

**BANDARI SUVARNA****Assistant Professor of English,****Government Degree College Warangal,****Telangana, india.****[bandarisuvarna819@gmail.com](mailto:bandarisuvarna819@gmail.com)****MAN AND NATURE: VICTIMIZING EACH OTHER****AN ECOCRITICAL ANALYSIS OF AMITAV GHOSH'S *THE HUNGRY TIDE*****ABSTRACT**

There is always an interdependent and inexplicable bond between Man and Nature. Karl Marks says “man lives from nature and must maintain a continuing dialogue with it if he is not to die”. But the recent era stands as a solid witness to a curious paradoxical bond between Man and Nature: Nature being the victim of man and as a result, Man being the victim of Nature, this is a kind of vicious cycle in which Nature as well as Man got trapped in. The harmony between Man and Nature has been gradually destabilized by the cunning interventions of neocolonial and neocapital tendencies, which form the negative side of Globalization, giving way to a modern man, who forgoes his reverence for Nature and wants to stamp his superiority over Nature.

Modern man, influenced by the capitalist market forces, destroys Nature with his technology, modern living style on one hand and screams out slogans to save Nature on the other. He believes in Darwin's theory of “survival of the strongest” but simply ignores the fact that man can survive only when Nature survives. In Bateson's words “The unit of survival is organism plus environment. We are learning by bitter experience that the organism which destroys its environment destroys itself”. The result is drastic Environmental degradation. Environmental degradation, being the most terrific challenge of the recent times has been proving itself in the form of untimely natural calamities which show an adverse impact, especially on poor and marginalized people, adding to the number of environmental refugees year after year. Though the relation between man and his physical environment has been a part of Literature from the beginning, Literature across the world is now trying to address these major challenges of Environment by making Environment and Ecology related issues as a part of it. Inclusion of various complex issues related to environment and ecology in literary works, is in turn helpful in raising environmental consciousness among common people. The need of raising awareness as well as environmental consciousness may also be one of the factors that contributed to the popularity of Ecocriticism recent days. The term “Ecocriticism” first appeared in William Ruckert's essay “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism” in 1978. Ecocriticism has emerged as a separate discipline by

1990s owing its popularity to the continued Global Environmental crisis. Many literary works across the world and few Indian works successfully projected the sensitive yet complex relation between Man and Nature. Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* is one of such novels. Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*, is a tactful presentation of a web of sensitive bioregion with its endangered flora and fauna along with marginalized people who struggle to carve a niche against all the oddities of the biome. Marginalized people being denied the basic right to live inevitably depend on nature and in the process of making their living out of Nature, leave ecological foot prints which are rather heavy on Nature thus metamorphosing it from a protector to destroyer.

**Keywords:** *Ecocriticism, Environmental refugees, Globalization, Ecological footprints, Marginalized people.*

## INTRODUCTION

Man has been a part of nature since his origin. It is his continuous interaction with nature that has helped him to evolve from a primitive being to the civilized one. Man's existence, survival, development... everything is possible due to his relation with nature. In Karl Marx's succinct formulation, quoted by Holt: "man lives from nature and he must maintain a continuous dialogue with it if he is not to die". Man's relation with nature will be in perfect harmony as long as he realizes the fact that every form of his life and his needs are fulfilled by Nature alone. In Karl mark's words "in a physical sense man lives only from these natural products, whether in the form of Nourishment, heating, clothing, shelter etc. Nature is man's inorganic body". For a certain period of time, the relation between man and nature used to be comfortable, though he had to demand something from nature in order to fulfill his needs that never impacted nature too adversely, because he had limited needs, which can be satisfied through the immediacy of nature he had been enjoying. But as that time progressed, along with it increased the gradual alienation of man from nature. Changes in man's social and economic tendencies with their concomitant results influenced individual's life tremendously.

## ESTRANGEMENT OF MAN FROM NATURE

With the beginning of industrial revolution, the rate of production was accelerated to high degrees leading its way to Mercantilism and later to Capitalism. Capitalism succeeded in estranging man completely from nature by indulging in mass production of goods, on one hand and by inducing change pattern in individual's social and economical tendencies on the other, thus causing a gradual shift in individual from satisfying with basic needs to strive for luxury goods. "In place of the old needs satisfied by home production we have new ones which demand the products of the most distant lands and climes for their satisfaction. In place of the old local the national self-sufficiency and isolation, we have a universal commerce, a universal dependence of nations on one another". (Marx, Engels). Capitalism changed not only the modes of production but also the prevailing social patterns and relations of the time. Lukacs puts it as, "a relation between people takes on the character of a thing and thus acquires a 'Phantom objectivity', an autonomy that seems to strictly rational and all-embracing as to conceal every trace of its fundamental nature: the relation between people."

