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*The Hungry Tide* -RE-LOCATING THE ECO-LOGICAL PLACE FROM LOCAL TO GLOBAL

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### ***The Hungry Tide* -RE-LOCATING THE ECO-LOGICAL PLACE FROM LOCAL TO GLOBAL**

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Abstract: Environmental studies formulating “ecocriticism” or “environmental criticism” as an analogy to the generic literary criticism involves multifarious, eclectic, and cross-disciplinary initiatives to explore the environmental dimensions of literature in the spirit of environmental concerns. Ecocriticism, by the virtue of word-power, story and images reinforces and enlivens the

direct environmental concerns contributing significantly to the understanding of multifarious forms of eco-degradations ruthlessly bruising the bleeding wound of the Gaia (Mother Earth). Amitav Ghosh's writings intimately connecting this sustained interest in the world reflects poignantly on the threatening alarm of the "global environmental crisis" echoing between the natural and the human world all over the globe. His novel *The Hungry Tide* located at the familiar space of the Sundarbans abounds in varied species of natural growth—farms, forests, trees, and a variety of animals—seemingly remain 'different yet interconnected'. In this process of an individual adapting to the whims and norms of other human personas despite their distinct dissimilarities plotted against ethno-cultural differences emphasize the significance both the human and the natural world alike.

*Key words-* Environmental crisis, third-world space. green post-colonialism, ecosophy, environmental advocacy.

Ecocriticism developing into an increasingly worldwide movement digresses into two main waves or stages: the first marked by a commitment to preservationist environmentalism, an ecocentric environmental ethics, an emphasis on place-attachment at a local or bioregional level, a prioritization of the self-nature relation, and forms of literary imagination that especially reflect these; the second marked by a more socio-centric environmental ethics attaching special importance to issues of environmental (in)justice, to collective rather than individual experience as a primary historical force and concern in works of imagination, and (increasingly) to the claims of a global or planetary level of environmental belonging. Throughout these shifts, however, a number of concerns have remained constant. Literature and environment stand to benefit from closer consideration of each other, and that comparative literary criticism and ecocriticism are mutually illuminating. The in-depth combination of the theoretical discussion with detailed

analyses of literary texts across land and sea posit new connections in creating forms of ecological awareness, poetics and aesthetics. In the application of ecocriticism to the study of all forms of literary works it shows the ideas and thoughts that prove helpful in dealing with the relationship between man and nature, and also contribute to the cause of environmental preservation. Consciousness rising in environmental thinking, and the ethical and aesthetic dilemmas posed by the global ecological crisis force literary scholars to recognize the important role literature and criticism play in understanding humans' expression, their behavior and their impact on the environment. Sven Birkerts in his *Boston Book Review* article 1996 questions about the use of literature as an examining tool to raising concerns about man and his practical relation to the natural world. Lawrence Buell however states that an environmental text frames the non-human environment not merely as a framing device but rather equates humans, non-humans and land as inevitable parts of nature and environment. The theory of ecocriticism displays this growing awareness of environmental issues. Eco-criticism expands the notion of 'the world' to include the entire ecosphere with diverse eco-geographical variations. The cartographic ranges in the Indian continent display the ice-capped Northern Himalayas to the plateau lands in the South, from the dynamic lush green of the Sunderbans in the fertile East to the dry Thar of the West. My chapter explores *The Hungry Tide* as the literary delineation of the author intrinsically dealing with human and nature interconnection as the key component of literature and theoretical discourse. In the sub-sections the chapter unfurls the inextricable symbiotic bond nurtured between the living organisms and the natural environment dismantling the social hierarchical structure to extend the boundaries of the ecocriticism not just as mere nature-wilderness study, but rather inclusive of everything which constitutes the environment.

