

Gender Roles vis-à-vis Nature: Eco-Feminist Reading of Amitav Ghosh's Novels

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Declaration

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my own original work while completing degree at Brac University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I have acknowledged all main sources of help.

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Abstract

The thesis focuses on the Sundarbans region and the idea of Eco-feminism through Amitav Ghosh's novel. Through this work readers will be able to understand and discover the unique relationship between human and nature, and can relate to the ideas presented by Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva in their seminal book *Ecofeminism*. The term Eco-feminism is a unique approach through which people can explore the bond and connection between women and nature, which is different from what we find in Eco-criticism. Eco-criticism focuses on environmental issues and women's rights aligned with preservation of nature. This research intends to analyse Ghosh's writings and the characters presented in them through the perspectives of Mies and Shiva. I will conduct a qualitative research to analyse the ecofeminist perspective in the novels *Jungle Nama*, *The Hungry Tide* and *The Gun Island* in a detailed manner. The ordeals of women living around the Sundarbans as portrayed in Ghosh, will disclose the eco-feminist ideas he has woven in his writings. This thesis extensively analyses the important characters like Bon Bibi and Moyna from an eco-feminist perspective. These important characters reach far beyond their assigned roles to show us the most important principles of eco-feminism. These characters from the novels are extremely valued and demonstrate a bonding between the culture and natural settings. They establish a fascinating setting for exploring the ideas of human and environmental justice.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

At the heart of the Sundarbans, where a labyrinth of mangrove roots is intertwined with the ebbing and flowing rhythm of tidal waters, there lies a landscape vivid and energetic.

Between root and tide, the complicated dance of gender and society and the Earth unfolds to create the dynamic web that ties the lives of those who inhabit the landscape as much as they govern it. This thesis dives into the Sundarbans' ever-shifting delicate balance of life as it explains eco-feminism through the story and experience of the vast dynamic landscape.

Furthermore, eco-feminism as intricate and diverse intellectual and social movement emerging with a concern to fuse feminism & environmental movements might have offered emancipatory perspective in understanding the relationships among gender relations embedded within an ecology. In the first place, eco-feminism deconstructs orthodox idea of power and hierarchy instead it highlights how astonishingly oppressive networks are perpetually interlinked. For example, eco-feminism uses the particular experiences of women and marginalized peoples to explore how the degradation of the environment harms those who are less able to deal with its destruction. And the cross-cutting dimensions of gender and environment will come alive in the mangrove swamps of the Sundarbans, a UNESCO World Heritage site spread along both sides of India – Bangladesh border in ways that are deeply arresting. The largest mangrove forest in the world, and home to thousands of flora and fauna species (some of them incredibly rare), the Sundarbans is more than that. A mere representation of human adaptation and resilience.

1.1 Statement of the problem

Underneath the lush green canopies of the Sundarbans is a land riddled with degradation and disasters, which are also unequal in their socio-economic terms for women & diversely

numerical tribally categorized people. This is where we land up speaking about the works of Amitav Ghosh, an accomplished writer whose literary journeys track the complex interface between space and religion through history, culture and climate. Here he takes us deep into the heart of the Sundarbans, where natural forces and human populations meet in one place with consequences that never cease to amaze. Doing so, his texts weave a multifaceted portrait of delta life that is also spiced with true feelings and humanity, about its citizens—and their efforts to survive. The way people behave with the environment, that is totally governed by gender dynamics; especially as much visible in characters like Piyali Roy and Kanai Dutt in *The Hungry Tide*. The book emphasises the gender difference that influences these exchanges and the different parts that men and women play in this whole contact with the natural environment. Building on these ideas, Ghosh's *Gun Island* explores the global aspects of migration and climate change while narrating a story that ties together historical and modern concerns. Deen Datta, the main character, travels across periods and countries to show how closely entwined human and natural histories are. Ghosh enriches the conversation on eco-feminism and the interaction between humans and nature by delving into the displacement and resilience of populations experiencing ecological upheaval via Deen's experiences. In *Jungle Nama*, Ghosh retells, in contemporary verse, the legendary story of Bon Bibi, the Sundarbans' protector. The rich cultural legacy of the area is celebrated in this piece, which also emphasises the mutually beneficial interaction between the inhabitants and their surroundings. The story of Bon Bibi, who guards the woodland and its occupants, emphasises ideas of justice, balance, and the feminine divinity. *Jungle Nama* too supports the eco-feminist viewpoint by emphasising the critical function that women play in cultural continuity and environmental care. Through the skillful narrative of Ghosh and the firsthand accounts of its residents, I have set out on a voyage to cross the delicate grid of gender and environment that makes up the Sundarbans in my undergraduate thesis. This is the setting in

which eco-feminism may be rediscovered and its essential relationship to gender, environment and social justice in the twenty-first century highlighted.

1.2 Background

Theoretical foundation and progression Eco-feminism explores the connections between the subjugation of women and the exploitation of the environment. The correlation between the prevalence of women and environmental degradation is often attributed to the influence of capitalism and patriarchal systems, which prioritise control and exploitation over sustainability and harmony. Eco-feminists argue that an environmental ethic should be one that is broad and fair; it ought to pay attention to women's special roles when considering how society maintains or conserves the natural world. In this frame, social and ecological justice is intertwined with the necessity of fostering our relations with all else on Earth.

A far-flung archipelago in the Bay of Bengal is a locale for *The Hungry Tide*, published in 2004. In this case, it is the intertwining lives of Piyali Roy (specialist in river dolphins) and Kanai Dutt (a businessman). Through his experiences, Ghosh navigates the conservation of environment as it meets human displacement and that scale nature balances against our endeavors. This tale exposes what people have to endure living day in and day out, on the shore of danger as things are always changing for better or worse. *Gun Island* (2019), follows the Kolkata-based rare books dealer Deen Datta as he goes from Calcutta to LA and then on to Venice. The book blends timeless myth with history and modern themes such as migration and global warming. As Deen uncovers the strands of a Bengali tale involving snake goddesses and poor fakirs, he must also come to terms with environmental science and the popular colonization that spawns desperate refugees. Conveying both the

infinite links between environmental problems worldwide and the lasting power of myths on how we understand our natural world, *Gun Island* is a potent read.

A narrative poem from 2021, *Jungle Nama* tells the story of Bon Bibi guiding a group that becomes lost in the forest after an attack; Bon Bibi who lives there as mother protector but must thwart man's devil forces. That tale, which has to do with justice and balance and the feminine deity in nature is written/creates myth poetically. This modern relaunch from Ghosh, speaks to the symbiosis of nature and humanity in concert with homage for the cultural placescape preserved within Sundarbans. On their own, these examples would seem to provide ample proof of the instructive power and ecological relevance of this particular set of folk tales.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

Eco-feminism is a fluid frame which inhabits disjunction between both feminists and environmentalists speak. The strategy is to acknowledge and then make secondary nature-exploitation and women-oppression abolishing relevant economic choices. By the turn of the 21st century ecofeminist theories and philosophies had developed over. It also considers new pathways for incorporating ecological sustainability with the drive towards justice, including through analysis of and resistance to gendered norms.

Therefore, to fully grasp and appreciate the present-day use and many interpretations of eco-feminist thought, it is essential to delve into its historical development. This entails examining the fundamental concepts that underpin this philosophical framework, as well as engaging with ongoing discussions that keep this area of study vibrant. Now, question may arise here— how do we get these? The works of Mies and Shiva, as well as Ghosh's writings, advocate for a comprehensive and inclusive approach to addressing social and environmental issues, known as "*Ecofeminism*". They emphasize the need of acknowledging the

contributions of women and indigenous knowledge in constructing an equitable and environmentally responsible future.

Mies and Indian physicist Vandana Shiva argue that the oppression of women goes hand in glove with the exploitation of nature. They argue that both patriarchal and capitalist ideologies originate from the same roots of types of oppression. In their book the authors states, "The marginalization of women and the marginalization of nature, have a common genealogy" (Shiva & Mies, 2014/1993, p. 13). Ghosh's novel *The Hungry Tide* offers a powerful lesson in the balanced ecology of the Sundarbans and its people, tied specifically to women. Dr Piyali Roy, a pioneer researcher on river dolphins is one such example of how much women can contribute towards understanding and protecting the environment around them. Her efforts in science shed light on the importance of women to ecology research and conservation, something that is necessary for wider environmental sustainability.

The work of Mies and Shiva shows that it is the indigenous, local knowledge which means women, who play a very pivotal role in fighting for environmental policies which are sustainable. Similarly, the authors argue, "Women have been vital to agriculture and subsistence economies: they are society's main contributors of biodiversity" (Shiva & Mies 2014/1993, p. 164). Ghosh's *Jungle Nama* underscores the significance of the Sundarbans' cultural heritage and ecological wisdom embedded in its mythology. The concept of environmental conservation and fairness is represented by the myth of Bon Bibi, the deity of the forest who protects the land and its residents from the dangers of the wilderness. Ghosh acknowledges the crucial role that local communities, particularly women, play in maintaining the balance between humans and the environment through their ecological knowledge and traditional narratives in this contemporary adaptation.

Although Rachel Carson's applied feminism in her personal, professional and literary life goes almost unmentioned, overshadowed by the more visible and self-identified feminists

of the 1960s, whose activism within and across the diverse counter-cultural movements of the 1960s and '70s also powered the anti-war and anti-nuclear movements. Greta Gaard claims that it is generally acknowledged that Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) launched the environmental movement that took form by Earth Day in 1970 (Gaard, 27–28). Men therefore assumed worldwide authority over fertility, or to put it in another way, control over both natural and human fertility, but the latter's function in reproduction remained unclear (Derzelle). Her demand for an ecological revolution would free nature and women from the exploitation of patriarchy.

With time, this becomes almost a belief system with the fundamental ideas of eco-feminism, which holds that divisions caused by patriarchal activity oppress both women and nature for the purpose of dominance/control or profit-making to benefit those in power. A fundamental idea in the ecofeminist philosophy is the recognition of the close bond between women and the natural world. This connection is understood with respect to the tangible facts as well as the symbolic connections. In cultural narratives, women have long been associated metaphorically with nature: they automatically assume the same roles as caregivers, helpless victims and things that need to be controlled. Considering that women are in charge of agriculture, water retrieval and resource management, they are more directly affected by environmental deterioration, particularly those who live in rural and indigenous communities.

Mies and Shiva also discuss the ways in which colonial and capitalist systems exploit women and the environment, resulting in both social injustice and significant environmental harm. According to them, development has resulted in the annihilation of both human and non-human life (Shiva & Mies, 2014/1993, p. 5). The central theme of Ghosh's *Gun Island* revolves around the impacts of historical and contemporary forces of displacement and environmental disruption. The protagonist, Deen Datta, embarks on a journey that spans across continents and centuries in order to reveal the far-reaching effects of exploitative

systems on ecosystems and societies worldwide. Ghosh demonstrates the global impact of these forces and their devastating repercussions on both the environment and human societies through Deen's firsthand encounters.

