

# “The Textuality of History and the Historicity of Texts”

## A Comparative Analysis of Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide* and Davidar’s *The House of Blue Mangoes* in the Context of New Historicism

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### Abstract

The aim of the paper is to make a comparative analysis of Amitav Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide* and David Davidar’s *The House of Blue Mangoes*, in the context of New Historicism. Ghosh, in his *The Hungry Tide*, questions the silenced massacre of Morichjhapi and the so called word ‘nation’. In *The House of Blue Mangoes*, Davidar narrates the story that happened in South India during 1899 to 1945. He describes another face of Indian tradition, culture and the social conditions of that time such as the breast war, the conflict between the castes and the religious uncertainty. Both the books deal with different people of different period; simultaneously they re-narrate the so called ‘history’. They emphasise the plurality of history.

. The term ‘New Historicism’ was coined by the American critic Stephen Greenblatt in 1980. New Historicism is defined as the parallel reading of the literary and the non- literary texts, usually of the same historical period. Instead of a literary foreground and the historical background it gives equal weight to literary and non-literary texts. It refuses to privilege literary text. A new historical essay places the literary text within the ‘frame’ of a non-literary text.

According to New Historicism, the critic himself trapped in his own historicity. When a critic analyses an incident in a text, unconsciously he adds his own views that emphasise the plurality of history.

David Davidar is an Indian novelist and publisher belonged to Nagercoil, the southern-most part of Tamil Nadu. He is the author of three published novels, *The House of Blue Mangoes* (2002), *The Solitude of Emperor* (2007) and *Ithaca* (2011). He has also written numerous articles and book reviews for newspapers and magazines in India the U.K and the U.S. Amitav Ghosh is also an Indian novelist. He is famous for his novels that deal with border issues. Some of his works are, *The Hungry Tide*, *The Calcutta Chromosome*, *The Sea of Poppeys*, and *The Glass Palace*.

The novel *The House of Blue Mangoes* takes readers on a delectable journey across three generations of a fictional family, the Dorais of south India. The journey begins in 1899 and ends at the end of World War II. The novel offers a sweeping and generous view of India's fractured history. The story starts from Salomon Dorai, thalaivar of the village Chevathar. He dies in a quarrel with his counterpart Muthu Vedhar. His elder son Aaron is a famous well jumper not only in Chevathar but also in the surrounding villages. He dies pathetically in the jail for helping Vaanchinathan. On the other hand Salomon's younger son Daniel studies medicine and become a famous Doctor in all over south Tamilnadu. The third generation starts with the birth of Kannan, Daniel's son. He marries an Anglo- Indian girl Helen. After the marriage he quarrels with her and returns to Chevathar. The story ends with Kannan's re-entry in Chavathar.

In *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh narrates the story that happens in three different periods, late 1940s, 1970s and climax set in 2002. Locale of the novel is Sunderbans. As it is a parallel narration he places his story in past and present. The novel revolves around the Morichjhapi massacre of 1979. Here he questions the terms 'border' and 'nation', and the difference between first world and the third world. Ghosh reveals the Morichjhapi massacre through the diary of Nirmal. The novel starts with Nirmal's moving to tide country after getting severe injuries in jail. It ends with the death news of Fokir, the local fisherman, and Piya naming after him her research centre. This novel is a voice of the voiceless people.

In the *House of Blue Mangoes*, Davidar questions the freedom struggle and the freedom fighters. Aaron helps Vaanchinathan in killing collector Ashe. As a result of it, he was sent to jail. In jail the officials started to torture him. Here Aaron becomes the representative of most of the freedom fighters. While people like Aaron were being tortured in the jail, Nehru was writing

letters to his daughter. In common all they have the same name, freedom fighters. But it is the class that decides all these things. While he was attending a meeting in Tuticorin, he lost all his money and started to steal things from people. Before entering into the freedom fight, he spent his time in useless chatting. This shows the conditions of the freedom fighters. There was nobody to support them.

