

Non-human as Hero in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*

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Abstract

*The present paper offers readers an immersive canvas to reflect on ecocriticism and various political epistemologies. It also focuses on the perspectives on non-humans as an essential part of nature. In his novel *The Hungry Tide*, Amitav Ghosh, a master storyteller, explores the Sundarbans' environmental challenges on a large scale, relying on various sources of factual information. It unites the art of nature writing with fiction, illustrating the conflict between humans and non-humans, both essential parts of nature. Ghosh engages in the rhetorics of storytelling, weaving fiction and fact, and using the pretext of nature and its ecosystem. The paper also explores non-human, people, and environmental concerns in the tidal area of the Sundarbans.*

The Sundarbans, their peoples, habitats, tigers, and dolphins, natural and artificial calamities that represent the entire ecological system of the archipelago rich in its biodiversity and life forms unique in the entire world have been harmoniously reintegrated. It also shows how non-humans are being affected by human activities due to the lack of awareness.

Keywords: *Sundarbans, Non-human, survival, tiger, dolphins, conservation, biodiverse*

The paper describes environmental situations in which non-human forces abruptly intruded, screaming for attention. The first instance is documented in Ghosh's first-hand report of a tornado that erupted out of nowhere and hit the country's northern section. The second episode is based on a Sundarbans-themed folk epic. These are moments of realization for Ghosh when one understands "the intense closeness of alien presences" that may have their agendas that we are unaware of. This instantaneous revelation of a non-human presence, according to Ghosh, is a sense of the eerie that comes with climate change.

The fact that climate change is intrinsically unsettling implied a period before climate change when the relationship between humans and non-humans was ostensibly peaceful, a time that has since been broken and unsettled by the environment's increasingly strange behavior.

When what is intended to be personal, familiar, or companionable suddenly turns against us, becoming odd and rebellious, or when what is supposed to be hidden—the will and awareness that lay in the non-human worlds—comes to light, the condition of homeliness might become unhomely. The source of comfort and homeliness for humans in the human-nonhuman relationship is primarily the environment's safe inertness. It is odd when the environment suddenly comes alive, acquiring its energy and will, forcing the human to realize this other creature. Importantly, Ghosh reminds us that the eerie that comes from the sensation that the environment has its own will is the product of human activity: "despite their profoundly non-human character, today's bizarre weather occurrences are yet powered by accumulated human actions."

Literature is described as a medium that helps to reflect life in all of its dimensions, and in recent years, it has focused on depicting the interaction between the human world and its physical environment and the ever-changing face of human connectedness with the natural world.

Forlongman's approach to nature was founded on the master/slave idea. For ages, the man had been the master of all he looked at, believing in the existence of nature only for his benefit.

The resulting dialogic performances between all of the characters—human and non-human—have a tangible impact on one another throughout two parallel histories: the first, a character-narrated history of the refugee massacre at Morichjhapi from a previous generation, and the second, an aftermath history of the next generation returning to the Sundarbans.

As a result, he made an effort to profit from it. Now is the moment when excessive use of the environment has resulted in the depletion, destruction, and annihilation of the Earth's surface into an unrecognizable condition, resulting in climate change phenomena. Nature has begun to retaliate against us in the most devastating way possible. Humanity must reconsider, review, and remodel its connection with its surroundings by accepting that we are a part of the environment and in no way superior to it and that we must simultaneously provide every other life the right to exist.

Ecocriticism begins with the belief that the heart of imagination and the study, through their grasp of the power of word, story, and image to reinforce, enliven, and direct environmental concern, can significantly contribute to the understanding

of environmental problems: the various forms of environmental degradation that afflict planet Earth today.

The select novel is primarily a study of the Sundarbans, a unique and vast archipelago home to thousands of species, both human and non-human, as a World Heritage Site and Biosphere Reserve. Based on Ghosh's responses to the Sahara India Pariwar's plan to create a large tourist project in the region in his article "Folly in the Sundarbans," he wrote the fictitious piece he makes a case for the world's richest mangrove forests of the delta. The Sundarbans, which serve as the novel's background, are continually flowing in constructing and remaking their territories, signifying the ever-shifting nature of life in the delta.

Its story is as comprehensive as the river's ebbing and flowing waves. The lives of three of the film's main protagonists, caught in the whirlpool of existence, reveal the unfathomable depths of the human spirit, which never gets bogged down in the survival of the fittest battle between nature and man. Ghosh depicts the Sundarbans in nature writing, which is typically described as writing about the natural environment and that often depends significantly on scientific knowledge and facts about the natural world.

