



Myth, Folklore, and Cultural Memory in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* with Reference to *Gun Island*

¹Mrs.B. Sivapriya & ²Dr.J. Albert Vincent Paulraj

¹Research Scholar in English

National College,(A)Trichy

²Assistant Professor of English

Urumu Dhanalskahmi College, Trichy



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Abstract

Throughout history, myth and folklore have played a significant role in shaping the way in which people view the natural world, morality, and group identity. Contrary to being a relic of the past, they are still a dynamic part of cultural memory, especially in socio-politically marginalized and ecologically vulnerable groups. In an attempt to examine the way in which myth is a living moral and cognitive system, Ghosh critiques anthropocentric modernity and offers an alternative environmental ethics of interdependence through the re-interpretation of indigenous myths such as the Gun Merchant myth and the Bon Bibi story. In the analysis, it will be suggested that Ghosh offers myth as an epistemological resource that enables transnational memory, environmentalism, and resilience in the face of climate change, rather than superstition. This paper presents a new and extended interpretation of Amitav Ghosh's "The Hungry Tide" (2004), comparatively with "Gun Island" (2019), in order to explore the importance of myth, folklore, and cultural memory in survival narratives. Based on a broad use of secondary literature and theoretical approaches, such as the study of bioethical imperatives in speculative fiction by Dr. J. Albert Vincent Paulraj, the analysis of narrative strategies and social conditioning by S. Kandasamy, and the work on posthuman subjectivity by B. Pradeepa, this paper will demonstrate that Ghosh redefines myth as an ethical and ecological discourse. The Bon Bibi myth, folklore, and migratory stories are not only cultural leftovers but also complex systems that mediate human/nature relations, subvert anthropocentric modernity, and sustain indigenous knowledge.

Keywords: Myth, Folklore, Cultural Memory, Ecocriticism, Bon Bibi, Indigenous Knowledge, Amitav Ghosh

Introduction

Myth, folklore, and religious tales are some of the oldest paradigms within which human society has been able to articulate its understanding of its relationship with nature and the universe. These tales offer a common language in which the discourse of fear, hope, justice, and ecological understanding can be expressed. In contemporary literature, particularly in the postcolonial realm, myth may well take on a renewed importance as a narrative of resistance to

Western rationality and a repository of cultural memory.

One of the most prominent voices in Anglophone fiction globally, Amitav Ghosh, often employs myth in order to subvert the limits of modern scientific epistemology. Ghosh repeatedly returns to the Sundarbans and other "edge territories" in which the human and non-human realms meet in complex and fragile ways in "The Hungry Tide" (2004) and "Gun Island" (2019). As J. Albert Vincent



Paulraj argues in his analysis of speculative fiction, the current trend in narratives is to emphasize ethical responsibility towards human as well as non-human life, and to consider literature as a space for bioethical thought (Paulraj 40). This paper will explore how Ghosh uses myth and folklore to create cultural memory and ecological ethics. Ghosh situates myths at the center of narrative significance rather than using them as a decorative backdrop. In Ghosh's texts, myths are a vital source of moral guidance that assist societies in coping with ecological uncertainty and climate change.

Myth, Folklore, and Cultural Memory

Assmann, for instance, argues that cultural memories are sustained through common narrative structures, rituals, and repetitions. By shared memories and moral teachings, myth becomes a cultural code that binds communities together. Ghosh uses the concept of myth in "The Hungry Tide" to inject alternative modes of knowledge and disrupt the linear narrative of realism. The natural environment of the Sundarbans transforms into a repository of complex memories, such as those of colonial extraction, political violence, migration, and native worldviews.

