CHAPTER III

ECONOMIC REVIVAL AND WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT IN THE HUNGRY TIDE

Amitav Ghosh has created women characters in his novel *The Hungry Tide*, as educated and economically independent. Economic independence is a necessity to maintain one’s standard of living. Affluent women in the modern milieu look out for channels that would fetch them resources to contribute to the welfare of the society. The desire to utilize their academic expertise and the wealth they possess reveal the women’s need to be connected with public life that gives them a sense of fulfilment and satisfaction.

Ghosh has thoroughly comprehended that the economic status is the most important factor which would pronounce the prominence of a person in today’s society and it is much more significant for a woman to be economically independent because her personal autonomy and freedom in decision making greatly depends on her economic status. In other words economic stability commands respect and dignity in the modern society irrespective of the gender difference. His women characters want to be self sufficient materially even in their marginalized situation. In the words of Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean, the novel is making a “materialist analysis of culture informed by and responsive to the concerns of women, as well as…other marginalized groups” (Landry x).

Economic status offers women freedom and power in decision making in matters related to her private and public life. The past considered woman as an ornamental symbol of the husband and marriage as an economic necessity for a
woman making her to depend on man throughout her life. Engels observes that the economic stability is the basis of patriarchal superiority causing oppression and exploitation of women, and once woman is allowed to partake in sharing of financial responsibilities man will no more be treated a superior being: “The supremacy of the man in marriage is the simple consequence of his economic supremacy, and with the abolition of the latter will disappear of itself” (Engels 65). Diminishing the inequality and balancing the economy with equal participation and distribution of opportunities among men and women will result in a change in the society.

Feminists believe that women, who remain single or married, must have reasonable source of income to live an independent life. Centuries ago, the feminists have begun their fight for equality in every sphere to claim it as their right. Eisenstein in the *The Radical Future of Liberal Feminism* puts forward that economic, social and religious doctrines are interconnected and they need transformation. She further predicts that women’s battle for equality would continue until they “stand equal in the church, the world of work and have an equal code of morals for both sexes” (Eisenstein 112). Stepping into the public arena, participation in social and religious services and ceremonies and sharing the financial responsibilities through remunerated jobs gives a sense of satisfaction to women rather than domestic life.

Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* argues for the need for women’s right to education and employment to liberate them from dependency on their partners. Socialist feminism emphasizes on a condition for the transformation of society offering economic and legal independence for women. It supports the absolute equality of women in economic productive life and attacks the domestic division of
labour, inviting men to participate equally in the domestic work, heralding a socio-economic metamorphosis.

William Thompson, an economist and his friend Anna Wheeler a leading socialist feminist lecturer, postulate a clear definition to feminism by their analysis on women’s situation in *Appeal on Behalf of Women*. They posit that economic independence is a compulsory component in a marriage to promote freedom and equality in the relationship as equal human beings. They see women’s oppression based on man’s selfishness: “Whatever system of labour...Whatever system of government...under every vicissitude of MAN’s condition he has always retained woman his slave” (Thompson 196). According to them, a woman’s worth is to be appreciated through her economic independence leading to financial contribution towards making of a home or a society, and thereby the distorting influence of men’s injustice will be reduced.

Amitav Ghosh is a writer who has brought in dynamic changes in his novels creating women characters, as educated and economically independent who can make their decisions pertaining to private as well as public life. The images of women in Indian scenario have gone through a change and they are taking the centre stage in the novels of Amitav Ghosh. In ‘The Hungry Tide’ the women characters are ordinary beings and the writer portrays the women characters whose ability and strength to stand in difficult life situations is immeasurable. Nilima with her experience and ability works for other women’s economic independence. Piya, a young scientist doing her research on marine dolphins, decides to build other women’s life by starting projects joining Nilima’s Trust. Kusum’s tremendous inner strength pushes her forward to tailor her life according to her heart’s desire and stands firm at the face of
losing one’s own life for a cause. Moyna, the tribal woman confronts the odds of life in order to fulfill the dream of her life to become a nurse.

