The Politics of Preservation: Unbuilding Universal Norms of Environmentalism in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*

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Abstract
Mainstream environmentalism is predominantly engrossed in the discourses of pure, pristine nature and its militant preservation. This environmental vision is based on the glorification of nature's aesthetics. It ignores the environmental experiences of the Global South where human lives are unavoidably entangled with ecology and interactions with nature are chiefly driven by the aims of survival. In its quest to glorify untouched nature, the human-ecology knot has transformed, often leading to unprecedented disasters. Amitvan Ghosh's 2011 novel *The Hungry Tide* paints a picture of the enforced evacuations and state violence inflicted upon the regional population during the rise of the much-celebrated 'Sundarban tiger reserve'. The most damage is suffered by the 'ecosystem people' who are forced to survive upon the meagre natural resources at disposal. They become what Kevin Bale terms 'disposable people'. Through textual analysis of this novel, with postcolonial ecocriticism by Ramachandra Guha and Dean Curtin as the theoretical foundation, this article will unveil the concealed colonial environment and conservation policies which advocate that nature must be 'rescued' from Indigenous people. The article also investigates how regional practices and ethical beliefs work towards upholding the sanctity of nature. The study questions the universality of environmental discourses of dominant cultures, which are heedless of geographical, cultural and socio-political disparities. In a broader context, the research builds a bridge between biocentric and anthropocentric perspectives by arguing that effective environmental conservation practices need not be anti-human in their approach.

Keywords: Global South, Environmentalism, Ecosystem People, Conservation, Disposable People.

Introduction

> I think of globalization like a light which shines brighter and
> brighter on a few people and the rest are in darkness, wiped out.
> They simply can't be seen. Once you get used to not seeing
> something, then, slowly, it's no longer possible to see it.[1]

Mainstream environmentalism stems from American transcendentalism developed by scholars such as Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson, and largely argues for the preservation of pristine landscapes. The discourse of purity and the militant defence of 'Mother Earth' is given priority. The 1964 'Wilderness Act' put forth by the American government advocates the preservation of unspoilt wilderness, safe from the touch of corrupt human hands. The deliberate isolation of human from the nonhuman is apparent where 'wilderness' is defined in such terms:

> A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.[2]

For a country like America, it is of not much concern to declare some areas as national parks reserved only for visitors and non-human entities. Throughout the world, this system of national parks and reserved forests has been imitated. Many are funded by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Reserving a large portion of landscapes for visitors and animals on a global scale indicates the underlying essentialist and reductive assessment of topographical features and human-nature interactions. Following this model of environmentalism in the Global South often has dire consequences as human experiences with ecology are not driven primarily by aesthetic goals, rather by aims of subsistence and survival. The human-nature interactions of people vary widely, based on their social, economic and historical conditions. Also, the ecological features are distinctly different in the Global South. It is beyond question that preservation of nature has noble intent, but the application of environmental discourses constructed by dominant cultures without giving due consideration to geographical, cultural and socio-political disparities can

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[1] Max Liboiron, 'The Perils of Ruin Porn: Slow Violence and the Ethics of Representation', *Discard Studies*, 27 March (2015). At: https://discardstudies.com/2015/03/23/the-perils-of-ruin-porn-slow-violence-and-the-ethics-of-representation/. Accessed 3/03/2022.

[2] The Wilderness Act, 88th Congress, Second Session (1964).

be disastrous. According to Ramachandra Guha, “the wholesale transfer of a movement culturally rooted in American conservation history” is severely problematic in the Indian context.[3] Lives of innumerable people are intricately tangled with ecology, people who are sustained by the meagre resource at their disposal. In the process of building reserved forests and national parks, these people are often displaced and dispossessed. The focus on the preservation of untouched wilderness can be viewed as a “neocolonial attempt to enforce legal separation of tribes from their inhabited lands.”[4] Amitvan Ghosh’s 2011 novel *The Hungry Tide* paints a picture of the enforced evacuations and state violence inflicted upon the regional population during the rise of the much-celebrated ‘Sundarban tiger reserve’. The most damage is suffered by the ‘ecosystem people’ who are forced to survive upon the meagre natural resources at their disposal.

