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AMITAV GHOSH'S *THE HUNGRY TIDE* AS A TEXT OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS: A STUDY

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Abstract:

*Through an ecological reading of the Sundarbans as an ecosystem, the human–nature relationship, and the ethical choices of conservation, this research paper discusses Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* as a seminal text in dealing with environmental issues. Ecological problems, social, and cultural threads are intricately woven together as Ghosh offers a story that rings both poignantly and the larger global environmental problems. A fading balance between human livelihoods and ecological preservation is the fruit upon which *The Hungry Tide* bites: this fusion of ecological and social justice is what gives the book a critical place among texts in environmental literature.*

Keywords: *Sundarbans, Environmental Literature. Conservation; Human Nature Relationship; Ecological Balance; Environmental Ethics, Etc.*

Introduction:

The Sundarbans, at the India–Bangladesh border, is a rare and delicate ecosystem, described brilliantly by Amitav Ghosh in his 2004 novel *The Hungry Tide*. The novel develops themes of environmental degradation, conservation and the ambiguous relationship forged between human beings and nature, as physically substantiated by the author's compelling narrative. Drawing on the Sundarbans as a case study, Ghosh exposes simultaneously this site as one of ecological fragility and of human struggle, and an arena in which environmental preservation ethics come into inevitable conflict and concatenate with matter of socio-economic inequality. In analysing *The Hungry Tide* as a text of environmental concerns, the research paper addresses the importance of the text in the contemporary discourse on climate change, ecological sustainability, and environmental justice.

Literature Review:

Most of the scholarship on *The Hungry Tide* has centered on its multidimensional treatment of social and ecological problems. Upamanyu Mukherjee and Sukanya Dasgupta argue that Ghosh has sensitively represented the Sundarbans as an entity that is diverse, but under threat of human exploitation. Studies by Rob Nixon and Jatinder Mann have explored the Ghosh's engagement with 'slow violence,' focusing on the long-term impacts of environmental degradation on marginalized communities. John Thieme, among other critics, has observed the way in which Ghosh is able to inflect ecological narrative with human narrative, giving his work a wider and much more rounded view of the problems of environmental preservation. *The Hungry Tide*



therefore, emerges in these studies collectively as a critical text in postcolonial and environmental literature.

Research Methodology:

The Hungry Tide is analysed in this paper by employing ecocriticism and postcolonial theory from interdisciplinary perspective. The study centers on textual analysis, specifically on Ghosh's narrative strategies, character development and thematic concerns. This research utilises secondary sources such as critical essays and scholarly interpretations for the contextualization of the novel within wider spheres of environmental and socio-political discourses. The study aims to position the Sundarbans within a broader discourse of both ecological and social justice in order to demonstrate how the novel highlights the relation between environmental and human concerns.

Analysis and Discussion:

The Sundarbans as a Character:

The Sundarbans is more than mere setting in *The Hungry Tide*, existing alongside kings and landholders as a dynamic character that has a role in shaping the lives of its human and non — human inhabitants. Of this region, Ghosh writes, the tidal forests and their flora and fauna are richly described. This abundance contrasts starkly with some of the threats to living in the Sundarbans – the tidal bores are unpredictable, as are the tigers, and man eaters at that. Ghosh manipulates nature's ability in all capacities, by portraying the Sundarbans that are nurturing and dangerous.

The text showcases the Sundarbans, written not as only a backdrop but as a very living character that is serving as the central character surrounding the whole narrative and the environmental theme. The Sundarbans are painted by Ghosh as a site of beauty, danger and ecological tension, India's relationship with nature mirroring our own contradictory and confounding relations with both. Ghosh anthropomorphizes the Sundarbans: the environment is given a voice, and agency. The tidal landscape is depicted as ever-changing, unpredictable, and indifferent to human existence:

Deep in the forest, the tides extend, bringing little fish and crabs with them up the farthest of the creeks. But the river is not a forest's best friend. The soil is gouged out, deep channels dug, trees toppled and the land suddenly heaved away as it pulls back, leaving a swirling, bubbling, broth behind (Ghosh, 7).

