



# THE NEED AND APPROACH OF BIOCENTRISM IN AMITAV GHOSH *THE HUNGRY TIDE*

**MEENAKSHI**

MA English (Final Year)

Department of Science and Liberal arts Mody University, Lakshmangarh

**Dr Shruti Soni**

Assistant Professor English Department, SLAS  
Mody University, Lakshmangarh.

## Abstract

Literature is a strong platform for connecting people to problems affecting people's way of life in order to improve their lives. The purpose of this research is to anticipate the environmental issues in literature. Ecocriticism is an interdisciplinary field that studies literature as well as the environment. The literary scholar examines the book not only for environmental concerns, but also for the presentation of ecology as a literary theme. The term Ecocriticism may have first appeared in William Rueckart's essay "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism." In his book *The Hungry Tide*, Amitav Ghosh, an ace story teller, covers on a large poster the concerns of environmental difficulties concerning the Sundarbans, drawing on various sources of facts. He combines the skill of nature writing with fiction, exposing the conflict between human and animal, both of which are an intrinsic part of Nature. Ghosh participates in the rhetoric of narrative, mixing fiction and reality, and using Nature and its environment as a pretext to investigate the politics of human life. The researcher explores the novel through the lens of biocentrism and how the human and non-human world, in order to survive, should live with harmony and interdependency. Biocentrism is a balance between Anthropocentrism and ecocentrism.

Literature is a medium and a course for displaying human nature and current societal challenges. Ecological issues are also a part of social issues because man is never separate from society, and so concerns caused by human actions are never separate from society. Literature contributes to the embodiment of the difference between the human and nonhuman worlds.

The purpose of this study is to highlight the key environmental challenges of the Sundarbans, its peoples, ecosystems, tigers, and dolphins, natural and manmade disasters that reflect the overall ecological systems of the archipelago rich in biodiversity and living forms unique in the world. Ghosh has seamlessly reintegrated the interaction between many disciplines such as Literature and Environmental Studies in order to examine the possibilities of ethical evaluation of our duty towards our environment, of which we are also an intrinsic part. In the process, the author has made substantial efforts to attract attention to the importance of understanding and conserving life on the island with the biocentric approach.

**Key words:** Biocentrism, Ecocriticism, Human and Non-human relationship, Anthropocentrism, Ecocentrism, Conservation, Survival

## Introduction

### 1.1. Research Statement

Ecological issues have been vividly and widely represented in literary works in the recent past. Hence, the present study targets the study of the need of biocentrism in the context of Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2004).

### 1.2. Purpose of Research

In modern literature, the notion of ecology and various parts of it have been the topic of discussion and research. After carefully reviewing journals, papers, books, seminar and conference reports, fictions, and editorials, it can be concluded that there are some key components of ecology that should be highlighted. With the lens of modern literary theory Ecocriticism, one can detect ecological concerns in Amitav Ghosh's creative works. This research endeavour attempts to investigate the representation of numerous ecological concerns in *The Hungry Tide* using insight and meaningful research.

### 1.3. Hypothesis

The present research study assumes that Amitav Ghosh is a postmodern writer; however, he has also discussed the environmental issues with the help of the characters and historical events. These issues have remained untouched by the literary scholars and need to be researched. The present work of Amitav Ghosh *The Hungry Tide* embraces a lot of ecological approaches. The researcher tries to establish the need of the biocentric approach at the present time, with the help of novel incidents. Hence, it is hypothesised that Amitav Ghosh undoubtedly takes nature as an educational tool in his works and identifies the engagement of Human and Nonhuman world with the bio-centric approach.

### 1.4. Scope

The findings of this study assist academicians and researchers in better understanding and determining Ecocriticism and its importance in today's world, which inevitably leads to a subject for discussion and research.

### 1.5. Aim and Objectives

The aim of the study is to represent the need of the biocentric approach for the Mother Earth at the present time. The study takes out the bio-centric approach in the novel *The Hungry Tide*.

The objectives are:

1. To trace the prominent bio-centric approach in *The Hungry Tide*.
2. To balance out Anthropocentric and Ecocentric approach with the help of bio-centric approach.
3. To transform readers' attitudes regarding the physical environment and encourage them to engage in more environmentally conscious behaviour.

### 1.6. Review of Literature

Ecocriticism is a new term used in literature to describe the study of the unexplainable relationship between nature and humans. Eco-critical theory emphasises the importance of the physical world as depicted in literature, not merely humans. The theory of Ecocriticism demonstrates an increasing understanding of environmental challenges in the twenty-first century. Environmental deterioration has become a serious global worry for humanity at this time.

Many researchers have studied Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* with the view of environmental issues, ecocritical perspectives, Anthropocentrism, ManAnimal conflict, and increment in global crisis.

## 1.7. Methodology and Expected Outcome

In depth literary sources are made for the research work. A thematic study of *The Hungry Tide* is made.

The research presents an ecocritical analysis of the work and displays how the issues of research are rooted in the literary works taken for study.

## 1.8. Chapterisation

The dissertation is divided into four chapters.

### Chapter I: Introduction

Chapter I deal with the introduction of the entire research work. It includes the aims and objectives of this research work, its hypothesis, its purpose, scope, review literature, proposed methodology, the Chapterisation of dissertation, and its proposed outcome.

### Chapter II: Ecocriticism: A Theoretical Framework

Chapter II deals with the origin, history and development of the term 'Ecocriticism'. The chapter also covers the relationship between literature and Ecocriticism, natural world and silence, and nature and culture. The chapter also articulates the researcher's ecocritical concerns by Cheryl Glotfelty, ASLE, and Lawrence Buell.

### Chapter III: Bio-centric Approach in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry tide*: An Ecocritical Analysis

Chapter III deals with Amitav Ghosh as an Indian writer, whose texts can be explored for environmental problems as well as how ecology is treated in literary works. This chapter also deals with the biocentric reading of Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* and how this novel depicts the relationship between Human and Non-human world. There is discussion of other approaches like Anthropocentric and Ecocentric. This chapter also sketches the portrayal of ecological concerns and biocentrism through the characters and incidents.