The Hungry Tide

The Hungry Tide (2004) is one of Amitav Ghosh’s most popular novels.[5] The narrative is set in the Sundarbans, a remote corner in the eastern part of India, consisting of a number of tiny islands linked by numerous rivers. Ghosh explores the conflicts that arise when wealthy elites with political power take it upon themselves to preserve and protect the natural world from corrupt human hands. The novel presents a fictional account of the gruesome events around the forcible evacuation in the interest of building a tiger reserve, which directly led to the Morichjhapi massacre of 1979. The narrative begins with Kanai, who represents the privileged outsider, oblivious to the struggles and ethical beliefs of the poor inhabitants of the Sundarbans. The events of the past are brought forth through a journal of Kanai’s late uncle Nirmal. This view of a poorly planned conservation program and its anthropogenic losses is contrasted with Piyali Roy’s endeavour of scientific research on Irrawaddy dolphins. This article seeks to expose the irrelevance and perils of Northern modes of environmentalism in Global South contexts, problematising the glorification of pure natural space devoid of human touch. Through a close textual analysis of *The Hungry Tide*, the first part of this article seeks to unmask the primarily Northern reductive and totalising vision

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[3] Ramachandra Guha and Alier Juan Martínez, *Varieties of Environmentalism: Essays North and South* (London: Earthscan, 1997), p. 96.

[4] Deane W. Curtin, *Chinnagounder's Challenge the Question of Ecological Citizenship* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), p. 7.

[5] Amitav Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide* (New York: Harper Collins, 2017).

of environment which ignores the Southern human-nature experiences. The argument then moves on to present instances of human communities that are irrevocably embedded in their surrounding ecosystems. The subsequent segment paints a picture of how this entanglement is undone by upholding Northern environmental discourses. The fourth section deals with the ethics and modes of consumptions that aligns with a sustainable lifestyle. Finally, it is argued that effective environmentalism does not necessitate a foundation of anti-human sentiment.

Rejecting the Reductive Vision of Environment

The American inventions of national parks and reserve forests are based on the principle that nature is "an Eden too perfect for the fallen progeny of Adam and Eve."[6] Wilderness, as yet untouched by human hands, is glorified for its pristine beauty. The adoration of unspoilt wilderness comes easily to those with full bellies and heavy pockets. A natural space devoid of human presence serves well a tourist few in their time of leisure and relaxation. This approach to environmental preservation totalises the topographical conditions everywhere. Ghosh dismantles the romanticised vision of every natural space, the Sundarbans in this case, as a beautiful garden. As Aldous Huxley argues in 'Wordsworth in the Tropics' (1928), the love for calm nature and the easy-going pantheism of William Wordsworth would have been cured had he been through the unforgiving conditions of a tropical forest.[7] The Sundarbans is a place of epic mutability and complexity. To start, the physical location of the islands is on the very margin of India: "trailing threads of India's fabric, the ragged fringe of her sari."[8] The portrayal of the Sundarbans' mutability and complexity dismantles the generic conception of Edenic natural space. The geological obscurity finds emphasis when the author says: "The tides reach as far as three hundred kilometres inland, and every day thousands of acres of forest disappear underwater, only to re-emerge hours later."[9] The novel rejects the sweeping general conceptualisation of passive and benign natural beauty and presents nature's mutability thus,

> When the tides create new land, overnight mangroves begin to

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[6] Amitav Ghosh, 'Amitav Ghosh: Wild Fictions', *Amitav Ghosh* (2008). At: https://www.amitavghosh.com/. Accessed 3/03/2022.

[7] Guha and Martínez, *Varieties of Environmentalism: Essays North and* South, p. xi.

[8] Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide*, p. 6.

[9] Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide*, p. 7.

> gestate, and if the conditions are right they can spread so fast as to cover a new island within a few short years… Mangrove leaves are tough and leathery, the branches gnarled and the foliage often impassably dense. Visibility is short and the air still and fetid.[10]

In addition to these geo-physical complexities, the human-nature interaction is far from that of a relaxing touristic one.

The region is frequented by severe cyclones, storms, floods and famines: "[t]he novel disrupts the dominant *bhadralok* image of the Sundarbans as a beautiful garden devoid of human beings— based on a romanticized urban vision of nature and wildlife—by confounding its urban, bourgeois characters with the alterity of the tide country."[11] The restricted visibility in the dense mangrove forests and unnavigable waterways make the region difficult to inhabit. The place defies all efforts of the inhabitants who try to cultivate the available land. First, the geophysical obscurity proves to be an obstacle. Secondly, the lack of fresh water renders the area uncultivable. The Western portrayal of feeble and tamed nature is completely rejected by the author when he presents that the environment repudiates all human efforts to cultivate the land, instead rewarding them with "hunger and catastrophe."[12] People must toil and struggle with nature itself to make ends meet. Hunger drove them to hunting and fishing, often with disastrous results. Many died of drowning, and many more were picked off by crocodiles and estuarine sharks.[13] The hostile environment and the acute hardships faced by the inhabitants compel the readers to question the traditional presentation of benign and passive nature.

