



***The Hungry Tide* as Blue Literature: Eco-Critical Reflections from the Sundarbans**

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Abstract

*This paper examines the book through the lens of Blue Humanities from the Eco-Critical aspects describing water resources, hides the hazard behind its magnificence, despite being a provider. The book *The Hungry Tide* by Amitav Ghosh is set in an alluring Sundarbans displays a connection between human and nature and it also explores the theme of man vs. nature, environmentalism and globalization. It also highlights water being the key means of living, but sometimes it ends up in sacrifices of life. The book drives the reader to the Sundarbans by the two main characters Piyali Roy and Kanai Dutt who ascend a deep connection between water and people. Piya in spite of her language, as a hindrance, builds a great interest to research on the aquatic mammals. Ghosh also portrays the difficulties in survival through the means of culture, language, food above all unexpected climate changes. When the book unfolds we could understand the relationship of water and human when, Fokir a local fisherman, who helps Piya to explore Garjontola a place in Sundarbans and Horen and Kanai had the knowledge to predict the cyclone ahead. Therefore, *The Hungry Tide* exhibit the Sundarbans as a forceful aquatic environment where human and animals lives are interconnected and shaped by the unpredictable forces like tide, storm, river, sea and predatory tigers. Thus this paper exemplifies that blue humanities reference through eco-criticism is accentuated in this intertidal book.*

Keywords: blue humanities, eco-criticism, intertidal, Cli-Fi, maritime, Amitav Ghosh

According to Dobrin and Keller, ecocriticism is a study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Ecocriticism thus takes as its primary subject the interconnections between nature and culture, specifically through the cultural artifacts of language and literature. Steve Mentz, states that even the water in my body, and yours, shifts in micro-tidal patterns. In juxtaposing the water that makes up roughly sixty percent of my own body with the forces that move vast basins of salt water across the surface of the planet, this preface aims to foreground the interpretive challenge of multiple scales. Water

surrounds us—in our bodies, our neighborhoods, and our planet.

Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha and West Bengal are India's coastal region. These seaside plains not only beautify the geographical region but it also shapes the socio-cultural practices of the coastal inhabitants. Michael Pearson describes Indian Ocean, as one of the oldest sea where people used to traveled over 5000 years. He also has mentioned the importance and impacts of Indian Ocean in which trade, exploration and cultural exchange



flourished. The old Tamil Sangam literature has a separate division on the sea and the coastal region, which denotes that human life is centered on the basis of language, food, clothing, literature, folklore, occupation, culture, place, etc. (Rejithkumar 2022)

According to UNESCO World Heritage Centre, The Sundarbans is one of the largest Mangrove forest regions in the world; it lays on the delta of Ganges, Brahmaputra and Meghna rivers. It is contiguous to the border of India's Sundarbans World Heritage site, inscribed in 1987. The site is intersected by a complex network of tidal waterways, mudflats, and small islands of salt-tolerant mangrove forests which presents an excellent example of ongoing ecological processes. The area is known for its wide range of fauna, including 260 bird species, the Bengal tiger, and other threatened species such as the estuarine crocodile and the Indian python.

Amitav Ghosh's the intertidal work *The Hungry Tide* explores the Sundarbans an archipelago which is a beautiful fragile landscape shaped by the merciless forces of climate change. This book serves a blend of Eco-Criticism and Blue Humanities. Where Eco-Critical lens provide the nuances of land centered life and Blue Humanities is an emerging study on the relationship between human and ocean and the way in which human life has been shaped by water resources.

Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* portrays oceanic and estuarine environment helps in shaping culture, identity and survival skills in that precarious space. Ghosh presents the Sundarbans as a geological setting and a space which is divided by ecological challenges and human resilience. (Dora and Islam, 2). Through the story line Ghosh gives us a wide view on the coastal region, the coastal life and their precarious day to day activities with no assurance of another day. They undergo problems through natural forces like unpredictable cyclones, tides and human eating tigers. Ghosh skillfully intertwine the plot with themes like history, migration, marginality and ecology and explain the Sundarbans as a place where human and nature intersects through its entire means.

