



PIYA'S SNELL'S WINDOW: VIEW FROM WINDOW

¹M K Neeraj, ²Dr K Prabha

¹ Research Scholar, ²Assistant Professor,

¹Department of English Language and Literature,
Kongu Arts and Science College (Autonomous), Erode

²Department of English Language and Literature
Kongu Arts and Science College (Autonomous), Erode

ABSTRACT

Amitav Ghosh's novel "*The Hungry Tide*" explores a knotty relationship between humans and the environment. Piya Roy's journey in "*The Hungry Tide*," began as a marine biologist who came to study the specific dolphin species. The experiences in the Sundarbans made an emotional transformation when she interacted with the natural world of the Sundarbans and its people. This paper gives an insight into how Piya was transformed in the novel from the interaction and connections with local people, animals, and the environment. After initially feeling cut off from her Indian-American background, Piya was able to rebuild a connection with her cultural roots and ancestral land, thanks to her journey to this mysterious and dangerous ecosystem. She becomes deeply involved in the local communities and environment while researching the endangered Irrawaddy dolphins, transforming her scientific endeavour into a personal mission and deepening her commitment to conservation and the welfare of the dolphins and the local population. Her interaction with Fokir, Nilima, Moyna, Kanai, and Tutul helped her change the perspectives she viewed life until then. She started to appreciate the traditional knowledge and symbiotic relationship of the locals with nature. Piya fostered greater empathy and understanding rather than being a scientifically trained scholar. The harsh nature of the tide country evoked her resilience and courage. She was ready to challenge and face fears to adapt for survival. She understood the delicate balance between nature and humans, and its impact on both the physical environment and its people. Piya's professional and personal growth evolution is seen as she is deeply connected to the environment and the people. It inspired her personal growth, empathy, and a sense of responsibility toward the environment. The experience in the Sundarbans helps her reconnect with her Indian heritage, she felt like an outsider and the way Kanai described her in the beginning also transformed the gap between her diasporic identity and her ancestral roots.

Keywords: *Environment, Reflection, Nature, Diasporic Identity*

INTRODUCTION

Amitav Ghosh's novel "*The Hungry Tide*" explores an intricate relationship between human beings and the environment. Sundarbans being the background of the novel, the novel talks about the lives of its characters, who are deeply affected by this vast mangrove delta region in India and Bangladesh and the looming threats of climate change. It is not only the inhabitants who are affected by the aura of these mangroves. Amitav Ghosh shows Piya Roy's Indian-American background made her initially feel disconnected from her heritage. Studying the Irrawaddy dolphins was a step in her life to find the answers and clear dilemmas she had. The journey to the Sundarbans was driven by her dedication to marine biology and her desire to contribute to the conservation of the endangered dolphins but it developed a more holistic understanding of the delicate balance within the ecosystem than the survey and scientific results she expected.

One of the central characters, Piya is an American Indian cetologist who comes to the Sundarbans in search of a rare species of river dolphin. Her scientific perspective and outsider status allow her to see the beauty and importance of the ecosystem with fresh eyes. For her the nature is something that can be studied and also admired. Piya is shocked after her encounters in the beginning of the novel and kept on thinking why people wanted to live in such a dangerous place where the animal and nature itself can be a threat for life. Her expedition started in the Sundarbans with government approval along with her appointed forest guard and a boatman/guide suggested by the forest guard himself. She got to know that they were of no use to her. Her perspective changes when she meets another character the local fisherman, Fokir. She falls into the crocodile infested water while talking to Fokir about the dolphins. She began to drown and began to experience "Snell's window.", the way light travels through water in a cone form and ends at the submerged viewer's eye is known as a Snell's window. It isn't accurate in muddy water, much like Piya felt. She panics when she can't tell which way is up and gets mud in her mouth and nose. She trembles when something touches her and realises it's a crocodile's nose. As she thrashes around, something hits her in the face. She breaks to the surface abruptly, but her breathing is still laboured. She senses that someone grabbed her with arms and that their mouth is trying to remove the muck from her lips. Piya is aware that Fokir saved her. Piya's views about everything starts to change here.