Amitav Ghosh explores the issues of protective diverseness, distrusts materialistic forces that ransacks the planet's natural resources. He takes half within the new rising paradigm of creating a cloth flip, therefore considering doable ways to research language and reality, human and the non-human life, mind and matter, while not falling into divided patterns of thinking. This paper in its broad spectrum aims to focus about the challenges that global climate change poses for the modern postcolonial author and the evolving grid of literary forms and conventions that stimulate his narrative imagination. Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin define the literary exploration of Ghosh's eco-narrative as "greening post-colonialism". In *Postcolonial Eco-Criticism*, Ghosh offers a replacement perspective of considerations and debates that have an effect on the planet at large, exploring the problems of protective diverseness, distrusts the grandeur of empty materialistic gains and highlights how postcolonial literature is rich in discursive and remedial formulations. The stories of narrative matter replete with their material mesh of meanings serve as forces in imparting knowledge to people about the historicity of events, documents, music, art and people. The role of literature, here, posits a remarkable shift in creating an interface between the humans and the environment. Amitav Ghosh's novel *The Hungry Tide* deeply intertwined with environmental concerns is set in the background of the Sundarbans engages with themes of nature, ecology, and the human impact on the environment. The novel presents an intricate relationship between the characters and the natural world, highlighting how the environment shapes their lives, decisions, and identities enabling the reader to identify himself with the central premise of articulating resistance against the materialistic forces of a global imperium. Through his eco-critical manual dexterity of hand, Ghosh aims to reveal that the global climatic change promotes an ecological derangement of natural resources inhibiting the creation of a '*new-world*' (my italics) and on the contrary ensuring the continuation of the present.

*The Hungry Tide*, is a re-telling of a modern tale of adventure counterpoised with unexpected passion, personality and past. The Hungry Tide is divided into two sections The Ebb: Bhata and The Flood: Jowar and is set in the Sunderbans. Measuring over ten thousand square kilometers, this delta is the world's largest mangrove ecosystem. The name 'Sunderbans' means the 'beautiful forest,' located in the northern part of the Bay of Bengal. It stretches across the coastal India and Bangladesh, from the Hoogly in West Bengal to the shores of the Meghna in Bangladesh. It is the home of the Bengal tiger, and since the tiger is an endangered species, Government of India has taken steps to protect it by preserving its natural environments. This, however, has resulted in confrontations with the local populace, and that conflict is part of the history behind this novel. The novel begins with a meeting between Kanai Dutt and Piyali Roy who is a young marine biologist of Indian origin, and stubbornly American by culture. Her trip starts with a tragedy, as her boat capsizes in the water and she confronts a life-death struggle plunged into crocodile-infested waters from a ferry. Fokir, a young, illiterate fisherman comes forward to save Piya from death and become the 'noble savage'. Though they have no language between them, they are strongly drawn to each other through promoting the Eurocentric vision of protecting human set against the pretext of killing wild inhabitants. Two parallel narratives interweave the story of the novel. Nirmal's journal voicing out the historical enigma of the Morichjhapi incident and the subsequent political tensions prevailing in the region actually highlight the plight of deprived individuals set against the background of the anthropocentric state authorities in the Sunderbans region. The tale of Nirmal, sternly Marxist by ideological principle along with the social worker Nilima define the poverty-stricken lives of the poor citizens regulated by the power and the position of state authorities. A sharp contrast to the under-privileged Sunderban clan is delineated through the tale constructed by the American cataloguist Piyali Roy and the New Delhi-based

translator Kanai Dutt, reflecting on the Western approach to conservation. For pursuing her research on Irrawaddy dolphins found in the Ganges, Piya comes to the Sunderbans. Kanai lands to Lusibari Island to assist his uncle in literary assignments namely reading and translating the journal his uncle needed him to read. The novel deals primarily with the Morichjhapi massacre incident, the cruel indictment on the refugees having been evicted by the government. The government needs to save the tigers, and human lives are made vulnerable in this pretext. Nilima is a social activist who has built the faith of Badabon to support refugees who are vulnerable and powerless. It depicts the plight of powerless refugees against the societal anthropocence powerful class. The role of Kusum, represents the hardships and sufferings of tribal individuals. She is a poor, marginalized woman, indomitable in spirit and invincible to succumb to patriarchal domination subjugated in the society. Fokir though academically illiterate by societal terms, is replete with knowledge about the dolphins' whereabouts. Moyna frames the inner urge to be a doctor through her nursing profession. A catastrophic storm at the end of the book strangulates Kanai, Horen, Piya and Fokir as they move out on an adventure. Though the death trap storm bestows life benevolence to Kanai and Horen, Piya and Fokir remain entrapped in the rain. At the cost of risking his own life, Fokir becomes the life-saver for Piya. At the end, Fokir dies, but Piyali's life is spared. In Sunderbans, the nature –man coexistence is restored through Piya's decision to stay back in the rural bio-region restoring the lost ecological imbalance by dedicating her project in the name of Fakir as a sign of homage to the deceased man, her true-life giver.