An Indelible Human-Nature Bond

The complexities and hardships that render the landscape beyond human control also point to the second major issue in glorifying untouched natural spaces. In Indian, a larger part of the Southern population is directly or indirectly dependent upon ecology for subsistence, and their survival is inseparably linked to their immediate environment. The isolation of humans and nature can be disastrous where the lives of innumerable people are intricately tied to local ecosystems. As Guha points out,

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[10] Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide*, pp. 7-8.

[11] Priya Kumar, 'The Environmentalism of the Hungry Tide', in *Ecocriticism of the Global South*, ed. Scott Slovic, Swarnalatha Rangarajan, and Vidya Sarveswaran (New York: Lexington Books, 2019), p. 14.

[12] Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide*, p. 66.

[13] Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide*, pp. 66-67.

> India is a long settle and densely populated country in which agrarian population have a finely balanced relationship with nature, the setting aside of wilderness areas has resulted in a direct transfer of resources from the poor to the rich.[14]

The indelible entanglement between human and environment is presented on many occasions. Kusum identifies the inhabitants of Sundarbans as “the tide-country people.”[15]

The ancient ‘tinai theory’ is worth mentioning in this regard, as it advocates for a shared *oikos* or space of habitation, constituted by the inner landscape and outer geophysical space, yoking the environment, the human, the nonhuman, and the sacred in a seamless continuity. Swarnalatha Rangarajan explains that “identity in tinai theory is therefore not to be defined in isolation but through the integral bonds that the member shares with other citizens of this integral *oikos*.”[16] The ethereal bond is explained: “… rivers ran in our heads, the tides were in our blood.”[17] The bond is not just spiritual, but also material, as the majority of the population is dependent upon the immediate environment for subsistence. Fokir, Horen, Moyna and many other characters in the novel represent ‘ecosystem people’, who are wholly dependent upon local ecosystems for survival and suffer the most when the ecosystem is degraded or separated from them. They subsisted by catching fish and crabs as the salinity of water and the complexities of the tide-country rendered the place almost uncultivable.

Breaking the Bond

Wilderness preservation has come to be seen as synonymous with environmentalism by the wealthy elites and consequently, environmental agendas of the Southern nations are overlooked. An array of environmental issues such shortages of resources, soil erosion, and pollution, which largely impact those in lower classes, are often ignored. Environmentalism based on wilderness preservation essentialises the environmental experiences around the globe. It is of not much concern for a sparsely populated Northern nation to declare some area as reserved forest, meant only for nonhuman entities and tourists. However, “the wholesale transfer of a movement culturally rooted in American conservation history can only result in the social uprooting of human populations in other parts of the globe."[18] These programs are often funded by agencies like WWF and IUCN. To the eyes of economically rich nations, national parks and protected forests serve as indicators of ecological development in Southern nations. This entails a longing for validation from the North, which causes disruption in the finely balanced human-nature mesh. This kind of preservation strategy can be paralleled with a neocolonial attempt to enforce legal separation of tribes from their traditional lands.[19] The quest for aesthetic pleasure renders the Indigenous population's needs negligible. The already difficult lives of the inhabitants are presented through the lack of basic amenities, drinking water, food and electricity.

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[14] Ramachandra Guha, ‘Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation’, *Environmental Ethics*, vol. 11, no. 1 (1989), pp. 71-83.

[15] Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide*, p. 164.

[16] Swarnalatha Rangarajan and Scott Slovic, *Eco Critcism: Big Ideas and Practical Strategies* (Hyderabad: Orient Black Swan, 2018), p. 74.

[17] Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide*, p. 165.

As Justin McBrien asserts, "beauty hunger" supersedes actual existing hunger and issues.[20] Annu Jalais argues that the peddling of such images of a naturally human-free natural environment, whether for wildlife preservation or in current bids at rebranding the place for the purposes of global marketing, will increase the alienation between groups such as the inhabitants of the Sundarbans and its wildlife.[21] With the inception of the tiger reserve in the Sundarbans, the whole area was made out of bounds for the Indigenous population. In trying to protect an animal species, the policies did not consider the socio-economic and material impact on the region's people. The cost of this mindlessly executed preservation program is borne by the most deprivileged lot. The implementation had to be done through the physical displacement of the people inhabiting the Sundarbans. The author says in 'Wild Fictions' that

> …over many decades, there has been a kind of 'ethnic cleansing' of India's forests: indigenous groups have been evicted or marginalized and hotel chains and urban tourists have moved in. In other words, the costs of protecting Nature have been thrust upon some of the poorest people in the country, while the rewards have been reaped by certain

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[18] Guha, 'Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation', pp. 71-83.

