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## *Eco-Feminism and Environmental Justice in Amitav Ghosh's The Hungry Tide*

**Mrs.G.Annepriya.**

Assistant Professor,  
Department of English,  
Hindusthan College of Arts & Science,  
Coimbatore, India

**Dr.C.Leena**

Dean of Social Science,  
KG College of Arts and Science,Coimbatore,  
India

**Abstract:** The Hungry Tide calls for an inclusive approach to equality and conservation by exposing the vulnerability of underprivileged women and the ecology through the interweaving ecofeminism and environmental justice. Gender and diversity are connected through a number of intersections. The idea that women are the "second sex" is akin to the incapacity to accept diversity, which is mirrored in development ideologies that cause biological diversity to be replaced and eventually exterminated. A patriarchal worldview marginalizes variety and promotes hierarchy by placing man as the primary measure of value. Women are therefore seen as inferior and unequal because they are different. This viewpoint also applies to nature, when variety is commercialized for profit rather than appreciated for its inherent value. Therefore, diversity is troublesome due to commercial criteria, which see it as a deficiency. According to Environmentalists Vandhana Shiva, this ideology fosters the development of monocultures and encourages the erasure of diversity in order to uphold the demands of capitalist patriarchy. The novel intricately portrays how women, often the most vulnerable to environmental degradation, become pivotal in the fight for ecological sustainability and justice. By analyzing the intersecting oppressions based on gender, class, and environment, this study reveals how Ghosh's narrative advocates for a more inclusive and equitable approach to environmentalism. The findings underscore the importance of integrating eco-feminist perspectives into broader environmental justice movements to address the complex socio-ecological challenges of our time

**Keywords:** Ecofeminism, Environmental Justice, Vulnerabilities, Ecosystem, Marginalized Women,

### **Ecofeminism in *The Hungry Tide***

Ghosh's narrative revolves on the lives of Piya, a marine biologist; Kanai, a translator; and Fokir, a local fisherman, against the backdrop of the Sundarbans' tidal landscape. Piya's character incarnate an ecofeminist sensibility, as her scientific work and personal journey reflect a deep empathy for the region's dolphins and an understanding of the interdependent relationship between humans and nature. Her encounters with Fokir, who possesses an sound knowledge of the local ecology, further underscore the value of indigenous knowledge systems often overlooked by patriarchal and colonial frameworks. As Mies and Shiva note, "Women, being different, are treated as unequal and inferior" (Mies and Shiva 45).

The novel highlights the plight of marginalized women through characters like Kusum, who suffers from the double burden of social marginalization and environmental displacement. Kusum's narrative disclose how the destruction of natural habitats directly bangs women, who are often the primary caregivers and sustainers of their families in rural settings. Kusum's experiences reflect the ecofeminist view that "nature's diversity is

seen as not intrinsically valuable in itself; its value is conferred only through economic exploitation for commercial gain" (Mies and Shiva 56).

Kerridge's introduction highlights the importance of understanding these varied perspectives to appreciate the full spectrum of human-environment interactions. In *The Hungry Tide*, these interactions are depicted with an awareness of both the beauty and the brutality of nature, challenging the characters to adapt, survive, and find meaning in their coexistence with the environment.

### **Environmental Challenges and Survival**

The Sundarbans are depicted as a place of both refuge and danger, a sense of polarity that mirrors the broader environmental challenges faced by humanity. The constant menace of cyclones, floods, and tiger attacks underscores the instability of life in this region. Ghosh's depiction of these environmental threats resonates with the themes explored in *Writing the Environment*, where the environment's influence on human life is a central concern.

The novel also addresses the socio-political dimensions of environmental issues, highlighting the plight of marginalized communities who bear the brunt of natural disasters and environmental degradation. The displacement of the refugees in Morichjhāpi and their struggle for survival is a poignant reminder of the human cost of environmental and political neglect.

**Piya's Journey and Connection with Nature:** Piya's research on the Irrawaddy dolphins is representative of an ecofeminist perspective. Her scientific mission is deeply empathetic and respectful of the natural world, contrasting with exploitative practices. Piya's journey on the river, guided by Fokir, showcases a cordial relationship between human beings and nature. This bond with nature is not merely for scientific observation but for understanding and preserving the delicate ecosystem of the Sundarbans.

"Eco-cosmopolitanism advocates for a global environmental ethic that transcends national and cultural boundaries, recognizing the interconnectedness of all life forms and ecosystems." (Huggan and Tiffin, p. 80). Piya's international background and her conservation work reflect an eco-cosmopolitan approach, emphasizing a global responsibility towards the preservation of the Sundarbans and its biodiversity, beyond local or national interests.

Ghosh's narrative investigate deeply into the symbiotic and often precarious relationship between the inhabitants of the Sundarbans and their environment. The novel's protagonists, Piya, Kanai, and Fokir, each have distinct relationships with the environment, reflecting diverse perspectives on nature. Piya, a marine biologist, represents scientific and conservationist views, while Fokir, a local fisherman, embodies indigenous knowledge and traditional ways of life. Kanai, a translator and businessman, provides a more detached, anthropocentric viewpoint.

Kerridge's introduction emphasizes the importance of understanding these varied perspectives to appreciate the full spectrum of human-environment interactions. In *The Hungry Tide*, these interactions are depicted with an awareness of both the beauty and the brutality of nature, challenging the characters to adapt, survive, and find meaning in their coexistence with the environment.

"A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise." (Nash, p. 198). In "The Hungry Tide," the character Piya embodies this ethic through her work to protect the Irrawaddy dolphins, striving to preserve the integrity and beauty of the Sundarbans' ecosystem.

