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ORAL PARABLES OF REGIONAL ECOLOGICAL WISDOM: RITUALS OF CO-BELONGING AND MULTISPECIES CARE IN *THE HUNGRY TIDE* BY AMITAV GHOSH

Introduction

The animal turn in literary studies has been a neoteric advancement in the posthumanist vanguard that calls for more inclusive research methods. These methods have further promoted ontological apertures calling for the serious consideration of non-human animals as our allies in shared spaces. This article draws on posthumanism as a conceptual framework insisting on moving beyond cartesian dualism and towards a radical openness and ethics of multispecies care.[1] While Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* is broadly read as a contemporary postcolonial text that grapples with marginalized histories alongside climate change, there is lesser attention given to the narrative ethological perspective of this work and its intersection with resilience—a gap that this article aims to fill. At the heart of the novel rests an indigenous performative ritual that has survived orally, which Ghosh has tried to translate into the colonizer's tongue to spread and preserve this ancestral knowledge. The article extends discussion on the indigenous knowledge systems that have faced epistemological ruptures due to colonization and also globalization, and how Ghosh addresses this problem in his work. The ethics of care is pivotal to the study of human-non-human animal relations as it "attempts to deal with conflict, disagreement, and ambivalence

rather than attempting to eliminate it" (Lonkila 481). In *The Hungry Tide,* similar ethical issues surface, where *golpos* (cultural myths), mantras and *Jatras* (folk performance) bring us closer to the kin outside our doors, especially in the wild, therefore well suiting the complexities of care phenomenon in the face of climate change and species extinction. The interest in the field of care under the Literary Animal Studies has burgeoned, expanding its boundaries to the heavier, more serious questions of the Anthropocene, what multispecies care would achieve in such a context and how to achieve it. Annika Lonkila in her article quotes Fisher and Tronto's definition of care emphasizing that the interdependency of all lively beings consists of practices that seek to "maintain, continue and repair our world so that we can live in it as well as possible" (481). Care is central not only for sustenance but also in fostering empathetic multispecies relations and futures. In *The Hungry Tide*, however, the dilemma of application of care in face of conflict sets in. Whose needs and desires should we choose to care for when there is a conflict of interests rings throughout the reading of the text especially in Kusum's recalcitrance towards the government favoring the animals over the refugees. Kusum says "Who are these people, I wondered, who love animals so much that they are willing to kill us for them" (Ghosh 284). Hence, the question of care in the face of persistent human-animal tensions and conflicts demands ethical answers. These questions surface profusely as the novel progresses, forming a larger, yet much ignored part of the novel, revealing instances of ethical ambivalence. The tiger burning incident in the novel (Ghosh 315), despite Piya's relentless resistance, reveals a darker shade of care. Such problematic situations of complex human-animal encounters often reveal the greater need to internalize the fact that our existence depends on suffering of others as much as of ourselves in this world. Such a thought reveals the interconnectedness and mutual vulnerability of both humans and nonhuman animals. The traditional knowledge systems in general help attain such an internalization as opposed to being termed retrogressive or anti-developmental. Through this novel, Amitav Ghosh reveals that indigenous cultures offer the possibility of living in balance

with the environment. Rather than favouring either, Ghosh bridges traditional and scientific knowledge systems, and seeks to decolonize the scientific modern day conservation models by opening up to the traditional knowledge of Sundarbans people. The particular focus is on the oral and performative traditions of Bonbibi, the Palagan (religious musical narratives) performances and the imagining of early widowhood that function as cultural informants of care, balance and respect for the non-human animals and entities. This article shall highlight local practices of care in conflict that open adjacent possibilities towards a resilient multispecies future. Through the theory of resistance and resilience this article articulates how the oral and performative tradition manages to transform and endure through a predominantly western narrative model, a novel.

The scope of this article is to address questions like: what traditions are relevant to build complicated notions about animal and environmental ethics, and possibly to imagine alternate, more resilient futures? How do the non-human beings occupy space in the Indian reflective tradition that sets them in contrast to the western practices? The answers are not straightforward.