Nilima, a bold woman who stands resolute and determinant in getting married to the man of her choice is the first step she takes to break the familial norms, rigid and conservative. She trusts her husband despite knowing that her marital life would be complicated and at times she has to suffer due to the strangeness of the place they have decided to live in at Lusibari. This condition prompts her later to strive hard to rebel, revolutionize and create a forum for herself to question the existence of her status and also of other women in her area ridden of basic comforts and being surrounded with life threatening troubles. She clearly comprehends the essentiality of evolving as a woman, working for economic liberation from the forces deferring women’s rights and equality. In feminism financial freedom is one of the significant factors.

Amitav Ghosh believes that women are equipped with amazing leadership qualities and if responsibilities are bestowed on them they would serve for the cause of the society. The women characters in *The Hungry Tide* are such leaders shaping themselves and shaping the society around. Nilima empowered with education and revolutionary mind-set, works hard to fulfil her dream of building others life, and her inner strength never fails her from completing her task and achieving her goal. Her honesty and transparency in running the NGO makes it a model for others and women find solace in her work. ‘Nilima’, as complimented by her relative Kanai Dutt, “was legendary for her persistence - her doggedness and tenacity had built the Badabon Trust into what it was, an organization widely cited as a model for NGOs working in rural India” (HT 19). As an activist, Nilima wishes that her actions should speak
louder than her words and in turn the Trust would grow for benefit of all the women who depend on it for their livelihood.

She orients the women to use their skills and the material resources available in their area to weave and sew clothes that could be sold through the trust. She is the first to buy and adorn herself with their makings: “It was her practice to dress in saris woven and crafted in the workshops of the Badabon Trust, garments almost always of cotton, with spidery borders executed in batik” (HT 21). To swirl women to her ideology is not an easy task for her. Women living in that tide island are bound with oppressive traditions peculiar and awry. Widowhood is something that is dreaded of by Indian woman. It not only deprives them of a secured life with their husband, rather it makes them economically stranded. Surprisingly the women of the tide island are taught to prepare themselves for widowhood and the exterior changes of being unadorned with marital symbols in their appearance. Nilima is awestruck and appalled learning their habits. Nilima works hard to change their life “in equipping women so that they’re not disempowered in the market economy” (Viner).

Metamorphosis is hard to occur in such stern ambience. If Nilima intends to create awareness on the need of changes to empower them and to improve their monetary condition, she has to remain passive and should never touch their culture and life style. She re-examines the Lusibari women’s beliefs, understands their vulnerability and begins the process of metamorphosis talking to “…the women who gathered at the wells and the ponds...” (HT 80). Her motivation is to stabilise the women financially which will lead to further transformation. With an aspiration to get them changed: “it did not matter what they were; what mattered was that they should not remain what they were” (HT 81). Nilima’s views on shifting of the existing
images of Lusibari women are akin to the views of a feminist Rosemarie Tong who says that “change and growth are necessary to life and what makes feminist thought liberating is its vitality, its refusal to stop changing, to stop growing” (Tong).

In the past, widows were the oppressed lot. Nilima realises that widowhood “often meant a lifetime of dependence and years of abuse and exploitation” (HT 81). She earnestly desires to transform them. It is her retrospection on the conditions of a widow she has witnessed at Lusibari and Lusibari shopkeepers’ exploitation and the unjust behaviour toward her that compels Nilima to unite the Lusibari women and to instruct them to explore strategies to save money. Meanwhile this “tiny seedling of an idea” (HT 81) is a small move to establish the Women’s Union, a forum in the name of “Mohila Sangothon” (HT 81).

Nilima’s chivalrous attitude helps her to provide all possible services – “medical, paralegal, agricultural” (HT 81) for people through this union. She convenes meetings several times a week to work on income-generating projects “knitting, sewing, dyeing yarn and so on” (HT 89). Nilima’s perseverance and consistent efforts convince the women to be the members of the union and later associate with her as members of Badabon Trust, a NGO organization that she starts to reach the society ridden of basic needs and facilities like hospital. Hospital is one of the vital needs of people living in a village. When Government sector fails to provide health care facilities due to lack of resources it is Nilima who plans for a hospital to help people in their acute need in the island.