**Fokir's Indigenous Knowledge:** Fokir's profound understanding of the Sundarbans' ecology represents the often-overlooked indigenous knowledge systems. His relationship with the environment is characterized by a deep symbiosis, which Piya recognizes and values. This recognition challenges the colonial and patriarchal tendency to marginalize indigenous ways of knowing, highlighting ecofeminist respect for diverse epistemologies.

**Kusum's Plight and Environmental Displacement:** Kusum's story is a poignant illustration of how environmental and social injustices intersect. Her displacement due to the Morichjhanpi massacre and subsequent struggle for survival underscores the vulnerabilities faced by marginalized women in the face of

ecological degradation. Ghosh writes, "The tide country's inconstant geography had worked for Kusum as it always had for the area's poor; it had provided a refuge, a place of escape" (Ghosh 174). Kusum's experience epitomizes Mies and Shiva's argument that "the destruction of diversity and the creation of monocultures becomes an imperative for capitalist patriarchy" (Mies and Shiva 66).

**The Morichjhanpi Incident:** The novel's recounting of the Morichjhanpi incident, where refugees were forcibly evicted and the environment was devastated, serves as a critical example of environmental injustice. This historical reference is not just a backdrop but a significant event that illustrates the brutal impacts of state-led development projects on marginalized communities. The incident reflects Mies and Shiva's assertion that patriarchal and capitalist structures exploit both people and nature for economic gain.

**Nirmal's Reflections on Nature and Society:** Nirmal's diary entries provide a reflective and philosophical dimension to the narrative, critiquing the social and ecological upheavals caused by colonial and postcolonial powers. His reflections often echo ecofeminist themes, such as when he muses on the Sundarbans as a place where "the boundaries between land and water, between fresh water and salt, were always mutating, transforming" (Ghosh 219). This fluidity mirrors the interconnectedness of human and ecological systems that ecofeminism advocates for.

The Sundarbans are portrayed as a place of both refuge and danger, a dichotomy that mirrors the broader environmental challenges faced by humanity. The constant threat of cyclones, floods, and tiger attacks underscores the precariousness of life in this region. Ghosh's depiction of these environmental threats resonates with the themes explored in *Writing the Environment*, where the environment's influence on human life is a central concern.

"Deep ecology advocates for a profound respect and reverence for all forms of life, recognizing the interconnectedness of all living beings." (Nash, p. 273). It resonates with the interconnected lives of humans and animals in the Sundarbans depicted in Ghosh's novel. The deep ecological perspective is reflected in the mutual dependence and respect seen in the relationships between characters like Fokir and the natural world.

The novel also addresses the socio-political dimensions of environmental issues, highlighting the plight of marginalized communities who bear the brunt of natural disasters and environmental degradation. The displacement of the refugees in Morichjhanpi and their struggle for survival is a poignant reminder of the human cost of environmental and political neglect.

"Environmental degradation often leads to displacement, creating 'environmental refugees' who are forced to migrate due to the uninhabitable conditions of their homelands." (Huggan and Tiffin, p. 157)

"The Hungry Tide" portrays the plight of the refugees in the Sundarbans, who face displacement due to both natural disasters and conservation policies. This situation underscores the concept of environmental refugees and highlights the complex dynamics between environmental conservation and human rights.

**Kanai's Realization and Transformation:** Kanai, initially a skeptic, transforms as he witnesses the interconnected struggles of the environment and the people. His evolution from a detached observer to an empathetic participant underscores the potential for a broader societal shift towards ecofeminist values. Ghosh writes, "But it was Piya who had brought him back to the tide country and made him see it anew" (Ghosh 302). This shift highlights the novel's call for recognizing and valuing the interconnectedness of all life forms.

"The development of environmental ethics can be traced through key historical movements, from conservation and preservation to modern ecological thinking." (Nash, p. 301)

## Intersection of Ecofeminism and Environmental Justice

The intersection of ecofeminism and environmental justice in *The Hungry Tide* is most evident in the novel's critique of development paradigms that prioritize profit over people and nature. Ghosh challenges the reader to reconsider the dominant narratives of progress and development, advocating for a more equitable and sustainable relationship with the environment. This aligns with Mies and Shiva's contention that "the very basis of capitalist patriarchy is the concept of power as domination over people and nature" (Mies and Shiva 70).

Mies and Shiva's work underscores the importance of recognizing the interconnectedness of all life forms and the need to dismantle hierarchical structures that perpetuate inequality and environmental degradation. *The Hungry Tide* brings these ideas to life, showing how the fight for environmental justice is inherently linked to the struggle for gender equity and social justice. The novel's portrayal of Kusum's and Piya's experiences illustrates that "the domination of nature and the domination of women are not merely coincidental, but are interconnected and mutually reinforcing" (Mies and Shiva 80).

"Postcolonial ecocriticism foregrounds the interconnectedness of environmental and social justice issues, emphasizing the importance of considering ecological concerns alongside historical and cultural contexts." (Huggan and Tiffin, p. 12)

In "The Hungry Tide," Ghosh intricately weaves the historical and cultural context of the Sundarbans with its environmental challenges, showcasing the entanglement of social justice issues, such as the displacement of local communities, with ecological conservation efforts.

## Conclusion

*The Hungry Tide* serves as a compelling narrative that bridges ecofeminism and environmental justice, offering a vivid portrayal of the interconnectedness of ecological and social issues. By examining the novel through the lens of Mies and Shiva's *Ecofeminism*, we gain a deeper understanding of how patriarchal and capitalist structures contribute to the exploitation of both women and nature. Ghosh's work calls for an inclusive and holistic approach to conservation and social equity, emphasizing the need to value diversity and foster a harmonious relationship between humanity and the natural world.

This analysis highlights the enduring relevance of ecofeminist thought in contemporary literature and environmental discourse, illustrating how stories like *The Hungry Tide* can inspire a more just and sustainable future.

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