

# A Study of Amitav Ghosh's novel, *THE HUNGRY TIDE*

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## Abstract:

Amitav Ghosh's novel, *THE HUNGRY TIDE* (2004), centres on a triangle of three characters: Piyali, an American cetologist, Kanai & Fokir. The Sundarbans, an enormous archipelago of islands "interposed between the sea & the plains of Bengal," are the setting of the novel, which takes place in the northeastern region of the Indian subcontinent & Bangladesh (p. 6). Mangrove trees cover the majority of this archipelago, which is characterised by its aquatic mangrove forest. The Sunderbans, a complex network of huge mangrove islands in the Bay of Bengal, is shared between Bangladesh & West Bengal, India; roughly one-third of the Sundarbans is in Bangladeshi territory while the other two-thirds is in Indian territory. Approximately 10,000 km<sup>2</sup> of islands. Although there are a handful that have been documented in history, the most have been swept away, and their width ranges from very vast to barely wider than sandbars. According to the author, the sea's characteristics and the interplay between land and water are continually changing & unexpected (p.7). The mangrove jungles and picturesque forests of the Sunderbans are the main attractions. In Ghosh's work, the environment, religion, myth, class structure, travel, and the complicated history of India and Bangladesh in relation to colonialism & sectarian strife are all set against the backdrop of the Sunderbans, which are also known as the tide country and are home to tigers, crocodiles, and other predators.

**Key Words:** environment, inspiration, businessman.

## INTRODUCTION

However, this group of islands is commonly referred to as "the Sundarban" by people all over the globe, meaning "the beautiful forest." The Sundari tree, scientifically known as *Heriteria minor*, is thought by some to be the inspiration for the name of a common mangrove species.

The Mughal rulers' records show that this area was called after a tide (bhati), not a tree, therefore the origin of the term is just as puzzling as its current ubiquity. The locals on the islands call this area "bhatir desh," which translates to "the tide country." However, the word "bhati" refers to more than simply the tide; it specifically refers to the ebb-tide, or bhata). This is land that is partially underwater during high tide; the forest is only created when the water falls. Observing this peculiar birth, attended by the moon, explains why the term "tide country" is not only appropriate but essential. (p.8)

There are many different people and places in *THE HUNGRY TIDE*, and they all have connections to one another. In the opening chapters of *THE HUNGRY TIDE*, we meet Kanai Dutt, a middle-aged, rich translator, linguist, and businessman from New Delhi. He travels to the Sunderbans to see his aunt Nilima Bose and to look into a recently rediscovered journal written by his uncle Nirmal, who passed away not long ago. The year 1979 was a very long time ago when the journal was written. Located in a secluded corner of Nirmal's study room at his residence was this journal. After Nirmal retired as headmaster of the Morichjhapi village school, he kept a diary in which he detailed the most formative experiences of his life, including his relationship with Kusum, the birth of her son Fokir, and their hardships throughout their time there. In his private life, Kanai displays traits of haughtiness & hubris. Piyali Roy, a woman in her twenties, is being watched by Kanai from a railway platform. On his travels, Kanai crosses paths with Piyali Roy, a young marine scientist who is of Indo American origin; that is, she is a cetologist (a specialist in marine animals). According to Amitav Ghosh, Piyali Roy is:

The sharpness of her hairdo stood in stark contrast to her long, slim face, which had an elegance of line. A silver stud gleamed against the sun-darkened blackness of her skin; nonetheless, her arms were bare and she did not wear a bindi on her forehead.

