

SURVIVAL IS A QUEST FOR SUBALTERN IN AMITAV GHOSH'S *THE HUNGRY TIDE*

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ABSTRACT

*The postcolonial writing is a powerful tool to show the existing colonial society and its complex institutional system by giving voice for the voiceless. The voiceless are the people who are totally away from the hegemonic structure of the society. In postcolonial literature, 'subaltern studies' has become a vibrant topic in the post colonialism at present. The meaning of the term 'subaltern' is used today in a broad sense which brings more diversity to subaltern studies. Subaltern literature reflects the pain and suffering undergone by the people who have been marginalized and suppressed from the main stream social activities by hegemonic for various reasons such as race, colour, caste, religion, language and gender. The literary products of the colonizers and the dominant forcers have failed to reflect the ground reality of the marginalized people. Therefore, a group of South Asian Historians with the leadership of Ranajith Guha, wanted to rewrite the history to redeem the silenced voices of subaltern. Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* is great voice for the subalterns who are given shelter in Sundarbans forest, West Bengal. He clearly picturizes the marginal people who run their lives by facing various risk given by the nature and the oppressed. This paper explores the real trauma of subaltern with various situations.*

INTRODUCTION

The postcolonial literature is produced to scan the postcolonial society which has opened a new horizon to understand the contemporary imperial third world. The power of imperialism totally wrecks the third world or the marginalized society by its political system and hybrid culture. It paves some crucial ways for the subaltern to face different challenges in order to survive on their imperial home-land. They have to face three main challenges – survival, cultural, financial and psychological challenges. Survival is a main challenge which is very crucial in the imperial society. Thus, their lives become full of quest.

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Subaltern Studies has become a powerful weapon to give voice for the voiceless. The term 'subaltern' is first used in a non-military sense by Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci which refers to a group who are outsider of the established structure of political representation. He also emphasizes that the term 'subaltern' is an allusion which refers to any group of inferior rank and status, whether because of race, class, gender, religion, sex, ethnicity, creed and caste. This term later is used by different scholars like Partha Chatterjee, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Ranjith Guha, and Gayatri Chakrabarty Spivak.

Amitav Ghosh, an intellect postcolonial writer, once again proves his anthropological power in writing to produce a historical novel, *The Hungry Tide*. This novel shows the study by Ghosh to provide the ground reality of subalterns and their lives in Sundarban forest. It has no border to divide fresh water from salt, river from sea, even land from water. The tides reach more than two hundred miles inland. It has become a land of man eater and the crocodiles and tigers who rule there. This crucial condition questions the settlers in Sundarbans and makes their lives a big quest.

Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* is a powerful story which has three major threads – ethnography, historiography and romance. First, there is Piyali Roy, a marine biologist born in India but raised in American. As Piyali researches the endangered river dolphins that live in the Sundarbans. She meets Kanai Dutt, a multilingual interpreter from New Delhi who is also traveling to the Sundarbans. Kanai's journey leads to the second plotline. His aunt Nilima runs a local NGO and hospital in the town of Lusibari. She gives Kanai the journal of his late uncle, Nirmal, a former schoolmaster, socialist and poet. The journal is written over twenty years ago. It contains description of the tide country's history, geography, and folklore. It also has a personal account of how the Indian government massacred a community of refugees living on one the Sundarban islands in 1979. Ghosh stresses that Morichjapi massacre is an actual historical event neglected in the history of postcolonial India. The third plotline concerns a local fisherman named Fokir who is unable to communicate with Piya and helps her to find some of the river dolphins. Fokir's mother turns out to be an old friend of Kannai's who is killed during the government massacre while Fokir is a child.

Amitav Ghosh in his novel *The Hungry Tide* defines the space of home in relation to the global village. This novel summaries the events at morichjhapi in 1979 and the subaltern consciousness that Nimal finds in the novel. He not only emphasizes with the world but also indentifies with the refugees as he understands the universal yearning of the wretched of the earth, the millions with a home. In this respect, Homi Bhabha emphasizes the important of relation of social power in his working definition of subaltern groups as oppressed minority groups whose presence was vital to the self-definition of the majority group: subaltern social group were also in position to subvert the authority of those who had hegemonic power.

Amitav Ghosh in his novel delineates the post partition influx of population from East Bengal to West Bengal. The problem of the Bengali Hindu refugees was not confined geographically to one state rather crossed the eastern border in West Bengal mostly in Calcutta and its suburbs also.

In the novel *The Hungry Tide*, Nirmal's diary entries recounting Morichjhapi and the plight of the Fokir's mother Kusum serves as true reality of the Sunderbans. The refugees fought for survival. They become the victims of Morichjhapi after the water and food supplies are cut off to the islands to coerce the refugees to flee. The question of rootlessness and deprived classes who are the subaltern agents sit there helpless and listen to the policemen making their announcements. They say that their lives and their experience are not worth that dirt or dust.

The eminent critic of subaltern, Gayatri Spivak whose epoch-making line is fully apt "Can Subaltern Speak?" implies that silence is the critical component of subaltern identity. Interestingly the maneuvering the Dalit and the gendered subaltern Kusum's story retold by the male and elite class representative Nirmal. The role and the complexities of the subaltern language also very prominent in the text of the novel. The ethnicity and the gender intersections are the crucible for articulating the relationship between internal colonialism and subaltern studies which has been prominent in *The Hungry Tide*.

The refugees were the subaltern classes who are forced to seek out a dwelling elsewhere but unfortunately forced to shelter into resettlement camp somewhere in Central India. Here home is not only something which make our hands, it is a place which the mind decides to be its personal space, a space free of all inhibitions. Nirmal, a revolutionary during his earlier days is enthused by the spectacle of resilience shown by the Morichjhapi incidents. He decided to record everything in his notebook so that history can get certain publicity through the Kanai. Nirmal in his journal finds a strong utopian stand in his endeavor, in his attempt by dispossessed to possess something of their own. It is brutally repressed by the government forces and aftermath Kusum is killed. Nirmal as Marxist believes in rapprochement across class barriers that can bring subaltern people and the elite together which a generation later Piya repeats with Kusum's son Fokir. The inherent cause of the brutal violence, Morichjhapi is for a long time in both for an academia and popular imaginary can be attributed to the invisibility of the low caste and class identity.

The voice of the common men, their struggle and sacrifices which go unnoticed in the annals of the history began to get a prominent voice in the fiction of Amitav Ghosh in a different way. It shows a real picture of subaltern and their survival in the given shelter is a unimaginable challenge for the poor and the voiceless people who run their lives with tiger, crocodiles and other dangerous animal in Sunderbans.



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