The results of capitalistic production: the alienation of commodities from their producers and their subsequent circulation throughout society and the transformed social relations between people- entangled man in a web which as Luckacs names it as 'second nature'. "Men are constantly smashing, replacing and leaving behind the 'natural' , 'irrational' and actually existing bonds while, on the other hand, they erect around themselves in the reality that they have created and "made" a kind of second nature which evolves with exactly the same inexorable necessity as was the case earlier with irrational forces of nature"(Lukacs). The 'second nature', which is a self creation of man succeeded in estranging man from nature which ultimately pathed the way towards destruction of man. As in Bateson's words," the unit of survival is organism plus environment. We are learning by bitter experience that the organism which destroys its environment destroys itself", which is very true. Ramification of capitalism with its tendency of prioritizing profit over social good, natural resources and environment had a strident blow on nature and its resources. The incessant greed of competitive market forces, in accumulating profits at the cost of nature resulted in injudicious utilization of natural resources which caused an irreparable damage to nature. This entire phenomenon influenced the individuals and thus society, by shaping its social, cultural, economical and political existence according to its tune. As Karl Marx declares in preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. "The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determined their consciousness". The major blow of capitalism is that, in a way, it motivated its beneficiaries to seek for an absolute economic vitality and in order to achieve that, it developed a range of machinery, Neo-Colonialism being one of those. Neo-Colonialism made most of developing and underdeveloped countries, its victims, by spreading its control over them politically economically and ultimately grabbing their human resources as well as Natural Resources for its benefit, causing humanitarian as well as environmental crisis in those countries.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION**

In recent era the distance between countries is not at all a matter with the advent of technology and modernization. Transcultural, transnational boundaries are set aside and the entire world has become a global village. Cultural and Economical integration is made feasible due to Globalization. But the glorified side of the globalisation is very dominant that its nocuous effect are generally got nullified. The effect of Globalization on nature is not a minuscule one. Globalisation has caused severe stress on ecology cycle in so many ways. Due to globalization there is a tremendous increase in consumption of products. Raw materials and goods are moving from one country to another in such a swift that the entire burden is to be taken care of by natural resources of various countries and as a result, large quantity of natural resources are diminishing day by day, laying a heavy stress on environment leading to environmental degradation. The United Nations International strategy for Disaster Reduction defines environmental degradation as "The reduction of the capacity of environment to meet social and ecological objectives and needs". Environmental degradation has become one of the major challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Man and

Modernization are two major contributors of the environmental degradation; culture of consumerism, Urban Development, technological and industrial development, increase in sophisticated Technology, all these laid a heavy weight on environment that now many countries are striving to meet their basic requirements such as water. The world is already confronting the repercussions of neglected nature in the form of increasing number of natural calamities like untimely cyclones, tsunamies, earthquakes, droughts. Due to these natural calamities, large numbers of people are getting devastated every year adding to the number of environmental refugees. It is no wonder that mostly the people who are becoming victims of these natural calamities are poor and marginalized people. In order to make their life, these people have to depend mostly on nature again, thus further adding to the vulnerability of nature. As these people have to depend on their immediate environment they are more likely to destroy it having no other choice. As the people become poorer they destroy the resources faster, and reversely, degraded environment in turn accelerates poverty.

It is an alarming effect that environment is getting more adversely affected due to anthropogenic activities than anything else. Global warming, emission of excess amount of greenhouse gases are caused by human induced activities. In order to lessen the anthropogenic effects on Environment, creating environmental consciousness among people is very important. Numbers of attempts are being made to make people realize the sensitivity of nature which contributes to the stabilization of nature. The attempt of raising environmental consciousness among people through various genres of literature by projecting ecologically sensitive issues has become prominent globally because literature influences common people more than anything. The realization to spread environment consciousness among people may also be one of the factors that contributed to the popularity of Ecocriticism.

## **ECOCRITICISM**

The word Ecocriticism is a semi neologism (Buell, 1999). *Eco* is short of *ecology* which is concerned with the relationship between living organisms in their natural environment, as well as their relationship with that environment. The relationship between man and nature is always interdependent and inexplicable. By analogy Ecocriticism is concerned with the relationships between literature and environment or how man's relationship with his physical environment, are reflected in Literature (Tosic2006). Ecocriticism has been expressed through many literary genres. This is unusual combination of natural science and a humanistic discipline and is often informed by other fields such as Ecology, Sustainable Design, Bio Politics, Environmental History, Environmentalism and Social Ecology etc. As a separate movement or school of literary criticism. Ecocriticism started developing in the 1990s. The most widely known Ecocritics are Lawrence Buell and Cheryl Glotfelty, Simon C Estok, Harold Fromm, William Hoarh, William Rueckert, Suellen Campbell, Michael P Branch Glen A. Love. Ecocriticism is the study of literature and environment from an interdisciplinary point of view, where it analyses literary text that illustrates environmental concerns and examine the various ways of literature and theoretical approach to the inter relations of nature, culture and even some times super natural elements in nature. It attempts to explore expressions of environment in literary texts and theoretical discourse by using

literature as a pre-text to study environmental issues and evaluate relevant texts according to their capacity to articulate ecological contexts.

