CHAPTER – II

Humanity and Nature in *The Hungry Tide*

The indeterminate, fluid space, Ghosh chooses to situate his novel *The Hungry Tide* is the Sundarbans, where land and sea constantly yield to each other in a daily elemental cycle. The novel is published in 2004. Ghosh majestically focuses a magnifying lens on a micro-culture within the Sundarbans or the tide country—the islets of the Ganges delta that lie south of Kolkata and east of West Bengal/Bangladesh frontier. This delta spanning 335 km in width is the largest mangrove forest in the world at the mouth of Ganges and is spread across areas of Bangladesh and West Bengal. It is intersected by a complex network of tidal waterways, mudflats and small islands of salt-tolerant mangrove forests. It is a place in which the sea, the river, the land, humans and animals all co-exist. This co-existence is sometimes in harmony, but often in competition. The Sundarbans is a vast area of sundari trees, as the mangroves are locally called which are able to tolerate environmental conditions of salt water, and they constitute the flora of the area. The title of the novel, foreshadows the realities of surviving in such a desolate area, which is prone to the destroying effects of rogue tidal waves and tropical cyclones. Annu Jalais depicts the setting of the Sundarbans as a place of both ecologically and politically authentic nature:

On the southern tip of West Bengal in eastern India, just south of Calcutta, the great river Ganges fans out into many tributaries over a vast delta before ending a journey that began in the distant Himalayan north with a plunge into the Bay of Bengal. The mouth of this delta is made up of about three hundred small islands, spread over an area of about ten thousand square kilometers and straddling India’s border with Bangladesh. It is one of those areas of the world where the lie of the land mocks the absurdity of international treaties, because it is virtually impossible to enforce border laws on a territory that constantly shifts, submerges and resurfaces with the
ebb and flow of the tide….These are the Sundarbans- the forests of beauty. (qtd in Pablo Mukherjee 108)

This river delta consists of innumerable islands which appear and disappear according to whims of tides and seasons, “a terrain where the boundaries between land and water are always mutating, always unpredictable” (7). In the Sudarbans, the contours of the land constantly change with the ebb and flow of water. The channels of the rivers are spread across the land like a fine-mesh net. Some of these channels are mighty waterways and are so wide that one shore is invisible from other. Every day thousands of mangrove forests merge and re-emerge as the tides engulf several islands. The powerful currents of tides reach as far as 300 kms inland, which results in the disappearance of thousands of acres of forests. There are no borders to divide fresh water from salt and river from sea. This tide country offers no visible borders between land and water.

On a land which is so volatile and unpredictable, the Sundarbans— the beauty as the name of the forest suggests, comes with its risks and dangers. It is a natural habitat of many endangered species including the Royal Bengal tiger and the Irawaddy dolphins and is the home of the mangrove forest or sundari trees. Ghosh details the ecosystem of the Sundarbans with its variety and splendor. It is clear that the transformation is the rule of life there. The rivers stray from week to week and islands are made and unmade.

In contrast to his early novel, *The Glass Palace* that spans over several generations and several locations, *The Hungry Tide* is limited to the Sundarbans and is geographically quite narrow. Ghosh’s description of the tidal country leads to an obvious comparison with an earlier landscape writing by Salman Rushdie in his novel *Midnight’s Children* in the chapter entitled “In the Sundarbans”. Rushdie represents tidal land as exotic. His visual images mostly focus on the uninhabitable nature of the Sundarbans and are macroscopic in approach. His description of the Sundarbans is from the angle of a magic realist who views the tidal country as a huge jungle hiding alien creatures and mysteries. In *Midnight’s Children* the tidal land oscillates between the semiotic play of mystery and magic where as in *The
The Hungry Tide the land seems to be captured through a microscopic and ecologist’s photo prints. The setting shows a pen picture of physical environment and human interaction with it.

The Hungry Tide begins with the juxtaposition between a map of the Sundarbans and a scene of travelers orienting themselves to the area. It centers on two visitors to the Sundarbans, Kanai Dutt and Piyali Roy (Piya), and their interaction with the community of tidal country people and with each other. Kanai, a Delhi based businessman, comes there to pay a visit to his aunt, Nilima, an NGO activist who runs a charity, a hospital, a guest house and educational services in the name of Badabon Trust on one of the islands, Lusibari. Nilima’s work revolves around the welfare of women, education for children and basic health care amenities for the citizens of the tidal land. Kanai comes to collect a parcel that his late uncle, Nirmal, has left him. The parcel appears to contain a diary, excerpts from which are sprinkled throughout the novel. The package he discovers is an account of his uncle’s last days, which revolve around Kusum and her son Fokir, who are portrayed as the victims of eviction from the island of Morichjhapi. Through this package, Ghosh reveals the story of the Sundarban island, its geography, origin, landscape, waterscape, skyscape and the story of human beings whose life is entwined with the ecology of the Sundarbans. As such, Ghosh presents Nirmal as a person having knowledge of history, geography and geology. It is the result of the fact that Ghosh’s writing has never had a strict demarcation between fiction and non-fiction. He has always combined the roles of a novelist, journalist, scholar and historian. Lawrence Buell in The Future of Environmental Criticism, argues that ecocritics explore literary texts as, “refractions of physical environments and human interactions with those environments, notwithstanding the artifactual properties of textual representation and their mediation by ideological and other socio-historical factors” (30). Ghosh presents nature as main protagonist by giving a detailed description of human-nature interactions. Buell further in The Environmental Imagination very rightly maintains:
The salient feature of environmental literature is that nature is not merely a setting or backdrop for human action, but an actual factor in the plot, that is, a character and sometimes even a protagonist. This is particularly obvious in nature and wilderness writing, which originate in the narrator’s transformative encounters with a landscape and its inhabitants. (qtd. in Tallmadge 282)

In the same way, Ghosh in *The Hungry Tide* presents landscape not just a scenery or a flimsy stage set but as an energizing medium from which human lives emerge and by which those lives are bound and measured. Piya, an Indo-American scientist from Seattle comes to Sundarban as an American despite her Bengali origins. Piya is by profession a cetologist, one who studies marine mammals. Though she is born in Kolkata, she is brought up in Seattle, USA, from a very early age. Her professional interest in water mammals brings her back to India. Her journey to the tide country is a part of her ongoing research on dolphins. She is aware of the fact that the species of river dolphins, *Orcaella brevirostris* commonly known as the Irrawady dolphin inhabit the Bay of Bengal near the Sundarbans. She is armed with a rangefinder, a depth sounder, clip charts, pens and a monitor that is connected with the satellite through the GPS (Global Positioning System), and the sketches of the dolphins. Ghosh brings about the fact of a research that shows that there are more species of fish in the Sundarbans than could be found in the whole continent of Europe. He maintains:

>This proliferation of aquatic life was thought to be the result of the unusually varied composition of the water itself. The waters of river and sea did not intermingle evenly in this part of the delta; rather, they interpenetrated each other, creating hundreds of different ecological niches, with streams of fresh water running along the floors of some channels, creating variations of salinity and turbidity. These micro-environments were like balloons suspended in the water, and they had their own patterns of flow... Each balloon was a floating biodome, filled with endemic fauna and flora. (125)
The above extract of the novel clarifies that it is the proliferation of the mingled environment which is responsible for creating and sustaining a dazzling variety of aquatic life forms in this micro part of the world. Piya asks Fokir, an illiterate fisherman to accompany her as a guide in the canals, creeks and rows of the area. Fokir brings her to Garjontola, a place where she finds a whole shoal of dolphins.

