

## **Major Themes in the Hungry Tide**

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**Abstract**

*Amitav Ghosh's seductive novel The Hungry Tide appeared in 2004, depicts several ebbs and tides which frolic the human life every mysterious leaving behind dramatic changes and tumults. The novel shows Ghosh's concern for the individual against the broader historical and geographical backdrop. The present paper deals with the major themes which are represented through the novel 'The Hungry Tide'.*

**Keywords:** *humanitarian attitude, individual concern, ebb and tide, hungry tides*

Reference to this paper should  
be made as follows:

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*Major Themes in the Hungry  
Tide,*

Notions 2018,  
Vol. IX, No.3,  
pp. 56-71,

Article No.9

Online available at :  
[http://anubooks.com/  
?page\\_id=5005](http://anubooks.com/?page_id=5005)

## **Introduction**

Amitav Ghosh's seductive novel *The Hungry Tide* tries to fasten the readers by the fascinating and picturesque description of an immense archipelago of islands known as 'Sundarbans' which means 'the beautiful forests'. The most common species in this ecosystem is mangrove – *Heriteria minor*, the Sundari tree. This place is also known as 'bhatir desh' among the local inhabitants, which means 'the tide country' as it is frequently visited by ebbs and tides.

The Hungry Tide depicts several ebbs and tides which frolic the human life very mysteriously leaving behind dramatic changes and tumults. This tumult can be felt in the mind and heart of the characters, their relationships and their pattern of life. It is a great swirl of recent issues, be they social, political, or environmental and the author presents these issues with seductive narration, with romance, suspense and poetry.

The plot also concerns itself with the conflict between government and the local populace, regarding the issue of the Bengal tiger, which has killed thousands of people, but the government is keen on protecting this endangered species at the cost of the human lives. In this way, Ghosh has raised a very controversial issue: whose interests are more important – local peoples or local animals? This issue is creating a conflict between man and animal or man and authority in all areas near every national park, sanctuary and protected zone. The human life is given less priority in the name of wild life protection, the tigers frequently attack and kill the people but the authorities are more interested in preserving the tigers. To quote Sarika P. Auradhkar:

“But in the name of tiger preservation, human lives are threatened; the tigers routinely maul and often kill islanders. Though there are the obvious modern devices that might be used to protect the islanders, the state allows the deaths to continue.”(Auradhkar,2007:118)

Simultaneously, Ghosh has created such characters as are aware of the futility of the dividing shadow lines among individuals, be they of any religion, caste and creed, nation and social status. They are eager to cross these lines at any cost. The theme of crossing the borders and obliteration of it through the portrayal of the flood on land is always there.

In the novel, *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh seems to be obsessed with personal divisions between men and women and their individual strife. It is suggested that the social taboos and barriers created by language and other social institutions break automatically when the medium of communication becomes mutual understanding

and a shared chemistry between two individuals. Despite apparent differences, Piyali and Fokir are able to communicate with each other when they are out in the sea exploring marine life. Their platonic love and mutual understanding and finally Fokir's sacrifice for the sake of Piya's life make the novel very intriguing.

Theme of adaptation in hostile terrain is also there. Nirmal and Nilima, in the beginning, could not adapt themselves to the adverse conditions of their new habitat, be they natural or manmade. The people of island lived there lives without the basic need of living; they were just passing their life in destitution. The land wasn't fertile enough to yield sufficient crops to fill the bellies of the hunger stricken people; neither there was any regular supply from outside. The author describes the pathetic state in his words:

“For their first few months on the island, they were in a state akin to shock. Nothing was familiar: everything was new. What little they knew of rural life was derived from the villages of the plains: the realities of the tide country were of strangeness beyond reckoning.”(79)

“...in Lusibari, hunger and catastrophe were a way of life. They learnt that after decades of settlement, the land had still not been wholly leached of its salt, the soil bore poor crops and couldn't be farmed all year round, and most families subsisted on a single day meal.”(The Hungry Tide-79)

The people had to struggle a lot to keep their body and soul together. In order to satisfy their hunger they started hunting and fishing, but ironically, instead of being able to hunt, they were hunted by the predators. “No day seemed to pass without news of someone being killed by a tiger, a snake or a crocodile.”(The Hungry Tide-81) In this way, the author tries to raise the issue of the clash between man and wild animal in such areas where there is coexistence as well as a struggle for life between them.

