Do they know what is being done in their names?” (Ibid: 262) Ghosh states that under the pretention of protecting nature, political actions continue. The Morichjhapi massacre¹ of 1979, supposedly for ecological purposes, exemplifies the government’s unsympathetic act. Orders are given and diligently executed to get the refugees killed, in order to evacuate the island of Morichjhapi. This incident highlights the short- sightedness and lack of ecological vision of the policy framers, who vouch for the conservation of ecology at the expense of the underprivileged human and nonhuman world. Ghosh says that the basic tenets of all-inclusive vision are missing in many ecology conservation drives. These drives lack the humanitarian quotient for the sustainable development of all life on the earth.

The lack of ecological vision is obvious in the extensive corruption and exploitation of conserved areas, and the violation of laws. The promotions of products that harm ecology for

¹ Morichjhapi massacre alludes to the 1979 removal of the Bengali migrants when the police and the administration of the area prevented the local people from getting food supplies and pure drinking water. This action pushed the locals on the island to use polluted water leading to many deaths.

short term monetary gain also have a severe long- term impact on ecology. In *The Hungry Tide*, the new nylon nets used by the fishermen to catch the spawn of the tiger prawns trap the eggs of other fishes as well. It was impossible to ban the use of these nets because as Moyna says, “there’s a lot of money in prawns and the traders had paid off the politicians. What do they care- or the politicians for that matter? It’s people like us who’re going to suffer and it’s up to us to think ahead.” (Ibid: 134) In his essay, *Wild Fictions*, Ghosh says that in “Sundarbans, with the introduction of commercial fisheries, great value has come to be placed on the microscopic spawn of prawns. As a result, fishermen have begun to trawl the waters with nets of very fine mesh. This means that the waters are being sieved in ways that are likely to have devastating effects on all aquatic life.” (21)

Ghosh’s *The Great Derangement* highlights the global transformation caused by capital exploitation, colonial expansion, and imperial domination, resulting in massive migration flows. Ecologists advocate for an eco-cosmopolitan view, promoting harmony between human and natural habitats, economy, and society. The term ‘eco- cosmopolitanism’ was introduced by Ursula Heise in her book *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global* (2008) It embraces an open- minded and inclusive sense of solidarity that is not restricted by the frontiers of geography, culture, history, caste, species, race or gender. Heise argues that it is not “circumscribed by human social experience. [It] ...reaches toward ...the more- than-human world- the realm of non- human species, and also that of connectedness with both animate and inanimate networks of influence and exchange.” (71- 2) Ghosh calls it the ‘uncanny’ in nature. He believes that man’s “dream of silencing the nonhuman world has never been completely realized, not even within the heart of contemporary modernity. [The agency of nonhumans has an] uncanny ability to stay abreast of technology.” (Ghosh, *Great Derangement* 87)

Ghosh says that “the Anthropocene presents a challenge... to our common understandings and beyond that to contemporary culture in general.” (*The Great Derangement*: 15) He observes that humans have a collective inability to engage with climate change in a meaningful way. He argues that the climate crisis is a crisis of the imagination, presenting our failure to recognize human impacts on the environment as rooted in our

difficulty in imagining the sheer scale and urgent nature of the problem. In *The Great Derangement*, Ghosh explores the ways in which our modes of representation have derailed humanity, blinding us to our real condition. In this context, he states, “Let us make no mistake: the climate crisis is also a crisis of culture, and thus of the imagination.” (Ibid: 15) Contemporary fiction struggles to accurately depict climate change’s effects, despite their perceived improbability, affecting communities reliant on the environment for survival. Ghosh believes that fiction has a crucial role to play in the climate crisis. He says, “Nowhere is the awareness of non- human agency more evident than in the traditions of narrative.” (Ibid: 67) Quoting Lawrence Buell, Karen Thornber argues, “The power of story, image, and artistic performance and the resources of aesthetics, ethics, and cultural theory are crucial to understanding nature. Karen continues to argue that “our relationship with our surroundings is generally constructed around stories”. (*Acquiescing to Environmental Degradation*: 211) In *The Great Derangement*, Ghosh contemplates how traditional narrative can help understand the environment and transform our thinking by changing dominant conceptions of our material surroundings, to better face present ecological conditions. He uses myths and legends extensively as his narrative technique to address the profligate pillage of ecosystems in his novels.

