



STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL OF REFUGEES IN AMITAV GHOSH'S *THE HUNGRY TIDE*"

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ABSTRACT

Struggle means the competition in nature among organism of a population to maintain themselves in a given environment and to survive to reproduce others of their kind.

The concept of the struggle for existence concerns the competition or battle for resources needed to live. It can refer to human society, or to organism in nature.

Amitav Ghosh, born in 1956, is an Indian fictionist and winner of the Janapith award. Highly educated in social anthropology, he stands with expose to multinational demographic atmosphere with his experiences. He was a journalist first and started teaching comparative Literature in Queens College, affiliated to the University of New York. His famous novels are: *The Circle of Reason* (1986). *The Shadow Lines* (1988), *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1995), *The Glass Palace* (2000), *The Hungry Tide* (2004), *Sea of Poppies* (2008), *River of Smoke* (2011), and *Flood of Fire* (2015).

In *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh has created a space for an open discourse on the conflict between environmentalists and the refugee settlers who fight against eviction.

In *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh takes up the remote Sunderban Islands as the setting for his novel. With its thick mangroves, the man-eating tigers, snakes, sharks, crocodiles and huge tidal

waves, rising in the ebb and flow of water, rocking the Islands, makes the setting enigmatic, foreboding death. The novel weaves together past and present, childhood and adulthood through the agency of memory. The most dominant concern of the novel is the human survival as it battles with extreme forces of nature.

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Amitav Ghosh, born in 1956, is an Indian fictionist and winner of the Jnanpith award. Highly educated in social anthropology, he stands with exposure to multinational demographic atmosphere. He was a journalist first and started teaching comparative Literature in Queens College, affiliated to the University of New York during the year. His famous novels are: *The Circle of Reason* (1986), *The Shadow Lines* (1988), *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1995), *The Glass Palace* (2000), *The Hungry Tide* (2004), *Sea of Poppies* (2008), *River of Smoke* (2011), and *Flood of Fire* (2015).

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The waves here are treacherous. The tides reach miles inland, and every day thousands of mangrove forests disappear to re-emerge hours later. People do not prefer to live in the barren land and Sundarbans Island. Yet, they have settled there to wreak out a living from the barren, unyielding salty, tracts of land. The men are mostly fishermen who depend on the river and the sand for fish and crabs for sustenance. Each day of their lives is unpredictable, and survival is precarious on those islands, also referred to as the tide country.

On a train to the Indian city of Canning, Kanai Dutt, a wealthy middle-aged translator from New Delhi, meets Piya Roy, a young Indian-American marine biologist. Both are traveling to the Sundarbans: Kanai, who's been there once before, is going to visit his aunt and read his late uncle's notebook, while Piya is carrying out a survey of the region's dolphins. Kanai invites Piya to visit him in Lusibari.

When Kanai meets his aunt, Nilima, he finds that she is still deeply impacted by his uncle's death decades ago and that the natural landscape of the Sundarbans has already changed since his visit as a child. Furthermore, he learns that his childhood friend Kusum was killed in a 1979 massacre. Her son, Fokir, is now a fisherman with his wife, Moyna, and son of his own, Tutul.

When Kanai begins reading his uncle's notebook, he has discovered that it was written in a very short amount of time as his uncle, Nirmal, tried to fight to protect the refugees who had settled on a local island from the government's aggression.

Meanwhile, Piya begins her survey alongside a forest guard, who's required to accompany her, and a boater named Mej-da. Both of them are rude to her and offer no help. They approach a fisherman in the water, and the forest guard fines him for supposedly poaching. Trying to surreptitiously give the fisherman some money in return, Piya falls off her boat, and the fisherman rescues her. She decides to ask him to take her to Lusibari, and he turns out to be kind and respectful, though they do not speak the same language. He introduces himself as Fokir, accompanied by Tutul. The next day, the group observes dolphins behaving differently than usual, which intrigues Piya. As they travel, Piya and Fokir get along extremely well and find that their work styles are very complementary despite their apparent differences.

Kanai continues reading Nirmal's notebook, which tells of his dedication to Marxist theory and his decision to involve himself in the plight of the refugees, partially because of Kusum, who he has romantic feelings for. Against the wishes of Nilima, his wife, Nirmal travels to Morichjhāpi repeatedly. One day, police begin a siege on the island and destroy a boat filled with refugees. Kusum and her young son Fokir survive, but Kusum is killed later.

Impressed with Fokir, Piya hires him for a week to help her survey the dolphins in the region. Kanai comes along to serve as a translator, and they bring Nilima and Nirmal's friend Horen, who owns a large boat. When the boat's engine dies, they float to a nearby village. That night, they hear loud voices and find a tiger captured in a building surrounded by angry people. Wanting to protect the tiger, Piya tries to break up the mob, but Kanai stops her. Later, he admonishes her for wanting to protect the tiger at the cost of the local people.

One day, as Fokir and Kanai observe the dolphins together, Fokir suggests going ashore to an island he believes is protected by Bon Bibi, a goddess. As they trudge through the mud, Kanai falls over and gets angry, sending Fokir away. He arrives onshore trying desperately to escape from the crocodiles of the area, then runs into a clearing where he sees a tiger. Slowly, he backs away and returns to the rest of the group, who don't believe that he saw the tiger. Kanai decides to return to Lusibari along with Horen.

