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The Hungry Tide: A Blend of Historico-Environmental Concerns

Sheenam

Research Scholar

Central University of Punjab

Bathinda.

Abstract:

With the advent of environmental degradation, writers started penning down these crucial issues in their literary writings. Consciously or unconsciously they analysed the degrading effects of environment in relation to the society and its people in their works. In this research paper, the researcher has tried to analyse Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* from historical as well environmental perspectives. Ghosh has very aptly critiqued the Eurocentric notion and the western model of conservation adopted by Indian government at the cost of lives of tribal people.

Keywords: Anthropocentrism, Colonisation, Conservation, Environment, Morichjhapi Massacre, Sunderbans.

Introduction

Amitav Ghosh is one of the most prominent writers focusing on the issues of post colonial era. Born to an Indian middle class family on 11 July 1956, in Kolkata, he spent his childhood at several places like Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and other neighbouring countries as his father was a lieutenant colonel in the Army. Ghosh has written many novels as well as non fictional works also. Ghosh has been acclaimed as “an elder statesman” among Indian writers in English (Jaishree 351). He deals with the themes of identity crisis, marginalities, histories, knowledge systems, migration and Diaspora. A. A. Mondal comments,

Ghosh mediates upon a core set of issues but each time he does so from a new perspective: the troubled legacy of colonial knowledge and discourse on formerly colonised societies . . . the formation and reformation of identities in colonial and post colonial societies . . . an engagement with cultural multiplicity, and an insistent critique of Eurocentrism. (2)

The Hungry Tide describes the history of colonial era and the plight of marginalised tribal people. The setting of the novel is in a very remote area in West Bengal known as, The Sunderbans, which means “the beautiful forest” (8). Sunderbans is an area which is rich in biodiversity, but has very fragile ecology. The area has been described as the land of mangroves, tigers and a number of other species. The novel is divided into two parts: The Ebb: Bhata and The Flood: Jowar. The novel is about current problem of conservation in the Sunderbans delta. This region has remained one of the major sites of conflict between conservationists protecting many endangered species especially tigers and the poor marginalized people who depend on natural resources including forests and animals for their livelihood. This novel provides a critique of the Western model of conservation adopted by Indian government for preserving some particular species. It is argued that:

Ghosh is an ideal representative to comment on environmental issues in India . . . a critique of the neglect of local issues in national environmental projects provides a pathway that does not make ecological concerns abstract, but rather facilitates a humanist version of culture-specific, location-based environmentalism. (Sen 367)

The story of the novel runs through two parallel narratives. Nirmal's journal which acts as a background to describe the plight of deprived people. It critiques the role of state authorities in the Sunderbans area. The historical incident of Morichjhapi and the political tensions prevailing in the area are illustrated through Nirmal's journal. Marxist sympathiser Nirmal and social worker Nilima's story builds one part of the story in which the lives of poor people and the role of the state authorities have been described. American cetologist Piyali Roy and New Delhi based translator Kanai Dutt construct another part of the story in which western approach to conservation has been focused.

The novel opens with an encounter of Kanai Dutt with Piyali Roy, a typical American at a railway platform. Piya comes to Sunderbans for her research on Irrawaddy dolphins found in the Ganges. Kanai comes to Lusibari Island to read the journal which his uncle wanted him to read and translate. Through Piyali, Ghosh foregrounds the Eurocentric version of conservation in which animals are preserved on the cost of tribal people by ignoring their local living conditions.

The novel mainly deals with the incident of Morichjhapi massacre which takes place because the government has evicted out the refugees. Even government killed tribal people when they resisted against them. The government wants to save the tigers and for this the human lives are put on stake. Nilima is a social activist, who has established the Badabon trust to help the needy and helpless refugees. It depicts the plight of powerless refugees against the powerful class of society. Ghosh portrays the struggles and sufferings of tribal people through the character of Kusum. She is a poor marginalised woman but also a very bold one. She raises her voice against the governmental authorities. Fokir is the son of Kusum. He is an illiterate man who usually goes for fishing. It is his hobby and he possesses abundant knowledge about the whereabouts of the dolphins. He is familiar with every corner of Lusibari as well as neighbouring Islands. His wife Moyna is well educated nurse who aims to be a doctor. At the end of the novel, when Kanai, Horen, Piya and Fokir are out on expedition, a disastrous storm is about to come. As a consequence, Kanai and Horen save their lives but Piya and Fokir are caught in the storm. Fokir saves Piya's life by putting his own life in danger. At the end Fokir dies but he saves Piyali's life. Piya decides not to go back but to pursue her research in Sunderbans. She wants to pay homage to Fokir. She names the project after Fokir. She has changed herself, she begins to wear plain sari and she is full of guilt. She takes Tutul and Moyna as her own responsibility. Nilima is a practical woman, she agrees to Piya's decision of pursuing her research in Sunderbans.

