



SYNCRETISM OF NATURE WITH HUMANS IN THE SELECT NOVELS OF AMITAV GHOSH

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ABSTRACT

From ancient texts to contemporary literature, nature is a major subject. Syncretism of nature with humans' spans across epochs. The entire living being depends upon nature for resources, shelter, and sustenance. Amitav Ghosh is an incandescent writer of Postcolonial Ecocriticism. Ghosh's novels emphasize more on ecology and connect different people. Amitav Ghosh, he focuses on exploring the relationship between nature and culture in his works. This article explores the connectivity of nature with human in the select novels of Amitav Ghosh such as *The Glass Palace*, *Sea of Poppies*, and *The Hungry Tide*. The term 'Syncretism' here refers how the characters interlinked with nature culturally and economically. In his first novel, Ghosh portrays bountiful resources of teak and rubber in the Burmese forest. The novel *Sea of Poppies* talks about the opium poppy fields in the 19th century India. In the novel *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh paints the picture of Sundarbans, a vast Mangrove Forest in India. He describes how the rich nature of the fields is degraded and destroyed. He also leaves behind a landscape scarred by exploitation and neglect.

Keywords: bountiful resources, cultural, ecology, incandescent and syncretism.

Amitav Ghosh is one of the most celebrated authors in contemporary literature. He has received so many

national and international awards for his fiction, which is keenly influenced by history and is characterised by humanism,

cosmopolitanism, communalism, colonial power, ecocriticism, and history. He is one of the most significant literary figures to emerge from India in recent decades. Ghosh places skilfully the facts about historical events written in the fictional language and matter-treated history. Amitav Ghosh's success in his historical novels owes much to his power of documentation and his distinctiveness in well-researched socio-political narratives. Ghosh, as an anthropologist and historian, delves into nature and history. The novels *The Glass Palace*, *Sea of Poppies*, and *The Hungry Tide* which are chosen for this research paper, highlight the environmental filth, reveals the human interference with nature, and justify that the humans are solely responsible for the destruction of the environment.

Shakespeare's character Ulysses conveys the message, "One touch of nature makes the whole world kin." (*Troilus and Cressida*, Act 3, Scene 3). In this line, 'nature' is referring to an ultimate power shared by all human beings. This line suggests that there is a universal bond among humanity. Nevertheless, despite our the individual backgrounds, cultures, and beliefs, all of them share certain inherent qualities and experiences that connect people. When compared to nature itself, the quote highlights the idea that,

just as nature has its own connectivity with the universal elements, human beings share an essential link that transcends divisions and boundaries. Nature unites us, and we depend upon the resources of nature. But, in turn, humans destroy nature.

The Glass Palace is about the invasion of Burma by the British during the 19th century. The novel is divided into seven parts, and it consists of forty-eight chapters. It depicts man's excessive greed for wealth and worthless materialism, which impulses him towards the massive demolition of ecology. Ghosh concentrates on the capture of the Burmese noble family in India and the bountiful atmosphere of teak property in the Burmese forest. He paints a vivid description of the exploitation of nature's tranquility by westerners and tries to remind the readers by repeating history. The novel's memorial power is so strong that near the end, when Rajkumar, a pivotal character, reflects, "Ah, Burma—now Burma was a golden land" (*The Glass Palace* 494), he mentions that earlier Burma was described as "a golden land," full of rich minerals, natural resources like teak, and gems. But with the interruption of the British and Japanese in Burma, now it's "a poor land." It catches the readers'

eyes that something has been lost with the invasion of British people.

In *The Glass Palace*, the character Jaya was decked by the attractiveness of palm trees, but under that palm tree there were houses of birds, where they took protection during the night. As mentioned, “Jaya was fascinated by the oil palms. Between the palms, there were birdhouses” (*The Glass Palace* 500). Ghosh made an attempt to jot down in memory the identities of individuals who were sheltered by birds and animals from the lap of nature. On earth, animals construct their homes in forests, and birds perch on trees to build their nests. People ought to quit snatching, not just for food but also for making their homes. This novel suggests that environmental problems are not caused by anthropocentric attitudes alone but by following the systems of domination or exploitation of humans by other humans. The British invaded Burma and exploited natural resources like teakwood and rubber for their own benefit.

Sea of Poppies is the first novel in the Ibis Trilogy by Ghosh. It is a saga of time during the opium trade that evolved during the colonial rule. Paulette’s dislocation from her adopted homeland brought tears to her eyes, and watching the Jungle of the Sundarbans from the Ibis

made her realise the trauma of migration. Neel meticulously reveals the complexity of the elements of cultural displacement. Neel recoils at the thought of being extradited as a convict to an unknown island and has a nightmare in which he sees himself as a castaway in the dark void of the ocean, utterly alone, severed from every human mooring. The crescendo of this angst arrives at the migrants at the moment when they have lost the landmark of their homeland. The Ganga Sagar recedes from their vision. The memory and nostalgia about the last homeland among the women of the Ibis are captured in their lamentation. In order to explain the terms with the sorrow of separation from the homeland, the Ibis resonates with the lament songs usually sung when a bride leaves her parents’ home.

