

The Tidy Hunger in The Hungry Tide

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Abstract

Ecology is the scientific study of natural interdependencies of life forms as they relate to each other and their shared environment. Creatures produce and shape their environment, as their environment produces and shapes them. Ecology developed in reaction against the practice of isolating creatures for study in laboratories is based on field work and draws to specific disciplines of study including zoology, botany, geology and climate change and so on. A variety of wildlife survived till the later part of the 19th century despite the rapid depletion of habitat. In 1875, the sundarbans has variety of wild animals like tiger, wild buffaloes, rhinos, leopards, wild hogs, monkeys and so on and also rich floras. But now the entire sundarbans is under threat due to population explosion and the greediness of the humans. Amitav Ghosh’s novel, The Hungry Tide has profound ecological implication as he views the current global ecological crisis from the ecological and eco-feminist perspective in the sundarbans

Keywords: Ecology, Eco-feminism, Climate change, Natural interdependencies, The sundarbans, Population explosion, Greediness of people, Deep ecology.

Introduction

Ecology is the scientific study of natural interdependencies of life forms as they relate to each other and their shared environment. The word ‘ecology’ is frequently used in connection with the ‘green’ movement. Deep Ecology is a radical version of environmentalism, conceived in the early 1970 by the Norwegian Philosopher Arne Naess and developed by the American environmentalists Bill Devall and George Sessions in 1980s.

The word ‘eco-criticism’ first appeared in William Ruckert’s essay, “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Eco-Criticism” in 1978. Eco-criticism is the study of relationship between environment and literature. People who practice eco-criticism explore the human attitudes towards the environment as expressed in nature writing. Eco-critics encourage other to think seriously about the aesthetic and ethical dilemmas posed by the environmental crisis and about how language and literature transmit values with profound ecological implications.

There are few novels in Indian English Literature which can be read through the lens of eco-criticism. Raja Rao comes first in line. His depiction of the South Indian Village Culture and environmental setting is true depiction of relationship between man and nature. R.K. Narayan created his own village Malgudi which inherits all the features of ecological concern. In other words, R.K. Narayan, used landscape as an important theme and this also one of the important considerations under eco-criticism. The other Indian writers and their works are: Bhabani Bhattacharya's *So Many Hungers*, Kamala Mankandaya's *Nectar in Sieve*, *The Flood*, *Ruskin Bond's An Island of Trees*, *No Room for a Leopard*, *Copperfield in the Jungle*, *Anita Desai's Cry the Peacock*, *Voice in the City*, *Where Shall We Go This Summer* and Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*.

Amitav Ghosh may have become the first Indian writer to strongly engage with ecological issues in Indian English Fiction with the arrival of his novel *The Hungry Tide* in 2004. The novel has been widely accepted by all the eco-critics, without giving any remarks, or objection. The novel is about one of the most dynamic ecological systems in the world, the Sundarbans. The Sundarbans is the large single block of tidal halophytic mangrove forest in the world. It is a UNESCO World Heritage Site covering some of the major parts of Bangladesh and the Indian State of West Bengal.

Results and Discussions

The Sundarbans, an archipelago of islands spread between the sea and plains of Bengal on the Easternmost Coast of India. Here there are no borderlines to separate fresh water from salt, river from sea, and land from water. Survival is the everyday battle for the settlers of the Sundarbans. They have learned to strike a balance with nature. The novel extensively deals with the ecology of the tide country that includes, a couple of small villages such as Lusibari, Garjortola, Canning, Morichihappi and Emilybari.

In this isolated world, the lives of three different people from different background collides each other. Piyali Roy, an American biologist of Indian origin, who comes to the tide country for her research purpose on the dolphins of the Ganges. She hires a fisherman Fokir to help her in her research and finds a translator in Kanai, a Delhi based businessman. Kanai and Piya come close to the ecology of the tide country through Nilima who has been running a hospital in Lusibari, since her husband Nirmal's death. Nirmal and Nilima settled in Lusibari from Calcutta is because of the pollution free environment. Nirmal introduces the history of Lusibari to Kanai through his diary.

Nirmal in his diary says, "Remember, at the time there was nothing but forest here. There were no people, no fields just mud and mangrove. At high tide most of the land vanished under water and there were only tigers, crocodiles, sharks, leopards" (Chaturvedi and Mishra, 27).

When Nirmal and Nilima reach Lusibari, they find that hunger and catastrophe were a way of life. Life was hazardous and people died in their youth. Nirmal noticed that many species of birds has been disappeared. When Kanai asks Piya, "Do you think there are fewer dolphins than there used to be?" (266).

Piya grimly connects this fact with drastic and disastrous changes in the ecological system and comments, "When marine mammals begin to disappear from an established habitat it means something has gone very, very wrong" (267). Technological development resulting in advanced fishing gear has also had a destructive influence on nature. Some of the fictional characters in the novel *The Hungry Tide* serve to highlight the anthropocentric attitude of humans towards animals. Kanai, Fokir and the villagers of Lusibari who killed the tiger which strayed into the human habitat are more anthropocentric and supporters of shallow ecology. They hold the opinion that the animal obstructs the human habitat and it is to be killed. But Piya was a staunch supporter of deep ecology. She think that all life on earth has an equal importance.

Dolphins are human friendly marine mammals. They have a cute sensory perception to gauge atmospheric pressure and to give forewarning to the fellow creatures against impending natural calamities. A symbiotic relationship exists between dolphins and fishermen in the Sundarbans Rivers. Piya, the researcher is deeply pained to see them becoming extinct and she wants to do something to protect them. So she undertakes a miniature project on the vanishing species of dolphins in the Irrawady Rivers of the Sundarbans and how to protect them. 'Live and Let Live' is the more powerful ecological principle than 'either you or me' (Leena, 82).

The chief objective of her project is to study the physical appearance of the dolphins and their behavioral patterns. Fokir begins to catch some crabs when Piya is doing her observations. The activities of the crab bombard her mind with a volley of questions with regard to their role in eco-system.

With some questions in her mind, Piya says, "Didn't they represent some fantastically large proportion of the system's biomass? Hadn't someone said that intertidal forests should be named after crabs rather than mangroves since it was they not the crocodiles or tigers, which were the keystone species of the entire eco-system? (Chaturvedi and Mishra, 28).

The high-sounding motor boats with its propellers make the life of the aquatic creatures really risky and leads to their extinction. Ecological degradation due to human interferences is wiping out many species. Mangroves are natural barriers against natural disasters and they are essential for the protection of coastal ecology. Crabs keep the mangroves alive by removing their leaves and litter, without them the trees would choke on their own debris. They are the keystone species of the entire eco-system.

Conclusion

Nature has its own right to shape or reshape, break or build the islands and the peninsulas at its own will. Human endeavour to deforest for their own habitation is Nature's aversion, and it often causes nature's fury against human beings. In the cosmic chain of being every species has the rightful claim to exist on the earth. The disruption of the chain by human transgression might adversely affect the symbiotic relationship between the human and nature. The novel is devoted to the treatment of ecology of the Sundarbans. The novelist is highly sensitive to the problems and challenges that confront those who depend on nature for their existence. The major focus of Ghosh is *The Hungry Tide* is to warn humanity of an impending ecological disaster, unless people are ready to discard some of the crazy ideas for development, global warming and other disastrous consequences of modern technology. The novel is left open-ended and the readers are left to ponder over the issue and suggest solutions. *The Hungry Tide* shows how even the less bountiful natural surroundings are thoughtlessly exploited by man causing more havoc on the already precarious ecological balance.

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