In *The Hungry Tide* one finds a persistent concern for environmental issues. The novel focuses on conservatism. It talks about tigers, dolphins and other endangered species. Also it invariably deals with interventions between human and nonhumans. Here, Ghosh uses metaphors and myths to redefine humans’ relation with other- than- human objects. The author unsettles the conventional anthropocentric view of man’s relation with objects and advocates a non- conventional perception of the human relationship with biotic and abiotic objects. Through this particular narrative, Ghosh fosters a more productive kinship between human and nature. He does this with his locales, metaphorical symbols and ecological legends.

In *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh structures his plot in the fluctuating tidal patterns of the Sundarbans. In the mangrove region, people need to come to terms with other beings in a friendly to live happily and peacefully. They frequently encounter various life- threatening

dangers in the tide country. The novel refers to the human encounters with tigers, crocodiles, and sharks; the regular flooding; the ever- changing landscape; and the constant threat of sudden tropical storms. Ghosh quotes Nature's caprice in Horen's and Nirmal's encounter with the storm stating that they were "swept along against [their] will... the wind suddenly started up... it attacked with that peculiar, willful malevolence that causes people to think of these storms as something other than wholly natural. The river had been calm... but now we found ourselves... shaken by huge waves." (*The Hungry Tide*: 160)

The Sundarbans reacts very quickly to weather variations and builds up defences to protect itself against interlopers. Left alone in the forest, Kanai discovers "that a rope- like tendril had wrapped itself around his ankles. He felt his balance going and when he tried to slide a foot forward to correct it, his legs seemed to move in the wrong direction." (Ibid: 312) The mangrove spores and roots were, "scattered like booby traps [and like] camouflaged tripwires" (Ibid: 315) Deforestation and human commercial activities impact global climate change. With the increase in global temperatures, sea levels are rising, fertile lands are lost, saltwater is making its way further inland and low- lying islands like the Lakshadweep islands are likely to disappear. In *The Great Derangement*, Ghosh estimates that the rising sea level "could result in the migration of up to 50 million people in India and 75 million in Bangladesh. [The quality of crops and the top soil get affected. Ghosh says,] 24 percent of India's arable land is slowly turning into desert." (92) Ghosh uses the site of the Sundarbans to emphasize the devastation of an ecosystem and the annihilation of other creatures in their surroundings, because of wanton human interventions. The Sundarbans mirrors the limits of the anthropocentric cruelty towards the non- humans. He writes that in the 1970s the Mekong Orcaella "had suffered the ravages of indiscriminate American carpet bombing. Later, they too had been massacred by Khmer Rouge cadres. [This led to the extinction of the] abundant population: of the Orcaella in the Tonle Sap." (*The Hungry Tide*: 305) The forests retaliate with recurrent cyclones and irregular, unpredictable and unseasonal rains.

In *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh narrates the encounters between the human and the nonhuman world in the ecologically sensitive Sundarbans. The storyline encompasses factors related to environmental issues and their impact on climate derangement. The plot weaves