Usually the upper caste people have the dominating hand in the freedom fight. The irony here is that they were not ready to give enough liberty to the lower caste people while protesting for the 'swarajyam'. The below given letter is taken from Vaanchinathan after his death. It proves their upper hand.

The mlechas of England having captured our country, tread over the sanathana dharma of the Hindus and destroy them. Every Indian is trying to drive out the English and get swarajyam and restore sanathana dharma. Our Raman, Sivaji, Krishnan, Guru Govindan, Arjuna ruled our land protecting all dharmas and in this land they are making arrangements to crown George V, amlecha, and one who eats the flesh of cows. Three thousand Madrases have taken a vow to kill George V as soon as he lands in our country. In order to make others know our intention, I who am the least in the company, have done this deed this day. This is what everyone in Hindustan should consider it as his duty”.

There was no bridge between the upper and the lower caste people. Lower caste women were not allowed to cover their breasts. People, other than the upper caste were not allowed to enter into the temples. In 1859, the government of Travancore allowed the lower caste women to cover their breasts. The below given examples from *The House of Blue Mangoes* and other sources give a clear picture about the division among the people before independence.

I've been told that these high-caste fellows with their absurd tufts and caste marks even have the nerve to think of as Englishmen as polluting! ... Andavar and Paraiyan didn't drink from the same cup or eat of the same bread... The memory of the 1859 breast wars was burned into the minds of all those castes who were affected... Andavar and Nadar women who clothed themselves were abused in public, even beaten... (PP 19, 21, 30)

Here Davidar questions the unity of our people before Independence. It is because of the insolent Brahmins, many lower caste Indians were turned to Christianity. These incidents emphasise the plurality of history.

In *The Hungry Tide* Ghosh questions the silenced massacre of Morichjhapi and the so called terms 'nation' and 'border'. By what crisis, people draw the border is the main question of Ghosh in the novel. People killed in the Morichjhapi massacre have no borders. Indian government treated them as the refugees of Bangladesh and send them to Thandagarunya, a dry place in Madhyapradesh. The people were not ready to live there. So they started settling in a place called Morichjhapi in Sunderbans. But the government ordered them to clear the place as it is named as a tiger resource centre. When they were not ready to leave the place government showed its powerful vigorous face to the innocent people. As a result of it many people were killed, many women were raped and men were sent to different parts of India. Ghosh boldly reveals this truth through the diary of Nirmal, one of the major characters in the novel.

Till this date no justice was given to the people who were affected heavily by the Morichjhapi massacre. It was neither done by the terrorists nor by the other countries, but by the so called 'motherland'. This shows the difference between the first world and the third world. For the sake of tigers West Bengal government had spoiled the life of so many people.

Geographically, these two novels narrate the story of two different areas. There was no similarity in the culture either. Elaborately these two books are like east and west. But they have the same motive. Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* can be considered as the continuation of Davidar's *The House of Blue Mangoes*. According to the chronological order it is perfectly right. Davidar ends his novel after the end of the Second World War and Ghosh starts his story immediately after the independence. Both the novelists tries to find the difference between the first world and the third world; the world of rulers and the world of the common people; the world of the voiceless people and the world of the luxurious people.

These two novels question the basic needs that provided to the people. People need a place to live in the world the people call it 'shelter'. Nation is made by many shelters. The term 'nation' is only for the rights of people. When nation has a problem people start to fight for it. It is like 'all for one and one for all'. Both the novels dealt with this point people we need a nation. In this nation third world suffers by the mistakes of the first world; first world rules whereas third world obeys; first world tortures and the third world accepts the torture and at last first world is considered as a world of saints but the third world is considered as the world of sinners.

History is plural. It is written by the winners. It is very tough to define the history. It is neither full of facts nor full of thoughts. So everything should be analysed perfectly. Though this paper analyses two novels in a new historical context, it is also a copy of a copy.

#### Works Cited

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