Ghosh empowers Fokir on many levels, in his familiarity with the tide country and its creatures. His mother, Kusum choking with pride says, “see saar: the river is in his veins” (245). Even Piya, an outsider praises his power while being out in water. It seems as if he is always watching the water— even without being aware of it. She says that she has worked with many experienced fishermen before but has never met anyone with such an incredible instinct. She feels like Fokir can see right into the river’s heart. His abilities as an observer of nature are extraordinary. He has adapted himself to the rhythms of nature around. Piya ponders that:

It was surprising enough that their jobs had not proved to be utterly incompatible—especially considering that one of the tasks required the inputs of geostationary satellites while the other depended on bits of shark-bone and broken tile. But that it had proved possible for two such different people to pursue their own ends simultaneously—people who could not exchange a word with each other and had no idea of what was going on in one another’s heads—was far more than surprising: it seemed almost miraculous. (141)

Ghosh portrays Fokir in full spirits in water and not the sullen, resentful creature he evidently seems to be on land. Piya recognizes and values Fokir’s knowledge. His embodied knowledge of the river becomes a map on Piya’s GPS monitor. Her quest for Orcella is enabled by Fokir’s knowledge and courage throughout the novel. The judgment runs counter to the evaluation of Fokir’s wife, Moyna and Kanai who see his knowledge as a relic lacking value in the modern economy. Providing different perspectives on Fokir, Ghosh allows readers to understand and comprehend that this sort of dismissal of knowledge by dominant
epistemologies forms a part of current environmental crisis as it weakens local knowledge of places. In her famous essay, “Home Is Where the Orcella Are” Rajinder Kaur points out that Fokir, “lives in idealized harmony with the rhythms of the tide country” (135). He belongs to a community who is marginalized by the state to live in the environmentally challenging area. He loses his life and becomes a victim of seasonal cyclones in the process of steering Piya safely through the forests. He fits the archetype of the hapless and illiterate native, exposed to the man-eating tigers, sharks, crocodiles, snakes, tides and cyclones inhabiting the tide country. Wind and water prove to be a lethal combination in the violent storm during which Fokir is killed.

_The Hungry Tide_ depicts the fact that it is not easy to make human and non-human world co-exist in an ecologically challenging environment. The novel puts forth the dilemmas involved in conserving endangered ecosystems and animals when the livelihoods and life of local inhabitants are simultaneously put at risk. The novel is discussed under the realm of ecocide, deep ecology, social ecology, environmental racism and environmental justice issues.

The chapter discusses issues like:

1. Human-Nature Conflicts
2. Conservation of Nature: A Symbiotic Relationship
3. Issues of Habitation and Environmental Justice

**Human- Nature Conflicts**

_The Hungry Tide_ is an environmentally oriented work that suggests that the human history is caught up in the natural history. It presents the pen picture of wildlife versus human suffering. The novel explores the plight of human beings and their survival in an endangered ecosystem where human live and fight with animals and tides. A.A. Mondal commenting on the novel writes:

_The Hungry Tide_ is a plea as well as a testimony to the many other songs of the earth, sung by the many different peoples who live on it and claim some portion of it as their own; a plea that they do not
go unheard, that they are not swamped by the hungry tides of either development or environmentalism. (19)

Nature has always been Mother Earth, the beautiful and bountiful; who with her plenty always blessed man, protected him and was omnipresent and omniscient. The Romantic age in literature was a different phase of the nature writing tradition. In the course of nature writing tradition, nature featured as a specimen to be observed. It was appreciated and enjoyed. Poems on a bird, a rainbow, a story about a forest or animal were the subjects for this genre. Writers were occupied with bounteous and the beautiful, the overwhelming and overflowing. The consortiums were formed, conferences were conducted, and nature was enjoyed. The nature was celebrated, forgetful of science and technology. Nature was rendered its highest position, worshipped as friend, philosopher, guide and spiritual healer. It provided comfort and solace to mournful hearts. In course of time, nature writing took an ignorant turn. Nature is no longer the same bountiful, but a depleting and exploited phenomenon. Natural resources and natural sceneries are dwindling and no more offers the same inspiration and awe. An appreciation and celebration of nature has now turned into an awareness and consciousness of it. Cynthia Deitering in “The Postnatural Novel” maintains:

. . . the literary construct of nature during much of the nineteenth century mirrored that of a society with a profound need of nature as spiritual healer, and the literary conception of nature for much of the twentieth century mirrored that of a society which valued nature as an economic resource. (201)

In contrast, in The Hungry Tide, Ghosh presents nature not as a setting of picturesque beauty alone, it also appears as hungry of human blood. His treatment of natural and geographical surroundings in the novel is quite unlike Romantic’s adoration of the same. The great romantic poets worshipped nature for its beauteous forms.

Ghosh, in the novel, looks back at a period of 1903, when an English visionary, Sir Daniel Hamilton, bought ten thousand acres of the tide country from
British government. These islands included Gosaba, Rangabelia, Satjelia and Lusibari collectively known as Hamilton-abad. These regions were hosted by number of predators. During that time, there was no human population but forests abound with predators like tigers, crocodiles, sharks, leopards and snakes. In the words of Nilima, “there was nothing but forest here. There were no people, no embankments, no fields. Just kada ar bada, mud and mangrove” (51). In order to make the region habitable, he invited people from different places. The settlement allowed people from different regions like Northern Orissa, Eastern Bengal, and the “Santhal Parganas”. Hamilton made every effort to tackle the predators, “Sir Daniel began to give out rewards to any one who killed a tiger or crocodile” (52). The people who killed any animal were given land in reward as these people were desperate for land. Over the years this habit of indiscriminate killings went on unheeded which resulted in decline of animal population. This became the start of conflict—humans killing animals and animals killing human. Ghosh by the above mentioned episode confirm the fact that the root cause of ecological crisis lies in the ruthless intrusion of humans on nature. Annu Jalais in “Dwelling in Morichjhapi” maintains, “In the context of the tide country, every day, is a struggle for survival. Man killing the tiger and tiger killing man are scenes that happen every day on the terrain of Sundarbans” (1758). The novel is full of human nature conflicts. Sometimes nature is kind and benevolent like mother goddess but sometimes disastrous, chaotic and havoc:

A mangrove forest is a universe unto itself, utterly unlike other woodlands or jungles. There are no towering, vine-looped trees, no ferns, no wildflowers, no chattering monkeys or cockatoos. 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 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 aforesaid extract from the novel shows that the rough and tough peculiarity of mangrove trees help resist the tides. Mangroves act like a buffer and protect the coastal areas from storms. On the other hand, these forests posit the extremely hostile approach towards humans because of being a shelter of many deadly beasts. The inhabitants of the Sundarbans have the fear of human-eating tigers and dangerous crocodiles, “Not a day passed without the news of someone being killed by a tiger, snake or crocodile” (79). The novel unfolds the tremendously unreceptive approach of nature towards human beings. The hazards of the life in the tide country are so great that many people perish in their youth. Nilima, in the novel conveys this as, “I know that in this day and age, in the twenty-first century, it’s difficult for you to imagine yourself being attacked by a tiger. The trouble is that over here it’s not in the least bit out of the ordinary. It happens several times each week” (240). She confirms that as per the unofficial records, over a hundred people are killed each year in the Indian part of the Sundarbans. The number doubles if the Bangladeshi part is included. She claims that a human being is killed by a tiger every other day in the Sundarbans. Nobody knows exactly how many killings there are. None of the figures is reliable, but the fact is that there are many more deaths than the authorities admit. Figures compiled by J. Fayrer, the English naturalist, who coined the phrase, the Royal Bengal Tiger, points out that 4,218 people are killed by tigers in lower Bengal in a period of six years between 1860 and 1866, “That’s almost two people every day, for six years” (241).

*The Hungry Tide* stands for all the disastrous and unfriendly aspects of nature. Many people die of drowning, many more are picked off by crocodiles and sharks. The attacks by tigers are very common. When we examine the novel carefully, of all the deaths by animals, Kusum’s father’s death is described in detail. This scene leaves human helpless and presents power of nature stronger than human power. Ghosh writes, “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 own order, it was skilled in dealing with the wind and it knew that the people on the other bank were powerless against these gusts”(108). These great cats of the tide country are like ghosts who never reveal their presence except through marks,
sounds and smell. Ghosh shows the tigers and crocodiles plan, follow, stalk and then attack their prey. It seems as if these natural attackers know that the people are powerless against their gusts. He fully exposes this nature of tigers when Kusum’s father is attacked:

So great was its confidence that in the last stretch it actually broke cover and went racing along the shore, in full view of the far shore; intent on its prey, it no longer cared about concealment. This was in itself an astonishing sight, almost without precedent, for the great cats of the tide country were like ghosts, never revealing their presence except through marks, sounds and smells. (108)

It is a matter of pity that the tidal surroundings bring not only numberless hazards and risks to the lives of inhabitants there but a constant fear and paranoia, “Think of what it was like: think of the tigers, crocodiles and snakes that lived in the creeks and nalas that covered the islands. This was a feast for them. They killed hundreds of people” (52). Further, bringing forth paranoia, Kanai broods over and compares pain of death caused out by the tiger and the crocodile. He presents tiger merciful because death is instant as the mere roar of the tiger leaves one in shock, senseless and numbless. On the other hand, the crocodile with its sleek underbody and slippery feet drags the prey under water mercilessly, “A crocodile, it’s said, will keep you alive until you drown; it won’t kill you on land; it’ll drag you into the water while you are still breathing. Nobody finds the remains of people who’re killed by crocodiles” (328). Ghosh presents a scene of crocodile attack on Piya. She catches a sight of two sets of interlocking teeth making a snatching, twisting movement as they lunge at her. The reptile then attacks the stern of the boat and she is luckily saved by Fokir. It is a close brush with death and sends Piya into a state of paranoia and shock for a long time. It is a fact that a haunted mind can see a physical manifestation of fear. The same fact is brought out by Ghosh in a scene where Kanai is left alone in an area of Gorjontola island:

He could not recall the word, not even the euphemisms Fokir had used: it was as if his mind, in its panic, had emptied itself of
language. The sounds and signs that had served, in combination, as
the sluices between his mind and his senses, had collapsed: his mind
was swamped by a flood of pure sensations. The words he has been
searching for, the euphemisms that were the source of his panic, had
been replaced by the thing itself, except that without words it could
not be apprehended or understood. It was an artifact of pure
intuition, so real that the thing itself could not have dreamed of
existing so intensely. (329)

The above incidences, present the physical and psychological impact of fear. In the
field of ecocriticism, psychologists are exploring the linkage between
environmental conditions and mental health. The same fact is revealed by Ghosh in
the novel. He shows that it is fear that takes a physical form and leave humans
numb.

At the very onset of the novel, Ghosh prepares the readers to the utter
hostility of the terrain. When Kanai comes to Lusibari, after several years, he finds
the Matla river has changed its course. The water level has gone down and people
are facing difficulties to move from one place to another. It is the result of
establishment of port canning, an embankment on river Matla. The government
authorities actually want to build a town with hotels, promenades, parks, palaces,
banks, streets deep in the tide country. For this reason, mangroves which are
actually Bengal’s defense against the Bay, are indiscriminately cut down. A
scientist, Mr Piddington warns against the establishment of the town, but he is
unheard. He says, if mangroves are endangered, it is certainly going to diminish
the possibility of Bengal being protected against the storms of Bay. It is a fact that
nature refuses to accept the domination of human beings. As such, Ghosh presents
nature as protagonist in the novel, rather than a non-living object. It is only after
few years, the nature fights back against this human interface. A terrible storm, a
fierce wave, a surge, rises as if in a challenge and hurls itself upon Canning and
bleaches away every thing. Disturbed by this sort of human interface, Nirmal, puts
his hand on his heart and recites Rilke:
But oh, how strange the streets of the city of pain . . .
Oh, how an angel could stamp out their market of comforts,
With the church nearby, bought ready-made, clean,
Shut, and disappointed as a post office on Sunday. (287)

The river Matla has once been a vast waterway, but now is narrowed down to a ditch due to human interface. Nature is taking every effort to fight back. The concern for such sort of ecological disturbance is visible throughout the novel in face of nature attacking humans and vice versa. Nature, in this area, protests and forces every passer by to struggle hard before moving on and makes them flounder through the mud. Kanai freezes in disbelief on seeing the plight of the passengers in the boat due to the vast expanse of the blowing mud. Women hitch up their saris and men roll up their trousers before moving on. On stepping off the plank, it is so strange to watch the passengers sinking into the mud, “like a spoon disappearing into a bowl of very thick daal” (24). The mud engulfs them exactly up to their hips and as such their upper bodies seem twisting as if they are a different kind of humans, a sort of supernatural beings without lower bodies.