Ultimately, both Mies and Shiva advocate for a reassessment of societal values and a focus on establishing ecological equilibrium and social equity as paramount. The authors claim that in order to restore our connection with the natural world, it is imperative to first restore the connections and bonds between individuals (Shiva & Mies, 2014/1993, p. 241). Ghosh's works exemplify this concept, as his characters often strive to comprehend and harmonize with their natural environment. The immersive experiences of Piyali Roy in the Sundarbans, as depicted in *The Hungry Tide*, highlight the importance of cultivating a respectful and mutually beneficial relationship with the environment. *Jungle Nama* emphasizes the cultural reflections that highlight the mutually beneficial relationship between people and their environment, while *Gun Island* portrays Deen Datta's realization of the interconnectedness of environmental and human histories.

The main claim of Mies and Shiva is that contemporary science is based on the material connections between capitalism and colonialism, which in turn produce (forms of) patriarchal violence (Molyneux and Deborah Lynn Steinberg, 89). Postcolonial eco-feminists further contend that the environmental damage and enslavement of women on a scale unmatched to oppression in more industrialised countries are made possible by the colonial past and current neo-colonial strategies of destruction. We can see the demand for a decolonization of environmental practice and policy in these and many more instances. Successful ecological protection requires Indigenous and local people's leadership and expertise at its core.

Considerable debate also focuses on the role of modernity and technology in ecofeminist philosophy. Eco-feminism supports the re-adoption of traditional community

centred modes of life and considers this change to be necessary for reorientation away from our current industrialized, technology practises which are viewed by eco feminists as overly exploitative and non-sustainable. However, others argue that technology can help gain gender equality and sustainable development, deliver innovative and equitable technical solutions able to help address environmental problems while contributing toward improved standards of living for marginalized populations.

1.4 Objectives

1.4.1 General Objectives

This thesis aims to conduct a thorough analysis of Amitav Ghosh's literary works, such as *The Hungry Tide*, *Gun Island*, and *Jungle Nama*, to explore the complex connection between gender dynamics and environmental challenges within the Sundarbans. This paper explores how Ghosh's fictional narratives showcase eco-feminist concepts, highlighting the diverse roles and experiences of women in their interactions with and reactions to the environment. This study aims to make a valuable contribution to the ongoing discussion surrounding eco-feminism and its significance in addressing current concerns related to social and environmental justice.

1.4.2 Specific Objectives

2. Understand the women nature interface in *The Hungry Tide*, *Gun Island* and *Jungle Nama*
3. To assess the socio-economic and cultural variables conditioning gender dynamics in Sundarbans as depicted in Ghosh's novels
4. Assessing Amitav Ghosh's writings on eco-feminism in current environmental issues and gender norms

1.5 Literature review

Eco-feminism, a discipline that rigorously analyzes the connections between environmental decline and gender subjugation, has received considerable scholarly attention. Below are many noteworthy works and their significant contributions to the field:

Carolyn Merchant's seminal work, *The Death of Nature : Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* is a fundamental text in eco-feminist ideology. Merchant contends that the emergence of modern science and mechanistic worldviews throughout the 16th and 17th centuries resulted in the perception of nature as an entity to be controlled and utilized, a transformation that mirrored and strengthened the oppression of women. "The shift from an organic to a mechanistic worldview was paralleled by changes in ideas about the female gender, who, like nature, came to be seen as passive and inert" (Merchant, 1980, p. 193). Merchant's research emphasizes the interconnectedness between the subjugation of nature and the historical subordination of women, a concept that is also reflected in Ghosh's portrayal of the exploitation of both gender and the environment in his literary works.

Ariel Salleh's *Ecofeminism as Politics: Nature, Marx and the Postmodern* examines the intersection of eco-feminism, Marxist theory and socialist feminist philosophy. It claims that the subjugation of nature and the oppression of women are fundamentally linked to patriarchal and capitalist structures. "Ecofeminism brings to light the way capitalism, as a system of economic production and social reproduction, depends on the unsustainable exploitation of both women and nature" (Salleh, 1997, p. 34). Salleh's research offers a conceptual structure for comprehending the interplay between social, economic, and ecological factors in Ghosh's works. These works often depict how marginalized people, frequently symbolized by women, suffer the most from environmental deterioration.

Vandana Shiva's *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Development*: Vandana Shiva asserts in her book "*Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Development*" that women in

the Global South hold distinctive ecological expertise that is crucial for achieving sustainable development. Shiva criticizes Western development approaches that disregard or weaken this understanding. "Women have been the custodians of biodiversity, the producers and providers of food, and the nurturers of the environment... their knowledge systems are ecological and context-specific, rooted in local ecosystems and communities" (Shiva, 1989, p. 67). Shiva's work aligns with the topics explored in Ghosh's novels, where female characters frequently reflect ancient ecological wisdom. These characters play vital roles in promoting environmental protection and resilience.

Amitav Ghosh's *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*

(2016): Ghosh examines the inadequacy of contemporary literature and politics in addressing the existential peril posed by climate change. He criticizes the current culture's failure to envision and address the magnitude of the environmental issue. "Climate change is also a crisis of culture, and thus of the imagination... the modes of literary and artistic expression that we have inherited are unable to grapple with the most urgent question of our time" (Ghosh, 2016, p. 9). This work offers a framework for comprehending the wider thematic preoccupations in Ghosh's literature, where ecological emergencies meet with cultural and societal narratives, frequently via the perspectives of oppressed factions, such as women.

Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace* (2000): *The Glass Palace* by Ghosh is a narrative that covers colonial Burma, India, and Malaya, delving into the topics of displacement, migration, and the ecological consequences of colonialism. Although not expressly eco-feminist, the novel contemplates the correlation between the colonial exploitation of natural resources and the enslavement of indigenous communities, particularly women. "The forests, once seen as sacred and inviolable, were systematically felled, their timber feeding the insatiable demands of the colonial economy... The loss of the forests was also the loss of a way of life" (Ghosh, 2002, p. 287). The portrayal of ecological deterioration and its societal

ramifications in *The Glass Palace* corresponds to eco-feminist criticisms of colonialism and its inheritance, specifically in relation to its effects on both women and the environment.

Research Gaps that the thesis addresses

Although these fundamental texts offer crucial perspectives on eco-feminism, there is a notable deficiency in applying these theories to the writings of Amitav Ghosh, specifically in relation to the Sundarbans and his examination of gender dynamics. Additional research is required to establish a clear connection between Ghosh's tales and eco-feminist theory. This research should specifically examine how his female characters interact with and oppose environmental concerns within the patriarchal institutions portrayed in his novels.

1.6 Research methodology

My thesis endeavours to investigate the entwined gendered power dynamics and ecological distress in the Sundarbans explored through literary works of Amitav Ghosh. Coming under various names, the methodology used in this study should hopefully deal with these issues more thoroughly: by means of literary analysis and eco-feminist theory as well as cultural contextualization.

1. Research Design:

The thesis foregrounds the textual analysis of Amitav Ghosh's novels like *The Hungry Tide*, *Gun Island* and *Jungle Nama*. The research directed itself around the core ideals of eco-feminism as a theory, to explore such areas where exploitation in relation to our environment is inherently linked with that of women. This paper attempts to examine very closely the manner in which Ghosh networks these elements through the particularly combined cultural-biological setting of the Sundarbans.

2. Textual Analysis

The principle method used in this thesis is a close analysis of some novels.

- **Thematic Analysis:** This entails the recognition of common issues in Ghosh's writings which concern gender aspects, destruction from pollution and eco-feminist concepts. To this end, the research analyzes how these texts depict female characters as compared with nature and what their participation in environmental conservation has to do with women's resistance against a patriarchal order in the Sundarbans' ecology.
- **Character Analysis:** In-depth analysis of central characters such as Piyali Roy in *The Hungry Tide* and other women like the ones populating *Gun Island* and *Jungle Nama*. The purpose is to provide a gendered analysis of how they are interacting with the environment and how these interactions may be influenced by their gender.
- **Narrative Techniques:** Ghosh employs narrative structures, symbolism and language to reflect his explorations of eco-feminist themes. It involves exploring the way Ghosh merges myth, culture and ecology to mirror a nuanced reflection of gendered dynamics in interaction with environment.

3. Contextual and Comparative Analysis

The research establishes the novel's connections to broader cultural, historical and ecological issues at Ghosh.

- **Historical context:** The historical background of the Sundarbans that Ghosh penetrates and presents in his discourse on environmental issues, as well as a gendered history (gender concerns), contributes to the socio-political development of the region. This critical analysis encloses land use regulations before and after colonial periods, impact of climate change on the region, socio-economic status of women in Sundarbans.

- **Comparative Literature:** This thesis aims to look closely at other eco-feminist literature and environmental fiction to think through Ghosh. Such a comparative method allows for isolating differences in Ghosh's eco-feminist representation and at the same time spotting broader patterns in literature surrounding gender-environment relationship.

4. Cultural and Mythological Analysis

This study encompasses an examination of the cultural and mythical aspects that hold a major position in Ghosh's work, with a specific focus on *Jungle Nama*.

- **Mythological Analysis:** This analysis focuses on how the myth of Bon Bibi is utilized to investigate eco-feminist topics, including the involvement of women in upholding ecological equilibrium and opposing environmental exploitation.
- **Cultural contextualization:** It discusses how Ghosh represents gender within the environment through cultural practices, beliefs and traditions unique to Sundarbans. This will necessitate a close examination of the way these cultural transmitters actually help flesh out eco-feminist ideas in their narratives.

5. Data Collection and Sources

The literary works, which are used as the primary sources for this research includes *The Hungry Tide*, *Gun Island* and *Jungle Nama*. The augmented books include further resources (in the form of scholarly articles, book chapters on environmental studies and eco-feminism etc. more broadly as well in relation to Ghosh's writings and The Sundarbans) relevant for studying these novels. Ghosh's work or eco-feminism often draws upon a wide range of research papers and publications.

1.7 Scopes and limitations

This study primarily focuses on doing a thorough textual analysis of these works by Ghosh. The main objective is to examine how Ghosh depicts the interrelation between gender and environmental concerns in the specific cultural and ecological context of the Sundarbans. The research seeks to utilize eco-feminist theory as the main analytical framework to examine how Ghosh's narratives both reflect and contribute to the wider discussion on the simultaneous exploitation of nature and women. Additionally, it aims to explore how Ghosh's portrayal of female characters and their interactions with the environment either challenge or reinforce existing eco-feminist concepts.

This study also examines the cultural and historical background of the Sundarbans, investigating how the region's distinct difficulties, such as colonial exploitation, climate change and socio-economic inequities, influence Ghosh's narrative. The research places Ghosh's work into the broader context of eco-feminist literature, employing a comparative method. Finally, it connects to an analysis of his environmentalist and feminist writings.