Steve Mentz who coined the term Blue Humanities states that it is an interdisciplinary field which gives us the understanding of relationship between human and oceanic world. In the book *The*

Hungry Tide, Ghosh projects the Sundarbans which is an archipelago a place where waterscape and water shapes human and non-human entities throughout the story. It also gives us an immense connection between ecological and cultural entities, through the lens of Blue Humanities from the view of Piyali Roy a cetologist and Fokir a local fisher man.

Ghosh's book *The Hungry Tide* has been analyzed through postcolonial, eco-critical, socio-political view. It brings out the nuances in which the book has been interconnected with the field of blue humanities through the vivid description of the characters. Water a dynamic entity is not only a livelihood but also a fatal destiny, thus Sundarbans is a place of both survival and existential crises through the fragile landscapes and unpredictable natural disasters.

Blue Humanities through Eco-Criticism in *The Hungry Tide*

India is a country where we have a strong belief in naming. Each place in India has a naming reason which resembles the place's culture, language, religion and so on. Here Sundarbans refers to tide, gives us the unsympathetic view of nature where people called it as tide country. Through the eco-critical view we can understand the formation of the Sundarbans where a large tide submerged the semi part of the land. Through blue humanities we could understand how people used to frame their living, shelter, occupation and survival skills according to the unpredictable flood and tide.

This story is a combination of Blue Humanities and Eco-Criticism which projects the ecological interdependence of humankind and the way in which their life has been shaped by nature and water. The setting Ghosh uses for his story directly contribute to Blue Humanities, and the ecological changes come up with Eco-Critical perspective. But, the heart of the matter is both Sundarbans, and environmental impact molds civilization.

The very first encounter Ghosh gives about the Sundarbans is the significance of its name which means, the beautiful forest. It is not derived from a common mangrove tree Sundari instead it has a record in the book of Mughal emperors, that Sundarbans has been named under a tide-bhati and



not a tree. The inhabitants of the island also called the island a bhatir desh which means the tide country moreover, it is said that the island itself has been created by a large tide. “But the word’s origin is no easier to account for than is its present prevalence, for in the record books of the Mughal emperors this region is named not in reference to a tree but to a tide — bhati. And to the inhabitants of the islands, this land is known as bhatir desh — the tide country” (Ghosh 10).

The book starts by describing Kanai and Piya, where Piya introduces herself as a cetologist. It is a study on marine mammals like dolphins, whale dugongs and porpoises. (Ghosh 13) Piya is very much interested in marine life epistemology so she risked her life towards it. Piya joins with Fokir a local fisherman who helped her to find the Irrawaddy dolphins since he had knowledge on the geographical landscape through his experience. Piya owned technological equipments like GPS detector which records the range and depth of the water, camera to document the action of the dolphins, and a binocular. (Ghosh 300) Despite being an uneducated man Fokir had more experience and knowledge about the Sundarbans. Through this incident we could have admit that Fokir was accomplished by the archipelago with its entire means.

Ghosh portrays his intelligence by combining two contrasting features like tradition and technology where Fokir represents tradition through his occupation, experience and spiritual belief of Bon Bibi. Piya a conservationist represents a different culture, class, environment, language, education and culinary practice. They created a bond not through language but through gestures and interest in the tide country. “But she persisted, making signs and gestures until finally he understood.” (Ghosh 77) Language was not a barrier between them, and Piya feels more comfortable with Fokir than being with the guard appointed by the forest department.

Kanai reaches at Lusibari which is one of the central islands of the Archipelago and he is struck by his nostalgic memories, where he could find the drastic change in the landscape of Lusibari. He recalls his days with his uncle, aunt, and Sir Daniel Hamilton’s experiments on Lusibari. Kanai discover the immense changes in the place of his childhood

memories. The reunion with his family exposes a deep historical background and the culture of sundarbans gives an outlook on the transformation of the landscape over the years. (Dora and Islam 6)

