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## Landscape and Postcolonial Ecologies in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*

ORIGINAL ARTICLE



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### Abstract

*This article brings ecological studies into a dialogue with postcolonial studies. By examining Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* and South Asian literatures, it tries to depict the relationship between human and nature. This article also makes a compelling argument for a more global or universal approach to think about our present environmental crisis. Amitav Ghosh is such a writer who is very much conscious about ecological issues. The way he depicts landscapes in his novels and relates them to human activities is worthy to discuss in detail. In the novel, *The Hungry Tide* Amitav Ghosh has beautifully shown his concern about landscapes and postcolonial ecologies. Ghosh tries to discuss the relationship between people and nature, people and animals etc. Climate change, Government policies and western outlook towards environmental changes are major concerns for him. His outlook towards nature is*

*very positive and he raises many serious concerns about upcoming catastrophe because of the unbalance in ecology. This novel is an intense and memorable novel expected only from a writer of this stature. This novel is a mystery novel which is very close to the Bengali tradition of the river novel. The landscapes of the Sunderbans which is a huge group of islands located at the southernmost tip of West Bengal has picture postcard realism. We find beautiful animals like tigers, crocodiles, dolphins and many marine mammals. Indigenous people around this ecology are very much attached to all these things. This article also tries to interrelate landscapes and post-colonial ecology to social issues that the novel raises.*

### Key Words

*Landscapes, Ecology, Sunderbans.*

Amitav Ghosh is a leading postcolonial writer in English who is Indian by birth but global in his vision. Most of his works reflect the relationship of the individual to culture and history. He believes history always provides us path to constitute our experience into idea. Ghosh says that history is intensely associated with a work of fiction and about journey of people. Ghosh is a sensitive and humanistic writer who uses to condemn imperialism all the time. He always raises his voice against violence, suffering and injustice. Ghosh is considered as a postcolonial writer because of his tendency to fight for deprived and alienated community. Ghosh believes that art and literature has a power to fight for that deprived people and communities. Ghosh has been an experienced traveler who cross many cultural boundaries and meet cultural differences to form his idea of art.

In general a landscape is the observable topographies of a range of terrestrial, its landforms, and how they add with normal or man-made features, often deliberated in relations of their pleasing appeal. A landscape embraces the corporal essentials of geophysical demarcated landforms such as highlands, hills, water forms such as canals, lakes, tarns and the aquatic, living rudiments of land shield including aboriginal foliage, human foundations containing unlike arrangements of landusage, buildings, and structures, and transient features such as striking and weather surroundings. Merging both their fleshly origins and the cultural hide of social survival, frequently created over periods, landscapes redirect a quick synthesis of people and habitation that is vibrant to confined and national uniqueness. But when we see the literary landscape of Ghosh, he interprets the image of Environment as mother. Devoid of Natural resources human being can't be reared in proper mode. He has to takings aid of Nature for relaxed life.

Post-colonial ecocriticism gives one a room to understand a native culture and their practices to safeguard the natural and ancestral heritage. The analogy of Globe as a mother character is extensively theorized in almost every indigenous culture and is a vital component of post-colonial ecocritical theory. One of the key principles of ecocriticism is the importance of environmental justice. Ecocritics are engrossed in sightseeing the methods in which ecofriendly concerns and distresses strangely affect sidelined communities, and in how writings can be used to encourage community and ecological integrity. Ghosh discovers the elaborate exchanges between individuals and the surroundings, discovering the enormous ecological variations brought on by imposing subjugation via a postcolonial eco-critical perspective. The basic opinion of postcolonial Eco reproach is that social prejudice is implanted in the perception of nature and it grasps fairness in both by rejecting Universalist claims of Eurocentric which perceives nature and indigenous community people as resources.