### Chapter IV: Conclusion

The chapter deals with the major findings of this research work.

## 1.9. Conclusion

Thus, the chapter concludes its purpose, hypothesis, scope, aims, objectives, Chapterisation and organisation of dissertation.

## Chapter – 2

### Ecocriticism: A Theoretical Framework

#### 2.1 Introduction

Ecocriticism is one of the most well-known and debated terms in English literature of the twentieth century. The subject of Ecocriticism is the interconnection between the human world and non-human world. The majority of ecocritical works are motivated by a desire to communicate with nature. Human beings have exceeded its ecological limitations, a phase of destroying the essential life support system of the earth as a result of human behaviour. This consciousness triggers an urge to support the world. The modern world today faces a global crisis not because of the workings of the environment but because of how it functions in relation to our ethical structural system. The modern field of literary theory, Ecocriticism, has come about through this concern and its reflection on literature.

#### 2.2 Ecocriticism: Theoretical Formulation

It was a dormant continuation of Thoreau's Environmental frameworks from the 1860s. The term 'ecology' was first used in 1869 and defined as "Ecology is the scientific study of the interactions between living organisms, along with humans, and their physical surroundings" by German zoologist Ernst Heinrich Philipp August Haeckel. Afterward, the word ecology was introduced into literature to raise consciousness about the social dilemma of environmental destruction and to address it in a literary context, as literature is a representation of life. Environmental writing, nature writing, green studies, environmental ethics, and green studies are some of the other terms for ecological writing. The persistent deterioration of the environment, as well as an ego-centred rather than eco-centred lifestyle, was the focus of the Ecological Writing. In his book *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, M.H. Abraham defines

Anthropocentric as "it is claimed that the reigning religions and philosophies of Western Civilisation are deeply anthropocentric; that is, they are oriented to the interest of human beings, who are viewed as opposed to and superior to nature, and as free to exploit natural resource and animal species for their own purposes" (97). Anthropocentric thinking is based on and justified by Biblical terms; "God gave man dominion over the fishes in the sea, the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals and all the creatures that move

along the ground". Instead of the Industrial Revolution, religious scriptures and theories can be used to explain the ecological crisis. Colonization, independence struggles, World Wars, and technological and scientific advances in the twentieth century are all factors that have contributed to global deterioration.

Literature depicts the lives and social environments of people in the 18th to 20th centuries, emphasising on environmental conditions and ecological crises. *Wasteland* by T.S. Eliot and *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Becket are two works of literature that reflect the era's environmental deterioration. Various mythical writings and Sutras among many Hinduism Dharmashastras the Manusmriti (1776), which is an ancient legal text and constitution which states that "If one cuts a fruit giving tree he will have to recite Gayatri Mantra 100 times". These religious texts show how often Hindu religious texts warn about global problems and have ecological impacts in their writings and scriptures and are believed to be the earliest impact on ecologically based literature, but mankind never thought about it and held the approach.

Nature writing can be traced back to the origins of Ecocriticism and Ecological or Environmental Writings. Nature and literature are inextricably linked and to enhance poetry writers have used natural elements. Nature writings benefited greatly from the Romantic revolutions. The Romantic poets William Wordsworth and S.T.

Coleridge are well-known nature writers. However, there is a misconception about nature writing, which is described as the use of natural elements in poetry. Nature literature, on the other hand, is a literary work that focuses on environmental themes, such as natural beauty or environmental concerns. In his epic poem 'Paradise Lost', John Milton used natural elements to depict God's conception, such as heaven and earth. In the play 'As You like It', William Shakespeare used natural elements to characterise the Garden of Arden. These works cannot be explained in the context of nature writing because the central theme and writer's purpose is not to focus on Nature. The poem 'Daffodils' by Wordsworth is a good example of nature writing because the poet's intention is evident as he praised Nature and said, "God is there in nature". Nature writing is a literary genre that has been studied and praised in English literature. During the Romantic era, the genre "nature writing" was treated and formed. Eventually, the style and development shifted from adorning nature's beauty to discussing the era's ecological destruction. The field of nature writing underwent significant change and development in the mid - twentieth century, and it introduced new concepts and methodologies to literature. As a consequence of the constant pursuit of new techniques, enhanced forms of Nature writing such



as Environmental writing have emerged. Before the creation of Ecological Literature, environmental writings persisted.

The word ecology comes from the Greek language, where eco means "house" and logy means "research," so ecology refers to the study of one's own home. The term 'ecology' was initially applied in the context of a scientific investigation of nature. After that literature adopted the concept and used it to describe works that were concerned with the ecosystem. Joseph Meeker introduced the name Literary Ecology, but William Rueckert coined the term Ecocriticism in his essay "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism (1978)" by stating that Ecocriticism is "application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature". It was an evolutionary divergence that began in the 1890s with the writers of American literature, such as Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson. American literature explored the subject of Environmentalism, and eventually, a unique circumstance prompted the development of innovative and important terms such as Ecological Writings and Ecocriticism. Simultaneously, Ecological Writing appears in a variety of languages, including British literature. Various countries refer to it by alternative titles and treat it in completely different ways. Green Studies is one of several names for ecological writing, but it was not created or structured by critics. It is regarded as the British version of ecological writing and appears to be a continuation of Romantic era's nature writing. Green studies and Environmental Writings have no history, special occasion, or particular style or format.