What Nilima contributes to Lusibari through NGO sector cannot be underestimated. The hospital turns out to be not only the landmark of the village but
also a solarium discarding darkness literally and figuratively in the lives of the people living there. She procures jobs for many villagers; a generator donated by one of the trust’s benefactor illuminates the entire place and the children find the hospital a fitting spot to read; it helps them to save oil and candles.

The outer structure of the hospital building proves to be an epitome speaking of her power. Her nephew, Kanai is able to measure the hard work of Nilima behind this massive work standing before his eyes as a hospital: “They were nearing the hospital now and seeing the building close up gave Kanai a renewed appreciation of the sheer scale of Nilima’s achievement.” (HT 131) The maintenance and cleanliness of the hospital speaks about the efficiency of the person who heads it.

Just one hospital is instrumental in metamorphosing the lives of the entire village. Nilima is surging not only with power but with a spirit to take hold of multiple responsibilities to sustain the socio economic conditions of women. Her foresight and vision gives birth to concrete actions towards financial independence especially for women who work in the hospital. Moreover, the hospital becomes the milestone of that village leading “to the growth of a small service industry around the hospital's perimeters” (HT 132) and as time passed by “a number of tea-shops, guest houses and stands for cycle-vans had taken root and flourished . . .” (HT 132) providing employment directly or indirectly to the majority of Lusibari’s inhabitants. When she observes that settlers in Morichjhapi are a threat to the hospital and her husband is showing uncanny interest in getting involved with them she becomes furious. She readies herself to fight for the hospital like a mother to protect the children. She resists his attempts and warns him of its impact: “The hospital’s future, its welfare – they mean everything to me, and I will not endanger them. I’ve asked
very little of you all this time, but I’m asking you now: stay from Morichjhapi… If you get involved with those settlers you will be endangering my life’s work. Just keep that in mind. That’s all I ask” (HT 214).

Nilima has to constantly fight with him to stop him supporting the settlers who disrupt the peace of Lusibari and disband the real purpose for which the hospital is built. What meant just a “social Service” to Nirmal is a “revolution” to Nilima (HT 388). Nirmal is not very supportive of the social activism of his wife Nilima. He persistently discourages and dismisses “her life’s work” (HT 120) as “an ineradicable stigma of social service” (HT 82). The obstacle she encounters externally is minimal in its amount and intensiveness when compared to her husband’s reaction and response.

The patriarchal society believes that the impact of women’s work upon the family is dilapidating as it brings a breach between its members. There is a thought that women’s work can lay impact upon the family life. Feminists believe that this thought is biased and does not favour women. Though Nilima is depressed due to Nirmal’s behaviour, she does not let him to stand a barricade to her endeavours. Her sense of independence persuades her to ignore her husband’s biased attitude. She also transcends her moments of combat with her Marxist husband and emerges as a determined woman who stands firm in carrying out her responsibility.

Nilima decides to go on with her social activism and build hospital and provide medical assistance only to people of Lusibari and not to anyone else despite knowing her husband’s favoritism for settlers from Morichjhapi. Kusum, the settler from Morichjhapi requests her to send medical help for them, Nilima’s outright as
well the practical and discrete sensibilities makes her conscious of hospital’s destiny if she volunteers to help the settlers. Though an iota of mercilessness is surfaced upon her benevolence, there is a valid reason when she brusquely brushes aside Kusum’s request for Nilima’s help though she wishes to help her. The government has clearly stated that it would resort to any steps to the settlers and warned that anyone “suspected of helping them was sure to get into trouble” (HT 122). Nilima twice thinks about and determines that she “could not afford to alienate the government” (HT 122) but “consider the greater good” (HT 122) - the medical service rendered through the hospital to the natives of Lusibari village.

