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Socio-Cultural Realities and Ascendance in the Novel Hungry Tide by Amitav Ghosh

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Abstract

This article examines the Socio-Cultural realities and Ascendance in Amitav Ghosh's novel The Hungry Tide, which draws on India's experience with internal and external borders, the Sundarbans' specific border country and its ambivalent land-water space, and a subaltern approach that has evolved from a historiography method to an aesthetic choice in Amitav Ghosh's work. Through the accomplishments and achievements of the novel's characters, The Hungry Tide illustrates the breaching of social and cultural boundaries and frontiers. It is based on the idea that socio-culture does not impede achieving one's goals. Ghosh uses the voyage as a means of self-discovery in this work. He pushes for a world that is human-centered and free of caste, creed, race, sex, and religion. He emphasizes the dismantling of artificial borders between nations and people. The story introduces new and unexpected arenas, as well as ethnic, cultural, and territorial divides. The focus of this study is on Ghosh's view of socio-cultural confluence as the apex of human achievement.

Keywords: Ascendance, Socio-Cultural, Ascendance, human.

Introduction

Amitav Ghosh, a pioneer of English literature and one of the most well-known subalterns, diasporic, and post-colonial writers of the twenty-first century was born in Calcutta. He received his education at several colleges such as The Doon School in Dehra Dun and St. Stephan's College in Delhi. He also holds an Arabic diploma from the Institute Bourguiba des Langues Vivantes in Tunis, Tunisia. Finally, he received the title of D. Phill (Ph.D.) in Social Anthropology from St. Edmund Hall, Oxford. His thesis, "Kinship about the Economic and Social Organizations of an Egyptian Village Community," won him the prize. He visited the Fellaheen town of Lataifa (Egypt) in 1980, and his work In an Antique Land is the result of his visit. In this nonfiction work, Amitav Ghosh creates an example of all alone meetings in Lataifa and Nashawy, subsuming himself into a massive example of a Jewish vendor and his slave in India in the twelfth century. Ghosh and his wife Deborah Baker, who is

also a senior editorial manager at Little, Brown, and Company and the author of the life tale The Life of Laura Riding (1993), live in America with their two children Lila and Nayan.

Socio-Cultural Realities

Ghosh uses the encroachment of the West into the East to influence the discourse on social and cultural issues in this novel. Ghosh's writing has many of the elements that have marked historical fiction as a genre. It is a type of fiction that focuses on the certainty of perception and meaning. His narrative appears to be both an experimental and exponential novel, as well as interrogative and confessional in tone. When it comes to artistry, he is no primal, and he is well aware that he is dealing with the psycho-political elements of history; as a result, his narrative [1], despite flying from one period and space to the next, does not tend to cloud the realities of socio-political time and space.

This is Ghosh's convincing defense of his fundamental concern for reality. His historical reality assessment is firmly entrenched in the colonial past. The reader is kept informed about the unfolding plot. The discourse between Kanai and Kusum, for example, is an example of this. Kusum is from the island of Satjela. Kusum's mother is left with no choice and no compensation when Kusum's father dies. Kusum's mother is offered a job in the city by her landlord, Dilip. She has no choice but to entrust Kusum's care to her family.

Horen saves her and places her in the women's union, while Dilip tries to trap her in a brothel. Kusum expresses her desire to visit Calcutta after becoming close with Kanai. The Calcutta Massacre takes Kusum's life. Piya reappears in the narrative after Kusum's story, this time watching the dolphins play, implying that life goes on. Piya occasionally sees a dolphin, and she enjoys watching them. Piya is mesmerized by both the dolphins and the mangrove forest. She spends her time studying dolphins and worshipping at a temple.

The Hungry Tide depicts the lives of a decadent civilization enslaved by tradition and fixated on the dismal reality of colonialism. People are only profoundly entrenched in their cultural relationships and traditions on this planet. As a result, Ghosh skillfully returns the past to hit the present. The delta region, although representing a culturally profound predisposition, also reflects anarchy, a mishmash of ideas, and a lack of guiding information due to colonialism's impact [2]. Ghosh paints an image of Indian society by juxtaposing the presence of tigers with dolphins. The importance of Piya's role as a sea animal researcher is emphasized throughout the story.Ghosh's research on these aquatic mammals, punctuated by her frequent observations of innocent dolphins at play, is a dream for an ephemeral future. It is also the writer's dream. Piya recognizes the cow and calf combo when she sees two dolphins approaching the boat and beginning to circle. She recognized them before and is overjoyed to see them again.

"... for they surfaced regularly around the boat, and on one occasion, the adult even made eye contact," she comes to believe that these dolphins recognize her as well (HT, 127).

