

AMITAV GHOSH'S *THE HUNGRY TIDE*: A BIOREGIONAL APPROACH**Ms. Rimpi Sonowal**

Research Scholar, Dept of English, Assam University, Silchar

Prof. Baby Pushpa Sinha

Department of English, Assam University, Silchar

Abstract

The human- nature relation is not a new topic of discourse for us in this twenty first century. Enormous literary pieces are found related with regard to this topic. The concept, Bioregional deals with nature and it basically concentrates on the surrounding nature of a particular region. The term Bioregional consists of two separate terms i.e. Bio and regional which accordingly refer to life or living things and characteristic of a region. Bioregionalism developed as a field of study to give importance to the undeniable relationship between the living beings and the nature of the particular region. Critics like Peter Berg, Raymond Dasmann, David Haenke, Kirkpatrick Sale etc are associated with this concept. 54th Jnanpith awardee Indian writer Amitav Ghosh is well known for his focus on historical setting as well as his geographical exploration and social boundaries in his literary pieces. *The Circle of Reason* (1986), *The Shadow Lines* (1988), *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1995), *The Glass palace* (2000), *The Hungry Tide* (2004) and *Sea of Poppies* (2008), *River of Smoke* (2011), *The Great Derangement* (2016), *Gun Island* (2019) etc are some of his popular works. He is also awarded with several prestigious awards like Sahitya Akademi award, Padma Shre, Ananda Puraskar, Dan David prize etc.

His novel, *The Hungry Tide* (2004) speaks about the struggle of human beings of a particular region named Sundarban to find their space in the world and their dependency upon the surrounding nature in this respect. The aim of this paper is to dig out the instances related to the relationship between human being and nature. It also attempts to study those instances from the perspective of Bioregionalism.

Keywords: Bioregionalism, Human-Relation , Surrounding, Geographical, Sundarban, Space Etc.

With the passage of time, people have become so conscious about their food habits and living style that they do not want to compromise with their physical and psychological needs.. With the high rate of publicity , they quickly get influenced by the advertisement of products without judging them morally. In their run of consuming branded products one after another , people often forget to give value to their locally available products. By using the branded exported products for long, they find the quality of their locally produced products not up to the standard level of their expectation and hence they ignore such products. This growing negotiation towards the surrounding environment has given rise to the consciousness of Bioregionalism. According to the Bioregional thinkers, the concept of Bioregionalism is-

...as members of distinct communities, human being cannot avoid interacting with and being affected by their specific location, place and bioregion: despite

Modern technology, we are not insulated from nature (Mc Ginnis 2).

Through the above quoted lines, importance is given upon keeping harmony with our surrounding environment which should not be ignored at any cost. The surrounding environment affects both our physical body and mental health which is reflected through our appearance.

Bioregionalism is not a recent idea. The aboriginal, native or indigenous people of a particular region have close relation with the environment of that region and perhaps from this the concept has developed. During 1992, the concept Bioregionalism entered the mainstream lexicon. But the rapid development of science and technology, economic condition, high advertisement of other imported industrially produced branded products has been acting as hindrance for the indigenous people in maintaining their culture and tradition. In other words, the traditional system of livelihood is replaced by the artificial comfort of our present day life. But recently, consciousness regarding searching for the valuable flora and fauna in one's bioregion is developing. Various projects and surveys are also completed by Bioregional thinkers in different regions. Allan Van Newkirk first coined the term Bioregionalism and defined the concept as "biographically interpreted culture area... called bioregions" (McGinnis 22). He gave emphasis on the preservation of wild eco system of a particular region. Peter berg and renowned ecologist and cultural historian of California, Raymond Dasmann's joint classic writing "Reinhabiting California" gave a clear description about the concept Bioregionalism in 1977. Gradually people

are made conscious regarding the conservation of our surrounding environment and they pay respect to the environment upon which we all need to depend all the time. Cultural historian and bioregionalist Kirkpatrick Sale in his literary work *Dwellers in the Land: The Bioregional Vision* (1985), states the following points about bioregionalism:

- Machine- based civilization has abandoned the Greek mythological concept that the earth, Gaia, is a single sentient organism.
- As a result, multiple social and ecological exist that threaten the survival of human civilization.
- Bioregionalism offers an alternative paradigm based upon principles including:
 - Division of the earth into vested scales of “natural regions”
 - Development of localized and self- sufficient economics.
 - Adoption of a decentralized structure of governance that promotes autonomy, subsidiarity and diversity.
 - Integration of urban, rural and wild environments.
 - Bioregionalism is connected to anarchist, utopian social list and regional planning traditions (McGinnis 28).

