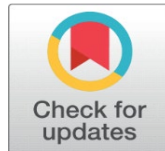


VOICES FROM THE TIDE: HUMAN RIGHTS, IDENTITY AND BELONGING IN AMITAV. GHOSH'S THE HUNGRY TIDE

Devesh Kumar Chaturvedi ¹, Sheeba Himani Sharma ²

¹ Research Scholar Department of English, DDU Gorakhpur University Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh, India

² Professor Department of English, St. Andrew's Collage Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh, India



Received 27 August 2024
Accepted 30 September 2024
Published 07 November 2024

Corresponding Author

Devesh Kumar Chaturvedi,
deveshchaturvedi258@gmail.com

DOI
[10.29121/granthaalayah.v12.i10.2024.5995](https://doi.org/10.29121/granthaalayah.v12.i10.2024.5995)

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Copyright: © 2024 The Author(s).
This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

With the license CC-BY, authors retain the copyright, allowing anyone to download, reuse, re-print, modify, distribute, and/or copy their contribution. The work must be properly attributed to its author.



ABSTRACT

The *Hungry Tide* by Amitav Ghosh examines several topics, such as identity, belonging, and human rights, against India's distinctive and frequently harsh Sundarbans. The book explores the lives of its characters, many of whom battle with societal injustice, displacement, and the quest for both individual and group identity. Ghosh brilliantly addresses a very complicated and historically charged issue in *The Hungry Tide*, shedding light on all of its dimensions. There are many concepts in *The Hungry Tide*, but none have a simple solution. The framework of science or business, where everything can be seen as black or white, is what Kanai and Piya prefer.

Nothing is certain and everything in life is grey in the Sundarbans, where the tides alter the landscape every day. Since tigers are a protected species, killing a tiger that has been preying on a hamlet draws in government officials to administer punishment, even though tigers murder hundreds of people there each year. Any individual's essence is reduced to its most basic form in a setting where life is precarious. Amitav Ghosh allows his characters and society to transcend social boundaries.

Keywords: Human Rights, Displacement, Identity, Violence, Justice, and the Right to a Dignified Life

1. INTRODUCTION

Human rights are extensively discussed throughout the book, particularly as they relate to underprivileged groups. Many people live in the Sundarbans region, including the indigenous tidal people, often known as "mangrove people," who are frequently mistreated or ignored by the government and the general public. The *Hungry Tide*'s characters experience a range of violations of human rights: Displacement and Land Rights: The prospect of displacement brought on by governmental actions and natural calamities is one of the main themes in the book.

Rising sea levels are a continual threat to the Sundarbans, but as part of broader government measures to preserve the ecosystem, the local community also faces the possibility of being evicted. These choices frequently disregard the life of the local populace, notably the underprivileged neighbourhoods. This disregard calls into question how to strike a balance between protecting the environment and human rights, especially the right to a house and land. The history of Morichjhāpi, where the Indian government forcibly expelled lower-caste Bengali immigrants from the Sundarbans, serves as a focal point for the novel's emphasis on the predicament of displaced refugees.

Two of these diverse stories are depicted by Amitav Ghosh in *The Hungry Tide*. First, it looks into displaced people; second, it looks into how humans and animals coexist in complex and hazardous settings. With several characters examining their sense of location within broader societal, cultural, and ecological contexts, the idea of belonging is essential to the book: Belonging to a Culture: Piya also feels alienated and divided between two cultures because of her Indian ancestry and American upbringing. She is searching for a location where she truly belongs in addition to learning about the Sundarbans and its fauna. In addition to being purely personal, this yearning for belonging touches on more significant social and political issues regarding who is entitled to a place in the world.