around the four major characters which are ecologically perceptive. Nirmal is the record keeper of the historical, social and mythical narratives of the island. His journal is the primary framing device in the novel that documents the natural defences against the turbulent energies of the Bay of the Sundarbans, its geography, origin, landscape, skyscape, and legends and the story of the human communities with their beliefs and hopes. He says that the mangroves serve “as a barrier against nature’s fury, absorbing the initial onslaught of cyclonic winds, waves and tidal surges.” (Ibid: 277) The second character is Piya: an American marine biologist who is pursuing research on Orcaella, an endangered river dolphin in the Sundarbans. She believes that in understanding the adaptational behavior of the marine animals to the tidal ecology, one can find solutions to their conservation. Her reference to scientific studies and research provides a second framework for the novel. Nilima is an NGO activist who runs a charity hospital, a guest house and educational services in the name of Badabon Trust in Lusibari. Horen and Fokir are subalterns, native fishermen with a simple instinct for the vagaries of the island. The value of Fokir’s knowledge and Piya’s scientific enquiry brings the local and global together and provide a full and nondestructive understanding of the ecosystem of the Sundarbans. Kanai is Nirmal’s nephew. He is a Delhi- based businessman, who comes to Sundarbans to collect the memoir of his deceased uncle, Nirmal. Moyna is Fokir’s wife, who understands the challenges of the island and yearns for a more comfortable life; Kusum is Fokir’s mother who puts her life in danger to save the island of Morichjhapi. The lives of all these characters are centred around the Sundarbans and affected by the constantly shifting ecology of the island. Their observations are revealing and have deep political, ecological and scientific implications. Horen’s perceptiveness is evident in his observation that the cyclone that devastated the island and came quicker than he expected. Piya reasons that the “metallic savor [of the] inhaled mud” (Ibid: 59) Moyna believes that the reduction of the fishes in the Sundarbans is related to nylon nets that trap their eggs. Nilima observes, “There isn’t as much water in the river and at low tide it gets very shallow.” (Ibid: 32) The rare species of the wildlife of the Sundarbans are brought to extinction as a result of changes in the environment. Water buffaloes, swamp deer, marsh crocodiles, tigers and aquatic creatures like dolphins are

among the most affected. The population of the tigers is also shrinking day by day. Studies show that the encroachment of human beings has caused great damage to the ecosystem as the rivers and streams of the island are claimed by the civilization. The thick mangroves are also destroyed because of rising sea levels, colonization and human intervention. The ecology is forever threatened and the rhythm of the earth is disturbed, quickened and “unfolded at an accelerated pace.” (Ibid: 217) The islands are submerged. The water level in the Bay of Bengal is rising steeply and fast. Rivers and waterbodies are claimed by civilization. The ecosystem of the Sundarbans is on the brink of collapse because of severe changes in the climate. The narrative becomes a subtle vehicle to convey the pressing issues of climate change. The “wheel of time” (Ibid: 217) spins fast and the ecotopia of the Sundarbans has irrevocably turned into a bizarre dystopia. The concept of ecotopia is a move towards the restoration of the organic integrity of nature, against the self- destructive forces of industrial society. It upholds the concept of the intimate connections of habitat, economy and society with each other.

Ghosh wrote this novel after the 2004 tsunami in the Indian Ocean that devastated the entire area mangrove in the Sundarbans which harbors a rich and diverse variety of flora and fauna. For Ghosh the Sundarbans is a living being with both human and animal qualities. The Sundarbans is rooted in myth. Ghosh in this novel likens he islands of the Sundarbans to a beautiful woman who is “trailing threads of India’s fabric, the ragged fringe of her sari, the *achol* at follows her, half wetted by the sea.” (Ibid: 15) The Sundarbans is fragile and unstable, making it profoundly vulnerable. The writer draws heavily from the Hindu mythology to explain her origins. She is born of the river Ganga, whose torrential “descent from the heavens [is contained in the] ash-smearred locks of Shiva” (Ibid: 14) The delta of the Ganga, Ghosh says, is the heavenly braid of Shiva which “comes undone [and is] washed apart into a vast knotted tangle.” (Ibid: 14) Ganga is the lifeline of the Sundarbans and is central to the ecosystem of the Indian sub-continent. The landscape of the Sundarbans constantly mutates between myth and reality like the river’s ebb and flow, waging a never-ending war for survival. Nirmal attributes the source of the Ganga to the pore created by the “tiny scratch on the fabric of creation” by an “errant toenail [of the divine dwarf]” (Ibid: 176)