In another episode, Piya, the cetologist, on a mission to study the Gangetic dolphins, falls and gets entrapped in the muddy tidal water. Despite of being a competent swimmer, she gets badly enveloped in the dirty mud and feels helpless and panicked in the hands of that face of nature. Here nature is seen in its worst form. The plight of Piya evokes a weird feeling of disgust, distaste and repugnance for nature:

With her breath running out, she felt herself to be enveloped inside a cocoon of eerily glowing murk and could not tell whether she was looking up or down. In her head there was smell, or rather, a metallic savour she knew to be, not blood, but inhaled mud. It had entered her mouth, her nose, her throat, her eyes- it had become a shroud closing in on her, folding her in its cloudy wrappings. She threw her hands at it, scratching, lunging and pummeling, but its edges seemed always to recede, like the slippery walls of a placental
sac. Then she felt something brush against her back at that moment there was no touch that would not have made her respond as if to the probing of a reptilian snout. (54-55)

Pointing towards human nature conflicts, the novel is sprinkled with descriptions about tides, storms, cyclones. These tides and storms are the result of human interface with nature. It is because of the ecological disturbance caused due to indiscriminate chopping down of mangrove forests. Nature with its cyclones and tsunamis stands wild, destructive and ugly. The ecocide presented in face of cyclones and tides seem beyond repair and malevolent.

In the novel, a storm is described in which a kilometer length embankment is destroyed. The cruelty of this storm is felt by the freshly arrived people in the tide country. The storm leaves the hopeful people hopeless, “They had even managed to grow a few handfuls of rice and vegetables. After years of living on stilt- raised platforms, they had finally been able to descend to earth and make a few shacks and shanties on level ground. All this by virtue of the badh” (203). These people try to establish a settlement facing every challenge and hardship. Human beings cannot build a home there but the fact is that these people have nowhere else to go. As they cannot go anywhere else, they try to make a living from the barren, unyielding, salty tracts of that land. They are mostly fishermen who depend on fish and crabs for sustenance. Their life is unpredictable and survival dangerous. These people are always in struggle and there is an exposure to the incessant battle against beasts, storms and tides. The storm within a fraction of time erases their efforts completely leaving them rootless and roofless. Ghosh establishes a similarity between maws of the tide and jaws of a tiger. He gives the account of a furious storm in the novel. It is the first known instance of two catastrophes- earthquake and storm happening together. The catastrophe is beyond imagination: “The waters rose so high that they killed thousands of animals and carried them upriver and inland” (204). The storm is so fierce that the corpses of fast tigers and heavy rhinoceros are found kilometers away from the river in rice fields and village ponds. All the fields are carpeted with the feathers of dead birds.
At the same time hit by the earthquake, thousands of dwellings fall instantly to the ground.

In this whole process of natural disaster, human and non-human lives are lost indiscriminately. The destruction in shape of storm and earthquake rages like a fiend and tears apart everything. This is the harsh example of natural ecocide. Ghosh mentions that there are people, scientists, who believe there is a mysterious connection between earthquakes and storms. In the novel, Horen, Nirmal’s friend puts it as “There was a storm on its way, Horen explained. A jhor. The weather office in New Delhi had put out warnings since the day before that it might even be a cyclone” (342). Pointing towards another episode of storm in which Horen and his uncle are trapped, Ghosh shows how the storm’s surge drowns most of the shore line. The flood is so deep that struggling with it, both of them ties themselves with the mangrove trees and cling on for almost two days without any food or water. There are corpses everywhere and the land is covered with dead fish and livestock. The storm claims around three hundred thousand people. In one sense nature in the form of trees gives them refuge and on the other hand ruthlessly robs them off of every thing. At the near end of the novel, Fokir and Piya are caught in a terrible cyclone, “It was as if the wind were a clawed animal doing all it could to tear the boat apart” (372). Fokir leads Piya deeper into the island. Here again taking refuge under nature, they tie themselves together with a mangrove tree. The wind grows violent and dark. The water of the tide country rise with its myriad cross-cutting currents, eddies, whirlpools and hits both of them forcefully. The scene presents a pen picture of terror and gory face of nature:

Powerful as it already was, the gale had been picking up strength all along. At a certain point its noise had reached a volume where its very quality had undergone a change. 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.

(379)

The above quoted passage unfolds how the hungry tidal waves sweep every thing in its path. Highlighting the extreme hostility of nature, Ghosh brings forth the struggle of these fictionalized characters with the fierce tides. The weight of the rushing water bends the tree trunk to which they are holding. Water furiously rages around them. This water seems as if trying to dismember their bodies. Ghosh presents helplessness of humans at the hands of fury of nature. Amidst of the storm, Piya finds the birds struggling for existence. They are trembling with fear so much that she could feel the fluttering of their hearts. Even the massive animals like tigers are betrayed of their strength and senses. The entire ecosphere is left handicapped with the storm. Fokir loses life saving Piya.

Depicting these sorts of ecological imbalances as a result of human nature attacks, Ghosh wishes humans to live and establish a harmonious relationship with nature. Ecocriticism plays an important role in the study of human association with nature. Ecocritics are concerned about the revival of nature after its disaster. The ultimate aim of ecocritics is to protect nature and develop a harmonious living between human beings and physical environment.

Conservation of Nature: A Symbiotic Relationship

Ghosh brings out the symbiotic and homogenous relationship that exists between nature, humans and other living creatures. The world’s flora and fauna are constantly connected in order to ensure survival. Each organism has its role well defined in the ecosystem. Humans always exist in relation to other living beings. As Donald Hughes comments:

Human ecology, then is a rational study of how mankind interrelates with the home of human species, the earth; with its soil and mineral resources; with its water, both fresh and salt; with its air, climate and weather; with its many living things, animals and plants, from the simplest to the most complex; and with the energy received ultimately from the sun. (3)
Piya the cetologist discovers how the dolphins herd fish and hunt them. Watching this habit of dolphins, Piya recollects a past incident on the Irrawaddy river wherein two fishermen get the dolphins to herd a school of fish towards their boat by drumming a wooden stick on the boat’s gunwale. The small fish herd around when the dolphins stick to the river bed. As a result a huge number of fish are caught by casting a net. Meanwhile, in sinking to the bottom, the net pushes a great number of fish into the soft floor of the river and dolphins are free to feast on this underwater harvest. Piya is awestruck, “Did there exist any more remarkable instance of symbiosis between human beings and a population of wild animals?” (169).