However, the temporal structure is significantly broadened through the books of past occurrences, which are periodically recounted by the characters and at other times by the narrator through a long-ago journal and a fairy tale created in the distant past. The Sundarban Islands of Bangladesh, with their ever-changing biodiversity, are the setting for Amitav Ghosh's novel The Hungry Tide. The vast array of islands, rivers, and the endless sea are constantly at odds,

> ***"an environment where the boundaries between land and water are constantly changing, always uncertain" (HT, 158).***

Man must be wary not just of the water, which threatens his home and life, but also of the original occupants of the islands, who desire payback for the havoc man has wrought. Ghosh investigates the limits between ecology and human rights in this work, as well as how man is being dispossessed in the Sundarban Islands in favor of the species that live there. In The Hungry Tide, there appears to be a schism between ecologically conscious organizations and the underprivileged, barred people who migrated to southern Bangladesh in search of a better life. Through the evolution of two of the key characters, Piya Roy and Fokir, Amitav Ghosh analyses this viewpoint.

Piya Roy, a traveling American of Bangladeshi origin who grew up in Seattle and hopes to make history as an aquatic scientist studying the Irrawaddy dolphin, was raised in Seattle. Piya is a symbol of the Sundarban Islands' emergence as a result of green politics. She tries to have sympathy and enjoy the distinct culture and people that surround her, but she is hampered by her ideals and obligations as a first-world citizen [3]. Piya's battle with villagers who capture a tiger inside a mud hut before mercilessly burning the animal alive in retaliation for their murdered villagers and animals slaughtered by the creature is an example of this.

Kanai Dutt, a middle-aged businessman from New Delhi, meets Piyali Roy, or Piya, a young marine biologist from Seattle, at the start of the narrative. They're on a vacation to Canning, in south-eastern India, from whence they'll take a boat to the Sundarban Islands, a Ganges Delta archipelago with a slew of small, mangrove-covered islands. Piya has been permitted to study a rare type of river dolphin, while Kanai has been asked by his aunt to read a notebook left by his uncle Nirmal Bose, who died in unexplained circumstances thirty years ago during an uprising.

Kanai cordially invites Piya to see his aunt on Lusibari, one of the Sundarbans' most remote islands, before they disconnect at Canning.Why would an immigrant, an adolescent woman, be waiting for a train to Canning in a south Kolkata passenger station? The fact that

this streak constituted the only rail connection to the Sundarbans was undeniable. However, as far as he knows, it has never been utilized by visitors; the few who have traveled that way have done so by water, using steamers or launches on Kolkata's riverfront. The train was mostly used by commuters who traveled from far-flung towns to work in the metropolis.He noticed her rotating to ask a pedestrian a question and was grabbed by a suggestion to listen in. His source of income and fixation was language [4], and he was constantly preyed upon by a near-irresistible want to overhear something in public discussions.

He got within audible range just in time to hear her finish a sentence that finished with the words ***"train to Canning?"*** as he made his way through the crowd. With an upraised arm, one of the onlookers attempted to explain. However, the explanation was written in Bengali and was misplaced on her. ***"Ami Bangla Jani na,"*** she responded, raising her hand to block the man and apologizing for not recognizing Bengali.

"Like strangers everywhere, she had learned just enough of the language to be able to convey due warning of her incomprehension," (HT, 179), he may tell from the ineptness of her pronunciation.

Kanai was the one who pretended to be the other "outsider" on the stage, and he immediately drew his share of attention. He was of ordinary height, and at forty-two, his calmly thick hair had begun to show a few grey stripes at the temples. There was a hushed assurance in the slope of his head, as well as the thickness of his posture, an indication of well-grounded confidence in his ability to succeed in most circumstances. His eyes had prominent creases pushing out from their edges, even if his face was otherwise unlined - but these furrows, by intensifying the fluidity of his face, showed his youth rather than his age.

Even though his waist had condensed over the years despite his previously modest build, he still approved himself casually and with the attentiveness categorized of the traveler's temperament for occupying the instant. Kanai was transporting a wheeled airline carrier with a telescoping handle at the time [5]. This piece of baggage, together with Kanai's sunglasses, trousers, and shoes, was only one of the numerous details of Kanai's look that suggested middle-aged affluence and metropolitan prosperity to the merchants and roaming salesmen who followed their products on the Canning line.As a result, he was mobbed by hawkers, urchins, and bands of young people soliciting money for a variety of causes:

"it was only when the green and the yellow electric train finally rolled in that he was able to shake off this obnoxious retinue."(HT, 249)

He lost sight of her when she was brushed inside.The whistle blew at that point, and Kanai intervened to bring the throng to a halt. When he walked in, he noticed a seat and quickly slid into it. There

was no appropriate light to read by, and a woman with a crying infant stood to his right.The seat on his left was appropriate to his own, being immediately beside the window - the only problem was that it was occupied by a gentleman engrossed in a Bengali newspaper when he arrived. Kanai took a few moments to assess the newspaper reader, noticing that he was an elderly and submissive-looking man who would be susceptible to manipulation [6].