The juxtaposition of the concurrent narratives highlights the conflict in the novel—the problems and the concerns with geographical conservation and its related survival costs in areas populated by the socially and economically under-privileged masses now and then. The sub-narrative structured around the character of Fokir represents the third voice of this ecological

drama. William W. Hunter mentions forest guides called "Fakir" who accompanies woodcutters and hunters on their expeditions to the jungle. In this context Hunter points out to the superstitious belief of the localities "who is supposed to receive power from the presiding deity— whom he propitiates with offerings—over the tigers and other animals." He fits the genre of native archetype, regularly exposed to the teething claws of ferocious man-eaters, reptiles and sharks. His familiarity with the betrothed land and keenness to imbibe and preserve the legacy of a centuries-old oral tradition makes him far from being stereotyped, a quality that distinguishes him from Piya and Kanai. The expedition and the storm confronted by Piya and Kanai at the end of the novel relocates the landscape with a resurrection to facilitate the renewed understanding of the ethnocentric bonding nurtured between Sundarbans, the place, and the people. W. R. Greer suggests that choosing the Sundarbans as the noel backdrop is an equalizer equating "to create a setting where everyone is on an even footing the hostile environment erases all social strata because everyone is an equal in the struggle to survive in the hostile environment." The novel in this sense suffused with multiple social transitions, between the First World and the Third World, local and global, rural and urban, traditional and modern all framed in the friasco of meandering water tunnels Only in the face of a hostile environment are the social barriers broken down and overcome, and nature serves as the agent to equalize all social and cultural hierarchies'.

The theology of place being the focal point of interest to eco-literary studies have wilfully coined interdisciplinary addresses, partaking the scope to amend the historical neglect of relative plot setting, character- imageries, and symbols in literary works. Ecocriticism's literary cognition however, reflects its acknowledgement of the interconnectedness between human life/history and physical environments. The works of literary creation imagination (in all media, including literature) bear witness to a unanimous call for subverting the human monopoly to the ubiquitous

conformation of nature-human alike. Thus, literature-environment studies alienate the scope of highlighting the authority on place- theory, an interest shared across the socio-humanities as well in social and applied sciences. Eco-critical thinking in allegiance with the “humanistic geographers conceive place-sense as a fusion of personal allegiance, social construction, and physiographic matrix” as a way of harmonizing balance between the two claims.

Amitav Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide* is the best replica of the inextricable bond between man and nature harmoniously integrated to explore the possibilities of ethical evaluation of human responsibility towards our environment. Ghosh speculates on the origin of the name of the angiospermous tree forests, the “Sundarbans” and therefore the social science, botanical, geo-tidal and historical influences within the bearing of its name. “There isn’t any beauty here to ask the trespasser in: nevertheless, to the planet at massive this ground is known as “the Sundarban”, which suggests, “the stunning forest”. The Sundarbans with its endangered flora and fauna along with the marginalised struggling people constitutes the bioregion which is known as “*the number in the thousands, these islands some are immense and some have tasted through recorded history, while others were washed into being just a year or two ago...*” Ghosh takes the reader-voyager on an eco-narrative discourse across the Gangetic delta revealing the varied quests, travels, expeditions of the protagonists and his life surial tactics. The passage of tides and seasons prompt the set of non-human characters present in the novel like the sundari trees, the powerful Royal Bengal tiger, the treacherous Sundarbans Orcaella, the cetacean dolphin protagonists in the novel, creates unique ecosystem for plants and animal life. The recurrent tide and the ebb coupled with the shifting modes of the environmental changes in the Sunderbans invent the third world which reveals the uniqueness of flora, fauna and their mutual co-existence of interdependence. The non-human protagonists represent the non- anthropocentric voice in the novel against human counterparts