Nilima continues to revel in the thought of her achievements though not with pride but with an attitude to self motivate to enlarge her vision and to bring changes in the constrained lives of Lusibari people especially the women. Feminist consciousness is divided between “consciousness of victimization” (Lee 15) and “the joyous consciousness of one’s own power, of the possibility of unprecedented growth...” (Lee 16) Nilima is tossed between her consciousness of her power and also of her powerlessness. As a powerful woman she unites Lusibari women under common edifice. At the same time she is also aware of her limitations and powerlessness to protect them from “the world’s ills” (HT 29) is pertaining to “male violence” (HT 29).

There are many occasions when she could not succeed to satiate the needs of under privileged who have built their life catching fish, crabs and prawns. The usage of nylon nets is a scourge to the spawn of fish and tiger prawns. And Nilima fears that by fifteen years there shall be no fish and she bravely resists it but could not stop for the political pressure involved in the matter. She consoles herself of the benign factors
she has accomplished for the wellbeing of the people of Lusibari which even Sir. Daniel Hamilton could not do:

I’m not capable of dealing with the whole world’s problem. For me the challenge of making few little things a little better in one small place is enough. That place for me is Lusibari. I’ve been given it everything I can yes, after all these years, it has amounted to something: it’s helped people; it’s made a few people lives little better (HT 387).

Nilima deserves to be glorified for her philanthropic sense and her readiness to adapt to any kind of situation unhesitatingly shedding of her comforts for selfless reasons. She rebels against the conservative society, political intimidation, mentally unstable husband, settlers at Lusibari, ferocious tides and animal threats to solve the problems of women’s subordination and their socio economic liberation through Badabon Trust. Her relentless efforts fetch her one of the country’s highest honours.

Amitav Ghosh revels in creating charismatic women of high caliber, well educated and aiming higher. He deserves special appreciation for the creation of the character Piyali Roy who represents modern women’s aspirations in pursuing her education and there by attaining economic independence. Piyali Roy is a Cetologist, from Seattle, U.S. visiting India to do the study on marine mammals. She belongs to the women of new generation and is prepared to face the world with all its challenges. Ghosh presents a line of assertive women who can accomplish tasks that demonstrate their potential in a males’ world and attain success in the workplace. It is a celebration of women growing their materialistic attitude by creating a viable space through their economic stability, discarding the dogmas that insisted on their passivity.
Piya is the replica of a character Isabel Beasley, a student in Cambodia, whom he had met during his travel to North Queensland. Ghosh was impressed with that lady and her research on dolphins. She was daring and courageous. Her passion towards her research on Dolphin and her tenacity surprised Ghosh as she once though is devastated by her pet dog and severely injured, unmindful of her health, took him to the locality where she had been doing her research for four months. Piya is also a scientist with such a persistent commitment towards her profession.

Piya’s intention to carry out the marine project displays her status as an independent woman, economically and intellectually comfortable to have her own space to continue her research on dolphins. She gets her papers cleared from the Forest Department’s office with a guard assigned to assist her on her survey. The guard arranges a launch to move into the water as the launch owner was a seasoned guide. In India an educated woman with an attitude to be on her own, self reliant and affluent seeks the attention of the people around. The guard and his associate, the launch owner who proclaim to be a guide, prove to be unfit to accompany her during her venture into the ocean as she realises they are ignorant and lack knowledge about dolphins that are connected to Piya’s research.

During the course of their sail, they connive to abuse her lonely situation on the ocean and approach her with bad intention. It is Fokir, a fisherman who comes in a boat to rescue her from that dangerous situation. Fokir is the only male character who comprehends her purpose and respects her very presence. Piya is amazed to find the reflection of Fokir’s inner decorum in his speech and gestures: “There was a consideration in this gesture, an acknowledgement of her presence that touched her; it
seemed like the first normal human contact she had had since stepping on the launch” (HT 47).

