



AN ECO-AESTHETICAL READING OF AMITAV GHOSH'S *JUNGLE NAMA: BONBIBI MYTH*

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Abstract:

The paper is an eco-aesthetical reading of Amitav Ghosh's verse adaptation *Jungle Nama* which comprises of an episode from the legend of Bonbibi, a tale popular in the villages of Sunderbans. The name "Sunderbans" translates to "beautiful forest" in Bengali, a fitting tribute to the enchanting landscape that unfolds before our eyes. The Sunderbans is renowned for its rich biodiversity, harbouring a vast array of flora and fauna. It is the realm of the Royal Bengal Tiger, a majestic creature that prowls through the mangroves with an air of quiet power. Amitav Ghosh is a mesmerizing fiction writer who explores the ecologically precarious aspects of Indian Territory. He tells the story of modern India through the lens of Ecocriticism. His fictional world is based on real-life events and characters from Indian ecocritical philosophy. He attempts to re-create a modern India based on environmental ideology. The paper will also aim to unfold the undying myth surrounding the divine role of Bonbibi, the local deity, in ensuring the protection of the weak against the wrath of nature. The myth of Bon Bibi, as recounted in the *Jungle Nama*, showcases the power of courage, resilience, and faith in the face of adversity. It celebrates the deep connection between the people and the Sunderbans, emphasizing the need for harmony and reverence toward nature.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, Aesthetics, Bonbibi, Sunderban, Resilience, Environment, Eco-aesthetical

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Introduction:

"Eco-aesthetical" refers to the combination of ecological and aesthetic elements in an artistic or literary work. It relates to appreciating and representing nature and the environment through an aesthetic lens. Eco-aesthetics explores the intersection of beauty, art, and ecological awareness, emphasizing the natural world's intrinsic value and visual appeal. In eco-aesthetical works, the portrayal of nature goes beyond its utilitarian or scientific aspects and delves into its inherent aesthetic qualities. It involves capturing the visual, sensory, and emotional dimensions of the environment, whether through vivid descriptions, imagery, or artistic representations. Eco-aesthetics often aims to foster a deeper connection and reverence for nature by evoking a sense of awe, wonder, or contemplation through artistic expression. It may also incorporate themes of environmentalism, sustainability, and the need for ecological stewardship, highlighting the importance of preserving and protecting the natural world. Eco aesthetics represents a mindset and creative approach that seeks to align artistic and design practices with environmental sustainability, promoting a deeper appreciation for the beauty of nature and fostering a more ecologically conscious society. According to Scott Slovic, "Beauty often feels so private, so complacent even decadent." In 1991, Frederick Turner, in his book *Beauty: The Value of Values* says that "The word beauty is a little embarrassing; there is something old-fashioned about it. It is precisely for this reason that I shall use it rather than the much cooler and more stylish term *the aesthetic*."

The first-ever book in verse, *Jungle Nama* evokes the wonders of the Sunderban through its poetry. And having being written in verse form is aesthetic in itself. Besides that, the powerful landscape of Sunderbans makes it a typical instance of ecocritical aesthetics. Ghosh uses the natural world as a source of imagery and metaphor, drawing on the beauty and complexity of the forest to create a powerful narrative. This poetic narrative is a celebration of the natural world and a call to protect it from the destructive impact of human activities. The world's largest mangrove forest, the Sunderbans, has been an abiding subject in Ghosh's oeuvre. Ghosh elaborates in one of his interviews,

"When I started writing *Gun Island*, initially, I didn't intend to start it in the Sunderbans. But somehow, it just happened. The Sunderbans itself pulled me back into the landscape so I had to engage with it. Clearly, it just keeps pulling you back."

The 'Sundarbans trilogy', a collection of works published in the new millennium that consists of two novels, *The Hungry Tide* (2004) and *Gun Island* (2019), as well as a novella in poetry, *Jungle Nama*, is known for Amitav Ghosh's environmental imagination (Ferdous 2022). The pieces all share a similar geographic setting as well as a fascination with folklore that mythologizes a continual dialectic between humans and nature and signals an ecological imperative to find a balance between their respective rights to inhabit this biologically delicate, richly anthropized, and profoundly taxing tidal region (Elena 2023).