Soon, Horen and Kanai realize that a major cyclone is coming, but when they turn around, they can't find Piya and Fokir. After waiting overnight, they decide they can wait no longer if they want to save themselves, so they return to Lusibari. Wading to shore, Kanai falls and drops Nirmal's notebook. He promises to rewrite the notebook from memory, and Nilima asks him to include her story as well.

Fokir and Piya tie themselves to a tree on an island, but Fokir is crushed by a large flying object. Piya manages to navigate back towards Lusibari, running into Kanai and Horen. She stays in Lusibari for a few weeks longer, then returns soon after, planning to work on a conservation program alongside Nilima.

In the Sundarbans, people are constantly at odds with nature, living in a world full of dangerous rivers, vicious tigers, risk of floods and cyclones. Though the natural world is revered and believed to be protected by the goddess Bon Bibi, conservation efforts implemented by the government have

increased the conflict between people, especially the poor, and the local environment as they try to preserve nature at the cost of humans' livelihoods and even lives. Meanwhile, the forest department, part of the government, does nothing to stop the deadly tiger attacks in the area. Fokir and Piya are both deeply connected to nature as a fisherman and a marine biologist, respectively, but they take drastically different approaches to this conservation issue at first.

The Sundarbans are an archipelago of islands in the Bay of Bengal known as "tide country". They are made up of islands, sandbars and mangrove forests, rivers, creeks and channels. "At no moment," Ghosh writes, "can human beings have any doubt of the terrain's hostility to their presence"(THT 8). Countless residents are killed each year by tigers and crocodiles. Those, that survive, face not only periodic cyclones but the humbling sight of ebb tides that literally give birth to a forest every day, before swallowing it again. Along with a map at the front, and a rapturous description in the opening pages, *The Hungry Tide* shows its own servitude to the Sundarbans through section headings titled *The Ebb and The Flood*, as well as a plot in which nearly every turn is predicated by an act of nature. The story is also told in the unhurried prose to be expected in a narrative riding such eternal currents.

In *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh has created a space for an open discourse on the conflict between environmentalists and the refugee settlers who fight against eviction. The contending views are voiced through Nirmal and Nilima who are ideologically and politically opposed to each other. She is insensitive to the cause of the people of Morichjhapi who have been imaged as violators of the *Forest Act* and the voice of bureaucracy that speaks through her is revealed in, "These people are squatters; that land doesn't belong to them: it's government property. How can they just seize it if they're allowed to remain, people will think every island in the tide country can be seized. What will become of the forest, the environment?" (THT 213). But Nirmal who is a revolutionary and a humanist to the core of his being, is quick to retort that it was discrimination against the settlers, "Were the dreams of these settlers less valuable than those of a man like Sir Daniel just because he was a rich sahib and they impoverished refugees?" (THT 213).

Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* depicts different aspects of postcolonialism, suffering of the Sundarbans refugees who come back to their home, local people like illiterate Fokir and Horen, educated Nirmal and Nilima with their post nationalist dreams, to control the disaster going in the lives of local people in Lusibari Island. Translator Kanai from Delhi, who is going to visit her aunt Nilima Bose, and a cytologist Piyali Roy daughter of Bengali immigrants, comes with an ambition to study marine mammals of Sundarbans. All these characters are the product of postcolonial world. It is a study of the life of tide country against the back ground of the postcolonial aspects.

Amitav Ghosh's postcolonial consciousness has goaded him time and again to retrieve those events of the past that have been deliberately tucked behind the pages of history, out of human knowledge and vision. The canny insight with which he sees into the core of issues related to colonialism, imperialism, nationalism and multiculturalism, and his acumen for representing them in his fictional work is worth looking into. Unearthing stories and events that have deliberately been

effaced from official government records is a passion for Amitav Ghosh. The novel weaves together with past and present, childhood and adulthood through the agency of memory. The most dominant concern of the novel is the human survival as it battles with extreme forces of nature.

An understanding of the plight of the refugees from East Bengal which made the land of the Sundari trees their home is clearly portrayed. As Ghosh develops the story, everybody is irresistibly drawn into the vortex of experience that made life for settlers an incessant battle for survival against the unpredictable storms and tides, both natural and manmade. Despite it is threatening environment charged with fears of the all-devouring tides and man-eating tigers and crocodiles, it is the deep sense of human bonding among the islanders which transcends differences of class, caste, creed and nationality that help the inhabitants to defeat the forces bent on annihilating them.

It is the oppressed people, the subalterns, who in their own ways add a new dimension to the lives of Nirmal, Kanai and Piya. They give them a purpose, a meaning to live. The short visit of Kanai and Piya to the Sundarbans changes them and they soon return to the islands with plans for the future. Piya manages to attract funds for her project of dolphin conservation in the Sundarbans, a house for Moyna and Tutul's education. Kanai decides to return to Lusibari with a plan of writing his uncle's notebook. The lives of people like Kusum and Fokir correspond with the idea of truth, beauty and poetry. This is the message that Ghosh conveys the crux of Nirmal's philosophy, life is lived in transformation.

Through the lives of ordinary people, Kusum, Fokir and Moyna and the other islanders, Ghosh highlights the interrelation between the personal and the universal. Their personal lives portray the real picture of humanity. Their lives depict an entire history of the odds and adversities that ordinary individuals have to bear in their struggle for survival. This real history of survival, the pain and misery of suffering masses is overlooked by mainstream history. By focusing the lives of these individuals, Ghosh highlights that missing dimension of history that is needed to present a complete and true picture of humanity and simultaneously history which form the integral part of magic-realism.

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