The battle between human and non-human life forms, which, as Adams and Mulligan point out, is a component of colonialism that we are less used to recognizing, complicates the claims of various political and social groupings over the landscape in the book. The continual danger of man-eating tigers is a significant concern that people living in the Sunderbans and the protagonists in the novel, *The Hungry Tide*, cannot be ignored or avoided. The Sunderbans contain a thriving tiger population, but these tigers are also known to prefer

human flesh, unlike other reserves where tigers only attack humans under uncommon situations. While the scientific community cannot agree on the causes for this, residents of the Sunderbans see the tiger as a continual menace. Piya and Kanai, guests from far-flung cosmopolitan hubs, are baffled by this reality. Piya, in particular, is prone to romanticizing the locals' relationship with their surroundings. Piya thinks to herself as she watches some fisher and dolphins work together to pick up a school of fish that it is the most beautiful example of symbiosis between humans and a population of wild creatures she has ever seen.

Her respect for Fokir stems from his knowledge of the outdoors and his ability to monitor and track the dolphins she is keen to find. Piya realises Fokir's connection with his surroundings transcends her naive idealization of man at one with nature as the novel continues and their trek leads them further into the tidal country. It is particularly true when the genuine danger of predators (tigers) must be considered.

Nilima warns Kanai about this and gives him data proving that every other day in the Sundarbans, at the very least, a person is murdered by a tiger on both sides of the border. In reality, the tiger often appears throughout *The Hungry Tide*, whether as a pug mark, a distant roar, a stir in the woods, a dream, a remembrance, or a first-hand encounter.

There are no borders to divide fresh water from salt, the river from the sea. Every day, thousands of acres of forest go submerged, only to reappear hours later, hundreds of kilometers inland. When the tides produce new land,

mangroves begin to grow overnight, and if the circumstances are ideal, they may spread to cover a new island in a few years.

The Visibility was limited, and the air was fetid and quiet. Every year, scores of people are murdered by tigers, snakes, and crocodiles in the thicket of that deep forest. These islands number in the hundreds; some are enormous, while others are bigger than sandbars; some have existed since recorded history, while others were just created a year or two ago.

The rivers' courses are scattered over the ground like a fine-mesh net, resulting in an environment where the lines between land and water are constantly shifting and unexpected. When these channels confluence, the water stretches to the far edges of the landscape, and the forest dwindles into a distant rumor of land echoing back from the horizon.

The text uncovers several issues related to life and existence on this delta with its diverse ecosystem, in which both man, animal, and other beings strive for their eco-space, thereby trying to find their means of survival, by giving a graphic description of the unfriendly and shifting nature of the Sundarbans.

This mammals species is considered critically endangered, and Piya thinks that deciphering the Orcaella's motions as it adapts to tidal ecology may give clues to the species' protection. She will also see how these dolphins work with people in their cast-net fishing. In this way, the Irrawaddy dolphins help enhance the quantity of seafood taken by fishers, indicating their economic worth to the human race.

The net forces much fish to the river's bottom, allowing the dolphins to feed while the fisherman gathers their harvest. For even explains to Piya and

Kanai how he knows all there is to know about dolphins and where they travel. His mother Kusum had told him tales about the dolphins in Garjontola when he was a tiny child, about how they were Bon Bibi's messengers who gave news of the rivers and floods. They were on the verge of becoming his pals. Because of their nature of being particularly sensitive to air pressure, the Gangetic dolphins that Piya sees, later on, assist her to recognize a storm forming with their unusual behavior. She can sense the impending storm without even thinking about it.

Environmentalists believe that competition and cooperation exist but must be carefully balanced between man and animal. Each has a vital function to play in the bio networks more fantastic picture. Apart from lesser species like horseshoe crabs, Piya encounters estuary crocodiles.

In this delta region, river and sea waters did not mix; instead, they interpenetrated each other, generating hundreds of diverse biological niches, with streams of fresh water flowing over the bottoms of certain canals, causing salinity and turbidity fluctuations.

These environments were like balloons hanging in the water, with their flow patterns. Each balloon featured a floating biodome with indigenous vegetation and wildlife. It contains a diverse range of aquatic and terrestrial flora and fauna, and its productive environment serves as a natural fish nursery. However, due to human involvement in globalization, economic growth, and eco-tourism, this rich ecosystem is at risk of being exploited.

