

Traumatized Effect of the Anomalous Environment: A Critical Analysis of Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*

Mrs Poonam Pandit

Research Scholar, Mumbai University

Kalina , Mumbai

Abstract:

Nature normally radiates the feeling of serenity and divinity. Wilderness of the environment can be absolutely devastating, leaving the human being in an undisputed traumatized state. Environmental crisis require that the person and planetary must be cordially connected since the life doesn't stop it bonds to get adapted.

The jaunt will commence by exploring the anomalous behavior of the environment in the text of Amitav Ghosh, 'The Hungry Tide', it has unveiled that , nature is a permanent active force in our life and our life is ephemeral. Revisiting the historical wilderness of recent Amphan cyclone which had first appeared in 1737 will be analyzed.

Researcher will then proceed to investigate the traumatic effect caused by the nature's wilderness through the lense of psychological investigation. Trauma creates a speechless fright, it refers to extreme stress that overwhelm a person's ability to cope. Secondly trauma can change the identity of a person too.

The theory of eco-psychology will later help us to delve in the embedded aspect of human in the larger event, by exploring the unspoken dimension of environmental concern and finding out the response to the environmental issues. Co-existence of living things will make our planet a better place to reside, an attempt will be made to connect with the natural world.

Key Words – anomalous environment, traumatization, bio-centric spirit

John Keats poem 'Endymion' begins with the line, "A thing of beauty is a joy forever. It is very often used as a literary device. Beautiful things manifest into pleasant dreams, sound sleep, peaceful and healthy breathing. Nature is persistently decoded as

God's beautiful creation. Poets of Romanticism celebrated the beauty of our environment in their various poems. Even the beauty of a woman is symbolized by nature, sweet voice like cuckoo, graceful stroll like a deer. Many such examples are used in literary devices to enhance the beauty through a visible frame. On the contrary nature through a kind of invisible frame is a reservoir for human resources. The gift of abundant resources for mankind apparently divulged as a curse for nature that makes the environment retaliate for its security. Hence the adorable feelings towards nature turned itself into a critical faculty of intellectual by pondering over the transformed scenario.

Human life is heavily affected by the role nature and environment plays. Man of today is been caught in an environmental dilemma. The magnitude of the dilemma is very well encapsulated by the eminent author Amitav Ghosh in his master piece work 'The Hungry Tide'. The researcher will make an attempt to explore the anomalous behavior of the environment. The wilderness of nature attacks the mankind irrespective of time period since nature is a permanent active force in our life and our life is ephemeral. The recent Amphan cyclone is the best example which had visited Sundarbans in the year 1737 and revisited again in the year 2020.

The base of the novel 'The Hungry Tide' dwells in the island Sundarbans. These islands are the trailing threads of Indian fabric. The regular wilderness of the tide was experienced almost daily by the inhabitants.

"There are no borders here to divide fresh water from salt, river from sea. The tides as far as three hundred kilometers inland and everyday thousands of acres of forest disappear underwater only to re-emerge hours later. The currents are so powerful as to reshape the islands almost daily- some days the water tears away entire promontories and peninsulas: at other times it throws up new shelves and sandbanks where there were none before." (The Hungry Tide, 7)

Mangroves are the source of disaster management bestowed by nature. They are well adapted to such tides and gets resilient. When the tide create new land, overnight mangroves begin to gestate and cover a new island within a few short years. Mangrove

plays an important role in protecting the interior of the forest and land. Nature furnishes with the healing touch after the completion of its wilderness.

The protagonist of the text Kanai from Delhi visited his aunt Nilima to Sundarbans . She had called him to handover his uncle’s diary left exclusively for Kanai after the demise of his uncle Nirmal a retired school master. Amitav Ghosh has very well used the technic of story with in the story. Nirmal was the narrator and Horen the boat sailor was the listener. While reading the diary Kanai came across a very dreadful wilderness of nature in the facet of cyclone marched from the sea of Bay of Bengal in the the year 1737, unfortunately same cyclone revisited by baptizing itself as ‘Amphan’ recently on May 20th 2020.

“The worst storm of all, they say was long before my time. Long before the settlers first came to this island...it was 1737.” ...The waters rose so high that they killed thousands of animals and carried them upriver and inland. The corpses of tiger and rhinoceroses were found kilometers from the river, in rice-fields and in village ponds. There were fields covered with the feathers of dead birds.” (THT,219)

Amitav Ghosh in his recent interview has mentioned that “Cyclone Amphan has torn through the eastern coast 1737.In my novel ‘The Hungry Tide’ Nirmal a schoolmaster, describes this cyclone. In Kolkata tens of thousands of dwellings fell instantly to the ground...not a building in the city that was left with four walls intact. Bridges were blown away ,wharves were carried off by the surging waters, godown were emptied of their rice and even the gun powder in the armouries was scattered by the wind. On the river there were many ships at anchor...among them there were two English ships, of five hundred tons each. The wind picked them up and carried them over the tops of trees and houses, it threw them down a quarter of a mile from the river. People saw huge barges fluttering in the air like paper kite”. (Times of India 22.05.2020)

The disastrous havoc created by ‘Amphan’ in 1737 was of extensive high magnitude the enormity of the Amphan was the same when it reappeared on 20th May 2020 but the destruction was much lesser as compared to 1737. The prior warning

rendered by the meteorological department helped in taking necessary precautionary measures, which paved up in declining the devastating aftereffect of the cyclone.