Ecocriticism seeks to expand literary studies by connecting literary criticism and theory with wider and deeper environmental concerns. Ecocriticism is an appeal to literature to actively engage with the problems of the current environmental crisis. Ecocriticism, particularly, is concerned with the ecosystem which includes Ecocriticism, particularly, is concerned with the ecosystem which includes all living things (plants, animals, human beings and organisms) in a given area communicate with one another and with their nonliving environments (weather, earth, sun, soil, climate, atmosphere). Nevertheless, evaluating or understanding literary representations of nature/human relationships solely on the basis of symbolical inscriptions of the Earth as an interactive mechanism in literary texts is insufficient. Ecocriticism needs a more inclusive and interdisciplinary approach from a literary perspective. In literary theory, any investigation into environmental issues necessarily requires theoretical and critical specificity. To begin, reforming current critical theory concepts and approaches necessitates a significant expansion of theoretical frameworks. Secondly, critical lenses must be expanded in their study if critical emphasis becomes particular to specific

types of literature, such as nature poetry or fiction. Finally, if other types of writing are to be included in the ecocritical analysis, a substantial amount of effort must be put into their work regarding how they build or properly address ecological concerns. Ecocritical theory involves an intricate ecoliterary structure to investigate all intersections of literary and physical environments, since any association between these two phenomena necessitates institutional properties. The problem is deciding on an appropriate critical viewpoint that combines natural and literary phenomena. As a result, Ecocriticism is currently in the process of inventing and shaping itself, taking largely from other disciplines as well as natural sciences. In order to formulate ecologically informed critical principles in literary criticism and theory, ecological investigations and analyses of the relationship between nature and culture must contribute greatly to an ecologically focused critical approach. As an outcome, Ecocriticism aims to include a rare blend of literary and natural science discourses. This current eco-theory reacts to the global ecological crisis and tackles critical environmental concerns, exploring principles with profound ecological implications in literary texts. Thus, the term "Ecocriticism" refers to a literary approach that is earth-centred, as well as an ecological approach to literary criticism. The key focus of Ecocriticism is on how literature communicates with and participates in the entire ecosphere.

William Rueckert describes Ecocriticism as "the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature, as ecology (as a science, a discipline, and the foundation for human vision) has the greatest relevance to the present and future of the earth" in his essay "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism" (1996:107). Potential associations between literature and nature are discussed in view of ecological principles in this context. Ecocriticism, on the other hand, seeks to find a common ground between humans and nonhumans in order to demonstrate how they can coexist in different ways, as ecological problems have become an inextricable part of our lives. "As environmental problems compound work as usual seems unconscionably frivolous." Cheryll Glotfelty writes on behalf of academics worldwide, "If we are not part of the solution, we are part of the problem" (1996: xxi). The aim of Ecocriticism, then, is to build a conceptual premise for the analysis of literary and environmental interrelationships. Since literature explicitly answers questions about human constructions such as culture, expression, meaning, vision and imagery, literature can be perceived as an aesthetically and culturally constructed part of the world that can be related to the environmental awareness that humankind needs to achieve. Ecocritics are primarily perturbed with how literature conveys certain values that contribute to ecological thinking within this framework.



The primary focus of Ecocriticism should not be on irrelevant representational frameworks, but with how nature is textualized in literary texts to produce an ecoliterary discourse that would aid in the production of an intertextual as well as an interactive approach between literary language and the language of nature. However, as Christopher Manes points out in his article "Nature and Silence," "to regard nature as alive and articulate has consequences in the realm of social practices" (1996:15). Manes contends that understanding of nature is often influenced by historical and social power formations. In this regard, what William Rueckert refers to as "literary ecology" investigates how nature is marginalised, silenced, or forced, in Manes' terms, "into a hazy background against which the logical human subject struts upon" (1996:16). Eco-literary debate, on the other hand, can explore how literary texts express nature's silence and what implications this has. Thus, Ecocriticism in literature should investigate what we can term a discursively mediated nonhuman universe, and examine how it is marginalised, suppressed, or integrated into human language. The linguistic formations of the natural world in either romantic, idealised form, or as an aggressive natural setting, particularly in the form of poems and fictions, generally lead to a binary way of thinking which justifies the present catastrophic nature-abuse. In opposition to this logo-centric approach, Ecocriticism begins the project of reconceptualising nature, not as an object for observation or interpretation, but as a complete self active agency.

A view of nature as a self-articulating topic challenges the nature/culture dualism that pervades our thought in favour of a human consciousness that values both nature and culture in all of their heterogeneity. The presumption that nature communicates for itself, on the other hand, poses a discursive issue in literary texts, since it is once again the human subject speaking for nature in a paradoxical effort to resolve the human/nonhuman difference within the discussion itself. According to Val Plumwood, "the assumption that we as humans can therefore speak as nonhuman nature appears to play on inclusive and exclusive senses of 'nature,' as well as the assumption that we can somehow completely eliminate the nature/culture divide, rather than merely overcome its dualistic construction." Given such troublesome paradoxes, Ecocritics accept the need to reconstruct nature as a topic that needs a nondualistic comprehension and analyzation from a human perspective, rather than as the 'Other' excluded from the sphere of discussion. In linguistic terms, a conversation with nature is not feasible, but building a new form of interpretation and understanding that permeates, if not removes, the nature/culture divide is. In the reading and writing of literature, an ecocritical attempt to deconstruct the privileged human subjectivity in its dialogue with the language of nature could result in a sustainable ecological vision. Despite the fact that the distinction between nature and culture is

controversial, it is a category that "humans have developed to help us understand and order the world." As a result, Ecocriticism encourages us to reconsider our widely held values and assumptions, as well as our versions of nature, in order to achieve a "consciousness of the crucial unity of all life."

### 2.3. Ecocriticism in Literature

Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm coined the term "Ecocriticism" in the recently published anthology entitled "The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology (1996)". In this, Glotfelty defined Ecocriticism as "...the study of the relationship between literature and physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of mode of production and economic class to its reading texts, Ecocriticism takes an earth centred approach to literary studies." Literature is a strong platform for connecting people to problems affecting people's way of life in order to improve their lives. So many authors, writers and poets have contributed in order to expose contemporary environmental and social issues.

