

# Human-Nonhuman Interaction: An Analysis of Amitav Gosh's *Hungry Tide*

Khyati Bhardwaj<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Bindu Karnwal<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar (Ph.D. English, M.Phil.), Department of English, SD (PG) College, Ghaziabad  
Affiliated to Chaudhary Charan Singh University, Meerut, India

<sup>2</sup>Associate Professor, Department of English, SD (PG) College, Ghaziabad Affiliated to the Chaudhary Charan Singh University, Meerut, India

**Abstract:** Humans and nature have always shared an unbreakable and interconnected link. The relationship between man and nature has always been mysterious and ambiguous. Nature can be both a provider and a destroyer for human beings. In today's scenario, humans think that they can take over nature by developing new technologies. The humanistic belief of man is that he is superior to nature. But men forget that they are just an inseparable part of nature. According to Karl Marks, 'man lives from death and maintains a continuing dialogue with it if he does not die'. In some areas, man and nature have a harmonious relationship with each other, and humans completely depend on nature for their livelihood. But on the other hand, man and nature have conflicted and victimised each other. In literature, many authors from different parts of the world and even Indian authors have tried to portray this sensitive yet complex relationship between man and nature. Amitav Ghosh is one of those authors who has tried to show ecological issues in his novels. Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2004) is one of the finest examples of such a novel. In this novel, Ghosh represents the life of marginalised and poor people in the Sundarbans, a mangrove area near the Bay of Bengal. This novel shows the interdisciplinary relationship and the conflict between humankind and the natural world of the Sundarbans. These forests of the Sundarbans are a UNESCO World Heritage Site and the home of the Bengal Tiger. The central idea of this study is to show the interrelationship, interaction, and conflict between the marginalised people and wildlife of the Sundarbans. This study examines Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* in the context of eco-criticism.

**Keywords:** nature, human, ecosystem, Sundarbans, and marginalized people

## INTRODUCTION

If we talk about nature in the broadest sense, it is a physical world. The word "nature" refers to a

phenomenon of the physical world. Humans are also a part of this nature. The word "nature" is used in different contexts nowadays, and it frequently refers to geology and wildlife. Nature can apply to a broad range of living organisms, including plants and animals, as well as in some cases to the processes involving inanimate objects. The ways in which specific kinds of things, including the weather and Earth's geology, exist and change. It's not easy to define nature because it has gone through many changes of meaning during its history. According to George Perkins Marsh,

"Whereas [others] thinks the earth made man, man in fact made the earth". (G.P. Marsh, *Man and Nature; or, Physical Geography as Modified by Human Actions*) He thus suggested that if we don't repair and preserve world resources and increase awareness about our actions, man could destroy himself and the earth. Human beings cannot live their lives without nature, but nature can. Humans need nature in every aspect of their lives. If human beings want to live a normal and peaceful life, they need to have a harmonious relationship with nature. But on the contrary, humans always try to exploit nature in different ways. We think that most of the environmental theories assume that humans get benefits from the exploitation of environment. The biophysical ecosystem, biodiversity and other resources are all impacted by human activity. The word, which broadly refers to all significant human impacts on the environment, is occasionally used in relation to pollution emissions that are produced as a result of human activity. Technology is one of the main reasons for the negative impact on the environment. The application of technology is unavoidable for several reasons, but after seeing the

result of actions, man realizes their mistake. In contemporary world, humans affect nature or the ecosystem negatively as well as positively. In Amitav Ghosh's novel *The Hungry Tide*, humans affect nature in both ways. This novel portrays the complex relationship between humans and nature.

Nature is one of the prime issues in many literary works in English literature. Nature has been depicted as a concerning issue in many novels, poems, and other expressions of literature. Today, problems related to environment and nature have been portrayed by many Indian authors and Amitav Ghosh is one of the first Indian authors to have strongly raised ecological issues in India in his many novels. Ghosh's novel shows the interactions between the state, the poor and marginalized, the fauna and flora, and the physical environment.

*The Hungry Tide* (2004) is Amitav Ghosh's 6<sup>th</sup> novel. This novel won Hutch Crossword Book Award for fiction in 2004. This novel deals with the interaction and conflict between man and nature. The novel is set in the forest of Sundarbans, a mangrove area near the Bay of Bengal. Piya Roy, an Indian-American marine biologist and Kanai Dutt, an Indian translator interpreter, are the two main figures in the story. Piya is on her way to access the local dolphin species and Kanai is on his way to see his aunt and read his uncle's diary, when they cross paths on a train. The wildlife of Sundarbans, language, the clash between human and nature world, the human cost of environmental regulations, theory vs. Practice and education vs. experiment are some of the novel's major themes.