He traces the ancestry of the Ganges to Tethys, the Greek goddess of the ocean. Ghosh bestows on the Sundarbans a touch of the ethereal through his use of these myths. By using these techniques of narration “the novel subtly reflects ...on how language shapes the landscape and vice versa. Ghosh’s landscape, [Jens Martin Gurr writes]... can be read like a text. [Ghosh turns the text to a lived experience through the telling of stories which enables] the expression of human experience, of history, and of human identity.” (150)

Through *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh addresses the dual identity of land and water, the good and the evil, the rural and the urban, the local and the universal in the Sundarbans. He uses the mythical powers of Dokkin Rai, the tormentor, and Bon Bibi, the benefactor, to exemplify the dual gender identities. These opposite forces get merged by the reality of the Sundarbans into one sweeping, forceful whole. The tide country becomes a veritable crucible, interconnecting its environment with the human beings. The novel seeks to explore the interconnectedness between the human and nonhuman environments. Ghosh’s narrative strives to establish the nature- human dichotomy. Here, the Sundarbans is wild and pristine at the same time. Part of it is habited by untamed animals and uncultivated plants, and part of it is habited by human activities and intrusions. This nature- culture dichotomy is evident in the natures of Fokir and Piya. Fokir represents the wilderness in nature. Piya symbolizes modern culture. She depends on modern gadgets like the camera and the binoculars while Fokir lives by his instincts. This dichotomy is also emphasized when the dolphins shy away, frightened by the movements of Piya’s bhotbhoti. *The Hungry Tide* focuses on environmental justice. Piya belongs to the world of culture and technology and is conscious about the need for environmental justice. She would readily and willingly give up her life if that will make “the rivers safe again for the Irrawaddy dolphin.” (*The Hungry Tide*: 291) She is also aware that giving up lives “would make no difference.” (Ibid: 291) In the Indian epics of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata the Sundarbans features as a densely forested region, abundant in flora and fauna. But “at no moment can human beings have any doubt of the terrain’s hostility to their presence, of its cunning and resourcefulness, of its determination to destroy or expel them.” (Ibid: 16) The only aboriginals were the tigers, crocodiles and a few human immigrants, dozens of whom perish, trapped in the dense foliage or killed by the tigers or

crocodiles. The area is a “sodden wasteland...entirely uninhabited... where no one would exploit anyone and people would live together without petty social distinctions and differences.” (Ibid: 54- 8) Nirmal comes close to realizing this dream after he witnesses Kusum’s heroic and fatal protest against the eviction of the settlers of Morichjhapi.

With the increasing onslaught of human occupation and activities, the biodiversity of the Sundarbans declined. Divya Anand quotes from Paul Greenough’s *Hunter’s Drowned Land: An environmental fantasy of the Victorian Sundarbans*, that by the late 1980s the “forbidding and obscure began to be read by cosmopolitan naturalists in positive terms.” (62) Conservation policies, commodification tendencies, and loss of biodiversity have disrupted the bionetwork of the Sundarbans reducing it to a threatened ecosystem. In *The Folly of the Sundarbans*, Ghosh talks about the Sahara India Parivar’s venture of taking over land from the Sundarbans for ecotourism. Ghosh is convinced that such an attempt would upset the fragile ecosystem and further threaten the endangered biodiversity of the region. The Morichjhapi massacre, which forms a vital strand in the narrative of *The Hungry Tide* is a sharp allusion of the aborted attempt of the Sahara India Parivar. It also reflects the obstinate refusal of the inhabitants to give up their right to their land. The narrative unfolds through Nirmal’s letter to Kanai and the Morichjhapi episode that took place twenty years ago. It proceeds through the journey of Piya, a scientist. The two strands are interwoven to reveal the current human and non- human environment, ecology and ecosystem of the Sundarbans. In *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh gives ample space for the animals and environment of the Sundarbans and effortlessly weaves history with fiction. The eco- critical drama of the Sundarbans and its unique natural history is unfolded through the characters of Nirmal, Fokir, and Piya. Through Nirmal, Ghosh explains that ‘Sundarbans’ which translates to ‘beautiful forest’, got its name from the Sundari tree, which abounds the place. The Mughals referred to the region as ‘bhatirdesh’ or ‘tide country.’ It is Nirmal’s diary that sheds light on the Morichjhapi massacre for Kanai and the readers. The inhabitants of the Sundarbans were ruthlessly massacred on the grounds of ecological protection. The inhabitants had to suffer terrible punishments including rape and death. Kusum, the mother of Fokir, had to pay heavily for transgressing the man- made boundaries and asserting human will. Horen