The major part of the novel deals with the environment and its relation to human beings. It is a novel in which Ghosh portrays various issues related to conservation and ecology. Human beings are dependent upon nature as nature provides abundant useful resources to them. These resources are helpful to every creature on the planet whether they are humans or animals. But human beings have always tried to exploit the resources for their own benefit without caring for other living beings. Man exploits nature and he considers himself the sole heir of the universe and this attitude depicts his anthropocentric attitude. This particular idea has been dwelt upon by Ghosh in this novel. He tries to revisit history which has been forgotten by the present post colonial India. The incident of Morichjhapi of 1979, is the base on which he tries to revisit history. The evicting out of refugees from the Land of Morichjhapi Island and brutal killings of innocent people was the main focus of the incident. It was done due to the orders given by the Indian government as it declared the area of Morichjhapi as conservation area for the project of tigers. But the fact is that nature as well as tribal people are considered marginalised in front of more powerful or centralised people. As it is said in the article "Dwelling on Morichjhapi" by Annu Jalais:

It was often expressed that the government was happy as long as the tigers thrived and that in contrast, whether the islanders lived or died, as with the refugees, made no difference, because they were just “tiger food. It was also said that earlier both animals and humans lived in harmony and the animals did not harm the human beings. But after the incident of Morichjhapi, the tigers became “man eaters”. (1761)

So, it is clear that those officials who are in favour of making the land as a wildlife conservation area are more concerned with their benefits. The tigers are being used for the international trade and it makes money for them. They are hardly concerned for the tribal people and they had no concern towards those innocent animals. The foremost concern of the novel is of anthropocentrism that the man considers himself at the centre of the universe. He indulges in those activities which led to the killing of innocent creatures present on the earth.

Various characters like, Piyali Roy, has more scientific approach than Fokir. As Fokir being the native of that particular area, knows each and everything about the dolphins and the area which is safe or dangerous for the human beings. Without Fokir, Piya would have been unable to do her research. But both have a different approach towards the conservation of animals. His livelihood is based on the nature itself whereas Piya shows purely American traits. She has her meal in packed canes, whereas Fokir collects fresh crabs and cooks them. Fokir is depicted as a marginalised poor tribal man, who is an illiterate and has no formal education as exactly opposite to his wife, Moyna. He is not ambitious like her. At once she says that it would be better if he has a “gyan” rather than “gaan” (212) as he always hums a tune.

People have different assumptions according to their mind set up; some think nature as a living being which provides food to all the creatures living on this Earth. Whereas some perceive it as a non living thing, they use nature for their own material needs. They do not bother about the harm done to the flora and fauna and the disturbance in ecological balance. People like Fokir and Kusum regard nature as a living goddess. They eat what they get from nature. And the myth of Bon Bibi, the goddess of the forest, clearly shows the way they worship by making small images and going to Garjontola every year. It is mentioned in the novel, “. . . Bon Bibi rules over the jungle, that the tigers, crocodiles and other animals do her bidding” (102). Kusum’s father has built a shrine to Bon Bibi. The myth related to Bon Bibi, is that anyone who is pure at heart will never be alone in this dangerous area. Bon Bibi is both the protector as well as destroyer. People believed that, “No man who is good at heart has anything to fear in this place” (324). The dolphins are called as “Shushuk” and are considered as the messengers of the goddess Bon Bibi. The fishermen believe that it is a good omen for them because after that they easily get fishes in the river.

There is a strong connection between nature and society. Nature and culture are interdependent on each other as one cannot exist in isolation. Cheryl Glotfelty opines that, “All ecological criticism shares the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it” (19). Amitav Ghosh makes an attempt to bring out this interrelationship in the novel. *The Hungry Tide* shows that nature is more dominant and more powerful than man. Nature, from the very ancient times, has been considered as a preserver as well as a destroyer. Sometimes, nature is kind and benevolent like mother goddess and sometimes very destructive. One of the major issues in the novel is that of preserving flora and fauna at the cost of tribal people who are expelled. In an article named “Literature and Ecology” it has been opined that, “In ecology, man’s tragic flaw is his anthropocentric vision and his compulsion to conquer, humanise, domesticate, violate and exploit every natural thing” (Rueckert 113).

Environment and human beings are not isolated but man is the product of the natural habitat. His economy, culture, physique, psychology as well as development depend on environment itself. Culture is the product of historical, mythological, political and religious conditions (Bachan 367). Culture and environment are inter-related. But, the nature of human being is getting worse day by day. He has become so self-centred that instead of recognising himself as a part of nature, he is trying to show himself as the Supreme Being or Lord over the entire cosmos. He no longer considers himself as a part of the whole Universe but a superior body to dominate on other elements as well as creatures. This all has led to various dreadful consequences which are very detrimental for the human beings themselves in the long run and for the flora and fauna, because they are on the verge of extinction. Nature is an independent creation of the world but man is trying to control it. And this interference and control of man over nature leads to disaster.