With Ghosh's charm and Toor's illustrations, both the story and the narrative have a universal appeal to readers of all ages. It can be considered a light read for those who are interested in a story, specifically coming from the Sundarban area (Biswas 2022).

In *Jungle Nama*, Ghosh returns to the natural world as a source of aesthetic inspiration. *Jungle Nama* is Amitav Ghosh's verse adaptation of the medieval Bengali tale about the Sundarbans' Forest Goddess, Bon Bibi, which is a very popular myth in the villages of Sunderban. According to this myth, Bonbibi is the daughter of a sultan who is lost in the forests of the Sundarbans. She is raised by the animals of the forest and learns to communicate with them. As she grows older, she becomes the protector of that forest and its inhabitants, particularly the humans who venture into the forest to collect honey, fish, and wood. Bonbibi is also known as the 'Lady of the Forest' and is worshipped as a protector and a guide.

The word 'Bonbibi' is a hybrid coinage that straddles two linguistic zones: in Bangla, 'Bon' means forest and the later part '-bibi' which means queen, has its etymological root in Urdu. As the Sundarbans find their entity in the confluence of 'land' and 'water', 'forest' and the 'rivers', the word "Bonbibi" exists at a crossroads of 'Bangla' and 'Urdu', even from the point of sectarian identity – at the confluence of the 'Hindu' and the 'Islamic' faiths. The two dominant religious communities of the Sundarbans, the Hindu, and the Muslim, worship Bonbibi with the common belief that Bonbibi would ensure living and livelihood vis-à-vis the hostile nature. The aesthetic elements in *Jungle Nama* are somewhat irreplicable. The beauty of nature is by far the most attractive thing in the world. *Jungle Nama* is a story of a sad lad Dukhey, his name is also sad. He was given the opportunity to become a billionaire in just one night by his brothers in a forest which is forbidden by the man-eaten tiger. The people once earlier were saved by the goddess of the forest named

Bonbibi. And her brother also saved people from the ferocious tiger.

There is a poignant and visually striking scene where Bonbibi, the goddess of the Sunderbans, and her brother Shah Jongoli come to the rescue of a distressed fisherman named Dukhey, who finds himself in grave danger from the menacing Dokkhin, a demonic figure representing the treacherous southern winds that sweep through the region. As the scene unfolds, the setting is characterized by the dense mangrove forests and the mysterious, shifting waterways of the Sunderbans. The atmosphere is infused with a sense of foreboding and unease, as the winds howl and the shadows deepen.

Dukhey, portrayed as a vulnerable figure, is seen struggling against the fierce wind and the treacherous currents, desperately clinging to his boat as he is tossed and turned by the relentless storm. The scene is painted with vivid descriptions of the crashing waves, the swirling mist, and the deafening roar of the wind, creating a sense of chaos and imminent danger. Suddenly Bonbibi, the divine protector of the Sunderbans, appears radiant

and resolute, accompanied by her brother Shah Jongoli, the fearless warrior. Their presence brings a palpable shift in the atmosphere as if a protective aura envelops the surroundings. Bonbibi's ethereal beauty contrasts with Shah Jongoli's sturdy and determined presence. With grace and power, Bonbibi and Shah Jongoli take on the role of saviours. They join forces to confront Dokkhin, the embodiment of the destructive winds. The battle between the divine and the demonic unfolds, depicted through mesmerizing visuals of swirling energies, flashes of light, and clashes of elemental forces. The scene is both captivating and awe-inspiring, as the supernatural beings engage in a fierce struggle against the chaotic and malevolent Dokkhin. In a display of courage and determination, Bonbibi and Shah Jongoli manage to subdue Dokkhin, gradually calming the winds and quelling the storm. The atmosphere transforms from one of chaos to a serene and tranquil stillness. The waterways become calm, the winds subside, and a sense of harmony is restored to the Sunderbans.