This description gives a duality of the Sundarbans – fostering and wrecking, the category that surpasses human interference. This is accomplished through an exploration into Environmental Concerns and Human Vulnerability.

However, The Sundarbans represent the tenuous comp balance between habitat, man and preservation. The narrative highlights the challenges of human survival in a hostile natural environment:

Thus, the struggle posed by the elements is never ending for the Sundarbans settlers. This is a test in endurance every day, a struggle to sweat out a living out of an unconcerned earth (Ghosh 51).



The Sundarbans is known for the precarity of life, with human attempts to tame nature all too often brought low, questioning sustainability and coexistence. Further, the text, interlaces human exploitation with environmental degradation of the Morichjhāpi massacre. The refugees' attempt to settle on protected land leads to a violent confrontation, reflecting the clash between conservation and survival:

Morichjhapi was a reserve, or protected, island, according to the law....to clear the forest would be to murder the end pieces of a wonderful ecosystem (Ghosh, 150)

In this episode I take this prioritisation to task, demonstrating that conservation of ecological 'nature' can be anti-thetical to caring for people already living in nature. The Sundarbans tiger is an iconic symbol of the area's wild soul, and its ecological importance. Its presence underscores the region's biodiversity and the tensions between human needs and wildlife conservation:

In the tide country, tigers kill, but they also sustain; they are the heart of the forest, the essence of its life (Ghosh, 225)

This is a statement that shows that the tiger is both predator and guardian of the balance of the ecological mind, and thus, he is the symbol of the dilemmas which arise from wildlife conservation. The character like role of Sundarbans is also further brought about the myth of Bon Bibi, the forest goddess who saves humans from natural dangers. Bon Bibi embodies the region's spiritual and ecological essence:

That Bon Bibi is not the protector but also a reminder that the forest is not for human greed,' she said. One has to honour the boundaries of the character to live, respect its rules (Ghosh, 117)

However, the legend epitomises the whole deal of the environmental concerns which have to do with the requisite of the harmony of nature and humans.

Thus, Ghosh gives the Sundarbans a literal character in *The Hungry Tide*, as a place that is beautiful, hazardous, and environmentally fragile; a place to which people are continuously attracted and repelled. The novel raises questions of environmental stewardship, conservation, and displacement, as well as life alongside one another.

Human-Nature Relationship:

The Hungry Tide by Amitav Ghosh is richly concerned with the nature of the relationship between humans and nature (or the environment)—especially in terms of the Sundarbans, an ecological zone that is also highly fragile. By employing the conflict between characters, natural forces in the tide country, and human and nonhuman citizens of the tide country, Ghosh attacks anthropocentrism, shows the importance of ecological balance.

The text takes a deep dive into the relationship between man and his domain. In contrast, characters such as Piya, a cytologist studying the endangered Irrawaddy dolphins, adopt a scientific and conservationist viewpoint towards nature. However, those who inhabit the area, such as Fokir, represent a more symbiotic and were native like relationship with the ecosystem. This juxtaposition reveals the conflict between current conservation processes with traditional lifestyles. The interactions between Piya and Fokir allow Ghosh to criticise how environmental



policy frequently marginalises indigenous local people, and demonstrates the importance of participatory conservation over top-down strategies.

The study of Environmental Ethics and the connections between these notions and the work of conservation are mentioned. Ethical dilemma of conservation is central conflicts in *The Hungry Tide*. The novel further narrates the story of the historical eviction of refugees to Morichjhanpi island, on the pretext of conservation laws that sometimes led to eviction of marginalised communities. This episode is offered by Ghosh as a critique of governmental conservation policies that choose to favour wildlife over human welfare. This tension is indicative of a more general problem in mediating the requirements of ecological sustainability and those of social justice, a topic that links closely with environmental

The Sundarbans are a space where human and natural forces are in a constant state of war, according to Ghosh. Through it, the tides, the mangroves, the wildlife all play a role in making lives for the people who inhabit them and these elements resist being humanised. The omnipotence of nature is vividly described:

The tide country's terrain was so mutable, its rivers and creeks so perishable and transient that it seemed as if the land itself were poised for liquefaction (Ghosh, *THT*, 7).

