

ECO CRITICISM IN THE HUNGRY TIDE

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ABSTRACT

The novel speaks about the efforts taken by Piyali Roy, an Indian American biologist to make a study on marine mammals, especially on Irrawaddy dolphins. The novel is set in Sundarbans. Piya arrives at Sundarbans which is considered by her as a suitable place for carrying out her study. She lands on an island in Sundarbans and gets acquainted with an inhabitant of that place named Fokir. He remains to be a guide for her and instructs her about the marine habitats. Fokir being a resident of that place, he knows about the tides occurrence in the seas and the perils. Though he knows these, to the dismay of the readers, Fokir dies when a storm breaks out followed by heavy rain and powerful and devouring tides. As ideas given by Fokir could be the sources for decades of 'research', with the sponsorship of Nilima and involvement of local fisherman, Piya starts an institution in the memory of Fokir. The novel deals with the dislocation of people due to tide. Tide causes great havoc to the life and property of the inhabitants of the islands in Sundarbans. The poor people who have become victims of natural catastrophe suffer from hunger. I would like to bring out the human environmental relationship in the novel. Human beings depend on nature and environment. Eco Criticism on this novel helps to evaluate this literary text in the literature and environment perspective.

Keywords: Tide, Catastrophe, Hunger, Human environmental relationship.

Piyali Roy is an Indian American biologist who arrives at an island named Lusibari in Sundarbans to carry out her research on marine mammals. Fokir who is an inhabitant of Sundarbans helps Piya (Piyali Roy) to conduct her research. Fokir helps Piya in foretelling the occurrences of tides, presence of marine mammals and especially the location of Irrawaddy dolphins in marine. The eco critical point of view has been chosen to explore this literary text in environmental perspective. The study of literature and environment in *The Hungry Tide* with environmental concerns examine the various ways of literature treating nature.

This novel highlights the dislocation of the refugees caused by nature and the government. Let the dislocation caused by nature be examined as this is the topic the paper is concerned with. The novel is set in the Sundarbans, which means 'the beautiful forest'. People believe that the word is derived from the name of a common species of mangrove the Sundari tree. But in the record books of the Mughal emperors this region is named not in reference to a tree but to a tide-*bhati*. To the inhabitants of the islands this land is known as *bhatirdesh*- the tide country. The description of the tide country itself provides a picture of dislocation places. This tide country is an immense archipelago of islands stretching from the Hooghly River in the West Bengal to the shores of the Meghan in Bangladesh. Some of these islands are "immense and some are no larger than sandbars; some have lasted through recorded history while others were washed into

being just a year or two ago" (7). In this area the river channels spread across the land like a fine mesh net They have created a terrain "where the boundaries between land and water are always mutating, always unpredictable" (7).

In the Sundarbans when the tides create new land, mangroves begin to gestate overnight and cover a new island within few short years. Other kinds of trees are not found here, mangrove forest is a universe unto itself. The mangrove is impassably dense. Every year dozens of people perish in the embrace of that dense foliage, killed by tigers, snakes and crocodiles. By providing the background of mutating, fluctuating, transient islands and boundaries of islands, Ghosh propounds that dislocation is not just human creation it is a natural phenomenon present since the origin of the earth.

One could decipher the lives of Sundarbans inhabitants from a thorough reading of this novel. This novel explains the havoc caused to the island people of Sundarbans. Especially it speaks about the loss of lives and livelihood in Lusibari. People of Sundarban islands are subjected to calamities such as storm, tides and flood. They are also devoured by hungry tigers in Sundarbans mangrove forest and attacked by venomous snakes, crocodiles and whales in the sea. These are the environmental issues face by the people of islands in Sundarbans. Amitav Ghosh who is very much acquainted with Bengal life and subsequently shows interest in Indian ocean churns well the novel with all details of Bengal and Indian ocean.

Piya when she arrived for the first time in Sundarbans is saved from getting drowned into the salty vegetative marine water by Fokir. She then finds Fokir to be a real source for her in providing elements of information for her research. Though Fokir does not know English, he and Piya are able to communicate by other means. Fokir is a subaltern of a Sundarban island and he and his people are widely prone to political, natural, and social issues. However Fokir loses his life in a storm that raised the hungry tides and devoured his life. The other inhabitants of Sundarban islands also lose their life day by day by some or other environmental issues. It has been found that not even a single day is spared by bringing the news of dead people in Sunderban islands.

The people of Sunderbans live with fear that their life is unsecured. Each and every day is seen with some or other disaster. Ghosh has portrayed this pathetic trauma of island inhabitants in the following lines:

There are no borders here to divide fresh water from salt, river from sea. The tides reach as far as three hundred kilometers inland and everyday thousands of acres of forest disappear under water only to re-emerge hours later. The currents are so powerful as to reshape the islands almost daily- some days the water tears away entire promontories and peninsulas; at other times it throws up new shelves and sand banks where there were none before (7).

None has a palpable concept for stating the occurrence of tides, floods, storms or cyclones. It is all associated to natural setup and intervention in it. Nilima and Nirmal who are aunt and uncle to forty two year old Kanai Datta have experienced a lot of miseries and sufferings in Sundarban islands. This explains how Nirmal is killed in a massacre called Marichjhapi massacre. Nilima mentions in the novel that she could find many young widows as their husbands lost their lives for tides and cyclones at sea.

Hunger is one of the foremost issues which is experienced by the island inhabitants. They muster up their courage and go for fishing to get something to eat. To the consternation of everyone, they become victims to the fishes and sea. But still going for hunting and fishing continues as the people of Sundarban islands need food for their livelihood.

The hunger drove these people to hunting and fishing and the results were disastrous many died of drowning; many more were picked off by crocodiles and sharks. The mangroves also didn't

help the people; thousands risked their lives to collect meager quantities of honey, wax, firewood and fruits. No day seemed to pass without news of someone being killed by a tiger, a snake or a crocodile.

The occurrence of cyclone and flood is the common phenomenon in the tide country. Horen narrates his own experience of being caught in one such cyclone. Once when Horen and his men were on the water, immediately the water level rose. They tied the boat to the tree trunk; they climbed up and sat on the branch of a tree. Looking around he saw that they were not the only people to take shelter in a tree. Many others had saved their lives in similar fashion. Whole families, young and elderly alike, were sitting on branches. They spent two days on the tree, without food or any water. Many had been blown away by the storm. When the flood subsided they look around, "there were corpses everywhere and the land was carpeted with dead fish and livestock. They found out that three hundred thousand people had died" (350). So also Nirmal records in his diary about the worst storm that had hit the tide country.

The water rose so high that they killed thousands of animals and carried them upriver and inland. The corpses of tigers and rhinoceroses were found kilometers from the river, in the rice fields and in village ponds. There were fields covered with feathers of dead birds. They say there was not a building in the city left with four walls intact. Bridges were blown away, godowns were emptied their rice, and on the river were many ships at anchor, large and small. The wind picked them up and carried over the top of trees and houses. They say that over twenty vessels were lost that day, including boats, dinghies and the like (204).

Hunger and catastrophe remain unaltered in the lives of island inhabitants. They survive by facing lots and lots of troubles day by day. These are all due to ecological imbalance or ecological turbulence. The novelist has very well made clear to the readers how literature examines environment. *The Hungry Tide* provides an insight into the human environment relationship as well as literature environment relationship.

REFERENCES

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