[19] Deane W. Curtin, *Chinnagounder's Challenge: The Question of Ecological Citizenship* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), p. 7.

[20] Justin McBrien, 'Accumulating Extinction Planetary Catastrophism in the Necrocene', in *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism*, ed. Jason W. Moore (Oakland: PM Press, 2016), p. 124.

[21] Annu Jalais, 'The Sundarbans: Whose World Heritage Site?', *Conservation & Society*, vol. 5, no. 3 (2007), p. 336.

> segments of the urban middle class.[22]

Such an exclusivist approach to conservation alienates humans from ecology, rendering the deprivileged lot as 'disposable beings'- people overlooked from the idea of nation making and development. The inhabitants of the region were forcibly evacuated and trucked away to internment camps in Madhya Pradesh. They became what Rob Nixon terms 'surplus people': "superfluous to the labour market and to the idea of national development and were forcibly removed or barred from cities."[23] People, who, for generations, worked as fishermen were forced to resettle in dry, dusty, barren lands of the Dandakaranya region. Kusum articulates her anguish that they are a form of 'human waste' who must be properly disposed of. They became what Nixon calls a nation's "unimagined communities."[24] In a desperate attempt to reshape their lives, they tried to return to their familiar 'tide-country' and make uninhabited islands habitable. Morichjhapi was one such island where these 'nowhere people' tried to build a life from scratch. Ultimately, the state decided to use violence and in a matter of days, every trace of human existence was wiped out.

Ngugi Wa Thiongo articulates that "colonial mappings divide land into three categories: the border, the center (metropole), and the outside" and "We either receive the privileges associated with the center, or the genocidal policies and erasures associated with its periphery."[25] The article also exposes how the colonials control the national story, which characters are to be introduced, and how they are controlled." In a neocolonial vein, the lifestyle of these inhabitants was rendered uncivilised, unacceptable, and irrational because they were judged as failures in advancing national interest. They thus became 'uninhabitants'- people concealed from public view.[26] They were evacuated not only from land but also from public awareness. The militant attitude to protect land from men can be viewed as a legacy of colonial forestry practice which advocated that land had to be rescued from indigenous population. People are cut off from the outside world, forced to starve and shot at. Houses are burned, people along with boats are drowned and killed. The frustration and anguish find expression through Kusum:

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[22] Ghosh, 'Amitav Ghosh: Wild Fictions'.

[23] Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), p. 151.

[24] Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, p. 159.

[25] Aman Sium and Eric Ritskes, 'Speaking Truth to Power: Indigenous Storytelling as an Act of Living Resistance', *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, vol. 2, no. 1 (2013), p. vi.

[26] Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, p. 162.

> … the worst part was not the hunger or the thirst. It was to sit here, helpless, and listen to the policemen making their announcements, hearing them say that our lives, our existence, were worth less than dirt or dust. "This island has to be saved for its trees, it has to be saved for animals, it is a part of a reserve forest, it belongs to a project to save tigers, which is paid for by people from all around the world." Every day, sitting here, with hunger gnawing at our bellies, we would listen to these words, over and over again. Who are these people, I wondered, who love animals so much that they are willing to kill us for them? Do they know what is being done in their names? Where do they live, these people? Do they have children, do they have mothers, fathers? As I thought of these things, it seemed to me that this whole world had become a place of animals, and our fault, our crime, was that we were just human beings, trying to live as human beings always have, from the water and the soil. No one could think this a crime unless they have forgotten that this is how humans have always lived- by fishing, by clearing land and by planting the soil.[27]

Nixon's notion of 'spatial amnesia' refers to "communities [that are] are physically unsettled and imaginatively removed, evacuated from place and time and thus uncoupled from the idea of both a national future and a national memory."[28] These people were reduced to mere numbers, statistics, and denied even the bare minimum right to survive. The conservation policies were likely noble in intent, but the dehumanisation and use of violence point towards the latent aggression beneath the intention.