The interactions between the state, the poor, the physical environment and the flora and fauna of the area are very well presented in the novel. It also highlights the clashes between the humans for conservation. U. Sumathy says “Ghosh’s biocentric vision as exemplified in *The Hungry Tide* is worth a detailed analysis as it raises many important questions related to sustainability and conservation” (51). The hypocrisy involved in the efforts of conservation is also displayed very clearly. The most important concern towards nature as well as human beings in this world has been ignored by the politicians or the government. John C. Hawley rightly says about the novel, *The Hungry Tide* “it shares Ghosh’s concern for the individual against a broader historical – or even, in this case, geographical – backdrop” (132).

Change in the climatic conditions of any country or any part of a country is affected due to human interference. The effects like that of ozone depletion, global warming, are some of the major reasons which affect the whole nature comprising animals, plants as well as human beings. In the novel, when Kanai comes to Lusibari after several years, on the invitation of Nilima, his aunt, he sees that the river has totally changed its course. The water level goes down and the people have to face a lot of difficulty to go from one place to another. Now, the things have changed, the situation of today is completely different from 1970’s. It is all due to the establishment of Port Canning on the Matla River. So, because of human interference, the nature gets affected as in Sunderbans it is going worse day by day. Ecological damage is very well visible and this dwindling of fishes and other species is going to be disastrous. Moyna tells Kanai, “Mashima says that in fifteen years the fish will all be gone” (134).

The attacks on Morichjhapi Island are still going on because of which several people lost their lives. Here, Kusum, a marginalised tribal, totally disheartens, says in a very feeble manner,

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, which is paid by people from all around the world. (261)

The people behind these acts are those people who belong to the *Bhadralok* class, which is the upper class of Kolkata that is, out of the tide country. And Ghosh too mentions the people who belong to the First world nation that is the westerners. They took nature as an entity which is to be conserved for its valuable assets. And to safeguard these valuable and expensive assets they are ready to put at stake the lives of innocent human beings. This has been very well presented in the novel through the voice of suppressed and the tribal people.

Therefore, it can be seen that the anthropocentrism is working from upper class to lower class due to the hierarchical levels set up by the society or human beings. The change is clearly visible that occurred in the society and in the minds of the people and as a

result literature too depicts that change. In the book by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, it is said that;

The literary construct of nature during much of the nineteenth century mirrored that of a society with a profound need of nature as spiritual healer and the literary conception of nature for much of the twentieth century mirrored that of a society which valued nature as an economic resource. (201)

Kusum is one of the refugees who speak against the cruelty, which is faced by the tribal people due to government's policy of turning out the people from Morichjhapi and making it a forest reserve area. Kusum's words seem to depict that from the very ancient times, nature and humans have lived in harmony. The relation between both of them is of interdependence on one another. As she says,

No human being could think this a crime unless they have forgotten that this is how humans have always lived – by fishing, by clearing land and by planting the soil. (262)

So, earlier people look upon nature as a deity, but now it has been declined to the status of merely a thing or an entity to be used by people who can control over it. With the change in cultural values, the value of nature is also changing with the passage of time. There is a dire need to protect the image of nature. It is said that "nature has grown silent in our discourse, shifting from an animistic to a symbolic presence, from a valuable subject to a mute object" (Manes17).

The inter-connectedness between nature and man can be seen in the entire novel as Ghosh depicts a dual face of nature in his novel. First as a kind and benevolent nature and the other as a disastrous one. At the end of the novel, there are instances that man sometimes is shown to be at the mercy of nature. There is no hard and fast rule that human being or nature only one will win out of the two, but sometimes nature dominates human beings and vice versa. But the storms in the tide country are the proof that man cannot always impose his domination over nature. At last, we see Piya, sitting alone and helpless on a branch of a tree. She has lost all her equipments as well as the data which she has collected in her ongoing research about the dolphins in the tide country because of the disastrous storm. The scene of storm is depicted in the novel;

Powerful as it already was, the gale had been picking up strength all along ... It sounded no longer like the wind but some other element ...The air was now filled with leaves, twigs, branches, dust and water. This dense concentration of flying objects further reduced the visibility...It was difficult to imagine that the wind could grow any stronger or more violent. (379)

So, here it seems that nature refuses to accept the dominion of the human beings. Moreover, it looks like nature has been portrayed as a character in the novel rather than being a non- living object only. It seems that Ghosh depicts nature both as a preserver as well as destroyer. The novel very aptly describes humans' responsibility towards nature and a balanced relationship between man and nature. Hawley comments about the ending of the novel, "The last point is certainly true: the cyclone is powerfully described and reminds readers very forcefully of the humility that is demanded in the face of nature, and our place in it" (134).

The problem arises when man's relation with nature gets imbalanced because man does not consider himself as a part of nature. Getting out of the domain of nature, he begins to control it, which becomes a problem for man himself and consequently, the ecological balance gets disturbed. There is a reference in the novel about the importance of crabs in the tide country. Their presence is helpful for the mangrove trees. The following lines depict their importance for mangroves.

