Hyperseparation and Value Dualism: An Ecocritical Analysis of *The Hungry Tide*

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Abstract

The burgeoning gulf between humans and nature is an inevitable corollary of an anthropocentric approach towards nature. It strengthens the illusion of human dis-embeddedness in nature and conceives their relation in dualistic terms, suggesting their polarised identities. In this way, the human-nature duality enables the domination and exploitation of nature, posing a threat to its integrity and life-sustaining capacity. The paper provides an ecocritical analysis of Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2004), drawing on Val Plumwood's critique of human-nature dualism and employing textual analysis methodology. The excessive divide between humans and nature is used as a tool for colonisation and a view of nature as separate/inferior to humans. This dualistic perspective on nature is a major factor driving the current environmental degradation. Through its setting, the novel reflects that the self-centred approach of power structures in dealing with the unique part of the land of the tide-country has rendered a great blow to the ecological balance of its rare ecosystem. The references to the declining number of keystone species like crabs, which are vital for the existence of the mangrove forests, and Piya's task to survey the endangered Irrawaddy dolphins present a poor spectacle of aquatic life. It reflects the dominant orders' (marine life traders, rulers & forest officials) detached perspective on the natural world. The paper attempts to provide an understanding that hyperseparation as an oppressive feature of dualistic thinking underpins the subjugation and exploitation of the sphere of nature as well as the underprivileged humans associated with it.

Key Words: *ecocriticism, anthropocentrism, hyperseparation, value dualism*

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Introduction and Theoretical Framework

Amitav Ghosh's acclaimed novel *The Hungry Tide* (2004) provides a rich canvas for ecocritical analysis, highlighting the complex relationship between human society and the natural world. This paper will examine the novel through the lens of Val Plumwood's influential work on value dualism. Plumwood's critique of human/nature dualism reveals how this hyper-separation between the human and the ecology serves to justify the exploitation and domination of the natural realm for human ends. The novel presents a microcosm of these dynamics, set against the backdrop of the Sundarbans, a vast mangrove forest archipelago in the Bay of Bengal. The novel's protagonist, Piya, is a marine biologist who arrives in the Sundarbans to study the region's rare freshwater dolphins. Initially, her rational, scientific approach to the natural world exemplifies the Cartesian mind/body or reason/nature dualism that Plumwood criticises, wherein humanity is positioned as the master observer and exploiter of an objectified nature.

In contrast, Fokir, the local fisherman, embodies a more integrated, relational understanding of his environment. Rather than viewing the Sundarbans merely as a resource to be extracted, Fokir is attuned to the tides, currents, and rhythms of the mangrove forests - a perspective that resonates with Plumwood's call to recognise the "agency" of the more-than-human world (Plumwood 1). The tension between these two worldviews comes to a head as the characters navigate the challenges posed by the region's cyclical flooding and storms. The novel's climactic hurricane lays bare the consequences of humanity's estrangement from nature, as the characters must confront their own vulnerability in the face of the Sundarbans' unforgiving power. By highlighting the profound interdependence between human and natural systems, *The Hungry Tide* (2004) aligns with Plumwood's vision of a more holistic, ecocentric ethics that recognise the inherent value of nature, rather than simply its instrumental use to human ends.

At the core of Val Plumwood's ecocritical philosophy is her identification of a pervasive "value dualism" within Western thought, whereby human identity is constructed as 'outside' nature (Plumwood 2). The nature/culture dualism is the product of Western thought (Ingold 14). In the modern world, the conceptual divisions between the human sphere and the world of nature have created a dualistic relation by placing them in a binary state of "domination/subordination" instead of placing them side by side (Plumwood 41). Crucially, Plumwood contends that this hyper-separation of humans from nature is not simply an abstract philosophical problem but has manifested itself in very real and damaging ways. The construction of nature as a resource to be exploited for human ends has justified the large-scale destruction of ecosystems, the extinction of species, and the disruption of delicate natural cycles – as this ecocritical reading of *The Hungry Tide* (2004) reveals.

By examining *The Hungry Tide* (2004) through this theoretical lens, the paper aims to unpack how Ghosh's novel grapples with the consequences of this deep-seated human/nature dualism. The analysis examines how the novel reflects and challenges the "concept of dualism" (Plumwood 2) or "value dualism" (Warren 23) that has justified human domination over the

ecological realm. The novel reflects the ecological concerns revealing human/nature alterity demarcating them as radically separated entities. It raises consciousness regarding the cultural and social marginalization in relation to nature and 'other' human groups placed in a peripheral position. The novel portrays the working of hyperseparation in the prevailing colonization of the marginalised entities.

