
"AUGMENTED ANALYSIS OF NATURE (WATER) IN AMITAV GHOSH'S THE HUNGRYTIDE"

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Abstract

The novel 'The Hungry Tide' serves to highlight the importance of ecological questions to be relevant to the Third World. The traditional conceptualizations of water and the River Ganges, the materiality of the presence of water and its significance as an agency dealt with in the novel; illustrate the violence inscribed within western conservation discourses when arbitrarily implemented in the Third World. Preservation in the popular imaginary often regarded as a beneficent phenomenon that institutes safeguards for a "mute" nature that is violated by continuing at full strength of human encroachment. Protection in the Sundarbans, directed mainly toward the preservation of the tiger, reveals the privileging of an animal because it meets a higher aesthetic standard of beauty and prowess.

Keywords: *mute, Sundarbans, The Hungry Tide, artifactual, woodcutters*

A work of fiction created in the imagination of its author. The author invents the story and makes up the characters, the plot or storyline, the dialogue and sometimes even the setting. A fictional work does not claim to tell a story. Instead, it immerses us in experiences that we may never have in real life. Fiction can inspire us, stratagem us, panic us and engage us in new ideas. It can help us see ourselves and our world in new ways.

It may define as the art or craft of planning, through the written word, representations of human life that inculcate or divert. The various forms that fiction may take are best seen less like some separate categories than as a continuum or more accurately. When any piece of work is long enough to compose a whole book, as opposed to a part of a book, then it may be said to have accomplished work of fiction. But, this state admits of its quantitative categories, so that a relatively brief story may be termed a novella and a very long novel may overflow the banks of a single volume.

Nature and Agency

Water is the central characteristic of the coastal region between India and Bangladesh known as the Sundarbans. Here water swallows and regurgitates land with every turn of the tide. The tiger conservation project in the Sundarbans in the 1970s prompted the state-led violent expulsion of Bangladeshi refugees from the islands, and in 2000 the government handed over large tracts of the islands to a private company for an ecotourism project. The first incident is narrativized in the novel, presenting a political indictment of the second development. The role of water as a metaphor presence in the text to examine, how the novelist articulates the rupture of social hierarchies and voices dissent over the violation of human rights in the name of conservation. The Hungry Tide takes a step further to accent the subaltern experience. The story raises national and global awareness about the history of violence inscribed on the Sundarbans, throwing into relief the continuing exploitation of the place. As Lawrence Buell argues, eco-critics explore literary texts as "refractions of physical environments and human interactions with those environments, notwithstanding the artifactual properties of textual representation and their mediation by ideological and other socio-historical factors." In this

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vein, Ghosh's novel reveals the interactions between the state, the poor, the fauna and flora, and the physical environment, and in doing so, this work highlights both the tragedy and the hypocrisy that were inherent in the conservation efforts in the Sundarbans. More precisely, it is the cursive construction of the Sundarbans' waterscape in Ghosh's novel that helps achieve this purpose.

In *The Hungry Tide* Ghosh problematizes the tensions between and within human communities, their relations with the natural world. Ghosh sets his novel in the Sundarbans, the tide country where the contours of land constantly change with the ebb and flow of water. He uses water as the agent that rewrites the social matrix of the Sundarbans in the novel. Water is both motif and agent, shaping not only the story but also the geography and history of the land. The agency of water highlighted here—its potential to act, as well as to move from object/other position to that of the subject and, in doing so, reverse the object/subject status of the characters. It is also significant that Ghosh uses water as the agent to resolve the conflict fictionalized in the novel. First, water, as the agent of change, provides Ghosh a way to steer clear of taking a moral or ideological stand while addressing the complex struggle between humans and animals for survival. Second, the motif of water makes it possible to objectively and dispassionately highlight the plight of both the dispossessed people and the threatened wildlife. Third, by using water as an element to undermine the hegemonic social order, Ghosh can keep the focus on the conflict, rather than on the resolution, making the novel itself and indeed its primary trope, water, the agents of political and social change. In this context, my paper explores the ways in which water moves beyond being a recurring literary motif to become an active participant that dynamically engages and exerts an impact on the human drama. Water, as a symbolic phenomenon in the novel which serves to expose the eco-social and eco-political issues that the work addresses as it dramatizes the competing claims of human and non-human species for existence.

The Influences and the Occurrences

The Hungry Tide unfolds through the eyes of two upwardly mobile, educated individuals who undertake a journey to the tide country. Kanai Dutt, the Bengali-born, Delhi-settled businessman, arrives in Lusibari to visit his Aunt Nilima and claim the package left for him by his late uncle, Nirmal. The package, he discovers, is an account of his uncle's last days which revolved around Kusum and her son Fakir, who portrayed as the victims of dispossession from the island of Morichjhapi. Indian background who chooses to journey into the Sundarbans to study the threatened Gangetic River Dolphins. The juxtaposition of these two narratives highlights the conflict in the novel—the problems and issues of wilderness conservation and its related social costs in areas populated by the socially and economically disprivileged both in the past and the present. The sub-narrative foregrounded in the character of Poker represents the third voice of this ecological drama. William W. Hunter mentions forest guides called "Fakir" who accompanied woodcutters and hunters on their expeditions to the jungle. Hunter points out that these woodcutters were so superstitious that they would not venture into the forest unaccompanied by Fakir, "who is supposed to receive power from the presiding deity— whom he propitiates with offerings—over the tigers and other animals. Occasionally, a large number

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of boats proceeds together in a party to take Fakir with them" (312). Fakir is the anglicized form of Fokir, the name of Ghosh's character who guides Piya and Kanai through the waterways. Fakir also worships Bon Bibi, the forest Goddess and loses his life in the process of steering the outsiders safely through the woods. He fits the archetype of the miserable and illiterate native, exposed to the man-eating tigers, sharks, crocodiles, and snakes inhabiting the tide country and also vulnerable to bribe taking officials of the state, who are constant threats to his survival.

But Ghosh empowers him on another level, in his familiarity with the tide country and its creatures, and the legacy of a centuries-old oral tradition he inherits, qualities that distinguish him from Piya and Kanai. Ghosh's portrayal of Fakir thus resists the stereotypical patronization of him as the noble savage or the innocent villager or even the epitome of a pioneer. Added to these three characters is the uniqueness of the Sundarbans, the waterscape that alternates between being subject and object, victim and victimizer. Water in the Sundarbans, more than being a passive recipient of both social and physical changes, exercises its potential to transform the physical space and in turn alter the social order. For both Piya and Kanai the expedition and the storm at the end of the novel that remaps the landscape facilitate a renewed and more understanding of the Sundarbans, the place, and the people. W. R. Greer suggests that choosing the Sundarbans as his setting allows Ghosh "to create a setting where everyone is on an even footing the hostile environment erases all social strata because everyone is an equal in the struggle to survive in the hostile environment."

Social differences between both the urban and rural sets of characters are gradually elided, resulting in an increasing tension between their cultural and social identities. The novel in this sense suffused with multiple social transitions, between the First World and the Third World, local and global, rural and urban, traditional and modern, and among linguistic, religious, and class barriers, all played out in the context of the waterscape. Only in the face of a hostile environment are the social barriers broken down and overcome, and nature serves as the agent to level all social and cultural hierarchies.

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