#### 2.3.1. The Ministry of Utmost Happiness by Arundhati Roy (2017)

In both fictional and non-fiction works, Arundhati Roy, the well-received postcolonial writer of Indian English Literature, amplifies her ecological interests. The recent book, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, explores issues such as river degradation due to dam construction and industrial waste sewage systems, the 'otherness' of animals, birds, fishes, and trees and their simple oppression, the extinction of the sparrow and vulture from biodiversity due to excessive scientific manifestations, the plight of zoo animals and the enslavement of zoo animals. The novel begins with a preface, in which the author expresses his concerns for the animal world. Humans' insatiable hunger has resulted in the extinction of the 'white-baked vulture', and the death of sparrows as a result of environmental changes, - "sparrow that have gone missing, and the old white-baked vultures, custodians of the dead for more than a half century, which were wiped out," The ecocritical philosophy of Wordsworth was that nature never betrayed those who loved her, and this is very much valid in the case of Roy's protagonist, Anjum. After being rejected and humiliated by the people, she sought shelter in Graveyard. Through her writings, Arundhati Roy's sole concern is to raise public consciousness about environmental degradation and its destructive effects on human life and other animals.

### 2.3.2. The Road by Cormac McCarthy (2007)

The Road by Cormac McCarthy depicts America as a wasteland in a fantastic future vision. It foreshadows the United States' potential nightmare. The world has been ravaged and human civilization has been devastated by an unknown disaster. McCarthy argues that humans are still conscious of the impact of nature on their lives through the air they breathe, the water they drink, and the food they consume. Because of the clear presence of nature and environment in his work, as well as the significant impact of natural ecosystems on the characters' thoughts and behaviour, Ecocriticism is an acceptable critical approach to The Road. The horrific atmosphere dominates the events in the book, from the very beginning to the very end. McCarthy concentrates on the downsides of nature's hostility toward humans. Instead of talking about the American dream, he prefers to speak about the American nightmare. He seems to be warning Americans not to rely on the so-called American Dream, which can quickly transform into an American nightmare.

### 2.3.3. The Colour Purple by Alice Walker (1982)

The Colour Purple is an epistolary novel by Alice Walker, released in 1982. Through frameworks that intertwine Ecocriticism and feminist critique, Alice Walker's novel "The Colour Purple" to the seminal concepts of ecological conscience and environmental conservation. The approach incorporates discussions of "The Colour Purple" representations of women and nature, as well as the connection between women's oppression and nature's exploitation by male domination, enslaving women and nature in the commercial market. Celie, a black woman in the South, is the protagonist of the novel. Celie reveals her life—her positions as daughter, wife, sister, and mother—in letters to God. Women use letters to not only document but also reflect on their lives, which is a source of personal development. Walker reflects on the issue of double exploitation of black women in the American experience in The Colour Purple, as she does in her other writings.

### 2.3.4. Wide Sargasso Sea by Jean Rhys (1966)

Wide Sargasso Sea (1966) is a work of literature that is deeply concerned with nature and natural forces, as well as the inner nature of humans. One of its main goals may be to achieve harmony between nature and the human environment. This work is well aware that human desires and actions are destroying nature, so nature is praised and revered in this film. In the book, nature is portrayed as a participant. Those who love and

protect nature are portrayed as having higher moral and ethical values in the book, whereas those who oppose it are portrayed as being evil.

## 2.4. Natural World and Silence

"The uncounted voices of nature... are dumb," a Tuscarora Indian once said, in contrast to his people's experience of the world. The differentiation made in anthropological studies of animistic cultures highlights an aspect of our society's connections with the non-human world, which recently became an express theme in the discourse on the environment. It is presented in our culture that nature is dumb and silent in the context that the privilege of becoming a speaking subject is insecurity defended as it is only right of human. For animist cultures, in comparison, those who regard the global ecosystem as inspired are seen to be articulate, at times intuitive subjects, capable of communicating with people for good or ill, not just people, but also animals, plants and even inert bodies such as stones or rivers. Besides the language of humans, there is the language of all the living things and non-living things (birds, wolves, waterfall, wind, trees, and earthworms), a world of independent speakers whose intentions one ignores at one's own peril (hunters and poachers). Social power is influenced by a system of privileged speakers, such as priests and rulers, writers, intellectuals, and celebrities throughout history as convincingly stated by Michel Foucault and the words of these speakers are taken seriously. As opposed to the discussion of "unintelligible" and frequently marginalised voices of women, minorities, insane, children as well as nature. As a result, we can confidently agree with Hans Peter Duerr when he says, "people do not exploit a nature that speaks to them." Unfortunately, our society has gone a long way to prove that this statement is valid.

As a result of these events we need a viable environmental ethics in confrontation with the silence of Nature in our contemporary thinking system, because the ecological crisis that now demands the quest for environmental counter-ethics takes form and flourishes within this massive, mysterious silence surrounding our wordiness human subjectivity. Realising the need, some deep ecological strains have underlined the link between the listening of the nonhuman world and trying to reverse modern society's environmentally damaging practices. Without infusing it with human dominance a modern eco-literal discourse will consider the voice of nature. The role of human beings as superior speaking subjects will then be challenged by a dialectic contact with Mother Nature's language. To accomplish this, it is essential that Ecocriticism draw

from the critical theories that exist to codify the literary ecology, to define the literary discourse that has been named as eco-literary discourse and to formulate as such the conceptual foundation of ecological critique.