Apart from direct use of state violence, the discussed conservation policies with no regard for socio-economic realities of human communities, serve to accelerate what David Harvey calls "accumulation by dispossession" - suppression of rights, state control over natural resources and rejecting indigenous forms of knowledge and production.[29] The designation of a 'reserved forest' excludes human communities from the region. Control over resources, forms of knowledge, and production are transposed from the earlier inhabitants to the state and few touristic elites. Before being physically displaced, their claim to the meagre natural resources at disposal is broken. The cry of defiant refugees is relevant in this regard - "Amra kara? Bastuhara. Who are we? We are the dispossessed."[30] This kind of displacement, Nixon explains, "refers to the loss of the land and resources beneath them, a loss of the land and resources beneath them, a loss that leaves communities stranded in a place stripped of the very characteristics that made it inhabitable."[31]

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[27] Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide*, p. 261.

[28] Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, p. 151.

[29] Shakti Jaising, 'Fixity Amid Flux: Aesthetics and Environmentalism in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*', *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature*, vol. 46, no. 4 (2015), pp. 63-88.

Another facet of the poorly implemented conservation policies comes to the surface as Nilima explains in the novel that the peculiarities of a tidal ecology are not taken into consideration by those in authority. With the daily submersion of parts of the forest during high tide, the scent markings of the tigers are often washed away, thereby confusing their territorial instincts. This confusion causes heightened aggression in the tigers, often leading to incidents of human-tiger conflicts and casualties. This conflict between man and animal is further fuelled by the state's active privilege being vested in the tigers at the cost of poor human communities. Meanwhile, nothing is done for the needs of the local people or their development. No official data is maintained concerning human deaths caused by tigers over the years. While these people try to survive with acute shortage of basic amenities like fresh water, electricity, education and medications, the tigers are provided with pools of fresh water for drinking purposes. The cost of building a tiger reserve is borne by this deprived community. By putting the interests of tigers against those of human communities, the state sponsors an antagonistic image of tigers to these people, albeit unintentionally. The tigers are placed higher on the hierarchy and human beings neglected. This approach has not only been harmful for humans but also for the very animal species it seeks to protect. As Jalais rightly points out,

> The islanders now started to see the state's investment in tourism and wildlife sanctuaries as instituting an unequal distribution of resources between them and wild animals. Correspondingly, tigers became 'tourist tigers' and moved onto the other side of the overarching status division and were therefore no longer protected by the islanders but started being attacked when they ventured into villages.[32]

A Regional Sustainable Living

The totalising discourse professed by the elite conservationists utterly ignores the understanding and wisdom possessed by Indigenous populations.

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[30] Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide*, p. 254.

[31] Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, p. 19.

[32] Jalais, 'The Sundarbans: Whose World Heritage Site?', pp. 335-342.

The neocolonial spirit reflects when wilderness preservation programs discard the local forms of knowledge and ethical beliefs as backward and primitive. The Northern champions of environmentalism take it upon themselves to 'civilise' the people living sustainably over generations in a region. Guha believes that "many agricultural communities do have a sophisticated knowledge of the natural environment that may be equal (and sometimes surpass) codified 'scientific' knowledge".[33] In the novel, we can find many instances of Indigenous population's affinity with nature through spiritual ties. The author highlights the numinous value of the deity 'Bon Bibi', the keeper of balance between human and nature. Her legend is culturally rooted in the Sundarbans, and it occupies a major part in people's daily lives. Habitants of the region maintain a strict adherence to the moral imperatives put forth in Bon Bibi's legend. They respect the division of the forest area and do not venture into the parts that the legend designates to 'Dokhin Rai' or the realm of the king of tigers. The inhabitants of the region believe that this part of wilderness must not be interfered with by human population. Even in their regular vocation of collecting forest produce, they invoke the deity and are careful not to harm the sanctity of the forest. They do not malign the region even with spit, bodily excrements, or any other belongings. Their belief that disrespecting these boundaries would bring about the wrath of Bon Bibi ultimately leading to death by tiger attack or storms is far more effective in conservation and placing limits on human greed when compared with any institutionalised set of instructions or fines.