The Hungry Tide (2004) effectively demonstrates key theoretical concepts through its narrative structure and character interactions. Through characters like Piya and Fokir, the novel clearly shows the clash between scientific and traditional knowledge systems, reflecting theoretical discussions about value dualism. The Morichjhãpi incident and tiger conservation conflicts in the novel mirror theoretical debates about environmental justice and power relations. While Plumwood reveals how Western value dualisms form a linked "network" (Plumwood 2) stemming from the reason/nature divide, Ghosh's portrayal of the Sundarbans challenges this rigid separation. His depiction of the ecosystem as simultaneously nurturing and threatening disrupts the conventional dualistic view of "nature as Other" ("Environmental Culture" 109). We realize now that the centric approach in favour of human beings has created devastating implications for the sphere of nature, leading to the present ecological mess that threatens our survival. Thus, Plumwood emphasizes: "[o]ur current debacle is the fruit of a human- and reason-centered culture that is at least a couple of millennia old" (8**)**. She argues that from Plato to Descartes, this rational fallacy of "master identity" (Plumwood 191) continued its course only to reassert in the forms of mind/body and subject/object pairs, implying and retaining the hierarchical dichotomy of reason/nature dualism. Thus, "reason is defined in opposition to everything associated with feeling and the body, and ultimately, and most especially, nature" (Mathews 59). Plato's emphasis on reason as a distinguishing mark of human virtue brings to the fore man's radical detachment and severance from nature, as it directs his course to rise above the baser connections of "materiality" or **"**the lower order" (Plumwood 93) of the physical world. On the other hand, Descartes' scientific worldview defines reason as an exclusively human consciousness, radically separating it from nature. By casting nature as a passive, mindless physical realm, this view legitimises human control and objectification of the natural world (116).

In the aftermath of the development of new associates of the core dualism like mind/body, subject/object, and ends/means disjuncts, the more "unified" (106) category of human/nature dualism emerges. This shift in focus is further explored by Mathew, who expands on Plumwood's analysis by observing that:

> Her aim was to show that each term in a binary opposition is not merely dichotomised or *hyper-separated* from its opposite and *ranked* relative to it, but that the term on the right hand side of each pair is *instrumentalised* to, or made to appear as if created for the purpose of serving, the term on the left. So, for example, the body is seen merely as a vessel for the mind, rather than having significance in its own right. (58)

Thus, the mind gives "the perspective of power" (Plumwood 191) to humans to subjugate nature as a realm of material resources devoid of its own needs or ends. The mechanistic

worldview deepened the human/nature divide by defining reason as uniquely human. This radical separation positioned nature as a subordinate legitimising "control of and ruthlessness towards the sphere of nature as the Other" ("Environmental Culture" 4).

In this context, value dualism manifests most prominently through what Plumwood terms 'hyperseparation'-a radical form of separation that not only distinguishes between humans (culture) and nature but creates an unbridgeable gulf between them. It serves as a key indicator of dualism by constructing radically opposed identities through the systematic denial of shared qualities and continuities between dualised pairs. Therefore, in *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason*, Plumwood places it above the rest of structural features such as backgrounding (denial), incorporation, instrumentalism, and homogenisation. A careful scrutiny reveals that radical exclusion (hyperseparation) has invariably been a fundamental feature of every dualised structure right from the core category of reason/nature contrast to "the more recent" (Plumwood 42), one of human/nature dualism. Plumwood emphasizes this point: "Dualism is an emphatic and distancing form of separation (hyper-separation or dissociation) which creates a sharp, ontological break or radical discontinuity between the identities constructed as the privileged 'centre' and those subordinated" ("Environmental Culture" 101).

She explicates further that radical separation predominantly springs from an "anthropocentric viewpoint" that "treats nature as radically other" (Plumwood 107). In the current scenario, it serves the purpose of compounding the outlook of human-centeredness to set humans apart from dualistically conceived entities treated as alien others, merely commodities or resources, mindless matter, or insignificant for any moral consideration. Plumwood indicates that showing care for pet animals and denying sensitivity towards commercially farmed animals is a clear reflection of it (160). The instrumental identity in the latter case is constructed and naturalised through complete severance that presents these animals radically different and as "objects denied any subjectivity, commodified and reduced to flesh" (Alloun 157).

