

Ecological and Humanistic Concerns in Amitav Ghosh's

The Glass Palace and The Hungry Tide

By

M. Elakkiya

(13PEN003)

A thesis submitted to Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and

Higher Education for Women, Coimbatore – 641 043

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the

Master's Degree in English

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Ecology is to provide knowledge about the way the world works and give evidences on the interdependence between the natural world and the human world. A better understanding of ecological systems will allow society to predict the consequences of human activity on the environment. Saving environment is the need of the day. The way we destroy our environment will lead to destruction of life from this earth, therefore it is necessary that we save our environment. Everyone should contribute and do something to save our environment.

It is evident from the works of famous poets and other writers down the ages in almost all cultures of the world that nature and literature always share a close relationship. Today, the intimate relationship between the natural and social world is being analysed and emphasised in all departments of knowledge and development. A literary critic tries to study how this close relationship between nature and society has been portrayed by the writers. In this context two terms have become very important today - ecology and ecocriticism. With time, however, these ecosystems have been harmfully affected due to increasing population and the greed of mankind. Literature cannot remain unaffected from this depletion and this work is on how the concern for nature changes from reverence to destruction in Indian literature.

Organisms and their environment are two components of nature. Ecology relatively a new science, deals with the various values which govern such relationships between organisms and environment. At present, ecology is defined as the way in which plants, animals and people are related to each other and their surroundings. In this

relationship they are equally dependent on each other that any trouble in one, always disturbs the other. History has proved this every now and then, that with every change in the society the relationship of animals and human beings has also modified. The effect of civilization on environment has been so sensitive that sometimes it has cleaned the whole civilization from the face of the earth. Therefore, concern for ecology is one of the most important issues of today. It is the concern of every country to refill the diminishing factors of ecology.

Literature is like a mirror reflecting modern issues. The world of literature throngs with works contrasting with beauty and power of nature. However, the concern for ecology, environment and the threat that the continuous cruelty of our environment poses on humanity has just caught the attention of the writers. It is this sense of concern and its reflection in literature that has given rise to a new stem of literary theory that is 'Ecocriticism'. The word 'ecocriticism' first came into view in William Rueckert's essay "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism" in 1978.

Man's observation on physical environment both in art and literature, has been in practice since time immemorial. The mode of depiction of natural phenomena passes through several changes in style and exposure with the shifting perceptions of human mind. However, this perception of nature was not earlier viewed and examined with any recognized critical, interdisciplinary lances, till the sixties and seventies. The inquiry, about what nature actually stands for in a literary text or whether the environment has any link to human culture gradually begins after the explosion of a social movement called environmentalism. But till nineties, writings on nature were viewed in accordance with a number of interspersed critical frameworks—such as American Studies, Pastoral(ism),

Regionalism, Human Ecology, etc. However, these studies did not seriously incorporate deep investigation in literature towards author's representation of environmental decline or calamity of the day-to-day world. Although William Rueckert first coined the word ecocriticism with an intention to apply ecological concepts to assess literature, it did not turn out to be a rational movement for the purpose that it intended to be. Finally, the two historic seminal publications in the mid-nineties such as *The Ecocriticism Reader* edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm and *The Environmental Imagination* by Lawrence Buell marked the authorized recognition of the concepts ecocriticism and ecology.

Ecocritical approaches make inquiries into the connections between nature and human culture. It also views at what instant the authors represent its effects. Rather than the social world, the whole of the ecosphere where energy, matter and ideas come to an interaction also forms the basis of ecocriticism. The fictional works of the Indian writer in English, Amitav Ghosh, can be viewed through ecocritical perspective.

The relationship between man and the ecological systems is in the fact that man belongs to the earth in much the same way as animals and plants do. He is also a species of animal, part of the ecosystem of the earth and dependent upon it for his survival. Man's superiority comes up out of the fact that he is the earth's only literary creature. Recent research shows that man is not the only creation to think how to balance with other creation. Experiments with the great apes, for example, has shown that they can make and use tools in the wild and that they can solve problems and think symbolically. One should realise that human capacities developed through natural selection from basic but essentially similar abilities seen in other animals also.

Ecology has come to play a central role in the present day. Ecology is the study of the interrelationships of living things to one another and their surrounding environment, the topic is wide ranging since it deals with the study of whole groups of living things interacting with one another. Such intermingling groups are called ecosystems.

The word 'ecology' has Greek origin. 'Oikos' means home, which means the whole inhabited earth. 'Logos' means reason or study. Donald Hughes' comment about it is quoted below:

Human ecology, then, is a rational study of how mankind interrelates with the home of the human species, the earth; with its soil and mineral resources; with its water, both fresh and salt; with its air, climates and weather; with its many living things, animals and plants, from the simplest to the most complex; and with the energy received ultimately from the sun. (3)

Ecology has been a distinctive feature of many ancient literatures. A remarkable feature of Indian thought about the universe is the principle that all creation is an important entity. The presence of a universal spirit binding the creatures of this universe is a recurring idea in most of the philosophical treatment of Indian literature. A mantra in the Chandogya Upanishad says: "Whether it be the tiger or the lion, the wolf or the bug everything originates from it" (qtd. in Ramachandran 197). This concept has ecological and scientific significance today, since all environmentalists consider this world as a great work of art.

Viewing ecology as a natural study of life points to the fact that, man stands somewhere in the web. The great sage Sankaracharya also considered that in this grand

scheme of earth, each individual, each creature and each item of matter has its place.

Early man and nature were indisputably one and nature was virtually unaffected by the new generation. The Atharva Veda, according to M.Vannucci, says:

Nature is to be understood as a friend, revered as mother, obeyed as father and nurtured as a beloved child. Nature is sacred because man depends entirely on it and because of this everything is sanctified, including man and the terrifying aspects of nature itself, such as glaciers, landslides, earthquakes, storms . . . (75)

In many ancient cultures, non-human forms of life like birds, animals and even trees and plants were believed to have power of super human abilities. They were believed to own a particular kind of wisdom and bear a special relationship to the sacred.

Such ideas and thoughts inspire in us a feeling that man not only occupies special place, but mingles with all other creature in the earth. This concept is well conveyed through the words of the Native American Chief Seattle, who says, “.....the earth is our mother. Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons of the earth. If man spit upon the ground they spit upon themselves. This we know. The earth does not belong to man; man belongs to the earth. This we know. All things are connected like blood which unites one family” (20) in “Ecology and Literature”.

Amitav Ghosh has been a predominant writer in the context of writing about nature and environment. He was born in Calcutta on 11th July 1956 and grew up in East Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Iran and India. After an M.A. in Sociology from Delhi University in 1978 and a Ph.D. in Social Anthropology from Oxford University in 1982, Ghosh worked as a journalist for ‘The Indian Express’ in New Delhi for a while. He has been

Distinguished Professor of Comparative Literature at Queen's College, New York from 1999 to 2003 and Visiting Professor at Harvard University 2004. He spends part of every year in Calcutta. He lives with his wife Deborah Baker and children Leela and Nayan in New York. His work include *The Circle of Reason* (1986), *The Shadow Lines* (1988), *In An Antique Land* (1993), *Dancing in Cambodia*, *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1995), *The Glass Palace* (2000), *The Hungry Tide* (2004), and the first two volumes of *The Ibis Trilogy: Sea of Poppies, and River of Smoke* (2011).

The Circle of Reason was awarded France's Prix Médicis in 1990. *The Shadow Lines* fetched him two prestigious Indian prizes the same year, the Sahitya Akademi Award and the Ananda Puraskar. *The Calcutta Chromosome* won the Arthur C. Clarke award for 1997 and *The Glass Palace* won the International e-Book Award at the Frankfurt book fair in 2001. In January 2005, *The Hungry Tide* was awarded a major Indian award, the Crossword Book Prize. His novel *Sea of Poppies*, was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize 2008 and was awarded the Crossword Book Prize and the India Plaza Golden Quill Award.

Amitav Ghosh's work has been translated into more than twenty languages and he has served on the jury of the Locarno Film Festival, Switzerland and the Venice Film Festival (2001). Amitav Ghosh's essays have been published in *The New Yorker*, *The New Republic* and *The New York Times*. His essays have been published by Penguin India (*The Imam and the Indian*) and Houghton Mifflin, USA (*Incendiary Circumstances*). He has taught in many universities in India and the USA including, Columbia, Queens College and Harvard. In January 2007 he was awarded the Padma Shri, one of India's highest honours, by the President of India. In 2010, Amitav Ghosh

was awarded honorary doctorates by Queens College, New York, and the Sorbonne, Paris. Along with Margaret Atwood, he was also a joint winner of Dan David Award for 2010. In 2011 he was awarded the International Grand Prix of the Blue Metropolis Festival in Montreal.

Amitav Ghosh's works are part of the body of Indo-Anglican literature. His work highlights a variety of themes such as diaspora, language, tradition, ecology, colonialism, etc. set against historical backdrop. They involve both fiction and non-fiction. However his fiction is not completely based on imaginary characters and incidents. They are realistic in nature. Ghosh combines historical events with imaginary characters. His essential interest is in people and their histories, predicaments and lives. There is not room for this in formal anthropology, which is interested in concepts and generalizations. Crossing over national boundaries, borders, language difficulties, etc. form an important theme of Ghosh's novels. When interviewed regarding this, Ghosh answered "I think this interest arose because of some kind of inborn distrust of anything that appears to 'given' or taken-for-granted. This is why I distrust also the lines that people draw between fiction and non-fiction. I think these lines are drawn in order to manipulate our ways of thought: that is why they must be disregarded" (Hawley 9).

A major part of Ghosh's work is narrated to those sections of society, who are voiceless, overlooked by history and crushed by power and time. Sanzum in his article, "Identifying Women's Position: Exploring Time, Space and Sexuality in Amitav Ghosh's Novels" quotes Ghosh's words that, "when an American writes a historical novel he or she can generally rely on the historians to have done the research. I didn't have this luxury available to me. I had to do much of the primary research while telling a story"(3).

Thus studying Amitav Ghosh's works one can trace history which is neither altered by a power of colonial or nationalist one as he writes stories from a very interlinked point of view where the narration transcends any particular country and time period. He rewrites history.

The Glass Palace is the story of the last King of Burma who was sent to exile after being defeated by the British and involves the stories of various people whose lives get interweaved with this particular historical event. The story like most of Ghosh's books rejects any particular national boundary and covers Burma, Singapore, America and India. This book can be used to explore the ideas of nationalism, the effect of automatic dispossession from the roots, the sexual arousal and also the individual identity of women which most of the times gets overshadowed by her family burden.

Displacement is also one of the important themes in Ghosh's novels. True to an Amitav Ghosh novel, *The Glass Place* contains an explosion of characters who comprise the privileged as well as the subaltern. The royal family - Thebaw, Queen Supayalat and the Burmese princesses; and commoners like Dolly, Raj Kumar, Saya John and Uma are united ironically by the storms of colonial displacement. These protagonists forced by the rough historical winds are displaced from Burma to India, Malaya, Singapore and they came back again, each time involving a pattern of terror, mass mobs and soldiers on the march as exemplified in the opening of the novel. Pankaj Mishra, in his article "There'll Always Be an England in India" in *New York Times Book Review* expresses his standpoint that,

Ghosh's inquiry loses its focus, however, as he alternates accounts of passionate sex on beaches and in forests with set pieces about battles and

migrations. The narrative goes into the epic mode too often, and the prose, while lazily reaching out for the ready-made phrase (...), often comes dangerously close to kitsch. Ghosh keeps introducing fresh settings and characters, without giving them enough time and space to grow. (7)

The Shadow Lines deals mainly in three different time lines - the World War II period, the 1960s beginning with the narrator's childhood and the 1980s when the narrator visits London. The setting occupies various locations from Calcutta to Delhi to London to Dhaka. One can see that again Ghosh transcends national boundary narrating the stories of people living in various locations and how their lives are connected to a particular event. The name of the book itself signifies the borders which do not exist physically but are present dividing people and it is these virtual borders which Ghosh wants to cross over. The character of Ila and Tham'ma played a vital role to understand the position women occupy in a national space and their idea of nationalism.

Sea of Poppies narrates the story of various groups of people from different strata of the society coming together for a voyage on a ship (Ibis). This story can be used to see the relationship between tradition and history, suppressed sexual desire transcending cultural boundaries, traditions being applied to suppress women. The Ibis symbolizes Ghosh's idea of a place without boundaries and one can understand the place women occupy in this small model of the society. From the above mentioned texts one can trace the footsteps of women right from the 19th Century (as in *Sea of Poppies*) to the present day (as in *The Hungry Tide*). They help in understanding the influence of history in shaping up their present, their suppressed sexual desires, their position in the society and their idea about nationalism and existence of 'imaginary borders' in their life.

The Hungry Tide narrates the story of a group of people whose lives get involved in an historical event (the Morichjhapi massacre). The book can be used to understand the relationships between a man and a woman. “Piya and Fokir are kept apart by language and class and by the social institution of marriage; Nirmal and Nilima live side by side for years but are unknown to each other, divided by different dreams for their lives, and by a lack of respect for the other's way of embracing life.” (Hawley 132-133). The characters cross over between the country of Bon Bibi and Dokkhin Rai, which signifies Ghosh's thought of transcending borders. Ghosh draws out strong female characters that are determined and do not fear to come out of the goddess like image which has been traditionally assigned to Indian women. For instance in *The Hungry Tide*, when Nilima has to decide between helping the refugees and being on the good side of the Government, she sides with the Government as she does not want to endanger the work of her lifetime.

