

The implication of Eco-consciousness in '*The Hungry Tide*' and '*The Glass Palace*' by Amitav Ghosh

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With the advent of natural disasters and calamities around the world, there is emergence for generating a complementary connection between the ecosystem and the human consciousness. This connectivity is possible only when there will be an effort to use language in association with the practical elaboration of landscapes around the world. This effort is much predominant in the writings of Amitav Ghosh. In the writings of Ghosh, the concerns and the consciousness for ecological welfare remains the predominant thematic approach. In his writings, especially in '*The Hungry Tide*' and '*The Glass Palace*', the consistent need to generate consciousness among people about the ecological imbalances, stay as an undercurrent.

In this article, I am interpreting the very prominent writings of Amitav Ghosh- '*The Hungry Tide*' and '*The Glass Palace*', which are milestones in the world of literature for connecting the need for Eco-consciousness among the human race as a whole.

'*The Hungry Tide*': Eco-consciousness in the Cries of Sundarbans

The narrative of *The Hungry Tide* by Ghosh remains closely knitted in generating an extensive labyrinth of awareness for eco-consciousness in the reader. The construction of this narrative is so close to the plight of human life that the reader gets the urge to save nature, very unconsciously. Ghosh remains very strict in terms of generating a sense of realisation in the reader about the devastating life of Sundarbans. The purpose of considering Sundarbans as the foreground for narrating through Piya Roy, a cytologist; Ghosh tried to offer a closer look into the harsh realities of Sundarbans and the continuous struggle for survival among the inhabitants. The story that runs through *The Hungry Tide* is an exclusive illustration of life in Sundarbans, which is an evergreen dense forest, situated 300 kms from the Meghna river of Bangladesh and Hooghly River of West Bengal, India. The narrative of Ghosh elaborates on the tide country and the impacts of these regular tides on the different classes of people. While generating the sense of eco-consciousness in the reader, Ghosh establishes the fact the natural disasters of Sundarbans treat every caste, and creed equally. There is no difference in terms of offering the sufferance of an equal cadre. In the words of Ghosh, the status quo of Sundarbans gets picturised as,

"It is common knowledge that almost every island in the tide country has been inhabited at some time or another. But to look at them you would never know: the specialty of mangroves is that they do not merely recolonize land; they erase time. Every generation creates its own population of ghosts." (2004, p.50)

As the plot is developed to bring the reader closer to the life of Sundarbans, Ghosh adds an urban lad, Kanai, along with Piya Roy to the plot. The idea is to connect the outside world of Sundarbans with the local inhabitants, especially as represented by Fokir. Rest of the characters like the government official, Nilima Bose; Fokir's wife and mother, Moyna and Kusum, respectively; and Nirmal, a social activist as well as a school teacher; add the additional edge of narrating the condition of lives in Sundarbans and how nature stays merciless to its inhabitants. The plight for life gets narrated by Ghosh by offering clear images of sufferance and a day-to-day struggle to strive amidst the harsh treatment of nature. The power of nature has been so extensively narrated by Ghosh that the reader starts belittling his existence. The mighty powers of tides and storms of Sundarbans and the devastating consequences bring in the realisation that Nature stays Almighty and humans need to bring in a compromising status with Nature by conserving it. It has been very clearly depicted by Ghosh that human existence will be demolished ultimately if Nature is not conserved well. A continuous narrative elaboration emphasises that it is high time to bring in eco-consciousness in human society. Negligence to Nature can lead to the destruction of the human race. The power of Nature as stated in Sundarbans is just a glimpse of the calamities that can end the human race. Innumerable political and cultural practices were explained in the narrative so that Ghosh could bring in the reason to develop eco-consciousness among the readers.

For instance, Ghosh demonstrates the death of Fokir caused by the storm. It was nerve-breaking and the reader can feel how merciless Nature can get. On the same page, Ghosh also demonstrates the efforts of Fokir to save Piya; which adds the humanitarian element to the incident. The reader soon gets sympathetic to Fokir, yet at the same time, the grievous nature of the storm creates a sense of fear and terror in the reader. Though Priya justified the incident by naming her project as *Fokir*, yet Ghosh makes the reader aware that Fokirs in Sundarbans die every day. There is no mercy when the rage of Nature is at its peak. This is a clear message that Ghosh delivers much boldly in his narrative.

Ghosh also adds the diary pages written by Nirmal about the life and struggles in Sundarbans. Massacre happens every other day, yet people still choose to be there, as they have nowhere else to go. They call it home and thrive to sustain amidst the hazardous calamities. It is here that the need for eco-consciousness appears to be the only way to live in “the beautiful forest”– Sundarbans(2000, p. 8). “The beautiful forest” has been defined by Ghosh as-

‘... the name of a common species of mangrove- the *sundaritree*, *Heriteria minor*. Bit the word’s origin is no easier to the record books of the Mughal emperors this region is named not in reference to a tree but to a tide – *bhati*. And to the inhabitants to the islands this land is known as *bhatirdesh* – the tide country- except that *bhati* is not just the “tide” but one tide in particular, the ebb tide, the *bhata*.’ (2004, p. 8)

It is this association of the colloquial terminologies to the plot, which adds great life to the narrative. People start getting connected to the plot and the realisations are made on a very practical basis. The attractive nature of Sundarbans has been much acknowledged by Ghosh as he establishes the fact that its charms have brought in many researchers and tourists to these jungles. Ghosh declares,

‘It’s only in films, you know, that the jungles are empty of people. Here some places are crowded as any Kolkata Bazar. And on some of the rivers, you’ll find more boats than there are trucks on the Grand Trunk Road.’ (2004, p. 17)

Midst all these hustles and bustles, Ghosh also made it obvious that the sanity of Sundarbans demands extensive care and serious ways of conservation. The concerns raised by the issues of climate change and global warming cannot be ignored or left unnoticed. Ghosh makes the reader aware that the jungles of Sundarbans are much populated than one can imagine. Life has flourished there full-fledged and it has got so dense that the harm caused to nature is leading to more consequences that are destructive to human existence.