However, the study was not without limitations.

One limitation of the study is its exclusive focus on certain novels that, although they comprise some rare ecological realities but are not representative of Ghosh's entire compilation. However, this focus could risk not recognising the full range and length of his engagement with eco-feminism across all of his work. The sole cling to eco-feminist theory as the predominant analytical framework could constrain the study because it might not take into account other critical viewpoints that can provide alternate perspective on Ghosh's complex narratives.

Additionally, the study area (the Sundarbans) is associated with distinct environmental challenges and social practices. While the specific nature of a study allows for

an exhaustive evaluation of particular dynamics in the region, it could impede on its generalizability to other situations. The interdisciplinary treatments of the research (completing several literary approaches with both cultural analysis and environmental science) proves a challenge for coordinating these diverse perspectives, which may create points in future analyses.

Moreover, this analysis is limited by the context of the production time of these texts as well as the status of the eco-feminist theory that existed at that time. This limitation may, however, decrease potential of the application of the theory to Ghosh's work since the idea of eco-feminism was much extended in later times. Lastly, the reliance in most of this research is on textual analysis and second-hand sources rather than primary fieldwork in the Sundarbans. This may confine the ability of understanding what is happening around us, through discussing environmental and cultural issues.

While this study has some limitations, it ultimately offers an important contribution to the field of eco-feminism in literature. It offers new insights into gender, environmental studies and cultural contexts in Ghosh's portrayal of the Sundarbans. Although the study acknowledges its limitations, there remains a need to build on this foundation in other directions that may address these gaps by expanding the scope of analysis, bringing together multiple theoretical perspectives or demonstrating field-based investigations.

1.8 Conclusion

Through a reading of Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*, *Gun Island* and *Jungle Nama* this thesis argues how these literary works enlighten the eco-feminist concept by linking gendered dynamics with environmental issues in the Sundarbans locale. Through his moving storytelling Ghosh does not only impress upon us the fragile and complicated relationship between

humans and nature but also highlights the key role women play in caring for, responding to ecological emergencies. The great Indian novel confronts the grand narrative of conquest and cultural homogenisation that the empire was very well-placed to initiate (and, for a time, sustain), on its way to challenging ecological activism; sets literature against novels of male association as an exclusive space with distinct fabric and dynamics and Ghosh brings out the best of him in these novels. Locating the Sundarbans through this repeated genealogy as an in-between place, where gender and culture get entangled with ecology, he offers a ripe rubric to grasp what is eco-feminism today.

Ghosh who has emphasized the status of women in nature based crises, develops our knowledge about eco-feminism and also its importance in World literature. The vulnerability and resilience of marginalised groups are evoked here, a representation of them as vulnerable (again) but also simply surviving, continuing to resist — providing space for hope or possibility in an ecocatastrophic future. When viewed from a eco-feminist perspective, Ghosh and his representation of the Sundarbans act as a model to questions about an intersection between gender, environment and life-path opportunities.

Chapter 2

Gun Island

In the Anthropocene, Amitav Ghosh intricately weaves a rich story that links migration and ecology through sex and gender in "*Gun Island*". Situated in the Sundarbans (home to perhaps the most vulnerable ecological and socio-cultural region on earth), this novel, questions loss, origin and survival to deliver a scathing reflection on today's global environmental trajectory. One of the key focuses within this novel is eco-feminism; a theoretical framework that links women and nature through exploitation, highlighting both struggles are interdependent to one another. Eco-feminism stresses that women's marginalisation and environmental degradation are interlinked products of patriarchal structures. In his portrayal of female figures and the relationship they have with nature, Ghosh casts light on how women are key to preserving — or saving — our planet. Much of the story moves across space as well as into metaphysical and psychological spaces, where past meets present, myth drifts in and out of real life. In Ghosh's case the use of mythology, such as the tale of 'Gun Merchant' and 'Manasa Devi' is a telling metaphor for both ongoing environmental disaster -and women who will do something effective about it. The tales are woven into the cultural fabric of the Sundarbans so they resonate with contemporary anxieties, creating a story that feels timeless and also urgent. In *Gun Island*, where environmental collapse is not just a backdrop but an origin story of the premise itself. The tides change, the living is fickle and flora becomes almost impossible to distinguish from fauna for miles on either side as it churns between salty landscapes; a microcosm that reflects an ecological disaster magnified around the globe. Women play a dual role of recipient as well as of master in the wide range of ecological challenges. Their experiences are not unique narratives but mirrors of girl children across the world who cry for justice. One of the running themes in Ghosh's body of work, migration is also here unveiled as symbiotic with the eco-

catastrophe ongoing at *Gun Island*. The novel is a classic example of wholesale relocations of populations for climate adaptation, perhaps driven largely by physical insecurity. The migration is gendered and inherently subjects women to more provisions and displacements because in addition to the housing of the burdens they were already tasked with keeping their family along other protected members of society, as usually maintaining daily life at home. Which is probably true for most of us — or many at least, as Ghosh's women, Nilima and Piya with particular savviness when describing how these challenges chip away — how the environment develops them into a new direction. Through eco-feminism *Gun Island* lays out how present-day gender contradictions are cemented over by environmental collapse with characteristic thoughtfulness. The book posits that to create strategies that can build resilience and adapt, it is imperative to understand the gendered elements of environmental changes. Through the powerful voices of industrious women and the force of their stories, Ghosh magnificently puts these front and centre, forcing reflection upon narratives that are still sanitised or historically concealed.

2.1 Echoes of Exile: Gender, Migration, and Sustainability Crisis

With his novel *Gun Island*, Ghosh draws on both of the main themes he has explored since becoming a full-time writer: feminism and ecology, fusing the two seamlessly in a narrative that is intimately involved with international human rights issues. In a near spare future where climate disaster, social inequity and human dislocation come together to form an ironic parable about how these things are most profound on women. The chilling parable explores the notion of exile, both real and figurative undergone by characters seeking to escape their abode because they are either dispossessed by climate change or have no money. The ease with which Ghosh has written these events emphasized the intersectionality, that eco-

feminism recognizes the interconnectedness of environmental issues and social justice, particularly for women-related problems.

At the center of *Gun Island* is protagonist Deen Datta, a true-blue Brooklyn book dealer. His quest to find the real story behind myth of Gun Merchant lead him from the Sundarbans, first to Los Angeles, and then to Venice. While Deen's story is at the heart of the novel, Ghosh introduces a host of female characters whose tales are forever affected by the ecological and social forces propelling along. This, from this brief intersection between these women — those female friends of Deen; Piya and Nilima and Cinta become more than footnotes to the quick progression of events that makes up Deen's journey. One of the cetologists from Ghosh's novel *The Hungry Tide*, Piya Roy works in the realms of integrated science and conservation advocacy. Encouraged by her search, Piya contemplates on the dreadful desolation climate change gives to the lively and dynamic Sundarbans encompassing human as well as animal societies around. Working from the Sundarbans to U.S. shores, her investigations reveal a tradition of global dimensions — evidence that the phenomenon reflects a climate change narrative distinct from more familiar definitions of refugees, no matter when or where in their world they happen to hail from now or throughout history. Piya has always positioned scientific enquiry as central to her lived experience. And her exile, moderated by the intersection of race and ethnicity because she is a diasporic Indian-American woman, is also the same displacement she finds in those whom she studies. But it breathes in another important female character: Nilima Bose —who writes of the life she knows as an exile.

Nilima, who has been in social work at the Sundarbans for a long time, suffers directly from environmental vile and economic injustice. She sits at the coalface of this sustainability crisis through her work with Badabon Trust, offering healthcare and education for people in its local area. The story of Nilima's struggle is like many other female

lawmakers preferring to stay back in their regions, instead of leaving as per the societal norms that demand them leave forcefully because of their economic self-sufficiency or due environmental curbs. Her unwavering devotion and commitment to her local community sheds light on the all-too-often ignored role women play in uplifting their families as well as our society—even when up against what feel like insurmountable obstacles. Nilima's unyielding generosity to the Sundarbans, even with increased water heights while a annual cyclone enhances a portrayed perception of gender frameworks when it comes to environmentally triggered displacement.

Cinta, an Italian scholar and Deen's lover, adds another dimension to the theme of exile. Her own displacement during World War II saw her leaving Venice, which she compares to the current migrations brought on by climate change. This is because, in addition to exploring the destruction wrought upon Venice, Cinta's scholarly work explores the decline of urban environment and compares it with the decay of the Sundarbans. Thus, it forges architectural/biological link between historical and modern day refugees. By using her own experiences in Sweden as a backdrop, Ghosh makes the reader believe that an exile is something more than just political one –it comes from within — and this time she does so by attributing it to Cinta. The exploration of making sustainability a necessity and its effects on characters, individual or in the community is made all the more compelling through Cinta's understanding that history, mythos and environmental change are interconnected. Cinta reflects on the destiny of Venice, a city being slowly swallowed by water - an emblematic model to illustrate in general terms what is happening worldwide with ecological catastrophe. Her detailed second examination, complemented by her intense personal investment in those matters underscore the pressing need for women to safeguard our cultural heritage whilst addressing threats that affect us and both realms of environment. Together, they represent the

tenets of eco-feminism as examples of endurance, defiance and profound dedication to their worlds — human or natural.

In *Gun Island*, the question of migration revolves not simply around the personal journeys undertaken by people but also with migrations as a displacement and erosion of population identity-cultural or biological. Through the lens of a community fleeing Kazakhstan, *Whole Life* reveals how environmental degradation forces entire communities to dislodge themselves from their homelands in grim circumstances. Ghosh shows that these migrations are hardly random, and largely the result of gender that most times takes away their fair share from women; Women tend to be the last ones left in their homes as it becomes less and less habitable land, caring for children, elders or those with ailments. Women meet with certain challenges on migration such as assault, abuse and loss of social protections. The gendered aspects of migration are central to the novel's examination of exile, as Ghosh shows that women lead lives shaped by environmental transformation and social change.

2.2 Narrative Works in the Sea of Tales: Women's Narratives in the Anthropocene

Even as Amitav Ghosh explores the interlocked crises of human-made climate change in an Anthropocenic epoch—an era when we are cinematic-inflating the environment—“*Gun Island*” rises up too, insistent with women who serve to anchor-and-envelope those characters and stories most effected—and dismissed. This focus is articulated through the experiences and actions of characters like Piya Roy, one of her field assistants Nilima Bose or Cinta that foregrounds gender as a key site where ecology intersects with social justice. Ghosh weaves in the story of Piya, a marine biologist with her own challenges as a woman so tied to nature. The story she tells about herself serves as a reminder of how environmental degradation affects the most disenfranchised communities but also has implications for understanding notions of participation, reciprocity, altruism and community in— especially

with respect to gendered activism around ecology. Through Piya, we meet other women in Nepal and around the world seeking to raise awareness of our entire planet as a living system — her story is iconic for so many who are currently navigating ecological crises far beyond what could have been imagined. In her own character exist the psychological and emotional prices of life in a world such as ours, ravaged by examples solastalgia (the anguish that comes from environmental change) as she sees ecosystems collapsed and peoples disrupted on two sides of Earth.