Ghosh's protagonists, who are a jumble of individuals from various sociocultural backgrounds, are occasionally forced to leave their nation due to historical circumstances or their own free will. Cultural fragmentation affects those who are forcibly removed from their familiar geo-cultural surroundings, and those who migrate in search of better economic opportunities attempt to adapt to their new surroundings. It should come as no surprise that Ghosh's characters represent a variety of cultural manifestations, resulting in numerous encounters with strange socio-cultural contexts. The development of a nomadic, cross-cultural society that engages in creative and cultural products is the most obvious effect of such relocation. The inadequacy of traditional ways of identifying ourselves is demonstrated by the dispersion of people across the continent following European colonialism, the transportation of Africans across the Atlantic, the indentured labor of Asians in colonial outposts, and the voluntary migration of people due to economic opportunities provided by globalization. In other words, global mobility has caused us to reconsider our traditional associations when it comes to identity construction. It's interesting to note that migrants who have been uprooted and relocated by historical circumstances formulate their previous associations in diverse ways. The wide spectrum of responses and reactions of migrants to their previous identities, which were characterized by national, religious, or regional attachments, is depicted by Ghosh.

The relocation of people is shown in Amitav Ghosh's novels as the direct result of several historical events, including European colonialism, the subcontinent's partition, World War II, the British invasion of Burma, and others. The "push" and "pull" variables are imperatives that are commonly used to explain human migration. The socioeconomic pressure that causes people to take flight is sometimes interpreted negatively as the push factor. War, ethnic cleansing, riots, violence, poverty, and other situations that drive people to leave their homes and move to a foreign location are the main examples of this type of push factor. A traumatic sense of dislocation is caused by this type of displacement, and migrants are unable to adapt to the new country.

Pull factors, on the other hand, are those that draw individuals from other places due to the favorable possibilities or facilities they provide. Opportunities for

guest workers have been made possible by technical improvement and economic globalization. Global connectedness in the modern era facilitates migration by making travel more convenient, comfortable, and less dangerous. One of the most obvious instances of this type of migration is Algerian guest laborers in France.

Many people from the Indian subcontinent and other locations are drawn to the Gulf region. Many IT workers have moved to the US and other developed capitalist nations in search of better economic prospects or a higher standard of living. It makes sense that moving to a foreign place has an impact on the migrants' material well-being as well as how they negotiate and engage with the local culture. The migrants face a different socio-cultural environment since they carry their cultural baggage with them, which could have a variety of negative effects. Their identity is shaped by these cultural exchanges.

The subject of identity takes on a distinct dimension in Ghosh's fiction, which is populated by migrants who have been uprooted from their place of birth. This includes its composition, sustenance, and potential re-formulation. The ingrained sense of identity is undermined by the displacement and dislocation that is followed by a sense of loss and a desire to return to one's native country. One observes intricate, multifaceted negotiation in one's connection with the cultures of one's original and host countries because diasporic migration entails moving to a new location and establishing roots there. However, it should be noted that the idea of one's country of origin does not match reality. The modern concept of homeland replaces the fixation on the motherland that is seen to be essential to diasporic speech and imagination.

For instance, Avtar Brah argues that a "homing yearning" rather than a desire to return to one's birthplace is what defines diasporic imagination: "Where is home? In the diasporic imagination, "home" is, on the one hand, a mythical location of desire. Even though the geographic area that is thought to be the place of "origin" can be visited, in this sense it is a place of no return. However, home also refers to a locality's lived experience. Shivering winter evenings, somber grey skies amid the day, heat and dust, the excitement of the first snowfall, or its sounds and smells—all of this is mediated by the historically particular quotidian of social relations (Ghosh, 180).

Salman Rushdie contends that homelands in the diasporic imagination are transformed into "imaginary homelands," and that writers who are drawn by the past and attempt to regain their sense of self as perceived in their native country only construct "imaginary homelands" rather than real villages or cities. Rushdie contends that the idea of a single, stable identity has now been replaced by the world's diasporic reality and migratory experience. He contends that we must acknowledge the truth of our incomplete and multifaceted identities. Rushdie contends that new identity formulations have emerged as a result of migration and dislocation. Homi Bhabha opposes the idea of a stable, rooted identity and views disjunction and dislocation as fruitful conditions.

