

Eco-Criticism in the Hungry Tide

Jayant Tomar, Dr. Bimlesh Kumar Singh

*Supervisor, Research Scholar, Mahatma Gandhi Central University
Motihari (Bihar)*

*Associate Prof. & Head of Dept. of English Mahatma Gandhi Central University Motihari
(Bihar)*

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ABSTRACT

In this research article an effort has been made to highlight the importance of eco-criticism so as to avoid conflict between mankind and wild animals. Here the author refers to a few shades of Marxism and asserts the importance of 'revolution' and 'struggle'. There are rare people like Nirmal and Nilima who shift to tribal areas and dedicate themselves for the education of children of tribal people. Like Florance Nightingale and Mother Teresa, Nilima takes care of medical needs of these helpless people and also trains women as nurses. In spite of all love for wife, Nirmal leaves his diary only for the reading of Kanai and not wife. Life of Lusibari is attractive for lovers of wild life and hence Piya, a great researcher, adjusts with Fokir in all odd situations. Amitav Ghosh can be regarded a pictorial artist as he has painted several pictures of hightides and low tides, cyclone, moon-rainbow, sun rise, sun set and flowers.

Who is hungry here □ the tides? the animals? the government officers who swallow the share of tribals? the old refugees? the new refugees? the crocodiles? the snakes? The author does not blame only the tides for human problems and asks people to think of natural atmosphere and tribals seriously.

Keywords : Revolution, Struggle, Pictorial artist, etc.

The Hungry Tide (2004) has aptly been regarded as a treatise on ecology as the author Amitav Ghosh is out and out a lover of natural objects and the tribal people. He has mentioned the bright and dark aspects of Lusibari and Morichjhapi, West Bengal in this novel. Like William Wordsworth and S.T. Coleridge, he observed the rivers, ocean, birds, crocodiles, snakes, tigers, and

other animals of this area well settled by Daniel in 1920. This Scottish fellow wanted to establish a classless society in this area of more than three hundred kilometers and succeeded in his mission with the help of M.K. Gandhi and R.N. Tagore. A lot of refugees settled here as the land was free. After 1942 many Bengalees became victims of famine and reached Lusibari for shelter and food. Since they knew the art of fishing, they caught fish and sold them in the market to manage their families and children.

In The Hungry Tide, the author refers to low tides that spread water on earth and the settlers feel a lot of problems due to mud in front of their huts. Due to high tides, they have to suffer horrible disasters and often they wait for a few days to resettle their shacks. Quite often they prepare new huts with dry grass and bamboos and remain hungry for many days.

With this landscape of Lusibari, the author relates the theme of Marxism with the help of Nirmal, lecturer of English at Ashutosh College of Calcutta. Nilima was his favorite student and was well impressed with his grand lectures. Soon they got married in a single ceremony in Calcutta. When Nirmal felt ill the physician advised him of the change of climate and hence Nilima and Nirmal visited Lusibari for a few days. Like H.D. Thoreau, an American Yogi, both of them decided to settle permanently in Lusibari and prepared a house to survive there. Soon they became acquainted with the tribal children.

With the help of the government of Bengal, a hospital was established in Lusibari, Here the children were taught the three Rs with vigor and zeal. A union of women was formed to check their

exploitation. Nirmal had studied *The Das Capital* written by Karl Marx and hence hated every kind of exploitation. Soon the refugees of Madhya Pradesh reached there for security and food and the government of West Bengal didn't allow this. The result was a conflict between the new refugees and the government. However, a lot of refugees reached Morichjhapi after the war of Bangla Desh (1941) as they had been the victims of upper-class Muslims in Dhaka and nearby places. The situation became dark, gloomy, and serious and the government officers reacted badly. On so many occasions warning was issued to the new settlers but in vain! Here the tigers often killed human beings and small animals. Many tricks were adopted for social security but in vain!

The author highlights the atmosphere of fear and terror though Piya had come here to do an advanced study on a particular species of dolphins found in Lusibari. She was really helped by the uneducated Fokir who took the risk of his life for her. Soon both of them shared their emotions, feelings, passions, and obsessions though failed to communicate with human language. Kanai asked Piya that it was strange that she depended too much on Fokir, an illiterate and uncivilized fellow. But then she realized the pure feelings and dedication of Fokir for herself. Since he had sailed a boat here for many years, he knew the exact places where dolphins and crabs were easily seen. He knew how to protect Piya, Tultul, and himself in the dark night on the bank of river.

