



## FLORA, FAUNA, AND FABLES: ECOCRITICAL ELEMENTS IN AMITAV GHOSH'S *THE HUNGRY TIDE* (2004)

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### Abstract

*This research paper critically examines the environmental nuances in Amitav Ghosh's renowned novel, The Hungry Tide (2004), through the lens of Ecocriticism, an English literary theory that explores the relationship between literature and the environment. The novel unfolds in the Sundarbans, a unique ecosystem fraught with ecological complexities, and serves as a rich canvas for analyzing the relationship between humanity and nature. Through ecocritical analysis, the researcher has studied Ghosh's portrayal of environmental components, investigating how the story addresses topics such as biodiversity, climate change, and the ethical consequences of human-nature interactions. The study utilises an ecocritical approach to interpret the symbolic importance of the Sundarbans, the portrayal of local ecological knowledge, and the wider environmental values encoded in the text.*

**Keywords:** Environmental concerns, Ecocriticism, Ecology, Deep ecology

Amitav Ghosh, a renowned figure in contemporary literature, exceeds conventional limitations through his apt interweaving of narratives that deeply connect with the complex aspects of human existence and the natural world. This research paper undertakes an interesting study of "The Hungry Tide," by delving into the profound ecological aspects that are skillfully woven into the narrative framework of the novel. Ghosh, a renowned author recognised for his meticulous literary craftsmanship, establishes himself as a narrator whose profound prose not only engrosses the reader but also profoundly addresses crucial global problems. Through "The Hungry Tide," the author delves into the complex ecosystems of the Sundarbans, providing readers with a literary expedition into the depths of ecological complexities. This study aims to deconstruct the depths of Ghosh's ecological awareness by

applying the analytical framework of Ecocriticism, a literary theory that investigates how nature and environmental concerns are portrayed in works of literature.

The term ecocriticism was initially used in William Rueckert's essay "Literature and Ecology: An Exercise in Ecocriticism" in 1978. But actually, it remained unused in the critical language until the 1989 conference of the Western Literature Association, when Cheryll Glotfelty was a graduate student at Cornell, now Assistant Professor of Literature and Environment at the University of Nevada, Reno. Glen Love, who is a Professor of English at the University of Oregon, has endorsed the call for ecocriticism at the same WLA meeting since that conference in 1989; the use of the word ecocriticism has bloomed. At the onset, however, scholars working in this area of literary theory remained marginal until the beginning of 1990, when the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment (ASLE) was founded in 1992. In the area of ecocriticism, *The Ecocriticism Reader*, published in 1996 in two leading volumes, *The Environmental Imagination*, edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Mr. Harold Fromm, and Mr. Lawrence Buell. Cheryll Glotfelty states in the very first chapter of *The Ecocriticism Reader*(1996)

What then is ecocriticism? Simply put, ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the 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 texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies. (xviii)

Eco-criticism is an analysis of society and the cultural objects of the human race, which are linked to human interaction with the natural world, including literature, texts, theories, etc. The study of the relationship between literature and the real world is ecocriticism. Just as *feminism* looks at expression and literature from a feminist viewpoint and Marxism increases awareness of the modes of development and the economic system to its text analysis, ecocriticism is an approach to literature. For example, Ecocritics study how nature is portrayed in any work of art.

Amitav Ghosh uses fictitious figures to warn of a worldwide environmental calamity that is about to occur. This research also thoroughly investigates and focuses on the current severe need to safeguard wildlife, plants, and marine biota. Reading *The Hungry Tide* (2004) ecologically helps us comprehend the environment surrounding us. Chitra Sankaran writes in her book *History, Narrative, and Testimony in Amitav Ghosh's Fiction* (2012)

The book, like others by Ghosh, is eloquently bound to the cause of the disenfranchised, both human and nonhuman, be it the forlorn refugees, the man-eating tigers of the Sundarbans, or the freshwater dolphins of the Irrawaddy. In step with Gore, it seems, Ghosh forces the readers' attention to compelling questions relating to the preservation of a delicate ecosystem that we share with land and sea animals, of the hazards posed by an unpredictable and changing environment on humans and animals, and the responsibilities these generate. (xix)

Almost everyone in the novel represents a view that expresses culture. Piya, who is a protagonist in the novel, is analysed from an ecologically profound viewpoint while Nilima as well as her husband Nirmal, who reflects both socioecological and ecological perspectives, discusses the necessity of uniting and protecting the environment and culture. In *The Hungry Tide* (2004), the author emphasises the significance of the environment and places that have a connection to tradition. This relationship between humanity and the environment has significant implications for the whole ecosystem.

In the novel, the author depicts a densely crowded, anthropocentric view of the metropolitan area, including overcrowding on boats and railways, ecological abuse, and bribery. For example, Gosh shows how Daniel Hamilton uses Indigenous People for his gain, and how he wreaks havoc on the area of tide country that formerly belonged to the organisms and inhabitants of the area, such as the tigers, alligators, and reptiles among others.