The actual importance of Ecocriticism is understood well when we realize that the greatest challenge in present times is to live on an unstable earth. Man might have been equipped with high-end technology but for sure he cannot withstand nature in its destroying mode. With the aid of modernization we reached to the far end of damaging the nature that it is highly impossible now to go back or repair the damage. But with a little awareness, remedial measures and pro-nature attitude we can slow down the rate of environmental degradation. Ecocriticism serves the purpose of increasing ecological awareness, as it is committed to affecting change by analyzing the function of the natural environment or aspects of it, represented in literature that contribute to material practices in material world.

## NATURE AND LITERATURE

Nature and literature always shared an eternal proximity, down the ages in every culture of the world. It is a good turn that literature across the world has been trying to address major challenges of environment by making sensitive Environment and Ecology related issues as a part of it. This inclusion in turn is helpful in raising environmental consciousness among commoners. Environmental consciousness refer to “specific psychological factors related to individuals propensity to engage in pro-environmental behaviours”. (Zelenzy and Schultz, 2000). Nature always occupied the prominent place in Indian literature and considered as a figure of reverence. Literature produced at a particular time period reflects the social and cultural relativity of the time. The transformations in the social and cultural environment have been influencing the representation of man’s attitude towards nature in literary expressions. As the concern for the ecological issues is increasing day by day the related issues are more considered in the recent literary works. There are few novels in the history of Indian English literature which have nature as an important backdrop. Amitav Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide* is considered as one of the best novels dealing with nature and Ecocritical perspective.

### ***THE HUNGRY TIDE: AN ECOCRITICAL VIEW***

#### ***Sundarbans: Nature’s miniature***

Amitav Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide* is one of the few novels which capture the severity of one of the sensitive ecological issues the Indian subcontinent is experiencing. The geographical setup of *The Hungry Tide* is not only the unique but also one of the largest mangrove forests in the world named Sundarbans. This sensitive ecoregion acquires its name from Sundari mangroves which defined the biomes physical features largely. The Sundarbans is a cluster of low-lying islands in the Bay of Bengal spread across India and Bangladesh. It comprises the delta region of Padmini, Meghana and Brahmaputra rivers. This archipelago of islands is home for many numbers of endangered and threatened species of flora and fauna. The Sundarbans has a reserve area for the famous Royal Bengal Tigers. Its brackish water serves as home to the endangered Orcaella. Sundarbans is a UNESCO world heritage site and very rich in biodiversity. The physical features of the biome are not clearly divided. “The area has

no borders to divide freshwater from salt, river from sea, even land from water. The deceiving nature of topography is further complexed by catastrophic floods and storms. The waves here are treacherous. The tides reach several miles inland and everyday thousands of mangroves disappear and re-emerge hours later. The tide in this area comes in twice daily, resulting in a constant shaping of the land and uprooting anything permanent. The currents are so powerful that they 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". It is amazing to see in Sundarbans that what nature is supposed to do over a reasonable period of time: making and unmaking of its different forms; creation and destruction of it within itself happens, in such a swift, in Sundarbans thus the dynamism of nature is so vivid to the naked eye as if Sundarbans is a miniature model to nature's universal manifestation. In Nirmal's words:"what was happening here, I realized, was that the wheel of time was spinning too fast to be seen. In other places, it took decades even centuries for a river to change course: it took an epoch for an island to appear but here, in the tide country, transformation is the rule of life. Rivers stray from week to week and islands are made and unmade in days". The complexity of the ecosystem startles the reader, making him feel awe towards nature, thus inducing ecological consciousness in his mind. The famous eco philosopher Theodore Roszak in the preface to his famous book *The Voice of the Earth*, remarked 'ecological unconsciousness' as the main cause for the deeper imbalance in nature.

