

## REFLECTION OF ECOFEMINIST PERSPECTIVE IN AMITAV GHOSH'S "THE HUNGRY TIDE"

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### Abstract:

Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* offers a profound exploration of the complex relationship between women and the natural world, emphasizing the empathetic connections that women often establish with their environment. The narrative intricately intertwines themes of human relationships, identity, and the haunting recollections of the Marichjhapi massacre, while also highlighting nature's dominance over human existence. This paper intends to analyze the novel through an ecofeminist perspective, concentrating on the character of Piyali Roy and her bond with nature, alongside the mythological figure of Bon Bibi, who symbolizes the protective essence of the natural world. By employing concepts such as the Gaia hypothesis, eco-grief, and transformative feminism, this study aims to explore the intricate relationships between ecological forces and women's experiences, ultimately underscoring the importance of female empathy towards nature.

**Keywords:** Ecofeminist, Eco-grief, Gaia, Transformative Feminism

The novel *The Hungry Tide* set in the Sundarbans, the largest mangrove ecosystem globally, features tidal landscapes that are reshaped twice daily. This vibrant environment is inhabited by both predators, including tigers and crocodiles, and endangered species like the Gangetic dolphins, which evoke a profound sense of empathy from the female protagonist, Piyali Roy. The forest is overseen by Bon Bibi, a goddess revered by the local population, who is believed to protect and preserve the forest. Bon Bibi's role in the narrative serves as a significant symbol of the interconnectedness between humanity and nature, as she is depicted as a nurturing figure who guides and safeguards those who enter the forest with good intentions. In contrast, those who act out of greed or malice face her wrath, with tigers serving as her enforcers, punishing wrongdoers on her behalf. This duality of protection and retribution reflects an ecofeminist viewpoint, where the female deity embodies both the nurturing and fierce aspects of nature.

Ecofeminism emerged as a theoretical framework in response to the intertwined oppressions of women and nature within patriarchal societies. The term was first introduced by French author Françoise d'Eaubonne in her work *Le Féminisme ou la Mort*, and it has since developed into a multidisciplinary movement that investigates the relationships between gender, ecology, and social justice. In India, the ecofeminist movement gained traction in the 1970s with the Chipko Andolan, where indigenous women played a vital role in resisting deforestation and advocating for environmental conservation. Similarly, the Green Belt Movement in Kenya exemplifies the intersection of feminist activism and environmentalism.

Ecofeminism critiques the patriarchal structures that perpetuate the exploitation of both women and nature. As noted by Noel Sturgeon, ecofeminism represents "a double

political intervention, of environmentalism into feminism and feminism into environmentalism” (Sturgeon 169). This perspective facilitates an analysis of how various forms of oppression—such as sexism, racism, and colonialism—intersect and contribute to the degradation of both women and the environment. Julia Mason, a notable ecofeminist scholar, emphasizes that ecofeminism seeks to explore the connections between environmental justice and gender justice, challenging the systemic inequalities that underpin these issues.

Within the context of *The Hungry Tide*, Piyali Roy exemplifies the principles of ecofeminism through her profound empathy for the natural world. As a cetologist and environmentalist, Piya is driven by a strong resolve to protect endangered species, particularly the Gangetic dolphins. Her journey into the Sundarbans, despite her unfamiliarity with the region and its language, parallels the sacred mission of Bon Bibi, who also ventured into the mangrove forests with a divine purpose. Piya’s choice to wear practical clothing instead of traditional female attire further emphasizes her commitment to her cause and her refusal to conform to conventional gender roles.

Piya’s experiences in the Sundarbans evoke a sense of eco-grief, a term that captures the sorrow and despair associated with witnessing environmental destruction and climate change. This emotion is particularly evident in Piya’s reactions to the near extinction of the Gangetic dolphins and the brutal killing of a tiger by local villagers. Her empathetic attitude towards nature is apparent as she confronts the harsh realities of ecological degradation. Piya’s determination to protect wildlife ultimately leads to a moment of cosmic justice when she survives a natural disaster, while her local companion, Fokir, tragically does not. This outcome serves as a testament to the notion that nature rewards those who exhibit compassion and empathy towards it.