The third key figure, Nilima Bose who is a social worker and the founder of Badabon Trust represents woman in Anthropocene from diverse perspectives. The story of Nilima is illustrative and this woman-centric narrative that depicts women as the builders of resilience, harbingers of sustainability especially in regions like the Sundarbans which incidents change climate more acutely. She is an example of a story that intersects gender and social class, which complicates the common image of women as pure victims or blamed for all ills in the Anthropocene. For these four young visitors, the existence lived by Cinta – a retired Italian academic — grounded in both individual quotidian and myriad larger histories. Reflecting on the environmental history of Venice, she reminds us that human civilization is far more fragile in relation to environmental change than we know and women represent a custodial role over cultural memory. The narratives of these women in *Gun Island* taken together provide essential interlocking analyses — they testify to the relatedness between ecology, society and gender; punch holes through to those Eurocentric points about analysis and action from which some myths have already fallen away or been destroyed by feminist tools.

2.3 Role of Women for change of Environment and Climate

In his novel *Gun Island*, Amitav Ghosh interlaces the stories of women as key characters who epitomize gendered experience of climate change and environmental catastrophe in connection with their agency to be composed within what he proposes is 'the state' (i.e.

Human Era). At the heart of this depiction are victims such as Piya Roy, Nilima Bose and Cinta who encapsulate diverse profiles of how female protagonists interact with contemporary environmental challenges. As a marine biologist, Piya takes center-stage in the novel as her work spans two continents (Indian Sundarbans and North America) representing the global aspects of environmental crises she investigates. Her science isn't just a determination to note symbolically the impacts of climate change on marine life; it is an intense, personal reflection that represents what she goes through and hopes for as hands-on witness to vulnerable species—and communities. Piya's movement—physical, cognitive—and her recognition of environmental injustice represents a form resistance to the eco- and social-violence that she witnesses — illustrating how global ecosystems are interlinked and yet simultaneously transnational impacts result in an inevitable process of planetary degradation.

Nilima Bose, on the other hand, is an individual movement that is molded by a similarly significant approach that is both established and connecting. Nilima is Founder of Badabon Trust & she lives with communities on the edges of society in a forest region called the Sundarbans, and she aims at saving some most vulnerable women from impacts of climate. While Piya travels to distant lands, Nilima is trapped by her work on a much more localised level: both have their place and contribute a vital perspective of the effects of environmental degradation entwined with deeply rooted social issues such as identity. However, from opposite sides of the coin Nilima through small communities and grassroots movements is demonstrating that community can overcome climate change. In these efforts, she is practicing one of the purest forms of environmental activism that must inherently be seen connected to social justice and gender equality right underneath it; her actions embody the truth that you cannot draw a hard-line divide along an ecological concern and call it anything but a social quandary or a political matter. What Nilima highlights is that profound

and influential environmental action need not involve jet travel around the world, but can emerge through a very local, place-based response driven by people. Together, the narratives of Piya and Nilima illustrate that women are neither passive casualties nor silken voices caught up in species tragedy but powerful people engaged in crafting responses to anthropocene threats.

An Italian scholar named Cinta, elderly at that point in the future, provides another thread of women's roles in the Anthropocene. Cinta — unlike Piya and Nilima, though her movements are more confined to the intellect than in their cases largely because she uses history and culture so instinctively to interpret what is organically changing on earth. She also talks about Venice, which is slowly sinking under the waves of rising water levels and a stark warning to human civilisation that we are living on borrowed time. Cinta continues to provide evidence of how mobility between histories, ideas as well as culturally diverse landscapes can play a crucial role in grasping the true nature of ecological crises. Ghosh uses her as an example to demonstrate the importance of women's roles in preserving cultural memory and intellectual heritage, arguing that a comprehensive expanse is needed to grasp all repercussions of living within anthropos discourse, not only from scientific but also historical and cultural angles.

Gun Island as a whole not only depicts how climate change devastates women; it creates space for responses: they have to speak up and reach back, since more often than not these environmentalists are simultaneously eyes witnessing the world unraveling around them. This takes place through Piya who works outside her home country primarily as a scientist, Nilima's local activities with grassroots mobilizing for the environment or Cinta's scholarly exploration over a climate and environmental matter. Through movement across continents, between communities and within intellectual landscapes; their journeys upend the orthodox narratives of migration and displacement that frequently exclude women. In

foregrounding these female voices, *Gun Island* provides a more complex and extensive international history of climate change along with a rhetorical claim that women can intervene in the greatest dangers posed by global warming or broader phenomena we identify as being associated with human cause environmental disaster. Ghosh's novel urges us to reconsider the world around us and how we react when faced with such global crises, by showing that women offer great insights into developing a sustainable future.

2.4 The Intersection of Mythology and Nature: Eco-feminism in a Changing World

Amitav Ghosh uses myth and reality to great effect woven together in *Gun Island* as he examines the whiles of anthropocene, linked inherent between humans & nature which eventually brings us upto speed with an updated version of eco-feminism. The convergence is in fact not just a narrative device but an examination of how prehistorical tales and cultural narratives are still used today to make sense of the landscape, as well as what our place within it -- and that attached vision of masculinity or femininity which we think belongs with it. The central narrative of the book is Ghosh's use of the mythological reference to Bonduki Sadagar- as a metaphor for environmental and social crisis faced by some characters. Using the goddess Manasa, both a nursing mother and terribly destructive natural force — symbolizing the dualism of nature fostering life versus death, Ghosh delves into gendered dimensions to environmental crises in which women are characterised as protectors (goddess/earth/mother) or pilgrims who suffer from its havoc.

One way in which we see this meeting of myth and history at the conjunction is through Ghosh representation of female characters: whose journeys are interfused with these long disturbing myths. Marine biologist, Piya Roy becomes ensnared in the larger-than-life narrative of a character like Bonduki Sadagar while negotiating through dangerous terrain such as that found within the vast Sundarbans. As she pursues her scientific missions,

grounded firmly in reality but ever-stricken by the legendary echoes of those around her, it is a reflection of the novel that announces this duality between myth and fact can never be penned in grasping ecological crises. For Nilima Bose, her ground level activism is not just in reaction to environmental pollution on the earth; but also a form of resistance nurtured by an environment and culture activist who believed boundaries between human and supernatural were fluid. These characters confirm that women in the novel do not just suffer at the mercy of nonhuman change but are agents who utilise myth and grim reality to reach, oppose and acclimate their era's flaws.

Additionally, Ghosh uses the fusion of myth and reality in *Gun Island* to comment on patriarchal systems that have historically kept women offstage — while plants so much as trees maintained their hold over global acclaim. The curse of Bonduki Sadagar, which occurred as a result of his disrespect towards the female goddess Manasa is perhaps also allegorical of how we pay for our dishonouring and exploitation of Nature — one that under patriarchal systems has often been gendered. As a result, the myth serves here as a flying chassis for Ghosh to dissect eco-feminism and point out how imperative it is that we re-examine these societal foundations within contemporary environmental happenings. In addition, Cinta is old Italian scholar of knowledge, who represents the myth and reality coming together. Her thoughts about Venice, a city imperiled by rising seas and built upon the ghosts of history and again facing contemporary tales that echo those ancient Sundarban myths is evidence enough to these stills as part of an ongoing discussion concerning climate events.

Ghosh importantly suggests that myths have not faded into history but rather remained a part of present-day environmentalism by casting light on the gendered dimensions to ecological struggles through figures such as those discussed above. The Sundarbans as a myth-laden no-man's land where the borders are perpetually open — between land and water,

human and animal, natural world and supernatural otherworld — also fits with an eco-feminist sensibility that resists hard-and-fast binaries or easy hierarchies. This fluid space foregrounds women as storytellers, activists and scholars to reveal how myths are powerful agents against environmental devastation and social injustices. Ghosh draws on the power of invoking the divine goddess Manasa in combination with ancient tales from the Sundarbans to situate his narrative within eco-feminist dialogues that highlight women as stewards and carriers for both sustainable environmental practises, indigenous knowledge and social justices.

2.5 Both Backlash and Resilience: Gendered Responses to Ecological Threats

Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island* is a detailed exploration of the differing reactions to ecological threats by gender, as demonstrated through themes of resistance and resilience. Ghosh sets the story of his narrator against a world in crisis, site-specific to climate change and environmental degradation—carrying with it population displacement. Ghosh uses his interlocutors to expand on the ways in which men and women respond differently, functioning as sexual biocriticism seeking out how gender shapes all experience response strategy of survival.

The women in *Gun Island* are the most resourceful in addressing ecological menace, even as they face a complex ecosystem with practicality, punishment and empathy. Piya Roy, Nilima Bose and Cinta know so much about the natural world as well and stand up to protect it— they are responsible for a lot of moments associated with change, acting like agents of resistance against any plan that would hurt their beloved environment. The character of Piya, a marine biologist trying to save the Irrawaddy dolphins in the Sundarbans symbolizes scientific expertise. Forged out of the many bureaucratic roadblocks, cultural scheos across the border is a constant presence with Piya that would mirror women's roots at times of environmental crises. In another guise of resilience, that of social justice and environmental

stewardship, Nilima Bose is the founder of the Badabon Trust. The idea of women holding fort while the surroundings invisibly change presents us with a perspective of resilience through gendering, encouraging collaboration where the load is shared. Nilima has shown bold leadership and resilience to overcome financial constraints, political pressures beyond the tall odds stacked against any woman in the leadership-environmental-social role. Nilima, as Ghosh suggests, disrupts the notions of self preservation and caretaking for others at large during this ecological trauma and / exercise agency. Meanwhile, Cinta — the historian of Venice — incarnates all possible intellectual and philosophical layers of resistance. By considering plagues as reasons of migration and climate change and by adding historical reflections we see the broader context surrounding environmental disasters; connecting myth to history, and past to present reality. But as part of her intellectual resilience, which also involves challenging the denial or indifference that we quizzically exhibit as an audience towards environmental dangers, commonly faced by one but none exempt—Cinta's education extends beyond information to something akin to critical resistance or enlightenment.

However the male characters lay out a different perspective and this is where Deen in particular lights up. Skeptical to start and largely aloof to the different types of doomsday scenarios playing out around him, Deen is headed down a path which reflects what looks like an unavoidable eco-epiphany. Although that is still resistance, his eventual realisation and response to these new threats falls more exclusively into the masculine text and leaves a gendered viewpoint on ecological issues. Deen proves that even a single ordinary observer can turn into an active fighter in the battle against ecological destruction. It also speaks to the gendered nature of resilience — in which men and especially privileged men may initially be more likely hardheaded on environmental matters. Through Deen, Ghosh tells us what he knows, that the qualities we ascribe to resilience such as resolve or courage are not innate but deliberate—dependent on an awareness and education nature possesses in abundance.