This is how absolute division not only exploits the existing distinction in a dichotomy, but also negates the identity of dualised 'others' as an end in itself to relocate it into the category of means. Mcfague (1997) presents similar thoughts: "Differences" in hyperseparation (radical exclusion), "are not seen as a matter of degree, but as absolutes" for the sake of hegemonic control and "to treat other as object" (89). Given the structure of logical manoeuvring, radical exclusion becomes the fundamental feature of dualism to justify the dominant and privileged position of the valued party in the dualised set of entities. Rose's (2013) insightful observation in "Val Plumwood's Philosophical Animism: Attentive Interactions in the Sentient World", further illuminates the point: "One of Val's key concepts was 'hyperseparation'—the structure of dominance that drives western binaries" as it "accords value to one side of the binary, and relegates the other side to a position of oppositional subordination" (94).

This paper uses Catherine Belsey's textual analysis method from her essay "Textual Analysis as a Research Method" to explore how *The Hungry Tide* (2004) addresses value dualisms. Following Belsey's approach, the analysis starts with key questions to systematically examine the text, focusing on how the novel portrays the exploitation of nature and the human/nature dualism discussed by Plumwood. Textual analysis of the novel reveals how it challenges value dualism in environmental discourse through its intricate narrative and characters. Belsey's focus on textual contradictions highlights how Ghosh destabilises these binary oppositions, particularly through Kanai, a linguistic and cultural translator. The novel's depiction of the Sundarbans ecosystem resists dualistic views of nature as either a resource to exploit or a pristine wilderness to preserve. Instead, it portrays a complex web of interconnected relationships between human and non-human actors. Belsey's assertion that research should "contribute to knowledge" (160) supports this ecocritical study, which aims to address what is missing in the existing research by exploring the domination of nature and the exploitation of those seen as part of it, revealing new dimensions of understanding the novel (160).

Critical Perspectives on *The Hungry Tide*

Existing scholarly analyses of *The Hungry Tide* (2004) have examined the novel through diverse theoretical frameworks, including postmodernism, postcolonialism, ecofeminism and ecocriticism. In his paper, Man Singh examines *The Hungry Tide* through a postmodern lens, equating ecocritical theory with postmodernism for its shared challenge to dominant ideologies about nature. He emphasises how language shapes the image of nature and critiques the capitalistic, colonial mindset that exploits it, arguing that the novel addresses "capitalism-powered colonialism" (5). Contrasting with Man Singh's perspective, Brindha in *Ecofeminism* argues that Ghosh focuses on the animistic creation and ecological balance of the Sundarbans, portraying the region as a living character. The novel's depiction of life and soul permeating every natural object offers readers a unique view of the ecosystem, highlighting the complex relationship between the harsh climate and the resilient inhabitants of the Tide country. Together, the views of both critics reveal how colonial projects in the Sundarbans driven by capitalist exploitation, systematically dismantled traditional relationships between the local population and their environment. These insights align with Nayar's assertion in *Contemporary Literary Theory* that ecocriticism as a theory offers a wide application to "nature-writing texts" and offers criticism to create "environmental awareness…a socio-political framework" (3) and is linked to "environmental activism" (33). This ecocritical lens helps bridge Singh's focus on colonial capitalism with Brindha's emphasis on ecological balance, showing how the novel employs nature writing to expose both environmental degradation and its colonial-capitalist roots. In addition, it substantiates that ecocriticism is a useful tool for analysing the selected text. Building upon this scholarly discourse surrounding *The Hungry Tide,* Bhushan (2021), Bundari. (2017), Soni, Amit Kumar (2022), and Arunprasath & Thenmozhi (2023) have conducted ecocritical analyses of the novel exploring the role of nature, nature, and human

relationship, use of myth in highlighting the power of nature and the ecological imbalance occurring due to man's intervention in nature. This paper applies Val Plumwood's theory of reason/nature dualism to address a gap in current scholarship, highlighting how dualistic thinking leads to the exploitation of nature and other marginalised forms of life. The current research draws insights from ecofeminist, postcolonial, and postmodernist criticism and substantiates how ecocriticism joins hands with these theories to question and dismantle the existing hegemonic beliefs and practices.