In *The Hungry Tide* Amitav Ghosh takes his readers into the journey of human mind and makes us rediscover our benumbed self. The novel is in two parts, the first part will focus on Ghosh's treatment of the progression of globalisation and how it has impacted the world of Sundarbans a landscape sharpened in beauty, change, myth and mystery. The second part of the novel further analyses how the global world exerts its hegemonic powers in this already fragile world and further breeds a sense of distrust for the traditional way of life. *The Hungry Tide* puts forward many complex issues which need to be considered over in today's worldview when identities are shaped by nationalities.

Ghosh problematizes the tensions between and within human communities, their respective relations with the natural world and the extra-discursive reality of nature that changes and is simultaneously changed by humanity in *The Hungry Tide*. *The Hungry Tide* is a brilliant work of fiction that greatly deals with ecological and environmental conditions affecting the life of Sundarbans. The entire action of the novel takes place in India's Sundarbans. The jacket of the book *The Hungry Tide* tells the readers about the setting, as follows:

Between the sea and the plain of Bengal, on the easternmost coast of India, lies an immense archipelago of islands... Here there are no borders to divide fresh water from salt, river from sea, even land from water. For hundreds of years, only the truly dispossessed braved the man-eating tigers and the crocodiles who rule there, to eke a precarious existence from the mud.

However, the picture changed towards the start of the last century, when a visionary Scotsman bought a few of these fragmented islands from the British to form a utopian settlement, where people irrespective of race, caste, and culture could live together.

The Hungry Tide is the work of Amitav Ghosh, written at the peak of his power. It is familiar in tone and style to Ghosh's overlooked masterpiece, *The Glass Palace*. In spite of the similarities, its smaller scope and more limited collection of characters make it feel somewhat more accessible than the earlier book. *The Glass Palace* has wide geographical variety like India, Burma, Malaya, Bangladesh and England. It is almost an epic of Southeast Asia. It tells the story of the Indian National Army during the world

war. The arrival of modernity in Burma especially the teak trades during the British colonialism and the plight of Indian migrant workers has been highlighted.

The Hungry Tide is geographically quite narrow. It is limited to the Sundarbans Island in the Bay of Bengal. Apart from the various interlinking plots, it has only two conceptual plots. First, it explores the plight of displaced people, specifically a group of refugees from Bangladesh in 1979. The other conceptual question is how humans share complex and dangerous ecosystems with animals.

Ghosh has an anthropologist's attraction for the stories people tell, the local mythologies that subvert the official, religious and national descriptions of history. In several of his works there is a precarious investigation into the local reality. Here the local reality is that the people of the tide country have narratives that they pass on orally and have a kind of local religion. They worship goddess Bon Bibi. Sashawati has given her review for the article "*The Hungry Tide* The Summing Up" that,

The Hungry Tide is a poignant story of the writer's personal love for the place. The book would have been ideal as a travelogue of a kind but is quite a dampener as a fictionalized book of sorts. The fertile soil of the land is a metaphor of the passion that has overawed the author. But this fails to turn into a fairly gripping novel, Ghosh is known for. Even as the three central characters- Piya, Kanai and Fokir are representatives of disparate eras and ideologies, their coming together expectedly would have been the high point of the tale. However Ghosh is too carried away by the mystical allure of the Sundarbans and lets his characters drift away in the clamorous 'swish and swirl' of the gorging Ganges. Its much like,

Ghosh deliberately holds a mélange of words as a flimsy curtain to the real undercurrents of the tale that would have otherwise been a delight to unearth. (5)

The novel tells a very present-day story of adventure, identity, history and love. Ghosh presents nature not as a setting of picturesque beauty alone but as something hungry for human blood. The tide and its surges stand for all the devastating aspects of nature.

The work is a study both on the natural and human environment. The tide country Sundarbans to which the whole of the work is devoted to is not only a far-flung land of intimidating physical environment but also a place among an assortment of communities ethnic, religious, linguistic, cultural etc. These are islands where inhabitants live in fear of drowning tides and man-eating animals. Jennifer has reviewed *The Hungry Tide* in *goodreads.com* as,

The narrator was very good, which naturally helps, but the language was beautiful, the setting was fascinating and the characters were so real ... The story is about adaptation, and about the interaction between humans, plants and animals. The author presents an excellent question: Do we have the right to promote conservation efforts in a place where those efforts will have the most detrimental cost to the people who can tolerate the cost least? ...this is only incidentally a biology or natural history book. The real story is in the interactions between people of vastly different backgrounds and how they adapt to each other and their environment.

Ghosh shows that the inhabitants of the tide country are a part of the local ecology having instilled with its malevolent and benevolent calls every day. They are well-

acquainted with the smell and pulse of its soil. The model that the westerners pursue to conserve wildlife in the land in accordance with their political activism brings dissatisfaction and untold miseries to the settlers. They wonder if it is a protection for wildlife conservation and beautification or ironically a systemization to put the local people daily into the mouth of dead. In *The Hungry Tide*, both human and surroundings and natural environment are damaged due to natural calamities and human inhabitation. Ravi Dayal's review "Tides and Eddies of Humans on Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*" says, "This book is about the confusion, misunderstandings, understandings and changes - all of which are played out in a world that's always changing, ever-silting, and in which the prey and the pursuer constantly switch positions". (*Hindustan Times* 17).

Amitav Ghosh's historically engaged novel *The Hungry Tide* presents the whole episode more or less impartially, even though the definite political actors and discourses that led to the gruesome massacre and forceful eviction of the refugees are downplayed in the novel. The Morichjhapi massacre is a shameful story of betrayal and of state-sponsored violence to evict Indian nationals from the land where they felt at home. It goes to the glory of Amitav Ghosh that he has challenged to record, in terms of fiction, this little publicized historical event.

The Glass Palace is a masterly novel by Amitav Ghosh, the gifted novelist Peter Matthiessen has called "an exceptional writer" "A Tale of Three Countries: *The Glass Palace* as a Postcolonial Text" (45). This superb story of love and war begins with the shattering of the kingdom of Burma and the igniting of a great and passionate love, and it goes on to tell the story of a people, a fortune, and a family and its fate. *The Glass Palace* tells of Rajkumar, a poor boy lifted on the tides of political and social chaos, who creates

an empire in the Burmese teak forest. During the British invasion of 1885, when soldiers force the royal family out of the Glass Palace and into exile, Rajkumar befriends Dolly, the woman whose love will shape his life. He cannot forget her and years later, as a rich man, he goes in search of her.

Amitav Ghosh's empathy towards issues of political importance, as well as of cultural significance, is apparent among other things in his reaction to the information that his fifth novel, *The Glass Palace* had been nominated for the Commonwealth Writers Prize in 2001. This had happened without Ghosh's knowledge and he leaves the novel from the competition on the grounds that it linked an area of contemporary writing. Further, he saw that the Commonwealth was not an appropriate quality for a literary and cultural group that included many other languages and realities beside those represented by the English language.

Ghosh's extraction from the struggle for the Commonwealth prize was widely noticed. As the attention accumulated, Ghosh ended up making contact with many of the writers who had won the award before, assuring them that he had been making a philosophical point worth discussion, not trying to criticise them for accepting the prize.

When asked to what extent his background as a historian, journalist and an anthropologist has affected his work and whether his novels are entirely a work of fiction, Dr. Huma Yaqub's has mentioned Ghosh's answer in his work:

For me, the value of the novel, as a form, is that it is able to incorporate elements of every aspect of life - history, natural history, rhetoric, politics, beliefs, religion, family, love, sexuality. As I see it, the novel is a meta-form that transcends the boundaries that circumscribe other kinds of

writing, rendering meaningless the usual workaday distinctions between historian, journalist, anthropologist, etc. (108)

Amitav Ghosh has been compared to Latin American novelist Gabriel Garcia Marquez. His intelligent training as a social anthropologist has enabled him to develop narrative with different histories and cultures of various places and people. He proves that he has more than fictionalizing history as popularly believed and that he has some concern and a sense of responsibility towards the world he has set out to discover. A well-built tinge of environmental and ecological alarm pervades through his phrases and actions, setting and choice of places in his fictional works especially in *The Hungry Tide*. The novel highlighted the interface between the human and the physical environment, the text's symbolic implications, and the historical episode (Morichjhapi incident of 1979). Divya Anand quoted Lawrence Buell in her article "Words on Water: Nature and Agency in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*" that, "refractions of physical environments and human interactions with those environments, not with standing the artifactual properties of textual representation and their mediation by ideological and other socio-historical factors" (22). Melvin Jules Bukiet has commented that,

Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace* is like the royal Burmese castle its title refers to exotically expansive, yet filled with intricately-rendered nooks and niches. A century of traumatic subcontinental history provides the architectural background to the intimate details of Ghosh's characters' lives. He conveys all of this with serenity and moral strength in the face of overwhelming turmoil. His book is a singular achievement. (7)

The Glass Palace is the understanding of the degradation done by colonialism. It started in 1885 in Burma when the British dominated it. They sent the Burmese royal family into exile. *The Glass Palace* refers to Burmese majestic palace at Mandalay. It is a wonderful hall of mirrors which forms the centre-piece of the royal residence. It is the traditional hall where the Burmese sovereign held audience. It is also the name of the photo studio in the late 20th century where the novel *The Glass Palace* ends, the studio which derived its name from its original, as a reminder of the old days when Burma was free from both the colonial powers and the government which controls it now.

The novel draws the life of Raj Kumar, a boy of Indian origin, who, after lots of struggles becomes a rich teak merchant. The notable aspect of the novel is that there is not a single episode in the complete book directly representing or addressing the British. They appear only in the background to support the situational circumstances. Ghosh has treated them almost in the same way that the 18th and 19th centuries British writers used the colonized countries. It is actually a short history of the nation seen through the eyes of the subaltern. Throughout the novel Ghosh explores the colonial period. Meenakshi Mukherjee comments in the 'The Hindu' about *The Glass Palace*:

No one is directly indicted in the novel, not a single person idealised. Yet casually mentioned details get linked across space and time to form haunting patterns, their cumulative effect staying with the reader long after the novel is over. For all its vividness of description and range of human experiences, *The Glass Palace* will remain for me memorable mainly as the most scathing critique of British colonialism I have ever come across in fiction. (15)

The Glass Palace contributes something essential to the current debate about Indian cultural identity in the face of Western domination. Ghosh lends his experience and insight to an examination of the nature of colonialism and the struggles that were essential to gain victory. Jhumpa Lahiri represents the complications of their cultural identity far from home that,

Ghosh, however, looks at a much more complex situation, that of a native people as they struggle to come in terms with the culture imposed by invading government. Unlike the situation in Australia or the American colonies, in Asia the indigenous people remained a majority throughout occupation, and integration with the occupiers resulted in remarkable tensions. (12)

The Glass Palace is comparatively a thicker book, not because Ghosh has changed his style or subjective matter, but the narrative is extended up to three generations. There are many characters who live in connection with each other. Many instances are given where the author has shown the cruelty of colonization and its impact on the lives and minds of the colonized. The novel also explores that decolonization is not easy. Ghosh narrates the havoc caused by Japanese invasion in Burma and its effect on the army officers and people. He creates the sense of depression that deals with human tragedy, wars, death, dislocation, environmental problems and devastations.

The Glass Palace has wedded postcolonial concerns with ecocritical ones. He also endeavours to bring out the ecological imperialism implicit in the European domination of Asia and Africa. Ghosh subverts the dominant discourse of civilization and process to present colonialism as an environmentally catastrophic venture for South Asia. The

action of the novel begins when the British forces settle down in the far flung Ratnagiri in India. It points out the environmental damage done by the war and the devastation and displacement caused by it. He clearly brings out the green concerns in his analysis of European colonial-capitalist venture. Pico Iyer's review on Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace* in *New York Review of Books* asserts:

The Glass Palace performs an invaluable service in showing us how the events of the last century, and especially the war, looked to many people in Burma and India, whose voices have seldom been heard before in the West; but its narrative is obscured occasionally by an abundance of detail, occasionally by political argument. (11)

The Hungry Tide brings to light the incredible loveliness and presence of the Sundarbans. For an ordinary tourist it offers nothing. Sundarbans surrounded with water possesses a history having multiple layers. Pramod K. Das gives his concerns on the island that, "It is like an onion; one can just keep peeling layers upon layers but can never come to the core; there is always more" (72). Ghosh gives equal importance to nature and human beings. In *The Hungry Tide* and *The Glass Palace*, he expresses his concern towards ecological and environmental issues.