In addition to gender, Ghosh in his novel *Gun Island* also dives into the social and political factors that revolve around ecological threats. The novel shows the way that women and especially those from marginalized communities often suffer first and worst in climate change-related crises even though their resistance can be key to mitigating impacts. It is one of the key tenets in eco-feminism, which stresses on gender geography as well as ecological and social justice coming into action. It is this eco-feminist lens with which Ghosh approaches the women he presents in *Gun Island* — and an argument could be constructed that it is only because of their deep rootedness to nature that they can simply adapt no matter how turbulent life gets.

Ghosh tells a story of displacement (geographical, along with identity-based and role-changing in an evolvedly destroying hostile environment for women) of a most compelling nature. The sense of migration and exile that seeps into the lives of these female characters, mirroring also larger global movements generated through climate crises. Through the transnational scientific endeavors of Piya Roy or localized activism undertaken by Nilima Bose, Ghosh shows how interconnected this is with the devastation that surrounds them in women's lives. And, as often made marginal victims of the patriarchal systems and environmental convulsions — they persist in resilience. The manner in which youth are able to mobilize, organize and push for change also speak of their importance of critical part when it comes to dealing with the interconnected problems relating gender justice and environmental sustainability. The physical and metaphoric movement of women in *Gun Island* strengthens its thematic exploration of gender, nature and the environment. These spaces of resistance and survival, whether they cross physical borders or renegotiate their positionality within the communities to which they belong, are occupied by women who together constitute an alternating landscape that counters environmental decay. They do not simply “move elsewhere” in reaction to threats from the environment, but move as an act of

defiance against a marginalized life. By Piya, Nilima and Cinta he envisions three women whose quests mirror the ecstatic ways in which women find elements that can redefine their place amid the fragile perch of a changing world. Their actions and decisions underscore that the future of environmental activism and sustainability are inextricably linked with any role women play or not on all levels — local, national, global.

With *Gun Island*, Ghosh is saying that if we are to really understand and solve the problems of planet Earth now in this anthropocene epoch and then it must be led through — by — women. In this complex and multi-layered narrative Ghosh seamlessly weaves the personal with the global, mythic fable into lived experience to show how women are fundamentally responding (in overcoming broad ecological challenges) in our world today. Their tales of mobility, endurance as well as defiance provide an evaluation to the resilience that is in females and additionally a plan for alternative ecological talk. In his novel, Ghosh has also underlined that the planet's future can't come without empowerment of women and accepting the place they assert around environmental justice.

Chapter 3

The Hungry Tide

The Hungry Tide explores the intersection between gender, environment and survival in the Sundarbans, which is an archipelago in one of the most environmentally fragile zones in this world. Situated in an unforgiving country devastated by cyclones, tidal flooding and struggling economies but also delves deep beneath such challenges women's strategies from making and finding their place in a nature-bound and determined world to becoming climate stewards, is a wonderful trajectory. Through the fiercely independent – in friend and fellow marine biologist Piyali Roy, to the singularly resolute – Nilima Bose, juxtaposed against the countless lost souls to climate disaster, Ghosh delivers a poignant exploration of environmental imperatives under these gendered narratives by plucking away an eco-feminist thought-process deep from the Sundarbans.

At the very core of *The Hungry Tide* is the understanding that women are fighting a larger battle, within the context of a fractured ecology and fleeting human lives. Ghosh tells the tale without any romantic coating of eco-feminism — not as though his women are just damsels lounging in distress on Temple debris, or as those sirens leading men to their doom. These are distinct women who catalyse the land and occur in many forms. *Shadows over the Sundarbans* throws light on a global challenge to feminism, being played out where women in the Sundarbans battle not only for survival but also for gender justice — against the larger backdrop of an ecological crisis that mediates and re-shapes social relations in ways that are pretending a world with competing narratives of 'development' at odds with conservation, as it strives to humanise sustainability as something distinct from ecology.

But in the Sundarbans, that landscape where land and water are forever at war with each other, it is once again women who lead this battle. A poetic analogy of the overlapping borders women must cross to freedom, all set into mystifying motion by

landscape. Certainly in creatures such as Piya and Nilima, Ghosh reflects upon the harsh circumstances under which few women try for any agency or to merely exist for longer within an atmosphere where forces of nature and larger systems of society appear to be conspiring to consign them into enforced iron cages at every step. Be it science, community leadership and personal sacrifice, the women in *The Hungry Tide* capture the resilience, strength and adaptiveness that underpin eco-feminist thought.

In addition, the novel provides a glimpse of women's subtle struggles in the Sundarbans, which usually go unnoticed or unmentioned in the wider context of environmental protection and ecological sustainability. In doing so, through the narration of these specific psychological struggles, Ghosh subtly yet incisively hints at not just the feminine ecological dimension but also widens his lens to include more vulnerable female populations that bear the double burden of being victims of environmental crises and social constraints. One of the novel's strongest messages is how gender, poverty and environmental vulnerability are intrinsically linked, where Kusum exemplifies the silence of a woman suffering.

While on the one hand eco-feminism, as explored in *The Hungry Tide* is also about women representing nature or the connection between them symbolically, on the other it has much to do with real lived experiences of those women who have deeply linked relationship with the land and waters of the Sundarbans. By embodying female leadership in Nilima, Ghosh deconstructs the traditional patriarchal systems and paves the way for a different conception of leadership- one which is based on building peaceful communities, finding compassion for each other, and understanding the living environment. The work of Nilima and the Badabon Trust constitutes an example that represents the integral space held by women in nurturing and protecting not only ecosystems but also human communities, a clear

affirmation that women are crucial to safeguarding both the Sundarbans and its millions of inhabitants.

3.1 Powering through the Currents: the Sundarbans and Women's Autonomy

Nilima and Piya represent various forms of women's agency, embodying elements of gender, ecology and survival in the Sundarbans as its female protagonists. The leadership of women like Nilima, who heads the Badabon Trust, can help in empowering and protecting poor communities. Her work extending to the local, she ensures that the women of the Sundarbans can exercise control over resources, and access education and opportunities for livelihood. Her independence shows in the standing she has in the community and the organization that she has built to handle health care, disaster relief etc. Nilima epitomizes what form women's agency in the Sundarbans can take, to the benefit not only of her sisters but also — by extension — those elsewhere who have had their voices drowned out by patriarchal callousness.

Piya's independence, on the other hand, is symbolically demonstrated by a narrow focus appearing in profile as she peeks through her telescope or works on the water this foreign marine biologist can access freedom and connection with no traditional constraints to which village women are so painfully bound —both physical and symbolic ones. Piya's freedom is also professional, not only political nor economic. The Sundarbans was where she went when she decided to study the river dolphins, mirroring her dedication towards environmental activism as well as making way for what ended up somewhat resembling a coming-of-age narrative. While Nilima is defined by her community, Piya's independence rests on a scientific enterprise and the facility with which she travels from one realm to another, geographically or culturally. In developing Piya, Ghosh shows that independence in

the Sundarbans is as much about choosing for oneself and being free to think as much it is about nature or being a woman who chooses what she wants.

Though their paths diverge in the ways, each approaches autonomy. Nilima and Piya are also two protagonists who share a common intention, to affirm their agency in a world where women's voices are still unheard. Thus, the hazardous terrain sustains as a metaphor to the volatile world which harasses women while they adjust with a male-dominated society. Women such as Nilima and Piya exercise their agency to differently respond to environmental degradation, by extension to act on sociopolitical issues the novel brings forth. With their stories Ghosh says that women's autonomy is important for her family's survival and the survival of their habitat with environmental problems they have been suffering from.

The autonomy of women in *The Hungry Tide* plays out both as an indivisible force confirming their independence and leadership personally and in a wider sense, aiding overall struggle for survival and sustainability in the Sundarbans. Ghosh's women defy conventional gender stereotypes, not just by refusing to break themselves but by stepping up in ways that allows them to be free and make their own communities stronger. Nilima and Piya, indicate at the empowering forces of women's autonomy in the midst of a struggle to survive imminent changes; however, she demonstrates that women play an integral role to preserve both ecology and community through strength.

3.2 Mangrove Matrons: Conditioning and Maintaining an Ecosystem

In *The Hungry Tide*, the mangroves are literal and symbolic examples of all life in the region being one entity, where women like Nilima and Piya protect it. In these ways, by practicing as social workers or conducting scientific research, they are the stewards; the protectors; the maternal forces of gea (the Earth as Mother); the matrons of the mangroves ensuring that

both human and ecological communities in Sundarbans are nurtured. Ghosh tells the story of these female leaders, helping us to understand that if we are to save ecosystems like the Sundarbans from environmental degradation, more science and conservation will not be enough—the health and well-being of nature requires strong and resilient human communities too. The joint efforts of Nilima and Piya prove that environmental protection is something we all can contribute to, that it needs to be a blend of nurture as well as knowledge or local wisdom that imparted the need for global consciousness.

Nilima's work in the Sundarbans is deeply linked with local social activism, somewhat akin to playing a role of an ecological guardian. She is involved in the local community through the Badabon Trust of which she is a leader — ensuring that those living at the heart of this hostile environment are also equipped to remain here, while showing inhabitants how essential it is to conserve these natural resources on which they live. While Nilima also is not necessarily working directly with environment as a focus of research or activism, the work that she advances in healthcare, education, and disaster relief ultimately contributes to strengthening bonds between humans and their environment which may facilitate a balance towards sustainability in Sundarbans. Nilima is safeguarding those ingredients in the social fabric, which enable humans to strike a balance between survival and conservation — natural disaster protection through community empowerment; educated and employed women. It is a true demonstration of how women not only can fight to defend the environment, but also cultivate robust and autonomous communities that both respect and care for the land.

On the contrary, Piya is more scientific and conservation oriented in her approach to engaging with the eco-system. Being a marine biologist, her focus of work involves studying the endangered Irrawaddy dolphins residing in the Aquatic ecosystem of Sundarbans. The commitments Piya has made to her research shed light on why scientific knowledge is critical

in protecting biodiversity and how championing these efforts can be a part of environmental stewardship for the 21st century. But like Nilima, Piya is intimately part of the local ecology and takes up the task of learning to traverse its predators and interpret those complex networks of creatures and people who live off each other in these islands. Further colored by a growing realization of local traditional knowledge already held by the fishermen, pointing to a combination of the scientific and indigenous as the means to nurture ecosystem. In taking steps to ensure that threatened dolphins are kept safe and protected, Piya embodies the larger role women play in trying to protect the Sundarbans — a vital check on development pressures that humans exert on nature here survived only by allowing others some space for their own existence.