They kept the mangroves alive by removing their leaves and litter; without them the trees would choke their own debris . . . intertidal forests should be named after crabs rather than mangroves (142).

The natural species had their own importance, it is not the human beings who think that they themselves are of sole importance in this world but each and every species and organism possess their own importance. In an article named "The Comic Mode", Joseph W. Meeker argues that, "a climax ecosystem is much more complicated than any human social organisation, only because it integrates the diverse needs and activities of a very large number of different species" (162).

It is quite clear that man uses animals for his own purposes. There is a reference in the novel about the use of dolphins to make oil which would be used to supplement the dwindling supplies of petroleum. It is a very heinous crime done by human beings on the innocent animals to fulfil their need. It is the main reason why the population of dolphins known as "Mekong Orcaella" declined in 1970s almost to the verge of extinction. Ghosh says, "These dolphins were hunted with rifles and explosives and their carcasses were hung up in the sun so that their fat would drip into buckets. The oil was then used to run boats and motorcycles" (306).

Another instance when Piya and Fokir are on their way to look for the dolphins, they see the carcass of an Irrawaddy dolphin. It is a newborn calf. It is mentioned in the novel, "The injuries suggested that the dolphin has been hit by the propeller of a fast moving motorboat" (346). And Piya tells that it is a kind of official boat usually used by the coastguard or the police or even the Forest Department. So, one who pretends themselves to be the savers of the flora and fauna of a particular area announced by the higher authorities are themselves responsible for their destruction.

The theme of dispossession is another theme of the novel. Ghosh tries to depict this theme through the character of Kusum. She is one of the refugees who are displaced and are suffering a lot of hardships in the hands of governmental agencies. They are being exploited in the name of conservation of Bengal tigers, a species that has been declared as endangered. In the words of Mondal, the incident of Morichjhapi has been described as;

The incident dramatizes the conflict between different ways of thinking and being, between the logic of modernity and development and the ensuing politics of ecology on the one hand, and the ways of life of indigenous peoples and their relationship to the environment. (18)

It is a kind of tragedy which has been inflicted upon the refugees, by the state authorities who force them to admit that they are helpless and powerless. The authorities are much more powerful and they harass the weak and defenceless. The hunger and instability is not the only difficulty in the Island but the matter of concern is the difficulty to endure the pain which has been given by higher authorities when they do not bother about the sufferings of the native people. As Kusum says in a very harsh tone:

Saar, the worst part was not the hunger or the thirst. It was to sit here, helpless and listen to the policemen making their announcements . . . our existence, was worthless than dirt or dust.(261)

Ghosh seems to depict the political issues related with the tide country in India. The novel is a depiction of the conflict prevailing between the conservation of endangered species and of the human beings who suffer because of this conservation. Ghosh admits:

In *The Hungry Tide*, I have tried to depict the technological, social ethical complexities of living in the world today . . . the living conditions there are extraordinarily difficult. The deprivation and difficulty are unbelievable, and it's shocking to hear that so little is known about it. There are four million people living in the Indian Sunderbans, and it's not the tigers but the

poverty that is killing them steadily. It's a continuing catastrophe. (The Hindu)

Nirmal is an ideologist, a teacher and a Marxist, who thinks that the policy of government is not appropriate. It is an injustice to the poor people. It is in favour of elite class and does not take into account the suffering which poor people have been facing. In the novel, the class has been referred to as "bhadrakalok", whose interests are based on the conservation of animals. No doubt, nature plays a very dominant part in our lives but the elite class bothers only about their own self interests. Even there is a lot of corruption in the name of conservation of wild life. Nirmal helps refugees by going against his wife and even puts his own life in danger. He stands with them against the government and state agencies. He is much concerned with the well being of humanity. Nirmal questions the anthropocentric concerns. He mentions the name of Sir Daniel Hamilton that if he is allowed to make use of the land for creating his experiment, then why these poor people are not allowed living here. He says, "Were the dreams of these settlers less valuable than those of a man like Sir Daniel just because he was a rich Shaheb and they impoverished refugees?" (213). The conversation between Nirmal and Nilima, depicts their clashes. It is about the help of refugees who has suffered in Morichjhapi incident.

'They want the trust to help them set up some medical facilities there.'

'So what did you say?'

'I told them there is nothing we could do.'

'Why can't you help them? They're human beings; they need medical attention as much as people do anywhere else.' (213)

Nirmal's wife considers refugees as squatters who have grabbed that land. She is with the governmental agencies while he demands justice for the refugees and tribal people. But, tragically he loses his life due to this reason. The failure of Marxism can be verified from the incident of Morichjhapi. This led to the killing of lots of innocent people including children and women. Their bodies were found floating in water and this killing which has been depicted by Ghosh is not the part of mainstream history. It is clear from the following lines:

. . . thirty police launches encircled the island thereby depriving the settlers of food and water; they were also tear gassed, their huts razed, their boats sunk, their fisheries and tube-wells destroyed, and those who tried to cross the river were shot all. (279)