Source- The Hindu

This aesthetic scene not only showcases the raw power and beauty of nature but also embodies the triumph of good over evil. It encapsulates the awe-inspiring presence of Bonbibi and Shah Jongoli as divine entities, their intervention serving as a beacon of hope and protection for the vulnerable Dukhey and the entire Sunderbans community. The scene is a testament to the strength of unity, resilience, and the enduring power of the natural world.

With their unique ecosystem and breath-taking landscapes, the Sunderbans already possess inherent beauty. The Sunderbans offer stunning views during sunrise and sunset. The sky is painted in gold, orange, and pink hues as the sun rises or sets over the mangrove forest. The serene reflection of the colourful sky on the calm waters creates a picturesque and serene atmosphere. The intricate network of mangrove trees in the Sunderbans forms a mesmerizing backdrop. The aerial roots, twisted branches, and dense foliage

contribute to the unique aesthetic of the region. Emphasize the interplay of light and shadow as sunlight filters through the canopy, creating captivating patterns on the forest floor. The Sundarbans are home to a diverse array of wildlife. It highlights the beauty of the Royal Bengal tiger, deer, monkeys, and various bird species. The elegant movements of a tiger, the playful antics of monkeys, or the graceful flight of birds against the backdrop of the mangroves. These encounters showcase the beauty and diversity of life in the region. The Sundarbans are crisscrossed by winding rivers and waterways, adding to its charm. It captures the stillness of the water, the reflection of the surrounding greenery, and the occasional glimpse of wildlife on the riverbanks. These scenes evoke a sense of tranquillity and allow for a deeper connection with nature. Envision the Sundarbans under a moonlit sky. The moon's glow casts a soft light on the water, creating a mystical ambiance. The gentle rustling of the mangroves and the occasional nocturnal calls of animals add to the enchantment of the scene. It highlights the tranquillity and ethereal beauty of the Sundarbans under the moonlight.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, an eco-aesthetical reading of "Jungle Nama" unveils a profound and intricate relationship between nature, humanity, and the ecological crisis. This literary masterpiece by Amitav Ghosh transcends conventional boundaries by intertwining ecological concerns with the aesthetics of storytelling. Through his vivid descriptions and evocative imagery, Ghosh paints a compelling portrait of the interconnectedness of all life forms and the urgent need to restore harmony with our environment. His Sundarbans trilogy (*The Hungry Tide*, *Jungle Nama*, *Gun Island*) surpasses all his previous works as he combines his personal voice with a factual and accurate description of the mangrove forest (Ferdous 2022). The eco-aesthetical lens allows us to appreciate the profound beauty and resilience of nature, while also acknowledging the destructive forces that threaten its existence. Ghosh skilfully weaves together narratives of loss, displacement, and ecological devastation, reminding us of the profound impact human actions have on the natural world. By intertwining history, myth, and personal experiences, he underscores the urgent need for collective action to confront the ecological crisis and safeguard our planet's future. Furthermore, "Jungle Nama" prompts us to question our prevailing paradigms of progress and development, which often prioritize short-term gains over long-term sustainability. Ghosh

challenges the dichotomy between human civilization and the natural world, urging us to recognize that our fates are intricately intertwined. Through poetic language and introspective narratives, he invites us to reflect on our responsibilities as custodians of the Earth and to reconsider our relationship with the natural world. Ultimately, an eco-aesthetical reading of "Jungle Nama" serves as a powerful call to action. It encourages us to engage in deep introspection of our values, priorities, and the choices we make in our daily lives. Ghosh's evocative storytelling compels us to re-evaluate our relationship with nature and embrace a more sustainable and harmonious way of being. By amplifying the voices of marginalized communities and shedding light on the environmental injustices they face, Ghosh inspires us to advocate for social and ecological justice.

"Jungle Nama" is a testament to the power of literature in fostering ecological awareness and inspiring change. Through its eco-aesthetical lens, this extraordinary work invites us to explore the intricate tapestry of nature, culture, and human existence. It reminds us that the preservation of our planet is not only an ecological imperative but also a moral obligation. As we close the pages of this remarkable book, let us carry its messages with us and take meaningful steps toward a more sustainable and harmonious future for all.

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