In *The Hungry Tide* Piya's relocation from her city home to Bengal's marginalized Sunderbans gives her a fresh perspective on science, borders, and universal concepts like ecology, among other things. The location alone illustrates how erratic human relationships and identities can be. Despite her extensive travels due to her research in many regions of the world, Piya has the chance to confirm the veracity of different meta-narratives, such as ecology and environmentalism. She encounters the pitiful situation of the subalterns who are struggling to make ends meet under the most challenging circumstances while conducting her fieldwork.

Piya realized that the so-called universal discourse of ecology cannot be applied to areas like the Sunderbans without issues during her encounter with Fokir and the standoff over the enraged mob's killing of a tiger. A businessman from Delhi who owns a translation service, Kanai, seeks to inform Piya about the human cost associated with implementing different ecological programs funded by international organizations. Piya can comprehend the inauthenticity and invalidity of global schemes that fail to consider local particulars because of the subaltern perspective provided by the lives and actions of the marginalized characters.

Her identity is typically rooted in particular socio-cultural markers, such as ethnicity, gender, occupation, etc. when she is displaced from her familiar surroundings. However, she finds a connection with the locals and considers the island to be her "home." Ghosh illustrates the crippling effects of displacement on refugees who continue to live on the periphery of society. For instance, in *The Hungry Tide*, the dispersion of impoverished and disenfranchised members of East Pakistan's lowest social strata causes them to struggle with existential issues. These people suffer greatly from the loss of their "home," and the Indian nation-state views them as trespassers and squatters, supported by the global environmental rhetoric.

The refugees learn that their relocation to a new location diminishes the significance of their social identity. The refugees do not adopt any hybrid identities as a result of their exile because they lack political and cultural authority. However, they suffer from the nullification of their social identity, which is based on a variety of socio-cultural ties. It is understandable why nation-state thinking labels these individuals as trespassers and undesirables who must be removed to maintain the Sunderbans biological equilibrium. According to Ghosh, the politics of power have a big impact on how displaced and dislocated individuals establish their identities.

However, because he embodies the potential shifts in how one can understand oneself in a different setting, Amitav Ghosh disassociates himself from providing any clear paradigm of identity creation. People may be forced to maintain their specific identity in the face of prevailing rhetoric, even though dislocation can occasionally help them become more conscious of their many affiliations. As a result, they engage in identity politics and fail to recognize the shortcomings of social identity markers.

Ghosh brilliantly addresses a very complicated and historically charged issue in *The Hungry Tide*, shedding light on all of its dimensions. Ghosh connects to an underlying aspect of our human psyche that goes beyond simple intellectual comprehension by presenting the Sunderbans not just as a place but also as a living being with both human and animal characteristics and a mythical foundation. It is not a story of nonstop action and suspense; rather, it is about the fight of every individual to find their place in the world. With tales of the local gods, scientific facts, and the history of the tideland, the author keeps the pages spinning.

It is the foundation of all human emotions, including pride, trust, jealousy, and love. We travel through the center of Tide country with Piya, Kanai, and Fokir. The framework of science or business, where everything can be seen as black or white, is what Kanai and Piya prefer. Nothing is certain and everything in life is grey in the Sunderbans, where the tides alter the landscape every day. Since tigers are a protected species, killing a tiger that has been preying on a hamlet draws in government officials to administer punishment, even though tigers murder hundreds of people there each year. Any individual's essence is reduced to its most basic form in a setting where life is precarious.

The novel's primary focus is on the identification problems of its key characters, such as Piya Roy, an American scientist who has come to study the endangered Irrawaddy dolphin that inhabits the tidal country's rivers, and Kanai Dutt, a

businessman from Delhi. Kanai, who has a translation degree and runs a profitable translation company, travels to the island of Lusibari to see his aunt Nilima. Kanai is conceited, egotistical, and not above abusing his position to further his agenda. He makes an effort to maintain constant control over the relationships in his life. He is "one of those men who likes to think of himself as being irresistible to the other sex," according to Nilima. Sadly, there are plenty of women in the world who are stupid enough to agree with such a man's self-perception, and Kanai seems to be constantly searching for them.