In *The Hungry Tide* he presents the problems faced by the people in everyday life. Nature is very beautiful, at the same time it is equally dangerous for the people who live in the island. Ghosh penned his concerns for human beings in his novel *The Hungry Tide* along with the problems faced by the refugees and in *The Glass Palace* through the native people arrested by the British. *The Hungry Tide* is devoted to the treatment of the ecology of the Sundarbans. Ghosh is very sensitive to the problems and challenges that

confront those who depend on nature for their existence. He has specially highlighted the exploitation of the settlers of Morichjhapi by the policeman to bring to light what is happening in the eco-sensitive areas in the name of development and preservation of wildlife. Nilanjana S Roy gives her review in 'Business Standard' in an article "The Trip of a Lifetime" that,

Ghosh is an anthropologist by training, and more than any of his contemporaries, part of his allotted task as a writer appears to be to dredge up lost stories in the way an archaeologist would, to analyse them in the way an anthropologist might, and to illuminate them in a way only a deeply sensitive writer can.....the trip of a lifetime. (8)

Through *The Hungry Tide*, governments and citizens around the world are ever more aware of the ecological consequences of atmospheric pollution and climate change. Much of the pollution is caused by burning fossil fuel. In large-scale researches, plants and animals are exposed to carefully controlled atmospheres and variety of ecological conditions. Scientists have discovered how flora and the insects that feed on them respond to pollution and climate change. Forecasts are made regarding the changes in the distribution of plants and animals and how crop and forestry yields might be affected. In *The Glass Palace*, Ghosh points out the ecological damage done by the European intervention in other parts of the world. He endeavours to bring out the ecological imperialism implicit in the European domination of Asia and Africa; not only for the concerns but also the survival and the struggle faced by the people. Ruth Scurr gives her review in 'The Times' about Ghosh's writing style and his historical view of the country:

Even more astonishing than his ambitious plot is Ghosh's technique for executing it. The key to this is the pace. Characters meet and marry within sentences. (...) But if it is fast, *The Glass Palace* is also rigorously controlled. Ghosh is a deeply serious writer, sure of his human and historical insights, and confident in his ability to communicate them. I cannot think of another contemporary writer with whom it would be this thrilling to go so far, so fast (2).

The chapters in the thesis deal with the environmental issues in the novels *The Hungry Tide* and *The Glass Palace*. It highlights the ruins caused to nature by humans. It also discusses how the characters differ with regard to surroundings. It brings out the conditions of flora and fauna in the hands of man. It further argues about the circumstances of the refugees and their sufferings due to their concern for nature and also due to colonisation. It explains how human beings are made as wanderers and the struggle they undergo to survive in a constant settlement.

Chapter 2

Ecological Concerns in *The Hungry Tide* and *The Glass Palace*

Amitav Ghosh shows his concern for ecology in his novels *The Hungry Tide* and *The Glass Palace*. If *The Glass Palace* presents a significant portion of his father's history, *The Hungry Tide* brings out the unbelievable beauty and presence of the Sundarbans, a dark archipelago in India. History has highly influenced his life that he cannot set himself apart from it.

Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* is an astonishing work of fiction that greatly deals with ecological and environmental conditions of the Sundarbans. *The Hungry Tide* also portrays the author's bond with his own family. He talks about his own motherland near Bay of Bengal and explores its history. India is a country with variety of ecosystems, which starts from the Himalayas in the North, Plateaus in the South, Sundarbans in the East and the Thar Desert in the West. Sundarbans is a beautiful island spread between Bay of Bengal and the plains of Bengal on the easternmost coast of India. It is full of mangroves. Pure water for drinking is a huge problem faced by the inhabitants of Sundarbans because there is no border between fresh water and salt water. Human beings are left to die due to thirst. Pramod K. Das in his article, "*The Hungry Tide: An Ecological Study*" states, "A German biologist... the reasons why the tigers were killing human beings was because they didn't have fresh water" (2).

For the people of Sundarbans, leading their life is itself an everyday battle. Yet, they have learned to strike a balance between their life and nature. The novel deals with the relationship among all the living things and their environment in the tide islands of Lusibari, Gajrontola, Canning, Gosaba, Satjelia, Morichjhapi and Emilibary. The over

use of environment has led to the depletion, destruction, annihilation and remarkable changes in the ecosystem.

Das in his article asserts that “Tribals find their happiness in the lap of the nature” (*The Hungry Tide: An Ecological Study* 3). Nature is everything for those people and it is the main source for their livelihood. They feel that it is their birthright to live amidst natural surroundings. Even after attaining independence there is no freedom for the tribes to carry out their livelihood. The Indian government had promised to restore the rights of the tribes like collecting firewood, hunting, collecting honey from the hive and so on. But the promise made was rarely fulfilled. They go to the forest and collect firewood where the forest department officers either demand their stock or bribe or charge them a fine. They are seemingly under the protection of nature but they are haunted and inflicted by the same.

Ghosh is of the opinion that being in India it is increasingly like being in two countries simultaneously. The habitat of certain regions is very much civilized and modernized and those are generally termed as urban centers. On the contrary, there exist rural areas like Sundarbans where even today one can see the precarious condition, which they would expect some hundred years ago. Urban people have forgotten that they are not aliens but descendants of a part of the rural people. Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* elaborately discusses the environmental condition of Sundarbans through his characters in the novel.

Sundarbans is the largest delta in the world, and the fact is river Ganga and Hoogly divide themselves in many parts of Calcutta and afterwards merge into the sea. The speed of the water reduces and the river deposits its silt. The mouth of the river with silt is shaped like an island and they provide a perfect environment for the ‘sundari’ trees

to grow. According to Das, Sundarbans is “spread over an area of almost 10,000 sq kms (now shared by Bangladesh and India) and it is home to many birds and animals” (“*The Hungry Tide: An Ecological Study*” 162). It was once a paradise for tiger hunters where many tigers were hunted illegally. So the area came under the control of the government for preserving tigers. The tigers in the Sundarbans are known to swim at a record distance of 10 kms. Tigers are not the only attraction of Sundarbans, the island is also known for wildlife including crocodiles, snakes and varieties of birds.

The novel raises national and global awareness about the history of violence in the Sundarbans. It reveals the interaction between the state of the poor, the fauna and the flora and the physical environment. Nishat Zaidi says in his article “Myth-History Interface in Fiction and Nation: A Reading of Amitav Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide*” that “The geographical terrain of Sundarban that serves as the chronoscope of the novel is itself a metaphorical representation of nature’s rigid resistance to be put into fixed categories and compartmentalization” (247).

Sundarbans is a tide country which constantly changes with the ebb and flow of water. He uses water as an agent that rewrites the social matrix of the Sundarbans. He also uses water as a metaphor in locating the plot in an environment such as Sundarbans, a place which emerges as a larger forum confining the real character, where water engages all minor and major change in the lives of the people and the environment in three ways. First, the author uses water as an agent with the clear moral and ideological stand to address the struggle between humans and animals for their survival. Water is a crucial factor that conceives the crucial part of the novel as it holds the function of the entire world, “When water fails, function of nature cease, you say; / Thus when rain fails,

no men can walk in ‘duty’s ordered way’” (Thirukural 20). Second, he uses water as a motif bringing out the plight of both the dispossessed people and the threatened wildlife. Third, he represents water as an element to destabilize the hegemonic social order.

Ghosh responds to the global phenomena in various ways. *The Hungry Tide* has profound ecological suggestions and he views the current global ecological crisis from an ecological perspective. Some of the fictional characters introduced in *The Hungry Tide* highlighted the ‘anthropocentric’ attitude of human beings towards animals. The villagers’ killing the tiger which strayed into human area depicts man being more anthropocentric and shallow towards ecology.

This novel is exclusively on human and natural environment. Sundarbans, to which the whole of the work is devoted to, is not only a far-flung land of intimidating physical environment but also a place of dealing an assortment of communities, religion, culture etc. The group of islands has inhabitants living in fear of drawing tides and man-eating animals. Ghosh has given minute descriptions of the moods and microenvironments of the tide country that serve as a lush backdrop for an intricate narrative that moves fluidly between past and present.

The Hungry Tide has the back drop of an immense archipelago of islands, Sundarbans. The cyclone has snapped the island and left it fragile. The ecosystem of the islands is delicate between man and nature. The following shimmering expression in the novel captures the very tone of this environment:

At low tide, when the embankment was riding high on the water, Lusibari looked like some gigantic earthen ark, floating serenely above its surroundings. Only at the high tide was it evident that the interior of the

island lay well below the level of the water. At such times the unsinkable ship of a few hours before took on the appearance of a flimsy saucer that could tip over at any moment and go circling down into the depths.

(*HT* 37)

Ghosh talks about the low-lying, half-formed, mangrove dominated mud-flats which have been reclaimed for farming from about 100 years ago. The existence of human settlements over them is made possible only by earthen embankments all around them. In Morichjhapi ecological concerns and protection efforts served as mere disguise towards political ends. Divya Anand quotes Ghosh's words from "The Chronicle Interview" regarding nature and human beings. She says, "By placing Morichjhapi as the centre point of the novel, Ghosh asks a crucial question, unique to Third World and Fourth World peoples: 'If you care for the environment, does that mean that you don't care about the plight of human beings, especially impoverished people?'" (qtd. in "Words on Water: Nature and Agency in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*" 33).

Ghosh allots the leading role of the novel to Piya, in order to defend the life of the animals. Dolphins are human-friendly marine mammals. They live in the coastal areas as well as fresh water. N. Leena in her article "Ecological Crisis in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*" states about the symbols that, "A symbolic relationship exists between dolphin and fishermen in the Sundarban Rivers. Piya, the researcher is deeply pained to see them becoming extinct and she wants to do something to protect them." (82). She visits Sundarbans to find the oracella of the coastal variety. Snakes, crocodiles and tigers are a constant threat to the scant human population of the island and so human beings

attempt to kill them. The destruction of these animals create ecological imbalance in nature.

The novel begins with Piyali Roy, an Indian American scientist, researching the island in order to conduct a survey on dolphins. She always supports nature and animals and her views are 'biocentric'. She holds the opinion that all living and non living beings exist in relation to each other. Her compassion towards animals reveals her inclination towards nature and ecology. Piya finds a translator Kanai, a business man from Delhi to assist her. Kanai is an interpreter by profession and visits his aunt Nilima at Lusiburi. Piya is made to stay at Nilima's guest house. Piya discloses her plan to Nilima and the latter arranges a motor boat for her research. She seeks the help of Fokir, a fisherman, to be her guide and she wants him to take the boat. He is an illiterate yet he knows everything about the Sundarban islands and the forest. Kanai functions as a mediator between Piya and Fokir as he is the translator. When the trio is on the boat for their purpose, they come across an isolated area where the people turn out to be Bengali refugees. The government's eviction of the refugees from Sundarbans forms the crux of the novel, exploring topics like humanism and environmentalism and the relation between them and how they function when they face conflict with each other.

Once, Piya and Fokir visit Gajrontola, an island and find a group of dolphins cuddled under their mother's embrace, but she is soon shocked to find a dead calf lying nearby. Piya wonders that the propeller of the motor boats of the coast guard or the police or the forest officials would have hit the calf which led to its death. Fokir also points out that he had come across three such incidents along the river.

Meanwhile, Kanai and Piya grow closer to the ecological system of the tide country. Nilima runs a hospital in Lusiburi after her husband's death. Her husband Nirmal worked as a headmaster in Calcutta. He was affected by a terminal disease and so he was advised to quit urban settlement. Sir Danial Hamilton from Scotland purchased thousand acres of the tide country from the British government. He named the land Lusibari after his niece Lusy. Introducing Kanai to the Lusibaris, Nirmal says that there were no people and no embankment but just mud and mangroves during that time. At high tide most of the land areas vanished. One could only find tigers, crocodiles, sharks and snakes as survivors of the tide.

An incident in the novel questions the credibility of conservation of one particular species in the coast. Piya, Kanai and Fokir become witnesses to the killing of a tiger by a mob. The tiger has already killed two people and many livestock of the village. Piya wishes the tiger to be saved but is shocked to see Kanai and Fokir joining the mob and set fire to the animal. Piya is sympathetic towards animal rights but ignores since human beings fight for their own survival. Sagara has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Bangladesh and its only goal is to develop tourism in Sundarbans. In the article, "Human vs. Non human, Environmental Issues and Concerns in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*", Marie Josephine Aruna quotes the words of the Chairman of the project, "That project can be initiated here as the larger part of the Sundarbans falls in Bangladesh" (5). It is the government's duty to protect from such infringement of humans. Ghosh wonders at the credibility of conservation of one particular species at the cost of another. Piya is sensible to the rights of animals but does not understand the dangerous situation where human beings fight for their survival against the animal. Dr. A.

K.Chaturvedi and D. K. Mishra, in a research article “Ecological Concerns in Amitav Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide*” says:

In 1978 it happened that a great number of people suddenly appeared in Morichjhapi, cleared the plants and trees, built dams and put up huts. It happened so quickly that in the beginning none even knew who these people were but in time it came to be learnt that they were refugees from the government settlement camp in Danankaranya, deep in forests of Madhya Pradesh... A few months after their settlement in Morichjhapi, the government declared the place as a protected forest reserve and they announced the settlers to leave the island. But the settlers refuse to do so. The government authorities read the message that they would do all that was possible to drive away the settlers. The settlers were adamant on staying in the island whatever be the consequences... the policemen employed the gangsters to drive the settlers out and announced that all movements in and out of Morichjhapi was banned under the provision of The Forest Preservation Act and Section 144 was imposed on the whole area. (12)

Critics Tiffin and Huggan discuss in *Editorial: Green Postcolonialism* on the growing awareness in the developed countries on the rapid dwindling of the ‘natural’ environment during the 19th and 20th centuries that caused a “shift in emphasis from anthropocentric to environment-based (ecocentric) philosophies and practices” in order to “preserve non-human animal and plant species, and what ‘pristine’ environments remained” (3). Unfortunately, this shift in general did not benefit the indigenous

population in most cases; it marginalised them even more than before and effectively created a hierarchical position for them below the needs of animals and plants.

