



## ECOCRITICISM IN AMITAV GHOSH'S *THE HUNGRY TIDE*

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### ABSTRACT

The Ecological bond between man and nature is unbreakable. Each and every living creature and plant are the part and parcel of Nature. Man has realised that he is a cosmological product. Whatever happens inner and outside of a creature, it is the inevitable cause and effect of nature. Realizing this universal truth many writers, poets and Novelist made a prominent place for the environment in their writings. As far as the writers concerned the nature is composed of both the favourable and unfavourable aspects. According to Wordsworth nature is our Guide, Companion, teacher and compassionate mother. Whereas Amitav Ghosh depicts the physical properties of nature. Our Nature/Environment sometimes remains calm, sometimes furious, sometimes bright, sometimes dark, sometimes destructive, sometimes creative Amitav Ghosh throws list on the physical aspects of Nature/Environment. He presents both the optimistic and pessimistic note upon our Nature. He also presents the changes which occur in the Nature and their consequences upon us. This article discusses the Ecocritical concepts of Amitav Ghosh in a realistic manner.

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### INTRODUCTION

Indian English Literature is an endeavour of showcasing the rare gems of Indian Writing in English. At the initial stage, Indian English Literature became a new form of Indian culture and voice in which India spoke. Some of Rabindranath Tagore's works were originally written in English as *Sadhana Personality* and *The Religion of Man*. Yet another Indian writer in English was Sarojini Naidu, "The Nightingale of India", who rendered familiar things with an essence of colour and romance. Though Gandhi used his mother tongue, Gujarati, to write his famous autobiography, later translated into English by his secretary Mahadev Desai under the little *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (1929). In 1930s emerged that, the first major figures in the field of English Literature in the shape of "Big Three"

of Indian fiction. Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K.Narayan. Mulk Raj's first two novels are *Untouchable* (1935), which gives an account of "a day in life" of a sweeper, and *Coolie* (1936), which follows the fortunes of a peasant boy uprooted from the land. Raja Rao's first novel was *Kanthapura* (1938). The early novels of R.K.Narayan included the trilogy of *Swami and Friends* (1935), *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937) and *The English Teacher* (1945). They explore conflicts between traditional Hindu values and Western incursions into the society. Vikram Seth, author of *The Golden Gate* (1986) and *A Suitable Boy* (1994) is a writer who uses a purer English and also more realistic themes. His outstanding achievement as a versatile and prolific poet remains largely and unfairly neglected.

Anita Desai has written *Fire in the Mountain* (1977), *Clear Light of Day* (1980), *The Village by the Sea* (1982), *Cry the Peacock* (1963), *Bye-Bye Black Bird* (1971) and *In Custody* (1984). Nayantara Sahgal, a niece of Nehru, writes about the Indian elite of today and yesterday. Her novels include, *This Time of Morning* (1965), *The Day in Shadow* (1971), *A Situation in New Delhi* (1977), *Rich Like Us* (1985) and *Plans for Departure* (1986), she was the winner of the Eurasian section of the 1987 Commonwealth Writer Prize. Arundhati Roy, has written only one novel, she managed to gain international recognition as the popularity of her maiden novel, *The God of Small Things* transcended geographical boundaries and thereby made her presence feel among the contemporary literary greats of the West. Amitav Ghosh has carved a distinctive niche for himself with his profound works such as *Circle of Reason*, *Calcutta Chromosome*, *Shadow Lines*, etc. Every work of his amply displays his penchant for inquisitiveness, serious research and diversity. The history of fiction in all countries shows the same route and direction. It picks up the strands necessary for its needs from the contexts of the available socio-political history and movements of its time for creative expression either in the urgency of their origin or in retrospect: The Indian political novel in English took its roots only with the upsurge of nationalism and revolt against the foreign rule.

Amitav Ghosh, was born on 11<sup>th</sup> July 1956, in Calcutta. He was an Indian-born writer and whose ambitious novels use complex narrative strategies to probe the nature of national and personal identity, particularly of the people of India and Southeast Asia. He worked as a journalist for the first time with the Indian Express newspaper, Delhi. Ghosh subsequently returned to India began working on the Ibis Trilogy which comprises *Sea of Poppies*, *River of Smoke*, and *Flood of Fire* (May 2015). He was awarded the Padma Shri by the Indian Government in 2007. In 2009, he was elected a fellow of Royal Society of Literature. In 2015, Ghosh was named a Ford Foundation "Art of Change Fellow". Amitav was the author of *The Circle of Reason*, in 1986, *The Shadow Lines* (1988), *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1995), *The Glass Palace* (2000), *The Hungry Tide* (2004), and *Sea of Poppies*

(2008), thus the first volume of the Ibis Trilogy was set in the year 1830, just before the opium war. His most of the works deal with a historical setting especially in the contact of Indian Ocean world. Ghosh famously withdrew his novel *The Glass Palace* from consideration for "Commonwealth Writers' Prize", where it had been awarded the Best Novel in Eurasian section, citing his objections to the term "Commonwealth" and the unfairness of the English-language requirement specified in the rules. Subsequently, he landed in controversy over his acceptance of the Israeli literary award, the \$1 million Dan David Prize.