Ghosh dwells upon the role played by crabs in the tide country ecosystem. He identifies them as the “keystone species” of the tide country. He calls them the sanitation department and a janitorial team. They keep the mangroves alive by cleaning their leaves and litter. He claims that without crabs, the trees would otherwise choke on their own debris. The physiology of these creatures enable them launder the mud and scrub it grain by grain. Their feet and sides are lined with hairs forming a sort of microscopic brushes and spoons. They use these to scrape off the diatoms and other edible matter attached to each grain of sand. Joseph Meeker very rightly maintains that each species, “performs unique and specialized functions which play a part on the overall stability of the community” (qtd. in Sumathy 54). In The Hungry Tide crabs are presented as the main source of livelihood for the people living in these tidal lands. It is the crabs that lead Piya so easily and successfully to the pool where the orcella are found. The line spread by Fokir to trap crabs acts like a guide-rail by keeping the boat to a straight unvarying track which leads them back to the precise point from which they had started. This simple line of Fokir acts as a Global Positioning System for Piya. Ghosh does not forget to mention the support crabs offer to the environmental refugees at the time they are left to die with hunger during their evacuation period. He continues his gratitude for crabs by asking: “Didn’t they represent some fantastically large proportion of the systems biomass? Didn’t they outweigh even the trees and the
leaves? Hadn’t someone said that intertidal forests should be named after crabs rather than mangroves” (142).

Handling his subject realistically, he boldly warns about the threat posed by the overpopulation of these creatures to the ecosystem of tidal land. He calls them the monstrous appetites which can by time turn up the embankment- the frail fence around the Lusibari, “Even as we stand here, untold multitudes of crabs are burrowing into our badh. Now ask yourself: how long can this frail fence last against these monstrous appetites- the crabs and the tides, the winds and the storms?” (206).

In the novel, told from Piya, the cetologist’s point of view, Ghosh not only familiarizes the dolphin behaviour to a common reader but also raises fathomless questions regarding the conservation of these dwindling species. Piya’s discovery of the dolphin’s adaptation of their behaviour to suit the ebb and flow of waters opens up endless possibilities before her for their conservation. She is so committed to the conservation of these marine mammals that she thinks, “It would be enough; as an alibi for a life, it would do; she would not need to apologize for how she had spent her time on this earth” (127). She even earnestly asserts that she is ready to give up her life for the cause.

Ghosh provides sampling about making humans realize the immediate need of conservation of varied species. For instance, Piya narrates how the *orcella* population in Mekong is declining rapidly due to indiscriminate American carpet bombing. She reveals how the dolphins are massacred by Khmer Rouge cadres to use dolphin oil to supplement their dwindling supplies of petroleum. She 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. This oil was then used to run boats and motorcycles…they were melted down and used as diesel fuel” (305-06). Ghosh further mentions about the destruction of the habitat of these species followed in the upper Mekong by making the river navigable. The navigation proves to be a catastrophe for an entire dolphin population. Moreover, dolphins become victims to the flourishing clandestine trade in wildlife. They
become showpieces in aquariums. Piya narrates the story of a stranded river dolphin which she nurtures but is removed without her notice by some traders to be sold elsewhere. This is believed to be a valuable commodity fetching as much as one hundred thousand US dollars on the market.

Ghosh’s mention of these episodes of disasters and depletion of the species of dolphins for sake of oil and diesel fuel to be used in boats and motorcycles parallels with Kit Wright’s “Song of the Whale” which shows how whales are killed for manufacture of lipstick and shoe polish,

Great whale crying for your life
Crying for your kind I know
How we would use your dying
Lipstick for our painted faces
Polish for our shoes. (qtd. in Sumathy 48)

In the above extract of the poem, poet shows how man chooses lipstick and polish instead of life. Reconnecting this issue, Ghosh unfolds how in an episode while being out on waters with Fokir, Piya remarks that the so called conservationists in motorboats mindlessly hit the dolphins leading to their death in their natural habitats. Even the calf that Piya has been following gets killed by the fast moving motorboat used by the uniformed personnel. The dolphin’s body reveals a huge gash behind its blowhole tearing off flesh and blubber. Ghosh through the characters of the novel voices his concern about this mindless destruction leading to the depletion of various species of animals. Piya views, “When marine mammals begin to disappear from an established habitat it means something’s gone very wrong” (266-67).

Ghosh predicts that all the other kinds of fish would show a sudden decline because of the use of nylon nets that trap the fish along with their eggs. Through the words of Moyna, Fokir’s wife, Ghosh echoes that in about only fifteen years the fish will all be gone. The nylon nets are actually used to catch the spawn of tiger prawns. The anguish is felt when Ghosh speculates, “Because there is a lot of money in prawns and the traders had paid off the politicians. What do they care- or
politicians for that matter? It’s people like us who’re going to suffer and it’s up to us to think ahead” (134). Ghosh blames traders and politicians for this long chain disturbance in ecosphere of Sundarbans. These traders for their own interests emerge out to be a threat to the entire ecosystem. Here Ghosh alarms the fact that the steady destruction of so many varieties of fish, in turn, would affect animals which depend on them. It would in turn be a threat to endanger the different species of dolphins. Thus, step by step it would result in the breaking down of a kind of food chain and food web in the ecosystem. U.Sumathy, in *Ecocriticism in Practice* maintains:

The dolphin population in the Sundarbans is reducing because of the ‘magic oil’ they yield. A newspaper report dated Jan 30, 2008 tells how a rare dolphin was beat to death by fishermen in Bangladesh because they had not seen this kind of creature before. They then tried to sell it as a rare fish. When they failed, the men gave up and dumped the carcass outside a museum. This incident stands testimony to the callous treatment meted out by man towards his fellow living creatures. (75)

Worried about the disturbances in the ecosystem, Ghosh through Nirmal observes the avian changes in the sundarban islands. The sky that used to be darkened by the flights of birds at sunset now looks dull and empty. This dullness and hollowness is pointing towards some kind of extinction, “The birds were vanishing, the fish were dwindling and from day to day the land was being reclaimed by the sea” (215). Ghosh is worried if these disturbances would engulf and submerge the tide country totally because of the changes in the level of sea. This is a clear pointer towards global warming that result in the alteration in the sea level. Ghosh wishes humans to develop an ecological vision and brings forth the idea, “that nature should also be protected by human laws, the trees (dolphins and whales, hawks and whooping cranes) should have lawyers to articulate and defend their rights is one of the most marvelous and characteristic parts of ecological vision” (Rueckert 108).
As the novel draws to a close, Piya dedicates herself to a conservation project that values local knowledge. She is so much destined for the cause that she asserts that she is ready to give up her life, “If I thought giving up my life might make the rivers safe again for the Irrawady dolphin, the answer is, yes, I would” (301-02). To Piya, “home is where the Orcella are” (400). In the whole process, Ghosh seems driven by an ambition to make the Sundarbans visible. He dreams of bio-philic mutuality toward all biotic and abiotic components of ecosphere which would lead to the establishment of new ecological ethics and conservational justice. His social ecological and deep ecological vision clarifies that human beings must refrain themselves from the destruction of their other fellow beings and the dominance over other forms of life. Human’s quest of subjugating whatever seems to obstruct their hopes of conquest, actually leads to ecocide and destruction of overall nature. Ghosh’s views resonate with Meeker, a great ethologist, who in “The Comic Mode” very aptly maintains:

Human behavior has generally been guided by presumed metaphysical principles which have neglected to recognize that man is a species of animals whose welfare depends upon successful integration with the plants, animals, and land that make up his environment. (163)

**Issues of Habitation and Environmental Justice**

*The Hungry Tide* by Ghosh focuses on the ongoing tensions between humanity and nature in the Sundarbans. The novel considers the conflicts between the nature and its tenacious residents and between those residents and the global conservation groups who intent on preserving the Sundarban’s unique aquatic life and tiger population at the expense of its residents. Ghosh usually depicts those historical incidents which never appear in history. He reconstructs history and uses it as a tool to focus on the present sufferings of the tribal people. In most of his novels, he shows how the tribal people are forced by the colonial powers and capitalistic societies to become environmentally displaced. Murray Bookchin, the great social ecologist in *Remaking Societies* rightly claims that, “nearly all
ecological problems are social problems” (24). He argues that it is the impact of hierarchy and class division that affect social relations and thus humanity’s ability to live in balance with the natural world. The state as well as the elite class considers the poor communities living close to nature as a burden and they are thrust upon by various environmental injustices. Ratnagiri Usha in “The Dynamics of Human and Environmental Concerns in The Hungry Tide” quotes:

The novel takes to address the issues connected with the predicament of millions of the disinherited immigrants, refugees, settlers, squatters and land grabbers who find themselves in the perpetuations of conflict with the authorities that are determined to evacuate them as much as with the predators and the cyclones and storms. (52)

Ghosh interlaces together two narratives: one unfolding through Nirmal’s journal narrating the Morichjhapi episode and the second through Piya’s expedition, revealing the contemporary situation of the humans, the flora and fauna of Sundarbans. Ghosh published the novel in 2004 when the corporate house, Sahara India Parivar was adamant to take over large areas of Sundarban to convert it into an ecotourism area. There were no comprehensive environmental impact assessments and local consultations taken into consideration prior to the sanctioning of the takeover. Huggan and Tiffin in Postcolonial Ecocriticism very aptly mark that the novel is advocating, “the sensible policy of no conservation without local consultation and participation” (188). The project involved constructing floatels, restaurants, shops, business centers, cinemas and theatres. It further advocated setting up activities such as excursions to the interiors on motorboats. This move was opposed by several environmental agencies and individuals as the constructions and the use of motorboats would disturb the fragile ecosystem and threaten the endangered biodiversity of the region. After extensive protests, the central government intervened and annulled the proposal. At that time, Ghosh was one of the prominent intellectuals campaigning against the proposal.
The aborted *Sahara Project* can be located against the historical backdrop of the fictionalized Morichjhapi incident in the Sundarbans.

Ghosh in the novel refers to the historic tragedy in 1970 of refugee settlers from Bangladesh on the land of Morichjhapi in the Sundarbans through Nirmal’s diary. The facts of the incident are revealed by Nirmal’s widow, Nilima as:

In 1978 it happened that a great number of people suddenly appeared in Morichjhapi. In this place where there had been no inhabitants before there were now thousands, almost overnight. Within a matter of weeks they had cleared the mangroves, built badhs and put up huts. It happened so quickly that in the beginning no one even knew who these people were. But in time it came to be learnt that they were refugees, originally from Bangladesh. Some had come to India after partition, while others had trickled over later. In Bangladesh they had been among the poorest of rural people, oppressed and exploited both by Muslim communalists and by Hindus of the upper castes. (118)

The story of the Sundarbans is intrinsically linked to the history of partition of India and the events in its aftermath. India’s independence in 1947 resulted in the division of the Sundarbans, with 40 percent of the mangrove forests falling into East Pakistan territory. The partition of India in 1947 geographically bifurcated Pakistan into Eastern and Western fragments with India in the middle. East Pakistan was created for the Bangla-speaking Muslim majority, which led to the influx of Hindus from East Pakistan into India’s West Bengal region. It was especially the Hindus who were persecuted by low class Muslim tenants. They fled and found refuge in the homes of their affluent friends and relatives of Calcutta. But low class Hindus squatted on public and private land. The government sent them in hostile and infertile areas deep in the forests of Madhya Pradesh, hundreds of kilometers from Bengal.

It is the same historical fact which is being fictionalized in the novel by Ghosh. He thus reconstructs history and uses it as a tool to focus on the present
sufferings of the tribal people. The war breaks out in Bangladesh and the entire village of the victims is burned to ashes. These victims, cross the border and reach India’s West Bengal territory. On crossing the border, the police takes them forcefully to the resettlement camps in forests of Dandakaranya in Central India. The resettlement camps, where these refugees are forced by government to live in are more like concentration camps or prison. The refugees face beyond measure difficulties and hurdles in these camps. The extreme hostility of the terrain is presented in the novel as:

They were surrounded by security forces and forbidden to leave. Those who tried to get away were hunted down. The soil was rocky and the environment was nothing like they had ever known. They could not speak the language of that area and the local people treated them as intruders, attacking them with bows, arrows and other weapons. (118)

It is this sort of compulsion and injustice by the government which compels these environmental refugees to settle in threatened environments in co-existence with the killer waves, tigers and crocodiles. Many of these environmental refugees escape to various places and some go to Morichjhapi Island that is relatively easily accessible from the mainland. The refugees work in fraternity with other islanders and build huts, cultivate and earn through fishing. They dig tube wells; establish fishing industry, salt pans, dispensaries, schools and so-on. The refugees show the initiative and ability to continue their survival. These refugees work together to carve a niche for themselves. But the effort made is only short lived. The government declares that the settlement of Morichjhapi is unauthorized. It is further declared that the permanent settlement would disturb the forest wealth and ecological balance.

Ghosh skillfully brings in a postcolonial political conflict between demands of wildlife conservation and needs of inhabitants. Ghosh, like Bookchin is critical of environmentalists, who in Bookchin’s opinion, mistakenly focus on the symptoms and not on the root causes of the environmental crisis. He claims that
the environmental crisis is a result of particular social relations, of the hierarchical structures of society. Ghosh acts as a social ecologist as he advocates the understanding of the role of hierarchy and domination as the root cause of ecological crisis. For Bookchin, hierarchy is closely linked with age (gerontocracy), gender (patriarchy) and class status. In the same way Ghosh highlights the hierarchy of class status wherein the poor marginalized settlers of Morichjhapi are tortured and deliberately set against nature. He like Bookchin, emphasizes that the idea of dominating nature has its origin in the very real domination of human by human.