Conservation Conflicts

The Hungry Tide narrates the story of the entwined lives of Kannai Dutt, a translator, and Piyali Roy, an American Cetologist, who land in the Sundarbans together, with seemingly diverse motivations that eventually converge towards the end of the novel. Kannai is driven to the Sundarbans to procure Nirmal Bose's writings addressed to him, while Piya's enthusiasm is brought about by her wish to encounter and study the two kinds of dolphins: the Gangetic and the Irrawaddy. Nirmal Bose's diary narrates major events and introduces other characters alongside that make up the plot of the tidal country. Nirmal, Piya and Kannai's narratives supplement each other and "enable the possibility of a sea change in their attitude toward the animals, the cetaceans and the subalterns" (Lundblad 150). The narrative of the novel moves in the fashion of a Palagan,

which is Bengali for 'singing in turns,' taking turns to sing about the tigers, dolphins, marginalized people and the state-sponsored conservation policies. The hazy border between the salt and freshwater makes the aquatic life of the Sundarbans "rhizomatic" (151), resulting in the creation of "hundreds of different ecological niches" (Ghosh 131). These microenvironments invoke in Piya the multitudinous "universe of possibilities," therefore leading the characters to rediscover themselves through their dynamic relationships with the non-humans (131). Sundarbans is ruled by the laws of neither man nor the jungle but by the ebb and flow of tides that continuously wash borders, hence is called '*bhati-r desh*' (or, the tide country)*.* This phenomenon creates liminal spaces for the encounter between the human and non-human animals, making Sundarbans among the most unwelcoming landscapes globally setting alight the paradox to its former label:

> Every year dozens of people perish in the embrace of that dense foliage, killed by tigers, snakes and crocodiles. There is no prettiness here to invite the stranger in: yet, the world at large this archipelago is known as "the sundarban," which means, "the beautiful forest." (Ghosh 8)

The Sundarbans stands as an anomalous remnant of the eroded utopian dream of Sir Daniel, a Scotsman who saw immense potential in the harsh terrains of Sundarbans and so bought land there to develop an ideal society. The course of his dream was altered by the Western conservationists who declared Sundarbans, which housed massive halophytic mangroves and estuarine ecosystems, to be made completely uninhabitable by humans in order to conserve it. They introduced a massive project to save the royal Bengal tigers that intended to preserve the wilderness:

> According to Mick Smith, such a Tiger Project or the massacre in the Sundarbans is to be seen as a type of radical environmentalism, itself a form of "ecological sovereignty" in total control of the biological life of the people living in the Morichjhāpi, ironically rendering the living landscape of the poor an "uninhabited wilderness" of tiger reserves. (Lundbland 155).

These Western dominated and government backed models based on "deep ecology" and overemphasizing wilderness conservation were criticized by Ramachandra Guha, who found it troublesome to apply Western models of conservation to third world countries. Such projects "without the consideration for the people living there are to be perceived as a form of neo-colonialism and neo-imperialism" (Lundbland 155). *The Hungry Tide* tries to explore care by incorporating subaltern ecological wisdom that changes the Heideggerian belief as stated in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*: "animal is poor in the world" (Heidegger 183) to—animals and humans are entangled equally in complex webs of relationships. This opens a possibility of an "anti-anthropocentric ethic" (Walther 61). Ghosh, who at the outset may seem to be rooting for the scientific Western ideas of care through characters like Piya and Kannai, on a deeper reading reveals—in the section titled "Home: an epilogue"—that these characters have undergone massive changes and have emerged as responsible community members, standing in solidarity with the people of the Sundarbans. Once Piya recognizes the pitfalls of modern-day conservation that ignores the poor, she returns to Lusibari to carry on with her project with the people of the Badabon trust. Kannai's self-importance wanes by the end of the novel and he decides to restructure his business so as to take more time out to visit Lusibari. Ghosh weaves indigenous resilience and survival through their relationship with the land and the animals in history and memory.

