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**Environmental Concerns with Monolingual and Multilingual Characters in *The Hungry Tide***

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**Abstract:**

The essence of the novel cannot be separated from its language. Language plays an eminent role in conveying messages and the same eminence can be seen in the works of Amitav Ghosh. Since most of the novels of Amitav Ghosh are postcolonial, historical and reflects his eco critical concerns, his novels have prominent role for language. This article will explore that how Ghosh presents his environmental concerns with his monolingual and multilingual characters.

**Key words:** monolingual, multilingual, environmental concerns.

Ghosh's novels are known for numerous significant issues. His use of different languages and vocabularies that carry a powerful position in his novels. He

is an eminent spokesman of various issues of the society through his distinguished use of language. With his magnificent skill of amalgamating fact and fiction, he proves himself as a master of English language. Changing languages or adapting the different languages other than mother tongue is not a new practice in the history of literature. In the literary history, many writers preferred to write in a presiding language rather than their mother tongue. Other reasons for translingual writing are personal choice of the writers and also emigration. Considerable number of translingual writers emerged during recent years as exposure to the English language increased world wide. The Indian translingual writer Raja Rao believes that many writers tend to change the muse of the language while writing in English for the purpose of expressing their emotions correctly. By saying this, he supports the non-native writers of English in his 'foreword' of his *Kanthapura*:

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The telling has not been easy. One has to convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own. One has to convey the various shades and omissions of a certain thought-movement that looks maltreated in an alien language. I use the word "alien", yet English is not really an alien language to us. It is the language of our intellectual makeup [...] but not of our emotional makeup. [...] We cannot write like the English. We should not. We cannot write only as Indians. [...] Our method of expression therefore has to be a dialect which will someday prove to be as distinctive and colorful as the Irish or the American. (v)

Chinua Achebe, the Nigerian author, also supports this change of language derived by the translingual writers. In his essay "The African Writer and the English Language", he mentions

The price a world language must be prepared to pay is submission to the many different kinds of use. The African writer should aim to

use English in a way that brings out his message best without altering the language to the extent that its view as a medium of international exchange will be lost. He should aim at fashioning out an English which is at once universal and able to carry his peculiar experience. (100)

Amitav Ghosh has received a prominent place in English literature as an Indian translingual writer. Language is an intense instrument used by Amitav Ghosh in his novel *The Hungry Tide* to intertwine various factors such as politics, history, environment, myth etc. In an essay entitled "Silenced worlds: Language and Experience in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*" Gareth Griffiths mentions, "Throughout Ghosh's novel language, speech, writing, translation and interpretation are confronted by forms of experience that resist the mediation of language." The article explores that how Ghosh uses the instrument of language to bring out his concerns on environment.

The mud bank is shaped by various languages: "the mud banks of the tide country are shaped not only by rivers of silt, but also by rivers of language: Bengali, English, Arabic, Hindi, Arakanese and who knows what else?" (Ghosh 247). In another

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instant, while Kusum narrates the death of her father, She stops Kanai to utter the name of the animal, tiger as it has the ability to summon the animal Only if it's name is pronounced: “Do you mean,” Kanai interrupted, “that you saw a --?” But even before he could say the word bagh, tiger, she had slammed a hand over his mouth: “No you can’t use the word – to say it is to call it” (Ghosh 108). In the narration of telling the death of Kusum's father, Ghosh is not using the word ‘tiger’ directly, instead he mentions only as great cats and compares the power of the tigers with ghost: “the great cats of the tide country were like ghost, never revealing their presence except through marks, sounds and smells”.(Ghosh 108)

The three of the predominant characters in the novel have their roles peculiar for their known languages. Piyali, who refuses to teach Bengali-her parents language, is monolingual and her language in the novel is only English. Fokir who does not know any other languages except his local dialect is also monolingual. On the other hand, Ghosh creates another central character Kanai as multilingual. He is a translator by profession and knows six languages. Language plays significant role in the lives of these three characters. The author brings out the capacity of language uses and obstacles in using them during social conversations.

Fokir is blessed to sing the song of Bon Bobi, but he appears to be silent in most of the communications with humans in the novel. Though Piya is monolingual, she does not face much issue in facing the world with the limitations of language while travelling to various countries. Though she refuses to learn Bengali during her childhood days and expects her parents only to translate the messages into English: “I always made them translate their messages into English- or else I wouldn’t carry them”<sup>250</sup>. But later she regrets for it. In an incident while Nilima forgets to talk with her in English and responds to her in Bengali, Piya says, “My mother used to say that a day would come when I’d regret not knowing the language. And I guess she was right” (Ghosh 249).

These three Central characters in the novel are created to bring out the power of language and its limitations during the communication between human beings. The characters also play significant role in exhibiting Ghosh’s environmental anxieties. Though Piya has limitations in the knowledge of language, she does not face any issues in communicating with Fokir. Only by communicating two words ‘Lusibari’ and ‘Mashima’, she successfully conveys her message to Fokir. Ghosh, while talking about the power and limitations of language, he does not forget to mention the communication in and out of silence. While Kanai tries to convey Fokir

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that he knows his mother, his only reaction to Kanai's voice was silence:

She (Piyali) hadn't understood what had passed between the two men, but there was no mistaking the condescension in Kanai's voice as he was speaking to Fokir: it was the kind of tongue in which someone might address a dimwitted waiter, at once jocular and hectoring. It didn't surprise her that Fokir had responded with what his instinctive mode of defense was clearly: silence. (Ghosh 210)

Ghosh also brings out the fact that one doesn't need to feel superior for being multilingual. Having knowledge on many languages does not help in every situation or in every communications. Understanding the communication between human beings needs more than knowledge on languages. Kanai's communication with Moyna also explores his superiority over multilingualism. While Kanai was asking about her dissatisfaction in her wedding with Fokir and why she agreed to marry him, she said:

She smiled, as if to herself. "You wouldn't understand," she said. He was nettled by

the certainty in her voice. "I wouldn't understand?" he said sharply. "I know five languages; I've travelled all over the world. Why wouldn't I understand? ...It doesn't matter how many languages you know," she said. (Ghosh 156)

Though he could speak six languages, Kanai is inadequate in understanding the soul and emotions of his fellow beings, while Piya and Fokir have no issues in understanding each other even with their language limitations. Here language becomes ineffective in making meaningful communication.

To conclude, Ghosh executes his ideas through multiple voices of the characters in the novel *The Hungry Tide*. Through the perspectives of different characters in the novel, Ghosh presents his ecological concerns. In *The Hungry Tide*; the characters carry Ghosh's potentiality of language in their way of life. Through the character of Kanai, the novelist presents the dangerous circumstance of the island. Piya, being researcher, the defenceless situation of flora and fauna is presented. The life of Nirmal in the novel is displayed only through his writings. The letter brings forth environmental surroundings of Sundarbans and it is the main source that contains origin of people of the island.

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