The police deprive the settlers of food and water. They are tear-gassed, and their tube wells, huts, boats and all possession is destroyed and submerged. Environmental justice opposes military occupation, repression and exploitation of land, humans and culture and other life forms. Annu Jalais in the article “Dwelling on Morichjhapi” maintains that the settlers are not only made ecological refugees but also reduced to tiger food:

It was often expressed that the government was happy as long as the tigers thrived and that in contrast, whether the islanders lived or died, as with the refugees, made no difference, because they were just “tiger food.” It was also said that earlier both animals and humans lived in harmony and the animals did not harm the human beings. But after the incident of Morichjhapi, the tigers became “man eaters”. (1761)

The incidence is full of killings wherein nature as well as tribal people are considered marginalized in front of more powerful or centralized people. At that period of military occupation, Kusum, the mother of Fokir, a victim of Morichjhapi incidence presents the extreme hostility and injustice that could be imposed on hungry and helpless, “she had subsisted on a kind of wild green known as jadupalong. Palatable enough at first, these leaves had proved deadly in the end, for they had caused severe dysentery. The latter, on top of lack of proper nutrition, had proved most debilitating” (261). Ghosh uses Kusum’s voice to apprise the readers
of how the government steps up pressure on the poor settlers. The island is patrolled by police, preventing the refugees from obtaining the basic necessities of life like food. The starved people are ruthlessly attacked and killed. The police intimidates and harasses the locals. Several people are arrested, several hundreds die and their bodies are thrown into the river, “thirty police launches encircled the island thereby depriving the settlers of food and water; they were also tear gassed, their huts razed, their boats sunken, their fisheries and tube-wells destroyed, and those who tried to cross the river were shot all” (279).

Ghosh also focusses on the issues of habitations. While Lusibari flourishes as a settlement, Morichjhapi’s attempt to establish as a habitation is opposed harshly and brutally. Lusibari and many other islands are explored and established owing to the efforts of an English man, Daniel Hamilton. The intrusion of an Englishman is considered as a part of the civilized mission, but when poor environmental refugees try to establish a settlement, they are evicted and resisted by the government calling the place Morichjhapi, a reserve forest belonging to a project to save tigers. They justify their move of ruthless eviction of poor people from a small and inhospitable island on the grounds of environmental conservation. Government uses the rationale of the tiger refuge as an excuse for forcibly removing the refugees. A.A. Mondal rightly argues:

Ghosh mediates upon a core set of issues but each time he does so from a new perspective: the troubled legacy of colonial knowledge and discourse on formerly colonized societies . . . the formation and reformation of identities in colonial and postcolonial societies . . . an engagement with cultural multiplicity, and an insistent critique of Eurocentrism. (2)

Despite the well known fact that the human-eating tigers in the Sundarbans claim a death-toll of several dozens of people per annum, the preservation of this endangered species has constantly taken priority over the protection of the local population. It is because of the international funds available for the protection of the former but not of the latter. As a result, these anti- environmentalists are trying
to exclude human out of the sphere of nature which can erupt out as a big threat to both humanity and nature. Rajinder Kaur in “Home Is where the Orcella Are” views, “. . . the irrational logic of an environmental program, largely funded by the west, in which human beings live on the edge of survival, like these refugees of Morichjhapi, become the expendable species in favour of the treasured tiger” (131). The novel explores the plight of displaced people, their struggle for settlement and survival in an endangered ecosystem. These poor settlers undergo environmental injustice, undue pain and discrimination which elicit an outburst from Kusum, a poor settler:

. . . the worst part was not the hunger or the thirst. It was to sit here, helpless, and listen to the policemen making their announcements, hearing them say that our lives, our existence, was worth less than dirt or dust. “This island has to be saved for its trees, it has to be saved for its animals, it is a part of a reserve forest, it belongs to a project to save tigers, which is paid for by people from all around the world. (261)

Ghosh as such presents the case of environmental injustice and environmental racism. He urges the need for reconceptualization of the notion of habitat preservation and endangered species as it ignores and threatens the life and dwellings of the poor and minority communities. Michael Bennet, an ecocritic in “From Wide Open Spaces to Metropolitan Places” maintains, “. . . the mainstream environmental agenda was captive to classist and racist interests in issues like the preservation of wilderness and wildlife for the leisure and recreation” (304). Kusum expresses her pent up hatred against government and police force. She brings forth the crude reality that the poor communities are the real endangered species. Her indignation towards these biased authorities is revealed through her words:

Who are these people, I wondered, who love animals so much that they are willing to kill us for them? Do they know what is being done in their names? Where do they live, these people, do they have
children, do they have mothers, fathers? As I thought of these things it seemed to me that this whole world has become a place of animals, and our fault, our crime, was that we were just human beings, trying to live as human beings always have, from water and the soil. (262)

Kusum points out that human have always lived their life by interacting with land, clearing it as well as planting it. Her feelings depict that nature and human have always been living in a harmonious relationship. Ghosh sympathizes with these poor environmental refugees by justifying their simple quest for the land for survival.

One of the major issues of the novel is preservation and conservation of flora and fauna at the cost of lives of innocent and poor human lives. It is a case of unequal justice; we cannot put the human beings in an unknown corner in the vast stage of ecosphere. Mondal describes the incident of Morichjhapi as:

The incident dramatizes the conflict between different ways of thinking and being, between the logic of modernity and development and the ensuing politics of ecology on the one hand, and the ways of life of indigenous people and their relationship to the environment. (18)

In the scene of a mob, killing a tiger, Piya is awestruck to see the horrifying cruelty shown by human beings towards a ferocious but mute animal when it strays into human habitat. The tiger wanders into a village at night, drawn by the sounds of a buffalo giving birth. It follows the sounds to the animal’s pen and claws its way in through the roof. The villagers seize on their opportunity against the tiger as it had killed two of their people and countless heads of livestock. The angry villagers blind it by piercing a sharpened bamboo pole into its eyes and burn it alive. Piya raises her voice against this act. Being a deep ecologist, she hints about the fact that humans with their monstrous ego are always in a continuous trial of dominating and destroying other fellow creatures. Deep ecologists believe that once humans destroy all other species, they start killing their own fellow beings.
Joseph W. Meeker in his essay “The Comic Mode” writes, “Morality is a matter of getting along with one’s fellow creatures as well as possible. All beliefs are provisional, subject to change when they fail to produce harmonious consequences” (167). Hence it is human’s responsibility to realize the importance of all the creatures. Their role as a conqueror undoubtedly faces self defeat because they are not sure of what is valuable and what is worthless. This is so because the biotic mechanism is so complex that its workings can never be fully understood. The great ecologist Aldo Leopold had himself once underestimated the importance of the mountain wolf and as such hunted them down. He gets a revelation only after looking into the eyes of one dying wolf. He realizes that he was wrong to think that he was protecting the deer by killing the wolf. But actually the wolves were needed to control the deer population which would otherwise grow unchecked and deforest the mountain slope.