There is another incident set back at Morichjhapi, one of the islands in Sundarbans, where the forced deportation of illegal settlers takes place. Nirmal's diary is a prominent source that narrates the story of the settlers. Kusum is the main character in the novel and she dies during Morichjhapi violence. The incident shows how government's predominance for ecology and use of forces in Morichjhapi forces hundreds of refugees to die. Fokir's mother Kusum is in agony at the announcement made by the policemen. She says to Nirmal,

the worst part was not the hunger or the thirst. It was to sit here, helpless, and listen to the policemen making their announcements, hearing them say that our lives, ours existence, was worth less than dirt or dust.... Every day, sitting here, with hunger gnawing at our bellies, we would listen to the words, over and over again. (HT 269)

The Hungry Tide is not a mere work of fiction but is rich in the usage of symbols. Treating an endangered ecosystem in the Bay of Bengal as its setting, Ghosh employs several natural symbols in his frame work. The frequent and sudden rise of tide brings danger to the inhabitants. Here Ghosh makes the readers to understand the situation where humans strive against all the devastating aspects of nature, especially wild animals and vice versa. Ghosh is a writer who never uses symbols in his novels or in his narrative but in *The Hungry Tide* he tries to capture the readers through symbols. He has an extraordinary power of bridging between the imaginary and the real. For instance, Piya falling into the sea gives the readers a dramatic picture. The expressions like "the muddy

brown water was rushing up to meet her face” (*HT* 48) is stated in order to invoke the necessary dramatic experience.

Ghosh explores the ethical possibilities in possessing harmless attitude towards our environment of which man too is an integral part. The writer has taken much effort to give a clarion call towards the understanding and conservation of life in the Sundarbans. The land and the living beings are similar to a selected organization of one organism. Sudipta Kaiti says Ghosh “desired to write a book that explored forest and animals and *The Hungry Tide* was almost a natural outgrowth,” in her article “*The Hungry Tide: An Insight into the Culture of Sundarbans*” (144). He says that the integration completes while co-operating with each other. Its integral part should be treated like man’s own integration of mind, body and soul. Rashmi Gaur says that “*The Hungry Tide* shows that even the less beautiful natural surrounding are thoughtlessly exploited by man, wreaking havoc on the already precarious ecological balance,” in her “Ecology and Gender: An Eco-Feminist of Amitav Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide*” (86).

In the case of Kanai Dutt, he is genuinely humane and becomes the spokesperson for ailing humanity. This becomes controversial when it is pitted against ecological concerns:

That tiger killed two people, Piya, Kanai said. ‘And that was just in one village. It happens every week that people are killed by tigers. How about the horror of that? If there were killings on that scale anywhere else on earth it would be called genocide, and yet here it goes almost unremarked: these killings are never reported, never written about in the papers.
(*HT* 300)

Amitav Ghosh's serious concern for environment and humanity becomes explicit in Piya's words spoken in sheer despair when she witnessed another tiger killed for the safety of human society. Her despair is exhibited through her expression, "Just suppose we crossed that imaginary line that prevents us from deciding that no other species matters except ourselves. What'll be left then? Aren't we alone enough... Once we decide we can kill off other species, it'll be people next....who're poor and unnoticed" (*HT* 301). Here Ghosh informs the complex matter that man is not the only one with the right to live and enjoy the gift of life, but every living creature has a place to establish its own shelter under the glowing star. Men do not have rights to kill any other living creature in the world. Thus, Ghosh advocates for a balanced ecosystem which can be sufficiently assisted with technological means.

The Hungry Tide is a novel full of ideas and suggestions rather than answers to the questions raised by the author himself. Kanai and Piya view everything in black and white. In Sundarbans the tide changes the island every day; nothing is certain and everything in life is painted with melancholic shade of grey. It's a place where tigers kill hundreds of people every year. In an environment where life is easily perishable, the essence of spirit of any person is lost in core. He breaks down the barriers of the society and his characters. Undoubtedly the novel engages normal people bound by the attributes of their own motherland. It is based on human emotions, love, pride, culture and trust through the characters who make all the difference.

The major focus of Ghosh in *The Hungry Tide* is to warn the humanity of an impending ecological disaster that is about to occur, unless people are ready to face global warming and all other ecological problems. Cyclone and earthquakes become a

common factor taking toll on the human and the animal kingdom. The novel is open-ended and the readers are left to ponder over the issues.

Amitav Ghosh's another novel *The Glass Palace* raises the author's voice against technological life in today's world. It explores the increasing awareness of environmental degradation and ecological damage due to over consuming culture. The adverse effects of disasters on the poor have made large number of scholars to include green concerns in their postcolonial analysis. Postcolonial ecocriticism or green postcolonialism is the result of this understanding that a socio-cultural critique of modernity, colonialism and imperialism is inevitably intertwined with environmental and ecological issues.

Nirmal G. says that "*The Glass Palace* looks back at the colonial period to show the socio-cultural-economic and ecological devastation brought by European intervention in South Asia" ("Postcolonial Ecocriticism as Illustrated in *The Glass Palace*" 12). *The Glass Palace* is Ghosh's opus where he has wedded postcolonial concerns with ecocriticism. This family memoir comes across as a subversive rendering of the history of the South Asian region from an environmental angle. In his grand fictional piece, Ghosh rues the loss of the pre-colonial pastoral world with the invasion of European colonialism.

The novel points out the environmental damage done by the wars and the devastation and displacements caused by the war. "Ghosh's technique is simply to borrow the war-journalist's tripod, lenses and so forth and then swivel his viewfinder so that it alights on families living out their lives in tumultuous times" says Rukmini Bhaya Nair in her article "The Road from Mandalay: Reflections on Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass*

Palace” (164). Ghosh’s ecocritical concerns on this phenomenon are evident in *The Glass Palace*.

The Glass Palace is a remarkable fictional representation of the tale of defeat, spirit and resistance of man and nature to British colonialism. Ghosh’s sensitivity towards the ecological development of nature is evident when he recalls that trees were not cut or erased but assassinated. *The Glass Palace* is also significantly ecology-oriented for the reason that it dwells upon the lives of elephants too, in very close quarters. The author's affection for this very Asian-Indian animal is obvious when he enlarges the science and art involved in educating, rearing and training these huge beings by trail men like Don Say and Neel Rattan. Raj Kumar owned a whole farmyard of elephants for his rising timber-trade. But these tongueless monsters also have their moment of rebellion and glory when one of them kills Raj Kumar’s own son, the young and handsome husband of JuManDey, Neel Raha at the most unexpected time in the most shocking way, as if the silence of the lambs is finally broken by the trumpeting cries of these hefty pachyderms. This incident becomes a kind of precursor for the series of unfortunate events that spell out one after another for the important figures in the novel.

Arjun represents the Indian soldiers in British Army he belongs to, yet another section of the population, narrated to bring out the undercurrents of didactic bargaining. These young men are so carried away by the veil of power and positions that they regard them as more worthy than others and believe themselves to be the real citizens of the country. Arjun is surprised by the luxuries his job provides. The narrator records him as saying:

Every meal at an officers' mess, Arjun said, was an adventure, a glorious infringement of taboos. They ate food that none of them had ever touched at home: bacon, ham and sausages at breakfast; roast beef and pork chops for dinner. They drank whisky, beer and wine, smoked cigars, cigarettes and cigarillos. Nor was this just a matter of satisfying appetites: every mouthful had a meaning - each represented an advance towards the evolution of a new, more complete kind of Indian.... They had to prove, to themselves to as well as to their superiors, that they were eligible to be rulers, to be qualified as members of elite: that they had vision enough to rise above the ties of their soil, to overcome the responses instilled in them by their upbringing. (*GP* 278-279)

Nirmal G. in his article "Postcolonial Ecocriticism as Illustrated in *The Glass Palace*" points out Meenakshi Mukherjee's view on the novel *The Glass Palace*. He says, "The novel is memorable for her, "mainly as the most scathing critique of British colonialism I have ever come across in a fiction." He also endeavors to bring out the "ecological imperialism" implicit in the European domination of Asia and Africa" (13).

Ghosh further comments, "We understand the West better than any of you civilians, 'Arjun liked to say. 'We know how the minds of the Westerners work. Only when every Indian is like us will the country become truly modern'" (*GP* 279- 280). Education in the postcolonial context is not only the process of creating a man but a way of power projection. The second half of the narrative which moves across the twentieth century postcolonial Burma supports this notion of awareness and struggle related to power. The antidemocratic attitudes and situations that plugged Burma, faced resistance

from various quarters, the most difficult being the one from the university student community. The strikes and demonstrations that they hold against the atrocities of General Ne Win is a marked example of their powerful resistance staged during their university student life. The education, awareness and rights that these scholars communities claim is the major cause that unites them together.

Ghosh through his novel, brings out the ecological imperialism implicit in the European control of Asia and Africa. He subverts the dominant discourse of civilization and progresses to present colonialism as an environmentally tragic venture for South Asia. The action of the novel begins in the year 1885 with the British forces that includes mostly Indians, invade Mandalay. The king and the queen accompanied by a small band of attendants are forced to leave Mandalay and settle down in far flung Ratnagiri, in India. Through the portrayal of Rajkumar Raha and his extended family, the writer captures the politics of collusion and resistance to British colonialism. Amitav Ghosh in his environmental historiography captures both the acquiescence and revolt of man and nature against the imperialist venture of the British. In *The Glass Palace*, King Thebaw, on his way to exile, rephrases colonial enterprise from the perspective of the colonized:

What vast, what incomprehensible power, to move people in such huge numbers from one place to another - emperors, kings, farmers, dockworkers, soldiers, coolies, policemen. Why? Why this furious movement - people taken from one place to another, to pull rickshaws, to sit blind in exile? (*GP* 50).

The Glass Palace establishes how colonization is considered wild and elaborates on the subsequent commercial exploitation of wilderness that accompanied it.

Ghosh points to this commoditization of nature at the hands of the British colonialists. A relatively unknown historical fact that provided the motive for British colonization is explicitly described in *The Glass Palace*. The author states that the motive or impetus for the British invasion “came from a tree that had felled dynasties, caused invasions, created fortunes, brought a new way of life into being” (GP 71). The socio-cultural structure of the colonized societies is not only changed but also has cascading effect on the whole environment of the annexed bioregions.

In *The Glass Palace*, Ghosh blames the European invasion for this change in the eco centric view of the world, “Yet until the Europeans came none of them had ever thought of using elephants for the purpose of logging ... It was the Europeans who saw that tame elephants could be made to work for human profit. . . This entire way of life is their creation.... these method of girdling trees, these ways of moving logs with elephants.... this system of floating them downriver.....” (GP 74-75). The novel not only describes the subjugation of nature but also documents its resistance. Amitav Ghosh has skillfully brought out the green concerns in his critique of European colonial-capitalist venture. *The Glass Palace*, thus, can be an ideal illustration of the burgeoning field of postcolonial eco criticism.

In the beginning of the novel, it is because of the nature and environment that Matthew and his beloved wife Elsa get killed in a car accident, which is very ironical because Matthew as a character has been built up as a rich, US returned little monster. The accident reflects his attitude towards nature and his surroundings. He is very fond of cars; every significant moment is called by a new model of car in his life. He could narrate the latest designs in passion.

There is another example for the never ending damage on the environment caused by the quest for power – the World War. The scientific revolution and colonization developed by the people led to an incessant and careless infringement of the earth's ecology and environment. The later development of the novel shows that destruction of oil in nature led to self damage. These incidents create an important pattern that man is the self assumed master of everything. They portray man being hated and betrayed by nature, which is supposed to be just out there for man's use, need and enjoyment.

T. Vinoda in her article "A Tale of Three Countries: *The Glass Palace* as a Postcolonial Text" says that "Ghosh offers in this novel plenty of scope to read it as a counter discourse / construction of national identity that would disrupt and alter the Eurocentric projections" (7).

The Glass Palace is valuable for its hints towards the present day oil imperialism too – a theme Amitav Ghosh treats cleverly in his novel. Here, he shows the oil wells of Burma in Yenaungyaung beside river Irrawaddy. Raj Kumar notices the increasing number of foreigners and white men from France, England and America walking from well to well. Followed by this, very soon, this area turns to be a noisy and ugly part of the good-natured Burmese ecology as "Wooden obelisks began to rise on the hillocks, cage-like pyramids inside which huge mechanical beaks hammered ceaselessly on the earth" (GP 123). This refers to the never ending thirst of man's greed which turns the whole nature in a most shocking manner. The level of heartlessness is seen and the colonizers no doubt, work hard to attain the peak in expressing greediness. Be it the oil in Middle East, cotton and silk in Africa or Popy and indigo in India all these have taken Ghosh's novel to another level.

The Glass Palace ends with showing Illongo Alagappan, a labourer woman's illegal son's rise to the highest and most successful position. Contrary to his poor education, his new generation family is educated and settled, supporting the close link between nature and its goodness. Illongo is declared as a 'half wit', or 'idiot' in his childhood by his master's family; his doubly marginalized fate left nothing to be mourned on. So, the final work of Illongo repeats the blessings of being close to nature. He is an exemplification of knowledge lent by the traditional belief of Mother Nature.