These lines depict the cruel and harassing attitude of government towards the poor people. In a way, nobody is concerned with the welfare of weak and dispossessed people besides Nirmal and some of his other friends, and finally, they too are shot dead by the government. It is rightly pointed out by Mondal, about the attitude regarding refugees by the Indian government,

In his latest novel, *The Hungry Tide*, refugees are also the centre of attention as he recalls a marginalised episode in the coercive history of the modern post-colonial Indian state, namely the Morichjhapi incident. (133)

The plight of displaced people and tribal people is emphasised. It is the political scenario which has been depicted, how for their own selfish interests, the powerful people exploit the less powerful ones. The novel explores the plight of displaced people which is Ghosh's major theme a group of refugees from Bangladesh who seek support in the tide country that is, the Sunderbans. As a consequence it leads to violent confrontation with the Indian Government. The reason behind their worse condition is hunger. As a consequence, refugees are forced to do the hunting and fishing to meet the demand of their one time meal, which further results catastrophic.

Through the voice of Nirmal, Ghosh tries to emphasise upon the truth in history and about several facts, which are actually concealed from the public. The narrative starts from the depiction of a place called Morichjhapi Island where several settlers come from other places to settle there. But their idea of settlement lead to a great event, called “Morichjhapi incident of 1979”. Through this incident Ghosh displays the plight of displaced people. One of them is Kusum, who reacts against the conservation policy. The state authorities cause the displacement of tribal people. It has been remarked by Huggan and Helen that:

The novel gives us to understand that previous violence against the refugees has been perpetrated by Bengali politicians in the name of the tiger, which makes it difficult to come to any other conclusion than that the tiger is being turned into a sacrificed symbol of violence itself. (190)

Kusum, a marginalised subject, has suffered a lot and it is the Badabon trust, developed by Nilima, a social activist, which helped her. Kusum’s mother falls prey to the mechanism of powerful people like Dilip Chaudhary, who exploits her and takes her to a brothel. And the next is the turn of Kusum, but she is saved at last point by Horen. It is “Mohila Sanghothan” who took care of Kusum.

One of the basic agenda of Ghosh while writing the novel is to depict the politics behind the conservation taking place in India, and the struggle between environmentalists and local people inhabiting in that area which has been declared as “a reserve”. In an article entitled, “Restoration of Human Spirit in The Hungry Tide of Amitav Ghosh” Ambethkar mentions:

The tigers are zealously protected by various international environmental groups who apply economic and diplomatic pressures on the Indian and Bangladeshi governments to maintain the tiger habitats by military or police force. But in the name of tiger preservation human lives are threatened; the tigers routinely maul and kill the islanders and their cattle. (6)

A huge number of human lives are threatened on the cost of conservation. This is one of the reasons why incidents like Morichjhapi takes place. Ghosh depicts the voice of the subaltern and marginalised people through his fiction. In this way he tries to bring the issue of conservation versus survivalists into forefront. There is an ongoing conflict between native people and the government to which both the literary postcolonial as well as environmentalists of the country have taken into consideration. In the words of Huggan and Helen:

Such conflicts of interests have attracted the attention of both postcolonial and environmentalist critics, who are alert to the dilemmas involved in livelihoods of local (subaltern) peoples, are simultaneously put at risk. (185)

The rulers rule over the country and make colonies by power or hegemony is well elaborated by Ghosh. If we take into consideration, a different shade of anthropocentrism, then the rule of Britishers, like Sir Daniel Hamilton can be looked upon from a different perspective. No doubt, he wants a classless society where there should be no distinctions regarding class, race and religions. “It would be a country runs by co-operatives . . . here people would not exploit each other and everyone would have a share in the land” (52).

This is the practice of making people civilised which depicts that human centeredness is on the top. According to his progressive ideas, people should be provided with telephone, bank and currency and electricity. So, it can be said that a capitalist dreamed about colonial India. He wants that the people should work hard. This is a kind of colonial rule that he wanted to establish in that cyclone prone area that is Sunderbans.

This is all about considering human beings at the centre and dominating nature for our own benefits. It is very well known that the area where the port named “Canning” is

going to be established is a cyclone prone area even then it was ignored and the Britishers made that particular port in the Island and the consequences were disastrous, as the port was dismantled after a short period of time. Whenever man tries to curb nature or dominates his own will upon nature, it shows her disastrous face as contrary to that of benevolent and kind nature. Christopher Manes opines that,

We must need to learn a language free from the directionalities of humanism, a language that incorporates a decentred, postmodern and post humanist perspective. We require the language of ecological humility that deep ecology is attempting to express. (17)

Thus there is a dire need to save the environment as we all know it is the only planet where life is possible for human beings. They should think it as a serious task for them. They must understand the world of non living as well as their surroundings because it is the surroundings of an individual which affects him or her most of the time.