Piyali Roy emigrated to America at the tender age of one from her birthplace of Calcutta. She was not familiar with Bengali. At California's Scripps Institution of Oceanography, she majored in cetology. She travelled to India to research the Sundarbans' supposedly rare marine creatures, such as dolphins, whales, dugongs, and others. She is on a mission to locate Ornella freshwater dolphins & document their habits and distribution patterns. Kanai provides Piyali Roy with assistance in the form of translation, interpretation, and guidance. The two friends, Kanai Dutt and Piyali Roy, began chatting on the train from Calcutta to Canning in southeastern India. From there, they took a boat to the Sundarban Islands, a group of tiny mangrove islands in the Ganges Delta. Because to her generous contribution, Piyali will be able to research a river dolphin species that is very endangered. Meanwhile, Kanai's 76-year-old aunt Nilima started a women's union and then transformed it into a charity called Badabon Trust by 1980. Along with her work at the Sundarbans High School (then known as "Sir Daniel Hamilton High School 1938"), Nilima established a hospital for the local population. A hamlet that was acknowledged by the British idealist Sir Daniel Hamilton was located close to the site of this institution. Uncle Nirmal Bose died in a strange manner thirty years ago during a revolt, and his aunt Nilima has requested Kanai to go through a journal that he left behind. Just before they part ways at Canning, Kanai graciously extends an invitation to Piyali to see his aunt on the island of Lusibari, which is among the most isolated in the Sunderbans. \*After the passing of Hamilton's wife, Lucy, \*Lusibari\* came to be known as \*Lucy's House\*. Lusibari literally means "Lucy's house," according to him, and there are a surprising number of Sundarbans locations with English origins. page 40 The displaced people lived on Hamilton's 10,000 acres of Sundarbans property, which the benefactor had donated. Three waves of settlers arrived between 1920 and 1947 (followed by partition) and 1971 (followed by the Bangladesh war). Kusum was brought up by the women's union after being abandoned by her mother and forced into prostitution in a brothel, where she eventually died. Rajan, a destitute man left crippled in a bus accident in Calcutta, was her spouse. Fokir, their kid, lost his father Rajan when he was just four years old. At the train station, Piyali is polite to Kanai but shows little enthusiasm for continuing with this or the two-part ways. While Piyali gets her academics in order, finds a boat & necessary forest guides, she begins working. While on the hunt, they come upon Fokir, son of Kusum, a fisherman from the area. Fokir, a poor fisherman who is uneducated, has a mastery of the Sundarbans' waterways & channel systems. The young lady Fokir is married to, Moyna, is highly disciplined and educated. Regarding Moyna, Nilima remarks:

It was Nilima's opinion that Moyna was both intelligent and driven. Despite receiving little support from her loved ones, she persisted in her pursuit of higher education. She had to trek the several kilometres to another hamlet every day as her own didn't have a school. She had hoped to continue her education in Canning or another neighbouring town after doing well on her school-leaving examinations. She was fully prepared, having obtained her Scheduled Caste certificate among other things. Her family was opposed to her leaving & wanted her to be married instead, so they could foil her intentions. Fokir was the guy she picked as her husband; he was a lovely young man overall, but he was illiterate and subsisted only on crab fishing for a living.

She decides to remain with Fokir in a small boat instead of returning to the forest guides, who are extremely interested in her money & expensive equipment, after she nearly drowns when conversing with the man with all her doubts, but she gets sidetracked and falls into the sea. Fokir, who was out on a crab fishing expedition with his son Tutul in a tiny boat, agrees to be Piyali's guide. The Irrawaddy Dolphins (*Orcaella Brevirostis*) are a threatened species, therefore she recruits Fokir to accompany her on a short-term field research. Fokir had extensive understanding of marine life, including freshwater and saltwater dolphins. He is well-versed on the river and its inhabitants. Her choice turns out to be a smart one in the end. Despite Fokir's inability to read or write and his lack of English proficiency, Piyali has no trouble communicating with him. All she needs to show him is her equipment & few pictures of dolphins for him to understand her purpose in the Sunderbans and that she wants to hire him and his boat. Even though Piyali & two locals Fokir and his son Tutul don't speak the same language, they manage to work along. Fokir even brings Piyali to see some rare dolphins. After clearing space on their boat for Piyali, Fokir and his son Tutul who assists his father in trade set sail. Piyali is busy with the here and now, whereas Kanai is delving into the region's

history. A former Marxist educator, Nirmal is Kanai's uncle. Nirmal writes down his thoughts on real-life historical occurrences in his journal. The horrific removal & subsequent slaughter of Bengali refugees from West Bengal's Marichjhapi island in May 1979 is detailed in graphic detail in the journal. Kanai starts reading his uncle Nirmal's notepad after his aunt Nilima Bose gives a lecture. From then on, the story's subplot is portrayed via Nirmal's writings, which include letters and diaries. A portion of the notebook is represented by a distinct, italicised chapter that the author gradually incorporates into the plot, episode after episode. Nirmal writes down in his notebook the details of real life historical occurrences. About a third of the way through the book, Kanai will finally look at the final entry. Fokir is so familiar with the region that he will quickly locate dolphins for Piyali to observe. Additionally, he ensures that she remains cognisant of the fact that they are in waters inhabited by crocodiles and that the mangrove woods are home to tigers, despite her delight. Now the author begins to shift gears, devoting one chapter to Piyali and Fokir's fishing boat voyage & next to Kanai on Lusibari and the past. A few chapters of Lusibari are notes taken from a notebook.