poignantly remarks, “If you are caught between a pirate and a forester, you should always give yourself up to the pirate. You will be safer.” (*The Hungry Tide*: 287) In her article, *Dwelling on Morichjhapi*, Annu Jalais observes that the settlers were made ecological refugees and reduced to “tiger food.” (1757) In the past there was harmony between the animals and humans in the Sundarbans, “The animals did not harm the human beings.” (Ibid: 1758) Through the Morichjhapi incident, Ghosh provides an instance of environment conservation policies executed by the insensitive and ruthless removal of its inhabitants. After the Morichjhapi disaster, the tigers became man- eaters. *The Hungry Tide* tackles community knowledge and management of a natural environment endangered by human activity. As a social ecologist, Ghosh believes that domination is the root cause of ecological crisis. His novel shows that every living being and the non- living objects on the earth play a role in the sustainable development and that ecological balance is essential. The crabs, too, “kept the mangrove alive by removing their leaves and litter; without them the trees would choke on their own debris.” (*The Hungry Tide*: 140) In the massive biodiversity of the Sundarbans, Ghosh reads the interdependency of human and non- human forms. The inhabitants of Sundarbans are mostly fisher folks. They battle with relentless and terrible natural catastrophes. *The Hungry Tide* mentions the tempest which devastated the dike up to a kilometer rendering the lives of the inhabitants perilous. The tide country is constantly swayed by the ebb and flow of water. Water defines and dictates the history, geography, culture and lives of the people. It provides a running motif for the narrative as the plot unfolds, “The waters rose so high that they killed thousands of animals and carried them upriver and inland” (Ibid: 199) It is influenced by social and physical changes. It has the potential to transform the physical space and the social order. The rising waters “would swallow up the jungle as well as the rivers and their openings.” (Ibid: 42) The waters of the Sundarbans are “limitless [and] patient [and] quietly bide their time.” (Ibid: 200) They remind human beings of their limits. The tides prevent permanent docks on Lusibari because their movement is so powerful; the mangroves have power to re- colonize lands and to “erase time.” (Ibid: 55) The ecotopia of the Sundarbans clearly defines the place of human beings in the ecosystem where they are only a part of it.

The Hungry Tide, in another distinct scene, explores the conflict between tiger and man. In the tiger killing scene Kanai, like the villagers, has an anthropocentric opinion of the incident. Piya is horrified at the killing and takes an environmental perspective. She sees the tiger as a symbol of power, beauty and grace. The killing of the tiger highlights the environmental crisis in the Sundarbans. Piya believes that it is in the preservation of wildlife that the future of mankind lies. The blending in nature is complete when Ghosh compares the tempest and tides to the jaws and claws of the tiger. The narrative exposes connections between the socio- physical environment and man's communications with it. He believes that novels of this type can help achieve the necessary transformation of vision to understand the human- nature relationship. *The Hungry Tide*, therefore, registers humans' long term interdependence with the land. The inhabitants can see, hear and feel the movement of the tides. The knowledge that Fokir possesses about the rivers, the dolphins and the legends of the Sundarbans resides in his body. "It's like he's always watching the water- even without being aware of it... he can see right into the river's heart." (Ibid: 259) Fokir can hear crabs gnawing away at the foundations of the tides. He is perceptive to the rhythms of nature, "the crabs and the tides, the winds and the storms" (Ibid: 201) and trusts his instincts. Ghosh believes that the skills that Fokir exhibit and his ability to read his environment and interpret its signs are crucial skills for the present moment.