Ghosh reminds us here that the Sundarbans are unstable; one might say that even the largest rivers in the world are more apt to change their course than human beings. She reminds the reader of the instability of nature, its fluidity, and its intractability as much to human designs to control or keep it stable as permanence.

The novel revolves around the tension between the conservation of endangered species such as the Irrawaddy dolphins and Royal Bengal tigers, and the survival of marginalized communities. Piya Roy's scientific research centres around contradicting with the local fishermen's practices, which are part of larger environmental debates. For instance, Nirmal notes the paradox of protecting wildlife at the expense of human lives, "It is a bitter irony that the very people who should be the first to speak for the forest are, in practice, its greatest enemies" (Ghosh, *THT*, 121).

This emphasises the difficulties of carrying out environmental conservation in economically vulnerable regions where human lives' sustainability is normally placed against environmental conservation. Moyers Paper assesses the way natural resources are being exploited for economic gain while jeopardising ecological balance in the process. The displacement of the Morichjhapi settlers illustrates this, as their attempt to live off the land is violently curtailed by the state: "The dream of Morichjhāpi was the dream of a home for the homeless" (Ghosh, *THT*, 258). The tragedy of this is that environmental policies which are in place supposedly for the protection of nature, result in marginalising the most vulnerable, underlining the inequalities inherent in human nature interactions.

In the tide country nature is not a backdrop but a central part of life and identity for the region's residents. This symbiotic relationship is exemplified in Fokir, whose intuitive understanding of the Sundarbans contrasts sharply with Piya's scientific approach: "He could read the flow of the river, the direction of the wind, the smell of the tides" (Ghosh, *THT*, 143). Fokir's connection to nature is spiritual—the sense that he belongs to it and that it belongs to him—and



intrinsic, providing an alternative to the exploitive nature of the human relationship to the environment.

The Irrawaddy dolphins are an allegory to the fine line of us and nature that we all live upon. Piya's research on these dolphins is an attempt through science and human interaction to bring science and its ecological consequences into harmony. She reflects, "These animals were unique to this place, to this river, and no other" (Ghosh, *THT*, 172).

It uses the dolphins as a symbol, because a hope for a balance between human ambition and preservation still exists in the Sundarbans while the dolphins are on the verge of survival but they have not stopped living.

The Hungry Tide is a microcosm of the global environmental crisis and the Sundarbans, which provide the backdrop of the novel, stand for the world's developing ecological crisis. Like the rest of the country, the region is vulnerable to rising sea levels and extreme weather events associated with climate change. Ghosh's characterisation of the Sundarbans sheds light on the interdependence of local and global environmental issues, a point he emphasises that sorry, WE need to address! With this global perspective, Ghosh places the Sundarbans novel as a suggestion for a fresh way to envision humanity's connection with nature. The second theme the researcher discuss here, is marginalisation and Environmental Justice

The novel directs attention to the social aspects of environmental issues by focusing on marginalised communities, like the fishermen and refugees. In his representation of the nature of these characters, Ghosh defies nature as a solitary creature; he emphasises the mutual dependency of ecological and social concerns. Ghosh's message is, sandwiched between labelling certain people's voices as 'unnecessary' or 'misdirected' is an environmental ethic that puts equity and inclusion first.

Conclusion:

Thus, to conclude, *The Hungry Tide*, by Amitav Ghosh's is a poignant work examining the interconnection of ecological and human concerns challenges the public appropriateness of our reading as well as sales based economic hierarchy. The novel poignantly depicts the Sundarbans and its inhabitants, forcing readers to grapple with the ethical ramifications of conservation and the socio-economic inequalities that fuel environmental degradation. *The Hungry Tide* addresses the themes of climate change, ecological fragility, and environmental justice, making it an important contribution to the field of environmental literature with much to say about what it takes to achieve sustainability in a world that is becoming ever more fragile. This study further corroborates Ghosh as essential voice in contemporary literature, having to say something more comprehensive and more equal about social and environmental matters.

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