Discussion

In *The Hungry Tide*, Amitav Ghosh explores the increasing alienation between humans and nature, particularly in the context of the Sundarbans' fragile ecosystem. The novel highlights the violence inflicted on the environment, particularly the exploitation of aquatic life, and the resulting disconnection between human society and the natural world. This divide stems from the imposition of modern, mechanistic modes of thinking that position nature as an object to be controlled and exploited, reflecting the logic of reason/nature dualism as critiqued by Val Plumwood. In this framework, nature is subordinated to human rationality, reinforcing hierarchical distinctions perpetuating domination.

From Harmony to Hegemony

Ghosh illustrates the ecological disruption in the Sundarbans, where the once harmonious relationship between humans and nature has been replaced by exploitative practices. A key example is the use of "nylon nets" (Ghosh 134), which Moyna discusses with Kanai. While designed for greater efficiency, these nets are causing irreparable harm to the region's aquatic species. The ecological consequences of this practice are dire, as the destruction of fish populations threatens not only individual species but the entire balance of the ecosystem. The dialogue between Moyna and Kanai serves as a microcosmic representation of this broader ecological crisis. Their discussion of nylon fishing nets symbolises the intersection of technological advancement and environmental deterioration, demonstrating how seemingly isolated technological interventions can precipitate cascading effects throughout an ecosystem. Moyna shares Mashima's grim prediction that "in fifteen years the fish will all be gone" (134), emphasising the long-term consequences of such practices.

This exploitation, driven by a mechanistic and dualistic view of nature, will ultimately backfire on the local communities that rely on the ecosystem for their survival. As the natural resources dwindle, the very people who have historically lived in harmony with the tide country will find themselves deprived of their livelihoods. Ghosh's novel warns of the consequences of human interference with nature and the dangers of treating the environment as a separate, controllable entity rather than an interconnected system. That is why Moyna gives way to her apprehension. She says, "It's people like us who are going to suffer" (134). In this way, the poor people of the tide country are, first, exploited to adopt modern means

of development that provide the basis for hyperseparation of nature and then left helpless to share their fate with the destructed sphere of nature. In a paradoxical comment about the negative impact of the mechanistic view of nature, Shiva (1988) argues "that what is currently called development is essentially maldevelopment, based on the... accentuation of the domination of man over nature" (5). The novel particularly highlights the issue that these new nylon nets pose a serious threat of ecological injury as they have given rise to the problem of bycatch. They are made "so fine that they catch the eggs of all the other fish as well" (Ghosh 134). Such a situation can undoubtedly wipe out certain species from their natural habitat and gradually put the sustainability of the entire ecosystem in danger. According to Moyna's account, Mashima couldn't "get the nets banned" because the beneficiaries of this violence against nature are the dominant orders of "traders" or "politicians" who are amassing "a lot of money in prawns" (Ghosh 134). These people, sheltered by their privileged position, often overlook the harm done to nature, unaware that the deep separation between humans and nature has profound consequences that cannot be easily dismissed. The depletion of nature undermines its role in sustaining life, ultimately boomeranging back to threaten humanity with a catastrophic crisis.

Commodifying Nature

The novel shows how commodity culture deepens the divide between humans and nature. Piya's story of the stranded dolphin, Mr. Sloane, highlights the commodification of the natural world. "Mr. Sloane was a valuable commodity – Irrawaddy dolphins had been known to fetch as much as one hundred thousand US dollars on the market" (Ghosh 306). This instrumental view, rooted in the Cartesian duality of mind versus nature, removes ethical responsibility toward nature. It leads to the disregard of non-human beings, treating them as mere objects without any sentience or "empty mechanism" of materiality (Plumwood 115). Blinded by the "self-interest" (Bulbeck 184), the callous captors and those involved in "clandestine trade in wildlife" (Ghosh 306) treat these sentient beings like Mr. Sloane as hyper-separated objects of exploitation and ignore the perpetual suffering of such intelligent and sensitive creatures in captivity. Ghosh attempts to highlight this unidentified threat of wildlife trafficking promoted by the flourishing trend of aquariums which has developed into a show industry and specifically its growing demand for river dolphins (306). This menace of aquariums, especially its popular variant of petting pools, highly chlorinated and noisy enclosure, has turned the lives of captive dolphins impoverished and has become the major cause of their massive killing, depletion of population and destruction of natural habitats. The deplorable fact of this live trade of aquatic mammals reveals that "[a]ll methods of capturing cetaceans are invasive, stressful and potentially lethal. It is hardly surprising that so many dolphins die of shock before or shortly after they reach the concrete pools or pens for which they are destined" (Lemieux 255). This illustrates the extreme stress and trauma dolphins endure when captured from their natural habitat and confined to artificial environments.