The Hungry Tide unfolds many evidences that speak of the weather variations which happened in the mangrove area. Much to her astonishment, Nirmal visited the Lusibari to find out that the area was not the same in terms of natural landmark, and the birds he used to see had just disappeared from the place. Nirmal recalls, "I remembered how, when I first came to Lusibari, the sky would be darkened by birds at sunset. Many years had passed since I'd seen such flights of birds. When I first noticed their absence, I thought they would soon come back but they had not." (Ibid: 209) No questions are raised about extinction or disappearance of a species. Ghosh warns that such seemingly insignificant neglect will have severe ecological impact in future. He says, "The birds were vanishing, the fish were dwindling and from day to day the land was being reclaimed by the sea. What would it take, to submerge the tide country? Not much- a minuscule change in the level of the sea would be

enough.” (Ibid: 209) These remarks provide an effective means of understanding the place of humans in the natural scheme of ecology. The fictional narratives on climate change help to heighten awareness of the environment and confront the realities of climate change.

Fokir’s embodied knowledge has also been dismissed and feminized by dominant epistemologies. Ghosh believes that this obvious disregard of what Piya calls ‘instinct’ is partly responsible for the current environmental crisis as it weakens the local, lived knowledge of places. With the Sundarbans as the backbone of the narrative, the novel seems to voice “the troubling awareness that we have reached the age of environmental limits.” (Glotfelty, Cheryll & Harold Fromm, *The Ecocriticism Reader*: 19)

As per the Hindu mythology, the legend of ‘Bon Bibi’ is treated as an ecofeminist character and that the conception worshipping her is a plea for environment protection. Nirmal remarks, “In a place like this people would pay close attention to the true wonders of reality around them. But no, they prefer the imaginary miracles of gods and saints.” (Ibid: 102- 3) They believe that the goddess ‘Bon Bibi’ watches over the islands and will protect them from the unavoidable natural calamities. The legend of ‘Bon Bibi’ connects Fokir and the other inhabitants to the environment. Ghosh uses the myths as powerful aids to develop ecological responsibility. ‘Bon Bibi’ demarcates the island between the humans and tigers, giving each an equal right to live on it, independently and interdependently.

Ghosh says in *Wild Fictions* that the prohibitions are so powerful “that villagers will not urinate, defecate or spit while collecting honey or firewood. The fear of the demon’s wrath is far more effective than secular anti- littering laws.” (12) Ghosh observes that the myth is silent in matters of exploitation of marines with the beginnings of commercial fishing at Sundarbans and believes this to be “a sign of its limitations in the contemporary context.” (Ibid: 21) Scientific interpretation and mythical knowledge complement each other to address environmental issues. He goes on to suggest that, “The legend of ‘Bon Bibi’ employs “the power of fiction to create or define a relationship between human beings and the natural world. Nowhere is [Nature’s] consciousness absent... [This myth presents] a treasury of concepts and allegories to fight against predatory capitalism.” (Jyotsna Singh& David D., *The Postcolonial World*: 194)

Ghosh portrays 'Bon Bibi' as a true ecofeminist, embodying nature's needs providing a balance between evil and benevolence. She stands against human cruelty and greed, highlighting the interconnectedness between humans and nature. Women, however, play less significant roles in nature-related issues, with climate change and greenhouse gas emissions being the worst impacts. Instead, they focus on production, protection, and home-related responsibilities, while men migrate to cope with weather and natural disasters. Gender barriers put women and children in the front lines of climate change. In *Ecofeminism and Climate Change*, Greta Gaard writes, "Ghosh upholds the ecofeministic view of women being closest to ecology and nature and being most affected by climate change. Disasters like hurricanes lead to the deaths of large number of women as exemplified by Kusum during the Morichjhapi massacre" (47) She goes on to state that, "The deaths of women lead to increased infant mortality, early marriage of girls, increased neglect of girls' education, sexual assaults, trafficking in women and child prostitution" (Ibid: 47)

In this context, Ghosh critiques the social system of patriarchy and imperialism, highlighting the marginalization of women and subalterns. He presents women characters like Bon Bibi and Moyna, Kusum, and Piya as heroic ecofeminists striving to restore balance and harmony in the Sundarbans, emphasizing women's central role in climate change. They are unduly affected by climate change impacts, such as droughts, floods and other extreme weather events, but they also have a critical role in combating climate change. In *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh demonstrates the destruction of the ecosystem of the Sundarbans, which function as a natural barrier against the cyclones that frequent the place, with multiple anti-humanitarian colonial and post-colonial projects.