Nirmal and Nilima being overwhelmed by the pathetic conditions of the people wanted to do something for them. These poor people were settled there with promises to be provided free farmlands. But it was beyond understanding what the use of that barren land was; the truth was that they were befooled. What to say about living there with peace and happiness in their homes, they were losing their life one by one in that harsh island country. Most of the women in Lusibari were widows as their husbands fell prey to misfortune leaving behind the beleaguered families to suffer endlessly.

What a tortured life they were living can be understood by knowing the fact that when the men folk went outside for fishing, their wives used to take off their

bangles and wash the vermilion from their heads in order to prepare themselves for the inevitable misfortune they were likely to face. Nilima became restless seeing the plight of those women who became widow in their young age and the challenges they were destined to undergo after losing their male counterparts.

“Nilima learnt, even more than on the mainland, widowhood often meant a lifetime of dependence and years of abuse of exploitation” (81)

There was nothing for the people except a lifelong strife and difficulties. Nilima wanted to do something for them. She had her individual ideas and plans and in order to give practical colour to her dreams, she sowed the seedling of an idea which grew up and ultimately became an institution named the Badabon Trust. In this way Nilima’s individual and lone idea and hard work became a source of hope for all the destitute and poor women of the island. The Union’s work was to make plans for income generating projects like knitting, sewing, dyeing yarn etc.

Nilima’s efforts and dedication, undoubtedly, brought positive changes in the life of the people, especially of the women, who were so far helpless. She had all the requisite qualities of an able administrator and organiser. She was both strict and compassionate. Her love for Nirmal was beyond measure. She had a close affection for Kanai. She also seemed to be affectionate for Piya, Kusum and Moyna. But her tenderness never became hindrance to her work, when Kusum came to ask her for some aid to Morichjhapi, she directly refused to help as she didn’t want to involve herself in that matter as according to her, the people of Morichjhapi were squatters who were encroaching on the government property and directly or indirectly it was going to be a threat for environment as well as for her trust.

Likewise, she did not agree at all with Nirmal’s views for she found them utopian and impractical. Even when he tried to persuade her, she strongly opposed his views and denied to go against the government. To quote her:

“You have no idea of how hard we’ve had to work to stay on the right side of government. If the politicians turn against us, we’re finished. I can’t take that chance.(214)

Amitav has tried to focus on the individual’s obsessions and idiosyncrasies in this novel, the hungry tides are raging not only on the shores, but also on the psyche of individuals and their relationships. For Nilima, the Trust was everything; she couldn’t bear any kind of harm to it. She had fostered it like her own child. She had laboured a lot to establish it. Her attachment to her enterprise can be seen in her words when she was having an argument with Nirmal:

“And if you ask me what I will do to protect it, let me tell you, I will fight for

it like a mother fights to protect her children. The hospital's future, its welfare – they mean everything to me, and I will not endanger them.(214)

On the other hand, Nirmal was a person who had nothing to do with the practical side of life. He always remained lost in his ideal dreams and poetry. He was a poet at heart who routinely invoked Rilke and at the time of retirement realized that he never lived up to his revolutionary ideals in comparison to that of his wife. His papers left for Kanai contains an account of the events at the end of his life, which revolved round Kusum, her son Fokir, and the catastrophic struggle of the dispossessed to settle a new colony in Morichjhapi. He knew Nilima's sacrifices for him, but still he couldn't resist his affection for Kusum.