In both novels Amitav Ghosh extends the role of nature beyond that of moral indication; he rather makes people conscious of what we do for our globe. He alters man's conscience to think about nature and means to live simply on the earth. Though the novel *The Hungry Tide* doesn't give any solution for the ecological problem, it creates an awareness/ecological consciousness about the unique mangrove forests. Thus, his novels enable the readers to launch themselves towards conserving the planet for future generations.

Chapter 3

Humanistic Concerns in *The Hungry Tide* and *The Glass Palace*

Literature is basically defined as a mirror of life. In modern times it is concerned with the connection between human world and the physical environment. The novel *The Hungry Tide* surveys the human connectivity with the natural world. In this novel, Ghosh gives equal importance to both human world and natural world. Man, for many years had been the master for everything on the earth. Marie Josephina Aruna says “For long man’s attitude to nature had been based on master / slave theory” (2). Now, man has re-established his relationship with his surroundings that he is part of the natural environment and in no way is superior to it. This novel is based on Ghosh’s essay “Folly in the Sundarbans”.

Amitav Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide* speaks not only about the difficulties of displaced East Bengali refugees but also makes his readers familiar with the world of Sundarbans, a perfect setting to unravel the inner recesses of human mind. The politicians had assured that if they won the elections they would settle them in West Bengal. This shows the inhumane nature of the politicians who, if they do not win in the election, do not bother about the refugees. Many refugees had assembled at the railway stations to move to Sundarbans, but they were asked to return since the government denied basic supplies like food and water. Many of them escaped to different places while some went to Sundarbans. The refugees who went to Sundarbans had relatives there. They were brought by the British to clear forests for farming. They worked with the islanders, built huts, cultivated and earned through fishing. They established a fishing industry, salt pans

and schools. Though they worked mutually to carve a place for themselves, the effort taken was only short lived.

D.S.Bindhu talks about those refugees and the cruelty of the government towards them. She says that,

Out of 1, 50,000 refugees, 30,000 encountered government opposition under the leadership of Satish Mondal, a sympathizer of communist party. The government declared that Morichjhampi was “unauthorized and violation of the forest act”. The government declared that the permanent settlement would disturb the forest wealth and ecological balance. The police deprived the settlers of food and water, they were tear-gassed, their tube wells destroyed and boats sunk. People who tried to cross the river were shot. Several hundreds died and their bodies were thrown into the river...the core of the novel lies in the ruthless suppression and massacre of East Pakistan refugees who had run away from the Dandakaranya refugee camps to Morichjhampi as they felt that the latter region would provide them with familiar envisions and therefore a better life. This is a reality which is almost forgotten (2).

In *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh brings the dilemma of the stress between and within human beings, their relationship with the natural world and the changes in their nature due to disasters. Sundarbans is an isolated area with regard to human habitation, colonial historiography and also due to the prevalent uncomfortable landscape. A colonial historiography by Sir William W. Hunter published in *The Statistical Account of Bengal* in 1876, represents Sundarbans as a wanting landscape for the settlers. Other than the

political saga, it also remarkably portrays absurd human characteristics like ambition, humility, longing, charity, innocence, impatience and perseverance – all through proper narratives and different characters. As Paul Greenough mentions, Sundarbans was a place where there were “no indigenes: the humans were all immigrants and the tigers and crocodiles were the only aboriginals” (247).

The projects for settlement were more or less failures, including Sir Daniel Hamilton’s venture to found a supportive society in the cyclone-prone region. The water that shelters tigers, crocodiles, snakes and the mangrove trees enriches the forests. By contrast, the postcolonial Sundarbans witnessed increasing human activity, declining biodiversity and marketing of the uniqueness of the Sundarbans. Greenough states that, “Until recently the Sundarbans have been thought of, when thought of at all, as forbidding and obscure. Yet, during the late 1980s a reversal of values occurred, and the Sundarbans’ obvious hazards, inaccessibility and desolation began to be read by cosmopolitan naturalists in positive terms” (237).

The novel reacts to the social and economic differences, both in India’s past and its present. The novel is a proof to the historically unsettled sufferings of the rural poor. It is a transnational struggle of victims. It is the representation of the marginalized people’s plight in the tide country. Marxism has failed in many situations. An NGO established by Nilima – Badabon trust emphasizes a practical way to make contributions through institutions and community building. But, the success of the trust is limited because Nilima procures funds through governmental support. She has to co-operate with the government of India.

The government is not worried about the massacre in Morichjhapi. The Morichjhapi massacre resulted in huge scale raping and killing on the island. The event was documented by the journalists; the crime remained unpunished and an enquiry has never been held. It has failed due to oblivion. “The notebook of Nirmal represents the failure of institutional academia for such atrocities. Every year myriads of people are killed by tigers, snakes and crocodiles. Proximity of human being with nature is set with historical past, geographically blending human and natural ecosystem, involving characters hailing from Delhi and the US” (32). The novelist has highlighted the dilemma of the subaltern of Sundarbans in West Bengal, where socio-political turmoil is relative to the tides. He focuses on the huge parts of the Indian society that has been compressed and oppressed by the storms of Indian history. He challenges the power and status, struggles for the impoverished and displaced and creates space for their plight to be heard.

Human beings are not able to build homes there and they also have nowhere to go. Everyday thousands of mangrove forests come back as the tides reach more than a few islands and re-emerge hours later. As the fishermen have no place to go, they try to make a living from the unproductive, unyielding, salty areas of land. They are fishermen who depend on fish and crabs for food. Their life is changeable and their survival is dangerous. The refugees made the land as their home and there is a non-stop battle against storms and tides apart from many other problems. In addition, they have faced the terror of man-eating tigers and dangerous crocodiles. The hungry people begin to question on the importance given to the fauna and flora more than human beings. But the people in the island lead a life transcending class, caste and nationality. Man has the strength to reconstruct. The island of Morichjhapi had to be preserved as a forest reserve.

The government plans to handover a considerable part of the Sundarbans to a manufacturing house like the Sahara Parivar. Different to the principles, the Sundarbans would turn as a large stretch of forest, soaked in the blood of evicted refugees. The readers are left in a dilemma between the conservation of nature and the helplessness of human beings. Amitav Ghosh presents the political pretense that is involved in the name of protecting animals and their natural habitat at the cost of innocent lives.

Myth represents the history of the people and their land. Ghosh's fictional journey carries a sustained attack against the borders that divide the nations, human beings and cultures. Nishat Zaidi says,

The Hungry Tide (2004) is yet another addition in Ghosh's project of establishing a heteroglossic national identity and here he does this by using a largely realistic framework around a geographical space which itself is fantastical extremely unrealistic, using the co-text of history and digressing into myth, not borrowed from established religious, but the local folktale that itself is reflective of the cultural hybridity of the land (107).

Ghosh's narrative of Bon Bibi represents the culture of the people of the tide country. The basic struggle of the people and their survival and the risks involved in it are so powerful that it has no room for feuds founded upon religious and linguistic differences.

The Glass Palace represents the story of three generations spreading over three countries where colonies are formed by British Empire. The novel talks of levels of movements and awareness in Burma and India during the colonial period. It brings out

the images of the Burmese views on India's loss of selfhood and destruction of the social system. One of the important features is the practice towards recovery of the sense of selfhood. Ghosh also creates the struggle developed during the 1920s and 1940s.

Ghosh clearly brings out the concern for humans as well as for their freedom and dignity. In his clear understanding of humanism, comes out the rejection of colonial practices. Equality is the main concept of humanism. According to him, human beings are irresponsible of their nationality, culture, religion, caste, social and political status. He gives his view in fictional way as N.K. Neb says in his article "Humanistic Concerns in Amitav Ghosh's the *Glass Palace*.", "In order to express his concern Ghosh has given fictional expression to the practices that block human freedom and tend to subjugate man / woman" (16). The cruel behaviour of the rulers has been expressed through the treatment of their subjects.

In the novel, the author focuses on the British rule; treatment of people in an inhuman manner and also on the suppression of human values. Self declaration of the native rulers brings out the author's view on humanism. Through this the readers come to know about the inhumanistic attitude during the post colonial period. The impact of various forms of political power makes people to migrate. According to Tiwari Shubha, "Raj Kumar is an individual here as well as a representative symbol of a whole migrated community" ("Amitav Ghosh: A Critical Study" 93). It is one of the reasons Ghosh gives for his serious attention on humanism in this novel. Before presenting any specific aspect of humanism *The Glass Palace* supports the idea of multiplicity. In the process of human experience, human life gains priority for necessary, transcendental perspective that will put down pre-fixed idea and will create importance of human thought.

Queen Suplayatt of Burma needs several maids for her palace. She has many young girls to attend on her and her own family. She does not bother about the children. It shows the queen's cruelty towards people. The worst part of this is that they were not willing to do any such work. She pushed the maids to do all sorts of work in her palace. "Young girls, orphans, many of them just children." (GP 7). "They'd been purchased by the Queen's agents in small Kachin, Wa and Shan village along with the kingdom's northern frontiers" (GP 20). This shows the inhuman attitude and behaviour of the queen of Burma. While this behaviour is very normal and natural for the rulers, it also shows the inhuman attitude of the native rulers. The Burmese rulers assume different meaning for 'humanism' and that makes them to rule the country in an inhuman way.

Another incident also shows the inhuman attitude of the queen. She expects her workers to give respect to her family. This is a routine happening for the Burmese. Apart from employing girls as servants to her and her family there are many incidents that show the inhumane nature of the ruling class. Further, every individual who works under the queen should prostrate before her to show their respect. It is called 'shiko'. Ghosh explains these things to show how different practices were adopted by people by dehumanising themselves.

Ghosh also portrays the climatic conditions. People explore and use the forest wealth under inhuman and unfriendly surroundings. They make use of their young men to work as long as they can tolerate the dangerous atmosphere and the harmful climate. There is another view of imperialism that is presented by Saya John. She gives her voice on the aspect of imperialism in this manner: "...these young Europeans. They have at best two or three years in the jungle before malaria or dengue fever weaken them to the

point where they cannot afford to be far from doctors and hospitals” (GP 74). The company uses these people as a tool to further its interests, thus exposes its inhuman attitude. “The company knows this very well; it knows that within a few years these men will be prematurely aged, old at twenty-one; and that they will have to be posted off to city offices. It is only when they are freshly arrived, seventeen or eighteen, that they can lead this life, and during those few years the company must derive such profit from them as it can” (GP 74). This cruel attitude of the colonised, further aggravates the people.

The inclination of the colonialists to create a kind of knowledge and their attempts to define human values according to their own standard has been expressed by the novelist. The involvement of power politics and their concern for human values has been highlighted. The central theme of the novel is to expose the designs of the British imperialism about the subject and their culture. The power of British colonialist involves a conscious effort on the part of the novelist to challenge and assume superiority of the Western culture. In their effort to begin themselves as custodians of human values, these people often project their subject races and their culture as barbarian and antihuman in nature. The power of colonial rulers constructs the kind of fiction about the culture under their rule. It helps them to understand their rules and their imperialist design and their domination over the people. In *The Glass Palace* the British rulers make the people believe that the Indian kings ruled the country in a very cruel manner. According to them, only the British are civilized and that, when the Indian kings ruled the society; it becomes uncivilized and uncultured. Hence, the British colonizers assuming that they provide proper civilisation, stress on the people following western culture. Uma, the wife of an Indian officer but working as a representative of the British has been made to believe the

same, like other people. She shared her feelings about human concern and values with Dolly, “One hears some awful things about Queen Supalyalt . . . That she had a lot of people killed . . . ‘Doesn’t it frighten you’, she said, ‘to be living in the same house as someone like that?’” (*GP* 113-114).

Dolly’s replies to her question was that, it was very natural and essentialist. She also expresses the façade of humanism and liberality of the British rulers “Don’t you sometime wonder how many people have been killed in Queen Victoria’s name? It must be millions, wouldn’t you say? I think I’d be frightened to live with one of those pictures” (*GP* 114). These words symbolise British authority.

The novel represents human helplessness in such circumstances. All that a human being can do is try to adjust, negotiate, live and above everything else form relationships. This forming of new bonds, mixing of races and castes is something that does not stop. The image of *The Glass Palace* symbolically represents the king and the queen. It was one of the important sections of Mandalay fort, where many events had taken place in the opening of the novel. Queen Supayalat was the determined and most loved wife of King Thebaw. “lined with mirrors. As she approached its centre, an army of Supayalats seemed to materialise around her . . .” (*GP* 39) says Ghosh in his novel. The self-centered ambitious nature of the Queen, who wanted to make her husband a powerful ruler, is explicit here.

The images reflect the life of the people of Burma. The myriad images in the life of the Queen reflect the selfish strain in her character. Political power is out of touch with the masses. The description of the mobs running into the palace once the King has been beaten by the British army, the humiliating exit of the King and his family from the city

add to the reflection of their lives. Ghosh gives the whole separation between the King and the masses. He also shows the complete unpreparedness of the King to face the British power project in India. These images in the mirror reflect an order, closed in political system and completely not enough to face the new threat.