## 2.5. Nature and Culture

The cultural background determines how nature interacts with humans as well as others. Nature is worshipped as God in some cultures, seen as an exterior medium of inspiration in others, and used as a source of livelihood in others. It is a fact that people's attitude towards nature is distinctive and many of the disparities are influenced by culture. It is shown by Cheryll Glotfelty how nature and culture are related. Ecocriticism, in her opinion, is:

“Despite the broad scope of inquiry and desperate levels of sophistication, ecological criticism shares the fundamental premises that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it. Ecocriticism takes at its subject the interconnections between nature and constantly influencing and constructing each other is essential to an informed Ecocriticism. As a critical stance, it has one foot in literature and the other on land. As a theoretical discourse, it negotiates between the human and the non human.” (Glotfelty, 1996, xix) Ecocriticism is a philosophy that considers humans to be inherently part of nature, paying attention to depictions of human cultures in all of their varied interactions with nature, rather than concentrating solely on texts that depict humans witnessing or encountering the natural world in the wilderness or pastoral settings.

## 2.6. Conclusion

In the field of literary and cultural studies, Ecocriticism is a recent movement. This is an environmentally oriented literary study that fosters ecological literacy in readers, who become conscious about the conditions of the ecosystem as a result of the experience, and thus take better care of Mother Earth. It addresses the most fundamental concerns of environmental crisis, economic hardship, and social inequity. It has encouraged, supported and gave voice to the ignorant, marginalised, and silent Nature. In their various genres of literature, several authors have expressed their concern. They agree that the ecosystem's integrity and stability must be preserved as it is always preferable to leave the planet in a better state for future generations.

## Chapter – 3

### The Need and Approach of Biocentrism in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*

“One of the first Conditions of Happiness is that

The Link between men

And nature shall not be broken.”

- Leo Tolstoy

#### 3.1 Introduction

The rapid degradation of the environment is a serious problem for all fields of knowledge, and anthropocentrism, or man-centeredness, is seen to be one of the key culprits. Ecocriticism is a literary method that focuses on environmental issues and man's dominion over nonhuman living and non-living items. Both of the novels chosen for this study depict the repercussions of environmental deterioration caused by man's anthropocentric attitude. In his work *The Hungry Tide*, Amitav Ghosh explores the topics of animal conservation and natural flora and fauna preservation while taking human lives into account.

#### 3.2. About the Author

Amitav Ghosh, an Indian writer whose ambitious writings use intricate narrative techniques to examine the nature of the identity of the individuals and the people of India and South-East Asia. Ghosh as a child lived in India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Iran, and his father was a diplomat. A BA (1976) and an MA (1978) from Delhi University he also worked as journalist and publisher at approximately the same period. He then took a PhD in Social Anthropology in 1982 at the University of Oxford. Ghosh continued to lecture at the University of Delhi, the American University in Cairo, New York City's University of Columbia and New York City's Queens College. After a stay in 2004 at Harvard University, Ghosh went full time writing and split his time between America and India. He has contributed in the field of ecocritical studies by writing about the environmental issues and human ill treatment of Mother Nature. His texts can be explored not only for environmental problems, but also for how ecology is treated in literary works as a subject of nature.



He wrote in 1986 his first novel, the Circle of Reason, which was published in India and in Africa and was a 1990 Prize winner for 'Médicis Étranger'. Further works are The Shadow Lines (1988); the Glass Palace (2000) and *The Hungry Tide* (2004), a tale set in Calcutta and the Bay of Bengal. The Calcutta Chromosome is about the hunt for a genetic line, which promises immortality and won the 1997 Arthur Clarke Award for best science fiction. He also published the non-fiction climatic change book, The Great Derangement (2016).

### 3.3. *The Hungry Tide*: Overview

The novel *The Hungry Tide* takes place in the Sundarbans, an enormous labyrinth of small islands off India's easternmost coast, located in the Bay of Bengal.

Life is quite precarious for settlers here. Tiger attacks are a common occurrence. Eviction and unrest are always a possibility. Tidal floods can occur without warning at any time, wreaking havoc on the land. The lives of three people from various cultures clash in this place of spiteful beauty.

Piyali Roy, the protagonist, is a young marine biologist of Bengali-Indian ancestry who is staunchly American. She grew up in Seattle and now attends the Scripps Institute of Oceanography in La Jolla, California. She journeys to the Sundarbans in pursuit of *Orcaella brevirostris*, a rare and endangered river dolphin. On her trip to the Sundarbans, she encounters Kanai, a translator and businessman, on the Kolkata Suburban Railway travelling towards Port Canning. She hires a boat to search for dolphins after landing in the Sundarbans, but her trip is cut short when she is flung from the boat into crocodile-infested waters. Fokir, a young uneducated fisherman, comes to their rescue. Despite the fact that they don't speak the same language, Piya and Fokir feel compelled to be together because they have an innate sense of the sea's ways. Piya enlists the support of Fokir for her study, and she finds a translator in Kanai Dutt, a Delhi businessman whose idealistic aunt and uncle are long-time Sundarbans residents.

Some parts of the story are set against the backdrop of the Morichjhanpi massacre of 1978-79, when the West Bengal government violently expelled thousands of Bengali refugees who had landed on the island. The work delves into subjects like humanism and environmentalism, particularly when they collide.

### 3.4 Anthropocentrism to Biocentrism

**Anthropocentrism:** Humans are the most important entity in the cosmos, according to anthropocentrism. Anthropocentrism is a way of looking at the world that analyzes or considers it through the lens of human ideals and experiences. Human supremacy or human exceptionalism is terms that have been used interchangeably with human centrist to describe the concept. Many current human civilisations and conscious activities are thought to be deeply rooted in Anthropocentrism. It is a key notion in environmental ethics and philosophy, where it is frequently regarded as the source of issues caused by human activities in the environment.

**Ecocentrism:** The ecosphere, which includes all of Earth's ecosystems, atmosphere, water, and land, is viewed by Ecocentrism as the matrix that birthed (sic) all life and as life's sole source of nourishment. It's a way of looking at the world that sees ecosystems and the biological and physical parts that make them up, as well as the ecological processes that connect them spatially and temporally, as having intrinsic value. It's a term used in ecological political philosophy to describe a value system that is oriented on nature rather than humans.