"I felt myself torn between my wife and the woman who had become the muse I'd never had; between the quiet persistence of everyday change and the heady excitement of revolution – between prose and poetry. (216)

Nirmal wanted to do something for the voiceless and choiceless people of Morichjhapi and being an idealist, what else he could do except writing about their struggles. His longing was to empower and give voice to the dreams and aspirations of those people through his words. But Nilima's cautionary words "stay away from Morichjhapi" were echoing in his ears. He felt himself like a pendulum shuttling between Kusum and Nilima. Ghosh's style of depicting his dilemma is very realistic which resembles the modern man's conflict. Ghosh's characters are also aware of the futility of division. Nirmal's thoughts prove this. Being a teacher and leftist, he never supported any kind of division which separates men from each other.

"As headmaster I had felt it my duty not to identify myself with any set of religious beliefs, Hindu, Muslim or anything else."(222)

The couple had passion to serve humanity but still they have differences in their views, they had same aims but different methods to execute them. One wanted to bring changes by revolutionary methods and the other by welfare works without disturbing the present system. One was an idealist and the other a pragmatic. Nilima started to run a trust with the aid of the government and didn't want to do anything which was against the system, but Nirmal like a dissident Marxist dreamed of a revolution. He visited Morichjhapi against Nilima's wish. When he heard that the government was going to take measures, he became anxious to help the settlers. He wanted to convey the message to Kusum and the settlers about the Forest Preservation Act and about Section 144. He couldn't stop himself from going there. In his own words:

"For Nilima's sake I tried to keep up appearances. I tried to present as

normal as front as I could. But I couldn't sleep that night and by the time morning came around, I knew I would make my way to Morichjhapi in whatever way I could, even at the expense of a confrontation with Nilima.”(252)

Ghosh's theme of individual concern cannot be properly appreciated unless his characters are studied. They are very confident, self-dependent, brave and daring. They are obsessed to fulfil their aims and visions and they have potential to do so. Nilima's ambition to serve the people issued the trust, Nirmal doesn't care anything when the welfare of the settlers comes forward, Piya is single minded to study the marine mammals and for this she takes a risky expedition, Kusum is a bold and unyielding woman who doesn't tire out of the strife for her livelihood, Fokir and Moyna are also devoted to their individual principles. The unyielding nature of the characters and their idiosyncrasies make the novel very catching.

From the very beginning of the novel, Piya appears before the readers as a confident and self-dependent girl who faces difficulties but solves them using her discretion. She is used to undertaking journeys alone even without a guide or interpreter. When she climbs the compartment of the train, she herself carries her backpacks, without taking the help of any porter. Seeing her confident, Kanai becomes her admirer at the first sight.

“There was a strength in her limbs that belied her diminutive size and wispy build; she swung the backpacks into the compartment with practised ease and pushed her way through a crowd of milling passengers.”(5)

Piya is undeterred and confident. Her experienced eyes identify Fokir, an unlettered and ignorant young man of the tide country as a potential help to carry out her research project. Ghosh creates a strange relationship between Piya and Fokir, the former is a highly educated and sophisticated woman, while the latter is an uneducated rustic. They can't do verbal communication as both are unfamiliar to each other's language. Fokir has no knowledge of English and similarly Piya does not know Bengali, despite her Bengali roots. But strangely Piya decides to proceed her research work with the help of Fokir. May be she perceives his first hand knowledge of the tide country and the marine mammals and his simple nature. Being a clever woman of wide experience of a variety of people, she sees that Fokir can't be any threat to her. She spends several nights on the boat and becomes attuned to the waves. Her striving nature is visible in her physical appearance:

“Over years of practice, her musculature had become attuned to the water and she had learned to keep her balance almost without effort, flexing her knees instinctively to counteract the rolling.”(72)