Among the Girimiyas who have gathered upon the Ibis, there is a tendency to preserve their cultural past and their self-identity with a new fervor. Girimiyas have to arrange a makeshift marriage between a couple on board the Ibis. Deeti knew that they would have to improvise. Despite the lack of proper arrangements, the migrants kept their culture intact by performing the *tilak* ceremony, the anointing of both bride and groom with turmeric paste, and finally the ritual of the seven circles, in which the bride and

groom circle around *thali* lit up with candles, without which a Hindu marriage would be regarded as meaningless. Though a physical return to their homeland was not possible, the migrants nevertheless retained their emotional and spiritual connection to their roots.

On the eve of her death, Sarju hands over an assortment of the seeds of Ganja, datura, and the best Benares poppy to Deeti. The seeds are the relics of a dislocated past life that Deeti will never be able to see again. The seeds also symbolise the dispersal of the innumerable migrant communities to far-flung plantation colonies, throwing them into an unknown future. *Sea of Poppies* is indeed a remarkable historical narrative that minutely captures cultural practices along with nature.

Ramchandra Guha (2000) mentioned that “nature has become a source of cheap raw materials as well as a sink for dumping the unwanted residues of economic growth.” As per the statement, the British have made a huge turnover from opium production even though they did not provide necessary things at the factory in the novel *Sea of Poppies*. The factory has caused a mist of exhaustion. It has caused dreariness and produced an awful smell in its surroundings. On her way to the factory in Kalua’s oxen cart,

Deeti and Kabutri suffer because of the opium-filled air. The waste of the factory in the form of fog takes over the fresh air of the city. The polluted air has a terrible effect not only on humans but also on animals. Deeti, Kabutri, Kalua, including Kalua’s oxen, and everyone else nearby the factory cannot help but sneeze out because of the air pollution. The opium factory shows both natural exploitation and human exploitation. The Ghazipur Opium Factory was established and managed by the British. The superintendent of the factory is a senior official of the East India Company, and the other important positions such as overseers, accountants, storekeepers, and chemists of the factory are also taken in charge by the British. Colonial power destroys natural resources and misuses the resources for their sustenance.

The air is polluted by the waste of the opium factory. A culturally more sanctified place is the Ganga. But pollutants infest the Ganga River and the animals in the environment. Once, the Ganga River represented bountiful culture and rich heritage. Deeti observes how the factory’s waste is badly affecting the population of monkeys near the factory. After consuming the contaminated water from the Ganga River, the monkeys seem to mimic an opium addict; those monkeys

lose their excitement and are stupefied by the factory's waste.

The Hungry Tide stands out as a prophetic novel, offering deep insights, exquisite beauty, and a profound sense of humanity. It underscores the undeniable interdependence between human life and the natural world. Humans recognise their reliance on the abundant flora and fauna, understanding that nature's existence is not merely about aesthetics but is vital for survival itself. In the context of growing environmental concerns, ecological literary criticism is gaining prominence, and Amitav Ghosh's work exemplifies this shift.

The Sundarbans, the biggest mangrove forest in the world, is a delta of the Ganges, Brahmaputra, and Meghna rivers that spans over Bangladesh and India and offers an intricate network of waterways, islands, and a distinctive ecosystem. Many authors have drawn inspiration from the area, which is home to the renowned Royal Bengal tiger and is rich in wildlife. Particularly in his book *The Hungry Tide*, Amitav Ghosh stands out among them for his evocative depiction of this area and its complicated connections with human civilization. (Sharma, Shubhangi, 2019).

Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*, set in the Sundarbans against the backdrop of

historical events like the Partition of India in 1947, portrays the mass migration of East Bengali Hindus to West Bengal, fleeing persecution by lower-class Muslim tenants. The relentless tides of the Sundarbans pose constant challenges for their inhabitants. While the narrative touches upon various aspects of life in the Sundarbans, from the peril of encountering tigers in the jungle to the struggles of fishermen and the scientific pursuits of characters like Piya, a researcher from a western country, Piya's fascination is shown by the ecological boundaries of the Sundarbans. Particularly through the character Piya, the novel stresses the close relationship between culture, tradition, and the land. Through Kanai, a translator finds his heart in the harsh reality of the suppression and massacre of East Pakistani refugees. These refugees, fleeing the Dandakaranya camps, sought solace in Morichjhampi, hoping for familiarity and a better life. Yet this dark chapter remains largely forgotten in the annals of history. Through his novel, Ghosh brings attention to this forgotten truth, weaving together history, contemporary events, and the timeless struggle between humans and nature.

However, in his journey of ecocriticism, Ghosh shows how the characters are interlinked with nature. His environmental approach to his vision is

clearly juxtaposed in his novels. Amitav Ghosh's novels reveal innumerable ecological problems. An attempt is made to prove that the novels of Amitav Ghosh are interpreted from an eco-critical perspective, which would surely give a unique way of understanding to the readers in the context of ecological study.

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