The Sahara India Pariwar, which had to shelve a multimillion-dollar project proposal to build an eco-village, floating restaurants, wildlife tourism, and several waterways in the region due to strong objections raised by

environmentalists, and Ghosh's book *The Hungry Tide*, which served to enlighten even those who were not involved in environmental studies, and the media all worked together to save the region from the clutches of the mammoth global tiger.

According to the West Bengal Tourism website, the royal Bengal tiger has been designated an endangered species in the Sundarbans and is protected under Project Tiger. The Sundarbans is the world's only mangrove forest home to the tiger, with the world's most significant tiger population in this tiger reserve. As shown by several studies, the protection of this magnificent species has been a privileged one over the unfortunate folks of the world.

At the same time, the inhabitants of the islands are becoming marginalized. With the rise in tiger population, the issue of how much area has been set aside for the migration of the species' increasing numbers arises.

When Piya tries to rescue the animal after it has already murdered two people and numerous cattle in the hamlet, she is surprised to see that both Fokir and Kanai have joined the crowd in lighting fire. Piya, sensitive to animal rights, does not comprehend the problematic situation in which humans fought for survival against this animal. Ironically, the following day is a day of arrests, fines, and beatings by the khaki-clad forest guards. When there is no distinct border between human settlement and Tigerland, there will be instances of loss of life on both sides due to man-animal conflict. Because the Sundarbans tiger is a documented man-eater, the man-animal conflict must be taken seriously.

Establishing a tiger reserve and its ongoing upkeep in this unique mangrove swamp necessitated coping with many unknowns. It was critical to

discover solutions to several concerns, like how many square kilometers should be allocated to each tiger, what sort of flora would be desirable, and how to preserve the availability of the tigers' natural diet without harming the biodiversity of this unique zone. The Sundarbans Project Tiger was intended to manage the unknown, but it has instead created new, unforeseen unknowns.

The study analyses the problem and argues that strong conservation research and mitigation measures that enable humans to coexist with carnivores at the landscape level and the displacement of people from tiger areas with attractive compensation are the answers to this human-tiger conflict.

Providing a more significant prey base inside its habitation will guarantee the tiger does not seek for livestock, making packages a preferable option to crisis management measures. Both will profit from the creation of a more extensive, undisturbed habitat.

Over 200 meters of coastal vegetation is lost every year due to global warming, storms, tidal surges, and human activity. The Sunderbans is a critical tiger habitat since it is one of just a few surviving forests large enough to host hundreds of tigers. The loss of the Sunderbans would bring these exquisite creatures one step closer to extinction.

Since the 1920s, people have been streaming in from India and Bangladesh to live in the tidal nation. Following the 1942 famine, the whole area was ravaged, and hunger and disaster became a way of life. After decades of settlement, they learned that the land had not been wholly leached. Edo, it is salt. The soil bore inferior crop sand and could not be cultivated throughout the year. Hunger prompted them to go hunting and fishing, which frequently resulted in

disaster. Thousands of people risked their lives to obtain limited amounts of honey, wax, firewood, and the sour kewra fruit. There did not seem to be a day without someone being murdered by a tiger, a snake, or a crocodile.

Ghosh presents a case for the indigenous peoples, who were seen as a direct danger to the lands, woods, and reserve areas, and was evicted from their homes to make room for the tigers. These people had to battle not just the unpredictable and dangerous natural environment, like storms, tigers, and crocodiles, but also other strong humans. Despite authorities' claims that the peoples of these mangroves were complicit in their destruction, indigenous peoples have their belief systems that could be used to generate knowledge about these areas. Bonbibi's tale in the literature shows the necessity to appreciate the environment despite its inconsistency and intimidation.

The narrative also serves an ethical and educational function by emphasizing people's restricted behavior in interpersonal and environmental relationships. It aims to control their behaviors and attitudes by instilling ecological and social values in their daily interactions with nature and other people, ensuring their survival in the face of the unknown. After all, people are environmental organs that need their area.

Various governmental and private organizations have made ongoing efforts to conserve the Sundarbans in conservation and habitat restoration to rebuild the region's complete ecology. However, the fact on the ground in these very vulnerable mangrove forests is that climate change and global warming have begun to impact the archipelago. Recent studies have shown how the Sundarbans' huge landmass is disappearing, its mangrove forests are decreasing,

and rising sea levels are forcing the submergence of cultivable regions, occasionally a whole island. People in the Sundarbans are often evacuated when cyclonic storms wipe away their houses and fields.