The theme of individual concern is in the creation of every character, be it Kanai, Piyali, Nirmal, Nilima or the islanders. They all are concerned to their individual thoughts and devoted to take them to their practical side. The mission, they have in their hands, is of first priority; and they are well prepared for them. Piya is well acquainted with the waves and tides of the seawater. She always takes with her all the necessary instruments and all the necessary things with her. She is dexterous enough to manage even in the most unfavourable conditions. She eats only for her survival not for any taste or delight. The following lines prove this:

“On every survey since, she had equipped herself with a cache of mineral water and portable food – principally high nutrition bars. On occasion, she also carried a jar or two of Ovaltine, or some other kind of powder for making malted milk. When there was milk to be had, fresh or condensed, she managed to get by on very little, a couple of protein bars a day was all she needed. The procedure had the added advantage of limiting the use of unfamiliar, and sometimes unspeakable, toilets.”(96)

She is also prepared to spend the night anywhere in any climate, weather or terrain. She is always equipped with her own matting. She is indeed a specimen of a true discoverer, devoted fully to her research work. Sarika Pradiprao Auradkar aptly portrays her distinguished character:

“Piya Roy is the daughter of Bangla parents who had immigrated to Seattle. She’s a woman used to solitude and rigors of the life of a scientist working in the field. Piya often works in areas where she knows neither the customs nor the language, and can survive for days on just energy bars and ovaltine as she studies river dolphins.”(Auradhkar,2007:121)

But Piya isn’t only selfishly devoted to her work alone; she is also concerned with the humanity and environment around her wherever she is. She has real concern and consideration for Fokir and his son Tutul who is accompanying them in the boat. Like a professional and travelling discoverer, Piya adapted herself to every type of conditions, be they geographical, linguistic or cultural. She does not have any problem with Fokir who is a quite illiterate, nothing to do with the modern sophisticated world.

Ghosh develops the theme of mutual relationship among individuals through the characters of Fokir and Piya and tries to reassert that there is something platonic beyond the sphere of physical nature which most of us occupy. In this sphere of mutual understanding, language is a secondary thing; dispensable to the level of nothingness. Without the means of verbal communication, they can understand every message conveyed to each other, defying the arrogance of languages.

In the novel, Ghosh shows a harmonious blending of Hindu and Muslim traditions through the character of Fokir. Piya who was raised in the western society respects all kinds of culture and traditions and when she finds this harmonious blending of traditions in his society, she appreciates it. She is pleased to see Fokir performing a strange combination of Hindu and Muslim rituals. For a time, when she hears him chanting word like Allah, she thinks him to be a Muslim, but to her great amazement, he begins to perform some actions, which resemble her mother's Hindu pujas. In a country like India, where religious fanaticism has been a great problem, a simpleton is teaching the lesson of religious tolerance.

“Fokir began to recite some kind of chant, with his head bowed and his hands joined in an attitude of prayer. After she had listened for a few minute, Piya recognised a refrain that occurred over and over again – it contained a word that sounded like Allah. She had not thought to speculate about Fokir's religion, but it occurred to her now that he might be Muslim. But no sooner had she thought about this, than it struck her that a Muslim was hardly likely to pray to an image like this one. What Fokir was performing looked very much like her mother's Hindu pujas – and yet the words seemed to suggest otherwise. But what did it matter either way? She was glad just to be there as a witness to this strange little ritual.”(The Hungry Tide-152)

There is a strange description of a local legendary goddess Bon Bibi, who protects the local people from the tides and wild animals. According to the story, Bon Bobi is a good spirit and she presides over the forests, rivers and seas of the tide country. She also fights the evil spirit Dokkhin Rai who takes the life of the people in the form of a tiger. The legend has a deep effect in the very conscience of the people and every incident either good or evil is associated with the blessing or wrath of the spirit and they often visit her shrine to pay their obeisance. The epic of Bon Bibi is tremendously affected by Islamic influences. The description of this legend reveals Ghosh's interests in anthropology, history and mythology.