Money that opens a vista of opportunities to research also causes inconvenience to Piya. Her empowered status is jolted for a while. This is a common scenario in India where women are abused, raped by men of lower esteem. The incident of Delhi gang rape on December 16, 2012 is etched in the memory of every Indian as it had sent shock waves across India. Men and women were on the street in protest demanding change in the attitudes toward women while the misogynist statements by the rapists and their lawyers revealed the mindset of the patriarchal society. Ghosh’s depiction of events concerning Piya’s abuse, though happening in the mid twentieth century is surprising to be noted as it brings forth the truth that till date women are vulnerable and thwarted by men. Women’s education, their professional success and raised financial status do not provide them adequate safety. But Ghosh’s women, though exposed to dangers, they make every effort to escape from them applying their own wisdom.

Being in Fokir’s boat with his five year old son Tutul, Piya becomes aware of her vulnerability but the child’s presence affirms her to place her trust on them. She is not familiar with this kind of flustered situations in U.S as she is used to be on her own even in the midst of strangers. “But her experience with the guard had bruised her confidence and she felt as though she were recovering from an assault” (HT 64). Piya finds a great relief in the company of Fokir despite the uneasiness she suffers due to the bitter experience. She generously rewards Fokir with money for his support and helps and appreciates him deep in her heart for being a gentleman.
Piya is best at her work and enjoys wholeheartedly being out on the water, alert and on watch, with the wind on her face and her equipment at her fingertips. Piya, whether she is on land or sea, has a rock-climber’s belt buckled to her waist. This picture of Piya speaks about her personality – a woman thoroughly being at home without the preoccupations of worrying about a family and the domestic chores. Her state of being empowered as a person with an independent attitude and professional aspirations makes her fully involve in her work with total commitment. She never hesitates to spend her time on water, day and night to find accurate information about Orcaella. The continuous exposure to hazardous situations does not deter Piya from her goal. She falls into the water flowing in rapid speed and for a second she believes she would die. Her body trembles at the mere thought of it. Yet, she is aware of the fact that a research in any field is challenging, risk involved, and frames difficulties but Piya reinforces her mind with determination and resoluteness.

Piya makes use of Fokir’s knowledge about the river and his ability to steer the boat tactfully even in the bad light and fog for the advantage of her survey. As she hears the sound of a dolphin, she identifies what the dolphin and its kind would be, thus revealing her professional knowledge. The dolphins being around the boat is an exhilarating sight that she is wonderstruck and becomes curious to know the secret of dolphin’s lingering at a particular spot. She desires to prove the behaviour patterns of fresh water and salt water dolphins which would make a remarkable contribution and a “hypothesis of stunning elegance and economy” (HT 124). For a second Piya becomes aware of the immense opportunities open for her to work upon with a lifetime project. This contemplation of success and recognition encourages her to ceaselessly continue her research on the dangerous ocean, teeming with not only
dolphins but also crocodiles. She confronts the raging storm; falls into the water escapes the jaws of crocodile; dares the heavy tides. Her anguished search for dolphins comes to an end with the death of Fokir.

The death of Fokir invites Piya to take up the responsibility for his wife and son and shows an overwhelming concern offering financial help to his family, “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 maybe even provide a college education for Tutul” (HT 396). In her attempt to empower that family, she gains success.

Piya resolves to create funds through her project proposals on Dolphins with a hope that the fund she fetches from the supporting environmental groups would be sufficient for her to help the people of Lusibari village. So she agrees with Nilima to take the upper floor of the Guest House on rent to start a data bank and an office. She decides to offer Moyna a part-time job to have an extra income for her family: “Moyna would manage that end of things – part-time of course, when she’s not on duty at the hospital. It would give her an additional source of income and I’m sure she’d be able to handle the work” (HT 397). Her establishment of work in Lusibari opens a new avenue of economic support for the people transforming their life to become better.

Piya has her own reasons for choosing Biology, a field that women of yesteryears less opted for. She is conscious that her study of Biology would give her the internal freedom and the external independence “to be on her own, to have no fixed address, to be far from the familiar, while still being a part of a loyal but loose-knit community” (HT 126). She chooses to be a scientist on travel around the coastal
areas to accomplish a life fulfilling mission in the field of science rather than getting entangled to the life of conventions and traditions that the patriarchal society has advocated for women.