Planetary Mnemocultures as Care in Conflict

While *The Hungry Tide* has garnered numerous ecocritical responses about human-non-human animal conflict and their intersectional histories (Gurr 2010, Biswas and Channarayapatna 2022), this section of the article concentrates largely on the practices of securing local archival reminders of human-non-human animal kinship primarily through the *Dukhe'r Golpo* (the story of Dukhe), which is a part of the Bonbibi myth, in the novel. While Ghosh's default structure is immersed in Western ways of documenting stories in the form of novels or the

written word, he has painstakingly tried to open a new form of storytelling through developing the section of the Bonbibi myth into an audiobook named *Junglenaama* (2021), which is far from a usual audiobook. In a related interview, Ghosh says "For authors and creators, it opens a new form of storytelling and allows them to not only work with their written words but also express themselves through their voice and sounds" (Sarfare). This way it is the closest that Ghosh has come to documenting, in a Western language, the essence of the local reflective tradition. The myth of the Bonbibi primarily centres around the non-human animals, which in turn facilitates the calibration of the humans and non-human animal relations. It is an age-old folk tradition that has proliferated and prospered in the Sundarbans through compositional modes of Indian reflective tradition. Ghosh, in this way, engages with the question of the animal and suggests that contemporary novels must incorporate and attend to voices other than human. Hence, resilient narratives, which the traditional knowledge systems offer abundantly, need to be incorporated into contemporary fiction. The Bonbibi myth unsettles the colonial nature-culture divide central to the Western epistemology by incorporating an ethical and cordial narrative about human and non-human animal relations. Folk traditions are community maps that are intensely in dialogue with their surroundings and are embedded with tangible evidence of sustainability through compelling narratives. Where the popular folk traditions usually ossify into abstraction only to reinforce the anthropocentric individuality of the current times, the Bonbibi myth is one rooted in the performative embrace of everyday ritual lives of the people of the Sundarbans and Ghosh's novel revitalizes this tradition as a relational mode of knowledge transmission. This performative mode of articulation and expression, manifested in *jatra* performances, rewilds this tradition that carries precious relationships and wisdom through the tides of the *bhatirdesh* into a resilient human-animal future. The myth functions as a kind of *nitishastra,* "not a moral science but a strategic science concerning action knowledge" (Rao 135). It creates a space suggesting strategies to "live with or befriend those unlike us"

especially in the conflictual context of the Sundarbans (135). This myth of which the tiger forms a larger part, challenges the Western assumption of human superiority over the animal. The performative tradition, mainly emerging out of cultural memory, is set in contrast to the dominant western communication modes of writing and documentation. These cultural memories or mnemocultures "proliferate through the most primordial forms of speech and gesture" (Rao 10). The novel dedicates a larger section to the Bonbibi performance, therefore affirming realities that are very different from the anthropocentric urge to value humans over nature. Ghosh combats the anthropocentric hyperindividualism of colonial capitalism by making these mnemocultural stories more prominent.

Ghosh tries to change the storytelling tradition by incorporating the legend and tradition of a local female deity who challenges the logocentric thought of humans ruling over the animals. The oral stories, therefore, create, in the words of Jeremy Rifkin, "biosphere consciousness" (in Oliver 26), a kind of awareness that the lives of all beings, human and non-human, are interconnected, entangled and interdependent. In the era of the Anthropocene, caring for the other, if put that way, would reveal another power dynamic where the human self cares for the animal other, therefore reducing this other to an object that needs to be cared for. A caring relationship should rather look like "the moral priority of the other over the self in an asymmetrical ethical relation which language cannot contain" (Chesi and Spiegel 10). In simple words, a caring relationship where the non-human other is prioritized over the human self is a relationship that the Western language has been unable to capture. It is here then that these oral cultures and traditions beat facts especially in the Sundarbans.