Both Piyali Roy and Kanai Dutt have experience towards the modern world where they are exposed to employ a western scientific rational approach towards land and water. They also have no hindrance like language, culture, class and education but they lack understanding apart from good communication. “I’m an interpreter and translator by profession — although right now I’m more of a businessman than anything else.” (Ghosh 160) Beside Piya’s technological knowledge and Kanai’s translating skills they couldn’t help each other and fail each others. (Paudyal 46)

Ghosh has created a separate chapter for Bon Bibi, whom the villagers trust that she protects the island and she is responsible for the animals in the island. Bon Bibi is a symbol which represents the unpredictable climate change. This mythical deity offers a comfort to the coastal people as she is represented as a shield that protects the Tide Country. Her myth was narrated by Horen to Kanai, educates us that it is not about human vs. nature but it is always human and nature. Greed and disrespect towards nature leads to a massive adversity.

Horen finds that there is an indication of a hurricane and he alerts Kanai but they couldn’t indicate Fokir and Piya, as they went in search of the Irrawaddy dolphins. Then the cyclone devastated the land, Horen and Kanai managed to find a safe place and Piya managed to survive but there is a tragic end for Fokir, he died in that cyclone. (Ghosh 283) This shows that nature has no prejudice towards experienced or inexperienced.

Nilima Bose is also an essential character in which Ghosh used to project the resistance of water in reshaping the life of an individual. Unlike Piya, Fokir and Horen she is committed to the Babadon Trust therein she helps people who suffer from the terrible feature of nature. She provides service apart from the coastal destruction. This act of hers projects the understanding nature of her towards the community in the fragile land of uncertainty. Nilima may not have undergone to suffering of the nature in the Sundarbans but she has been shaped by the tides of the Sundarbans.



People not only suffered through nature but also by their own actions like forced migration, displacement and Morichjhanpi Massacre. Morichjhanpi Massacre was movement where refugees were harmed and dispossessed from the Archipelago and the pressure of man eating tigers which destroyed the freedom of movement in the Sundarbans. (Ghosh 25) People of Sundarbans are not only oppressed by land terrors, but also by fluids. The destruction of nature is vast compared to artificial destructions; nature revives itself through its own means where humans make it worst through greed.

Sundarbans is a geographical space where land and water combines and creates a wet landscape. Here the very landscape itself is a metaphorical representation of human being where the people's ability to survive in a space of uncertainty, upcoming climate changes, never knowing whether it is a flood or a cyclone. The land has been shaped by the water equally living beings are shaped by the unpredictable nature and water.

Conclusion

Through this book *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh gives us an ethical and political knowledge of a destructive landscape through the lens of blue humanities as an umbrella and eco-critical view as its branch. Ghosh's plot weaves nature, environment, and oceanic entities with humans where the tide as a shaping agent of nature shows its vulnerability to the humanity through its force. Ghosh also presents the natural way in which Sundarbans becomes not only a place of biodiversity but also a space marked by socio-economic inequalities and historical Trauma. (Dora and Islam 12) Character like Piya who studies about the marine mammals reflects the blue humanity view on human and ocean relationship and Kanai represents the eco-critical way in which his nostalgic view on Sundarbans. Through the main characters the book intersects the field of Blue Humanities and Eco-Critical which questions the basic requirements like food, shelter, culture, language and tradition. Ghosh also criticized the brutal behavior of hierarchy in the cases of Marichjhapi which suppressed the refugees who have been migrated from Bengal and Bangladesh. They have been suppressed and killed by the natural disasters of that place and even humans

without humanism dominated them, in the act of so called protection for environment. Understanding nature doesn't need any communicational skill or any of the modern technologies. Ghosh explains that Fokir and Horen understood nature just by experiencing it through local knowledge. Unlike Piya they read the nature and its small changes like wind, tide level and behaviors of the wildlife. Thus, understanding ecology is a process of experience filled with challenges. Finally, this book blends both blue humanities, and eco-criticism by sketching the archipelago Sundarbans as a land of human nature entities where water, land and human intersect each other. It insists us to think of the power of nature over human, through natural disasters like cyclone, flood and man eating tiger. This gives us an environmental responsibility to protect nature and ensure our survival by understanding it.

Works Citation

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