Piya is portrayed as a specimen of the modern woman by the author. Her self-confidence is really praiseworthy. It is her daring instinct, which develops the plot of the novel. When Mashima, this is what Nilima is called in Lusibari, advises something to protect her in the tide country, she proudly answers that she can look after herself. She can distinguish between a flirt and a genuine talk. Being an expert in recognizing people, she likes Fokir's simplicity more than Kanai's ostentation. Her trust in the sincerity and innocence of Fokir ultimately turns out to be true.

The relationship between Piya and Fokir is the most interesting and



beautiful part of the novel and the author's description of their tryst is breathtaking. As a true research student, Piya does not leave any occasion of learning something new even from a rustic like Fokir. After observation, she finds extraordinary abilities in him and his company proves to be one of the best things in her life. She herself realises his invaluable qualities and many times, she describes them proudly.

"I've worked with many experienced fishermen before but I've never met anyone with such an incredible instinct : it's as if he can see right into the river's heart."(267)

"Fokir's abilities as an observer are really extraordinary. I wish I could tell you what it was like to be with him these last few days – it was one of the most exciting experiences of my life."(268)

Fokir tries to be true to Piya's expectations, he always proves to be reliable and trustworthy. Without any verbal communication, they develop a very unique understanding, which is beyond description. Fokir has a strange feeling of love for her and he is ready to sacrifice his life for her safety. When they are struggling against the storm for their survival, he does not leave any attempt to save her life. The platonic love and concern for Piya ultimately takes its price in the form of death of Fokir. At the time of death, he utters his wife and son's names and she is so much impressed that it leaves an indelible impression on her conscience and consequently it culminates in her reciprocating decision to stay in Lusibari forever with a project dedicated to and named after Fokir. May be it is the love or a compensatory gesture, she does her best for the welfare of the grieved family and even raises fund for them. But it was undoubtedly her love and homage for Fokir that she resolved to devote herself to the family and the tide country. The unexpressed love between these two individuals from poles apart, forms the most captivating episode of the novel.

The theme of individual strife and concern of one individual to the other is one of the basic themes of the novel and the author portrays this theme through many relations, be it between husband and wife or simply between man and woman outside the nuptial knot. There are many types of relations and most of them are between two sexes and they have paradoxes. On the one hand, there are Piyali and Fokir and, on the other, hand there are Nirmal and Nirmala; both relations are based on love, but there are many differences between these two relations. The paradox is that the individuals who cannot communicate with each other in the manmade language can understand each other better than those whose marriage is the outcome of the expressed and told love. The relation between Rajen and Kusum, Nirmal's fascination

for Kusum is also noteworthy. Thus, the relation between man and nature and man and man is the central theme of the novel. As Sarika Pradiprao Auradkar comments:

“The novel is in part about mankind’s relationship with nature. But central to the story is the possibility and impossibility of human relationship.”(Auradhkar,2007:123)

Nilima who remains always busy in the work of the trust leads the life like a nun, while her husband’s interests keep on diverting toward Morrighjhap and Kusum. For him Kusum is a source of inspiration, she has lived a life of great struggle and Nirmal wants to give words to her struggle. She lost her father in her girlhood and her mother lived a life of destitution. the following lines from the novel reveal how difficult it is for a girl to live alone in this brutal world.

“Horen appeared in front of them, panting. ‘Kusum’ he said, ‘we have to go. I saw Dilip – he’s here with some men, looking for you. You’re not safe here. You have to get away.”(The Hungry Tide-109)

Not only Kusum but her mother had to face such a hostile and inimical condition. Kusum describes the predicaments of her mother in the following lines:

‘she was working in a place where truck-drivers came, to sleep on charpais and buy women for the night, I went there with Rajen and in secret we met: I fell upon Ma, but couldn’t bring myself to speak. For so long I’d been waiting, but now my heart broke: her body was wasted, her face thin and drawn. “Don’t look Kusum”, she said, “Don’t touch me with your eyes; think of me as I was, before your father died. I blame that Dilip he’s more demon than man. He said he’d find me work, and where he brought me: to eat leaves at home, would have been a better fate. He sold me, that danob, to others of his kind.”(163)