Collectively, Nilima and Piya symbolize two distinct but overlapping characteristics of environmental stewardship in the Sundarbans. Nilima is the human face of sustainability, she does social work and works to create strong communities that can take life with true grit in such an ever changing system. At the same time, Piya is engaged in scientific research that advances direct conservation of biodiversity — underscore how much can indeed be lost if a deeper understanding and preservation of the natural world is not sufficiently recognized. Through their inimitable, respective manners the two women build and protect this ecosystem; proving how fundamental it is to bring women into leadership and decision-making when it comes to environmental health. These women are so clearly situated, and this allows Ghosh to illustrate the importance of women in conservation endeavours—in places like the Sundarbans where human existence is so intertwined with the preservation of natural life.

3.3 Inside the Whale: Women, Environment and Invisible Struggles

The depiction in *The Hungry Tide* by Amitav Ghosh discusses the problems these women, as are associated with the Sundarbans, face not just because of its hostile conditions but also due

to variety and context of socio-political configurations which exist there. Not only are the women of this region marginalized by society, but they are also charged with the arduous task of survivance in a dangerous and unpredictable environment. Female characters in Ghosh, like Kusum and Moyna are silent strugglers who have to fight the bloody battles between the land as well as the social positions. Through their narratives, Ghosh also presents that the experiences of living for women are entwined with larger environmental struggles in which they exist; hence the survival battles in the Sundarbans are not just human against nature fight, but also about addressing social limitations. Where life in Sunderbans region is generally cruel, there are good people like Nirmal and Nilima who have enriched the humanity through their social work among the poor and neglected section of society since 1950 (Mohan Lal Mahto, 2013, p. 141).

Kusum, a central character of the story represents those voices which are marginalized and people who suffer at large because of environmental exploitation and displacement. A single mother at the margins in the colonial Sundarbans, Kusum contends with not only daily struggles of life but also deals with larger forces dimming her community's future: government policies and corporate development. She never challenged anyone to a contest, the one she is running in for her life against adversity — defaulting to criminal by virtue of economic status and position; wearing like a bullseye on her forehead. The ultimate death of Kusum in the Morich Jhanpi massacre tells a gendered cost that ecological fragility and social turmoil have always levied. It is a story of resistance sans verbosity and woman-earth bond in its most primordial form; a fable that locates gendered and environmental oppression as related issues — where women bear the first load of being victims to ecological degradation, then they are displaced within it- all over again.

Another important female character, Moyna also confronts the internalized consequences of racism as she endeavors to create a better future for herself and her family;

one that is on par with the unfreedom of slavery. Unlike Kusum, who accepts a traditional Sundarbans woman's role, Moyna rejects that by escaping to get an education and work as a nurse. It is only her dreams lead her on a course that has to lead her away from Fokir and the burden of his people. The challenges Moyna faces, not just external as life in the Sundarbans is hard and unforgiving but also from within, her own desires to be free one minute followed by an understanding woman who knows what it means to be a wife & mother the next— her imperfect but almost personified pursuit of freedom as a woman under the patriarchal umbrella. Education also unfortunately fuels considerable resistance by the local environment and social institutions that would rather keep women like Moyna from changing their family fortunes.

If we consider the two characters Kusum and Moyna together, they combine to stand as the suffering of women, her identity is torn between a nature and culture that enslaves her principles ending in death or life surviving. The themes of Kusum's death and Moyna stepping outside of her traditional roles highlighted the multiple forms of oppression our female characters face—both environmental, and social, always at a great personal cost for some, if not simply survival— all in relation to their ability or freedom to voice themselves. The travails of the women in the Sundarbans uncover layers that are ecological, economic and material as they are deeply entrenched in patriarchal structures.

3.4 Mothers of the Mangroves: Women's Power in the Tide Country

In *The Hungry Tide*, Amitav Ghosh represents the never-before-seen types of female leadership that are possible and practiced in the Sundarbans, a place where tides are always rising and ebbing; dangerous jungle creatures burrow underneath each family's home in the riverine delta region; sinister mangroves ensnare fishermen who never return to land alive. Upsetting the stereotype of leadership, Nilima and Moyna — the matriarchs of the mangroves

refine how women can meet environmental challenges by juggling social traditions to bridge as pillars on every front for their communities.

An example of a woman who carves out a leadership role in the tide country is Nilima, co-founder of the Badabon Trust. She dedicates her life to helping the poor and marginalized people of the Sundarbans, both socially and environmentally. The way Nilima leads is a demonstration of her being pragmatic and quietly determined, these are the characteristics essential for leading a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) in which resources are limited, and the threats of nature are alive. She is not power-centric, but a resilient community builder concerned about healthcare, education and livelihoods. Nilima helps us realize that leadership, when it is based on empathy and service, offers an orientation of spiritual maturity toward the unhealthy pattern of dominance we have mistakenly accepted in our patriarchal society. She answers by dodging the control part, instead of explaining how she works to empower others, especially women, to act for themselves in the face of life-threatening circumstances in the Sundarbans.

In the same way, Moyna originally more of a self acquaintance was an emerging leader in her house and as a result in the community too. An ambitious woman aspiring to become a nurse, Moyna represents the desire for social uplift in her family and the constraints that prevent women from achieving more than traditional female roles. Although not as administrated in her leadership as Nilima, Moyna's intellectual enthusiasm and her work experience convinces us that she can enact real change for the better in her community, especially in a neglected region with scarce healthcare services. The added dimension of her struggle against societal norms, as well as her husband's disagreement with the idea of a career out side of the home, emphasises what would go some way to explain why there are still so few women who take their places at the head table in these positions in patriarchal

cultures. Against all odds, Moyna has always tried to excel in her job, not that flashy and much less popular type of leadership which you get from self-realization and service.

The overlap of Nilima and Moyna's stories hints at a feminine leadership that is not just about nurture, but also protection; about power and authority that are more than traditional. One looks at the ways in which women find pathways to power within patriarchal modes of community utilising the examples of Nilima's institutional leadership alongside Moyna's grassroots initiative. These are not women who populate title rolls or fill in highly visible public positions — but that is because what they do, no group of citizens could do as well. They provide education, healthcare and resources so that the de facto famine and poverty stricken region with poor environmental stability can survive.

3.5 Sustainability and Sacrifice: What Women Do in the Midst of Ecological Disaster

Amitav Ghosh sets women centre stage in *The Hungry Tide*, particularly looking at how women engage with the life-threatening problems served up by the threatening Sundarbans.

People like Kusum, Moyna and Nilima are flesh-and-blood symbols of the brutal fact that they carry their own existential challenge with them in a threat from the ecosystem itself.

These are the women who would make Ghosh relive their story and show him, that as wondrous nature is, for pangolins or tigers; for humans it means sacrifice on an unprecedented scale just to keep their families and communities alive. The Sundarbans, with its unforgiving terrain where floods or storms and savage feline strike are everyday hazards women deal in order to remain alive.

Kusum, a pivotal female character who captures the brutal subjugation of women in the Sundarbans. The plot follows Michonne from the moment she's born poor to winning back some control of her environment. Not only is her life dependent upon the laws of nature as an organism though, she is dependent more than anything else on the intricate social order

that exists in this far-off country, while making things even more difficult for women at the same time. Kusum repeatedly sacrifices — to save herself and her son from the economic and physical dangers of the Sundarbans, or as a figure behind-the-scenes of the Morichjhapi massacre, when she gambles on defying the government in order to help refuge seekers. Given the scale of these forces stacked against her, Kusum's resilience is incredible. It bitterly exemplifies the cost that women pay for opposing ecological and social violence. In Kusum, Ghosh illustrates a way of life in the Sundarbans—how so much of surviving there can translate to sacrificing one's safety, emotional health and ultimately existence.

Whereas Kusum has to grapple with the trials and tribulations of life in the Sundarbans, Moyna, too faces formidable odds – just of a different kind. And her battle stands test of the longing within her to come out of her own sphere of life and work for better future of family. Her determination to be a nurse for example, is as much an expression of her will as it is the sacrifices she will have to make to maintain this balance with the roles expected of her like that of being a wife and mother. And her bond with husband Fokir — whose fate is still at the mercy of a life in fishing — layers onto this sense of survival. Her sacrifices are sentimental and inward, she is wrestling with the dichotomy of chasing after her dreams or taking up a burden of family. Whereas Kusum literally has the state about to drop a nuclear bomb on her head and ecological disaster chasing at her heels, Moyna's problems are more personal, more domestic, but no less charged with significance. Ghosh presents her efforts to survive as a fragile balancing act of caring for others and fighting against the restrictions that her reality places on her.

In contrast, Nilima tells the story of sustainability at a long-term level with community service and institution building. Nilima is the caretaker of her people from Lusibari, as Badabon Trust's co-founder, which is meant to be a response with clarity so far in healthcare, education and in terms of making economic standard. Nilima's sacrifices are

for the community instead of environmental threats upon her person like Kusum or Moyna. She spends her life combating those who suffer from the unpredictability of the local environment and the socio-economic problems it imposes. Those personal sacrifices can pay off with years of hard work, rising through the ranks to a leadership position that requires levels of dedication and emotional strength most non-special needs caregivers could not even imagine. With Nilima, Ghosh describes a survival as service—a diagram of how women in positions of leadership are the very bulwark that replicates community survival in the environmental and social disasters to come.

In Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*, a survey of women's lives in the Sundarbans offers an intricate story of resistance, independence, authority and self-destruction. Kusum, Moyna and Nilima might be three variegated profiles of femininity that Ghosh paints in the novel; but they are portraits in one frame of women living and being their lives under the same overarching threat— that which electrifies life in a small village by the sea. Woven together, Ghosh highlights the resilience of these women also underscoring that environmental crises have a gendered dimension, with women frequently being on the frontlines experiencing attacks from both nature and gendered society. The women of *The Hungry Tide* trouble such gendered demarcations, not just in relation to the freedoms they are granted or denied within their ever more gate-locked world but also in regards to their crucial roles as holders of knowledge, care-givers and weavers within this threatened microcosm. Women who fight for their own communities but also lead federal, do kitchen gardens and are more intertwined with outsiders due to environmental activism, showing women as critical figures in relation to not only nurturing natural life form but also is something that human communities dependent upon. Their strength echoes through the displacement of worlds, natural disasters and patriarchal expectations that the women have to navigate with grace and grit whilst giving their all. So there they are, living these elaborate lives and then

you get the themes that play into survival and sacrifice. Ghosh narrates the story of women from the Sundarbans who have nothing once again to lose but their lives. Kusum who sacrifices herself, Moyna who is conflicted at balancing her ambition and her responsibilities to the family and of course Nilima who throws away an entire lifetime to service. But their stories speak to a resilience that extends well beyond mere survival, of the quiet but steadfast power these women found within themselves to push back against environmental devastation, political repression and the dead hand of tradition.