**Biocentrism:** Biocentrism is an ethical frame of view that extends inherent value to all living things, both in a political and ecological sense, as well as literally. It's knowledge of how the world functions, especially in relation to its biosphere or biodiversity. It opposes anthropocentrism, which places a premium on human worth.

Ecocentrism, on the other hand, recognises the intrinsic value of all of nature.

Biocentric ethics necessitates a reconsideration of the human-nature interaction. It asserts that nature does not exist just to be exploited or consumed by people, but that humans are only one species among many, and that, as members of an ecosystem, any activities that negatively impact the living systems of which we are a part have a harmful effect on us as well, whether or not we maintain a biocentric worldview.

### 3.5. The Hungry Tide: The need and approach of biocentrism

#### 3.5.1. Relation of Piya with the non-human world- Biocentric Approach

In Ghosh's text, Piya, a cetologist of Indian ancestry, is on her field study, on the trail of the Irrawaddy dolphin, with the assistance of the native Fokir, the indigenous guide. Piya observes a group of seven Orcaella and explains one of the smallest in the group's behavioural habits,

“coming to the surface in a ‘corkscrew’ pattern with its little head protruding out of the water-an indication that it still had to learn to breathe smoothly”(114)

If no actions are done to maintain and restore their habitats, species are in risk of becoming extinct. The Orcaella is a highly endangered mammalian species, and Piya believes that deciphering the Orcaella's motions as it adapts to tidal ecology may provide clues to the species' protection. She also gets to see how these dolphins work together with people to throw net fish. In this way, the Irrawaddy dolphins help fishermen get more fish, confirming their own profitable value to the human business. She had seen how it was done previously in the Mekong River.

“They had herded a school of fish into shallow water and the hundred creatures had buried themselves in the mud, in a futile effort to evade their pursuers”(167).

The net forces a large number of fish to the river's bottom, allowing the dolphins to eat as the fishermen collect their catch. Piya is enthralled by the following thought:

“Did there exists anymore remarkable instance of symbiosis between human beings and a population of wild animals?”(168)

Piya has been sympathetic about endangered species of dolphins in order to protect them. She feels so delighted around nature and the sight of the dolphins makes her happiest. Her relation with nature is pure and she believes that the survival of the human and non-human world is possible if they live in harmony as they are interdependent on each other.

#### 3.5.2. Relation of Fokir with the non-human world- Biocentric Approach

Piya encounters Fokir, a poor fisherman, while still in the custody of the forest guard and Mejda. After Piya falls into the water, Fokir saves her, and Piya feels safe with him. Fokir manages to communicate through

his movements despite the fact that he does not speak English and Piya does not speak Bengali. Their connection was based on their mutual love for nature and because of this love they didn't need any language to understand each other.

Fokir tells Piya and Kanai how he learned everything there is to know about dolphins and where they travel. His mother Kusum had told him stories as a child about the dolphins in Garjontola, about how they served as Bon Bibi's messengers, bringing news of the rivers and floods. They were the only close friends he had. In reality, because of their sensitivity to air pressure, the Gangetic dolphins (*Platanistaganetica*) that Piya sees later on aid her to understand a storm forming with their unusual behaviour. Later, she was able to know about a coming storm.

As ecologist Aldo Leopold points out, there is competition and collaboration between man and animal, but it is well balanced. Each has an important function to play in the bionetwork's greater picture.

### 3.5.3. Humans pervading Non-human territory: An Imbalance in biocentrism

When there is no clear line of division between human habitation and tiger territory, man-animal conflict will result in deaths on both sides. There were no people or embankments on the islands at first, only tigers, crocodiles, sharks, and leopards. Since the 1920s, settlers have been flocking in from all around India and Bangladesh to establish them in the tide country.

"They learnt that after decades of settlement, the land had still not been wholly leached of its salt. The soil bore a poor crop and could not be farmed all year round. . . Hunger drove them to hunting and fishing, and the results were often disastrous . . . thousands risked death in order to collect meager quantities of honey, wax, firewood, and the sour fruit of the kewra tree. No day seemed to pass without news of someone being killed by a tiger, a snake or a crocodile" (*The Hungry Tide*79).

When Piya and her companions, Fokir and Kanai, are on their adventure, they come across an island where a tiger has been imprisoned and is being burned alive by the locals. Piya is horrified by the tiger's slaughter and tries to express her displeasure, but Fokir violently removes her from view. This occurrence represents the centre of darkness for Piya, and both Kanai and Piya refer to it as "the horror," (324) a word that conjures up images of incomprehensible and awful behaviour. A Royal Bengal Tiger is a species that should

be protected, especially from an environmental standpoint. The unfortunate thing of all this is that Kanai, the cosmopolitan in the world, realises that the horror rests not in the villagers' act of burning the tiger, but in fact resides with people and the policies that believe that humans are less important than animals and remain indifferent to the sufferings of subalterns:

We all know it, but we choose not to see it. Isn't that a horror to---that we can feel the suffering of an animal, but not of human beings?'... 'Because it was people like you,' said Kanai, 'who made a push to protect the wildlife here, without regard for human costs, basically in order to curry favour with their Western patrons. It's not hard to ignore the people who are dying---after all they are the poorest of the poor.... (325)

Piya, on the other hand, refuses to accept Kanai's accusations against her tribe, stating that "there's a big difference between preserving a species in captivity and keeping it in its habitat." (325), through her logic, she seeks to confirm that the future of humanity resides in preserving biodiversity. The year 2012 was a disastrous year for tigers, with roughly 88 of them killed after wandering into human-dominated environments.

From the bio-centric point of view, the above mentioned incident shows that humans, like all other species, are members of a living society of equal status. Every creature is a "teleological centre of life," which means each one has their own reason for existing that is intrinsically "good" or "important." Human world is not necessarily superior to the non-human world. Every species is a component of an interdependent system. Many plant and animal species have been extinct as a result of man's deliberate or unintentional manipulations, while an equal number of species have been added to the endangered species list. Extinction is a natural occurrence, but it is being expedited rapidly due to human activity. According to the Deep Ecology principles, man is rarely satisfied with the fulfilling of his basic requirements.