“72 deaths across Bengal due to cyclone Amphan .88,000 hectares of paddy and 1 lakh hectares each of vegetable and sesame crops destroyed in Bengal. In Kolkata 5,000 odd trees and 2,500 electricity poles uprooted.” (Times of India 22.05.2020)

Nature’s wilderness can’t be control by any means but due to advancement of science, we can be vigilant by adopting precautionary measures to curtail the aftereffect of the disaster. Materialistic devastation can be compensated in any terms whereas there is no reparation for the human lives. The devastating effect of the nature’s wilderness certainly invoke the trauma, resulting in the change of identity of the human beings.

“Nature wilderness demands psychological investigation...we cannot separate out personal psychological practice from the larger environment content in which we live.”

(Eco psychological Theory and Critical Intervention 396)

Human psychology is ingrained in the environment. Any fluctuation in nature results in reshaping of human psychology. Human sanity is grounded in natural world. This was proved by Sir Daniel Hamilton the man from Scotland who initiated the people to inhabit themselves in the tide land of Sunderbans. People flocked from Orissa and eastern Bengal to Sundarbans in search of work and to buy land in this tide country by ignoring the nature’s wilderness and the threat from the wild animals as if they have learnt psychologically to digest the trauma of regular tides. The settlers were mainly of farming stock, drawn by the promise of free farmland. Hunger drove them to hunting and fishing. Many died of drowning, and many more were picked off by crocodiles and estuarine sharks.

“When the waters fell the settlers hacked at the forest with their *daas*, and when the tides rose they waited out the flood on stilt-mounted platforms. At night they slept in hammocks that were hung so as to keep them safe from the high tide...the tigers,

crocodiles and snakes that lived in the creeks and *nalas* that covered the islands. This was feast to them. They killed hundreds of peoples.” (The Hungry Tide 55)

The researcher has unveiled the glimpses of human being as the core part of nature and psychology must be accordingly nature centered. So the regular tide changed the identity of the inhabitants making them fearless. Trauma refers to extreme stress that overwhelms a person’s ability to cope.

As we proceed to examine the effect of the other facet of trauma where the suffering caused by the external source that makes internal changes to mind and irreversibly change identity.

Protagonist Piyali Roy a cetologist from America was in a research expedition on marine mammals to Sunderbans. Fokir an illiterate boatman was her companion as he was well versed with the topography of Sunderbans. His experience acted as a catalyst in the study of Piya even though they failed to communicate due to language barrier. But unfortunately during the final endeavor of Piya’s research journey, they had to confront the insanity of nature in the form of storm. It was a tidal wave, sweeping in from the sea: everything in its path disappeared as it came thundering towards them. Piya’s mind went blank terror of fear struck with high intensity. No time to absorb the reality, just hoping to be alive.

Fokir helped Piya to face the storm by his skilled experience, he used his wife’s Moyna’s sari and managed to tie himself along with Piya to the trunk of a tree. Everything was in their favor at that period but destiny took a fatal turn which left Piya traumatized.

“It happened in the last hour of the storm, she said. He’d been hit by something very big and very heavy, an uprooted stump; it had hit him so hard that she too had been crushed against the trunk of the tree they were sitting on. The sari had kept them attached to the trunk even as he was dying...She’d left his body on the tree, tied to the trunk with Moyna’s sari, to keep it safe from animals.” (The Hungry Tide 419)

Piya was traumatized, as she sat in the last hours of the storm, sheltered by Fokir's lifeless body. Leave aside the horror of the memory, imagine the guilt, the responsibility and obligation towards Moyna and Fokir's son Tutul. Assortment of all these feelings transformed Piya's identity. She never returned to America. All the data which Piya collected in her equipment with the help of Fokir's topological guidance was the foundation of her own project.

“That one map represents decades of work and volume of knowledge. It's going to be my own project. That's why I think it should be named after him.” (The Hungry Tide 426)

Change of Piya's identity is very much lucid as she is dedicating her work to an illiterate boatman and in addition to it, she along with her friends raised money for Fokir's family too.

