

# **Treatment of Ecology, State Power, and Society in Amitav Ghosh's Writings on the Sundarbans**



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**August 2023**

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A Thesis Submitted to  
The Department of English and Humanities  
University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
MA in English

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August 2023

## **CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL**

I hereby declare that this thesis is the student's own work and effort. All sources of information incorporated here have been duly acknowledged. This thesis has been submitted with my approval.



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Dr. Kaiser Hamidul Haq

Professor & Dean, School of Arts and Humanities

## DECLARATION

This thesis is a presentation of my original research work. Wherever contributions of others are involved, every effort is made to indicate this clearly, with due reference to the literature, and acknowledgement of collaborative research and discussions.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Fahmidur' with a stylized flourish at the end.

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## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to express my sincere and heartfelt gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Kaiser Hamidul Haq. His expertise and guidance played a pivotal role in shaping the outcome of this work.

I would also like to extend my thanks to Professor Syed Manzoorul Islam, Professor Shamsad Mortuza and Assistant Professor Nadia Rahman.

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## Abstract

The present study aims to explore the treatment of ecology, state power and society in Amitav Ghosh's writings on the Sundarbans. The Sundarbans is highly vulnerable to climate change. Climate change has a profoundly negative and threatening effect on both the ecology and the society of the region. More than 7 million people live in the Sundarbans. The inhabitants of the Sundarbans are among the most poor, impoverished and marginalized segment of population in the modern nation states of India and Bangladesh. While Bangladesh and India progress economically, it is not paying enough attention to the ecological and social concern of the marginalized indigenous communities of the Sundarbans. Due to destruction of the ecology in the Sundarbans, the inhabitants are migrating to cities and other countries. Ghosh portrays how the indigenous communities of the Sundarbans are falling prey to the human trafficking syndicate. Women of these communities are falling victim to the sex trafficking syndicates. The dissenting voices of the local inhabitants in Sundarbans are ignored by the nation states. Amitav Ghosh's writing on the Sundarbans reveals how modern nation states silence the dissenting voices and how that leads to ecological and social degradation. The research will follow a qualitative method and textual analysis. Ashish Nandy's collection of essays titled the *Romance of the state and the fate of dissent in the tropics* is used as a theoretical framework to explore the interplay of ecology, state power and society in Ghosh's writings on the Sundarbans.

**Keywords: Ecology, State Power, Society, Sundarbans**

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

The Sundarbans is a mystical and unique landscape straddling the modern nation states of India and Bangladesh. It is an extensive group of islands and mangrove forest formed by the confluence of the Ganges, Brahmaputra and Meghna rivers. (Jalais 1) Human beings have a long history of living in the Sundarbans along with Tiger, Crocodiles and other species. There are popular mythologies and folklore of the Sundarbans that depict human beings' relationship with other species like tiger, crocodile, snakes and the natural environment. While the Sundarbans gained international recognition through the launch of Project Tiger in 1973, aimed at protecting the endangered Royal Bengal Tiger, the importance of the Sundarbans as a habitat for the most marginalized and impoverished segment of population has been largely overlooked. Since it is a low-lying landscape, the Sundarbans is often vulnerable to frequent flooding and devastating cyclones which leads to significant loss of life and destruction. The region witnessed some of the world's most devastating cyclones. Numerous people and life perished away as a result of these cyclones. Moreover, the effects of global warming and climate change have made the area increasingly inhospitable and unforgiving for both the inhabitants and wildlife. Everyday different species like crabs, fishes, dolphins, mangroves, and other wildlife are diminishing. Oceanographers have already spoken about the increasing number of dead zones in the Bay of Bengal. Dead zones in the Bay of Bengal are a massive threat for the Sundarbans ecosystem. The lives and livelihoods of the indigenous communities in the Sundarbans is entirely dependent on the ecology and ecosystem of the Sundarbans. These marginalized indigenous communities, primarily consist of the Namasudras or scheduled caste Hindus, as well as Muslims and