contributing to our realization of the fragility of life on the earth and likewise promoting the invincible spirit of nature. The richness and the foliage density of the Sunderban juxtapose Ghosh's problematization of the place in an ethical and aesthetic way. In *The Hungry Tide*, although the Sunderban forest does not exchange a dialogue, it performs the role of being a phenomenal and an uncontrolled force. Ghosh beautifully draws the pen picture of man, a mere plaything in the hands of nature through the episode of Kanai's sudden encounter with the fierce tiger and the hapless state of Piya, Fokir caught in the cyclonic vengeance of nature. *The Hungry Tide* poses a status of Nash equilibrium between the survival of humanity and the conservation of nature. The tides in this area are in a state of constant flux, shaping the land and uprooting permanence in the soil of transience. Fisherman Fokir and marine biologist Piya both remain intrigued by their closeness to nature but differ in their views on the conservation issue. Piya's nomadic expeditions accompanied by the less literate Fokir highlights the detailed water depth, underwater concavities, tides, currents of the so-far un-named Sundarbans aquatic ecology. He focuses on how these variables speak for their dynamic flux of instability influenced by tidal forces and landscapes that participate in their crisis to resolve their environmental issues. While recording the teeming marine ecology, Piya highlights the eco-sensitive existence of micro-environments with their own patterns of life, only to re-emerge with new aquatic life forms be-fitting the scientific nomenclature to discriminate between the human, non-humans and the nature. Ghosh's eco-critical fiction thus lays stress on the interconnected nature of different life forms and Piya's quest to discover the un-named species can be considered as an ecocentric endeavor to consider how these ecologically connected groups can be creatively transformed.

Graham Huggan in "Greening Postcolonialism: Eco-Critical Perspectives", refers to the issues linked to "the inseparability of current crises of ecological mismanagement" ranging from

imperialistic and authoritarian abuse. As an interdisciplinary approach, ecocriticism champions the cause of the “other” and upholds the voice of the “non-human others”, the neglected the locals and their indigenous lives. Ironically, the shift of emphasis from anthropocentric to environment-based (ecocentric) philosophies and practices not only failed to benefit the localities, rather provided justification for their being ‘primitive’ precisely being made distinguished from the ‘civilized’ by its proximity to natural world. Sundarban in confluence with its hostile environment and the settlement of refugees is remnant of a legacy of colonization. During the partition, with the Marichjapi massacre the refugees were evacuated by the government resulting in mass genocide. Huggan and Tiffin asserts that this is a colonial attitude executed on the refugees at the beginning of the post-colonial era. In agreement with Huggan and Tiffin, post-colonial ecocritical study of *The Hungry Tide* gives us a lens to contemplate the colonized condition of the people (refugees and descendants) in a constantly shifting environment of flux and transience. Steinwand’s concept of “liminal creature” aids one to understand relation of humans dwelling in the environment of these liminal figures; they are the locals and indigenous people who are often overlooked when it comes to conservationist approaches in environmental studies. He further argues that these local and indigenous people are also liminal figures like dolphins and whales; they are marginalized too, and this needs to be taken care of by the same authorities who are protecting the wildlife. Piya’s profession as a marine biologist in the novel serves the role proposed by Steinwand as of prioritizing the eco-centric existence over the human centered life. Piya’s resentment towards killing the tiger is sensible, but she ignores the flipside of the argument about the condition of refugees and local people who live in such a hostile and insecure environment. Fokir’s indifference to killing a tiger offers a perspective that Steinwand argues, as both Piya and Kanai are both challenged to rethink their complicity through this incident. Ghosh is encouraging

readers to consider ‘the paradox of global environmentalism’ depicting that the earnest concern about environmental degradation remains instrumental is worsening the situation. This European approach of idealizing nature and showing sensitivity by preserving wildlife is objectionable for the reason that it leaves marginalized refugees and locals aside in this whole conservationist act. Kanai (although Indian cosmopolitan), Fokir with Kusums and Nilima are the voices of locals who believe in natural manner of living in relation with animals which nature/universe offers itself. Through the characters and their reactions to the holistic and the perplexing atmosphere of Sunderban, Ghosh draws our attention towards the sensitive relationship between the land and its inhabitants. The localities nurture the postcolonial ethical stance emphasizing the need to preserve ‘*all lives in the new world*’ (my italics) to balance the epicenter of man- nature inhabitation.

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