A Threatened Ecosystem

Similarly, another ecocritical concern in the novel is how the disturbed ecosystem threatens the ecological balance of the tide country. Nirmal's observation of the "absence" of "millions of swarming crabs" and "flights of birds," marks this sign of a collapsing ecosystem (Ghosh 215). The passage reflects that our anthropocentric outlook, even in the field of wildlife protection, has made us oblivious to the needs of nature. The situation of the mangroves in the tide country shows a case in point. Besides the other signs of disruption in the ecological balance of this place, as Nirmal notices, the alarming decline in the number of crabs indicates that the mangroves are in serious jeopardy caused by a view of nature as a radically separate entity "without needs of its own" (Plumwood 21). Ghosh emphasizes this point those crabs being the keystone species, keep the mangroves alive as they render an invaluable service of clearing their roots from dead leaves build-up, and "without them the trees would choke on their own debris" (142). "They are crucial in the processing of leaf litter" (Reynold 49). Without this natural cleaning process, the roots would become clogged, blocking the flow of oxygen and nutrients necessary for the mangrove trees to survive. In this way, crabs play a fundamental part in the overall functioning of the ecosystem, which in turn supports a wide variety of other species. Ghosh's depiction underscores the interconnectedness of species within an ecosystem, showing how even small, often overlooked creatures can have profound impacts on environmental stability.

The Impact of Technology

Besides drawing attention to the disturbed environment of the Sundarbans, *The Hungry Tide* further offers a penetrating critique of humanity's unidirectional, monological relationship with the natural world in examining the paradigm of "technological control" (Plumwood 239), illuminating how this fundamentally flawed approach engenders a pervasive ecological blindness. The text particularly emphasises how this growing detachment manifests in humanity's failure to acknowledge and comprehend the escalating vulnerability of non-human entities. *The Hungry Tide* brings to the fore the havoc of technological interference which not only undermines and restricts the freedom of aquatic species, especially dolphins, in the smooth channels of the tide country, it also deprives them of their natural habitats. The text highlights this grim reality through the poignant account of "the newborn calf" (Ghosh 345) which becomes the victim of humans' "technological power" (Plumwood 239). A powerboat, usually used by the Coast Guard or the Forest Department, tears its body, giving it a sudden death blow. Piya, who examines its injury, concluded that it was "hit by the propeller of a fast-moving motorboat" (Ghosh 346). The idea underlying this account is that in our zeal to embrace technology, we have distanced ourselves from nature, putting both its integrity and existence at stake.

Exploitation and the Plight of Orcaella

The question of existence resonates in Ghosh's concern about the colonisation and exploitation of the non-human world, particularly as the novel highlights the extreme violence inflicted on Mekong dolphins (Orcaella or Irrawaddy dolphins) for human purposes, threatening their very survival. In this "egoist-instrumentalist model" of self/other distorted relation, "self" (Plumwood 145) is seen as separate from nature. By defining nature as "reductively conceived" other ("Environmental Culture"160) and inferior to their own privileged identity, humans justify exploiting and controlling it without limits. The novel underscores the underlying strategies of radical separation, where, as Plumwood suggests, a dualistic framework is constructed upon this divide, thereby fostering additional oppressive tendencies like instrumentalism and homogenization. She considers these as "two important corollaries" (Plumwood 52) of polarisation. Such a reductive and brutal treatment of non-human nature is brought to light through Piya's survey of marine mammals. Surely, the resultant effect of this sustained maltreatment is so enormous it causes "much concern in the small wildlife community" of Piya's colleagues in "Phnom Penh" (Ghosh 305). They foresee something alarming regarding the sustainability of Orcaella in this part of the world. They arrive at a painful realization: "The Orcaella population of the Mekong was known to be declining rapidly and was expected soon to fall below sustainable levels" (Ghosh 305). Given that dismal picture of this endangered species, we get a clear indication of the hostile and dichotomous treatment of riverine dolphins – the unique beauty of the aquatic world – driven to the verge of the twilight of existence due to human insensitivity and alienation to set themselves apart from nature. "The apparent low abundance and recent declines in number of Irrawaddy dolphins are cause for serious concern" (Stacey & leatherwood 195). These substantial signs of recession in the abundance level of the sentient species of marine mammals are a huge loss of biological diversity. Ghosh provides a short historical glimpse of the atrocities committed against these dolphins of the Mekong River and of the surrounding water bodies in Cambodia. He relates that the year 1970 witnessed a severe blow to them caused by the human war maniacs. The writer states: "The Mekong Orcaella had shared Cambodia's misfortune: in the 1970s, they had suffered the ravages of indiscriminate American carpet bombing" (Ghosh 305). This single textual reference to the sad spectacle reveals what is not only shocking but also reflects a dualistic and oppressive framework of colonisation of nature which Plumwood criticises. This is exactly what she argues "that Western culture has treated the human/nature relation as a dualism" (Plumwood 2). Thus, the human/nature duality fuels a destructive drive for human dominance, reducing nature to a powerless other.