This legend is an example of the embeddedness of nonhuman nature in human lives. To the proud rational eyes of a Northerner, apart from satisfying their aesthetic needs, animals and nonhuman entities are often 'objects of study' meant to be dissected. In one instance, a British man of science named Blyth lays his hands on two Irrawaddy dolphins whom he "reduced to perfect skeletons" in order to categorise and study them.[34] However, the tide-country people, in their rustic simplicity, have a great amount of reverence towards these creatures as they are considered to be the messengers of Bon Bibi. The legend compels the local population to "incorporate natural entities into their sense of moral community."[35] The legend is based on such harmonious coexistence of men, animals and ecology that lays the foundation for a sustainable lifestyle in rather tough conditions. This is what Jim Cheney refers to as ‘mythic thinking’, whereby people actively try to integrate their own activities with those of the sentient beings around them. The local people collect forest products and catch fishes no more than they need to sustain. They condemn the nylon nettings used by large companies seeking to accelerate profits in order to cater to a market-driven economy, as these nets do not spare the eggs and small fishes and prawns. These are the forms of Indigenous knowledge which manifest as lived out practices and are embodied in the people who live in the Sundarbans. Such ethical beliefs dictate the lives and lifestyles of these people which promotes a sustainable living.

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[33] Guha, 'Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation', p. 73.

[34] Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide*, p. 229.

[35] Tom Lynch, Cheryll Glotfelty, and Karla Armbruster, *The Bioregional Imagination: Literature, Ecology and Place* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012), p. 12.

Does Environmentalism have to be Antihuman?

The Hungry Tide voices the social justice concerns springing from “antihuman environmentalism that too often sought (under the banner of universalism) to impose green agendas dominated by rich nations and western NGOs.”[36] Yet the portrayal of the struggle between anthropocentric concerns and ecocentric plights never leans towards either side. In an instance of subverting the supposed supremacy of human intellect, the symbiotic potential between human and animals is highlighted. Piya is awestruck by the spectacle of dolphins helping Fokir catch fish. “Did there exist any more remarkable instances of symbiosis between human beings and a population of wild animals?”[37] Ghosh presents a scientifically accurate portrayal of a tidal ecology throughout the novel. Nature does not serve as a mere background for the human characters to act out their roles; rather, the nonhuman entities are attributed with active agency which parallels them with human characters in the novel. The narrative gives space not only to the material value of wetlands and mangroves but also their ecological significance find prominence. These spaces are home to a range of biodiversity. Their role in absorbing cyclones’ onslaught and tidal surges is important. The social justice predicament never overshadows the rich details about nonhuman entities, their habitation patterns, vegetations and waterbodies.

Rejecting the popular notion that nature is best preserved in isolation from human touch, Ghosh presents the environmentalism practised by Piya.

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[36] Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, p. 5.

[37] Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide*, p. 169.

She understands the material and cultural interests of the local population and gives due respect to the intimate local wisdom of the ecosystem people in carrying out her research on Irrawaddy dolphins.

> And for myself I know that I don't want to do the kind of work that places the burden of conservation on those who can least afford it. If I was to take on a project here, I'd want it to be under the sponsorship of the Badabon Trust, so the local fishermen would be involved.[38]

As discussed earlier, the role of myths and legends is significant in preserving the sanctity of the environment. The social constraints propagated through the moral imperatives of the Bon Bibi legend are far more efficient than any institutionalised regulations. The fear of being eaten alive by a tiger is evidently more effective than any kind of imposed fine. This brand of environmentalism with the local population having a stake in its conservation is what Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing refers to as "community-based conservation." Here the local population is "reimagined as culturally marked and naturally wise."[39]

Conclusion

In *Nature in the Global South* (2003), Paul R. Greenough and Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing aptly argue that we need to "move beyond a blinkered conservation biology that views each nonhuman species in its own autonomous evolutionary space outside human histories."[40] Firstly, the imperial, urban and reductive vision of nature as a beautiful garden devoid of human presence must be rectified. In Indian contexts, often human and nature stay harmoniously in an organic entanglement and a failure in providing stakes for these human beings in conserving the very environment that sustains them leads to alienation of humans from nature. The consequences of such a situation can be disastrous and such "exclusivist approach to conservation has to be rethought."[41] The novel advances in dismantling universalisation of the established Northern notions of environmentalism. This article highlights the social and environmental dangers of the totalising discourses that such environmental management models pose. The author successfully captures the inconspicuous colonial practices of forestry and environmentalism which promote ecological imperialism in the Global South. Through Piya, the author seeks to bridge the gap between anthropocentrism and ecocentrism who gives due respect to local wisdom and considers the Indigenous population as knowledgeable equals in the quest of preserving the environment.

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[38] Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide*, p. 397.

[39] Paul R. Greenough and Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, 'Agrarian Allegory and Global Futures', in *Nature in the Global South: Environmental Projects in South and Southeast Asia*, eds Paul Greenough and Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 163.

[40] Greenough and Lowenhaupt Tsing, *Nature in the Global South*, p. 14.

[41] Amitav Ghosh, 'Amitav Ghosh: Wild Fictions'.