

A sense of Eco- Consciousness to Amitav Ghosh's The Hungry Tide

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Abstract

Amitav Ghosh is a renowned literary figure in the contemporary Indian English Novel. He has penned several notable novels. His novels exhibit diverse dimensions of human life. Among them, *The Hungry Tide* holds a unique position. It manifests the human sensibilities along with the squid form of man. The protagonist of this novel, Piyali Roy, an American born Indian biologist comes to the Sunderbans to research the rare Irrawaddy Dolphin. During her research, she comes into the contact with different kinds of people and faces various hardships and obstacles. She has immense love and compassion for nature as well as for human beings. On the other side, Kanai Dutt, a wealthy businessman, and translator is heartless, self-centered, jealous, and regardless to nature. In the research paper, through the allusions of ancient texts, I have tried to explore that a man without having human values becomes a destroyer and an exploiter of nature.

Keywords: Ecosystem, Flora and Fauna, Scripture, Hazards, Irrawaddy Dolphin, Endangered, Ambivalent, Mythological, Explore.

Introduction

Entire human being is the creation of nature and nature depicts five natural elements. As it is asserted:

Kshiti Jal Pawak Gagan Samira,
Panchbhut mil banaashareera

In our ecosystem, we all are intermingled with one another. The environment has a Universal chemistry and harmony. Our over desired policies are collapsing our nature; outer and within. We have forgotten our moral and ethical duties towards nature. Our industrialized vision has taken away our ability towards the living spirit in Flora and Fauna. We forgot the life energy, sustaining in the entire natural phenomenon and the sense of co-existence with nature.

Objective of the Study

This paper aims to exhibit the impact of ecology or eco-consciousness in Literature and our classical texts. The literary scholars and great saints who had created classical texts have had concerns about the environmental crisis. Apart from this, eminent figures from literature across the world not only in the modern times but also in our ancient times mentioned and underlined it profoundly. I have presented our 'Puranas' as examples to describe how our ancient scholars defined and determined the duties of man towards our environment in order to make them aware about future threat of nature.

Consequently, we all are realising and suffering today. My paper aims to evaluate human nature; man's feeling and attitude towards another man as well as towards nature. In *The Hungry Tide*, there are two important male characters; one is Fokir and another one is Kanai Dutt. Piya, the protagonist of this novel was fascinated by Fokir, a good human being and has love for nature while Kanai, a selfish and jealous has no concern about nature. So, I have to analyse in my paper that Piya's determination to establish a research trust in memory of Fokir, underlines and strengthens to my thoughts and observation.

Review of Literature

Vincent Suhasini [1] shows the inability of the present generation to assimilate the scale of Climate Change in the affairs of Literature, History and Politics. This paper lays emphasis on the resistance against materialism and the violence of climate change that can destroy our planet. It attempts to show the heinous operation of the imperial power leading to the opium wars as well as the Morichjhapi massacre. Ursula Kluwick [2] presents the actual condition of climate as well as climate change through

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an analysis of the figure of the flood. It exhibits the current geological condition in which human activity has been the dominant influence. Maria Sabina DragaAlexandru [3] had tried to interrogate a set of popular tropes and clichés that have become characteristic of the contemporary genre of eco-fiction. It has shown how science and technology have become futile before the unbridled forces of nature. It has studied nature's revolt against various sort of prolonged human aggressions.

DevjaniGanguly [4] has underlined how the tendency of bourgeois complacency has created imbalance in the systematic function of geological and planetary proportions. It has also emphasized on harmony between human and non-human life. It has also shown the tendency of this era of technobiogenetic capitalism and anthropogenic climate change. SarattmaMajumdar [5] has displayed seamlessness juxtaposition of cultural and sociological exigencies of both a specific place and movement within a timeless scope. It has emphasized the controversial disappearance of several dispossessed Hindu refugees from Bangladesh. It has explored Ghosh's excellent narrative achievement in the assimilation of the fragmented thinking of the man with the indigenous imaginative tradition.

Treatment of Nature in Literature: An Overview

The prominent literary giants, including all the romantic poets of English Literature and the poets of Hindi 'ChhayavadiYug' to Tagore and Tarashankar Bandopadhyay experienced the enormous capacity of Universal law of nature and aimed to present it through their artistic; creative writing. Matthew Arnold has also shown his agony at the loss of moral and spiritual values in his poem 'Dover Beach'. He grieves:

The sea of Faith, was once, too, at the full and round earth's shore

Tagore in his Gitanjali evokes:

He Mor Chitto Purno Tirtho Jago hey Dhire, Ai Bharoter Mahamanover Sager Tire

It means Oh! My conscious awake slowly in the sacred pilgrimage which is the ocean of great humanity of India.

Wordsworth in his sonnet, 'The World Is Too Much with Us' makes a scathing attack on the gross materialism of his age and avoidance of Nature.