Indigenous personhoods are inextricably tied to the land and the beings that are found there in ways for which the West lacks language. Ghosh, therefore, through incorporating the performative tradition of the Bonbibi myth facilitates thinking toward ecological as well ascosmological coherence in incoherent times. The novel realistically relays stories of eco-social fracture by

incorporating the myth named after the tiger deity/goddess. This myth revolves predominantly around the maneater and functions as a signpost for the ecosystem's process of self-healing. Neel Ahuja's article "Species in a Planetary Frame: Eco-cosmopolitanism, Nationalism, and *The Cove*" presents the subaltern stance in *The Hungry Tide* as a critique of rule or anarchic ethics. Ahuja also proposes that, since indigenous people are poetically interwoven into an environmental ethic, "*The Hungry Tide's* valorization of subaltern environmental knowledge must not be regarded as a simple orientalization or primitivization of the indigene" (Ahuja 29). The answer to why the Sundarban people lived remotely can be traced to their strong trust in the deities that they believe have the nature under control. Ghosh revokes this syncretic legend of Bonbibi, which is a part of the cultural imaginary of both the Hindus and Muslims of the Sundarbans, to highlight the profound force of the myths and traditions in building and sustaining communal harmony and reciprocation. The community here involves not only humans but also, significantly, the wild animals and the forest that they dwell in. In this novel the readers witness human and non-human others (inclusive of rivers, forests and animals), existing in a synergetic ecosystem where hierarchical fragmentation is self-defeating. The fisherfolk of Sundarbans always courted disaster because the tiger, however elusive, had a palpable presence in the spaces where they carried out their work to sustain themselves. The women who were married to these men imagined an early widowhood every time their husbands went off to the jungle to collect fish or honey: "They would put away their marital reds and dress in white saris; they would take off their bangles and wash the vermillion from their heads" (Ghosh 86). Such a practice was believed to be carried out either to ward off misfortune by living it over and over again, or to prepare for the inevitable. This ritual pays a certain respect to the jungle by acknowledging its dangers. Wendy Doniger talks about the intersection of religion and preservation and the sacrifice of animals, and her critical idea can be applied to *The Hungry Tide*, as the elusive Bengal Tiger instils reactions similar to those of deities (Ledesma). The

Sundarbans folk already consider the tigers equivalent to a higher being and are always aware of the imaginary boundary drawn by Bonbibi that they are always crossing for their livelihood. Thus, the ritual of imagining early widowhood stands as an acceptance, respect and sacrifice for the humans to cross the border. Zeenat Khan in her article on Sundarbans asserts that "[n]owhere does a term equivalent to *Nature* figure in the legend of Bonbibi, yet nowhere is its consciousness absent" (2020) which aligns with Ghosh's novel, where he encourages readers to observe the consciousness arising from the fusion of nature and folk traditions. This fusion establishes a nurturing environment where humans and animals co-exist amidst conflict. Additionally, the novel exudes the decimated voices of the subaltern and the fate of the human and the animal suffering under the western conservation logics.

Sundarbans: Where the Divine and Wild Intertwine

Radhika Raj in her article "Sultry Sundarbans" talks about the uncanny Sundarbans: "Sundarbansis a strange place [...] here tigers swim and fish walk on land" so it is not hard to believe that the forest dwellers have seemingly strange ways to live with under these circumstances (Raj 2022). The Bonbibi-r *Palagaan* has been subject to multiple mutations, both written and performative, whose earliest traces lack records, "which is suggestive of its folk nature—it cannot be traced back to one original performance" (Mandal 2017). Currently, it has developed into *Ekani-palagaan* sung solo by a *gayen* (singer) accompanied by a *dohar* (drummer)*,* and *Bonbib-r palagaan*, an improvised and flexible performance "which enables the performer to make spontaneous additions into the texts" (Mandal 2017). The Bonbibi folk tradition creates a space for the primal impulse to dialogue with the forest. The dialogues are "colloquial verses without the help of any "divine" language" and one of care and affection towards the shared land and all its non-human inhabitants (Biswas 2021). The Sundarbans folk firmly believe that the forest is their *mahal (forest)* and is meant to be both for them and animals. For these people the forest has bonding powers

and it "equalizes and unifies" them with the wild and vice-versa. Similar is the positioning of the forest deity that people of the Sundarbans worship:

> Bonbibi's worshippers insist that her cult is at the intersection between Hinduism and Islam and that she protects all communities equally [...] her play can only be acted when people of different jatis come together. (Jalais 81)