#### **3.5.4. Human and Non-human world driven by 'Hunger' - Need of**

##### **Biocentrism**

The word "hunger" in the title of the book has multiple meanings. On an external or primary level, it represents people's hunger as well as nature's hunger in the shape of tigers and storms. The title of the novel alludes to the emotional tidal wave that engulfs practically all of the novel's characters. Almost all of the novel's primary characters are consumed by their desire to form a relationship with one another.

It is because of the government's hunger for money from international funding agencies to protect the endangered Bengal tigers that makes poor islanders scapegoats. Bengal tigers, the dreaded predators, are fiercely protected by a variety of international environmental organisations. However, the state is endangering human lives in the name of tiger conservation. Ghosh contends that human lives are somewhat less valuable than tigers'. The tidal country tigers have evolved an unusual propensity for man-eating. There are numerous ideas as to why they developed a craving for human flesh. The chief reasons for tiger attacks are reported to be human encroachment, which resulted in habitat loss, and tigers' misunderstanding regarding territory due to the tide washing away tigers' scent markers.

If the tiger's hunger drives it to enter human territory, it is the human's hunger that drives him to seek food in the animal's territory. Nature's hunger, like that of animals, is referenced several times in the text. The novel's depiction of nature is in stark contrast to Wordsworth's appreciation of it. Nature can be as destructive and wicked as a vicious beast eager for human lives. The Sundarbans' residents are frequently exposed to life-threatening risks offered by nature in the form of storms and cyclones. Ghosh's portrayal of nature is free of bogus sentimentalism. The title of the novel, 'Hungry tide,' speaks for all the natural disasters.

### 3.5.5. Myth, Fiction and Facts - Approach biocentrism

The story of Bonbibi in the text reflects the necessity to appreciate the environment despite its inconsistency and scary nature. The story also serves an ethical and pedagogical function by emphasizing people's restricted behaviour in their interactions with others as well as with their surroundings. It tries to govern their actions and attitudes, instilling ecological and social values in their daily interactions with nature and other creatures, thus preserving their very existence in the face of the unknown. After all, humans are also environmental organs that require their own area. The bonbibi's messenger, the Garjontola dolphins, brings news of floods and tides which shows how Mother Nature takes care of people who worship or conserve her.

Sahara signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Bangladesh government in 2012 to promote commerce there, and one of its goals is to boost tourism in the Sundarbans. The area needs protection even more from such human encroachment, as illustrated by an event in the novel in which Piya and Fokir are startled to discover the corpse of the calf that she had been pleased to see at the first instance of spotting the dolphin along with its mother on one of their forays into the Garjontola. She discovers that the propeller of one of the police's or even forest officials' fast-moving motorboats struck the calf and killed it.



In fact, Ghosh wrote an essay titled 'Folly in the Sundarbans' in 2004 in which he expressed his concern about the Sahara India Parivar's grand plan of opening up the unknown regions of the Sundarbans to human onslaught in the name of ecotourism, which could have resulted in anthropogenic violation of the regency's unspoilt islands. Ghosh's book *The Hungry Tide*, which enlightened even nonenvironmentalists, and the media worked together to save the region from the natural and man-made disasters.

Nature appears to be adding to the problem of tiger-human conflict, as reported by the Hindu in its January 11, 2013 issue, which discusses the Sundarbans' diminishing mangrove forests, which pose a significant threat to the critically endangered species. Global warming, cyclones, tidal surges, and human development together cause over 200 meters of coastal vegetation to perish each year.

### 3.6. Conclusion

The Sundarbans are an excellent example taken by Ghosh in order to establish human and non-human relationship. On the Earth, there are a number of other ecosystems that are in danger of being extinct. Every person has a moral responsibility and accountability to maintain our ecosystem, which is progressively becoming a threatened environment for all of its members, human and nonhuman, each of whom requires its own space to exist. Humans are less environmentally conscious than animals. Global warming is to blame for the rapid depletion of space, resulting in a narrowing of animal and human space, resulting in conflict. The pressing necessity of the hour is to create a future that achieves a balance between man and his surroundings, allowing him to live in harmony with his surroundings.

## Chapter – 4 Conclusion

### 4.1. Introduction

During those literary periods when Ecocriticism was not seriously considered, *The Hungry Tide* is a provocative masterwork that transmits Amitav Ghosh's ecoconsciousness out of his love for nature and its non-human features. This novel traces how Ghosh has depicted the relationship between humans and nature with remarkable precision, expressing their Eco consciousness by saying that it is not wise for humans to harm or attempt to harm non-human elements of nature, and also Ghosh speaks about ecological ethics, calling for respect for Nature and compassion for life. On the one hand, Amitav Ghosh, a brilliant thinker with a keen

ecological awareness, contributed to the awakening of people. The future will almost likely take care of itself if the 'here and now' is put in its proper place. Higher education institutions are the best place to start making changes. Because they, more than anybody else, take the environment for granted, the youth must be tapped for their potential. Environmental principles, as well as the concept of human duty to safeguard the planet, must be instilled in their brains.

## 4.2. Major Findings

1. In the novel *The Hungry Tide*, Amitav Ghosh, a master storyteller, explores the Sundarbans' environmental challenges on a large scale, drawing on a variety of sources of factual information. He combines the skill of nature writing with fiction, exposing the conflict between humans and animals, both of whom are a part of Nature.

Ghosh participates in the rhetoric of narrative, mixing fiction and fact while studying the politics of human life using the pretence of Nature and its environment as a base.

2. The character of Piya in this novel has been portrayed as a nature lover, who has adored and is immensely concerned about the exploitation of the environment and animals. Piya is sympathetic toward the endangered species of dolphins in order to protect them. Through the character of Piya, Ghosh has shown the need of biocentrism for the survival of human and non-human world and it is only possible if they live in harmony as they are interdependent on each other.