The *Hungry Tide* challenges readers to consider how the Sundarbans, a region that is not well-known outside of India, are seen historically and currently. This is why one of the main characters, Nirmal, starts his notebook with the following extra-textual reasoning: I am writing these words in a place that you will probably never have heard of: an island referred to as Morichjhāpi on the southern edge of the tide country (Nirmal, 67). Characters from many walks of life delve into this type of interplay between environment and community, engage in action and counteraction, and ultimately become part of it. On the other hand, individual identity has been defined in the realm of the "total environment," which is an essential component of it, even if it does not necessarily involve peaceful coexistence.

This is because it properly acknowledges the existence of various human beings, including rich and poor, educated and illiterate, "insiders" and "outsiders," as well as their environment, which includes forests, rivers, and fierce animals like tigers and crocodiles, as well as natural disasters like devastating storms or terrible sea surges. If island studies are to effectively theorize important concepts like "island" and "islander," *The Hungry Tide* poses a fundamental question that has to be answered: what terms do we use to explain the relationships between places and people? A good place to start when answering this question is with the normal terminology used in literature, which includes, of course, words like "character," "setting," "actor," and "stage" [Ghosh \(2006\)](#).

Johansen praises *The Hungry Tide* for avoiding using different Sundarbans locations as "static backdrops" to human activity. The tide country shown in *The Hungry Tide* serves as an example of a region of the world where geography and history interact oddly: As a townie, I saw the jungle of the tidal country as a place of nothingness and a place where time stood still. I now realized that this was a delusion and that the exact opposite was true. I realized that the wheel of time was spinning too quickly to be observed. (Ghosh, 224) The story continues to include meta-fictional commentary on the number of people murdered or mauled by the tigers that raid human communities in addition to the fictional portion. Using her documents and "sheaf of files" (Ghosh, 240), Nilima informs Kanai that at least "a hundred people are killed by tigers each year" (Ghosh, 270). She goes on to say that this statistic just accounts for the "Indian side" (Ghosh, 270) of the Sunderbans; if one were to look at the Bangladeshi side, the death toll may be significantly higher.

Together, Nilima's records and the islanders' struggle against tigers as an "evil force" (Ghosh, 292) appear to depict a complicated geopolitical issue in which the Sunderbans' terrain turns into a troublesome battlefield between natural and human forces. However, why do tigers leave their enclosures to enter human settlements? Nilima's thesis illustrates territoriality issues in an ecological context. She expresses her theory to Kanai and argues with him that the unusual tidal ecological conditions where a significant portion of the forest was submerged every day might be related to tigers entering the villages. According to the argument, this confused the animals' territorial instincts and washed away their scent markers,

raising their threshold of violence (Ghosh, 241). Nature has the authority to remodel, break, or construct the islands and peninsulas as it sees fit. Nature dislikes human attempts to clear forests or plants bad for human settlement, and this frequently results in Nature becoming enraged with humans. Such ongoing conflict is crucial to the development of human society, social groups, folkways, myths, and legends.

Ghosh saves a special critique for municipal government, which instead of being the benevolent force that idealism would anticipate, turns out to be a violent and corrupt entity that doesn't care about the environment or the populace. For example, Piya can only get permission through her uncle in Calcutta, and even this does not ensure a seamless procedure. An individual named Mejda, who "squat of build many shiny chains and amulets hanging beneath his large, fleshy face," is a guard and skipper who accompanies her instead (Ghosh, 68). Since Piya doesn't know anyone else in the tidal region, he and Fokir return to Lusibari to visit Kanai and his aunt Nilima after a few days in the Sunderbans' rivers.

Kanai, Fokir, Piya, Nilima, and Moyna's interactions with the biological and cultural strata of the tidal land drive the main text forward throughout the book. Late in the book, Kanai loses Nirmal's notebook in the rushing currents of the impending storm, further solidifying the metaphor of the island landscape as a library—vast and delicate: "...it was as if the wind had been waiting for this one unguarded moment: it spun him around and knocked him sideways into the water." He emerged spluttering after pushing his hands into the muck. About ten meters away, he clambered to his feet in time to see the notepad bobbling in the current. Before disappearing from view, it remained on the surface for a few more minutes (Ghosh, 376).