Tarashankar Bandopadhyay in his masterpiece work 'Gana Devatha' manifests the deep agony of his heart through the representation of the characters and tries to put how machines and tools change the totalitarian picture of our society.

Moreover our old scriptures as Vedas, Puranas, Upanishads etc. discover and underline all the aspects regarding mankind and environment. Enormous elements of nature are considered to be interrelated with human beings. In our scriptures these numerous elements of nature have been regarded as god and goddesses and associated with religion in order to maintain our ecosystem. Protection of these resources was accepted as religious norms and was established as Dharma.

Ayurveda has also the sound concept of Dharma about the environment. It has been stated

that environment hazards occur due to Adharma (unrighteous deeds). Therefore, it implies our religious duty to have a humanistic approach towards nature. In 'Shiv Purana', there is a remarkable description about the protection of plants and animals. It is stated that salvation can be attained only through the protection of plants. The concept of 'Vanyaprastha Ashram' among four Ashramas was also regarded as a religious duty to perform towards nature and was established as Dharma.

In 'Shiv Purana', trees are considered 'Taruptraka' as it should be treated as son. In 'MatsyaPurana,' different kinds of punishment have been determined for the destroyer of nature and for disturbing ecological balance. Indeed our ancient literature and religious texts have a miraculous capacity of fore sighting about the threatening situation of our environment.

Indeed, ecological concern has been the subject of literature since the time, immemorial. Pagan literature is the prominent evidence of it that is considered to be created with the commencement of civilization.

However, the environmental movement in the last few decades has gained considerable momentum and prominently fused the intellectuals, academicians, social activists, writers and scientists. We know only earth is bestowed with the life-sustaining elements. Such environmental crises are creating challenges before flora and fauna and making the man-nature relationship too fragile and endangered. Consequently, conscious and sensitive artists, writers and social worker raise their formidable voices of dissent against the unmindful and unlawful destruction of natural resources and the interference of man in the cycle of nature. Having observed and experienced this current situation, maintenance and balance in our environment is very important in this globalized world.

Textual Analysis

Many contemporary Indian English fiction writers such as Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Kiran Desai, Bhavani Bhattacharya, Amitav Ghosh etc. have underlined various issues regarding environmental crises in their works. Among them Amitav Ghosh occupies a distinguished place in presenting such issues as well as tries to exhibit the deterioration of human values.

The renowned novelist Amitav Ghosh has also tried to show the value of eco-balance. Ghosh holds an eminent place in Indian English writing. He is conferred with various prestigious literary awards. His novels have been translated into more than twenty-five languages and he is regarded to serve on juries of the Lorcano and Venis Film Festivals. In 2018, the Jnanpith Award, which is India's highest literary honour, was conferred on Amitabh Ghosh. In 2019 Foreign Policy magazine named him one of the most important global thinkers of the preceding decade.

Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* was published in 2004 and won the prestigious international award 'Hutch Crossword Book' for fiction. This book is worldwide considered for its Eco-consciousness. Ghosh has acquired the essence of

the precarious existence of the Sunderbans inhabited islands with remarkable imaginative accuracy.

The story of the novel *The Hungry Tide* occurs mainly in the Sunderbans delta, a worldwide recognised massive mangrove forest that is divided between West Bengal in India and Bangladesh. This novel exhibits a man's tendency to exploit the environment. It delineates the betrayal tendency of man, class structure, inhuman corrupt system, exploitation for self-interest and the complex history of India. Like all novels of Amitav Ghosh *The Hungry Tide* depicts a vast array of incidents, thoughts, and characters that are intermingled and they leave indelible marks in the psyche of a man.

The plot of this novel revolves around a few characters like Piyali, Fokir, Kanai, Nirmal, Neelima, Moina, Tutul, Kusum and an abstract figure, Bon Bibi, the nature mother for the inhabitants of Sunderbans. The protagonist of this novel Piyali Roy is an Indian born American biologist; specializing in marine biology. She comes to the Sunderbans to research the rare Irrawaddy Dolphin. This endangered mammal is one of the few creatures which is able to survive in both; freshwater as well as in saline water. While coming Sunderbans, on the way, she accustomed to meet Kanai Dutt, a wealthy translator and businessman. He is also on the way to Sunderbans to meet his aunt to investigate journal that was written by his departed uncle. On the way of coming to the same place they have a long conversation on the train.