‘The Glass Palace’: Colonial Exploitations need Revival through Eco-consciousness

In his novel ‘*The Glass Palace*’, Ghosh considered the historical advent of colonial rule that has been plotted in the Burma. The thematic concern of this novel is to connect the plantations of rubber and palm to human greed to become rich, and the cruelties of colonial powers. Rajkumar, the pivotal character of the novel is a representative of human ambition, who exploited all the Burmese natural resources. However, it was by the middle of this age that Rajkumar starts realising that his life is so much connected to these natural resources. His emotions start being attached to the land, and soon Gosh depicts the ways Rajkumar starts feeling like an integral part of Nature that has been brutally destroyed by his younger self-

“Yes. But it’s hard, Dolly – it’s hard to think of leaving: Burma has given me everything I have. The boys have grown up here ... I don’t think I could ever love another place in the same way. But if there’s one thing I’ve learned in my life Dolly, it is that there is no certainty about these things.” (2000, p. 269)

Ghosh depicted this sentimental journey of Rajkumar to generate a sense of eco-consciousness in the reader. Rajkumar’s words, “*I don’t think I could ever love another place in the same way*” brings forth the fact that human beings cannot stay detached from nature. The character of Dolly has been narrated in such a way that the reader starts understanding that it is always better to remain in association with the natural existence. Adaptation is the only way through which humans can remain in collaboration with nature. Dolly’s decision to adapt Indian culture against her Burmese inheritance appeared very spontaneous. However, Ghosh made it very clear that it is through this adaptation that Dolly could get rid of any kind of diasporic confusion. This adaptation has made it easier for her to accept the fact that she cannot go back to Burma again. It is through this adaptation that she could make compromises with her roots and attained the power to merge with Indian cultural practices. In this process, Ghosh identifies that it is Nature that made the adaptation process so convenient for Dolly. Dolly realises that no matter wherever she is, the Nature Mother is always there with her and with Nature, and there is always room for ‘home’.

Ghosh illustrates that Nature understands human feelings and emotions and stays much supportive than any other being. To establish this illustration, Ghosh demonstrates the experience of other characters of the novel. The experience as faced Jaya, the daughter of Neel and Manju, among the palm plantations reveals it all-

Jaya was fascinated by the oil palms: clusters of yellowish-orange fruit hung from the stub- like trunks, each as big as a lamb. The air was very still and it seemed to have the texture of grease. Between the palms there were bird-houses elevated on poles. These were for owls, Illongo explained: the oil- rich fruit attracted great quantities of rodents; the birds helped their numbers under control. (2000, p. 430)

This expression makes the reader realise that Nature and its ecosystem are far beautiful than a human can ever imagine. It can balance itself and in a very fantastic manner can offer all kinds of bliss to the human race. Offering an adequate amount of consciousness to the ecosystem can bring great pleasure and prosperity to the human being. However, on the other hand, mishandling of natural resources can end up in devastating consequences. For instance, Ghosh demonstrates that when Japan invaded Burma, there were heavy blasts to destroy many plantations. The entire forests were uprooted to meet the capitalistic greed. Nature and its ecosystems were so shaken that Ghosh termed it as – *ecocidal*. In the words of Uma's Nephew, Arjun -

Minutes later, with a blast that was like a moving wall of sound, the Japanese heavy artillery opened up. The first shell went skimming over the tops of the trees, sending down showers of leaves and small branches. But then, slowly, the explosions began to move in their direction. The earth shook so violently as to send the water at the bottom of the trench shooting into their faces. Arjun saw a fifty-foot rubber tree rising gracefully from the earth and jumping several feet into the air before somersaulting towards them. (2000, p. 338)

Such destructions were never appreciated by the author and were demonstrated as a great threat to the human race. The ecological destructions initiated during the colonial phase were the reasons that the current world is suffering from global warming and climatic threats.

Tirelessly, Ghosh keeps on making the reader realise that it is time to get eco-conscious. Nature understands human existence and can get emotionally attached for its better survival. However, any adverse behaviour to Nature can lead to the disastrous end of this race.

Eventually, it can be concluded that the need for eco-consciousness is the only way that humans can survive in agreement with nature. As Ghosh establishes through Sundarbans that Nature rules and we as a human cannot defy its power, because-

“...here, in the tide country, transformation is the rule of life: rivers stray from week to week, and islands are made and unmade in days. In other places forests take centuries, even millennia, to regenerate; but mangroves can recolonize a denuded island in ten to fifteen years. Could it be the very rhythms of the earth were quickened here so that they unfolded at an accelerated pace?” (2004, p. 224)

REFERENCES

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- [2]. Ghosh, Amitav. *The Hungry Tide*. Harper Collins Publishers. 2004