The author also portrays the radical exclusion of these dolphins through the morbid and myopic mindset of "Khmer Rouge cadres" (Ghosh 305). These despots subject them to the worst kind of exploitation and cruel objectification. We come to know that during their despotic rule, they commit more lethal and large-scale killings of Orcaella – the vibrant expression of nature – in purely rather insanely reductive terms. The height of cruelty, as well as absurdity in such a dualistic treatment, is evident from the fact that these "intelligent

mammals" (Bulbeck 86) have been massacred to extract oil from their bodies "to run boats and motorcycles" (Ghosh 306). These textual references highlight the terrible activities of this vicious regime pertaining to the heinous domination and exploitation of non-humans on the basis of an absolutely self-centred and hyperseparated approach towards nature. Since they see this "relationship… as that of a superior to a separate inferior order", hence they are blinded by the domineering and reductive framework to construe it as "fitting and natural that the lower side serves the upper as a means to his ends" (Plumwood 53). They brutally victimise "Orcaella in the Tonle sap," and this mass violence against them brings their population "almost to extinction" (Ghosh 305). Their arbitrary exercise of hegemony and cruelty knows no bounds as these "acoustically sensitive" (Lemieux 241) beings are "hunted with rifles and explosives" (Ghosh 305) which portrays a torture terribly tormenting and excruciating in effect. The incident of Mr. Sloane's stranding clearly illustrates that such a disaster is an inevitable consequence of extreme violence. It clearly indicates that the Mekong Orcaella confront a far greater threat as the self-serving ends of human beings have put their sustainability at stake. It also shows that this alarming situation is linked with the ongoing colonisation of nature in the name of development which poses a serious threat to this riverine specie. Thus, it substantively equates the projects of "recent years" like blasting "the rapids of the upper Mekong… to make the river navigable as far as China" with "the certain destruction of the dolphin's preferred habitats" (Ghosh 306). This is what constitutes the anthropocentric or oppressive framework which leads to treating nature in dualistic terms.

The Epistemic Violence Against Nature

The archetypal segregation of the non-human world is presented through the metaphor of subject/object dualism in *The Hungry Tide*. "The radical separation of the subject of knowledge from its object is an epistemological foundation stone of monological science" ("Environmental Culture" 45). The novel shows that Edward Blyth's monological approach in conducting ruthless experimentation on riverine dolphins exhibits "a reductionist, '"mechanistic world view of modern science"'– one that sanctioned the exploitation of nature" (Warren 23). Such a mode of science and knowing has brought a drastic change in human-nature relation to be viewed reductively in the knower/known context implying that nature, in this new conceptual relation, is merely a non-agentic object of knowledge and, therefore, excluded from ethical thinking or human empathy. The novel draws a parallel between the savagery of the inhabitants of the Malabar coastal area and the callous act of insensitive objectification of sea giants under the cover of "sado-dispassionate science" ("Environmental Culture" 53) to bring out the unidentified threat of the latter. Mr. Blyth's brutal treatment of the stranded whales, reducing them "to perfect skeletons" (Ghosh 229) for personal ends mirrors the savagery committed by the inhabitants of the Malabar Coast. Both acts reflect a dualistic mindset that views these helpless creatures as objects of "intentional nullity" ("Environmental Culture" 45). Blyth sees the whales not as sentient beings deserving of empathy or respect, but as mere objects of study, devoid of intrinsic value or agency. His