Piya is not what Kanai, a domineering male character perceives her to be as “. . . hopelessly soft and spoilt, a kind of stereotype.” (HT 196). She is a focused person who strongly believes that she could sensitise the scientific field with her contribution however small it might be, “…even a part of it – it would be as fine a piece of descriptive science as any. 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” (HT 127). She desires to metamorphose the universe with her scientific as well as intellectual knowledge. Her attitude to be on her own freewill to pursue what she desires impresses Kanai. He realizes the magnanimity of her personality and her true extraordinariness: “She was not just his equal in mind and imagination; her spirit and heart were far larger than his own” (HT 315).

Moyna, a minor character in this novel is an ambitious tribal girl who has the power within to surpass all the hurdles on her path in achieving her life’s dream of becoming a nurse. She walks many kilometres from her village to get a school education. As an antagonized atmosphere existed in her family towards her education, she takes it as her personal responsibility to educate herself and completes her schooling successfully. Her dream to continue her college education is wrecked as she is compelled to marry Fokir.

After her marriage she moves to Lusibari with Fokir to become a qualified nurse. Moyna having command over her life decides to move ahead with strong will
power, “...she was not one to be shy of pitting her will against the world” (HT 130) Moyna takes Kanai to show the hospital around and there comes up a visible change in her with a professional touch as they approach the hospital. “With every step her carriage seemed to become a little straighter and her movements more assured” (HT 132), developing her personality bubble with confidence.

Her first aim to be self-sufficient economically is fulfilled. Thanks to her nursing job and the part time job given by Piya. Next her desire is to concentrate on her son, Tutul’s education which is not possible in the village where she lives. As a working woman she spares less time to be with her son and Fokir takes his son along with him and spends his time on the river. Moyna, as an educated and employed person she is persistent about putting him in a good school. At the same time she would not leave the job. It has given her both money and self respect.

She takes delight in belonging to hospital at Lusibari and experiences great amount of self esteem in her personality. Becoming a nurse was the highest aspirations of her life, “…her dream of becoming a nurse was no ordinary yearning: it was the product of a desire as richly and completely imagined as a novel or a poem” (HT 135).To achieve her goal, Moyna is prepared to face all odds which come on her way of achievement.

The internal empowerment is visible in her appearance and dealings. To quote from the book, “She knows what she wants – for herself and her family – and nothing is going to keep her from pursuing it. She’s ambitious, she’s tough and she’s going to go a long way” (HT 196). However she is educated, Moyna is unwilling to compromise with attitude concerning man and women relationship. She is troubled to
observe the intimacy between Fokir and Piya. At the same she is also cautious about it. She takes effort to save her marriage and she tries to make her husband understand that Piya is only a visitor.

Kanai provokes her with a suggestion to be with another man for the sake of curiosity and she retorts, “I may be a village girl, Kanai-babu, but I’m not so foolish as to answer a question like that. I can see that you play this game with every woman who crosses your path” (HT 259). Moyna attacks the mask of morality and ethics norms stipulated for women and the different standard stipulated in the patriarchal society favouring men. These are hidden from the visibility of the world.

Life changes unexpectedly for Moyna with the sudden death of Fokir in the cyclone and she has to stand up once again to face life. A friendship begins to develop between Moyna and Piya. Though they could not converse, they spend time together in silence comforting each other. According to the tradition, widows cut their hair and, “Moyna had also cut off her hair, in keeping with the custom, so it was now as short as Piya’s” (HT 394). Piya remembers her promises she has made in her heart to Fokir before his death. She decides to support Moyna and Tutul for their livelihood and she accomplishes it by starting a foundation of her own project in Lusibari in his name.