Ghosh's concern for human beings is different from others. He rejects all forms of operation and his concern is not limited to the freedom of politics as a means to power. N.K. Neb comments that, "He contests all forms of imperialism dictated by a will for power. He calls a leader like Hitler and Mossolini 'monsters'" (65). He gives his own voice through Dinu who expresses the power of hungry people "Their ideology is about the superiority of certain races and the inferiority of the others" (*GP* 293). Ghosh opines that even if humanism is designed by the native rulers, it is against the spirit of humanism. He gives a long speech about humanism and imperialism and how they function against their freedom and dignity, through the conversation between Dinu and Uma "And don't imagine for a moment that India and Burma will be better off if the British are defeated... The German's plan is simply to take over the Empire and rule in their place... And think of what'll happen in Asia... The Japanese are already aspiring to an Empire like the Nazis and Fascists" (*GP* 293). The rulers think that all shades and forms are genuinely and agreeably considered anti-humanism. Ghosh has a long debate on this issue between Uma and Dinu.

Another aspect of humanism in *The Glass Palace* is the rejection of a fixed concept of human identity. In this novel the concept of human identity brings out the conflict between the standard concept of identity and the identity formed through the culture. N.K. Neb says, "Human identity brings out the clash between the static notion of

identity that forms the core of cultural thought in imperialism and the democratic perspective adopted by Amitav Ghosh in this novel” (207). Ghosh presents that the characters do not worry and that they are not ready to carry out their national identities. N.K. Neb says that “Instead of being Indians, Burmans or Malay these characters are remembered as Dolly, Uma, Raj Kumar, Saya John, Alison, Dinu, Neel, Daw Thin Aye. Similarly, the two different names, one Burma and the other Indian—of Raj Kumar’s sons destabilize nation based identities” (207).

Ahdaf Soueif writes, “Ghosh is one of the most sympathetic post-colonial voices to be heard today, he looks at love and loyalty and examines questions of Empire and the responsibility, of tradition and modernity” (5). Throughout the novel, the Empire expands and then retracts, fortunes are won and lost. Namrata Mahanta comments, “The novel sees Amitav Ghosh’s recurrent concern with nationalism; boundaries and statehood transform into multi-leveled dilemmas” (54).

In *The Glass Palace*, Ghosh challenges the colonial critics who confuse narrative fiction with the nation’s reality by writing a historical novel. He wants a narrative whose fictional edges bleed more reality into the empirically verifiable facts of the real historical record. *The Glass Palace* unfolds over hundred years of pre-colonial, colonial, post-colonial Burmese history along with their families and also the individual characters who experience loss and joy. Social organization such as feudalism is destroyed and new ones are formed in the guise of colonial and post colonial nation-state.

The dialogical perspective on humanism is the most important aspect of the fictional work of Ghosh. The main concept of this discourse does not lie in an individual statement, but in their dialogical negotiation. It can be understood by the major character

that gets to order through the dialogical interaction in the novel. While *The Glass Palace* is considered as the Mirror of Myanmar, the situation under which the tragedies unfold is mainly the British colonization of India, Burma and Malaya. This dislocates the traditional culture and introduces 'modernity' and then the Second World War during which Japan invades the region with equal political hope and cruelty.

The Glass Palace is an excellent historical novel that begins with the end of the Konbaung dynasty in Burma (1885) and the appearance of a democratic system of a movement in Myanmar. The novel has a changed significance at present given the revitalization of the democratic movement in the country. In the first half of the novel, Ghosh evokes the agony of a land, shorn of its dignity, the tragedy of a king and then its history. History appears in the latter half of the novel and there are many debates scattered throughout the book; for instance about colonialism, women, Gandhiji and Ghadar party congress verses the position of the anti-fascist in the Second World War etc. One of these, the one which relates to the ethical dilemma of the Indian officers and the British Army has been highlighted. Some of them are later deserted from the Indian National Army. By the end of the novel many of the characters have their lives apart. They are refugees, political prisoners and survivors. The novel seems to be one of the psycho-historical and geo-political contingencies that leads to a national idea in India and the liberation of Burma and the British occupation.

Ghosh exposes the hollowness of the colonialist's concerns towards humans. The British imperialism is barbaric and anti-human not only towards its subjects but also towards the propagators and to those who work for it. The novel is set against the background of political turmoil and attempts to present the suppression of the democratic

right to the people of Burma and of the native rulers after its decolonization from the British rule. The novelist's major concern here is to exhibit the obliteration of human rights under the ruthless rulers. A specific concern from human freedom and dignity emerges from his rejection of colonial practices. The concept of equality for all human beings irrespective of their nationality, culture, religion or the social and political status gains supreme significance in his view.

In the novel, Ghosh's understanding of human values is political and power threatening. The disturbance of politics in different fields of life tends to marginalize humanistic concerns. The working of the government does not permit the social and cultural instructions to work for the self-respect of man. In the novel, Auang San Suu Kyi the organizer, who struggles to support independent values against the cruel rule of the military Junta, is presented as the embodiment of true humanism in the given circumstance.

The process of colonisation and the state of the colonised are important components of this novel. Aggression, capture and colonization are shown through the Burmese who are robbed of all grace, with guns and artillery. Apart from cruel colonization the Emperors were also distanced from reality, from their own subjects and land, to a shocking extent. When King Thebaw is taken out of his palace, it is for the first time he sees his land. Ghosh ruthlessly describes the conditions in Burma where people are taken to work in the docks and mills, to pull rickshaws and empty the latrines.

Ghosh centers the men and the women working on the streets at the lowest level of the society. He indirectly laments on the people's lives which are inferior. Both the historical figures (King and Queen of Burma) and the imaginary work (The Glass Palace)

reflect upon this incident. Questions have been posed on post-colonial societies being engaged with the failures of kings of one strong kingdom, the role of one nation oppressing or enslaving other free nation and the real force behind the management of the British Empire. As these individuals struggle to gain sense of subjectivity, to come to terms with the complex interconnections between economic, political and cultural development in the colonial world, there are significant transformations within them, leading towards changes in the nation's identities.

Human interests are important under the spell of colonialism in this novel. The social chaos in Burma during the colonial days is one of the threads of human concerns. Ghosh describes the defeats and disappointments of dislocated people in Burma, India and China such as the King and Queen, Raj Kumar, Saya John, Dolly, Uma, Dinu, Neel, Arjun, Hardayal Singh and Jaya Bango. As said by Meenakshi Mukherjee,

The story spans more than a century in the history of the subcontinent, people get involved in unexpected relationships across countries and culture, wars are fought, rebellions quelled, political and ethical issues are debated, fortunes are made and lost. The writer reports everything accurately thoughtfully - his precession backed up by meticulous research (5).

In *The Glass Palace* awareness of true humanistic concerns makes it clear that British imperialism is one among the powers working against the strength of humanity. Even the natives are in no way different when they are spoiled by oppressing activities. Uma criticizes Raj Kumar for providing indentured labour to the British rulers "Raj Kumar, you're in no position to offer opinions. It's people like you who're responsible

for this tragedy.....what you and your kind have done is far worse than the worst deeds of the Europeans” (*GP* 247).

The Glass Palace forms several little narratives about the common people caught in their personal and their inner conflict and quests. It begins with the portrayal of the King and Queen of Burma, losing their authority to an external enemy. At the end of the novel, it creates a different kind of power and control. Santosh Gupta talks about this in the article “Looking into History: Amitav Ghosh’s *The Glass Palace*” that “It takes the reader to the street in Burma in the 1990s, leading towards the house of Auang San Suu Kyi, the most popular and perhaps, in the manner, powerful leader of the Burmese people” (251). Timothy Garton Ash calls Auang San Suu Kyi the ‘Uncrowned Queen’. By maintaining the self-respect and the sovereignty of man as a man, she resists taking part in politics that blocks the way to human independence. In the words of Dinu, “She’s the only one who seems to understand what the place of politics is... what is ought to be... that it cannot be allowed to cannibalise all of life, all existence.” (*GP* 542)

In spite of all background and provisional meaning of humanism that conveys through the clash between the British Empire and its colonies, a common thread providing Ghosh’s understanding can be observed in his concern for full freedom of man, independence and dignity. It doesn’t refuse the imperialist through nationalist self-assertion, making native the central and self formative, rather it challenges the world view based on the split of ‘the governor and the governed’, ‘the ruler and the ruled’. It envisions a world free from the practices of subjugating others in any form.

In these novels, Ghosh not only presents the importance of nature, but is also concerned about human beings. In *The Hungry Tide* he deals with the issues of the

marginalized. He portrays the distress of the refugees based on nature as a cause of their suffering. In addition to that, the government also remains as a trouble maker for the refugees. In *The Glass Palace*, he talks about the people who were under colonial rule. The British government's conduct was draconic, not only towards the subjects, but also to their propagators and the ones who work for it. Through this survey, it is evident that Ghosh's writings embrace human affairs as a considerable element.

Chapter 4

Struggle and Survival in *The Hungry Tide* and *The Glass Palace*

In any literature the struggle and survival among man and nature has been used to evaluate the society. Writing has been the most important instrument to express all such elements for today's generation. There are several novels to portray the actual status of women in Indian societies. Amitav Ghosh is one of the writers who gives importance to women. In his novel *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh presents the trouble faced by people who live in the island of Sundarbans. In *The Glass Palace*, he gives importance to woman characters through the incidents that happened during the War.

The title of the novel is a narrative of the sufferings of the characters in *The Hungry Tide*. For instance, Kanai's character is portrayed as unstable throughout the novel when "over the last many years, several women had drifted in and out of his life" (HT 16). He is sexually drawn towards Piya and tries to find ways to accompany Piya because he wants to have good relationship with her. Hence he finds a way to explore the river in quest of the dolphins. Kanai's aunt declaims "You're all the same, you men. Who can blame the tigers when the predators like you pass for human beings?" (HT 243). The men who came to throw out refugee settlers from the island, threw them into the rivers, so that they would be washed away by the tides.

Poverty plays a major role in the novel. The setting of the novel takes us to the tide country or the Sundarbans. The mangroves, tigers, crocodiles, dolphins and tempest are all that the inhabitants live with, along with their complete poverty. Two travellers Piyali Roy and another significant character Kanai, head a bureau of translators in New Delhi. Both look into the world in an equal way. Nazia Hasan also talks about this in

these two characters “Piyali and Kanai Dutta the two representative characters from the modernized and advanced world find a drama going on between the human and the wild nature in this survival of the fittest scenario” (185). Fokir is another important character in the novel. His knowledge of the river and Piya’s interest for the knowledge are basic elements in the novel. Piya hires Fokir’s progression as part of her quest for the dolphin and goes on exploring the river. A connection is developed between them even though “they had no language in common” (*HT* 159). While Piya could not understand Bengali, illiterate Fokir could not speak English. The history of the island is looked deep into, through the pages of Nirmal’s diary which Kanai reads. The plot involving Nirmal, Kusum and Horen reveals the tragedy of the refugees settled on one of the islands brutally resulting in the death of thousands of people.

Apart from the amazing fear of the disturbing effect of *The Hungry Tide*, human lives are not safe on land since, according to Ghosh, every year dozens of people in the embrace of that dense foliage are killed by tigers, snakes, sharks and crocodiles. The tigers created such great terror among the people that they never expressed its name for they thought that to say its name was to call it. The men go out for fishing to the sea and it proves to be really difficult for them to return. “the hazards of life in the tide country were so great” (*HT* 81) that the girls grew up arrogant and equipped themselves to take care of their families and they would be widowed in their early twenties. “When the men folk went fishing it was the custom for their wives to change into the garments of widowhood” (*HT* 80). The girls had prepared themselves for the negative impact of the great storm that shook their place in 1970 and carried thousands of animals.

Not only the human beings, even the solid building cannot withstand the tides, because the tide is very high and it shows that even a building cannot stand for a long time. “There were no docks or jetties on lucibari, for the currents and tides that flowed around it were too powerful to permit the construction of permanent structures” (*HT* 37). Ghosh draws a similarity that describes the nobility of the tides during the high tide. “Only at high tide was. . . . At such times the unsinkable ship of a few hours before took on the appearance of a flimsy saucer that could tip over at any moment and go circling drawn into the depths” (*HT* 37). Lord Canning wanted to build a new port for Bengal and came to the banks of Matla, “an embankment arose, foundations were dug, a strand was laid out, a railway line built” (*HT* 285). “In 1867, the river rose as if to a challenge and hurled itself upon Canning. In a matter of hours, the town was all but gone; only the bleached skeleton remained” (*HT* 287). The embankment built seems to be frail in contrast to the hunger of the river. “Look at the waters that flow past it and how limitless they are” (*HT* 205). The boundless floods taking place in the islands, leave salt all over making the land barren to grow crops. Amitav Ghosh describes the same in this manner:

Hunger drove them to hunting and fishing and the results were often disasters. Many died of drowning, and many more were picked off by crocodiles and estuarine sharks. Nor did the mangroves offer much of immediate value to human beings - yet 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 (*HT* 79).

Sudipta Kaiti says, “To add this misery and disaster the government too behave as predators, giving no value to the lives of the refugees, settled on the islands considered to be a part of the reserve forest” (“The Hungry Tide: An Insight into the Culture of Sundarbans” 147). The implication of the title assumes another interesting idea with the mention of women characters like Piya and Kusum. Piya is highly impressed by Fokir’s profound knowledge regarding so many rivers and his concern for Piya. “It was not just that he had thought to create a space for her; it was as if he had chosen to include her in some simple practiced family ritual, found a way to let her know that despite the inescapable muteness of their exchanges she was a person to him and not, as it were, a representative of a species, a faceless, tongue less foreigner” (*HT* 71).