In the Sundarbans, illegal activities like indiscriminate felling of mangroves and poaching still continues. This escalating exploitation of the forest is directly related to the decrease in the tiger population. Tigers act as best conservators of the forest. They keep human beings away. Poaching still continues in the area as ‘Royal Bengal Tiger’ fetch big money for its skin, claws and bones. These tigers actually prowl into villages for owing to habitat loss. Ghosh through the novel conveys that it is actually the poachers and timber merchants, who are responsible for tiger killing and destruction of forest reserves. In the tiger killing episode, Piya finds the scene of the tiger attack most horrifying thing she has ever seen. She declares it totally savagery.

To express disparate and contradictory philosophical stances, Ghosh introduces the voices of different characters like Kanai, Piya and Fokir. Piya, being a deep ecologist holds up her ideology of protecting the animals at any cost, while Fokir joins the mob as he belongs to the community of people who are marginalized by the state to live in the environmentally challenging terrain. Kanai seems to be sympathetic with the crowd saying that it has killed two people of the village and has long been preying on their livestock. Actually the victims of the
village are not paid compensation for loss of livestock or life by wildlife enthusiasts and government agencies. Their voice is unheard. They are presented as environmental injustice victims, as environmental justice protects the right of victims to receive full compensation and reparation for damages as well as quality health care. Ghosh uses this pretext to raise questions:

It happens every week that people are killed by tigers. How about the horror of that? If there were killings on that scale anywhere else on earth it would be called genocide, and yet here it goes almost unremarked: these killings are never reported, never written about in the papers. And the reason is just that these people are too poor to matter. We all know it, but we choose not to see it. Isn’t that a horror too—that we can feel the suffering of an animal, but not of human beings? (300-01)

Here Ghosh again makes the readers aware that the conservation of animals should not be done on cost of human lives since humans are an integral part of the whole ecosphere. He provides an interesting ecological perspective about the human-animal dynamics in the tide country. He asserts that the authorities are providing water for tigers in a place where nobody cares about human beings who go thirsty. It is a matter of pity that animals are prioritized over humans. In an article entitled “Restoration of Human Spirit in The Hungry Tide of Amitav Ghosh” Ambethkar writes:

The tigers are zealously protected by various international environmental groups who apply economic and diplomatic pressures on the Indian and Bangladeshi governments to maintain the tiger habitats by military or police force. But in the name of tiger preservation human lives are threatened; the tigers routinely maul and kill the islanders and their cattle. (6)

Ghosh’s point is further justified as Greg Garrard in Ecocriticism maintains that the philosophical guru of deep ecology, Arne Naess specifically allows, “vital human needs may take priority over the good of any other thing, thus ruling out
difficult conflicts between the interests of humans and the interests of a man-eating
tiger or a bubonic plague bacillus” (25). Environmentalists hold their efforts for the
protection of wildlife without any regard for the human costs. Aldo Leopold very
aptly maintains, “the basic weakness in the conservation system is that it is
governed purely by economic motives” (qtd. in U. Sumathy 18). It is a matter of
pity that deaths of human beings are allowed to continue in the area for centuries.
The problem of one dimensional conservation homogenizes all people against
nature.

Through this novel, Ghosh dreams of a state of bio-philic mutuality
towards all living things which would lead to the establishment of environmental
justices. The concept behind the term ‘Environmental Justice’ is that all people
regardless of their race, colour, nation or origin are able to enjoy equally high
levels of environmental protection. Environmental justice communities are
commonly identified as those where residents are predominantly minorities or of
low income. The residents are excluded from the environmental policy setting or
decision making process and are subjected to a disproportionate impact from one
or more environmental hazards. Huggan and Helen in Postcolonial Ecocriticism
aptly writes:

Such conflicts of interests have attracted the attention of both
postcolonial and environmentalist critics, who are alert to the
dilemmas involved in livelihoods of local (subaltern) people, are
simultaneously put at risk. The problem often seems intransigent,
with either humans or the extra human environment demanding
prioritization. (185)

Being conscious about making the land habitable, Ghosh in the novel,
presents a myth and a belief that the people of tide country has about Bon Bibi- the
goddess of the forests. She is believed to have come from a different land of
Arabia with her brother, Shah Jongli to protect and make the innocent humans
habitable on the land of eighteen tides. The jungles of that land is believed to be a
realm of DokkhinRai, a powerful demon king who holds sway over every being,
every animal, every ghoul, ghost and malevolent spirit that lives in the forest. This
demon king harbours a hatred coupled with insatiable desires for human flesh. In
an effort to establish a habitat there to accommodate humans, Bon Bibi overpowers
DokkhinRai and divides the island into two halves- the wild and the sown being
held in careful balance. Being gracious, she gives one half of the jungle to demon
to rule while other half is made suitable and habitable for human settlement. This
myth is accompanied by the tales how she comes to rescue the innocent humans
and saves fishermen from distress abound in the land.

Responding to a deep-rooted human need, Jonathan Bate argues, “Myths
are necessary imaginings, exemplary stories which help our species to make sense
of its place in the world” (qtd. in Binns 136). In the same way, through this myth,
Ghosh wishes to create a balance between the wild and human. Moreover
inhabitants there also believe that the river dolphins which they call ‘shushuk’ are
the messengers of Bon Bibi, whom she considers to be her eyes and ears. These
messengers of Bon Bibi are believed to do good to fishermen by making them find
fish and crabs. Here Ghosh through this age old myth presents the issues of
habitation. Ghosh’s ecological concerns seems echoing the great American author
and traveller, George Catlin’s concept of a ‘magnificent park’:

. . . that would not only protect nonhuman nature but would be a
place where the world could see for ages to come, the native Indian
in his classic attire, galloping his wild horse…A nation’s park,
containing man and beast, containing all the freshness of their
nature’s beauty. (qtd. in Mazel 142)

The novel is in a way, Ghosh’s effort to bring the humanists and
environmentalists together in theory and practice. The environmentalists
emphasize on issues such as wilderness preservation and protection of endangered
species by promoting and encouraging environmental racism. Ghosh offers a sort
of reconciliation process providing a basis for united action. The novel puts
forward the most important appeal that humans have to find ways to keep the
human community away from destroying other fellow beings and the natural
community as a whole. The conceptual and practical problem is to find the grounds, upon which the two communities- the human and the natural can coexist, cooperate and flourish in the biosphere. He wants his work to be a record of contemporary world for the benefit of the future generations. The novel provides awareness about various types of environmental racism and environmental injustices faced by both human and non-human life forms. The novel remains open ended encouraging and inviting its readers and future generations to come forward with confidence and optimism to the task of conservation and protection of vanishing lives considering human beings as important part and parcel of the vast ecosphere. The unended age old conflict between environmentalists and humanists is needed to be tackled and resolved properly by way of adopting social ecological and deep ecological wisdom to make possible the co-existence and overcome the difficulties involved in sharing of planet.