The newspaper reader was taken aback, and for a brief moment, it appeared as if he might even object or complain. But when he saw Kanai's clothes and all the other details of his appearance, he felt a shift in his mood.Why is there a legal issue? He gracefully yielded and made room for Kanai to take a seat near the window. Kanai was relieved to have completed his task without causing a ruckus. After thanking the newspaper reader, he resolved to buy him a cup of tea the next time a chai wala appeared at the window. Then he reached into the outer flap of his luggage and brought out a couple of sheets of paper with Bengali script scribbled on them. He began reading after smoothing the pages over his knees. According to legend, the goddess Ganga's fall from the sky would have slashed the ground if Lord Shiva hadn't tamed her raging flow with his ash-smeared locks.Hearing this story, one gets a clear picture of the river:

"as a heavenly braid, for example, a huge rope of water, unfurling through a wide and parched plain."(HT, 287)

That there is a twist in the story that only becomes apparent near the end of the river's journey, and that this portion of the story is always unexpected since it is never revealed and hence never anticipated. ***"There comes a moment when the braid falls undone; when Lord Shiva's matted hair is rinsed apart into a big, tangled tangle,"(HT, 298)*** says the author.After passing through that crest, the river loses its requisites and splits into hundreds, if not thousands, of tangled threads [7].

It's virtually impossible to believe that an enormous archipelago of islands lies between the sea and the Bengal plains until you see it for yourself. But that is exactly what it is: an archipelago reaching nearly 200 miles from West Bengal's Hooghly River to Bangladesh's Meghna River's coastlines. The islands are India's trailing threads, the tattered fringe of her sari, the Achol that trails her, half-soaked by the sea. These islands have tens of thousands of inhabitants. Some are enormous, while others are the size of sandbars; some have existed since the beginning of time, while others were formed only a year or two ago. These islands are the rivers' restitution, the offerings by which they return to the earth what they have taken, but in such a way that they impose permanent sovereignty over their gift [8]. The rivers' channels are scattered across the ground like a fine-mesh net, resulting in an environment where the lines between land and water are constantly shifting and unexpected. Some of these canals are massive, with a width so great that one coast cannot be seen from the

other; others are only two or three miles long and a thousand feet wide.

Each of these waterways, though, is a river in its own right, with its own oddly evocative name. The water stretches to the far limits of the terrain and the forest dwindles into a distant rumor of land, echoing back from the horizon, when these channels intersect in clusters of four, five, or even six. A mohona, an oddly alluring phrase packed in several layers of beguilement, is how the locals refer to such a convergence.Piya makes preparations for her studies, including hiring the necessary forest guides and a boat and departs. She begins to have doubts almost quickly, and after falling into the ocean and being rescued by a fisherman named Fokir, she chooses to stay with him on his little boat rather than return to the guides, who appear too concerned with her money and equipment [9]. Although Fokir does not speak English and is unable to read or write, he is so brilliant that Piya has no trouble interacting with him. She only needs to show him her gear and a few images of dolphins for him to realize why she's in the Sundarbans and that she wants to employ him and his boat.

Fokir and his small son Tutul make room on their boat for Piya, and they set sail. While Piya investigates the present, Kanai investigates the region's past. Kanai begins reading Nirmal, his late uncle's journal, after his aunt, Nilima Bose, gives a lecture about the early history of the Sundarbans. Kanai will wait until roughly two-thirds of the way through the novel to read the final entry. Fokir is so familiar with the area that he quickly locates dolphins for Piya to observe. The story now shifts back and forth, with one chapter devoted to Piya and Fokir's exploits aboard the fishing boat and the next to Kanai on Lusibari, as well as the past.At the end of his life, he was just as idealistic as he had been at the start. Kanai starts to suspect exactly what Nilima is trying to avoid. There are no barriers here that separate fresh water from saltwater, or a river from the sea. The currents are so strong that they reshape the islands daily on some days, the water tears away from an entire peninsula and neck of land; when the tides create new land, mangroves begin to gestate overnight, and if the conditions are right, they can spread so quickly that they cover a new island in a matter of years. Every year, scores of people are killed by tigers, snakes, and crocodiles in the embrace of that deep jungle.

There is nothing here to entice the traveler, yet the Sundarbans, which means ***"beautiful forest,"*** is the name given to this archipelago by the rest of the world. Some people say the word comes from the name of a common mangrove tree called the Sundari tree, Heriteria minor. The Sundarbans' residents think that anyone who ventures into the huge watery labyrinth without a pure heart will perish [10]. The entrance of Piyali Roy, an Indian immigrant who is adamantly American, and Kanai Dutt, a clever Delhi businessman, throws the delicate balance of settlement life into disarray and puts in motion a catastrophic disaster.

