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A Traverse through the Anthropocentric Attitudes in Ghosh's the Hungry Tide

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ABSTRACT: An anthropocentric ethic claims that only human beings are morally considerable in their own right, meaning the direct moral obligation are owed to our fellow human beings. This kind of anthropocentric outlook however may be seen as a powerful way to assign significance to environmental issues. This paper deals with the various approaches towards Anthropocentrism and the after-effects of anthropocentric attitude in the Environment.

This paper also focus on the ways in which Anthropocentric attitude is represented in the novel and enables us to understand how anthropocentric attitude has brought destruction and environmental issues.

KEYWORDS: Anthropocentrism, human superiority, ecological crisis, Environmentdestruction, exploitation

A TRAVERSE THROUGH THE ANTHROPOCENTRIC ATTITUDES IN GHOSH'S *THE HUNGRY TIDE*

Anthropocentrism is a philosophical viewpoint arguing that human beings are the central or most significant entities in the world. Anthropocentrism regards humans as separate from and superior to nature and holds the view that human life has intrinsic value while other entities including animals, plants and mineral resources, and so on are resources that may justifiably be exploited for the benefit of human kind. The term anthropocentrism comes from the Greek words 'anthropos' and 'kentron' which means human centeredness. Anthropocentrism is often identified to be the root cause of present day ecocrisis, human overpopulation, and the extinction of many non-human species. The anthropocentric attitude of humans should be broadly analysed in order to reduce the alarming rate at which the environment is being degraded and the natural resources depleted.

According to the moral criticism, anthropocentrism is the mistake of giving exclusive or arbitrarily preferential consideration to human interests as opposed to the interests of other beings. The major part of the novel *The Hungry Tide* deals with the environment and its relation to human beings. Ghosh has also portrayed various issues related to conservation and ecology.

Amitav Ghosh is one of the prominent writers focusing on the issues of post-colonial era. He is a central literary figure in contemporary epoch who deals with the themes of identity crisis, marginalities, histories, knowledge systems, migration and Diaspora. Ghosh has tried to elucidate the fact that we human beings are the root cause of environmental degradations and the disasters. Human beings have tendency to dominate other creatures and nature as well. They are dependent upon nature as it provides abundant useful resource to them. These resources are helpful to every creature on the planet whether they are humans or animals. But human beings have always tried to exploit the resources for their own benefits without caring for other living beings.

Often humanity is considered to be something that is opposed to animality. But human beings are often hypocrites and they show more cruelty than animals. Animals hunt or kill someone to keep them alive. But we call them beastly creature just because they kill others. But humans are crueller than these predators. The guard and the pilot who accompanied Piyali Roy in her expedition showed their excessive greed of money. The guard has a leather bandolier and a rifle, to which Piya reacted as if the gun is really necessary. "The answer was yes, it was; regulations required because her route would take her through the tiger reserve. There was always the possibility of an attack" (31). The guard's reply shows that those who are conservationists they themselves kill the tigers when their lives are on stake. Whenever man is in danger, he first tries to protect himself from the outer danger he is going to face.

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Changes in climatic conditions of any country or any part of a country is affected due to human interference. The effects like that of ozone depletion, global warming, are some of the major reasons which affect the whole nature comprising animals, plants, as well as human beings. In the novel, when Kanai comes to Lusibari after several years, on the invitation of Nilima, his aunt, he sees that the river has totally changed its course. The water levels have gone down and the people have to face a lot of difficulty to go from one place to another. This has happened all due to the establishment of Port Canning on Malta River. So, because of human interference, the nature gets affected as in Sundarbans it is going worse day by day.

It is quite clear that man uses animals for his own purposes. There is a reference in the novel about the use of dolphins to make oil which would be used to supplement the dwindling supplies of petroleum. It is a very heinous crime done by human beings on the innocent animals to fulfil their need. It is the main reason why the population of dolphins known as Mekong Oracella declined in1970s almost to the verge of extinction. Ghosh says, "These dolphins were hunted with rifles and explosives and their carcasses were hung up in the sun so that their fat would drip into buckets. The oil was then used to run boats and motorcycles" (305).

Another instance when Piya and Fokir are on their way to look for the dolphins, they see the carcass of an Irrawaday dolphin. It is a new born calf. It is mentioned in the novel, "the injuries suggested that the dolphin has been hit by the propeller of a fast-moving motorboat" (346). And Piya says that it is a kind of official boat used by the coast guard or the police or even the Forest Department. These motor launches emit enormous amount of pollutants. The abundant use of generators on the islands of the tidal land causes huge pollution and the government and environmentalist taking no radical steps to stop them. So, one who pretends themselves to be the savers of the flora and fauna of a particular area announced by the higher authorities are themselves responsible for their destruction. Piya's trauma is further worsened when she stumbles upon the tiger wedged in the livestock pen, which is trapped, blinded, incapacitated and brutally murdered by the villagers plunging their staves into the pen setting fire to it, "screaming in a maddened blood lust, Maar! Kill! Kill!" (292). It is paradoxical that the same tiger is worshipped in awe and reverence, with the villagers even refraining from giving voice to its name.

From Kusum's words it is apparent that from the very ancient times, nature and humans have lived in harmony. The relation between both of them is of interdependence on one another. She says to Horen and Nirmal that human beings would never think this as a crime unless they have forgotten that this is the way humans have always lived – by fishing, by clearing, and by planting the soil. Human beings tend to forget this interpendence and consider themselves as the superior beings who is only worthy of living in this earth. When the ecobalance is disturbed by man the whole nature suffers in its anger. Earlier people look upon nature as a deity, but now it has been reduced to the status of merely a thing or an entity to be used by people who can control it.