Kusum’s mother was quite insecure about Kusum’s future but for her relief Rajen promised her that he could be their caretaker if she let Kusum marry him. But the predicament and tragedy of her life didn’t stop here and her hostile fate brought her the most tragic episode of her life in the form of the death of her husband. Kusum again fell in the same darkness of miserable life with her son Fokir and was forced to leave Dhanbad for the tide country.

Amitav’s experiences in Bangladesh run through his major novels and The Hungry Tide is no exception. He depicts the political upheaval and the massacre, which took place in the country leaving several people to destitution, famine, illegal trafficking and police brutality. The novel is a sad record of the human suffering in the form of political exploitation, sex slavery, child labour, and people being killed by the dangerous man eating predators. The novel has many compelling stories both

beautiful and harrowing. On the one hand, there are beautiful encounters between men and women and, on the other; there are the tales of suffering which are pathetic and heart-rending. Through the following words told by a woman, the author tries to describe the problem of cross border infiltration of the people due to political crisis:

“Once we lived in Bangladesh, in Khulna jila: we’re tide country people, from the Sundarban’s edge. When the war broke out, our village was burned to ash; we crossed the border, there was nowhere else to go. We were met by the police and taken away; in buses they drove us, to settlement camp.”(165)

The novel is also a sad record of those people who have to struggle for their identity after leaving their native places, they are either exploited by the government machinery or they fell in the hands of the local goons. They have to live a life of predicament and self-denying. Amitav describes the conflict between the government and the refugees who were trying to settle in Morichjhapi. They were branded as gangsters who were trying to occupy and encroach on the land illegally. They were voiceless people whose point of view was unheeded.

Even their children have no access to education because most of the time they have to do menial works in order to fill their bellies. What an irony of fate is that .Going to school for them was wastage of time and a very unimportant work. Amitav, though living in the U.S., feels the pulse of the marginalised people of his native country better than the authors who live in the vicinity of these unfortunates and he does not leave any effort to bring all the marginalised ones to the centre of the stage. In the present novel, he not only gives voice to these voiceless people who are victimised by the political disorder, but also satirises the system for depriving the future generation of their basic amenities like elementary education and health. What a shame that the parents of these children repeat the same tale of irony:

“Our children here have no time to waste. Most of them have to help their families find food to eat.”(173)

With the passage of time, the condition of these settlers keeps on worsening in every aspect. The government doesn’t leave any stone unturned to take very undemocratic and inhuman measures to evacuate the place. There are, police personals fighting with their own fellow citizens equipped with fatal weapons in the name of rubber bullets and tear gas grenades and killing thousands of innocent people for the sake of killing, resulting in the chaos and an atmosphere of panic and anxiety:

“The very next day, the government announced that all movement in and out of Morichjhapi was banned under the provisions of the Forest Preservation Act. What was more; Section 144, the law used to quell civil disturbances was imposed on

the whole area: this meant it was a criminal offence for five people or more to gather in one place.”(252)

The novel has vivid description of the skirmishes between the helpless settlers and the well equipped government machinery. The settlers are without any homes and shelters and the tide country, which they see their future home, is being snatched from them. Where should they go? None of them knows. The theme of belonging and identity comes to highlight in this episode of the novel. It is a great irony that the impoverished human beings are being evicted by their empowered counterparts in the name of wild life preservation. When no option is left, the people are forced to protest and confront the police machinery, which results in the killing of many of them.