The people like Daniel Hamilton are those who come from the West and they try to colonise the country and want to colonise the land as well as the psychology of the native people. By mutually getting acquainted with the natives, they try to mould the thinking of the people who are being colonised in one way or the other. Ramchandra Guha, focusing on the Third World Environmentalism rightly says that,

In India and Malaysia the businessmen and industrialists (the most hostile critics of the greens) are joined by state officials and technocrats, with both private and public promoters of development attacking environmentalists as motivated by foreigners ... or as wishing only to keep tribal and rural people 'backward', placed in a museum for themselves and their fellow romantics to gawk at. (124)

The upper strata of the society and the government authorities look at poor people as marginalised. The same is the case with the nature, which is looked as marginalised being. But the approach of the western people towards nature is very different from those of the natives. The western people take conservation as a task to be completed, but they totally ignore the sufferings and feelings of the native people. In an article by Divya Anand it is mentioned that in "The Chronicle Interview" Ghosh asks, unique to Third World and Fourth World peoples, if you care for the environment does not mean that you don't care about the plight of human beings, especially impoverished people? (33).

In this way there is always an ongoing clash between western approach of looking at the conservation projects and the hardships faced by the natives. Even the political parties also involve in this process, they are unaware of the harassments faced by the native people or they consciously avoid it. The state authorities also adopt westernised form of conservation which denies the needs as well as sufferings of the native people. One of the main hindrances in the conservation in Third World countries is due to lack of grants. To overcome this lack of finance, the government of these Third World countries depend on the First World nations. This results in the financial dependence for conserving endangered species on the First World or developed countries. Due to this, the conservation taking place in these Third World countries have to take decisions in accordance with the developed countries and this is the reason why tribal people and refugees are ignored and considered as marginalised. This novel questions or highlights the important ecological queries associated with the Third World countries. As Vineet Mehta says in an article entitled, "Amitav Ghosh's Ecocentric vision in *The Circle of Reason, The Hungry Tide and The Sea of Poppies*", "Ghosh establishes himself as an ecocritical writer by questioning imperialism, globalisation, western models of science and scientific progress and calling for a symbiosis between man and nature" (164).

In the novel, Piyali Roy is a First World ecologist. She comes to India to conduct research on the Irrawaddy dolphins in the Sunderbans area. Her perception of nature is quite different from those of the natives. She goes with Fokirat several places where the dolphins are found. As James Rachels, an American philosopher says:

We kill animals for food; we use them as experimental subjects in laboratories; we exploit them as sources of raw materials such as leather and wool; we keep them as work animals. These practices are to our advantage, and we intend to continue them. . . if animals are conceived as intelligent, sensitive beings, these ways of treating them might seem monstrous. So humans have reasons to resist thinking of them as intelligent or sensitive. (129)

It is said that how westerners look at the nature is contrary to the way natives look at. In *The Hungry Tide*, Kanai says to Piya, “What you see as fauna he (Fokir) sees as food” (8).

For natives nature acts as their primary need for their survival. In the end of the novel, when Fokir dies due to the disastrous storm, it is the sign of hardships and sufferings which the marginalised people had to face. He tries his best to save the life of Piyali Roy. And while helping her he loses his own life leaving behind his wife and son all alone. This all can be looked upon as an indication that whenever civilization takes place in a rural area, it is the native, poor and tribal people who have had to put their life on stake. On the other hand, the resources which are to be used by the people who possess the power to have them, there too poor people lost their lives. It is due to the fact that processes of extracting the resources are extremely difficult like mining etc. It is the natives and the poor who suffer due to urbanisation. It is only poor who lost their land as well as their lives. Thus, it can be linked to the colonial history that when Britishers had tried to make different countries its colonies then several people lost their lives and that process is still continuing. According to Mehta, “Ghosh endeavours to present Colonialism as an ecocidal venture and bitterly critiques the ecocultural damage brought by India’s prolonged brush with the British imperialistic machinery” (168).

The theme of divisibility and displacement is another issue of the novel. As Mondal says, it is more about shift in position of the colonised and the coloniser; the colonial as well as post colonial situations are represented while taking into consideration the history of the nation and its religion, beliefs, superstitions. He deals with the issue of environmental concerns, how the nature and animals have been marginalised by the humans by considering themselves as the superior beings. It is a novel which tries to depict the present scenario of our nation that how politics plays an important role in determining the lives of marginalised people. Thus, the main concern of Ghosh is how the man who is in power exploits the other who is powerless.

Ghosh takes into consideration the psychology of human beings. The characters have been portrayed vividly as they belong to different occupations and they possess their own ideologies for instance, Piyali Roy, a cetalogist who have been living in America since her childhood but was born in India. She is much more concerned with environment as she thinks that the use of motor boats by the forest department could be very harmful for the dolphins as their speed would kill several marine animals. Nilima, the social activist also says that the use of nylon nets for catching crabs as well as prawns and fishes could be very harmful. The reason behind this is when the fishermen use these nets the fish get caught along with their eggs, which as a result leads to slow growth rate and finally a threat to the ecological balance. Nirmal, a social activist also raises his voice against the injustice done to the land of Bon Bibi that is, Sunderbans. He depicts the change as he says,

Age teaches you to recognise the signs of death. You do not see them suddenly; you become aware of them very slowly over a period of many, many years . . . the birds were vanishing, the fish were dwindling and from day to day the land was being reclaimed by the sea (215).