Chapter 4

Jungle Nama

Jungle Nama, a meld of myth and eco-feminism is an artful ecology by Amitav Ghosh that performs this delicate dance between gender, ecology and justice under the very unique circumstances of the Sundarbans — simply asks for many re-visits. With its roots in the forests of the Sundarbans, and a saga based on the mythological legend of Bon Bibi, *Jungle Nama* is an adulation inspired by this forest goddess; believed to be watching over both, land and man in these deep dark woods. Drawing upon a myth at the heart of the oral traditions of the Sundarbans, this project reflects on what it means for women to be custodians not just of an ecological equilibrium but also as sisters and collaborators in survival amidst social-environmental crises that define our time.

The women-keepers of ecological knowledge and sustainability as an eco-feminist discourse noticed by Ghosh in *Jungle Nama*. By casting the story in performance, local legend also aligns with a broad and longstanding global ethic suggesting that female characters like Bon Bibi might serve as environmental stewards, reconciling human settlement with ecological preservation. Through the Bon Bibi figure, Ghosh argues that male and female representation and leadership are wholly necessary at both corporate levels and micro levels of decision-making to make sure communities and ecosystems survive. Moreover, *Jungle Nama* also offers a critique of misogynic environments that are harmful not only to balance between the environment and society as suggested here but to healthful maintenance of life itself. The villain is the Dokkhin Rai, representing greed and exploitation as more nefarious, behind-the-scenes entities — compatibilities for capitalism or patriarchy; fickle systems based on what benefits now rather than long term viability. But then, Bon is a different narrative where the dialectics of ecological rights and gender justice harmonize at the altar of nature conservation. This book, which elaborates the relationship between gender

and environmental justice from an eco-feminist perspective, encourages readers to replace traditionally conformed perceptions that have under-occupied both women and nature alike with differing new based-on-conflict hierarchies. And this chapter is devoted to the developing of *Jungle Nama* into certain intriguing passages. Through a reading of folklore like the one conducted by Ghosh's text, we can see how eco-feminist knowledge becomes established as common-sense wisdom multiplexed through Bon Bibi and we also gain insight into the weaving of gender, ecology and justice in the Sundarbans. *Jungle Nama* shows us how myths too are the wisdom of anti-patriarchy and its battle for mere existence in a world dominated by women as tough eco-systemic or social doers. Woven together, these discussions constitute a rich eco-feminist fabric and insist that the threads be woven through anything but superficial and reductive gendered, environed justice readings of Sundarbans.

4.1 A Feminist Account of Bon Bibi's Life and Her Impact on Ecology

Jungle Nama tells the story of origin of Bon Bibi, a deity worshipped throughout the Sundarbans and employs myth-making in combination with eco-feminism as an anthemic language for understanding mythology in Amitav Ghosh's deep dialogue between classic art form. The legacy of Bon Bibi, developed in an oral tradition that balances the conversion of scriptures to everyday language and understanding, offers a model for two kinds of relationships which are both egalitarian between nature and human and hence alternative to patriarchy as well as ecofeminist. She stands for justice, for the voiceless, and the oppressed; in this instance the impoverished inhabitants of the forest — a clarion call against unrestrained rapacity that threatens both community and nature. More than mere folklore, her narrative a powerful indictment of exploitation and environmental degradation that connects the dominion over nature to the oppression of—not just historically indigenous populations—but also women.

The myth of Bon Bibi, as it is narrated in *Jungle Nama*, arranges for her to be a keeper not solely of the natural bounty in Sundarbans but also hung on the social assortment which values and preserves this bounty. She is characterized as an equalitarian archetype, willing to treat the rich and powerful no different than men or poorer women, accepting only those who hold a fragile compromise of respect and caring for both the superorganism (the human needs) as well as the florauna (the environment). In this myth, Ghosh illustrates the eco-feminism that always envisions women doing crucial duty as environment agents. The guardian figure Bon Bibi's protectorate reflects the eco-feminist belief in the kinship between women and nature and that without women, or this connection to nature, ecological balance cannot be maintained. In opposition to the power-hungry patriarchy is her battle against malevolent figure Dokkhin Rai, embodying human greed/voracity and indifference towards nature destruction, signifying opposing reasons for development (exploitation in patriarchal worldview versus protection/nurturing/sustainability of Earth with feminine principle). In the story, Bon Bibi lives beyond just as a supernatural myth; she has an impact in the tangible lives of the human population living around her — predominantly its female counterpart. These women are the keepers of this house and just like Bon Bibi, they are trying to save the fragile world on which their lives depend. They imbibe the lessons of Bon Bibi, taking on the mantle of traditional underpinnings that is passed on from generation to generation. Women in the Sundarbans are closer to nature than many, since their daily interactions with the forest allows them a unique knowledge of how the forest works and grows. Their lives epitomize the eco-feminist observation that women — in rural and indigenous communities especially — are often carrying out the front-line work of environmental stewardship. In this myth of Bon Bibi, Ghosh is showing the deep rooted power in her roles as protectors to their families and the ecosystem though they are marginalized, often unheard alone women.

Simultaneously, the myth of Bon Bibi is a commentary on patriarchal systems reinforcing social and environmental decay. In her confrontation with Dokkhin Rai, the constant contrast of female preservation (Bon Bibi) against forces of exploitation (male hierarchy) gets explored. The broader eco-feminist struggle resonates through this collision of the tiger and the Bakarwals in *Jungle Nama*. Furthermore, the fact that Bon Bibi is a female deity who is venerated for her strength and wisdom in preserving balance further suggests an urgent need for feminine leadership when tackling ecological issues as such. This kind of leadership is non-colonial; it is not interested in taking over, but instead in looking after and providing protection for which, unfortunately, we have too few role models.

4.2 The Female Principle: Folklore as Eco-Feminist Experience

Amitav Ghosh acknowledges this significance of the oral tradition to maintain the cultural and ecological knowledge of the Sundarbans in *Jungle Nama*. The folklore of the region including the legend of Bon Bibi is more than mere fables, it is a primer to the ecology and an Indian way to life, gender equality and tension between animal and human kingdoms. Oral traditions and an eco-feminist view is portrayed in a very clear way, showing how the women are literally part of nature. The cultural stories have been passed on orally generation to generation and for the most part exclusively by women, who play the role of cultural keepers and environmental stewards. Telling stories becomes an eco-feminist act in and of itself, pushing back against the silencing of women's voices in a patriarchal world, while at the same time passing on essential wisdom about conservation, honour for the environment and understanding of community.

Women in the Sundarbans have traditionally been the carriers of these songs and dances, helping to safeguard the ecological wisdom that has been woven into them. A major figment of the Sundarbans folklore is the Bon Bibi story, which beautifully illustrates how

oral traditions provide a biocentric and eco-feministic perspective. At its heart is a story of Bon Bibi, a female deity that encapsulates the forest's natural forces which safeguards it and its animals from all harm. For many women in the Sundarbans, who are closely involved with the forest resources in their daily lives, Bon Bibi symbolises protection and nurturing. The importance of narrating the story of Bon Bibi and traditional systems through word of mouth had been vital especially when it comes to women issue. The story is also a symbol of the feminisation of environmental stewardship — women often are hit hardest by ecological destruction, yet remain in the forefronts undesirably fighting on.

The oral tales of Bon Bibi in *Jungle Nama* resonate with a larger eco-feminist criticism of nature and women as oppressed under patriarchal systems. At its core the stories are all about living in harmony with nature and they stand in stark contrast to the ravaging forces of male dominated exploiters, such as Dokkhin Rai. Women in the Sundarbans, like Bon Bibi, frequently face these forces head on. At the same time, they provide an important source of traditional wisdom regarding land use and resource management that is essential to maintain the ecological balance of the area. Eco-feminism, for example, examines this direct link with looking at women and nature as two subjugated groups rooted in same patriarchal systems which promotes domination and control scalping over care and harmony. The Sundarban folklore, transmitted across generations by women, serves as a counter-narrative to the extractive worldview, emphasizing the importance of nurturing and revering the earth.

Nevertheless, the female voice within these oral traditions is present not only in narratives concerning divine figures such as Bon Bibi. The text encompasses narratives and evidence of women's connection with nature. Their life, struggles, resilience and wisdom are like the tales multiplied in folklore underpinning and enriching their significance, among eco-feminist themes embedded in *Jungle Nama*. These stories reflect the very real concerns of

women as nurturers, protectors and carers for the earth — using empathy and respect for nature as an overriding leadership principle embodying in full measure, ecosystem sensibility and commitment to life. Thus, we can say that the oral tradition becomes a medium for women's voices to be magnified, their wisdom to be considered and their role in environmental sustenance is valued.

4.3 Striking a Balance: Justice, Gender and Ecology in the Forest

Amitav Ghosh takes the intricate ecosystems of the Sundarbans as a microcosm to grapple with those larger issues in *Jungle Nama*. The book explores ideas about balance – balance between humans and nature, between men and women, between justice and power — by skillfully weaving eco-feminist themes into the novel's narrative. Ghosh's story seeking inspiration from the legend of Bon Bibi illustrates how a fragile balance needs to be trained over ages in Sundarbans where humanity and nature live intertwined with each other. Yet this balance is always undermined by the forces of exploitation, greed and patriarchy causing a fight for justice to be made again and again, advocating particularly for women who suffer from the hardest consequences in ecological and social crisis.

As the beloved guardian of the forest, Bon Bibi is a great force for justice and balance in the ecosystem of the Sundarbans. She is not just the guardian of nature, but also the arbiter of justice and defender of the downtrodden as well as for the marginalized and the poor. She, as a legend says, that all jungle ever shared by every creature should not be exploited aggressively since it is just natural balance which too much consumption drives us out. In the Sundarbans, as in the case of Bon Bibi herself, the burden is often on women to keep this fragile peace. Women experience first hand the intricacies of these interlinkages and realize how they must all come together as part of a wider system to keep both their household running smoothly and grow food on farm. It is therefore the women who emerge as central figures in the fight for justice, as they are forced to bear the brunt of not only environmental

destruction but also gendered violence. Their understanding and labour to cultivate this balance makes them an eco-feminist leader in her community, even as we struggle together across a world designed to rob life from their voices.

The novel portrays the unequal power relations in patriarchal systems that mostly use women and nature. Creatures such as Dokkhin Rai, who personifies greed and ruthless power, make up the dark side of forces to which balance has been restored after figures like Bon Bibi were able to intervene in an outburst. Like patriarchy, the way Dokkhin Rai wants to dominate the jungle and has a hissy fit in which venting all his rage upon the absent woman is an exact mirror. In a broader sense, the women of Sundarbans fight this oppressive order every day, because they are so closely linked to the nature. Their role is to defend not only their families and communities from environmental hazards—but also their own bodies, as they counteract the patriarchal structures that threaten to leave them on the margins of society. Therefore, their pursuit for justice is fundamentally linked to the ecological equilibrium of the Sundarbans. While they resist the exploitation and conservation of their environment, Indigenous Women also challenge the social norms which try to keep them from exercising their agency, autonomy.