When enquired by Kanai whether she has any love for Fokir, Piya could not express her feelings. She says, “I don’t know, Kanai. I don’t know what to tell you” (*HT* 336). Kusum responds to the love of Horen who in turn is desperately in love with her “And then it was as if the barriers of our bodies had melted and . . . There was nothing to say and nothing to be said; there were no words to chafe upon our senses: just an intermingling like that of fresh water and salt, a rising and a falling as of the tides” (*HT* 364).

Ghosh’s text carefully demonstrates the damage done to the environment. Introducing a rediscovered diary as the first source, the novelist refers to the historic tragedy of refugee settlers on the island of Morichjhapi in the Sundarbans in 1970 and skillfully brings in a postcolonial political conflict between demands of wildlife conservation and the needs of the inhabitants of Sundarbans. The author shows that the populations of the tide country are part of the local ecology having instilled with its cruel

and variety calls every day. They are well known with the smell and beat of its mud. The shadow of the westerners to save wildlife i.e. the tiger in the land, in agreement with their political activity brings dissatisfaction and untold sadness to the settlers. Official estimate declared that only 36 refugees were killed in this action but actual number ran into several hundreds. Neena Jain talks about this incident in her article “Amitav Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide*: A Retrieval of Forgotten Event of Migration and Refugee Resettlement in West Bengal” as follows:

How the government had put all its importance on the protection of wild life and its subsequent use of force against the poor refugees which resulted in hundreds of them dying was seen by the Sundarban’s islanders as a betrayal not only of poor and marginalized in general but also, of Bengali *nimnobar* (inferior varna or caste) identity (100).

Neena Jain says that on January 26th 1979, “The government is going to make measures, very strong measures” (103). The government of West Bengal progressed with an economic barricade of the settlement with thirty police. The community was tear-gassed, huts were razed down and fisheries and tube-wells were devastated in effort to remove refugees by means of depriving them food and water.

The Hungry Tide is not only a work of fiction with a well-knit story but also a work rich in symbols. While treating an endangered ecosystem in the Bay of Bengal as the setting, Ghosh points out the significant things through a number of nature symbols. The tidal area is represented as a place where animals follow human beings day and night. The frequent and sudden rise in tides bring danger to its population. Both animals and nature create a new problem everyday for people who live in the island. Hence, the

title leads to an understanding of a situation where humans share their lands with animals as tides bear all the shocking aspects of nature.

The dwellings in the island named Morichjhapi, describe how the would-be populace of the island promised this land and were betrayed later. It also talks about the spirit of bonhomie and unity between refugees and the natives, whose similar knowledge of marginalization brings them together in connection over a common cause, which is to fight their own land. Kusum's anger proves this point, "the worst part was not hunger..... here and listen to the policemen making their announcements that our existence is worth less than dirt or dust" (*HT* 109). The conflict of wildlife versus human suffering or destruction of the ecosystem versus human survival is seen in Ghosh's concern for ecology which is expressed in a beautiful way throughout the narrative structure of the novel.

The feeling that overcomes Kanai represents true incidents through his journal. If Kanai Dutt is seen as a mirror image of Amitav Ghosh himself, one can see how Kanai's response to the tragedy reflects the feelings that envelopes the author who remains willing to the human histories that he attracts. He is affected by the incidents that he listens or reads. He reads a disturbed narrative which he finally tries to transfer to the novel.

The experience that Kanai has in reading about the Morichjhapi massacre makes him to to speak for the poor people, whose lives seem to have no value. A little later, Kanai directly deals with Piya concerning the security of the preservation of the tiger population in the Sundarbans: "Because it was people like you, 'said Kanai,' who made a push to protect the wildlife here, without regard for human costs" (*HT* 301). The act of

empathizing with the great pain of another is seen to result in the varying of attitude.

Kanai Dutt, becomes kind and a representative of humanity in the course of the novel.

This becomes controversial when it is uneven against ecological concerns in *The Hungry Tide*.

People suffered because of the dislocation highlighted in the novel which is caused by the government. Ghosh has provided the place for refugees in *The Glass Palace* and *The Hungry Tide* that throws light on the lives and predicament of disrupted refugees. It raises the serious issue of choice between protection of environment and human beings. In Morichjhapi, a large number of refugees had taken shelter. They were initially from East Pakistan. They had come to India after the partition of India and after the Bangladesh war in 1971. These refugees were the poorest of the rural people, Dalits, broken and exploited both by Muslim communalists and by upper caste Hindus. They were kept in a refugee camp called Dandakaranya in Madhya Pradesh by force. They faced a lot of difficulties there. Language was a hindrance to their life. Local people treated them as impostors. In 1978, these refugees prepared themselves, broke out of the camp and came to Morichjhapi. They did a notable work in this island. They formed organizations, institutions, set up their own government, did the census of the refugees and divided the island into zones. Their achievement was really shocking. Nirmal expresses his appreciation in these words. "I stood transfixed on the still-wet pathway leaning on my umbrella while the wind snatched at my crumpled dhoti. I felt something was changing within me" (*HT* 171).

This shows how displacement led to restore the hard work and culture of these people. The irony was that the government was not ready to allow them to settle there.

Those refugees were not living but simply surviving each day. The location, the government and the environmental issues made them difficult every day. The government wanted them to leave because the island was part of the reserved forest. Their serious demand was that “We need to let people know what we’re doing and why we’re here. We have to tell the world about all we’ve done and all we’ve achieved” (*HT* 172). These people should be left to live in their places without effacing their culture and values.

The Hungry Tide revisits history and makes a declaration on all such ideas of nation and nationhood which were exclusive and disruptive. The failure of any such forced nationhood lies in the stories of immigrants/refugees. The refugees who came across in Morichjhapi, which was imagined by its settlers of having the possibility of being a safe heaven for the tribals, are the people who have been away from their lands and sown in unfriendly conditions. There was no chance of their survival and hence they covertly moved to their familiar surroundings finally landing in Morichjhapi. It was through Kanai’s analysis of Nirmal’s diary that the readers encountered the translated world of Morichjhapi and the events which led to the battle and the massacre of hundreds of settlers. The painful account of Morichjhapi massacre had been given by Ross Mallick in his essay “Refugee Resettlement in Forest Reserves: West Bengal Policy Reversal and the Marichjhapi Massacre”:

At least several hundred men, women, and children were said to have been killed in the operation and their bodies dumped in the river. Photographs were published in the *Ananda Bazaar Patrika*, and the opposition members in the State Assembly staged a walkout in protest....The central government’s Scheduled Castes and Tribes Commission, which was aware

of the massacre, said in its annual report that there were no atrocities against Untouchables in West Bengal, even though their Marichjhapi file contained newspaper clippings, petitions, and a list with the names and ages of 236 men, women and children killed by police at Marichjhapi prior to the massacre, including some who were drowned when their boats were sunk by police. (111)

Ghosh portrays the past generation and later highlights the current generation. Piyali Roy, researches on the marine mammals, which is a rare profession for women. She is aware of her helpless condition as a scientist. The huge storm brings death and erases her long-held ideas. It also reveals her concern for Fokir, the illiterate simple fisherman who saves her with his basic nature. Fokir recalls the legend of Bonbibi, a mythical story of a tiger goddess of the tide country which is translated by Kanai for Piya. “Tilting back his head, began to chant and suddenly the language and the music were all around her, flowing like a river, and all of it made sense; she understood it all. Although the sound of the voice was Fokir’s, the meaning was Kanai’s, and in the depths of her heart she knew she would always be torn between the one and the other” (*HT* 360). She is confused between the poetry of Fokir’s unspoilt life and the attraction of Kanai’s ordinary lifestyle.

The difference between Kusum and Nilima comes to the fore in their definition of home. Piya defines her life through her career; home is where the Oracella are. Nilima, in spite of all her social works remains as a traditional lady. She says, “home is wherever I can brew a pot of good tea” (*HT* 400). Piya’s constant quest for the credible ends up in Sundarbans.

Moyna Mondal and Piya represent two different cultural and social backgrounds. Monya faces many struggles in her life. As a tribe, living life with self-respect is problematic. In addition to it, she is a woman with high levels of aspirations, which is unlikely for a woman. She stands in the novel as a self-respectful woman. The women - Nilima Kusum, Piya and Moyna- share a commonality of experience. They never lose their faith in the vital grandeur of their existence.

As the settlers are adamant on staying in the island, there has been a series of confrontation between the settlers and the government. The government authorities spread the message in the area that they will do all that is possible to chase the settlers. As a result, hundreds of policemen barricade the settlement, the supply of food items is stopped and as a result settlers are reduced to eating grass causing damage to the range. Fokir's mother Kusum bears the cruelty done to her by the policemen.

Kanai Dutt has the Morichjhapi massacre clearly in mind when he connects the incidents of the present to the incidents of the past. The eviction and killing of the residents of Morichjhapi is seen as the direct result of the completion of the Forest Preservation Act. The ecological concern is strongly opposed by Kanai who is now concerned for the safety of human beings. D.S. Bindhu concluded her article in the same manner, "The readers are left in a dilemma between the conservation and the helplessness of human beings. Amitav Ghosh presents the political sham that is involved in the name of protecting animals and their natural habitat at the cost of innocent lives" (7).

The Glass Place is an extraordinary successful work, a remarkable work of Amitav Ghosh. The novel is an honest and nonstop effort to present a historical document through a cycle of characters, time and space, i.e., three interconnected parts of the

British Empire - Burma, with its widening rifts and undercurrents of dissatisfaction; Malays, with its extensive plantation and India, amid growing opposition to British rule. Through the intertwining stories of Rajkumar, an Indian, and Dolly, the helper girl of the Burmese queen Supayalat, the history of the twentieth century is unfolded across three generations with an absolute narrative talent.

In *The Glass Palace* Amitav Ghosh talks about the condition of the people and how they lead their life in the hands of the British government. N. Lakshmi Priya says, “*The Glass Palace* which speaks about the colonial legacy focus on colonial patterns of suppression and further abuse” (136). Ghosh’s concern for humans through his novel has raised his voice against all kinds of domination and oppression. He is against the domination of one man by another man at all levels like political, culture, economic and armed forces.

Amitav Ghosh gives importance to women and the sufferings undergone by them in his novels. N. Jaishree comments on Ghosh’s presentation of women characters that, “He presents his women neither as overt radical feminist nor as the stereotypical images of Sita and Savitri” (264). He differentiates between two different dimensions of women, first type of women are those who accept the suffering while the other kind of women are those who complain the public very boldly. Through the portrayal of his women characters he aims to imagine a future generation wherein the hands of empowered women will lead to bring about changes in the larger social culture and structure.

The Glass Palace builds up to present the many voices inside the countries Burma and India, during the one hundred years of political struggle. It goes into the complex

relationship, conflict between the people and the environmental and natural calamities among the different section of people.

Uma plays a problematic role in the novel. She does good to others hoping to be a better person. Though she shapes Dolly's future, her future is at stake. The bond between Uma and her husband is weak. Her husband is a Collector who works for the British but treats Uma as a mechanical doll. The following lines show Ghosh's views on women: "He needed a girl who would be willing to step out into society; someone young, who wouldn't be resistant to learning modern ways" (*GP* 158). Uma is very much dissatisfied and leads a lonely life playing the part of an elegant hostess in all the social gatherings of the Collector. They live together without knowing each other and without sharing their deepest thought and without really loving each other. In a state of dejection, the Collector commits suicide. The society blames Uma for the death of her husband. Rajkumar says, "Your husband was as fine a man as any I've ever met, and you hounded him to his death with your self-righteousness" (*GP* 248). Before the death of her husband she couldn't oppose against the male chauvinist society.

Dolly gives birth to two sons namely, Neel and Dinu. Dinu is attacked by polio. Due to her son's condition she stays within the four walls. As a loving mother she worries about her younger child, to whom she spends most of her time and attention. She loses touch with her insulting husband after acknowledging his surreptitious visit to a coolie woman. She does not stand against or disturb her husband for having an illegal son. She remains silent and lives the last days of her life in a monastery in peace. Silence is one of the features of her character that runs throughout the entire novel. She is a follower of Buddhism and mitigates her inner sufferings and emotions through struggle

which is brought out in the following line: “Birth is sorrow, age is sorrow, separation from the pleasant is sorrow, and every wish unfulfilled is sorrow.....” (*GP* 344)

Amitav Ghosh portrays his women sympathetically: in fact they are the most important spirits in his fiction. They are different portrayals of a culture construction. Cultural constructs also help to contrast feminine positions and feministic understanding can emerge even through absence and negation. He presents his woman neither as an overt major feminist nor as wrong images of Sita and Savitri.

The Burmese King Thebaw and Queen Supayalat are to be thrown out by the English power. Dolly, a nine-year-old girl looking after the younger princess, grows into a gorgeous young girl and attains mental and physical adulthood. Sawant, the local servant is her natural option. However, they are caught by the first princess, who herself is in need of a male and takes him away. Dolly is hurt, emotionally puzzled and through a psychological change, identifies herself with the first princess and says she is waiting for the baby’s arrival. But Uma, her friend, coaxes her into marrying Rajkumar.