Moyna is a tribal woman from a less privileged circumstances but she transforms herself by fulfilling her dreams and becomes an inspiration for other women to change themselves in the society. As a woman with soaring aspirations to attain economic independence as a priority, she moves forward to attain education and gain confidence in a professional world. She commands respect in the society as a
nurse and she is not dependant on anyone for her economic needs. It is an obstinacy to survive that makes Moyna the most fascinating character in the novel. She braves all odds to educate herself and fulfils her dream to qualify as a nurse.

Amitav Ghosh’s another energetic character is Kusum, who wants to attain her economic independence through possessing a piece of land to make her livelihood. Her endeavours to acquire it prolongs until her death. Kusum, a strong and self-possessed woman, lives a life with utter courage and strength on the face of storms of life. Kusum’s father gets killed by a tiger while collecting firewood and her mother is offered a job in the city by a landowner, Dilip Choudhury. The mother leaves Kusum at the relative’s care and moves to city unaware of the woes awaiting. She is sold by the land owner to a brothel where the truck drivers visit and spend their nights. Horen, a relative of Kusum, comes to know about Dilip’s business of trafficking women and alerts Kusum regarding the danger he can cause to her life. He places Kusum under the care of the Women’s Union in Lusibari but Dilip’s search for Kusum once again forces Horen to remove her from Lusibari to an unknown place for her safety.

Women’s desire for economic empowerment is exploited by the patriarchy and women have been the victims of this system. Prostitution is the repercussion of male sexuality and unfair economic system which has compelled some women on to this path. Society is unsafe for women as Dubois says: “Society as organized today under manpower, is one grand rape of womanhood, on the highways, in our jails, prisons, asylums, in our homes, alike in the world of fashion and of work” (Dubois 123). This racket of trafficking women into prostitution has destroyed lives of many
women and it is a disease of our society. Kusum, due to the timely intervention of her relative escapes from falling into this cruel system of prostitution.

Later, she meets a man of her heart, gets married and gives birth to a male child, Fokir. Unfortunately her husband, Rajen dies and she is left all alone again with the stigma of being a widow, “. . . dressed in a white sari and . . . no bangles on her wrists and no vermilion in her hair…” (HT 121). Kusum comes to Morichjhapi to live the rest of her life. To own a piece of land for herself is her dream.

Hardworking Kusum joins with other people and commits her life with a dream of becoming an owner of land - a resource that would increase her status financially. The toil of the refugees changes the place into a prosperous land. They work with the hope to own that piece of land as a token of their economic independence. Within few weeks the altered land comes to the visibility of others, “Paths had been laid, the badh – that guarantor of island life – had been augmented; little plots of land had been enclosed with fences; fishing nets had been hung up to dry” (HT 171). The dream of Daniel Hamilton has been becoming true through these people. Hamilton from Scotland has learnt the most important lesson of his life from the school, “labour conquers everything’ (HT 49) and he invites people to come and live a healthy and abundant life without any division or differences among them.

Kusum with other refugees in the island seeks city people’s support to create public opinion so that the government would permit them to stay on and own the land. Kusum puts in great effort to draw the attention of the government and also of the people living in the city with the hope that they would understand the plight of the refugees and would join hands with them in giving pressure to the government. The
refugees take the guests around and show them the hard work put by the people in such short time to transform the whole island. “Saltpans had been created, tube wells had been planted, water had been dammed for the rearing of fish, a bakery had started up, boat – builders had set up workshops, a pottery had been founded as well as an ironsmith’s shop; there were people making boats while others were fashioning nets and crab lines; little marketplaces, where all kinds of goods were being sold, had sprung up” (HT 190). But powerful people always exploit the weak and that is what patriarchy is all about.

Patriarchy is certain about their plans against these poor people and deals with double standard. Knowing well the outcome of the government, the guests speak empty words to them. The changes in the island speak about the sheer industry of the people and the delicious food they serve for the guests has come from the contribution of the settlers. Young and old, and men and women work alike to earn that food to serve the guests. The guests were highly impressed and praise the achievements of the settlers but in Nirmal’s conversation with his friend, he comes to know that, it was all political eyewash. The government has already decided to evict the people from Morichjhapi and the guests are aware of this fact while partying at the expense of these poor people.