Dr. Anita Sree remarks :

The literary and critical interest in environment and green politics is a recent development with a critical approach known as eco-criticism. In the present century, many writers have emerged to demonstrate the centrality of environmental concerns and their profound connection with literature. One such writer is Amitav Ghosh. The relationship between nature and society plays a prominent role in a country like India with ecosystems ranging from Himalayas in North to the Indian Ocean in South and from Sundarbans in the East

to the dry Thar or the West. Moreover human culture is connected to the environment affecting it and also affected by it. The objective of this ... novel of Amitav Ghosh *The Hungry Tide* is to explore how far an ecocritical perspective illuminates this select novel. (Ecocritical Study ... Tide www.jetir.org 2018, Vol. 5, p. 297)

Life-like pictures of Lusibari, Morichjhapi, Garjontola, Canning, Gosaba, Satjelia, and Emilybari are wonderful and it seems that we are enjoying wandering in the tribal area. As a realist, the author does not hide the bitter realities of this area because many sailors became victims of storms, high tides, and animals. In a pathetic mood, he says that there are widows in their twenties and only a few lucky widows in their thirties. There is no objection if a widow wishes to remarry but then there are no men for that.

Yet Nilima works day and night in the hospital. Many widows are trained as nurses and Moyna is one of them. The unfortunate death of Kusum is referred to briefly. But the author exposes Dilip Chaudhary as he pushes Kusum's mother into prostitution in Dhanbad. The author briefly refers to the miserable life of the miners of Dhanbad.

Actually, Lusibari and other tehsils are meant for trees, rivers and animals. But the refugees have inhabited there against the orders of the government. Nirmal, a Marxist, finds no difference between man and man and asserts that 'revolution' is needed in this area for the safety and security of tribals. He had to run from Calcutta long ago as he was an activist. Once again he inspired the refugees: 'Struggle' must go on for a bright future. But the state government can't provide financial assistance for the welfare of more than thirty thousand refugees.

Nirmal joins the struggle and revolt of the tribals of Morichjhapi for equality, liberty, security, and settlement but really fails in his mission — What is he against so many? Moreover, he had no union and fellow workers to follow him. He didn't reveal his interest in the affairs of Morichjhapi to Nilima because, to him, she belongs to a 'class'. This

pinches her as she is devoted to tribal men and women. There is no pride in her mind and she never asserts her authority. In this novel, the word 'comrade' is used as communists fail to tolerate any government authority.

As a feminist, the author refers to an incident when the father-in-law forced his daughter-in-law to have sex with him. Since she attacked him to defend herself, she was turned out of home. This is all the presence of patriarchy, so disgusting for the author.

The theme of eco-criticism has been fully developed with due emphasis on the protection of tigers, crocodiles, and other animals. But then the question of human security can't be ignored. Hence the author wishes to maintain a balance between human society and ecology. He warns the readers with his narrative art that the problem of global warming can't be neglected at any cost. Secondly, people have to pay attention to falling water levels. Thirdly, the scarcity of water has created a serious threat to the whole mankind. Fourthly, the water from pumping set is wasted in urban areas. Fifthly, the water can be saved with a rain-harvesting system. Sixthly, pools, rivers, and ponds can help us maintain the water level of the earth. If a lot of trees are cut as a routine, the mountains will be naked and hence a threat to mankind. If the waste of factories is diverted towards rivers, people will have to drink polluted water. Dangers to public health are many and all need urgent public attention and cooperation. Dr. A. Amitha Sree remarks :

This novel of Amitav Ghosh, considers the conflicts between the environment and its tenacious residents, and between those groups intent on preserving the Sundarbans unique aquatic life and tiger population; sometime at the expense of its residents. The novel's centre character is a scientist, the American Piyali Roy of India descent. So it is not surprising that technology appears with some frequency throughout *The Hungry Tide*. Ghosh offers both warnings and cautions of how it can mix with nature. Amitav Ghosh has discovered yet another new territory,

summoning a singular place from its history, language and the myth and bringing it to life. Yet the achievement of *The Hungry Tide* is in its exploration of a far darker and more unknowable jungle, the human heart. (*Ecocritical Study ... Tide* www.jetir.org 2018, Vol. 5, p. 299)

After the death of Daniel, his son James paid a brief visit to Sundarbans (1139) and entrusted its management to clerks. Unfortunately, these assistants and clerks had no love and sympathy for natural objects and victims of storms. Secondly, the abolition of the Zamindari system didn't improve the conditions of refugees. Whenever the tigers got killed, the refugees were taken to task.