After surviving the storm, Piya and Kanai intend to remain in Lusibari, at least temporarily. Piya starts organizing a study project centered on the island, which she wishes to name after Fokir because the information he supplied will be crucial, in the book's last chapter, "Home: An Epilogue": "Every small creek and gully where he had ever seen a dolphin, Fokir took the boat." The journals and commentary' subtext centers on the plight of the refugees and highlights Nirmal's utopian ideals and his love or adoration for Kusum, which contrasts with his wife's practicality.

In the book, the conflict takes the form of "personal" or individual areas. Piya, Kanai, Nirmal, and Nilima on the one hand, and have a strong sense of their "private" areas, which can occasionally clash with the public space they occupy. As a cytologist who must only be with animals and "natives," Piya's personal space frequently clashes with Kanai's and occasionally with the public area.

Conclusion: - Through the lives of his characters—many of whom are disenfranchised and displaced—Ghosh explores the themes of identity, belonging, and human rights in *The Hungry Tide*. The book examines how these people deal with the difficulties of belonging in a world that is changing quickly on both a social and environmental level. The conflicts between individual and collective identities, as well as the difficulties people have when their rights and sense of place are endangered by more significant forces of politics, migration, and environmental change, are highlighted by Ghosh through characters like Piya and Fokir.

In the end, the book makes the argument that human rights are inextricably linked to the larger framework of social and environmental justice and that identity and belonging are malleable, influenced by individual experiences, history, and the physical environment. *The Hungry Tide* by Ghosh challenges oversimplified ideas of justice, identity, and home. The novel challenges readers to reevaluate who belongs there, whose voices are heard, and how history and nature influence human rights

movements by fusing personal stories with historical and environmental issues. The cast of individuals that Ghosh brings into the intricate web of existence in the Sundarbans somewhat reflects the technologically advanced and rational world of government, science, and intelligence.

Although each of these characters embodies one or more of the many stances that can be taken in the nature vs. human rights debate, they are all still very much human, complete with feelings, triumphs, and setbacks. Identity concerns are connected to all of these elements. The author skilfully and enticingly outlines these conflicts in the process of forming one's identity, wherein human endeavor, fate (history), and nature (geography) intersect in the lives of different people with a background in the form of a cultural landscape based on Jangal. Their ideals, customs, and aesthetics are reflected in the local cultural landscape, or the obvious effects of human activity in the Jangal.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

REFERENCES

- Aldama, F. L. (2002). An Interview with Amitav Ghosh. *World Literature Today*, 76(2), 284-290. <https://doi.org/10.2307/40157268>
- Artale, A. (2023). Retrieving Agency Beyond Bare Life: Narratives of Migration in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* and Neel Mukherjee's *A Life Apart*.
- Basu, S. (2020). Exploring the Bond Between Man and Nature in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*. *International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences*. <https://doi.org/10.22161/ijels.55.3>
- Bhushan, V. (2012). An Ecology and Eco-Criticism in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*. *The Creative Launcher*.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2022). Conceptual and Design Thinking for Thematic Analysis. *Qualitative Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1037/qup0000196>
- De, A. (2013). Remapping the 'Bhatir Desh': Reflections on Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*.
- Dutta Sharma, B. (2012). Environmentalism Versus Humanism in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*. *The Journal of Contemporary Literature*, IV(2), 15-22.
- Ghosh, A. (2006). *The Hungry Tide*. New Delhi: Harper Collins.
- Hicks, K. (2006). *The Hungry Tide*. Society & Animals.
- Johansen, E. (2008). Imagining the Global and the Rural: Rural Cosmopolitanism in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*. *Postcolonial Text*, 4.
- Jose, S. E. (2021). Man, Nature, and the World: An Ecocritical Interpretation of Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*.
- Mukherjee, P. (2006). Surfing the Second Waves: Amitav Ghosh's *Tide Country*. *New Formations: A Journal of Culture/Theory/Politics*.
- Weik, A. (2006). The Home, the Tide, and the World: Eco-Cosmopolitan Encounters in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*. *Journal of Commonwealth and Postcolonial Studies*.