Kusum approaches Nilima to ask for medical facilities for the settlers but she refuses to have any involvement with them as they have occupied the government’s land. Nilima is not in a position to create hostility with government and the politicians by supporting the settlers. So she defends her cause and her inability to help them. She is assured that she has already helped the people of Lusibari though
not the settlers, “…over the years I’ve built something – something real, something useful, something that has helped many people in small ways” (HT 214).

The issue of the refugees is taken seriously by the government and it restricts their movements around the island. The boat which carries provision for the settlers is destroyed by the police causing poverty among the people. Kusum begins to eat leaves, “Palatable enough at first, these leaves had proved deadly in the end” (HT 261), thus deteriorating her health to slow death. The confrontation goes on for a year between people and the forces. Women struggle to gain their economic freedom in the male dominated society. Kusum believes that possessing a piece of land fetches her the freedom to be on her own while for other women workers, considers attaining a wage for their work is economic empowerment. According to Jaggar “when women workers are achieving a living wage, they are not just workers winning a concession from capitalism, they are also women winning economic independence from men” (Jaggar 328).

Kusum is totally disappointed when government announces that the island has to be preserved for the animals and not for human beings to inhabit the place. Kusum feels the inhuman attitude of the police as people are not valuable in their sight, “…our lives, our existence, was worth less than dirt or dust” (HT 261). The lives of poor people do not count in front of money, and the love for animals is much more than the love for the fellow beings. Environmental destruction is part of patriarchy and Vandenna Shiva describes in her words, “modern science and development are projects of male, western origin, both historically and ideologically. They are the latest and most brutal expression of a patriarchal ideology which is threatening to annihilate nature and the entire human species” (Shiva xvi).
Kusum is not afraid to face the challenges and during the riot she gets killed. She is a courageous woman who sets out on a journey to look for her mother and the same enthusiasm stands by her when she wants to own a piece of land for her livelihood and economic independence. Nothing could deter her determination to achieve her goal, though the government deals against them with cowardice and brutality. She stands firm till the end and offers her life for the cause.

Kusum is one of the most inspiring characters of the novel. Her courage to voice in the midst of tribulation and suffering and her determination to stand with the refugees in an island called Morichjhapi reveals the mettle of her personality even at the face of sacrificing her life. The astonishing courage and conviction of Kusum to the extent that she is not afraid to die even if it is asked of her and that aspect surprises the reader.

Thus we find in *The Hungry Tide*, Amitav Ghosh has struck a balance in his authorship as a social writer with profuse responsibilities towards the development of women’s status and their sustainability by creating women characters who are socially strong and economically independent. Being a powerful writer, his pro-women novels undoubtedly leave an impact on the readers’ mind and trigger their passion to contribute consciously to build a better society.

Nilima in her own way struggles to make her views of living circumstances for her and others economically stable and progressive. She finds new way of meeting women where they are and create awareness of their situation. Her next step is cultivating desire in the women for the need of change towards a better status. Piya is profoundly daring in taking up a profession on the sea and to spend her day and night
in discoveries about dolphins. Her sensitivity is enormous to human beings as well as to animals. She literally fights out with men in a situation when a tiger was getting killed by men.

Kusum takes a form of a refugee since she had gone in search of her mother. But in the status of a refugee she does not turn back from her fight for a piece of land. She is steady and firm until the end to fight for the cause which reveals her power of determination. Moyna as a tribal girl becomes an inspiration for all women who want to achieve their goals in life. The society’s division based on class and caste does not stop Moyna to sit back but she strives towards success through hard work.

The need of the hour is women leaders, gifted with an eye to explore evils, an attitude to foresee ensuing impacts, an aptitude to metamorphose the entire system and an energy to act in coalition with entire force supportive to building of nation – nation ensuring safety and peace to women. Nilima, Piya, Kusum and Moyna create revolution in their own way through the renderings to the society as leaders. They are sure to impress the readers especially the women readers and motivate them to deeply get involved in social activities and act as agents of metamorphosis.