

## Worlds of Amitav Ghosh and Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai- Ecological Archetypes in the Select Novels

**S. Karunya**

Ph.D Research Scholar Department of English PSG College of Arts & Science  
Coimbatore, India

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### Abstract

In the words of Glotfelty, ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies that have one foot in literature and the other on land. In ecology, everything is connected to everything else—it is a web of life. It gives human beings a better understanding of nature. Human beings are co-dependent on nature. The present article explores the ecological archetypes that are traced in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* and Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai's *Chemmeen*. Both the writers explicates about a specific place and its inhabitants, the coast and the fishermen. In both the selected novels the sea and the river is worshipped as the ultimate force. These novels talk in length about living in harmony with nature. These novels paint a poignant portrait of the landscape and archetype of the two diverse places.

**KEYWORDS:** Ecocriticism, Green Density, Archetypes, Biodiversity

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Ecocriticism is not new to our culture and literature. Due to recent environment crisis, people have extroverted to the concept of protecting nature. Environmental issues and concerns have come to occupy a central place in the contemporary world. “Archana Prasad in *Environmentaism and the Left* observes, “The environment movement’ is an umbrella term used to describe a series of local struggles and conflicts that highlight issues of livelihood and ecological security in the development debate.” (131)<sup>[1]</sup> This concept has been used by our antediluvian writers in their works. Nature has been intimately connected with life in Indian tradition. Mountains, particularly Himalayas are said to be the abode of God. Rivers are considered and worshipped as goddesses, especially the holiest of holy rivers Ganga is a source of salvation for anyone. “Industries release their wastes and towns their sewage into streams, polluting their waters. So the richer countries have been treating their industrial and domestic effluents before releasing them into streams.” (53)<sup>[2]</sup> Forests have been the abode of great sages and were the center of great intellectual activity as most of the *gurukulas* were located in forests. Although different phenomenon was given different name such as Varuna (the protector of the eternal laws of nature), Indra (the God of War and Rain), Agni (the Fire), Surya (the Sun), and Usha (the Dawn), but these are all considered as reflections of one and the same God (the Brahman).

The ancient scholars derived that plants and trees had life almost akin to human life. According to the variation in climate, attitude, and habitat, the forest vegetation of India is divided into five types: Evergreen, the Deciduous, the Dry, the Hill and the Tidal. Among five regions, *palai*, *kurinchi*, *mullai*, *marutam* and *neytal* which were conceived as ‘a total web of life.’ The totality of human experience may be expressed in terms of the two basic opposed categories: *akam* and *puram*. The poems of the Eight Anthologies are

classified by their themes as *akam* and *puram*. *Akam* poetry portrays love in union and separation and does not deal with the platonic love of man and woman.

Our forefathers have done each and everything with eco-consciousness. They did not use pesticides for the plant growth. Instead they used natural manure to protect the soil and the plants. Our elders have put *kolam* only with rice flour as that could be relished as the food by the ants. The great ancestors have sent and passed their messages through birds like pigeon and peacock. Camel and horse have also remained as the dutiful message takers. Even the stalwart poet Kalidasa has made use of the nature cloud as the message taker in *meghaduta* (The Cloud Messenger). The character Yaksha who has been into exile for a year has sent his precious messages to his wife through the moving clouds. However British people celebrated the new revival of enjoying nature as The Romantic Period. Till that no one has boldly proclaimed nature as the guard and the teacher. In India the gods and the goddesses could be witnessed with specific birds and animals as their vehicles. Even the gods are portrayed as protectors of nature and even flora and fauna have been attributed to God.

Amitav Ghosh and Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai celebrate many similarities and differences. The former belongs to West Bengal and writes only in English for the International acclaim of his works. The later belongs to Kerala and writes only in his regional language, Malayalam. Amitav Ghosh has been in so many places in and around India. He has achieved worldwide fame through his works. He belongs to the period of 1980's. Thakazhi belongs to the renaissance period of Kerala (1950's) and has enjoyed 65 years in writing. He became the champion of the common man, and inaugurated an era of social realism in Malayalam literature and reached the height of transcendental realism. Ghosh has been honoured with so many literary awards including Sahitya Akademi award and Anandha Puraskar award. Thakazhi was bestowed with Jnanpith and Sahitya Akademi award. Both the writers indited their works based on social realism exclusively with eco-consciousness. These people belong to different states where they possess similar tastes for communism, football, fish and culture. The writers of my specific study have not talked anything beyond their lands. They try to reveal the problems of the people who are not given importance in the society.