Gosh describes his greed in the novel:

But S'Daniel cared nothing for the Forest Department. In 1903 he bought ten thousand acres of the tide country from the British sarkar .” “Ten thousand acres! How much land is that?” “Many islands’ worth, Kanai. Many islands. The British sarkar was happy to let him have them. Gosaba, Rangabelia, Satjelia — these were all his. And to these he later added this island you’re standing on: Lusibari. [51]

The partition of the country brought about a major calamity which included the Morichhapi Massacre. Mr. Sloame who is a greedy man, when Edward ruins whale migratory routes and the Irrawaddy dolphin population is wiped out due to the desire for the extraction of dolphin oil, which was used as a replacement for petroleum. Tigers and Irrawaddy dolphins are all sufferers of economic, technological, and industrial advancement. In *The*

*Hungry Tide* (2004), the author shows his displeasure by focusing on the environmental destruction caused by the residents.

The author describes how well the entire existence of the people of the region is characterised by distinct socio-cultural rules that serve as an environmental identity, such as avoiding any reference to the tiger or other poisonous species. Piya Roy expresses her care for the environment, but Kanai expresses his passion for anthropology. It is clear from Piya's memories that she takes peace in the natural surroundings of our country. Kusum's memories of her parents reveal that the tidal nation has an environmentally friendly way of living. Kusum When it comes to his daily activities, Fokir is a geocentric individual.

The natural world as well as culture coexists together and inseparably linked. The two coexist together in *The Hungry Tide* (2004). Culture cannot exist in the absence of nature. Before setting out for a day of fishing, fishers in this area offer prayers to the river as well as goddess Bonbibi. As a result, this developed into the region's culture. When Fokir was caught in a storm, he attached himself to the tree and survived by swimming to shore. Fokir, one of the major characters of the novel, has learned how to respect and worship nature. Fokir respects and worships the tree that provided him with his one chance at survival. Now, this kind of devotion had become a part of his life, and he had passed it along to his kid. Fokir recalls the occurrence and visits this tree every year with his kid to pay his respects and to worship the goddess Bonbibi and the tree which is sacred to him.

Gosh has shown concern about the idea that environmental borders should be used to limit human activities instead of political ones. Bioregion or ecoregion refers to a geographical region with comparable climate in which the same ecosystems and groupings of species may be found on the same types of locations, as seen from the viewpoint of ecology. The geological identity of an area may be determined via bioregionalism. The animals and plants found alone in this are amazing. They can only be found at a single location, therefore it's crucial. The author depicts Sunderban, as a bioregion in *The Hungry Tide* (2004). The Sunderbans which is an archipelago of islands includes a variety of flora and creatures that are not seen anywhere else in the world. One of the protagonists, Piya was researching a kind of dolphin that can only be found in this area. The author has utilised the names of several rare species in his writings. Although the author's biocentric perspective is well-expressed, it's well-discussed in the thesis by the researcher. A desire to protect and reconstruct the ecosystem while healthily meeting fundamental human necessities is included in the word "bioregionalism".

Habitat devastation, pollution, the loss of natural vegetation and wildlife, destruction of biodiversity are all addressed in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2004). Throughout the novel, Gosh expresses his worry for the tigers and the mangroves. The struggle between humans and non-human is the central theme of *The Hungry Tide* (2004). In addition, the causes of human-animal conflict have been examined, and the actual situation of circumstances is discussed. The researcher has discussed the elements and aspects that harmed the Sunderban Forest.

Priority is given to human interests above all others. The Marichjhapi event also occurred and it is well depicted in the novel as a result of humans invading a natural environment designated to tigers as well as alligators. Individuals just sought space for human settlement when the event of Marichjhapi occurred. Human-non-human conflict occurrences skyrocketed when the people took control of Marichjhapi Island. People were willing to slaughter tigers for the sake of having access to more territory. Sunderbanians and outsiders alike had little regard for creatures' welfare.

Gosh is worried about the environmental issues of the area. Amitav Ghosh expresses his worries for the environment in *The Hungry Tide* (2004). Gosh understands the value of the Sunderban forest and its ecosystem. The main goal was to raise awareness about this sensitive area via fiction and Gosh was successful in doing so. Nirmal who is one of the important characters learns that the Malta River is on its way to destruction and he dies in pain as a result when he comes to know this. Gosh has shown his concern for the environment of this delicate area by narrating the incidents of slaughtering Tigers and destroying Mangrove forests.

*The Hungry Tide* (2004) offers a negative perception of human beings' interaction with nature. As Piya finds the tiger slaughtered for attacking other people and animals, her moral concern for wildlife overshadows her sympathy for human life. Nilima tells Kanai about the threats made by the tiger.