Dolly nurses Dinu, perceiving her role as a mother as more important than that of a wife. But the suffering changes her attitude and she feels reluctant to go back to the life she had led before. A feeling of emptiness grips her, but she gracefully goes to the Buddhist nunnery and reveals her strong desire for renunciation which in the present circumstances she cannot fulfill, as she is deeply committed to her responsibilities. She proves her indomitable spirit and strength of conviction in ultimately entering the monastery and withdrawing from the world.

As a writer of historical novels, Ghosh finds addresses for his protagonists who are lost in history, through his fictional works. Rukmini Bhaya Nair defends the use of

fiction for representing history: “By dwelling on small details and bestowing on ordinary lives, an attention that the historian’s stricter annals cannot afford, a writer creates an interior history” (163).

Fiction as a genre basically involves a main plot and a story, which makes history more understandable. Novel is especially matched to bring substance to the empty frames of colonial subjects. Rukmini Bhaya Nair comments on the proliferation of characters in *The Glass Palace*: “That is why I cannot think of a clutch of sentences which better describe this massive 547-page book than these: ‘He has a small photo studio. Does wedding – pictures, group photographs - that sort of thing’” (164).

The Glass Palace also talks about the destruction of oil wells by the foreigners. Ghosh shows the oil wells of Burma in Yenangyaung beside the river Irrawaddy, around Mount Popa. Rajkumar noticed the increasing number of foreigners “walking from well to well” (*GP* 123). Very soon, the area turned to a noisy and ugly part of the Burmese ecology as “wooden obelisks began to rise on the hillocks-cage like pyramids; inside which huge mechanical beaks hammered ceaselessly on the earth” (*GP* 123). It shows man’s greed which makes nature turn more dreadful than it was earlier.

Ghosh carries his love for forming connections a little too far when he brings together Uma – Rajkumar in a visual manner at the end of the novel. Even with these stray unkind incidents, the novel is a wholesome treat for those who seek learning as well as those who seek histrionic family sagas. The novel is divided into seven parts and they are entitled as follows in sequence ‘Mandalay’, ‘Ratnagiri’, ‘The Money Tree’, ‘The Wedding’, ‘Morningside’, ‘The Front’ and ‘The Glass Palace’. The novel is well rounded with its beginning and end, both involving ‘The Glass Palace’ although of different

implications. It begins with a reference to the hall full of mirrors in the Royal Palace in Mandalay and ends in a small photo-studio of the same name run by an aged Dinu, in Rangoon, where revolutionary ideas take birth every day. In a review, Rukmini Bhaya Nair remarks:

Ghosh is a worthy writer, not a scintillating one, and his *The Glass Palace* is important not because it opens new stylistic or thematic doors, but because it reopens old ones so effectively. Burma at the present time is near inaccessible territory; yet Ghosh's book manages to hold up before a global community of readers a historically authentic "golden" Burma as it was - and could be again. At a time of millennial doom, when we are having to radically reconfigure our dimly remembered pasts in order to understand their effects on our chaotically disturbed present, that is, the novel's signal post-colonial virtue-elephants, teak, pagodas and all (174).

Chapter 5

Summation

The environmental issues in India are huge. Whether it is the rapidly reducing water tables, mass deforestation, land degradation or river contamination, India has it all and on a very big scale. Amitav Ghosh, as an anthropologist by training, searches up lost stories in the way an archeologist would and analyses them in the same way. Ghosh is equally at home with the dolphin and the pattern of working of a cetologist. He has been to the Sundarbans himself and on a review expedition to track dolphins in River Mekong. He mixes knowledge with complete simplicity in the main structure of *The Hungry Tide* and *The Glass Palace*.

It is understood that solution for these ecological crisis is not easily drawn. The novel makes a strong note to understand the irrelevance of local narratives like the myth of Bob Bibi story in *The Hungry Tide*. The focus of the novel is to warn humanity of an impending ecological disaster if people are not ready to discard some of the ideas for development. These disasters will become a common factor between the human and animal kingdom.

Maintenance in the Sundarbans, heading mainly towards preservation of the tiger, reveals the freedom of an animal because it meets a higher visual standard of beauty and ability. As the national animal of India, the tiger has a special meaning and reserves are especially barriers for its protection. The decreasing number of the Royal Bengal Tiger, in spite of the decades-old Project Tiger programmes all over India, goes over the significance of protection.

Water plays an important role in the novel. In *The Hungry Tide* water as an agency brings closure to the novel, with the loss of Fokir, which also engenders a revised understanding of the Sundarbans. Ghosh's uses of water as a systematic category reveals troubles of conservation from the perspective of both humans and animals dwelling in the area. It also serves as a tool to expose social structures reified as natural. Both the outsiders Piya and Kanai have a deeper knowledge of the Sundarbans and are left with the realization that local contribution is vital for saving not just the tigers but also the people, the flora and fauna of the Sundarbans. One cannot be achieved at the cost of the other. The problem of social hierarchy that alienated Piya and Kanai from Fokir also increasingly unfolds with the expedition into the waterways. A group of people in Sundarbans get their identity through Fokir, who is believed as a supporter of environment but Ghosh breaks this belief in two incidents.

Apart from the ecosocial issues that the novel addresses, the role of the state in protection is represented through the Morichjhapi incident and the picture of the coastguards highlights the collusion of the state in committing violence both on nature (death of the dolphin calf) and the people (Morichjhapi). The Sahara project takeover that appeared large at the time of the novel's publication further highlights the topicality of the violence. The publication of *The Hungry Tide* played a crucial role in acquiring worldwide support against the Sahara project, which led the Central Ministry of Environment and Forests to put an end to the project. The solution offered by Ghosh through Piya who makes a decision to start a protection project in Fokir's name with close local contribution, is rather immature and simplistic. Sahara India's project

proposal had also imagined close local community contribution to encourage tourism, which promised sustainable socio-economic development to the people.

Differences of all kinds, between people, between class and between nature and all that is believed non-natural, are restored in the novel at various occasions through the material presence of water. The characters and the land convert the marginalized people from injured to constantly getting injured. Water becomes the organization that facilitates all transitions, be they from land to sea or urban to rural, eradicating class, caste gender and linguistic fence. The all-pervasive physical existence of water in a setting such as the Sundarbans makes it impossible for the narrative to extricate itself from the presence of Sundarbans. As Nirmal marks, “look at the badh. See how frail it is, how fragile. Look at the waters that flow past it and how limitless they are, how patient, how quietly they bid their time. Just to look at it is to know why the waters must prevail, later if not sooner” (HT 205). *The Hungry Tide* becomes a political body that writes history; it makes as well as devastates people and places. Historical, cultural, scientific and ecological narratives come together through the material and symbolic presence of the land and environment, which at the same time connects and divides the islands of the Sundarbans archipelago and tells their story in *The Hungry Tide*.

Ghosh uses history of human beings and their relationship towards nature. Both humans and nature have their own value on earth. They are also in conflict with each other. Neither *The Hungry Tide* nor *The Glass Palace* provides a solution. Ghosh creates awareness and empathy for both humans and animals.

Through an analysis of Ghosh’s fictional works, this work has tried to separate the various thematic concerns that have been dealt in his novels. The omnipresent travel

motif and the aspiration to dream of a world free of divisions and partitions, has been introduced in all his works, though in varying manners. The quandary of the migrating subaltern and the ecological changes due to war and human inhabitation and the other changing perspectives of the post colonial subject are discussed, involving a variety of characters in different and interesting geographical settings.

Ghosh is concerned with the lives of prawn, dolphin and other such sea animals. Pramod K. Das quoted the words of Ghosh that, “The indigenous people have been completely victimized. They are not responsible for the denudation of the forest; more often than not, it is the timber merchant from the cities who do that in collusion with the forest department” (170). He deeply states the government’s indifferent attitude towards the betterment of the poor and the weaker section of the society and the marginalized. While weaving the story he gives a beautiful representation of the life of the Sundarbans in particular. With the help of his narrative method, Ghosh tries to project the troubles of the dispossessed and how they work hard to make both their ends meet.

The Hungry Tide is a difficult novel. On one hand Ghosh has discussed everyday problems of living beings from human point of view. There are non - human creatures that are more powerful like the tiger, shark and snake which clash with man. For every living creature it is common to struggle with nature and at the same time with other creatures as well. As Piya and Kanai in Ghosh’s text make a decision to conserve the people and the environment of the Sundarbans with commitment and repositioning themselves in their place, environmental values need to be inculcated in their mind along with the idea of necessary human responsibility to save the planet. Ghosh has created wide variety of characters who are bonded with historical and mythical tales. He has

formed such characters in order to create empathy for the readers about the land and the people of Sundarbans. *The Hungry Tide* does not pose a solution to this conflict; it only requests awareness and empathy for both humans and animals, by the environmentalists and humanists respectively. Reality is not possible at the end without co-existence.

Ghosh's fiction disclosed regular patterns of the major themes of boundary crossing and travel which chiefly involve the subaltern class with each fiction involving mass movements of individuals. A vision of a borderless space where all divisions blur and disappear predominates all the themes. Ghosh diligently researches each situation and location, emphasizing the history behind it, in all his fictional works which are difficult to classify and limit within the characteristics of particular generic expectations.

Amitav Ghosh expertly brings out the position of natural world during the postcolonial period. *The Glass Palace* is a notable fictional representation of the tale of subjugation and struggle of man and nature during British Colonialism. The novel not only deals with nature but also documents its confrontation. Ghosh's sensitivity towards ecological exploitation of nature and environment is evident when he recalls that the trees were not cut or removed but assassinated. *The Glass Palace* can be a design of the burgeoning genre of postcolonial ecocriticism.

Ghosh's attractive narrative describes the conflicts in one's identity formation, in which fate (history) and nature (geography) are imbibed in the life of various characters having a background in the form of cultural landscape. The local cultural landscape or the visible impression of human activity in the jungle reflects their values, customs and the aesthetics of their culture. This also includes how they have outlined the environment to serve their own principles and how they themselves have become part of the whole

environment by developing a sense of place of their own, grown out of the experience of displacement, diaspora and a dream of a new society.

Ghosh's approach to fictionalizing history heavily depends upon research. Both the novels are a survey on an endangered ecosystem. He constantly explores and responds to the issues of migration and collapse in societies in the historical past. The ecosystem used as a setting in the novel gives a co-operative view of place. It is a location where local and outsider meet together, share and feel that ecological degradation is the global concern. Global issues such as environmental decline, partition, loss of marginal histories swivel in Ghosh's writing style. The contention that Ghosh shows towards an engagement with the environmental decline might create an awareness to help prepare action plans for the safety of the settlers.

Ghosh's skills both as a story-teller and as a sensitive interpreter of historical and political developments are revealed in the way his non-fiction narratives effectively counterpoise vignettes of human drama. His non-fiction *The Imam and the Indian* brings to light his deep engagement in the political and cultural embarrassments typical of the current postcolonial and globalized world.

The wearing away of borders between nations is a recurring feature of Amitav Ghosh's writing. *The Hungry Tide*, like his previous novels *The Circle of Reason* and *The Calcutta Chromosome*, challenges the theoretical limitations that have been up righted to separate academic disciplines. The book intermingles marine biology, geography, myth, history, climatology, economics, environmental and natural studies and anthropology in a masterly but effortless mode. While talking about the defeated 'historical materialist' Kanai says: "For him it meant that everything which existed was interconnected: the

trees, the sky, the weather, people, poetry, science, nature. He hunted down facts in the way a magpie collects shiny things. Yet when he strung them all together, somehow they did become stories—of a kind." (*HT* 233). That seems to be a correct explanation of Amitav Ghosh's unique story telling skill in this gracefully researched novel.

In *The Glass Palace*, second World War occupies a pretty big portion of the narrative. The World War and its constant destruction is another example of the capitalist, scientific revolution and colonization. It caused a never ending violation to the development of the earth, environment and ecology. In the latter part of the novel Ghosh shows that destruction on nature guides ultimately to self destruction.

There are several other endangered ecosystems on the planet. It is the moral responsibility and accountability on the part of every human to preserve the environment, as it is more and more becoming a threatened environment for each and all of its members, human or nonhuman, where each needs its own space. Animals are more eco-sensitive than human beings. Global warming is responsible for the fast depleting spaces thereby lessening animal, as well as human space that ends in conflict. The need of the hour is to build a future that beats a balance between man and his surroundings, to live in harmony with his environment.

Environmental values need to be inculcated in the minds of the students along with the idea of compulsory human responsibility to save the planet. A strong curriculum has to be developed for this purpose. Of late Environmental Studies as a subject has been introduced at the tertiary level of education, though not with the expected kind of seriousness. These courses should not just stop with teaching concepts but enable them a firsthand practice of the problems and challenges facing the environment. Students as

probable environmental managers need to first understand their environment, taught to respect Nature, local people, their culture, animals and other wildlife species, and in turn to educate and sensitize others as well as about the environment.

Amitav Ghosh, as an important writer in the domain of Indian writing in English, has undertaken his literary mission with two significance promises, those of historical facts and expression of a concern over physical environment. In many ways Ghosh extends the role of nature away from that of moral pointer.

These are all several movements to protect and preserve nature. According to the saying 'pen is mightier than sword', Ghosh attempts to create awareness among the people and about nature through his writings. Besides discussing environmental issues, he also portrays the life of the marginalized people. Ghosh has not given solutions to these problems because it does not remain in the hands of the author. By leaving the novels without giving any solution, Ghosh indicates that the crisis of ecological imbalance and marginalisation can be resolved by means of active participation of human communities on the whole.

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