The dual narrative structure of the novel, which combines scientific research (Piya) with experiential knowledge (Fokir), underlines the conflict between the rational approach of modernity and the experiential knowledge contained in folklore. The narrative structure of the novel is in line with post humanist theory, which does not emphasize humanism but rather the ecological relationship. In S. Kandasamy's research on narrative strategies, the use of non-linear narrative, mythic form, and symbolic repetition is shown to reveal the mechanisms of social conditioning in contemporary fiction (Kandasamy 108). These strategies are at work in *The Hungry Tide*, where myth breaks into linear realism and shifts the narrative focus to ethical coexistence. In B. Pradeepa's analysis of posthuman subjectivity, the need to decenter the human in literary analysis is emphasized, particularly in texts that highlight interdependence (Pradeepa 73). These critical approaches offer a way to read Ghosh's

novels as interventions in ecological and cultural discourse. Through myth, Ghosh critiques the anthropocentric approach that distinguishes human beings from their environment.

The Bon Bibi Legend and Environmental Responsibility

The legend of Bon Bibi is the ethical and spiritual turning point of "The Hungry Tide". Bon Bibi symbolizes protection and harmony in nature, while Dokkhin Rai symbolizes the unbridled power of nature. The legend controls the activities of the villagers, as they perform rituals to obtain the prior consent of Bon Bibi before entering the forest. The legend is also a symbol of the villagers' reverence for nature.

This myth is no mere superstition but an ecological pedagogy that is grounded in experience. In a country where the tides are unpredictable and the danger of tiger attacks is real, the myth of Bon Bibi is a pedagogy in humility, in prudence, and in a recognition of the forces of nature that may be beyond the scope of Western scientific models. In making Bon Bibi the pivot of a myth, Ghosh demonstrates how myth is a regulatory system that enables sustainable coexistence.

Folklore and Indigenous Knowledge

Folklore is the corpus of oral tradition, collective memory, and folk wisdom that derives from experience down the generations. Fokir, the illiterate fisherman, is the quintessence of folklore. His folk wisdom regarding tides, migratory patterns, and riverine biotopes is immeasurably superior to any scientific knowledge. Ghosh, through Fokir, challenges the epistemological order that privileges academic knowledge over folk knowledge.

The novel positions Fokir's skill in the waterways as an exercise in heroism in its own right. Instead of the conventional epic hero of aristocratic warriors, Ghosh's conception of heroism is mediated through the lens of survival. Fishermen, refugees, honey gatherers, and forest dwellers are the new guardians of ecological knowledge. Their resilience, developed out of the adaptation of their forebears to



a hostile environment, is an alternative archive of knowledge that is not always recognized or prized by Western modernity.

Migration, Climate Crisis, and the Reimagined Myth in *Gun Island*

In *Gun Island*, Ghosh extends his exploration of the nature of myth further, exploring its capacity to change and adapt itself across cultures and continents. The tale of the Gun Merchant, Deen's hallmark obsession, is shown to be a metanarrative that spans the history of displacement, both forced and climate change-induced. In the passage of the myth itself across various geographies, from Bengal to Venice to the Mediterranean, it becomes clear that climate change is not merely a scientific or political issue; it is also a cultural and narrative one.

The movement of snakes, dolphins, and migratory birds is akin to the movement of refugees who are displaced because of the impact of climate change. Myth is a channel through which the reception and retransmission of the collective fears of the Anthropocene age take place. The Gun Merchant's escape from danger is also akin to the present-day refugees who are compelled to migrate across the world because of the rise in sea levels, cyclones, and the destruction of the environment.

Conclusion

Through "The Hungry Tide" and "Gun Island", Amitav Ghosh reveals that myth and folklore remain a relevant tool of interpretation in ecological disasters and human-environmental relations. Through the use of indigenous myths such as the

Bon Bibi story and the reinterpretation of myths such as the Gun Merchant story, Ghosh subverts the anthropocentric ideals of modernity and the concept of coexistence. Mythology is therefore portrayed not as a thing of the past but as a living and breathing ethical system that guides communities towards resilience, understanding, and environmental sustainability. In a world of climate chaos, Ghosh's fiction urges a return to these older ways of knowing.

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