When Piyali Roy reaches the Sunderbans, she has a long dispute against local Bureaucracy. But she attempts to get approval to conduct her research. In this regard, she comes into contact with local fishermen Fokir. He claims to have seen the Irrawaddy Dolphin, recently. Piya visits the area on Fokir's boat. They have a language barrier. Despite it, Piya can understand the elaboration made by Fokir about other species of the Sunderbans delta. Upon the completion of research, both of them return back to Lucibari where Kanai has been staying with his aunt. He goes through the journal and it recounts the story of an old man's life with the focus on the conflict between government forces and thousands of refugees of the Sunderbans. Being a prominent biologist, she is indeed a nature lover. She can establish emotional contact with Fokir despite having the communication barrier between the two. About Kanai, the novelist says "Language was both his livelihood and his addiction" (THT: 04) is unable to communicate with the heart of Piya. While the illiterate fisherman can capture her emotion. Piya has amicable relation with Fokir because of his great love and attachment with nature. His innocent and pure expression about nature reflects the purity of his heart, a true and pure human being in the true sense. The conversation between Piya and Fokir exhibits that idea:

".... very few people can adopt themselves to that kind of rhythm..... That is why it was so amazing to come across someone like Fokir. You saw he spotted that Dolphin there, didn't you? said Piya. It's like has always watching the water even without being

aware of it..... I have never met anyone with such an incredible instinct".(THT: 05).

The dialogue between Piya and Kanai interprets the idea that Fokir possesses a sort of intellect and wisdom about nature as well as gives the implication of having love and duty towards nature. That duty and love towards nature, defined by our ancient scriptures as decorum for a man to follow it. Fokir's innocence and virtuousness and his selfless love and duty towards nature fascinates Piya and creates affection in her heart. She feels that Fokir is a man who associates her choice as he sincerely elaborates the decreasing number of Dolphin. It also reflects that an illiterate Fokir has immense attachment and love towards nature and helps in Piya's research but other side so called educated local authority creates obstacles and hardships before Piya's research work. Indeed, these authorised government officers are exploiter of nature. Another incident of Morichjhapi conflict also brings a brutal face of our society before us. Ghosh eloquently summarises the event of Morichjhapi in 1979 through Nilima's narration. It is the place which marks the settlements of refugees from East Pakistan.

But all the inhabitants of the Sunderbans have some faith in their mother goddess. In *The Hungry Tide*, the religious narration of the Sunderbans, perceives nature as a complex and ambivalent force in the dual personified figures of the fertile mother Bon Bibi. "Bon Bibi is depicted as mother of the earth". (THT 357) Bon Bibi seems to present the nurturing aspect of nature and its capacity to sustain life. Even as Bon Bibi stands as "The forest's protectress" (THT 354) and "takes people in her lap with gentle cares" (359). She also embodies the epitome of domestic sustenance. In short, local myth narrates, allow human beings to examine both the nurturing and violent aspects of nature in two distinct personifications of the landscape of the Sunderbans. In this way, the tale of Bon Bibi is now a part of their cultural and class myths. Kusum, mother of Fakir is shocked when young Kanai, who visits the Sunderbans for the first time, reveals the ignorance of the Bon Bibi story. She says:

"You don't know the story of Bon Bibi? Then whom do you call on whom you're afraid?" (THT102)

Her innocent questions exhibit how mythological beliefs dominate the lives of the inhabitant of the Sunderbans. The profound knowledge of the place which the narrative Fokir, a fisherman possesses is derived from mythological oral narratives which have been passing through since long generation. He conveys it to Piya and Kanai:

"I cannot remember a time when I didn't know about this place. I had heard about Garjontola from my mother. She would sing to me and tell me tales about this Island..." (THT307). About Dolphins he says "As for the big shush, the Dolphins who live in the waters, I knew about them too, even before I came here. They were Bon Bibi's messengers..." (THT307)

Conclusion

In this way myths bring forth various questions regarding our birth, death, destiny, love, karma and other abstract ideas along with having

universal appeal. Though few sort of aspects they employ rely on superstitions which seem ambiguous and vague to modern education listeners and readers. But mythological tales and legends are a source of knowledge which enables us to connect the world around us. They are conveyed through oral narratives which are characterized by beautiful rhetoric, sublime thought and elevated themes that make indelible mark and capture the listener's imagination e.g., our legends and stories of Ramayana and Mahabharata. Such is the legend of Bon Bibi which reminds us our mythology where nature (prakriti) is considered to be the embodiment of Adi Shakti; the creator and nurturer. Remarkably, the characters of this novel are associated with nature intensely in some way. Nirmal one of the prominent characters of this novel uncovers threatening issues regarding the environment. In his words: "millions of creatures where had they gone? swarming crabs, those birds?

....vanishing the fish were dwindling and from day to day the land was being". Ghosh, profoundly points out the events at Morichjhapi. He unveils the trauma of Morichjhapi settlers and reveals it through following lines: "the worst part was.... to sit here, helpless, with hunger growing and to the police man say.... this island has to be saved for its trees; its animals". To conclude, it is analysed that Amitav Ghosh depicts various themes, he has made distinguished elaboration of Indian ethical scriptures regarding nature and its impact over physical environment. He exhibits the collapsed human values which hamper nature and its creation. His sensitive involvement with the natural world brings forth the calamity to the environment globally. Indeed, Ghosh through *The Hungry Tide* tries to explore the idea that human feeling, tendency and behaviour towards nature and within can save the entire environment. The novel ends with several hopes and thoughts pointing out the eco-friendly relationship between human and the nature.

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