The narrative of *The Hungry Tide* intertwines female and environmental narratives, creating a new discourse in ecofeminism. Ghosh critiques ineffective government policies and the conflicts between environmentalists and authorities, highlighting the anthropocentric attitudes that prioritize human needs over ecological balance. Through mythological references and ethnographic details, Ghosh emphasizes the interdependence of humans, animals, and nature, illustrating how the exploitation of one inevitably leads to the degradation of the other.

Piya’s character can also be examined through the lens of transformative feminism, which posits that women possess the power to reshape their relationships with nature and culture. This perspective underscores that ecofeminism, rooted in women’s traditional virtues and maternal roles can be revolutionary rather than merely reactionary. By the conclusion of the novel, Piya envisions establishing an ecological foundation, demonstrating her commitment to preserving and transforming the environment. Her influence extends to male characters like Fokir and Kanai, who experience shifts in their perspectives regarding nature, further illustrating Piya’s ability to inspire change.

The concept of Gaia, which posits that the Earth functions as a living organism, resonates deeply with Piya’s beliefs. The Gaia hypothesis, introduced by J.E. Lovelock in

1979, suggests that all life forms contribute to the Earth's self-regulating systems. This idea aligns with Piya's understanding of the interconnectedness of life and her commitment to respecting all species. Her shock and dismay upon witnessing the native villagers torturing a trapped tiger reflect her adherence to the Gaia principle, as she recognizes the intrinsic value of all living beings. Piya's refusal to accept any justification for the brutal act underscores her deep-seated belief in the sanctity of life and the necessity for conservation.

The relationship between Piya and Fokir is also significant in the context of ecofeminism. Fokir's love for nature and his deep connection to the land complement Piya's global identity and technological expertise. Their bond is forged through shared experiences in the perilous environment of the Sundarbans, where they navigate the challenges posed by both nature and human actions. Piya's survival during a crocodile attack and a tumultuous storm serves as a metaphor for nature's protection of those who demonstrate kindness and empathy towards it. This dynamic reinforces the idea that a harmonious relationship with nature is essential for survival.

The legend of Bon Bibi, as recounted in the novel, further illustrates the themes of protection and empathy towards nature. Bon Bibi is depicted as a benevolent goddess who safeguards the forest and its inhabitants. The local folklore surrounding her character emphasizes the importance of maintaining balance and harmony within the ecosystem. The story of Dukkhey, a poor boy saved by Bon Bibi from the clutches of the demon king Dakkhin Ray, serves as a powerful reminder of the consequences of greed and exploitation. Bon Bibi's role as a protector of the righteous and punisher of the greedy underscores the moral lessons embedded in the narrative.

In the chapter titled "The Glory of Bon Bibi," the legend is performed for an audience, highlighting the cultural significance of the goddess in the lives of the local people. The tale of Dukkhey's redemption illustrates the protective nature of Bon Bibi, who rewards the virtuous while punishing the corrupt. This narrative reinforces the idea that empathy towards nature is not only a moral obligation but also a means of ensuring one's own survival and well-being.

The popular belief in Bon Bibi as the guardian spirit of the forest reflects the deep-rooted connection between the local community and their environment. The inhabitants of the Sundarbans view every tree as a sacred entity, believing that Bon Bibi will protect them and their families. This reverence for nature is echoed in Piya's character, who forms an instant connection with the concept of the goddess and begins to embody her values of empathy and protection.

### **Conclusion:**

In conclusion, the characters of Bon Bibi and Piyali Roy, though one is mythological and the other human, share a profound connection in their empathetic approach towards nature. Both figures exemplify the principles of ecofeminism, advocating for the protection and preservation of wildlife while grappling with the emotional toll of witnessing environmental degradation. The spirit of Gaia runs through their narratives, emphasizing the importance of maintaining balance and harmony in nature. Through *The Hungry Tide*,

Amitav Ghosh weaves a compelling narrative that highlights the intersection of ecological and gender issues, ultimately advocating for a more just and harmonious relationship between humanity and the environment.

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