*Chemmeen* is an ethnic novel about the fishermen community of Kerala. It deals with the different aspects of fishermen's lives in a very realistic manner and creates a vivid local colour of the region. The sea archetype could be traced and the nature plays a significant role in the novella and the nature itself can be interpreted as a symbol. "The Sea is the infinite Mother for the fishermen, the provider of their food, the sustainer of their life." (15)<sup>[3]</sup> The fishermen's continuous struggle with the sea for survival is depicted in a naturalistic manner. The sea is considered both the protector and the destroyer of nature. The people who belong to the sea shore find themselves one with the nature. The Mother Nature could be seen as the Donor for fishermen as she gives them abundant wealth. The mother of Karuthamma, Chakki warns her daughter by saying "Do you know why the sea cries at times? The sea knows that if the sea mother gets angry, all will be ruined. But if she is pleased, she will give you everything, my child. There is gold in the sea, my daughter, gold!" (9) Fishermen community follow certain myths regarding the sea that if ever they utter lies or cheat people then the sea would devour those people.

The sea can be destructive and unfriendly as well. Despite the fact that the sea can take the lives of fishermen at any time, they always dwell close to the shore--the same situation is reflected in Pearl S. Buck's *The Good Earth*. When Jiya's whole family was swindled by the big waves 'Tsunami', Jiya remained quiet in the hill side for some time. Soon afterwards "I [he] opened my [his] house to the ocean.... If ever the big wave comes back, I shall be ready. I face it. I am not afraid." (57)<sup>[4]</sup> It can be sensed as a friend and a foe. As Thakazhi points out "The children of the sea are of five kinds: Arayan, Valakaran, Mukkavan, Marakkan, and a fifth caste of no particular name."<sup>[3]</sup> If the sea is happy, she offers wealth in amplitude to everyone. These folks are capable of reading signs from nature. When Karuthamma enters the sea shore of Palani, her husband, the entire shore looked strange to her. The hue of the sea differs from her side "Beneath the waves lay a swirl causing treacherous whirlpools. The sands too were coloured differently." (125) Each and every one of this fishermen community think that they are sons of the mother sea.

*Chemmeen* with the elemental appeal of its primary passions, the magnificent presence of the sea, the portrayal of the tragic culmination of the fisherman's ambitions to have a boat and a net of his own, and the music of the fisherfolk's dialect became an instant success and was received abroad as a masterpiece like Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*. (16)<sup>[3]</sup>

In the novel *The Hungry Tide*, the action takes place in the Sundarbans, island of Lusibari. Ghosh has undergone a thorough research even before venturing into the plot. The tidal archetypal is traced in the novel. Ghosh's richly layered description of the land, the people, and the animals of the Sundarbans revealed a unique environment which is charged with mythology. The tide country can't be treated just as a distant and hostile environment "The river's channels are spread across the land like a fine-mesh net, creating a terrain where the boundaries between land and water are always mutating, always unpredictable." (7) Kanai explains the history of the tide country as:

This is, after all, no remote and lonely frontier--this is India's doormat, the threshold of a teeming subcontinent. Everyone who has ever taken the eastern route into the Gangetic heartland has had to pass through it-- the Arakanese, the Khmer, the Javanese, the Dutch, the Malays, the Chinese, the Portuguese, the English. It is common knowledge that almost every island in the tide country has been inhabited at some time or other. But to look at them you would never know: the specialty of mangroves is that they do not merely recolonize the land; they erase time. Every generation creates its own population of ghosts.

Every element of nature in *Chemmeen* is united in harmony. The sea archetype also symbolizes changelessness. The routine life of fishermen is maintained daily. The boats go out to sea, eventually the sun rises, the fishermen catch their fish, and they row back to the land expecting a good trade and then the sun sets. The sea occupies the major portion in the earth. The very look of the sea gives oneself a mysterious experience as the line of the sky signifies the distant horizon and the secret land of the sea. In the words of Thakazhi: "The Sea has influenced me through a different score. The first sight that the fishermen see at the break of dawn is the infinite sea; the ocean--the storehouse of precious stones. The sea dwells like a Goddess in the mind of Araya fishermen." (81)<sup>[3]</sup>

The sea also signifies the symbol of life i.e., the journey of the life. Like the sea, people also become good and bad at times. Their mood shifts and it's not permanent. Boats represent journey and adventure that one undergoes in one's life time. Absolutely they don't find any boundaries in the sea to stop their adventure. Kuber in Manik Bandyopadhyay's *The Boatman of the River Padma* admits: "...it was a most difficult proposition for poor fishermen like him to earn their livelihood from the boundless stretch of the Padma." (6)<sup>[5]</sup> At times, people feel so proud that they are the sons of the endless termination and no one can overtake them. Being the sons of the sea, they are not avarice in saving money. It is very obvious in the words of Palani "Why does a fisherman have to save money? What lies spread before him is his wealth. What is that we don't have? Even if he doesn't set aside anything, the sea mother will bless him with enough. That's how it is!"(143) Nature is considered the mother of life. This is the reason for the fishermen not venturing into sea in the time of breeding season of fish. Hence, the symbol of water stands for fertility. The sea offers good catch to the fishermen and in turn they sell for good profit to the people who belong to land.