The experience here is a symbolic canon event. The transformative phase in Piya from admiring nature as a foreign cetologist who came to study took a turning point from here. Just like Robinson Crusoe's profound transformation through nature's interaction and how he fostered self-reliance and spirituality, Piya realises that for people like Fokir the tide, nature, and river are living entities that are deeply rooted in their lives. Piya begins to realise that the physicality of the environment remains the same for everyone but their experience and understandings are different. She began to feel more like an Indian and she started to do everything Fokir told her to do. Even though they both didn't share a language to communicate the charade was enough to understand each other. She believed it was the Indianness and nature that made her understand him. She doesn't understand what Fokir is singing at night but starts to enjoy it, the interaction that she couldn't stand spices for dinner which made them both laugh is proof that they were connecting. She can recognise indigenous wisdom and her cultural roots thanks to his traditional customs and respect for nature, which contrast with her scientific attitude.

During her visit to Lusibari Piya learns about the struggles faced by the people. She gets to know the historical, social, and cultural aspects. The myth of Bon Bibi made her realise that peoples' belief is rooted so deeply that they believe nature will not harm and nourishes them. As her studies went on about Irrawaddy dolphins in the area, she had the opportunity to work together with the local community who have lived in harmony with nature and its animals for generations. Piya's journey to the Sundarbans thus connected to her Indian heritage, helps her reconnect with her cultural roots. She remembers her father always belittling Indians because they didn't want to move and were fixated on an area. Now she realises why the people are fixated even though they are harmed and toils day by day.

Piya can be related to Sir Daniel Hamilton in a way. Sir Daniel Hamilton saw value in the mud of the tide country. Nirmal claims that Sir Daniel was educated in Scotland before relocating to India to pursue his

wealth. He was lured to the Tide nation after making a fortune for himself by selling tickets for a maritime company. He found that all islands have had inhabitants at some point, even though it is often impossible to tell. Upon his arrival back in Calcutta, Sir Daniel acquired 10,000 acres of land in the tidal country. Sir Daniel had a change here just like Piya had once she mingled with the locals. Sir Daniel gave free land to anyone who was prepared to come labour in the tidal country. When he abolished the caste system, thousands of people showed up. Sir Daniel started rewarding anyone who killed the animals since tigers, crocodiles, and snakes killed so many people. Nirmal explained that instead of focusing on making money, Sir Daniel wanted to establish a cooperative society.

The nature was also ready to accept new people. Nature changed its form manner and made it compatible with human civilisation. After decades nature has been accustomed to making rare dolphins live in them. As her studies began Piya noticed fewer dolphins in the afternoon as the tide rises. She questions whether the dolphins were migrating as she had first assumed. Some Orcaella dolphins prefer saltwater along the shore, while others prefer freshwater rivers, according to the narrator. The freshwater species exhibit territorial behaviour, frequently returning to the same areas year after year. Piya arrived in the Sundarbans with the expectation of seeing coastal orcas, which behave differently from the dolphins she watched throughout the morning even though freshwater orcas cannot survive in the salty water. She poses the intriguing question of whether the Sundarbans Orcaella move every day as opposed to twice a year, which has significant conservation consequences. It can be symbolically seen where decades apart the foreign species is a native. A late motif of Piya being a Lusibari settler can be read here as the quest to find identity and the roots of self. Piya's transformation dilemma, questioning, and self-realisation started.

Piya considers the distinctive salinity of the water in the Sundarbans, where a combination of freshwater and saltwater produces microenvironments with varying salinities. The Sundarbans highlight the interconnectedness with her Indo-American identity. She considers all of her inquiries and the work that would be required to do a thorough study of the Sundarbans dolphins. It would take decades to complete. Piya considers her lack of drive and the fact that the free-spirited lifestyle of field biology drew her in. But her dilemma changed when she had to face the turmoil of nature when she and Fokir had to face the cyclone at Garjotola. The size of the flying objects grows with wind intensity.

Piya witnesses the temple to Bon Bimbi and a whole cluster of mangroves taking off into the sky. The trunk in front of her keeps the flying debris from striking her, therefore she is grateful for it. She makes an effort to breathe behind Fokir at the same pace. Piya looks around the tree upon hearing a loud noise and notices a wall of water approaching them. Just before the wave hits them, Fokir pulls her closely against the tree while she freezes in terror. They both take a deep breath. Piya understands the water is deep because it pushes the tree nearly to the ground. In an attempt to release herself, she tries to untie the sari knot, but Fokir stops her. The pressure decreases as Piya fights, and the tree straightens above the water. Piya's vision of the temple to Bon Bimbi is like the human nature of the people of the Tide nation is to leave everything to Bono Bibi when things get out of hand.

