



# Looking At Thanatic Tendency Of Nature: A Study Of Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* And *Gun Island* Through Ecocritical Lens

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## Abstract

Nature is the mother of all living beings. It has the capacity to bring animation in inanimate objects. At the same time, it has the ability to destroy everything. Whenever a living being first comes in the lap of the earth, nature starts nurturing it from birth to death. At the beginning, there had been a healthy relationship between human beings and nature. But when people started claiming themselves as the supreme creation of the world, they began exploiting nature. Especially after colonisation, European people started creating problem in natural environment. When colonialism came to an end, independence brought independence in Eastern people for exploiting nature. At the beginning, nature was tolerating the exploitation like a loving mother. But when people start increasing the exploitation, nature begins punishing the humans like an angry mother. This has been reflected in literature. At the beginning, the erotic tendency of nature had been clearly visible in literature. Being influenced by nature, writers presented its creative purposes. Nowadays the outcome of nature's anger is painted in literary works. Writers intend to show the destructive wrath of nature for correcting the behaviours of human beings towards nature.

Nature has always been presented as a main theme in Indian English writings. From the ancient times to the contemporary era, nature serves as a guiding force to Indian writers. It encourages them to produce creative works. At the present time, the thanatic tendency of nature is presented in Indian English writings because the natural healthy environment is decreasing day by day by our malpractices. Amitav Ghosh is one of the writers who display nature's deadly reaction against the malpractice of humans.

**Keywords:** Nature, Environment, Wrath, Colonialism, Industrialization, Exploitation

Amitav Ghosh shows ecological disaster throughout his major works. Industrialization has brought a drastic change in our climate. Ghosh quotes the observation of Dipesh Chakrabarty in his *The Great Derangement Climate Change and the Unthinkable*- “humans have become geological agents, changing the most basic physical process of the earth.” (Ghosh 12) The deadly revolution in industry, technology and science decreases the creative power of nature. Ghosh suggests that the present ecological crisis needs immediate positive intervention. Soil, water and air are heavily polluted for the technological progress. Modernisation and urbanisation have an adverse impact on the relationship between humans and their environment. Human’s indiscriminate and unruly exploitation of natural resources is the main reason of the environmental crisis. The major environmental problems are the unusual discharge of green house gas, the ozone layer depletion, the carbon intensive economy, various types of pollution, the uncontrolled consumption of rare resources and the complete disappearance of many species. Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* shows the severe impact of chemicals on the environment. Ghosh talks about the climate change, environmental injustice, great and small creatures, violence of green revolution, belated spring, biopiracy, dust bowl, unquiet woods, fissured lands, floods and hungry tides. It is a great concern for the subversion of native cultures, the acidification of the oceans, global warming and the mitigation of natural habits. According to Ghosh, the life styles of primitive people were not a threat for nature and they lived in harmony with it. The primitive ways of living were observed in the refugees of Morichjhapi, who lived as human beings “by fishing, by clearing lands and by planting the soil.” (Ghosh 262) Industrialisation and politics are responsible for destroying the old practices and the harmony between nature and human existence. Again, the huge exploitation of natural resources has made human life very difficult. Kusum remarks in *The Hungry Tide*, “This island has to be saved for its trees, it has to be saved for its animals, it is a part of a reserve forest. It belongs to a project to save tigers.” (Ghosh 262) The same type of observation is reflected in William Rueckert’s *Literature and Ecology*; “The idea that nature should also be protected by human laws, that trees should have lawyers to articulate and defend their rights is one of the most marvellous and characteristic parts of the ecological vision.” (Rueckert 108)

Human beings assume sole authority over all other species and natural resources of the earth. They do not hesitate to exploit non-humans by snatching away their right to live. Sometimes human casualties are accepted illogically for protecting animals but at the same time nature is destroyed for making industries and factories. The Morichjhapi massacre gives evidence of callous attitude of the government. The Government gave orders to kill the refugees for evacuating the island of Morichjhapi. This reveals the lack of proper ecological vision and short-sightedness of the policy makers who were determined to conserve the ecology of Morichjhapi at the expense of humans. According to Ghosh, many ecological policies miss the basic principles of all –inclusive vision. These policies lack proper planning for the sustainable development.

The writer again shows how people run after monetary gain at the expense of ecological disaster. Sometimes, the bourgeois class promotes some products which have a terrible impact on ecology. For instance, new nylon nets are used by the fishermen for catching the eggs of the giant tiger prawns and trapping the spawn of other fishes in *The Hungry Tide*. Moyna rightly states, “there’s a lot of money in prawns and the traders had paid off the politicians. What do they care – or the politicians for that matter? It’s people like us who’re going to suffer and it’s up to us to think ahead.” (Ghosh 134) This is again exposed in Ghosh’s essay *Wild Fictions* where he comments that in “Sundarbans, with the introduction of commercial fisheries, great value has come to be placed on the microscopic spawn of prawns. As a result, fishermen have begun to trawl the waters with nets of very fine mesh. This means that the waters are being sieved in ways that are likely to have devastating effects on all aquatic life.” (Ghosh 21)

In *The Hungry Tide*, people frequently face various life-threatening dangers. Human's encounters with sharks, crocodiles, tigers, sudden tropical storms and the ever-changing landscape are presented in this novel. Nirmal and Horen's encounter with the storm is a case in point. They are swept along by the wind towards Lusibari. Nirmal tells;

We were heading home, when the wind suddenly started up. Within moments it was on us – it attacked with that peculiar, wilful malevolence that causes people to think of these storms as something other than wholly natural. The river had been calm minutes before, but now we found ourselves picked up and shaken by huge waves. (Ghosh 160)

The forest uniquely protects itself from interlopers. For instance, Kanai perceives “that a rope-like tendril had wrapped itself around his ankles. He felt his balance going and when he tried to slide a foot forward to correct it, his legs seemed to move in the wrong direction.” (Ghosh 325) Ghosh seems to suggest that the forest does not want wanton human intervention. Human intervention, colonisation and rising sea levels destroy the thick mangroves.