In *The Hungry Tide* the Badabon Trust that Nilima Bose now runs, and the high school that her husband Nirmal had run until his death, were built over the site of a commune established by a British idealist named Sir Daniel Hamilton. The house is called "Lusibari", a pidgin version of "Lucy's House" and was named so after the sudden death of Hamilton's wife who has sadly died on her way from England to join him. Being a Utopian visionary, Hamilton invited ten thousand immiserate people to occupy the place for free with specific condition that no caste system, and no tribal nationalisms should be followed and everyone would have to live and work together. They moved to the commune in three waves- in the 1920's, in 1947 and in 1971 after the Bangladesh war.

By placing Morichjhapi at a centre point Ghosh poses a crucial philosophical and moral question, "If you care for environment does this mean that you don't care about the plight of human beings especially impoverished people?" (Ghosh: *The Chronicle Interview*) (113)<sup>[1]</sup>

The sons of the water in *Chemmeen* are so scared about the wrath of the sea that if one is identifies for adultery then the mother's ire knew no bounds and everyone will go deep under the sea in her anger. Eventually if she loses her temper, the hue of the water changes dark. In the same way, as Karuthamma doesn't remain as the chaste wife now, the life of Palani is at stake by struggling in the currents of whirlpool. As Chakki has warned her daughter already, the life of the fishermen rests in the chastity and the prayer of a fisherman's wife. Instead of praying for his safe return, she thought about Pareekutty. Ergo, Palani was caught in the severe blows of the waves as it "rose as high as hills." (236) Knowing that his life is in the hands of his wife, she uttered the name 'Karuthamma!' (237) and again when she tried calling 'Karu...' the wave was on him and nothing was visible.

Against this background of exploitation and misery is enacted the moral drama in the novel. This community harassed as it is by poverty, with its unending, unrelenting struggle against the elements is governed by strict traditions and strong taboos. The basis of their life was their devotion to Katalamma the goddess of the sea

who according to them provided for them and protected them and punished them when they dared to transgress her strict laws particularly the laws of chastity and marital fidelity. (145) <sup>[6]</sup>

The book *The Hungry Tide* can be divided into two backdrops- The Ebb and The Flood and it is set in the Sundarbans. This delta is the world's largest Mangrove ecosystem by extending over ten thousand square kilometers. "Sagarika Ghose writes of this novel that the setting evokes a series of paradoxes in the interaction of these characters:..." (134) <sup>[7]</sup> The name 'Sundarbans' means "beautiful forest." The forest archetype signifies the mystery, secret, fertility, growth and primitive instinct. In the forest, he/she should enter the forest and must face the trial alone to grow. The mystery of the land is that the tide country comes in twice daily, resulting in a constant reshaping of the land and an uprooting of anything permanent. The fertility of the forests could be sensed as the nature gives a good shelter for the settlers who were not given prominence in the society. Nature takes care of everyone with motherly tenderness. Even the settlers of the Sundarbans believe that anyone who dares venture into the vast watery labyrinth without a pure heart will never return. At first when the people started settling in the tide countries, thousands of people have ended up as the victims for crocodiles and tigers. Ghosh tells a story about how seeing a dead Irrawaddy dolphin on the beach left a powerful image in his mind that influenced his interests in these animals and pursued him to do research further on the subject. The same setting is used by Ghosh in the novel. The character of compassion and spreading harmony in their surroundings could be sensed in the name of Piya. Even Ghosh's idea of preserving nature and mankind could be witnessed in the character of Piya.

Each and everyone in this novel face hard trials but in the end they could realize a total transformation in their complete perception of life once they enter the Sundarbans. Kanai remain selfish until he venture in facing the "inscrutability of life" himself. As the forest signifies the spiritual growth of a person, once after heading alone into the mangrove forest, Kanai returned as a chastened man who decides to leave the next day for New Delhi. This is remarkably an altered man from the one who cynically accepted his aunt's invitation to Lusibari. Even though the same people belong to the same nation, the lives of the characters are as diverse as the fauna and flora of the Sundarbans.