The intermingling of different cultures, myths as well as of languages is one of the other aspects of the novel. Piyali's encounter with Kanai, on arriving to the Lusibari Island shows Ghosh's depiction of intermingling of different languages. Kanai is a business man, who is proficient in more than three languages. He is the product of metropolitan city who believes that life does not exist out of these cities, but his trip to Lusibari, to his aunt Nirmal proves him wrong. He acts as the communicator between both Piyali Roy and Fokir, the native illiterate fisherman. Although Fokir is illiterate but he is intelligent, he knows about every nook and corner of his area, he has proper knowledge about the presence of dolphins. He helps Piya in her adventure, she feel quite comfortable in his company as they both are not able to understand each other's language but through gestures. Fokir is able enough to understand Piya's unspoken words. To quote, Dr. Ratnagiri Usha

The novel takes to address the issues connected with the predicament of millions of the disinherited immigrants, refugees, settlers, squatters and land grabbers who find themselves in the perpetuations of conflict with the authorities that are determined to evacuate them as much as with the predators and the cyclones and storms (52).

Piya is the protagonist of the novel. She is a staunch American but born in India. Her parents are from Calcutta, she is from Bengali origin, but does not know Bengali language. She says, "ami Bangla jani na"(4). Piya has lost her identity as she does not know about the customs or the language; she has become half Indian and half American. Piya is depicted as an ecologist who is much concerned with the animals. She becomes the victim in the hands of corrupt officials. When she takes permission from the forest officer she was granted two helpers one of them is pilot and the other one is the forest guard. The guard is assigned to her because he can better guide about the route and would help in hiring the boat, but they try to get money from her whenever they got the chance. They showed their excessive greed of money. In the novel, it is mentioned,

She asked to see the launch and was told that that would not be possible – it was anchored some distance away and they would have to take a boat to get to it. On inquiring about the price she was quoted a clearly excessive figure. She knew now that this was a set-up and she was being cheated. (31)

Even the guard has a leather bandolier and a rifle, to which Piya reacted as if the gun is really necessary. The guard replies in a positive way which shows that those who are the conservationists they themselves kill the tigers when their lives are on stake. Once again there is a reference to anthropocentrism, that whenever man is in danger he firstly tries to protect himself from the outer danger he is going to face.

Piya meets Kanai, the business man and a translator who is living in Delhi. He comes to Lusibari Island on the request of Nilima, her aunt. She convinced him to come and read the diary which her husband, Nirmal has written. But now he is dead and he wanted that his diary must be read only by Kanai himself. Kanai is proficient in six different languages. They both first meet at the railway station. He likes her appearance and feels inclined towards her. Later on, when Piya, Fokir and Kanai all meet at the Island of Lusibari, both Fokir and Piya sense spiritual attachment towards each other. They belong to different regions, castes, and backgrounds. Overcoming the obstacle of language, they both understand each other through their gestures. Though she is highly educated, a research scholar and Fokir being illiterate make a room in the heart of Piyali Roy. Thus,

Ghosh portrays in his novel an intermingling of different languages as well as cultures and customs.

Piya enjoys every moment with Fokir. Even one can say that there is a love triangle between Kanai, Piya and Fokir. But no one is able to express his or her feelings. In the same way there is a love triangle between Horen, Kusum and Nirmal. Piya and Fokir both enjoy each other's company. Kanai acts as a wall between three different characters and their relations become stronger. Ghosh has very well depicted the emotions of love, humanity, courage and faith in his fictional work.

Fokir, son of Kusum, is one of the most important characters of the novel. He is the hero of the novel, depicted as a marginalised man who faces the harsh realities of life. He is an illiterate man, who is unaware about studies as against his wife, Moyna. He is a native fisherman who knows each and every corner of the Sunderbans. His ignorance as well as illiteracy turns to knowledge when he helps Piya in her research without displaying his knowledge. It is remarked that "The novel appears to advocate the sensible policy of no conservation without local consultation and participation" (Huggan and Helen 188). It is he who goes with her at the place where the dolphins were present. Through the character of Fokir, Ghosh tries to voice the unheard plea of the subaltern and the marginalised. Fokir is a powerless creature who becomes a puppet in the hands of powerful ones that is, Nature as well as the government. Nature plays a very dominant role in the lives of people and the islanders as well as refugees were dependent on the environment for their essentials. Fokir always goes for fishing crabs in order to get food from the river. He takes his son named Tutul with him. Tutul is also interested in going to expedition with his father. But his mother, Moyna did not like this at all. She wanted him to study and go to school but he is happy in enjoying nature.