Later we get to know Fokir is no more and his last words were Tutul and Moyna, his son and wife. She is devastated by Fokir's death and the position of his family. Piya's relationship with her parents, especially her father, is tense and distant, which has helped her become independent. She realised that the smell of *gamtcha* and Fokir's interaction made her fill the void she felt with her father. She learns to rely on herself for practical and emotional support. Piya's mother is not prominently featured in the narrative, suggesting a possible emotional or physical absence in her life. Piya attempts to fill the emotional gap left by the absence of a caring maternal figure in her life by engaging in her profession and her connection with nature. The Sundarbans, Fokir, his family, and her deep connection with nature helped her to reconnect with her heritage and develop a sense of belonging that she missed in her family life. She was an independent and confident woman but Piya's courage and resilience are put to the strain by the harsh and unpredictable conditions of the Sundarbans.

In the beginning, Piya explains that she never learned Bengali because her father believed that Indians struggle to adapt to new places due to their attachment to home, so he always spoke to her in English. Her parents used Bengali when speaking to each other but during arguments. Now she is finding solace in language, the place, and people.

Nilima didn't think Piya would return to Lusibari after she left two weeks ago. Piya had developed an odd friendship with Moyna while she was still staying at the guesthouse, and she was a frightening presence. She had even started donning Moyna's old sari. Once Moyna chopped her hair, the two women had an uncanny resemblance. Piya had resisted Kanai's attempts to persuade her to go home. A few days later, Piya departed, and Kanai went back to New Delhi. When she indicated that she would return, Nilima didn't think she would.

Piya knocks on Nilima's office and explains that she's been at her aunt's house in Kolkata. She was a changed woman. She had a guilt in her conscience that she was responsible for Forki's death. He generated some money and it was enough to pay for Tutul's schooling as well as the purchase of a house for Moyna and Tutul. Furthermore, Piya claims to have received financing offers and to have written about her work with the dolphins.

She wanted the Babadon Trust to support any project, therefore before accepting them, she wanted to speak with Nilima. Nilima becomes excited when financing is brought up.

Piya requests permission to rent the guesthouse and utilise the upstairs space for an office. Nilima gently brings up Piya's need for staff, to which Piya responds that she would want to hire Moyna on a part-time basis. Nilima tries to come up with anything that could make this more difficult. Piya explains that her uncle can take care of the rest and that she is qualified for a visa that would let her stay indefinitely. With a giggle, Nilima inquires as to Piya's project's name. Given that Fokir's data will serve as the project's foundation and that her GPS is the only thing that survived, recording the path she travelled with him, Piya says she would like to name it after him. That path is a representation of his years of dolphin sightings and Piya's changes.

Piya is not that foreign girl anymore who hefted her two huge bags around the hovering porters, she is no more the one who never cared for chai but she knows the Darjeeling leaves. "You know, Nilima," she said at last, "for me, home is where the Orcaella are: so, there's no reason why this couldn't be it." She found her solace. The view from Snell's window in the muddy waters of Sundarbans changed Piya's emotional resilience, social relationships, and philosophical perspectives. Even though the novel explores themes of interconnectedness for Piya the experiences emphasize the involved balance between humans and nature. It was her commitment to environmental conservation that grew from a scientific pursuit into a personal mission to protect the dolphins and their habitat. Her journey also explores into the impact of cultural and socioeconomic contexts on environmental issues and personal identities. Piya's journey represents the larger message of the novel about the need for ecological balance and coexistence between humans and nature.

REFERENCES

Ghosh, Amitav. *The Hungry Tide*. India: Harper Collins Publishers, 2004, Print.

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.

Gurr, Jens Martin. "Emplotting an ecosystem: Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* and the question of form in ecocriticism." *Local Natures, Global Responsibilities*. Brill, 2010. 69-80.

Kaur, Rajender. "Home Is Where the Oracella Are": Toward a New Paradigm of Transcultural Ecocritical Engagement in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*." *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* (2007): 125-141.

S, M. "An Ecocritical Approach To Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*". *Kongunadu Research Journal*, Vol. 4, no. 1, June 2017, pp. 18-21, doi:10.26524/kjrj167.

Sinha, Sunita. "Amitav Ghosh *The Hungry Tide*: Book Review". *The SPIEL Journal of English Studies*. Vol-3, No. 1, 2007.

Thakur, Akhileshwar, "Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*: A Critique of Nature-Culture Duality". *Literary Perspectives*. Vol. 9, No. 1, January 2014.

Weik, Alexa. "The home, the tide, and the world: eco-cosmopolitan encounters in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*." *Journal of Commonwealth and Postcolonial Studies Vols 13.14.1* (2006): 2006-2007.