Piyali, Kanai, and the three Fokir are caught off guard by the secret currents of this secluded world as they go into the intricate backwaters. As Piyali seeks authorisation to carry out her inquiry (study) in the Sunderbans, she starts a confrontation with the local administration. Even though she has the go-ahead from the local authorities, they'll only allow her use their boat if she brings along an observer to keep a watch on her.

The notebook belonging to Kanai's uncle has occupied him. The elderly man's life is detailed in his notebook, with particular emphasis on the Sunderbans war involving thousands of refugees & government forces. The fact that Fokir and his family are friends of Kanai's family comes as a surprise to Piyali. After hearing Piyali's study intentions, Kanai and his family are eager to provide a hand by supplying additional boats and staff. Afterwards, Kanai demands to accompany Piyali & Fokir as translators because he is envious of Piyali's intimacy with Fokir.

Fokir and Piyali departed from the rest of the party, using their smaller boat to explore the jungle's secret waterways. As they are away, word comes out to the rest of the team that a huge storm is heading their way. Piyali & Fokir are left to face the storm on their own when Kanai and his crew are compelled to make the tough choice to return without them, despite their best efforts to wait for them. They seek shelter in the mangrove forest despite Fokir's efforts to separate them; the storm is too strong.

Fokir tries to protect them both from the storm's debris, but he is murdered in the end. Kanai and Horen both accompany Fokir's body to Lusibari for the cremation ceremony. Despite all the challenges, Piyali makes it back to Lusibari on the boat and tells Fokir's family about his heroic deeds and destiny. Once Kanai gets back to New Delhi a few days later, Piyali reads the note he left for her, in which he apologises for misinterpreting her. May she find happiness. Along with that, he gives her the complete Bon Bibi legend in English. Kanai and Fokir have distinct kinds of affection for Piyali. After spending a month with relatives in Calcutta, she goes back to the Sundarbans to take a job with the Badabon trust. have collected funds to assist Fokir's loved ones. By helping to pay for Moyna's house and Tutul's college tuition, she hopes to make Nilima's aspirations come true. In recognition of Fokir's invaluable assistance during her studies, she also sets up a research foundation to investigate the Irrawaddy dolphin. The organisation is named after him. She chooses to operate the trust with the help of the resident fisherman.

### **Environmental elements in The Hungry Tide by Amitav Ghosh**

Over the course of the book, we see the freshwater and saltwater ecosystems that humans & nature coexist in, a constant struggle for survival. In opposition to this intricate environment, the book raises several representations. This study is on "The Hungry Tide" by Amitav Ghosh and its environmental themes. The impact of a rapidly evolving world is depicted in Ghosh's work. The societal shifts shown in this work are mirrored in the natural world. This further proves that humans and their natural surroundings are interdependent. Man and his natural surroundings form an unbreakable bond. The environmental responsibilities of individuals are highlighted by his characters. Ghosh raises consciousness among readers on the need to protect our nation's abundant natural resources. The constructive & destructive ecological features are both present in Nature, as Ghosh demonstrates. Some of the changes that take place in nature and the effects they have are also covered by Ghosh. Exploring the ethical difficulties that arise from this, the story shows that ecology & conservation are not without their price.

Tigers, crocodiles, & dolphins all play important roles in Nature, alongside the other main character. An enormous archipelago of islands exists between the ocean & Bengal plains on India's eastern coast. While several of these islands have been around since the beginning of time, others have merely washed into existence. Their sizes range from enormous to tiny. Those lovely grounds are the Sundarbans. Nothing separates the river from the sea, the land from the ocean, or the pure water from the salt water here. Every day, mangrove forests covering thousands of acres vanish and then reappear an hour or two later, as the tides extend almost 200 miles inland. Over the course of hundreds of years, only the most destitute and idealistic individuals have dared to venture into the territory inhabited by man-eaters and crocodiles in order to scrape out an incredibly tenuous livelihood from the unforgiving muck.

In light of the global upsurge in activism around environmental concerns, this study employs Ghosh's "The Hungry Tide" to synthesise its ecological elements. Literature must permeate and shape our awareness for several valid reasons. Ghosh delivered a compelling message for mankind through Nature as a harsh teacher, as the researcher focusses on his concern for ecology and the harm brought by society's misuse of Nature.

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