*The Hungry Tide* deals with the admiration of beauty and the protection of environment. The writer shows the dual identity of good and evil, land and water, rural and urban, local and universal in the Sundarbans. Ghosh uses the myths of Bon Bibi, the benefactor and Dokkin Rai, the tormentor to illustrate the dual gender identities. The book seems to analyse the interconnectedness between the environment and human beings. The writer attempts to establish the human-nature dichotomy. The Sundarbans is pristine and wild at the same time. Some part of the Sundarbans is habited by uncultivated plants and untamed animals. The other part is habited by the intrusions and activities of human beings. This culture-nature dichotomy is manifested in the natures of Piya and Fokir. Piya represents modern culture. She relies on modern gadgets such as the binoculars and the camera. On the other hand, Fokir symbolises the wilderness in nature and he lives by his instincts. Though Piya depends on modern technology, she is very much concerned about the dolphins which are frightened by the *bhotbhoti*. She wishes to die if it could make “the rivers safe again for the Irrawaddy dolphin.” (Ghosh 301) Sir Daniel Hamilton wished to establish a utopian society in the Sundarbans:

Where no one would exploit anyone and people would live together without petty social distinctions and differences. He dreamed of a place where men and women could be farmers in the morning, poets in the afternoon and carpenters in the evening. (Ghosh 53)

*The Folly of the Sundarbans* expresses Ghosh's concern for the venture of the Sahara India Parivar of taking over the land of the Sundarbans for ecotourism. The writer believes that such an effort could upset the ecosystem and the biodiversity of this region. The Morichjhapi massacre is an allusion of the aborted effort of the Sahara India Parivar.

*The Hungry Tide* describes the devastating tempest which is capricious and perilous. The region is continuously swayed by the flow and ebb of water. Water dictates and defines the geography, history, lives and culture of the people. Again, Ghosh talks about the ecological changes which have taken place in this region. When Nirmal first arrived at Lusibari, it was ecologically better. Nirmal says;

I remembered how when I first came to Lusibari, the sky would be darkened by birds at sunset. Many years had passed since I'd seen such flights of birds. When I first noticed their absence, I thought they would soon come back but they had not. (Ghosh 215)

The *Ibis* trilogy gives the documents of the gruesome plundering of the ecosystems and natural resources. The British promoted opium cultivation for their monetary gain in the *Ibis* trilogy. The *Ibis* trilogy shows the impact



of the opium trade on humans, agriculture and the ecosystem. The opium cultivation causes environmental vulnerability and food scarcity. The dust from opium factory develops respiratory problems. The sewage of opium factory pollutes the water of nearby rivers. It brings a tragic catastrophe in the world. In the trilogy, the storm represents the 'revolt of nature'. The fire turns the opium cargo into 'muddy sludge'. This shows nature's wrath against the selfish and petty interest of colonialism. According to Ghosh, capitalism and imperialism are also responsible for climate derangement. Imperialism and capitalism also cause poverty and exploitation. Global warming and carbon emission are created by imperialism.

*Gun Island* expresses Amitav Ghosh's deep concern for the increasing environmental crisis. The plot and the locale of the novel are set in a world which is disrupted by capitalist structures. The allegory of Manasa Devi and the gun merchant is used by the writer to indicate the global climate crisis. The gun merchant symbolises modern capitalist man who can do everything for monetary gain. On the other hand, Manasa Devi represents nature. The disrespect of Manasa Devi by the gun merchant symbolises man's negligence of nature. Again, Manasa Devi's anger represents natural disaster. Manasa Devi makes the readers to feel her constant presence through Tipu who is bitten by the cobra for his insensitive attitude. Tipu is a medium to remind humans of their reckless and insensitive practices and its consequences. Tipu's forebodings indicate the impending devastation. For instance, Tipu foresees the impending massive wild fires of Los Angeles. Again, he gives Deen a hint of encountering a snake in Atlantis. All the premonitions of Tipu come true. The yellow-bellied snake's presence on the Venice Beach indicates climate derangement. The writer observes that the high temperature of the oceans compels the snakes to move towards Venice. Ghosh's recurrent snake metaphor implies the presence of Manasa Devi and her wrath. In this way, the writer establishes the connection of the ecological imbalance with the myth.

The scientific evidence of ecological crisis is very alarming. The consequences of climate change are reflected in the extinctions of species, accelerated species migrations, extreme weather events, vanishing coral reefs, receding glaciers, melting ice sheets, rising sea levels and the spread of viral diseases. The ecological disaster poses a threat to both the present and future generations. Hence our planet requires urgent action for rescuing whatever remains after massive destruction of ecosystems. Amitav Ghosh describes the degradation of the environment, which affects the life of the human and nonhuman world. Ghosh believes that human beings are responsible for the environmental degradation. He appeals to humans to take necessary step for protecting the earth so that all types of life can survive. He says with a painful heart;

Everybody knows what must be done if the world is to continue to be a liveable place.....and yet we are powerless, even the most powerful among us. We go about our daily business through habit, as though we were in the grip of forces that have overwhelmed our will; we see shocking and monstrous things happening all around us and we avert our eyes; we surrender ourselves willingly to whatever it is that has us in its power. (Ghosh 216)

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