3. The character of Fokir is similar to the character of Piya as both have similar interests and concerns for Mother Nature. As a child, his mother Kusum told him legends about the dolphins in Garjontola, about how they functioned as Bon Bibi's messengers, carrying news of the rivers and floods. They were his only close friends. Ghosh has represented, through the character of Fokir, how humans should give equal value to nature and be connected with nature in order to save Mother Earth. The need to spread biocentric ideology and fundamental shifts in values are required to ensure the transition from growth-centred society to one that recognises biophysical limits and priorities human well-being and biodiversity conservation.

4. Biocentrism stands for inherent value that every living and non-living thing possesses. Nature has begun to retaliate against humans in the most devastating way. In the novel *The Hungry Tide*, natural disasters, such as famine, drought, flood, earthquakes, and also the attacks of animals, constantly leave the man in the

lurch. Humans are in the midst of a worldwide crisis now primarily because they are concerned with their own interests rather than with the functioning of the ecosystem.

So, what biocentrism stands for is that humanity must reconsider and remodel its connection with its surroundings by realising that we are a part of our environment and not superior to it, and we must immediately grant every other organism the right to exist. Hence, the present novel exposes the need of biocentrism with the help of the innumerable ecological imbalanced and balanced incidents.

5. Biocentrism opposes anthropocentrism, which focuses on the worth of humans. Ecocentrism, on the other hand, offers inherent worth to all of nature. So, biocentrism is the balance between anthropocentrism and Ecocentrism. In this novel, Ghosh has exhibited the ecological system and landscape of Sundarbans in an ecopolitical context. Ghosh's understanding of the politics of ecology spans multiple spaces and perspectives, from forced migration to cosmopolitanism and from alienation to belonging.

6. The work explores a number of themes of life and existence on this delta, which has a diversified ecosystem in which man, animal, and other things compete for their own eco-space in order to find a way to survive. On the one hand, we are told about human problems, while on the other, we are told about nonhuman creatures, the most powerful of which is the tiger, which has to contend with man, the ever-depleting richness of biodiversity due to salinity, which is sounding the death knell for several rare species, and yet the ecosystem is home to Gangetic and Irrawaddy dolphins, crocodiles, and other animals. As a result, for every living being, it is a struggle with Nature as well as with other beings.

7. Ecocriticism is an appeal to literature to actively engage with the problems of the current environmental crisis. In *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh examines the tensions that exist between and among human societies, as well as their special relationships with the natural environment and the added desultory reality of nature that progress and is constantly altered by people.

8. Sundarbans has an unusually diverse aquatic and terrestrial flora and fauna, and its productive environment serves as a natural fish nursery. However, as a result of anthropogenic involvement in the form of globalisation, economic development, and eco-tourism, this rich ecosystem is in risk of being exploited even further as shown in this novel.

9. The story of Bonbibi in the text, on the other hand, reflects the necessity to appreciate the environment despite its inconsistency and scary nature. The story also serves an ethical and pedagogical

function by emphasizing people's restricted behaviour in their interactions with others as well as with their surroundings. It tries to govern their actions and attitudes, instilling ecological and social values in their daily interactions with nature and other creatures, thus preserving their very existence among the uncertainty.

## Bibliography

### Primary sources

Anand, Divya. "Words on Water: Nature and Agency in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*."

Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies 34.1 (2008): 21-44. Print.

Buell, Lawrence, Karen Thornber, and Ursula K. Heise. —Literature and Environment. Annual Review of Environmental Resources. 36:417-40. 2011. Web. 2 January 2013.

Chakrabarti, Ranjan.. —Local People and the Global Tiger. Global Environment. A Journal of History and Natural and Social Sciences. 7-8. 2011. Web. 10 January. 2013. Methodology of Research taken from MLA Handbook, 8<sup>th</sup> ed. PN 147 G525 2016 Ghosh, Amitav. *The Hungry Tide*. India: Harper Collins, 2004. Print.

### Secondary sources

Bhuddhadeb, R. Choudhary, Images at Home in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* in Nigamanda, Das (ed.) Contemporary Indian writing in English, Trend, Concepts publishers New Delhi 2007.

Chambers, Claire. The Relationship between Knowledge and Power in the Work of Amitav Ghosh, Leed: 2003. Print.

Dixon, Robert. Travelling in the West: The Writing of Amitav Ghosh, the Journal of Commonwealth Literature, 31.1 (1996):3-24. Print.

Ghose, Sagarika. The Shadow Lines: Review of the Hungry Tide, the Indian Express. 27 June 2004.

Howarth, William. "Some principles of Ecocriticism." The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in literary ecology (1996): 69-91.

John C.Hawley, “The Writer, his Context and his Themes” in Contemporary Indian Writers in English Amitav

Ghosh: An Introduction, Delhi: Foundation Books, 2005, p.3.

Rai, Asha. “The Theme of Hunger and Degradation in Markandaya’s Nectar in Sieve.”

Research Analysis and Evaluation 2.19 (2011): 6-7. Print.

Roy, Rituparna Datta “The Hungry Hearts: A Study of Amitav Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide*.”Poetcrit 20.1 (2007): 66-70. Print.

The Guardian. —Thousands of rare Irrawaddy Dolphins found along Bangladesh Coastl.

Wed 1. April. www.theguardian.co.uk.2009. Web. 5 April. 2013.

The Hindu. —Saving People, and Tigersl. Jan 14. www.thehindu.com.opinion editorial. 2012. Web. 5 April. 2013.

The Hindu Business Line. —Rapidly Shrinking Sundarbans Threat to the Bengal Tiger: Study. Jan 11. www.thehindubusinessline.com. 2013. Web. June 10.2013.

Warren, Karen, Karen J. Warren, and Nisvan Erkaleds. Ecofeminism: Women, culture, nature. IndianaUniversity Press, 1997.