Ghosh's extraordinary themes are the outcome of his colourful characters, who are lively, defiant and always changing. Amitav Ghosh is, no doubt, a writer of versatile genius. He is skilled enough to develop a number of themes in a single novel and they are closely linked to give it an organic unity. *The Hungry Tide* discusses many important concerning subjects and among them is the problem of environment and eco-system. Many crucial questions relating to eco-system are raised by the author. He tries to convey a message through the novel that there are many sensitive zones in our earth and man's unnatural activities in these zones may bring catastrophic results. Like an environmentalist, Amitav tries to raise the issue of the vulnerability of the tide country of Sundarbans.

While going through the novel, the readers come across the fact that within six years, over four thousand people have been killed by the tigers in the region. The question is: who is encroaching on the habitat of the other, man or tiger? The most accepted answer is that the over population of human beings is causing in the erosion of the forestlands and consequently a frequent conflict between man and tiger takes place. But for the tiger country, things are different. The atmospheric and geographic conditions of that sensitive zone are quite different from other parts of the country. Man can be the biggest enemy and danger to the tigers in other areas but in the tide country, according to Nilima, tigers are different from those elsewhere. She says that it is not only man, who disturbs nature but sometimes animals and other creatures also disturb the harmony. As she tells Kanai:

“In other habitats, tigers only attacked human beings in abnormal circumstances: if they happened to be crippled or were otherwise unable to hunt down any other kind of prey. But this was not true of the tide country's tigers; even young and healthy animals were known to attack human beings. Some said that this

propensity came from peculiar conditions of the tidal ecology, in which large parts of the forest were subjected to daily submersions. The theory went that this raised the animals' threshold of aggression by washing away their scent markings and confusing their territorial instincts."(241)

The Sundarbans are protected areas where the world famous Bengal tigers are given sanctuary; they roam about the forest and the human colonies without any resistance. The dwellers of this tide country have frequent conflicts with the tigers and in this conflict; naturally the helpless people become the meal of the predators. The tides of the region wash away the scent marks of the animals and they, losing their way, enter the human habitats and the price is paid by the people, by losing their near and dear ones. Hence, in the name of wildlife preservation, man's life is endangered in the area; the government does not take any measures to protect their life and property. This irony is expressed by the novelist from the mouth of Kusum:

"This island has to be saved for 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)

The conditions of the islanders are really very much pathetic and ironical. They aren't able to understand why the government undermines their right to live a safe life in their own native land. If tigers can kill them, why cannot they kill them for their safety? After all, they are also a part of the eco-system. These problems can be understood by even the illiterate people like Kusum, but the policy makers of the country don't try to understand and solve these issues. Kusum discusses these matters with Nirmal in the novel and her words are very touching, striking, pathetic and ironic.

"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 the water and the soil. No human being could think this a crime unless they have forgotten that this is how humans have always lived – by fishing, by clearing land and by planting the soil."(262)

There have been several killings by the tigers in the Sundarbans, but the actual figures are always underreported. If such cases had happened in the developed countries or any territory inhabited by the so-called elites, it would have created a worldwide debate and even the instant killing of the man-eaters. But how ironic and revolting it is to think that the killing of these voiceless people has nothing to do with the government and the nature biologists. They can feel the suffering of the animals

but not that of the poor people because at present, a wild life lover is regarded as a celebrity more than a humanitarian.

The theme of individual concern again comes to the fore in the introduction of many other characters and their breathtaking struggles. Among them, there is a woman character named Moyna. Her personality is charming and her character is full of vitality. She is a woman of boldness and amazing level of confidence. From the very beginning to the end of the novel, we find her struggling against the odds of life with great perseverance and patience. She is a specimen of the new rural women who are anxious enough to join the mainstream of modern urban women by being self-dependent, educated and bold. She is doing nursing training in the hospital run by Nilima. Like Nilima, she dominates her husband and decides the course of his life herself. Kanai is drawn to her ambition and strong will:

“Her ambition was so plainly written on her face that Kanai was assailed by the kind of tenderness we sometimes feel when we come across childhood pictures of ourselves – photographs that reveal all-too-unguardedly the desires people spend lifetimes in learning to dissimulate.”(135)