The story of Bonbibi apart from being an oral tradition is also recited by the *bauley's* or the forest fishers as an overture to their forest incursion, when they "*jongolkortegeslam"* or are set to "do jungle" (Ghosh 27). This venture is "a sort of economic agreement about equitable sharing of food and resources between humans and tigers" (Jalais 82). *Dokkhin Rai*, the theriomorph, a human-tiger hybrid in the story functions as a "mythic reminder of our rich evolutionary past as animals" and also as a reminder of our greedy bellicosity against an undeserving victim. The story goes like this: *Dokkhin Rai*, a Brahmin sage, dwelled in the forest and had ascetic powers to transform into a tiger preying on humans for their greedy usurpation of resources from the forest. *Dokkhin Rai*'s greed for the *Badabon* (mangrove) heightened and he declared himself the ruler of the forest:

> He becomes a demon (rakkhosh) who preys on humans. Tigers and spirits become the subjects of Dokkhin Rai and, emboldened by him, also start to terrorise and feed on humans. The trust that had existed between tigers and humans is thus broken. (Jalais 82)

The myth, as narrated in the section "the glory of bonbibi" in the novel, then progresses to how Bonbibi, abandoned at birth, is raised in the forest by a deer who takes pity on her. When she grows up, Allah calls her to save the land of eighteen tides from *Dokkhin Rai*'s atrocity. She calls on her brother *Shah Jongoli* to accompany her to Medina for blessings of Fatima for her odyssey and also to bring some soil from there to the tide country. On arriving at the tide country, with the name of Allah, they mix the earth with that of the Sundarbans evoking the wrath of *Dokkhin Rai*, who decides to wage a war against them. However,

Dokkhin Rai's mother Narayani takes the lead in fighting Bonbibi. Narayani, while losing the battle, calls Bonbibi (sai) "friend" which is accepted by her and the war is halted. This story is followed by another story of Dukkhe who is saved by Bonbibi due to his honest intentions, also ending in *Dokkhin Rai* calling Bonbibi "mother" and Bonbibi accepting her as her "son." What this mother-son relationship then reveals is the intimate bond that humans and animals share and their kinship beyond their taxonomy.

The opening scene of the Bonbibi *palgaan* to Kanai's surprise "was set in a city in Arabia and the backdrop was painted with mosques and minarets" (Ghosh 102-103) as opposed to the expected genesis from heavens or the Ganges, which reinforces the realism of this tradition which further makes it believable. The putative reason for the resolute belief of the people of Sundarbans in Bonbibi's glory is because of the fear of dwelling at the precipice and their daily dependence on it. Jauhar Kanungo and Lima Kanungo in their essay "The Disappearing Mahal and Changing Directions of Worship in the Sundarbans" reveal that:

> the most terrible fear was that of fear itself. Once in its grip, you were incapacitated. But even then, they would come back to the jungle as they do not have land to till. And those that had could produce only one crop per year. So they would come back to the jungle again and again. (53)

The unrelenting faith of these people in chanting the *mantras* and practicing performative rituals of folk tradition and legends including, but not limited, to the Bonbibi *palagaan* is because of their deep connection to the forest and its beings. Ghosh in *Gun Island,* the sequel to *The Hungry Tide,* extends his reflection that legends and myths may open up previously invisible worlds that once pieced together are more fully understood. These are not lifeless fragments in an academic archive but alive with still unheard meaning. These stories extend ecological awareness and an environmentalist structure of feeling where the most important thing in preserving the future of humanity is the preservation of its relationship to other species. The people of the Sundarbans live in an

unpredictable terrain where the tides cause the land to submerge and ascend each day. The mangrove shoreline dynamics, ever-changing due to persistent cyclones, drastically affect humans and non-human animals alike. In the face of such punishing climate conditions exacerbated by climate change, the question that can be asked is what makes these people still dwell on these islands in the face of fear, largely of death, due to starvation and conflict with the wild. There are no straightforward answers but these stories about the natural world, passed down across generations, can function as a bridge between our world and the world of the non-human animals that dwell with us.