The Hungry Tide depicts the relationship and interconnectedness between nature and man. Ghosh depicts a dual face of nature in this novel. First it is presented as a kind and benevolent nature and the other as a disastrous one. At the end of the novel, we could see instances that man is shown to be at the mercy of nature. There is no hard and fast rule that only one among the human beings or nature will win out of the two, sometimes nature dominates human beings or vice versa. But the storms in the tide country are the proof that man cannot always impose his dominion over nature. In the end of the novel, we see, Piya, sitting alone and helpless on a branch of a tree. She has lost all her equipment as well as the data which she has collected in her ongoing research about the dolphins in the tide country because of the disastrous storm. The scene is depicted in the novel:

> "Powerful as it already was, the gale had been picking up strength all along… It sounded no longer like the wind but like some other element – the usual blowing, sighing, and rustling had turned into a deep, ear-splitting rumble, as if the earth itself had begun to move. The air was now filled with what seemed to be a fog of flying debris – leaves, twigs, branches, dust and water… It was difficult to imagine that the wind could grow any stronger or more violent" (378-79).

There is a reference in the novel about the importance of crabs in the tide country. Their presence is helpful for the mangrove trees. Crabs' importance for the tide country is said in the novel. "They were a sanitation department and a janitorial

team rolled into one: they kept the mangroves alive by removing their leaves and litter; without them the trees would choke on their own debris' (142). The natural species had their own importance, it is not the human beings who think that they themselves are of sole importance in this world but each and every species and organism possess their own importance. Ghosh has depicted the conflict prevailing in the conservation of endangered species and of human beings who suffer because of this conservation.

Environment and human beings are not isolated but man is the product of the natural habitat. His economy, culture, physique, psychology as well as development depend on environment itself. Culture is the outcome of historical, mythological, political and religious conditions. Ghosh depicts how animals are considered as unwanted and humans believe that only their lives are significant. The Oracela population of the Mekong was known to be declining rapidly. They had shared Cambodia's misfortunes in the 1970s they had suffered the ravages of indiscriminate American carpet bombing. Mekong Oracella had been massacred by Khimer Rouge cadres, who had hit upon the idea of using oil to supplement their abating supplies of petroleum. These dolphins were hunted with rifles and explosives and their carcasses were hung up in the sun so that their fat would drip into buckets and this oil was used to run boats and motor cycles. Also the threat to Oracella had grown even more serious in the recent years. Piya said that there was a plan afoot to blow up the rapids of the upper Mekong in order to make the river navigable as far as China and this would lead to the destruction of the dolphin's preferred habitats.

Piya and Fokir saw a carcass of an Irrawaday dolphin on their way to look for dolphins. The shape of injury suggested that the dolphin had been hit by the propeller of a fast-moving motor boat. From Fokir, she understood that it was probably some kind of official boat used by uniformed personnel may be from the coast guard or even the forest department. This exemplifies the anthropocentric attitude of man where he is trying to grab the land where animals continue to exist.

The novel presents the emotional bond between the human and non- human members in a micro world of Sunderbans. It is a landscape in which the sea, the river, the land, humans and non-humans co-exist. Ghosh deliberately writes about hostility of nature by portraying that nature is made more hostile by certain group of people for their own benefit; as mangroves are axed down, animals are ruthlessly hunted and poached and fishes and prawns are caught along with their eggs. As a result of this non-stop human intrusion, nature adopts an ugly face and decides to take revenge. Ghosh presents extreme hostility of the terrain by way of human-beast encounters and other natural catastrophes.

In *The Hungry Tide*, the area where the delta is formed represents the mingling of rivers and it also represents the amalgamation of different cultures, castes, religions and most important myths also. So, Ghosh denies the man-made borders which are the symbols of a nation that divides the human beings from each other. It can be said that anthropocentric orientation is a major challenge to preservation of natural environment and appropriate treatment to other living beings f human-beast encounters and other natural catastrophes.

Humanist Marsilio Ficino said that essence of man is fundamentally similar to divine nature as he obtains food, clothing, a place to sleep, dwellings, furnishings, weapons- he provides for himself more efficiently than nature does for animals. But man obtains everything from nature and he exploits the resources leading to the extinction of them. Nature created everything for the sustainability of every living being. But man considers himself an elated being, a moral being, a unique being who has the cultural values that animals lack. Humans tend to forget that whatever destructions befall on nature will have a destructive effect on the life of human kind too. He is not outside the realm of nature but a part of nature.

Humans consider they are superior to the environment and continue to exploit it. Amitav Ghosh through his novel has depicted the consequences when man tries to control nature for his own gluttonical needs denying the warnings of nature. The tide and the storm towards the end of the novel take in its sweep of the island and the moment of solidarity. Fokir's death, destruction of Port Canning and loss of the all collected data of Oracella dolphin prove that how much ever man considers himself to be superior, even the slightest abrasion on nature will be reflected on his life too. The various instances from the novel show that the anthropocentric attitude is the cause of climatic

changes and destruction in the Sunderbans. The belief of human beings being opposite to animal and other non-living things is the root cause of all the problems. Belonging to a generation of human beings who are concerned about the well-being of our environment and let us see to that our next generation grows up in a world that empathizes with nature and believes that they are one with nature and not superior.

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