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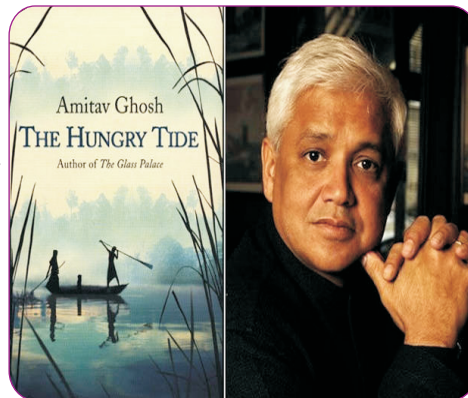


NATURE AND LANGUAGE IN AMITAV GHOSH'S *THE HUNGRY TIDE*

Mrs. Gaikwad Rajashri Dattatraya
Assistant Professor, Dept. of English,
Yashwantrao Chavan Mahavidhyalaya, Pachwad.

ABSTRACT: -

Between the sea and the plains of Bengal, on the easternmost coast of India, lies an immense archipelago of islands. Some are vast and some no larger than sandbars; some have lasted through recorded history while others have just washed into being. There are Sunderbans. Here



there are no borders to divide fresh water from salt, river from sea, even land from water. Here, for hundreds of years, only the truly dispossessed braved the man eating tigers and the crocodiles who rule there, to supply a precarious existence from the mud. Here, at the beginning of the last century, a visionary Scotsman

founded a utopian settlement where peoples of all races, classes and religions could live together.

KEYWORDS: Sunderbans, Nature, Language, Piya, Nilima, Fokir, Kanai.

INTRODUCTION :

Nature and language are two different entities. The story of man is also the story of man's moving away from nature. While the human population exploded, human societies developed in a way that has caused enormous damage to the environment. The human race could destroy itself and much organic life as a result. Human intelligence is the boon and the bane of the human species; it has marked its continuous engagement with nature right from the earliest times. The natural environment has been negotiated by man. One is aesthetic presentation of nature in literature and the other scientific pursuit of nature. Literature and Language cannot segregate from each other because literature is not existed without Language; Language is not existed without Literature. Literature and Science have served as mutually exclusive sites for the observation of nature. Literature and Science is studied together and so Amitav ghosh's novel can be read as an eco-critical text.

The story of *The Hungry tide* begins with the American Indian Cetologist Piya, the translator businessman Kanai, and their accidental meeting on their way to a common destination- the Sundarbans. The Sundarbans means beautiful forest. Kanai is going there after a long hiatus to meet his aunt Nilima who runs a charitable hospital, at the same time he is to read a journal written by and willed to him by his uncle Nirmal, a romantic intellectual idealist in the tradition of the 1970s Bengal. Piya is journeying to the tide country to research the Irrawaddy dolphin. She engages the services of Fokir for her research. Ghosh very skillfully presents interaction among Piya, Kanai and Fokir. Amitav ghosh explores the barriers of religion, class, language and gender that have been constructed in course of the onward march of civilization. The issue of language, translation and interpretation raised by Ghosh at the thematic level are metaphors for the fundamental alienation of natural and

scientific worlds, which can be comprehended or interacted only in translation. This in turn brings language at the centre of the issue as a construct or a game that hides more than it reveals:

Speech was only a bag of tricks that fooled you into believing that you could see through the eyes of another being (159).

The ways in which language is used to express and mould reality is narrated through the presence of Kanai, a translator and interpreter by profession. Amitav Ghosh's work is a translation too in the sense that he tries to find his own meanings at a site already given a meaning by the earlier western intellectual tradition and its manifestation in the form of colonization. If the enlightenment tradition placed nature as an adversary to be dominated and exploited, the colonial encounter marked colonized countries as wild and actuality. Kanai works with Ghosh :

"We're not comfortable at home in our translated world" (206).

The politics of translation is talked of at some length, particularly in the episode where Kanai and Fokir are keeping track of dolphins near the island of Garjontola. Ghosh tells us how the politics of translation is used to present nature as an adversary:

He understood all too well how the dynamics of their situation might induce Fokir to exaggerate the menace of their surroundings. He himself had often stood in Fokir's place, serving as some hapless traveller's window on an unfamiliar world. He remembered how, in those circumstances, he too had often been tempted to heighten the inscrutability of the surroundings through subtly slanted glosses. (321)

Amitav Ghosh expresses man's construction of nature and civilization in the encounter between Fokir and Kanai. Kanai talks to Fokir about the city and civilization and in Fokir's simple responses he sees an unformed elemental man. When Fokir takes Kanai to the island where he loses the use of his language and the advantage of belonging to the civilized urban world, the power line dividing the translator Kanai and the translated Fokir is reversed. Kanai presents in a helpless rage:

His anger came welling up with an atavistic explosiveness rising from sources whose very existence he would have denied: the master's suspicion of the menial: the pride of caste; the townman's mistrust of the rustic; the city's antagonism to the village. He had thought that he had cleansed himself of these sediments of the past, but the violence with which they came spewing out of him now suggested that they had only been compacted into an explosive and highly volatile reserve. (326)

After that Kanai realizes that Fokir had brought him to the island because he wanted him to be judged. Amitav Ghosh portrays Nature's man Fokir against the constructs of language and culture represented by Kanai. Kanai performs two functions. At first he serves to expose the cultural bias comes into play when he translates Fokir for Piya. Secondly Kanai is a conduit to the history of the Sundarbans as the reader and interpreter of Nirmal's diary, which calls for a reassessment of history. In this way, the politics of representation of nature is rooted in the colonial representation of history and nature.

The novelist's selection of the setting of the novel in Sundarbans is important and significant. He

proposes to present a possibility for man's integration with nature in difficult circumstances. He do not want to romanticize or glorify nature. Nature is presented as a ruthless oppressor:

Mangrove leaves are tough and leathery, the branches gnarled and the foliage often impassably dense. Visibility is short and the air still and fetid. At no moment can human beings have any doubt of the terrain's utter hostility to their presence, of its cunning and resourcefulness, of its determination to destroy or expel them . Every year dozens of people perish in the embrace of that dense foliage, killed by tigers, snakes and crocodiles (7-8).

The Hungry Tide is a great swirl of political, social and environmental issues, It is presented through a story that's full of romance, suspense and poetry. It doesn't have all the answers but it frames the problems with great energy and sympathy. Amitav Ghosh takes us into the Sundarbans , a vast mangrove forest on the coast of India and Bangladesh where the Ganges, Bramaputra and Irrawaddy rivers empty into the Bay of Bengal. The tides reach as far as two hundred miles inland. The novelist very effectively given beautiful treatment and dynamic place becomes suggestive symbol of the modern world.

The Hungry Tide is in part about mankind's relationship with nature. The possibility and impossibility of human relationships is depicted in the novel. Amitav Ghosh composes this big novel with brevity and passion.

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Mrs. Gaikwad Rajashri Dattatraya

Assistant Professor, Dept. of English, Yashwantrao Chavan Mahavidhyalaya, Pachwad.