Kanai has come to see his widowed aunt and read some of her husband's works, a political figure who died unexpectedly in the aftermath of a local rebellion. On the train from Calcutta, he meets Piya and learns that she has come to the Sundarbans in pursuit of a rare river dolphin species. Kanai becomes her translator when she hires Fokir, an ignorant but proud local fisherman, to guide her through the baffling backwaters. The tide begins to turn at this point. Amitav Ghosh has unearthed yet another new province, summoning a unique location from its history, language, and mythology and bringing it to life.The Hungry Tide's brilliance, however, lies in its examination of a far deeper and more unfathomable jungle: the human heart. It's a novel that questions, at every turn, what danger and delusion lie ahead. What man is capable of determining a person's genuine worth? Amitav Ghosh's whole body of work is based on the concept of crossing borders.

Nirmal and Nilima Bose arrived in Lusibari in 1950, eleven years after Hamilton's death. They had only been married for a year, and the reasons for their decision to relocate to this isolated and vulnerable location were complicated. When the couple arrived, they found severe destitution and much had collapsed in the previous eleven years.The Hamilton Estate was also harmed by lawsuits at the time [11]. No one was readily vanquished. Nilima founded the Women's Union and gained outside backing. The Badabon Trust was formed in the 1980s as a result of this.

"Within a few years of Nirmal and Nilima's arrival in Lusibari, Zamindaris were dissolved, and vast landholdings were legally dismantled. On the other hand, the union Nilima had created continued to flourish, attracting more and more members and providing an ever-increasing range of services - medical, paralegal, and agricultural." (HT, 317)

Words like development, achievement, and accomplishment have no value without continuous growth and progress. Nilima is a self-assured woman.Even though she is new to the area, she gains the trust of the villagers and becomes a role model for all of the novel's characters. Nilima comes from an affluent family with a solid educational foundation. Optimism is the belief in one's own ability to succeed. Nothing can be accomplished without hope and faith. Nirmal has a positive outlook on life.

Nirmal had passed away as the narrative begins, and has left a notepad containing his final musings to his nephew, Kanai.Nirmal is thus encountered by the reader through his writing as well as Kanai's and Nilima's memories of him. The work also serves as a chronicle of the gap between ignorance and knowledge. Those who bridge the line between ignorance and knowledge can obtain knowledge. Ignorance can masquerade as knowledge, while knowledge can masquerade as ignorance. As a translator

and interpreter, Kanai is fluent in six languages. In addition, he is in charge of translating Fokirand's language. He is quite proud of his ability to translate into six languages [12]. With the understanding of these languages, he believes he could accomplish anything in the world. However, the Sundarbans teach him a valuable lesson, turning his pride into ignorance.

Kanai reconciles his history with the help of a written document, his uncle's journal. Ghosh teaches Kanai about the practicality of life, and the rustic setting bears responsibility for Kanai's dramatic transformation. Kanai's first step in his search for identity is an admission of his linguistic limitations. Kanai's quest for identification entails traversing social, cultural, and language barriers.

Fokir is uneducated, but his ignorance molds his understanding of nature. As a result, Fokir acquires the knowledge of a Delhi-based literary figure. Ghosh brilliantly celebrates ignorance's triumph over knowledge. He believes in breaking down artificial human-made borders between nations and people, emphasizing the human spirit's oneness. Piya's scientific job necessitates her being on the water with Fokir. By performing a study on mammals, Piya discovers her life's vocation and develops a thirst for great ambition. She accepts the moral obligation of caring for his wife and child. As a symbol of moral duty, Piya arranges for Fokir's family to have a home and a college education. Piya has sketched out her research idea for the future. She would take over the responsibility of the Badabon Trust, which is managed by Nilima.

Nilima is taken aback when she learns that Piya refers to the Sundarbans as her "home" during a conversation regarding the latter's plans.

> ***'Did I hear you right?' Piya's choice of words astonished Nilima so much that she dropped the spoon she was using to stir the tea leaves,' Ghosh brilliantly portrays the interaction. Piya gets a shocked look from her. "Home," did you say? 'You know, Nilima, for me, home is where the Orcaella is: so there's no reason why this couldn't be it,'*** she finally said.***(HT, 352)***

Conclusion

The Sundarbans are beautifully depicted by Ghosh. The readers are transported to the tidal country by the realistic depiction of the scenery and natural environs. The novel's story is rich in anthropological detail, bringing to life a 'lost' and 'forgotten' world. The central theme of the story is the opposing relationships between the various entities. The novel emphasizes the ruling powers' exploitation of the downtrodden. The socio-cultural and economic realities of a society on the margins are brought to light by Ghosh's in-depth investigation. The poor 'subaltern' takes center stage in the novel's tales. The novelist seems to present various themes throughout the story but leaves it up to the readers to

decide on a conclusion to the dispute(s).

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