Through the above quoted lines the purpose of bioregionalism is understood which gives importance on regional environment and maintaining traditional and cultural value by paying respect to nature. The extracted lines also throw light on the economic independency which can be achieved with the help of regional environmental source.

The setting of Amitav Ghosh's novel *The Hungry Tide* (2004) is on an Island named Sundarban. Sundarban was declared a World Heritage Site and Biosphere Reserve by the UNESCO on 7th December, 1997 and on 4th May, 1984 respectively. The novel, *The Hungry Tide* (2004) depicts the natural scenario of Sundarban and the life of its inhabitants. It also depicts a clear picture of human- nature relationship through its narrative. The narrative of the novel also throws light on the issue of conflict between human and nature. The novel again progresses through multiple stories related to the region. The whole story of the novel revolves around two visitors of Sundarban i.e Kanai Dutta, a Delhi based businessman aged forty and

Piyali Roy, an Indo- American Cetologist aged twenty . The purpose of Kanai's visit to Sundarban is to visit his aunt named, Nilima Bose who resides at Lusibari in Sundarban. She is related with various developmental organizations at Lusibari. Kanai is a translator and interpreter by profession and hence he can speak several languages fluently. On the otherhand, Piyali visits Sundarban to study the Marine Mammals which is her specialization for study. Both Kanai and Piyali meet each other in the train to Sundarban and there they get to know each other well. After becoming aware of Piyali's purpose of visit, Kanai volunteers to help her in Sundarban in times of need. Piyali can neither speak Bengali nor Hindi and the reason behind it can be understood from the following lines:

‘You have a Bengali name,’ he said, raising an eyebrow. ‘And yet you know no Bangla?’

‘It's not my fault really,’ she said quickly, her voice growing defensive.

‘I grew up in Seattle. I was so little when I left India that I never had a Chance to learn’ (Ghosh 12).

Through the above quoted lines, it becomes clear that she has grown up in foreign land and hence she has not got any chance to learn her native language. Piyali is provided a native guide named Fokir by the Department of Forest to continue her survey in Sundarban and Kanai reaches his aunt's home. Gradually, through the survey, Piyali comes across several instances related to nature and living beings of the region. Being an Ecologist, Piyali always attempts to protect animals at any cost. Piyali continues to survey about marine mammals with the help of native guard Fokir and observes several species of mammals like Orcaella, Dolphins, and Crocodiles. Though the inhabitants of Sundarban who migrated to the place during the partition of India in 1947 struggled a lot to survive in the region because of their constant crush with wild deadly animals yet they have a different emotion for the region . Through the narration of Piyali, it becomes clear as to how people are dependent upon the surrounding environment of Sundarban. Being neglected by the central government as wild refugees, the people of Sundarban are always deprived of several governmental aids. The result of this is that they are leading a very simple life in harmony with nature. Their life style is very pathetic. The soil does not bear the good crops and hence they cannot produce abundance of food. The following lines describe the matter better:-

The soil bore poor crops and could not be farmed all year around. Most families subsisted on a single daily meal. Despite all the labour that had been invested in the embankments, there were still periodic breaches because of floods and storms: each such inundation rendered the land infertile for several years at a time. The settlers were mainly of farming stock who had been drawn to Lusibari by the promise of free farmland. hunger drove them to hunting and fishing and the results were often disastrous. (Ghosh 1264)

From the above quoted lines, the struggle of the people of Lusibari has been portrayed who are devoid of the facilities from the government. And this has made them dependant upon the locally available elements for their survival. Besides farming, they are also dependent upon fishing and hunting through which they earn a minimum amount for surviving in the tide country. They lead a very risky life there. Attacks from the dangerous animals, natural calamity and storms are common issue for them. Maximum people are fisherman by profession. Many people have risked their life while collecting honey, wax, firewood, sour fruit of Kewra tree etc. Almost every day they get to hear the news of death at least of one person due to the attack of wild animals. Many women have become widow due to death from this attack . The following lines describe Nilima's observation in the region:

...At the wells and by the ghats there often seemed to be no one who was not a widow. Making inquiries, she learnt that in the tide country girls were brought up on the assumption that if they married, they would be widowed in their twenties- their thirties if they were lucky. This assumption was woven, like a shein of dark wool, into the fabric of their lives: when menfolk went fishing it was the custom for their wives to change into the garments of widowhood (Ghosh 1276).