Human influence has been so significant that vegetation has been removed to make way for human habitation, and the area is now prone to regular fluctuations in weather. The rise in salinity of water due to fishing has resulted in the extinction of species and a decrease in fish catch. Erosion of the coastlands has also contributed to climate catastrophes in the Sundarbans, making them more susceptible. Following a cyclone, the loss of life, both human and animal, cannot be precisely estimated in such locations. Maintaining endangered species in the environment should not come at the expense of the livelihoods of economically disadvantaged locals.

The Sundarbans is only one example. Some different ecosystems on the Earth are in jeopardy. Every person has a moral obligation and accountability to protect our ecosystem, which is progressively becoming an endangered habitat for all of its inhabitants, human and non-human, whom each need their place to exist. Animals are more eco-sensitive than humans. Global warming is to blame for the rapid depletion of space, resulting in smaller animal and human space, resulting in conflict.

The pressing need is to create a future that strikes a balance between man and his surroundings, to live in peace with his surroundings. If the here and now are placed in its proper context, the future will undoubtedly take care of itself. The educational institutions of higher learning are the best location to start making changes. The youth's potential must be realized since they, more than

anybody else, take the environment for granted. Environmental ideals and the sense of human duty to rescue the world must be instilled in their brains.

Environmental Studies as a topic has been introduced at the university level of education, but not with the anticipated severity. Of late Environmental Studies as a subject has been introduced at the tertiary level of education, though not with the expected seriousness. The curriculum should go beyond just teaching ideas to provide students with personal experience with the difficulties and challenges that the environment faces—involving students directly in the field, making them proactive not only by imparting theoretical information on school but also by assisting them in their practice off-campus. Students who want to be environmental managers must first learn about their environment, be taught to respect nature, local people, their culture, animals, and other wild creatures, and then teach and sensitize others about the environment.

Because it trains most individuals who build and run society's institutions and instructors, higher education must lead this transition in attitude. It will need long- and short-term educational transformation and extraordinary leadership and dedication from colleges, universities, and professional schools.

In sum, our environment, our planet Earth, is in our hands, and we need to renegotiate and realign our connection with it. In Ghosh's novel, Piya and Kanai intentionally choose to relocate to the Sundarbans to protect the region's people and nature. Ghosh's writing raises environmental awareness and sensitizes readers to the world's unique mangrove forests. Incorporating such literature into the curriculum would guarantee a fundamental grasp of locations, their environments, and ecosystems, sensitizing young minds and empowering them

to tilt their thoughts toward saving and maintaining planet Earth for future generations.

The resulting dialogic performances between all of the characters—human and non-human—have a tangible impact on one another throughout two parallel histories: the first, a character-narrated history of the refugee massacre at Morichjhapi from a previous generation, and the second, an aftermath history of the next generation returning to the Sundarbans. As a result, the uncanny's emotive effect drives us to acknowledge alien activity and the entrenched connection between the environment's whimsicality and the human world.

The paper investigates how colonial history influences the construction of the Sundarbans wetlands, depicts interactions between the Indian diaspora and local fisherman, and tells a tale of eco-cosmopolitan relationships between humans and non-humans.

Ghosh pays close attention to their emotive and sensory reactions to the environment, whether human or non-human, to properly portray their complicated relationships with the dominant regime and the geography and ecology in which they must scrape out a living.

These animals reflect the novel's non-anthropocentric voice against human equivalents, leading to our knowledge that nature is incomplete without human people. The writer intends to convey that non-humans exist in nature and have a right to their existence via the female heroine Piyali Roy's struggle against tiger slaughter.

Amitav Ghosh explores numerous parts of nature to establish a connection between human existence and the non-human as a hero. The *Hungry Tide*

connects non-human and humanity, believing that any human activity that disrupts natural components will ultimately result in the extinction of life. Everything about man's existence and growth is possible because of his relationship with a non-human. Man's relationship with nature will be perfectly harmonious as long as he recognizes that nature provides for all aspects of his life and wants. Every species contributes to the fullness of non-humans and has a right to survive on the planet, but man's anthropocentric mindset has resulted in tremendous dominance over nature, oblivious to the fact that the destruction of nature is nothing more than the ruin of people.

The paper raises awareness and educates readers about the world's unique ecosystems. He proposes a non-programmatic response to climate change. This fiction is part of a refined climate fiction that weaves history and the current planetary crisis together, validating myths as a shaping tool of an environmentally conscious unconscious and a comfort corner, particularly for indigenous communities in an existential crisis—a unique story set in an ecologically and geographically active and vulnerable archipelago, the Sundarbans tidal nation. Thus non-human plays an essential role in *The Hungry Tide*.

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