The colour archetype can be traced in the novella *Chemmeen*. When the sea was in blue colour and looked a bit noisy, the life of the fishermen community was safe in the hands of the mother sea. But in the end, when the sea grew calm and became black, Palani was caught in the strong wind and eventually dies in the huge whirlpool. The characters that belong to this novel are so earthy. They do not know anything beyond their sea level. The archetypes of father, mother, daughter, husband and wife could be vividly traced in the novel. The same setting could be seen in Ernest Hemingway's *Old Man and the Sea*. The destructive nature of the sea can also be seen in J.M.Syngé's *The Riders to the Sea* in which the sea devours many people. *Coir* by Thakazhi portrays the changing patterns of man's relationship with land i.e., village. Manik Bandyopadhyay's *The Boatman of the River Padma* (1936) is an immaculately produced novel which explicates the lives of boatman and fishermen and their day-to-day encounter with the river Padma.

Like Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, this novel similarly obsessed with a mysterious animal that has been read as a symbol in all aspects. In this novel, the Irrawaddy Dolphin (*Orcaella fluminalis*), that Piya has come to study reveals itself as a symbol of an original unity. The Dolphin is rumored to be Bon Bibi's messenger. In the eyes of Nirmal, it represents the "gaze of the Poet." According to Fakir, his mother Kusum, the same symbol would represent their faith in a supportive force beyond the destructive forces that threaten them each day, a kind mother that wards off the evil. Piya recollect the memories of Indian language that she now hears with the language in which her parents argued when she was in her childhood.

Orcaella were of two kinds; one tribe liked the salt waters of the coast while the other preferred rivers and fresh water. The difference between these two communities was not anatomical- it had only to do with their choice of habitat. (123)

Fresh-water Orcaella on the other hand were a rare and dwindling breed. These types of rare dolphins could be compared with the few people who have their tendency to protect nature. Dolphins have the character of adopting themselves according to the ebb and the flow of the water. Removing ourselves from nature in attempts to analyse and solve problems within it hurts the human-environment relationship. Ghosh points out a vivid concept through the words of Piya that it is a big mistake to consider any environment completely separate from humans. The environmental problems that we are dealing with today are not due to lack in technology but the avarice of mankind.

Piya's tools of observation in finding Dolphins are symbolic of the Western Scientific tradition. Fakir and Piya are framed as different versions of the same thing: ecologists, one in the Western science tradition and one in the tradition of indigenous knowledge. Throughout the novel, they are portrayed in a sort of wordless harmony with each other. Even though Fakir doesn't comprehend the words of Piya, he could completely understand the intentions of her. Being a Cetologist, Piya has that urge to save the mother earth. Despite education and culture, Fakir has the tendency to comprehend nature. As soon as Piya showed the picture of Dolphin, he could perceive what it is and leads her to the spot. In the story, Piya takes complete burden in her shoulders to save the life of nature. When Kanai complains that some people like Piya are responsible for protecting only the nature without having any concern for the humankind, Piya replies by saying that 'there is a big difference between preserving a species in captivity and keeping it in its habitat.' The mankind and the nature are entwined and can't be separated from one another. The eco-centered Piya is even ready to sacrifice her life for the sake of saving the environment. After encountering with Piya and Fakir in a boat, Kanai, he himself has transformed and started finding one with the nature.

The colour archetype could be witnessed in the novel. Once the sky changed into 'steel-gray' colour, Piya read the signs of nature that there is going to be the severe cyclone attack. In the same way, Haroun perceived the coming of cyclone when 'the dark stain had spilled over the horizon.'

In *The Hungry Tide* and *Chemmeen*, Mother Nature is portrayed both as the saviour and the destroyer of life. If the nature feels protected, it remains calm. In the same way, if she comprehends any disturbance, she is ready to take the lives of innocent

people. In *Chemmeen* the lives of these people were at stake. According to the fishermen's community, chastity is the highest ideal to be followed by the women of the community. Even in *The Hungry Tide*, the story ends with the powerful cyclone and reminds everyone about the forceful nature of the humility that is demanded in the face of nature. Like the unsolved mystery of Sundarbans, Keshava Reddy's *He Conquered the Jungle* portrays the jungle as the symbol of beastliness, as there everything kills everything in the same way. Nobody can understand the mysteries of the jungle and it remains the unsolved mystery to the humans forever.

Nature has been interwoven with text in such an artistic manner that it has become a tenacious presence guiding, motivating, inspiring and enlightening those read it. Ecological balance is the foremost need of today and the novelists have tried to intensify this need throughout the texts. The socio-political scenario of the present world also works as a catalyst to enhance the gravity of the problem. The archetypes that are comprehended from these novels exhibit the positive and negative sides in the nature. Not only the lives of the entire populace changed but also our relationship with every other part of the eco-system. In order to enhance the existence of mankind, it is must to explore the profound green thinking in literature.

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