My belief is that over a hundred people are killed by tigers here each year. And, mind you, I'm just talking about the Indian part of the Sundarbans. If you include the Bangladesh side, the figure is probably twice that. If you put the figures together, it means that a human being is killed by a tiger every other day in the Sundarbans — at the very least. (240)

His knowledge of these events was based on his close observation of the Marichjhapi occurrence and subsequent investigation. Gosh has also addressed the issue of Bengali

invaders slaughtering Bengali Tigers, as well as dolphin protection. This incident is extensively addressed in the thesis by the researcher.

The ecosystem is polluted by many kinds of pollution. Pollution has become too common in recent years, yet it is still one of the biggest dangers for the environment that it was previously thought of as. It has existed from the beginning of humankind's increasing reliance on products that are a danger to the environment. Disruption to this balanced ecosystem has occurred in a variety of manners. Gosh has discussed the dangers of pollution on both humans as well as wildlife. The human population has been used as pollution that destroyed the forests, killed wildlife, and used items that are a danger to the environment in their daily lives. This populace established themselves along the shore and contaminated the land as well as water. Gosh mentions that an increase in the population of crabs may upset the delicate ecological order in the Sunderban. Alia Afzal writes in her thesis submitted to the University of Northern Iowa "Humans have trained themselves to live in a place where animals are in authority. Sunderban, as an archipelago, is an unadulterated biodiversity." (32)

The setting or the location of the novel has been assigned the same importance as other issues such as ethnicity and class. The majority of Gosh's works are set in the backdrop of various locations. Sunderban, one of the largest mangrove forests, is the setting for this novel. The setting seems to be more important than the individuals in this narrative. The protagonists in the narrative are impacted by the setting and behave in accordance with that setting. Sunderban is portrayed as a prominent character in the novel and is handled as more than just a setting. *The Hungry Tide* (2004) 's story revolves around what happens in Sunderban Forest. The plot revolves around the Sunderban forest, which includes the creatures, water, fisheries, and channels that make up the forest as well as the inhabitants that live there. By reporting and portraying the human-nature connection, the author makes nature the novel's main character. In Amitav Gosh's note for the novel, he informs that two significant places, Garjontola as well as Lusibari, are made up entirely in his imagination. There are a number of locales in the novel that are not created by imagination but are real.

Mankind is responsible for ecology, and every step taken to further his or her growth has an impact on the environment. Merely mankind is to blame for the planet's total devastation. Mankind has caused disaster in the environment in the name of progress and to achieve its ends by destroying it and upsetting its natural balance. *The Hungry Tide* (2004) shows the harm done to the environment. During the period covered by the novel, humans have encroached on wildlife habitats and begun to construct dwellings for humans. This is an obvious invasion, and people have already paid the price for it with their own lives. The attacks by the tigers had become so routine for them that they no longer noticed. The invaders decimated thousands of trees in their quest to establish a permanent settlement in the region. A once-diverse dolphin population is now in danger due to the activities of fishermen and boaters who slaughtered animals as well as melted down thousands of them to power their boats.

Concern about environmental deterioration is expressed by the protagonists of this novel. Piyali Roy who is a cetologist has flown in from the United States to research the Irrawaddy dolphin. Piya cares for the water creatures. Piya expressed her feelings and concerns when a tiger was slaughtered by people in the middle of the night. Among those

people, Piya spoke up for the protection of this beast. Fokir, a humble fisherman, respects nature and inspires that value in his kid too.

Aside from this, ecocritical interpretation sees the environment as an appropriate framework for addressing a broad range of topics such as history, the individual, society, and culture. Using ecocritical symbols and motifs found in the novel, the negative consequences of globalisation, modernization, urbanisation may all be shown on a cohesive panel. The analysis of *The Hungry Tide* (2004) by Amitav Ghosh concludes that when the environment is affected, humans are likewise affected due to the interwoven connection between nature and man. Humankind must treat the environment with respect and concern if he wants to live. Not only tigers but also Irrawaddy dolphins have been brutally killed, and the author explains why, as well as how this has led to the animals being rare. They're on the point of being uncommon very soon. It, thus, demonstrates that only humans are to blame for the extinction of wildlife. Individuals like Fokir and Piya are more necessary than ever to help rescue the planet. To prevent people from causing damage to the ecosystem, we need to come up with new solutions. To save and protect the environment, now is the perfect moment to educate and instill principles of biocentrism into civilization. The author has argued in the novel that the anthropocentric worldview should be replaced with a biocentric and ecocentric in order to protect the environment, as people are fundamentally part of it. Furthermore, his works convey a message about appreciating, preserving, and safeguarding the environment and culture. A lot of ecologists are concerned about environmental issues such as environmental consciousness and preserving ecological balance and aesthetics.

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