actions reflect the rationalist ideology of the West, criticised by Plumwood and this textual reference substantiates the core argument of the research that how reason/nature dualism provides grounds for domination and exploitation of nature. He denies the intentionality, worth or meaningful existence of these nonhuman creatures. After hearing the news about "a school of giant sea-creatures" all his concern to get quickly to "the Salt Lake" … wasn't that he cared about their being killed" but "[h]e just wanted to do it himself" (Ghosh 228-29). The dualistic subject-object separation evident in Mr. Blyth's cruel objectification of whales reflects a Cartesian-rationalist worldview, where a rational, conscious mind confronts a mindless, morally meaningless universe. ("Environmental Culture" 143). This framework leaves no space for care or respect for non-human beings, who are seen as devoid of value or moral significance. Thus, Mr. Blyth remains insensitive to the pain and plight of these whales entangled in the Salt Lake and feels no hesitation in causing more suffering to them. He shows no concern for their being "in great distress" and "exposed to the sun" (Ghosh 229) owing to the low level of water. His colonial approach in selecting "the best specimens" for redundant experiments on an already identified species, and restraining them "to the bank with poles and stout ropes" (229), starkly demonstrates an anthropocentric viewpoint. This outlook seeks to exploit and objectify living beings, instrumentalising them for the practice of epistemic violence. This "centric delusion" (Plumwood 29) of hegemonic relation of knower/known or subject/object dualism shifts the focus from scientific objectivity to objectification, from understanding to control of nature (Mcfague 75).

Subjugation of Morichjhãpi's Settlers

Similarly, in the dualist conception of self/other relations, the novel portrays the marginalised community of the settlers in Morichjhãpi as a highly subjugated and radically separated "counted as part of nature" (Plumwood 47). It reflects the self-centred approach of the dominant structures in which the importance of others is determined on the basis of the interest of the self. Ghosh highlights that the dominant orders in the novel like "the authorities" (119) and their "Western patrons" (301), imposing self-suited conservation, constitute a nexus of political and organisational power which threatens the very existence of these settlers whose sole source of subsistence is nature. Thus, their plight and miserable situation present them in the light of strict dualism in which "the other is to be treated as not merely different but inferior, part of lower, different order of being" (Plumwood 49). Initially, the logic of human/nature dualism is used to align these settlers with nature, deemed "less rational and closer to the sphere of nature" (47). However, the colonising authority later dominantly positions itself as the protector of "a reserve forest" (Ghosh 261), simultaneously denying the settlers' identity as equally valuable. In doing so, it erases their existence, subordinating them to its own interests under the guise of conservation. Thus, they are caught in an untoward situation in Morichjhãpi, still they look contented with their lot because they have experienced the worst in the "concentration camp" of Dandakaranya where "the local people" have "treated them as intruders, attacking them with bows, arrows and other weapons" (Ghosh 118). They

are unable to escape the maltreatment and absolute segregation, although their closer ties with the tide country bring them back to *"the right place … a large empty island called Morichjhãpi"* (165). Despite such a strong sense of embeddedness in nature, as they yearn for their tidal country mud, they are evicted from the land of their dreams and slandered in order to manipulate the situation by constructing their image in negative terms that they're causing damage to this place. In reality, as Nilima confirms: "They just wanted a little land to settle on" (Ghosh 119). The constant oppression and dehumanisation deaden their spirit to render them grief-stricken, though they sustain the hostile living conditions around them. Kusum relates this grim reality in the following words:

> "…the worst part was not the hunger or the thirst. It was to sit here, helpless, and listen to the policemen making their announcements, hearing them say that our lives, our existence, was worth less than dirt or dust. This island has to be saved for its trees, it has to be saved for its animals, it is a part of a reserve forest." (Ghoh 261)

But the egoistic self, embodied in institutional power, shows no regard for the settlers' basic needs or their right to exist. "Such a self is … separated from others as a centre of striving and needs; it treats the other as alien and is thus not constrained empathically or morally by the other's needs" (Plumwood 144). The perspective of exclusion helps the centric self to reduce the settlers to a peripheral position to be easily marked as a hindrance to wildlife conservation. This distorted image of their identity is constructed to attempt reversal of human/nature dualism, though this strategy affirms what a dualism constructs ("Environmental Culture" 32), and to justify the resultant violence against them under the cover of wildlife conservation measures. Certain voices defending the settlers' case constitute the counter-evidence which is convincing enough to judge that all the cry of the conservation of forests and "danger to the environment is just a sham in order to evict these people" (Ghosh 214). Ghosh (2004) highlights this realisation in the novel by presenting the concerns of those who directly or indirectly experience this hierarchical treatment. In this context, Nirmal unequivocally confirms that "Morichjhãpi, wasn't really forest even before the settlers came" (213). Kanai also denounces prioritising the protection of "the wildlife here, without regard for the human costs" (301). Kusum refers to this oppressive divide by articulating the agony of these marginalised people (262). The siege which takes "a terrible toll" (Ghosh 260), is, in a paradoxical sense, the culminating point in the extreme segregation of the settlers. First, they are *othered* by being linked to nature and later, by prioritising nature for their own self-interest, they are once again subjected to radical exclusion within the same dualistic framework.