Indigenous cosmologies recognise non-human animal agency and need to be highlighted in our readings of literary texts wherever they are underrepresented. The myths have preceded us and will most definitely outlive us as well. These stories open an ethical space for renegotiating the parameters of our entangled existence. *Golpos, mantras,* and traditions are performed by a particular class of Bonbibi worshippers: "fakirs, ojhas (ghostbusters), and gunins (occultists), who tame the Royal Bengal Tiger of the Sundarbans" (Khokhan 3). These "biocultural formations—called *jatis*—are the guardians of memory in Indian cultural traditions" (Rao 305). They are deemed respectful as they provide "protective mantras" such as "Baghbandhan" (taming the tiger), "Mukhabandhan" (muzzling up the mouth) etc. (Khokhan 3). Where the Sundarban people find Bonbibi as an intimate kith and kin, we see in Ghosh's text certain characters appropriate colonial modernity in a way that "ruptures the relation between *Jati* and culture by stigmatizing and recoding them in accord with lithic theo-cultural protocols" (Rao 305). For instance, Nirmal's consistent practice of writing diary and preserving memory is as "deeply chiselled in lithic orthography" and, in simpler words, Nirmal's focus shifts from preserving the cultural memory in the form of written word than the oral (Rao 43). When asked about the story of Bonbibi, he dismisses Kannai by saying: "It's just a tale they tell around here. Don't bother yourself with it. It's just false consciousness; that's all it is [...] But no, they prefer imaginary" (Ghosh 101). Nirmal's dismissal of oral

stories as merely imaginary makes him a subscriber of the massive cultural fracture through which art, spirituality and science are isolated from each other. Nirmal seems to privilege rational speech by discarding the "non-linguistic melopoiac reflection and imagination" (Rao 9) of the mnemocultures that reverberate through South Asian peripheries. This article augments its initial engagement with what makes these oral stories so important to the people of the Sundarbans by arguing that they serve as a means of a spiritual relationship with the living world, especially in the Anthropocene.

Henry Corbin, a twentieth-century French theologian, wrote extensively about imagination as a sensory experience and declared that the Western reader has to be awakened to another order of things as opposed to his old ingrained ways of thinking. For Western readers, the term imaginary equates to unreal. Here the concept of reasoning imagination provides some nourishment as "it neither polarizes the two faculties (of reason and imagination) nor subordinates one to the other" (Rao 67). What it does, as Rao explains, is form a fertile foundation of mnemocultures that float through timeless pasts, bearing indescribable impressions, and while they remain constantly receptive to imaginative futures, they do not follow specific patterns of storytelling from the past (82-83). This, in turn, cultivates a much-needed traditional ecological storytelling in all its embedded, land and water-based glory, discussing the hows and whys of engaging with the non-human communities and thinking with our entire web of kin. As D. Venkat Rao remarks in his book *Cultures of Memory in South Asia*:

> Myth and religion are still the resources for reflection on these articulations for many; in other words, imagination still intimates us with these regions. But to explore these archives of planetary relations—the very nature and concept of science would need a rearticulation. (Rao 38)

This re-articulation is possible through these narratives that bring forth the realization that we are not separate from non-human beings, that our survival is contingent upon them, that these stories, involving non-human beings who

playfully, dangerously, generatively inhabit our world, need to be told for a common resilient future. Fairn Herising's reference to the "transformative potential of the margin" realigns "new centers of knowledge gravity" pulled from the borders of Western-centric knowledge" (Lauck 91). By the end of the novel, what survives the cyclone is the collective unconscious of the fisherman Fokir, whose traditional knowledge enables Piya to take a more ethical and relational route towards her conservation project. Fokir's knowledge stored in Piya's GPS holds the archetypal patterns of ancient stories that were orally transmitted, which would then provide access to crucial data to maintain ecological balance.