#### **Anthropocentrism Vs non-anthropocentrism:**

One of the remarkable features of *The Hungry Tide* is that it questions the very anthropocentric belief of humans that nature is meant for humans alone. The consideration of humans themselves as the most significant entity of the universe is often considered to be the root cause of the harm done to nature due to human actions. There are a set of non human characters present in the novel: the stubborn Sundari trees, the terrific Royal Bengal tiger, the treacherous crocodile, the Orcaella, the crab- all these characters represent the non-anthropocentric voice in the novel against their human counterparts, contributing to our realization that nature is incomplete with human beings alone. Various kinds of flora and fauna exist in the nature not at the mercy of humans but with a right to their very existence.

Human being's pride of superiority over nature gets vanished when he encounters the nature in its horrific form, and the realization of the fragility of his life on the earth occurs to his mind. It is proved number of times in the novel, when Kanai suddenly encounters the fierce tiger and when Piya, Fokir caught in the cyclone. Every species contributes to the completeness of nature and has a right to live on the earth, but the anthropocentric attitude of man caused extreme domination up on nature without realizing that destruction of nature is nothing but destruction of mankind itself. In the episode of burning of the Tiger which is referred as 'the horror' in the novel the invasion of the predator into the human habitats is considered as a punishable crime but destructing other species habitats and killing them is not considered as serious crime by many people. No wonder that this insensitivity of man towards animals, one day or the other, turns as the insensitivity of man towards other man. Piya's words, "the difference is that it was what was intended not by you or me but by nature,

by the earth, by the planet that keeps us all alive. Just suppose we crossed that imaginary line that prevents us from deciding that no other species matters except ourselves. What will be left then? Aren't we alone enough in the universe and do you think it will stop at that? Once we decide we can kill off other species it will be people next" are very true.

### **Myth Folklore and Nature**

Human actions anyway have consequences which may be either good or worse. Many a times these actions result into irreparable damage and hence set themselves as examples or models for the future actions. In Karl Jasper's words: "humans however lack an adequate instinctual system which would enable us to function unreflectingly. To a significant extent we rely on habit, custom and traditions as our substitute for instinct. When those fail we have to resort to constructing cognitive models to make sense of our world". Thus myths are, in a way, proposals for acting in the world.

Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* contains the myth of Bon Bibi which the inhabitants of Sundarbans consider as the rule of their life. Complex topography of Sundarbans makes, leading life against all the oddities of the biome, a herculean task. Here nature is divided between its two entities: human and beast. There should always a perfect balance to be maintained between these two parts, for survivability of the both entities. Hence, the myth which beholds the islanders to enter into the domain of beast, in a way, can be considered pro-naturalistic. Such narrative helps to forge a sustainable mode of coexistence between humans and the rest of the creation. Ecological and nature myths are like motivators which lead to unstated basic convictions to sustain human efforts at ecological responsibility, just similar to the myth of BonBibi which ensures protection on either side though creating a kind of fear. When Nirmal is informed of the imaginary border between the realm of Bon Bibi and the realm of Dokhin Roy, he says " I realized with a sense of shock that this chimerical line was, to her and to Horen, as real as a barbed-wire fence might be to me" reveals the functional capability of the myth. "The preferred way of saving the truth of myths is to claim that, however they may deviate from the conventions of the empirical Sciences, myths are true an alleged deeper reality" (Freud).

### **Man Vs Nature**

*The Hungry Tide* poses a status of Nash-equilibrium between survival of humanity and conservation of nature. The inhabitants of Sundarbans pose a threat to the sensitive Ecoregion. Whereas, the complex physiography of Sundarbans with its treacherous waves, predators and untimely catastrophes pose a threat to the islanders. It is a notable point here that the inhabitants of Sundarbans who are getting their lives against nature in order to get a livelihood are very poor and marginalized people. Having no other choice, they have to depend on their immediate nature to survive. These are the people, who are denied the basic right to live, are forced to make their living out of nature. People like Fokir, Horen and Kusum are always placed on the margins with very few choices or rather with no choices at all. They have to demand nature with least concern of its sensitivities and threats thus, leaving their ecological footprints which are rather heavy on it. When the lives and needs of

these dispossessed and poor people are taken care of, the stress on environment will also be reduced because Poverty, marginalization of people and Environmental Degradation, accelerate one another.

## CONCLUSION

Man has always been a part of nature and lives out of nature. Industrialization and the aftermath of capitalism resulted into complete estrangement of man from nature and he started subjugating nature. With his ignorance and a false sense of superiority, he laid severe burden on nature thus metamorphosing it from a protector to destroyer. Victimized each other, man and nature got trapped in a vicious cycle, the repercussions of which are intolerable to the mankind. Now it is high time for man to become environmentally conscious and instead of regarding nature just as a commodity which belongs to him, he should realize nature as a community to which he belongs.

*Only when the last river has been polluted and  
the last tree been cut down, and  
the last fish been caught,  
will we realize We cannot eat money.*

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