Through the above quoted lines, Amitav Ghosh shows the reality of the region where people survive every moment with the fear of death. Through the observation of Nilima it is understood that women are matured enough to accept their faith whatever may be in their destiny. The custom of wearing the dress of widow while their husbands go for fishing reveals their practical way of viewing the circumstances and also signifies their courage to accept the challenges in life. But people have deep faith in God and hence some oral tales like miracle of Bon Bibi who is

referred to as the forest protector are very common among people. They believe that Bon Bibi protects and guards them against all the turmoil. In fact Piyali has observed that dolphins also help the fisherman in their fish hunting. Despite having several difficulties in life, people of Sundarban always make best attempt for survival in this barren, unyielding and salty tracts of the lands of Sundarban without any complaint because they know that they will not be welcomed at any other corner of the country except their own region.

Through the narration of Kanai the history of the place is revealed. Kanai explains the instances of the past by going through the pages of the diary of his uncle, Nirmal Bose who used to write diaries. The political issues related to the place are also revealed through the pages of Nirmal's diaries. By taking into account all these instances, Piyali has also realized the real cause of constant clash between human and animals in Sundarban. The instance of Fokir's death while trying to save her in the sudden storm in the river makes her understand better about the struggle and sufferings of the inhabitants of the region. She has understood that science alone cannot reach through the depth of the study all the time.

Through the bird's eye view of Kanai and Piyali, the daily life of inhabitants of Sundarban is reflected in the novel. Despite any government or non- government aid, people are forced to depend totally on the natural surrounding for their survival. Though they lead a very simple life but their innocent and helping nature are depicted through the narrative of the story. Both human and wild animal of the region depend upon each other for their survival. Nobody has any certainty about his or her life but then they possess a very protective nature towards their region. And this is a great lesson to be learnt from the locality of Sundarban. The native people are the best survivors from the perspective of Bioregional thinkers who believe in harmony with the surrounding nature despite destroying it or neglecting it.

Their use of bamboo materials, wooden products, consumption of locally available fresh natural fishes, flesh, crops, vegetables etc are in a way a great and valuable lesson to be learnt from them. The present situation of Covid- 19 resembles the situation of people of Sundarban. Due to the lockdown everywhere, people are now not in a position to purchase everything they wish. On the other hand, they are searching for their happiness and satisfaction in whatever is available to them in their surrounding nature. This lesson of gaining satisfaction from whatever we have with us is now taught to us by the present pandemic created

by Covid- 19 situation. And this was perhaps taught to us long back by the believers of Bioregionalism. The native people selling fish and other locally available edibles to other places signifies their self- sufficient economic upgradation which is ultimately a good sign of progress. The visit of tourists like Piyali for several academic or non- academic purposes to the region also contributes to the economy of the region. The instances of people becoming self- dependent in the novel can be seen from their hunting, farming, fishing and doing such other works themselves. This shows how they were independent and had achieved freedom from all the power and rule. Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2004) teaches us such significant lessons of becoming practical and self- dependent. It also teaches us to develop our surrounding society ourselves rather than escaping from the situation and complaining about it in order to get sympathy from others about the existing difficulties.

From the above discussion, the importance of Bioregionalism can be understood in our daily life which should always be valued at any cost. The present situation of Covid- 19 is a good example to understand this fact ver clearly which has made people learn a lot of lessons about the struggle of life. Amitav Ghosh's concentration is on the geographical area as well as on the life style of the inhabitants of Sundarban. The relation between them has similarity with our present pandemic situation and therefore the understanding of the Bioregional as a theoretical perspective becomes very relevant during this time which can be learnt from the several instances of Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2004).

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