She senses that her husband is dumbly and foolishly doted towards the alien girl and in some occasions, she rudely expresses her anger and jealousy. Her premonitions prove to be true and, to her great dismay, Fokir dies in saving her rival. But later the same woman comes to her help and devotes her life and everything to the tide country; it is not only a ray of hope for Moyana and Tutul but for the helpless islanders. Piya is a hope for them because the philanthropic works initiated by Nilima has at least a devoted successor to take them ahead. The conversation between Kanai and Piya again throws light on Moyana’s character:

“If you consider her circumstances – her caste, her upbringing – it’s very remarkable that she’s had the forethought to figure out how to get by today’s world. And it isn’t just that she wants to get by – she wants to do well; she wants to make a success of her life.”(219)

After studying the various themes of the novel, it can be concluded that the novel is a narrative of the struggles of the people of extraordinary capacities who are concerned with their individual interests and obsessed to translate their dreams, they are realist even to the success of the unlikely potential of their aspirations. The novel is the outcome of Amitav’s penetrating knowledge of science, anthropology, history, mythology and an amazing experience of travel. The novel is a collection of compelling stories, which are both beautiful and harrowing. It catches the attention by its beautiful stories of love, obsession, struggle and social work, but there are also

the sad tales of police atrocities, women sold in to sex slavery, children forced into dangerous work, and men swallowed by tigers, crocodiles and the hungry tides.

Likewise, the novel has many shadow lines or transcending barriers, which are defiantly crossed by almost every character without any qualms, be they moral, social, religious, political, geographical or linguistic. The land and water in this novel seem to be mutating eternally. There are no borders between fresh water and salt water. The same phenomena happen with human beings, no border can separate them, and if there are any, they are just shadow lines or transcending. Nirmal is a revolutionary thinker who mocks at the manmade barriers and social institutions. Piya and Fokir love each other and cross the shadowy borders, defying the very spirit of likelihood. Perhaps the geographical and ecological conditions of the ever-changing tide country have an influence on the inhabitants.

“There are no borders here to divide fresh water from salt, river from sea. The tides reach as far as three hundred kilometres inland and every day thousands of acres of forest disappear underwater only to re-emerge hours later. The currents are so powerful as to reshape the islands daily – some days the water tears away entire promontories and peninsulas; at other times it throws up new shelves and sandbanks where there were none before.”(7)

The novel also divulges the theme of an ideal state as dreamt by many political thinkers of the past and present. Sir Daniel Hamilton was such a thinker, who once thought of such a state where caste, creed and religion have nothing to do with the individual and social life of the people. He bought ten thousand acres of land in the tide country from the British government; the land was then nothing but an abode of tigers, crocodiles, sharks, leopards and other dangerous animals. Thousands of people came there in order to get settled themselves, but they didn't bring with them any kind of difference and so they settled there with mutual understanding and love. Sir Daniel provided the homeless people free land with one condition that any kind of division wouldn't be allowed in the country. Through Daniel Hamilton's dream, Amitav also expresses his own dream of such a world where the people live with cooperation without any divisions and in this world; the slogan of wild life conservation will not hurt the interests of human beings.

“Here there would be no Brahmins or Untouchable, no Bengalis and no Oriyas. Everyone would have to live and work together.”(51)

Finally, it is summed up that the novel is a mesmerising experience of reading on account of its subtle themes of individual concern, abiding interest in crossing borders and ironic obliteration. The unusual setting of the novel: the Sundarbans are

borderless like the inhabitants of the country. The comment of the noted critic Sarika Pradiprao Auradkar is apt to give the finishing touch:

“The Hungry Tide is a compelling novel about ordinary people bond together in an exotic place that can consume them all. It’s the basest of human emotions, love, jealousy, pride, and Trust that will make the difference.” (Auradkar)

#### **Works Cited**

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