This layering of gender and ecology and justice in the lives of ordinary women in the Sundarbans is depicted with great sensitivity through *Jungle Nama*. The whole of their existence is so intimately enmeshed within this natural world that it becomes an integrated part of them—inseparable from themselves—therefore any perturbation in the environmental status quo, reverberates quickly and strongly upon their welfare. It also highlights how women who are the most knowledgeable and expert on nature have intimate connections with natural entities, without whom the maintenance of the ecosystem's equilibrium is impossible. Still, so often the good they do is hidden or devalued in a world that prioritizes production over preservation because it is built for men. In capturing these

women, Ghosh also reminds us that we must not only see them for who they uniquely are, but honor their role in the ongoing maintenance of our environment and by extension indeed justice itself.

4.4 Questioning the patriarchy

Being the protector of the Sundarbans, Bon Bibi serves as an anti-patriarchal force in the novel. Dokkhin Rai embodies domination over the forests as well as the jungle dwellers; Bon Bibi symbolizes rule based on equitability, conservation, and balance. She is literally measured out against the patriarchal forces that treat nature and women as commodities to be extracted and subdued. Bon Bibi leads all, living and non-living to his/her fair share of the forest resources in an eco-feminist ethic of care – myth. Her abilities as a woman protector make her an anomaly in traditional male race systems leaning on punishment and violence to exert authority. In a twist of irony, the name and legacy of Bon Bibi provides strength to the women of the Sundarbans today who, like her perennial struggle against forces that wish to suppress them, carry on their everyday lives in this region. Thus, Ghosh uses the essence of the struggle of women in the Sundarbans with eco-feminism and its principles that translates to a resistance against patriarchal domination along with an ode for nature.

The women of the Sundarbans, who are their families breadwinners, community influencers and do all that it takes to ensure that house as a functioning unit are in many ways a living testimony of resistance on an hourly basis against what patriarchy brings to define their lives. These women who are usually second-class citizens in a male-dominated society have to survive not just the perils of the jungle but also restrictions by societal norms — which restrict their autonomy and agency. Their close relationship to the environment, however, gives them a certain type of power. Women of the Sundarbans, however, having a better understanding of their parental land and being capable of providing food to support their families in an ecological system that is carefully balanced, deconstruct this notion since

they too can play the role of provider and protector so reiterating the patriarchal power as vested solely in male hands. In aspiring to be the defenders of their environment and their homes, these women challenge the very foundations of the oppressive forces seeking to silence them; from behind translucent cloths of nonviolence. Their refusal to back down in the face of ecological destruction, poverty and social separation is a challenge that highlights survival as success when it requires resisting patriarchal control.

In this respect, *Jungle Nama* illustrates that it has real female leadership – which we need so much today and not only in order to deflect environmental damage but also against social norms propagates unequal outcomes. Despite the many challenges she faces, women such as Kusum who are deeply rooted in land and natural resources, rise up to be leaders of their communities. Their leadership is not abusive or misogynistic; but they are the guardians, nurturers, and protectors of both family and even the world. The female characters offer an alternative way for humans to interact with the environment besides exploitation and greed, as seen in some of the male characters in this novel. Ghosh interprets this dynamic as exemplifying the patriarchy in patriarchal settings that reward profit and power over preservation and equity. And in the Sundarbans, the women are those who challenge local patriarchal notions of leadership in favour of care and cooperation—embodying a different kind of leadership that is rooted on land and community.

4.5 Jungle Nama and Eco-Feminist Re-Imaginations: Songs for Survival

In *Jungle Nama*, Amitav Ghosh not only brings eco-feminist narratives together but uses a form of verse and song to underscore the indefatigable bond between humans, nature, and our struggle for survival across time. Written in verse, the novel is structurally similar to oral storytelling and folklore, mediums that have a long history of embedding within them all the histories and fights from society's underside (and women). The concept of “songs” played in *Jungle Nama* is all-important as it provides a reflection of the rhythm of life in the

Sundarbans which, being tidal and seasonal, teters between the binary extremities of existence and extinction. And within these songs, Ghosh embodies the eco-feminist will to power on — where women and nature sing together tales of expropriation; protestation and a better tomorrow that sees both united in transformative peace.

Bon Bibi is at the heart of her songs of survival in *Jungle Nama*. She is guardian of the Sundarbans, acting as a fierce mother whose protective spirit helps to maintain equilibrium between all living. It tells her story through orature and remains alive through songs of those relying on her protection. These music, more than mere tales, are an act of survival in themselves remembering a age when human-nature partnership was valued. The song of Bon Bibi in particular articulates a strong ecological and femeinist principle, emphasising on the need for balance between the natural world and we who inhabit it. In her, Ghosh allows us to see that womens survival has a direct bearing on the role that they play in keeping life alive. Both her legend and the songs that tell it remind those of the women from the novel, constantly torn between their duties as nurturers and their struggle to stay alive in a society that always seems ready to throw them away.

Finally, an intimate song from the women of the Sundarbans, where their voices are in sync with the land and sea. Women such as Kusum and those with her are portrayed as the burden of survival falls on them, not only for themselves but also for their families and villagers. Their songs are figurative articulations of an intuitive knowledge they feel for the land, the tides and rhythms of nature. The fishermen who inhabit the region are wise to when they should sow their crops, but also discerning of when they must flee from the threats of its mangroves. The songs they sing (literal or metaphorical) are an articulation of their wisdom and survival. But even these songs speak of their compromises, for they continue to silently suffer through the harshness of both worlds; natural and social. Silent songs like these, Ghosh infers, reflect eco-feminist thinking that women—like the natural world—may seem

insignificant in masculine discourses but are essential to the continued health and sustainability of their communities.

The narrative of *Jungle Nama* also illustrates how women are closely connected to nature and how they live in harmony with their environment. Whereas the men tend to be aggressive, trying to conquer or manipulate the environment, women know that survival means symbiosis and symbiotic equilibrium — a characteristic of civilizations in which beneficial factors than antagonistic ones reinforce each other internally. Their music embodies the strategies they must utilize to move through the changing waters of the Sundarbans — and just how significantly society is a part of oppressive ocean as well as every other human experience (like love, existential contemplation, or despair). The male characters that we see, for example: Dokkhini Rai is a patriarchal figure who has brought massive exploitation; the songs of the woman on the other hand represent care and conservation. Ghosh tells their stories showing the eco-feminist not to dominate but to nurture, not against but with nature.

Jungle Nama unites eco-feminism with the myth, folklore and survival stories of the Sundarbans in a way that is pure magic. Throughout the different stories visited in the tale, Ghosh gives us a world where women and nature go hand on hand, often with their destinies laid out by patriarchal forces of conquest as well. And in all these discussions, through Bon Bibi, *Jungle Nama* is making a larger comment on how patriarchy has always tried to silence the role of women vis-a-vis environment by reflecting upon the oral traditions and its ways of environmental sustenance based on what it calls justice with respect to gender and ecology. In interweaving myth and eco-feminism, Ghosh reveals the once forgotten legacy of Bon Bibi as justice in the Sundarbans whose identity women serve a significant function to wildlife conservation as well for her communities. As Ghosh rehearses the folk tales and femininity, he narrows in on the oral traditions which uphold women saggas, continuing to emphasize

how their voices have historically been instrumental in preserving of-the-river chant (both literally and figuratively). By doing so, the novel delves deeper into the careful link between justice, gender and ecology – how respect for one relies on respect for both the other (the natural world and the women more closely connected to it).

In stories of resistance, Ghosh also takes on the oppressive forces of patriarchy, women subverting structures that are designed to push us towards the margins and abuse nature. In this manner, *Jungle Nama* supports the eco-feminist maxim that enslavement of ladies and deterioration of nature are fundamentally entwined — one can't exist without the other — and you should never try to address only them, but always face both to complete ecologic equality and social decency. The songs of survival in the novel, be it literal or metaphorical, serve to represent women's resilience but also their fate in trying to ensure reproduction in a world where ecological crisis has gone rampant and patriarchal power represses still.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Spanning Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*, *Gun Island* and his eco-verse *Jungle Nama*; these three novels together converge on the theme of Ecofeminism by addressing the relationship between gender, ecology and any socioeconomic connectivity that exists in this fragile realm of the Sundarbans. In these stories, Ghosh uncovers the overlooked contributions of women on the socio-environmental frontlines of our communities and local ecosystems; a role that all too often remains shadowed by social frameworks and climate catastrophes. Through Nilima and Kusum in *The Hungry Tide*, the unnamed ecosystems of *Gun Island*'s climate-affected women, and the mythic Bon Bibi in *Jungle Nama*, his female characters ground survival strategies in place-based practical knowledge that pushes against patriarchal and exploitative models where nature is treated as an object or tool, rather than agency—both human and non-human. This representation also falls in line with the eco-feminist theories of both Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies, used to argue that the oppression of women is inter-linked with the degradation of nature itself, both rooted in systems of domination. For Ghosh's women in dance with nature, that relationship is both spiritual and utilitarian; their sense of the natural world becomes local knowledge that gathers significance when a crisis strikes. In *Jungle Nama*, for example, the forest goddess Bon Bibi is a figure representing ecological equilibrium and the rights of nature as they are threatened by exploiters; she embodies an eco-feminist archetype of women as guardians of webs of life. Through the mythology and folklore of areas like Bon Bibi, Ghosh highlights a worldview built around balance rather than conquest; collective well-being before individual wealth. That perspective was echoed in the idea of "staying rooted" described by Shiva as interdependence and attachment to one's land and surrounding, which contribute to resilience. In relation to this, Ghosh furthermore describes how the effects of environmental vulnerability and poverty converge to exacerbate

women's hardships (in *Gun Island*), with climate-induced migration portrayed as a male-focused phenomenon while women are illustrated as suffering the most due to ecological instability. In these stories, Ghosh critiques patriarchal structures that silence women and destroy the ecology, indicating that there can be no climate justice without social justice.

In the end, Ghosh's novels are plea for an eco-feminism integrated perspective where voice of women acts as a tool fighting for the cause of sustainability and equity. Slightly modifying that quote, we could say that —Eco-feminism really merges into the people and planet movement, which is not so much about 'genders' but rather an inclusive call for justice, just that eco-feminist activism connects oppressed humans with non-humans in harmony. In upcoming work, others could also build on some of Ghosh's ideas through the lens of eco-feminism with literature from equally ecological but also social vulnerable regions further researching how cultural heritages catalyse environmental practices as both a resilience and sustainable pathway towards more prosperous futures led by women.

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