The Perils of Human-Nature Divide

In continuation of the exclusion of marginalised settlers, the novel critiques the Western "rationalist hyperseparation of human identity from nature" ("Environmental Culture" 8), revealing the disastrous consequences of such a dualistic worldview. This conception of "ecological disembeddedness" (237) is subtly rendered in the text with

reference to the portentous project of "Port Canning" (Ghosh 287) which reveals an absolute disregard for nature's sustaining role by the ruling machinery of the British "who stand apart from it as masters or external controller of nature" (Plumwood 71). In the colonising zeal of imposing their ideals of development and to put organic landscape to "rational use" ("Environmental Culture" 21), they destroy the most valuable in it – the mangroves which constitute "Bengal's defence against the Bay" (Ghosh 286). They treat nature in dualistic terms to subjugate it to their "self-contained ends" (Plumwood 144) within a conceptual framework of polarised identities of culture/nature or human/nature dualism. Thus, they do not even take into account the apprehensions and exhortations of Mr. Paddington, a man possessing great acumen to "look into the hearts of rivers and storms" (Ghosh 286), that their act of clearing mangroves in the tide country will entail an irretrievable damage because they serve "as a barrier against nature's fury" and keep "the hinterland alive" (286). Shiva (1988) disapprovingly comments in this regard that "[w]ith the destruction of forests … we are losing our life-support systems. This destruction is taking place in the name of 'development' and progress" (xiv). In this mad pursuit of development, "no one [pays] any attention" (Ghosh 286), as the narrative ironically reveals, to the consequences of constructing a "new capital on the banks of the mad Matla" (285). This reference illuminates how the reckless drive of development disrupts the delicate balance of nature. In a similar context, Carolyn Merchant (2012) argues, "[w]hen we ignore the consequences of our interactions with nature, Engels warned, our conquests '"take… revenge on us"' (209). It means our attempts to control or subjugate the natural world invite nature's backlash, ultimately harming those who seek to dominate it. The failure of the British project to construct Port Canning at Matla exemplifies this notion. In this context, the British conception is grounded in "hegemonic rationality" ("Environmental Culture" 15) which promotes a monological approach to nature, aiming to colonise and control it. In contrast, Mr. Piddington's dialogical view is rooted in "ecological rationality" (15), emphasising a reciprocal understanding of nature. His apprehension highlights the importance of mutual sustainability between humans and nature, as exemplified by the catastrophic destruction of Port Canning. Thus, it becomes clear that "beyond a certain degree of interference of economic activity in ecosystem balances, the more man tries to submit nature to his law, the more she submits him to her law" (Marques 403). This insight underscores the inherent danger of exerting unrestrained authority over the natural world. Consequently, the hegemonic paradigm that seeks to impose control over nature and regards it as an alien other further deepens the dissociation between humans and the environment, thereby threatening the sustainability of the current ecological landscape.

Conclusion

This ecocritical analysis of *The Hungry Tide* (2004) reveals how various forms of value dualism operate within the novel, highlighting how concepts like reason/nature, culture/nature, mind/body, self/other, and human/nature (Plumwood 43) shape relationships between dominant and peripheral groups. These dualisms allow powerful forces,

such as colonisers, marine life traders, and political institutions, to marginalise both nature and the people closely associated with it. This separation between humans and nature results in the exploitation and endangerment of ecosystems like the tide country's mangroves, aquatic animals like dolphins, and the settler communities treated as part of the natural realm (42).
The novel's depiction of a polarised view of human/nature relations reinforces a centric approach, where those in power subjugate and control the peripheral or "otherised" entities of nature. The absolute separation between these dualistic categories erases any sense of continuity, leading to domination rather than coexistence. This portrayal in *The Hungry Tide* (2004) reflects a larger critique of how dualistic thinking in human society leads to environmental and social exploitation. By illustrating these dynamics, the novel encourages readers to question the rigid divides often drawn between humans and the natural world, as well as between dominant and marginalised groups. Recognising these dualisms prompts a call for more integrated and ethical ways of understanding our relationship with nature, prioritising coexistence over domination and suggesting that human survival depends on the well-being of the natural world and those connected to it.

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