“The money's not as much as I'd have liked of course, but it's something : it'll buy them a house of their own and may be even provide college education for Tutul.” (The Hungry Tide 424)

So here we can encompass briefly that trauma creates a speechless fright that can construct or divide one's identity. We need to find ways to bear our pain and suffering after crossing the traumatized state, by psychologically acceptance of the prevailing scenario. Our planet Earth is a home for God's creation. Human should experience themselves as part of larger biotic community. Researcher will make an attempt to bring coherence to a field of diversity. In exploring the love of nature and concern for life. NicholSEN asserts, “The natural world is part of the early home to which we bond and in which we form ourselves, but it is also the unfamiliar world from which we distance ourselves.” (Eco psychological Theory and Critical Intervention 400)

Human being has a strong intellectual and spiritual power which is probably missing in other God's creation. Power of human intellect makes them feel superior to those speechless creatures. Though human being could not stand by the physical strength of the wild beast and have to stoop in front of their natural instinct.

The eminent author has well elucidated the natural and inhuman perspective through the binocular of universe, which will surely supplement the saying of NicholSEN. Fokir's mother Kusum as a child lived in a hut that was in the lee of the embankment, on the shore of a narrow creek. Kusum's father row the boat to get to the forest to collect the fire wood. One fine day Kusum followed her father of the house and stood on the embankment as he rowed across the river. Strong wind blowing from the shore made him difficult to push the boat. The tiger was in the tree that lined the shore, and from the direction of its advance Kusum anticipated that the wild beast is going to pounce on her father. At her first scream her mother and many other villagers came running but unfortunately her father failed to hear the scream due to the powerful blowing wind in the wrong direction. Within no time the wild beast started stalking kusum's father. All the men present there stood helpless, yelling of women were muted by the wind.

“But it made no difference, for the wind was against them- the sound did not carry to the man on the far bank. The animal too was upwind of its prey and they could see its coat flashing as it closed in; because of the distinctiveness of its odour , it was skilled in dealing with the wind and it knew the people on the other bank were powerless against these gusts.” (The Hungry Tide 114)

Everyone witness the beastly act of the tiger. The sound of the bones cracking as the animal swiped a paw across the neck of Fokir's grandfather. The rustle of mangrove could be heard as the animal dragged the corpse into the forest. Within no time it was all over, all returned back to their huts without retaliating as if the show is over. But there is no compensation for the family for this natural act of the beast. Human has accepted it as part of their living.

“Rural Indians are unique in the world for their high tolerance for co-existing with potentially deadly wild life.” (BBC Future 21st November 2019)

Actually lack of natural prey and habitat loss forced the wild animals to prey on domestic life stock. Now let's toss the coin and unveil the other facet under the similar

circumstances. Once Piya along with Kanai , Fokir and Horen in her research expedition collided with an angry mob which was very strange for her as it was pretty dark too. On further inquiry she comprehended that the anger of the mob is against the man eater tiger. The villagers have captivated the speechless beast and is setting it on fire live. She was astonished to see that Fokir himself joined the mob and Kanai and Horen remained passive about it. Kanai justified his passiveness, by asserting that

‘Piya, you have to understand – that animal’s been preying on this village for years. It’s killed two people and any number of cows and goats-’

‘This is an animal, Kanai’, Piya said. ‘You can’t take revenge on an animal’

(The Hungry Tide 117)

Piya marched aggressively to protest against this inhuman act but in vain. When Kanai failed to stop Piya then Fokir took charge of her by holding her in tight grip so that she couldn’t reach the burning place and commanded her not to be upset with this act.

“She could hear the flames crackling in the distance and she smelled the reek of burning fur and flesh”... ‘How can I not be upset? That’s the most horrifying thing I’ve ever seen – a tiger set on fire.’ (The Hungry Tide 119)

The tiger has followed its innate nature, it was what was intended by nature, by the earth, by the planet that keeps us all alive. Just suppose if people crossed that imaginary line that prevents mankind from deciding that no other species matters except ourselves. What’ll be left then? Aren’t we alone in the universe?

‘The central argument of eco-psychology, according to Fisher’, is “if we accept the ecological view that we are members of the biotic community, rather than its mere exploiters, then we may learn to recognize the natural world as a social and psychological field, just as we do the human community.” (Eco psychological Theory and Critical Intervention 397)

“No matter how many people a tiger has allegedly killed it should be trapped and put into captivity translocated and re -released or simply left alone.” (BBC Future 21st November 2019)

Both the situations were critically analyzed by the researcher, tiger preying on man and man setting tiger on pyre. One cannot inflict atrocities and injustice on animals just because they cannot express themselves. The live and let live outlook has been the foundation for the coexisting of living being. Human being can have a binocular vision that would allow in maintaining a cordial relationship with all the God’s creation.

The researcher has critically analyzed the wilderness of nature followed by the traumatization caused by the wilderness which ended up in changing the identity of a person and lastly coexistence of all the creation of God in this biosphere will make our planet serene.

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