#### CONFLICT BETWEEN HUMAN AND NATURE

The Sundarbans forests are one of the largest mangrove forests in the world and they are supported by a complex network of tidal rivers that flow between thousands of tiny islands. Amitav Ghosh, an Indian-Bengali author, could hardly have chosen a greener and more troubled setting for his 2004 novel *The Hungry Tide* than this distinctive environment. The mangroves of Sundarbans are in trouble today because of rising sea level and extinction of different kind of species. This area was the site of the massacre perpetrated by the Government of India, especially for ecological reason in 1979. The Sundarbans has been the site of variety of colonial and post colonial

projects, some humanitarian and other anti-humanitarian, as Ghosh carefully shows in this novel. They serve as an important and irreplaceable barrier against the destructive force of the cyclones that frequently destroy this cost, sheltering most especially the Indian urban area of Kolkata. In 'the Hungry Tide', the Sundarbans Forest's geographic location to Kolkata is just as significant as the cultural connection and temporal connection between the post colonial present of the novel and India's colonial past. *The Hungry Tide* is about the fascinating and sensitive ecology of Sundarbans, as well as the crucial importance of this area's continued existence. When human and wildlife interact negatively, such as when there is a loss of property, livelihood or even life, this is referred to as a human-wildlife conflict. These species may eventually become extinct as a result of defensive and vengeful killing. Those encounters cause suffering for both human and wildlife, that are directly impacted by the conflict but they can also have a worldwide influence, with organizations like corporations and sustainable development agencies feeling its aftereffect. The problem has a substantial and truly global scope, yet we are unable to solve it at the necessary scale. The emphasis is placed on the anthropocentric altitude of humans as it is demonstrated through the merciless death of animals. It also investigates how killing of local marginalized people by wild animals lead to conflicts between people and wildlife. "Isn't that a horror too that we can feel the suffering of an animal, but not of human beings." (Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide*, 249) This novel set in the mystery, myths and history of forest. The life of local people is hazardous. The mangrove Forests of Sundarbans are extremely dangerous for human beings. People were killed in dozens because of its tough and thick foliage "People lived here once, but they were driven away by Tempest and tides, tigers and crocodiles." (Ghosh, 43)

These forests are the home of the Royal Bengal Tigers, crocodiles and some of the most poisonous and deadliest snakes. This novel is a journey of rivers in the search of the rarest creature of the earth, The Orcaella, a freshwater dolphin. The novel is a fight between reality of India and Western assumptions. This river delta is made-up of several islands that move around according to our tides and the weather. Here, there are no physical boundaries separating fresh

water from saltwater, rivers from the sea, or even land from water.

*“The tides reach as far as two hundred miles inland and everyday thousands of areas of Forest disappears under water, only to reappear hours later. The currents are so powerful as to reshape the island almost daily.”* (Ghosh, 5)

*“Every year, dozens of people perish in embrace of that dense foliage killed by tigers, snakes and crocodiles.”* (Ghosh, 2)

According to the philosophers, human beings are the most intelligent species of nature. But this pride of superiority over nature changed when humans encounter nature in its dangerous form. They understood that their life is in the hand of nature. But the human beings are not only the victims; nature is also victimized by human beings. In the tiger burning scene, which is referred to as ‘the horror’ in the book, predator’s entry into human habitants is seen as a several offences, but many people do not view the destruction of another species, homes and the killing of them as major crimes. It is not surprising that this insensitivity on the part of man towards animals eventually shows itself as insensitivity on the part of men toward the other men. *“That’s the most horrifying thing I have ever seen, a tiger set on fire.”* (Ghosh, 244)

#### THE COEXISTENCE OF HUMAN AND NATURE

A harmonious relationship should be set among man and nature and society. Human and nature depend on one another for existence. Nature is the foundation for the existence and development of human kind. The development of human is only guaranteed when they have a harmonious relationship with nature. We need to reexamine our relationship with nature and build this relationship interdependent, harmonious and coexisted. Human beings are the part of nature and the result of long-term development of nature. Humans have their existence because of nature. This is true even for the progress of human and social development. It is evident that nature serves as the pillar upon which the weight of human civilization rests and as the most significant natural bases upon which humankind and society can be born, exist and evolve over time.