### **The Pioneer Writes**

*“He is a writer who looks, listens and tells the story. If you want to see the Sunderbans painted in words, and a bit of its history, myth, and the story of an American Indian in search of the rare river dolphins, an impromptu translator and a local guide, then grab a copy of The Hungry Tide. There are chances you may catapult into the tidal landscape of the Sunderbans.”*

In 2004 Ghosh published his novel, *The Hungry Tide* which is set in the Sunderbans. It is a tide countryside of southern Bengal and situated in the estuaries of the Ganga and the Brahmaputra Rivers. This novel shows the glaring brawl to survive on the unique islands in the Bay of Bengal. This is an area subject to furious cyclones and the territory of ferocious tigers, dangerous crocodiles, and venomous snakes. This is the leading book where Ghosh pens a character, very similar like himself, with both Indian and American connections: one of its major central characters is Piyali Roy. She is an American cetologist who belongs to Bengali origin and has visited the Sunderbans to research on a rare and unique species of dolphin. Though she has come here for her study but she is also in search of her hidden root.

Piyali Roy comes across Kanai Dutt who belongs to a sophisticated Delhi-based Bengali businessman has come to visit his aunty Nilima. Nilima is an esteemed social worker who is trying all her possible attempts to building a school for children, a hospital, and other fundamental facilities for the people on the islands, Lusibari. Kanai is also an important character has come to island to receive a packet of documents left by his uncle Nirmal. Nirmal was committed and idealistic Marxist who met his death under secretive conditions. Piyali also meets a local fisherman, Fokir. Fokir is a very experienced boatman who has intimate knowledge of the tidal waters and its areas. He also knows the actual areas where the rare species of dolphins are found. Fokir is very confident to handle any situation created in this particular area but he underestimates the power of tide and sea. Fokir is the opposite of the cultured Piyali and the urbane Kanai. Here Kanai interprets the interaction between all the people who are engaged in search of Dolphins. The novel finishes with death of Fokir in a ferocious tidal cyclone. As the result Piyali and Kanai return to Lusibari to take part in Nilima's welfare workfor the people of Lusibari.

In this novel Ghosh has used of a romantic triangle but it is not strait love story. The forceful conflict between Kanai and Fokir on the voyage of a deserted island is not so much over Piya as it is about hatreds driven by variances in class, culture, civilization and worldview. Thus, on one hand Ghosh shows a story of self-realization, of provoking one's inner fears on the part of Fokir which is no less than of Piya and Kanai, and of Piya's and Kanai's acknowledgment that the uneducated subaltern Fokir is very similar to themselves. The other important story turns around Nirmal's manuscript which is a justification of his covert connection in the movement of the people that happened in 1979 on the separated island of Morichjhampi. Kanai notices when he drives about his work and sets up a way to the main action. Kanai knows about of the massacre of the people at Morichjhampi, which was carried forcibly by the Marxist Government of West Bengal to evict the thousands of refugees and other powerless people. After the partition of India in 1947 these people had set up a community to live together without any help from the Government. Through Nirmal's account we come to know how Englishmen under the leadership of Sir Daniel Hamilton won the tidal island and established their rule and set up colonies named Emilybari and Annabari. The pioneering attempts and spirit of the selected people is celebrated as history, but the endeavors and achievements of the subaltern inhabitants are erased and not glorified.

The trackless wetlands of the Sunderbans are full of all natural and ecological signposts and human inhabitants are smeared out time and again by natural calamities like tides and storms, is the opposition of a constructed civilization with its chronicled stability. The convoy of regular tempests that Ghosh presents, with specific place-names along with dates which tallies with fatalities and the consistent reforming of the natural face of that land, equals any description of variations wrought by confrontations and uprisings. In his elicitation of the tide people of that Island whose lives depend forever at the mercy of natural settings and animals of that region, Ghosh here presents that people have enriched their own rich oral culture of ritual, song, and folktale. In this novel Ghosh has tried to make people know about one of the least known community of the world through his humanistic approach.