### **The Role of Amitav Ghosh in Indian Writing in English**

Amitav Ghosh is an Indian novelist, essayist and non-fiction writer. He was popular and highly respected Indian author. In his novels and essays, he draws heavily upon the character, traditions, and dichotomies of his native land, yet Ghosh's protagonists and themes often extend beyond India's actual boundaries, most notably toward the Middle East and Great Britain. In character development, both modern and post-modern literature explore subjectivism, turning from external reality to examine the inner states of consciousness, in many cases drawing on modernist examples in the "Stream of Consciousness" styles of Virginia Woolf and James Joyce, or explorative poems like *The Waste Land* by T.S. Eliot. His first novel, *The Circle of Reason* (1986), follows an Indian protagonist who, suspected of being a terrorist, leaves India for Northern Africa and the Middle East. In *The Shadow Lines* (1988) is a sweeping history of two families (One Indian and the other English) that are deeply shaped by events following the departure of the British from India in 1947. *The Calcutta Chromosome*, *A novel of Fevers, Delirium and Discovery* (1995) represented Ghosh's first foray into science fiction; the novel offers an alternate history of the discovery of the parasite that causes malaria. *The Hungry Tide* (2004), set in Bengal and featuring American and Indian characters. With *Sea of Poppies* (2009) – a novel that describes individuals on the Ibis, and it was the first book in the Ibis Trilogy, which takes place shortly before and during the first Opium War. The historical series also included *River*

of *Smoke* (2011) and *Flood of Fire* (2015). His non-fiction works include *Dancing in Cambodia*, at Large in Burma (1998), *The Imam and the Indian* (2002), and *Incendiary Circumstances: A Chronicle of the Turmoil of our Times* (2005). Thus, Amitav Ghosh has made a prominent place in Indian Literature, who uses the technique of magic realism in order to explain the meaningfulness and profound vision of life.

### Ecocriticism

Ecocriticism is a branch of literary scholarship that tries to find tangible connections between literature and environment. Degradation of the environment tops the list of problems the world faces today. Ecocriticism can be distinguished in two phases. The first wave Ecocriticism rubs on nature writing, nature poetry and wilderness fiction. The second wave Ecocriticism or the Revisionist Ecocriticism is inclined towards an environmental justice to the issues of social criticism, urban and degraded landscapes. As critics have pointed out, one of the reasons that ecocriticism continues to grow as a discipline is the continued global environment crisis. Ecocriticism, aims to show how the work of writers concerned about the environment can play some part in solving real and pressing ecological concerns.

### Ecocriticism in *The Hungry Tide*

From the perspective of ecology, a bioregion or ecoregion is a geographical area of similar climate where similar ecosystems and groups of species are found on similar sites. Amitav Ghosh in his novel *The Hungry Tide* (2004) presents the biotic life in Sunderbans which is essentially a bioregion. The novel is set in the Sunderbans, the vast and largely covered by the mangrove forest. The imaginary boundaries of modern nation state, the wind and the tides take the fishing folk to the mouth of many rivers – channels that set up a unique turbulence of fresh and salt water. Kanai Dutt and Piyali Roy are the two main characters in the novel. Kanai, a Delhi based businessman and also a translator who came to the Island of Lusibari to meet his aunt Nilima. Nirmal and Nilima came to the Sunderbans when the revolutionary ideas of Nirmal became dangerous in Calcutta. The Journal of Nirmal had been written a long time before in 1979.

Piya an expatriate, American cetologist, who came to study about the Irrawaddy dolphin which lives in the rivers of the Tide country. Piya asks Fokir to accompany her as a guide in the canals of the area. Kanai also goes along with them.

She arrives at canning and hires a dubious guide and a guard from the government functionaries. Fokir does not know English and she does not know Bengali but they manage to communicate through non-verbal language. The Journal of Nirmal contains the information related to the village of Morichjhapi. The journal contains some personal history of Nirmal's life. Morichjhapi was the place for tiger preservation project, the government considered the refugees to the squatters. Piya hires Fokir to take her to the region of dolphins. Kanai decides to return from the trip, while Fokir and Piya go out to observe the dolphins. The story of the novel centers on the tide country that includes the villages such as Lusibari, Garjontola and Morichjhapi. Widowhood has been naturalized into their everyday lives in such a way that they shed their marital symbols everytime when their men go out for fishing. That Ghosh informs about the custom of the tide country:

when the men folk went fishing it was the custom for their wives to change into she garments of widowhood. They would put away their marital reds and dress in white saris; 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. (*HT*, 85-86)

Kusum and Moyna have sharpened their tools of survival. Amirta Banerjee points out that, "*The Hungry Tide* provides an insider's view of the patterns of survival in one such hostile space 'India's doormat', the Sunderbans." Ghosh wants to suggest that if the people of both privileged and impoverished backgrounds are united, then there will be prosperous future for the world's poor. The relationship between Piya and Fokir symbolizes the union between two. The tiger killing incident in the novel highlights the truth about the cultural differences between Piya and Fokir. When a tiger enters the village the villagers want to kill it with

their live stock. These people have suffered a lot due to the tigers, while the government authorities have imposed the restrains over the tigers and started the conservation of these animals. While Piya who is an outsider and does not know this history, the act of killing the tiger appears to be brute 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. Piya begins to believe that Fokir is a kind of man who is associated with nature and it's Habitat.

#### **Conclusion**

Towards the end of the novel when Piya and Fokir are trapped by the cyclone, it is the extreme desperation and fight for survival that brings them together. Piya begins with a mistranslation of the people and environment around her and proceeds to represent a movement towards equality between elite and subaltern culture. Ghosh wants to suggest if the world is to see the positive change through social anthropology, there is the need to promote such cross cultural relations. *The Hungry Tide* is not only a tale of settlers and their physical surroundings in the sunderbans but also an exploration into the hearts of the charecters. This fact that the present study detects mental agony of the inhabitations living in a fragile ecosystem is information about the condition of the people, and the present generation can take up fruitful steps to help improve the situation of Tide country.

#### **Works Cited**

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