Conclusion

In *The Hungry Tide,* the tides conflate, erasing the boundaries and forming new territories of porous and permeable ecological relations where humans, animals, water, deities and demons intersect. The novel locates humans and animals as a part of a porous continuum. Ghosh steps away from the anthropocentric structuring of neighboring relations by placing humans and animals in a constantly evolving web of asymmetric powers. The boundaries are retained and relayed through oral stories and rituals, where these boundaries are markers of respect. The encounter of the humans and animals is inevitable in Sundarbans and may not always be a cordial one. Ghosh, through the novel, reveals that just like the waters of river and sea do not blend evenly in the Sundarbans but interpenetrate each other and create many ecological niches, similarly Sundarbans is a world of not one but of the many and these worlds exist alongside each other maintaining their separateness as well as their sanctity. Pramod K. Nayar in his essay "The Postcolonial Uncanny" states that the Bonbibi myth and other indigenous knowledge in the Sundarbans teach the cosmopolitan humans about the boundaries of knowledge, while also presenting an alternative and sustainable belief system (90). This is how they constitute an ethical postcolonial, by caring panoptically, for the humans of the Sundarbans and also the non-human animals. Such a reading of *The Hungry Tide* reveals that Ghosh

has been attentive to the specific local and regional traditions which facilitate the shaping of ethical relations and encounters with the marginalized others and thus decenters the exploitative power matrix of the colonial discourse.

Endnotes
1. I am aware that Posthumanism as a framework is not bereft of its "ethico-political limitations" as Fayaz Chagani maintains in his essay "The Seductions of Posthumanism." Similarly in this essay, my focus shall be on how to overcome the nature-culture dualism that has emanated from the Euro-American centres of modernism, the application and appropriation of theories like posthumanism is what scholars have turned to, which has had serious implications for the humans who have not been able to pull themselves out of the category of sub-human. *The Hungry Tide* deals with these subhumans (*gramerlok)* who seem to be pitted against the man-eating tigers of Sundarbans. On a closer reading, however, we find that these humans are not against the tigers but the Western models of conservation that carry the agenda of marginalizing them further.

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Abstract

This article studies *The Hungry Tide* by Amitav Ghosh as an exemplary text that cuts through the simplistic ideas of human-nonhuman relations. Adapting Bhrigupati Singh's idea of agonistic intimacy, to a slightly different context, this article endeavours to investigate the cohabitation of ostensibly adversarial neighbours (humans and nohuman animals). The article seeks to elucidate the ways in which mythic and ritualistic oral traditions, related to the guardian spirit Bonbibi, function as mediators, fostering amity in these potentially contentious human animal relations. Ghosh points out the fallacy of ignoring the indigenous ecologies and highlights the absurdity of applying straight jacketed anthropocentric models of care in such contexts. Focusing on the multispecies ethos of the Sundarbans the novel embraces the porous and rhizomatic human-nonhuman kinship. This form of intimacy invokes existence of cohabitation and conflict and Ghosh's novel is a case in point for exploration and understanding of such encounters.

W artykule omówiono powieść Amitava Ghosha p.t. *Żarłoczny przypływ* jako tekst, który wykracza poza uproszczone idee relacji między ludźmi i nieludźmi. Dostosowując koncepcję agonistycznej intymności Bhrigupatiego Singha do nieco innego kontekstu, w artykule podjęto próbę zbadania współistnienia pozornie wrogich sobie sąsiadów (ludzi i zwierząt niebędących ludźmi). Artykuł ma na celu wyjaśnienie, w jaki sposób mityczne i rytualne przekazy mówione związane z duchem opiekuńczym Bonbibi pełnią rolę swojego rodzaju mediatorów, wspomagając relacje życzliwości w potencjalnie napiętych stosunkach między ludźmi i zwierzętami. Ghosh wskazuje na błąd ignorowania rodzimych ekologii i podkreśla absurdalność stosowania prostych, antropocentrycznych modeli opieki w takich kontekstach. Koncentrując się na wielogatunkowym etosie regionu Sundarbanów, powieść proponuje rozumienie relacji między ludźmi i nieludźmi jako porowatego i rizomatycznego pokrewieństwa. Ta forma intymności odwołuje się zarówno do wspólnego istnienia, jak i konfliktu, a powieść Ghosha jest próbą zbadania i zrozumienia takich spotkań.

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