In the novel *The Hungry Tide*, the local and marginalized people of Sundarbans totally depend on

the ecosystem of this forest for their livelihood. *The Hungry Tide* is a story of ecosystem of Sundarbans and its local people. The struggle and the love of man with nature have been perfectly dealt in the novel. In this novel, nature is not only presented in its horrifying form but this novel also shows the charming beauty and biodiversity of the forest. *“Yet to the world at large this archipelago is known as the Sundarbans, which means the beautiful forest.”* (Ghosh, 7) Nature is the main source for the daily needs in the lives of the Islander. Both human and non human entities are valued in an ecological context and cannot be sacrificed at the expense of other. Many displaced individuals who were just the victim of partition politics in favors of India’s independence have tragically died as a result of forced eviction carried out in the name of conservation.

In the chapter of ‘Bon Bibi’ the ecological justice has been presented. Ghosh tries to portray the link of these folk tales and myths with nature in this novel. Through Nirmal’s words, the retired headmaster, Ghosh shows their choice of settlement *“Rivers ran our heads, the tides were in our blood.”* Nature is divided in its two roles such as Human and Beast. It needs a balance between these two parts. These myths behold the Islanders to enter into the domain of beast. The myth of Bon Bibi is like motivator and ensures protection on either side. The local people of village believe that the goddess Bon Bibi hears their prayers and saves them from tigers in the forest. When Nirmal is informed of the imaginary border between the realms of Bon Bibi and the realms of Dhoken Roy, he says: *“I realized with the sense of shock that this chimerical line was, to her and hosen as real as a barbed wire fence might be to me.”*

#### CONCLUSION

In *The Hungry Tide*, Amitav Ghosh connects human existence with nature by revealing a variety of natural phenomena. *The Hungry Tide* links nature and people, and it holds that any human activity that disrupts the natural elements will ultimately result in the extinction of life. Everything about man’s existence and growth is made possible by his relationship with nature. As long as man recognises that nature provides for all of his needs and forms of existence, there will be perfect harmony between man and nature. This novel is an exploration of a new world, the Sundarbans, which is

unknown to the rest of the world. This novel also tells the story of refugees from Marichjhapi massacre in 1979. Ghosh portrays the truth that nature is able to search the inner perceptions of human psychology through the portrayal of characters like Piyali, Kanai, Fokir, and Nirmal. Man is completely cut off from nature as a result of industrialization and capitalism's aftermath, and man begun to dominate nature. He gravely oppressed nature with his ignorance and false sense of superiority, turning it from a protector into a destroyer. Man, and the environment began to victimize one another, which led to a negative cycle whose effects are unacceptable for humanity. It is high time for men to start caring about the environment, and instead of seeing nature as just a resource; he should see it as a community to which he belongs. In the novel, Piya's words are true,

*"That it was what was intended not by you or me but by nature, by the earth, by the planet that keeps us all alive. Just suppose we crossed that imaginary line that prevents us from deciding that no other species matters except ourselves. What will be left then? Aren't we alone enough in the universe and do you think it will stop at that? Once we decide we can kill off other species it will be people next."*

#### REFERENCE

- [1] Buell, Lawrence. *'Letter' in Forum on Literatures of the Environment*, The Modern Language Association of America. 1999.
- [2] Ghosh, Amitav. *The Hungry Tide*. New Delhi, Ravi Dayal, 2004. Print
- [3] Essays: *Folly in the Sundarbans*. Amitav Ghosh. N.d. Web.12 May 2005. India Today, "Amitav Ghosh: The Hungry Tide." Penguin Books India.n.d. Web.11 May 2005.
- [4] Mallick, Ross. *Refugee Resettlement in Forest Reserves: West Bengal Policy Reversal and the Marichjhapi Massacre*. The Journal of Asian Studies, 58.1 (1999), PP.104-125.
- [5] Marsh, G.P. *Man and Nature; or, Physical Geography as Modified by Human Actions*. New York, 1864.
- [6] Rangarajan, Swarnalata. *Ecocriticism*, Orient Blackswan, 2018.
- [7] Tošić Jelica, *Ecocriticism- Interdisciplinary Study of Literature and Environment*. Vol.3, No 1, 2006 pp. 43 – 50.

#### AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY



Khyati Bhardwaj is a Ph.D. Research Scholar at the Department of English, SDPG College, Ghaziabad, affiliated to Chaudhary Charan Singh University, Meerut, India. She is conducting her research under the guidance of Dr. Bindu Karnwal. Her research interests include the condition of women in African Literature. She has completed her B.A. and M.A. in English Literature from Chaudhary Charan Singh University, Meerut. Then, she has completed her M.Phil. from CCSU, Campus.