Kanai identifies himself with the people of Lusibari and feels comfortable with Aunt Nilima. He is delighted to see that the hospital and the school were highly useful for tribal people. The network of electricity had been spread but the high tide and the storm paralyzed it. The generator set provided service for two-three hours after sunset. Actually, the author aspires to suggest — (a) more facilities must be provided there (b) Tribals ought to be regarded as members of society (c) Equal rights must be granted to them for progress (d) Bengal police officers should feel sympathy for human beings as well as animals. (e) Harmony between men and animals ought to be established at every cost. (f) Political changes in Kolkata needn't affect the tribal policies.

While analyzing the intimate relationship of nature with human life, D. Aswini and Dr. S. Thirunavekkarsu aptly opine :

According to certain group of Tribal sects, the land cannot be bought or sold because they imagine it as their mother. In the ancient days, children are exposed to various plants and animals and are explained the significance and the use of such species. Environmental ethics were taught to young people through verbally in their childhood itself. ... Rivers are considered and worshipped as goddesses, especially the holiest of holy rivers Ganga is a source of salvation for anyone. Forests have been the abode of great sages and were the center of great intellectual activity as

most of the gurukulas were located in forests. In addition to this, the five elements of nature are worshipped as Gods in our nation.

In the present scenario environmental issue is banal throughout the world ... (Ecocritical Study ... Tide www.jetir. journal org. 2015, p. 94)

A brief reference is made to the school of Kumirmari as the children lead a poor life there also. Now two tigers are killed by the tribals out of revenge because almost every day one or the other gets killed by wild animals. This event created a sensation in the government office of Wildlife and action was to be taken against lawbreakers. At this critical juncture, Nirmal fails to take any action as harmony between human beings and animals gets disturbed. Animals attack human beings when they are hungry and government fails to provide them anything to eat. Sanjay Gupta finds the cause of conflict between human beings and animals and remarks :

Animal attack for Morsel—Alone in the year 2022, more than half a dozen instances have been reported to the staff of forest departments falling under various concerned police stations, in which the leopard ran away with goat, or sheep or attacked children, villagers and in one of the incidents got electrocuted at a Peepal tree due to a high tension electrical wire. ... Also these big cats tend to roam around in the open areas in winter, which is seen to amplify the possibility of them coming in contact with humans. (Times of India (3rd April, 2022) p. 2)

Sanjay Gupta refers to an incident of Mundhapande in this article and quotes Sharma :

The Encounter Continues— Adds, Sharma. "In a daring and rare example of courage, a woman, whose house falls under the Mundhapande police station area, snatched her child from the cruel jaws of a leopard, who stuffed her child in her jaws while they were sleeping at night. Clashing with the leopard-like a dare-devil, she made the leopard run away, leaving her child behind, though there were several injury marks. It was reported that the leopard was young in

age." (Qtd. by Sanjay Gupta Times of India (3rd April 2022) p. 2)

But Simarn Singh refers to the provision of law against killers of animals and says :

'As there is a Wildlife Protection Act and many penal provisions are there in the Act, both forest department and civilians are liable to be booked for dereliction. Also, animals are bound to cross the forest areas and enter the habitable zone; it is the duty of forest department to keep a strict vigil on animals by way of barricading the porous areas. The civilians, in frenzy, kill the animals to save their lives and later by the police and forest department are booked under various sections of Wildlife Protection Act; booking of villagers leaves them with bitter experience.' (Qtd. Times of India (2022) p. 2)

Then the author refers to the tragedies created in West Bengal tribal areas by nature such as floods and cyclones. All the crops are ruined by such disasters and tribals have to depend upon the fish alone. Kusum told Nirmal about her short marriage affair with Rajen and the birth of Fokir. Once again chance kills Rajen and brings new misfortunes in her life. But Moyna doesn't want to be disturbed by the presence of Piya as Fokir might flirt with the scientist and leave her. Surprisingly Fokir knows a lot about the conduct of dolphins such as —

- Where are dolphins easily found in Lusibari?
- Why do they not prefer salty water?
- Why do they hide themselves in mud areas?
- Why do they jump in the water?
- How do they kill their prey?
- What are other varieties of dolphins?
- What is their breeding period?

Nirmal wishes to settle in Morichjhapi after his retirement but all of a sudden he disappears without any information to Nilima.

So, harmony has got to be established between human beings and nature. Secondly, the lust to colonize the tribal areas must be given up. Thirdly, the volunteers and the government agencies ought to make arrangements for

clean water for animals. Fourthly, the poachers must be punished as they sell different parts of the animal's body. Fifthly, no laws apply to animals like tigers, crocodiles, snakes, and lions as they have ever been free in the lap of nature. Human beings have to accept certain limitations in their own interest.

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