Ghosh in, *The Hungry Tide* discusses refugee resettlement and movement in the forestry reserves of Marichjhapi of Sunderban and he also presents the complex man-animal connection in the archipelagos ecosystem. This novel also focuses on the unending tension between humanity and the tough environment of the Sunderbans which is known as the tide country of India and Bangladesh.

Amitav Ghosh's novel *The Hungry Tide* brilliantly blends environmental and posthumous themes. Ghosh discovers the ecological effects of colonial mistreatment, the association between human and nature, and the joining of recent technology and biology. According to his narratives, Ghosh urges readers to think again their rapport with the environment and embrace a more compassionate and interconnected worldview, aligning with the core principles of posthumanism.

In this novel, *The Hungry Tide*, Amitav Ghosh has tried to explore the extents of posthumanism through the dominant impact of the surroundings on its present inhabitants. The ongoing violence of the Sundarbans islands and its condition encounters the anthropocentric point view where nature is usually considered submissive and subject to the human control to exploit the region. Ghosh has tried to represent nature with its own autonomy and power which challenges traditional human-centered perceptions. We see in the novel, the island Sundarbans develops as a character in its own way, holding a reflective agency that impacts the lives of the human characters of this area. This way of portrayal underlines the posthumanist concept of nature as a vibrant and autonomous power, functioning beyond human control or command. As for example, we see the constantly shifting tides, dense forest of mangrove roots, and existence of ferocious animals all these things contribute to the Sundarbans' unfathomable power, thought-provoking human concepts of supremacy and mastery over this environment. The novel also enquires into the interconnectedness between human existence and their natural surroundings, distorting the traditional natural boundaries between the human and non-human world. All the characters in *The Hungry Tide* are deeply entangled in the enigmatic ecosystem of the Sundarbans,

and their ongoing actions resound throughout the natural surroundings. This kind of association highlights the notion that human are not isolated from natural things because they are also big part of a greater ecological system. As for instance, the choices preferred by characters like Piya, Kanai and Fokir directly impact the delicate stability of existence in the Sundarbans Island, representing the multifaceted system of connections between humanity and its natural surroundings. Portrayal on Jane Bennett's notion of "thing power", Ghosh highpoints the brutalizing treatment of suppressed and marginalized communities by powerful people. The refugees of Morichjhapi areas are seen as throwaway things by the Government, sparking a broader arrangement of objectification and indifference for human life. By emphasizing the ways in which natural surroundings, suppressed people and marginalized communities fight human domination, Ghosh thwarts our understanding of power game and leaves us to raise question the traditional notions of authority and power.

After this, Ghosh discovers the uncertainty of time within the impulsive landscape of the Sundarbans. The mangroves of Sunderbans area symbolize the cyclical and unique nature of life and the perseverance of history despite many attempts to cover it up by many people. Through references to antique structures and shipwrecks, Ghosh advocates that the past remains to impact the present despite of new technologies emerge.

## Conclusion

Thus we see that natural landscape which is found everywhere is sympathetic and soothing to man. It not only provides peace to man but it also acts as torch bearer, teacher, guide, guardian and safeguard. In this era of materialism we are destroying our nature day by day. Greenery which stands for freshness and humility is being replaced by all other material colours. Only when man lives in the core of nature can he be a true human. Today mankind is losing its true self because of an unbalanced environmental surroundings. Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* provides multiple facets on the Sunderbans ecosystem of mangroves and forested islands which is full of coastal plain, signifying the unceasing changes which undergoes. The inhabitants of that particular island suffer daily tidal flows with sections of island being temporary submerged with seawater. Ghosh has created a beautiful aura of Sundarbans where he has displayed landscapes which are under threat and on the edge of a desert; it is these images that we summon from his novels when we are distanced from them in memory. Ghosh has displayed the complete natural and environmental tactic to his vision clear in his novel. His exertions have been made to prove that the fiction of Amitav Ghosh is analysed on the basis of postcolonial ecologies and would sure give a new scenario and a unique path of reading to the lover of literature in the milieu of ecological perspectives and approach.

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