The island Lusibari is a small area which supported several people. The people have migrated from other places arrived in several waves first in 1920s and second in 1947 and later in 1971 after the Bangladesh war. But the West Bengal government evicted them out forcibly for making a wildlife conservation area (59). Ghosh tries to portray the gloomy picture of the sufferings of those islanders as well as refugees who became the victims of marginalisation and deprived of even the very basic necessities like food, water etc. According to Dr. Bindu, in an article named "Humanism vs. Environmentalism in *The Hungry Tide*",

The government declared that the permanent settlement would disturb the forest wealth and ecological balance. The police deprived the settlers of food and water, they were tear gassed, and their tube wells destroyed and boats sunk. People who tried to cross the river were shot. Several hundreds died and their bodies were thrown into the river. (135)

Therefore, Amitav Ghosh depicts those stories which never appear in history. He reconstructs history and uses it as a tool to focus on the present sufferings of the tribal people. A.A. Mondal rightly points out that Ghosh's texts, "In its own way, each of these texts challenges the Eurocentrism of History, sometimes by simply concentrating on non-European histories" (133). He depicts in most of his novels that how the tribal people are forced by colonial powers or by the capitalistic society to become refugees. The state as well as elite class considers the people living close to the natural environment as a burden. As a consequence, people living close to the natural environment longs for their harmonious association with the nature.

The women characters which Ghosh employ in his novel are not depicted as marginalised or weak but they are depicted as independent and self sufficient. Moreover they are ambitious. They all have their own ideologies. Nilima, one of the most important characters of the novel is married to Nirmal; they both come to Lusibari Island in 1950.

Nilima married Nirmal against the wishes of her family. This shows that in that time when girls are not allowed to see their bridegroom, she marries the boy of her own choice. Later on, Nilima decided to make a foundation of the island's "Mohila Sangathan".

Nirmal thinks after hearing Kusum, that the "legend has perhaps taken shape in the nineteenth or early twentieth century, just as new waves of settlers were moving into the tide country"(247). So, from these lines it is clear that Ghosh tries to remove the boundaries or borders that divide human beings from one another. Anthropocentrism is again questioned here, that human beings themselves made fences, as they think they are more superior and well cultured in comparison to the people of other castes and religions. Thus by breaking the barriers between human beings Ghosh tries to assure that the hierarchical levels which he himself has set up to consider an individual superiority, are transitory and imaginary. As the novel shows,

The tide country is a meeting point not just of many rivers, but a circular roundabout. People can use this pass in many directions – from country to country and even between faiths and religions. (247)

So, through these lines it is clear that Ghosh seems to think beyond casteism and hierarchies which try to divide human beings from one another.

There are many instances in the novel where hierarchy prevails among different species whether it is human beings themselves or with nature. The human beings have become so self-centred that they do not bother about other human beings with whom they do not have any relation. An instance in the novel is when the doctor, a psychiatrist visits Nilima and she is worried about the health of her husband, Nirmal. She explains the whole matter to the doctor about Nirmal's concerns about the Island Morichjhapi. The doctor replies in following words to Nilima:

Oh these refugees! Such a nuisance. But of what concern is this to your husband? Does he know anyone on that Island? What they are to him and he to them? (275)

Thus, man himself has created hierarchical levels among his own species. Today he is an isolated being in his own species.

Another instance of hierarchical difference is seen between Kanai and Fokir. Kanai believes himself as a well qualified and cosmopolitan who is proficient in six languages. He considers himself superior to the natives residing there in the tide country. When he meets Piya, the catalogist, he says, "Six. Not including dialects". Kanai acts as a translator between Piya and Fokir. He always regards Fokir as a marginalised being. When Fokir and Kanai both come to the Island of Garjontola, it seems that "the authority of their positions had been suddenly reversed" (325). Fokir starts addressing Kanai as "Tui" from the respectful "apni". All the hierarchical set up dwindles when Kanai who thinks himself as a knowledgeable and well cultured man now begins to use so harsh and abusive language for Fokir. So despite of his knowledge, he shifts to the abusive language, to which he is powerless to stop those words which were coming out of his mouth endlessly.

Conclusion

On the whole it can be said that Ghosh has incorporated a bunch of themes in his novel rather than sticking with only one theme. *The Hungry Tide* is a narrative on division, deconstructing history, themes like love, romance, religion, Diaspora, sexuality and that of myth especially. Mondal comments about the novel;

The Hungry Tide is a plea as well as a testimony to the many other songs of the earth, sung by the many different peoples who live on it and claim some portion of it as their own; a plea that they do not go unheard, that they are not swamped by the hungry tides of either development or environmentalism. (19)

The novel is more about the shift in position and of the environmental and climatic change. Ghosh assumes that the land of Sunderbans is not only an area where several rivers meet but different cultures and myths also intermingle with each other. *The Hungry Tide* has been acclaimed as an ecocritical text, depicting the gaps present in western environmental thinking and proposes to adopt a new approach to conservation which is based on the interests of local people. Therefore, Ghosh represents the social, environmental as well as religious and political spheres as interrelated.

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