The largest estuarine forest of the Sundarbans is naturally endowed with a rich biodiversity. The ecotopia of the Sundarbans mangroves helps biological productivity, maintains atmospheric equilibrium, checks soil erosion and stabilizes the coastline. It is the home of several endangered and threatened ranges of birds, fishes and animals- terrestrial, marine and freshwater. There are "more species of fish in the Sundarbans than could be found in the whole continent of Europe." (*The Hungry Tide*: 125) Indiscriminate killing and gradual destruction of the natural habitat of animals by human intervention has reduced their

number considerably, making the Sundarbans one of the most endangered ecosystems on this planet.

This ecotopia faces challenges due to population growth, unplanned civilization, industrialization, globalization, and deforestation. Mangrove ecosystems face threats from environmental pressure and human interventions, leading to increased salinity levels. The entanglements between humans and other species, coupled with global capitalism's exploitation, have caused socio-ecological perturbations and global transformation. Adam Trexler observes that *The Hungry Tide* is “preoccupied with the conservation challenges to mega fauna, specifically Royal tigers and Irrawaddy dolphins.” It epitomizes the intersection of these entanglements. Factories produce chemicals and other lethal and toxic products, which are environmentally hazardous. Industrial effluence degrades ecosystems irrevocably. Thermal power plants on the outskirts of the Sundarbans further damage the fragile and vulnerable ecotopia of the Sundarbans mangroves. A recent instance of the construction of the Lower Subansiri Hydroelectric Power Project in Northeast India is also underway and it is estimated that a huge area will be submerged, displacing a good number of humans and bringing an end to the non-human form of life. The Sundarbans exemplifies the cohabitation of man with wild nature. The wild rivers, the dense forests, the vast sea- all have a profound effect on the local human settlements.

Ghosh uses an imaginative narrative to build an ecological awareness account. He believes that imaginative narratives are as important as scientific facts to understand issues like climate change. Antonia Mehnert, in her book *Climate Change Fictions: Representations of Global Warming in American Literature*, says, “Imaginariness for the unfamiliar realm of the future... provide insight into the intimate aspects of human struggles in altered environments, exposes potential conflicts and is able to create affect, but shapes the very idea of climate change.” (8)

Ghosh gives *The Hungry Tide* an ecological spin to provide a solution for environmental concerns and ecological crises in the present times. In the novel, the Morichjhapi massacre is cited as a glaring example of cynicism and utter disconnection between the environment and natives on one hand and policies on the other. Yet another

instance of disconnectedness between humans and the natural environment is discernible in Piya's statement that "once we decide we can kill off other species, it'll be people next- just the kind of people you're thinking of, people who're poor and unnoticed." (*The Hungry Tide*: 291)

Conclusion

The research reveals that ecofeminism and cultural materialism in literature represent nature as having a soul and life of its own. Eco writers, like Amitav Ghosh, use folklore to show that oral tradition and literature reflect the world beyond the seen. Ghosh's biocentric vision embraces all creatures and his novels and legends urge mankind to redefine their relationship with nature. He advocates for a more sustainable existence and puts his vision into action, such as protecting the Sundarbans against the Sahara Parivar Project.

Research shows that the planet is fighting back against human failure to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, with non-humans like bacteria, viruses, and glaciers retaliating. Ghosh's novels suggest that the apocalypse has already begun, and he believes in the restoration of the non-human world to their natural habitats. Stories and folklore can help identify solutions for climate crisis and environment-related issues, while myths can encourage gender and environmentally appropriate behavior.

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