Christians. These communities have historically faced discrimination because of their race, ethnicity and caste. They are often referred to as Dalits. "Dalit" is a Sanskrit word which means "broken" or "scattered." The Dalits participated and played an active role in India's fight for independence from British colonial rule. However, till this date these communities remain marginalized and have limited political agency within the modern nation states of India and Bangladesh. In the modern nation State of India, they are one of the most poor, impoverished and helpless segments of population. They are mainly boatmen, fishermen, honey and wax collectors, crab catcher, craftsmen. Climate change and Global warming have worsened their living conditions. Everyday their struggle to stay alive in the Sundarbans region increases. Many people are migrating from the region. The communities who are still living in the Sundarbans are grappled by fear and uncertainty because they know that they are about to confront a bleak and harrowing fate. Through an analysis of Amitav Ghosh's writings on the Sundarbans, this thesis contends that addressing the concerns of marginalized indigenous communities is crucial for modern nation-states to effectively promote ecological well-being and societal welfare in the region. This study aims to examine the treatment of ecology, state power, and society in Amitav Ghosh's writings on the Sundarbans, with a focus on these marginalized indigenous communities. It seeks to analyze Amitav Ghosh's portrayal of the struggles faced by these communities, the impact of state power on their lives and the ecology, and the broader societal implications.

The indigenous communities living in the Sundarbans are often referred as Dalits and Scheduled Caste. Jogendranath Mandal was an influential Dalit leader. According to Professor Kaiser Haq,

Bengal was saved from large scale violence and killings because the scheduled caste or Dalits led by Jogendranath Mandal joined the Muslim league and supported the creation of Pakistan. (Haq 3) Mandal believed that Dalits would be safer and have more autonomy in East Pakistan, and so he advocated for their relocation in East Pakistan. However, his expectations shattered with in a very short time after partition because his constituents the Dalits, faced atrocities, discrimination and brutalities by the Pakistan State Power. Many Dalits fled to India during and before the 1971 Liberation War of Bangladesh. The number of Dalits that migrated to India during 1971 is around Ten million. (Haq 4) In India these people became refugees and started living in shanties and shacks. Indian State Power rehabilitated them in inhospitable and arid regions like Dandakaranya. Dandakaranya is mentioned in the Ramayana as the abode of the demons. (Haq 4) Despite promises of relocation by the Left Front in West Bengal, majority of refugees were forcibly returned to Dandakaranya when Left Front came to power. Around Ten thousand refugees did not return back to Dandakaranya and they settled in an island called Marichjhapi. The island became State protected area for tiger conservation, in 1973 when “Project Tiger” was launched by Indira Gandhi. The island was empty and it was similar to the native land of those Dalits. This is why that group of Dalit refugees decided to settle there and refused to leave. Jyoti Basu’s newly formed Marxist government in West Bengal utilized state power to massacre those people when they refused to leave. This barbaric and inhumane incident of Marichjhapi remains hidden until Amitav Ghosh exposed the bloody episode in his novel, *The Hungry Tide*. (Haq 4)

Amitav Ghosh is a renowned author of contemporary Transnational and Postcolonial Literature. He was born on July 11, 1956 in Kolkata, India. Ghosh achieved a PhD in Social Anthropology from University of Oxford. His fiction and nonfiction are characterized by extensive research,

vivid explanation and nuanced observation. He is famous for his style of synchronizing historical events and real lived experiences. Amitav Ghosh has received several notable awards such as the Jnanpith Award, Sahitya Akademi Award, the Ananda Puraskar, and the Crossword Book Prize. *The Great Derangement* is a non-fiction book by Ghosh in which he speaks about the issue of climate change and the reason most people are still unable to grasp the reality and consequence of climate change. Three books of Amitav Ghosh are set on the Sundarbans. *The Hungry Tide*, published in 2004, followed by *Gun Island* published in 2019. Most recently the verse translation *Jungle Nama*, is published in 2021.

In the novels *Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island*, Ghosh delves into the complex dynamics of the region. In these two novel Ghosh deals with a wide range of phenomenon such as climate change, the lives of indigenous communities, Culture, Mythology, State power exerting authority and control on citizens, migration, human trafficking, ecological disasters, corruption of state power, social concerns, persecution and discrimination faced by the indigenous communities in the hands of State power.

Amitav Ghosh's latest book is an English translation of an important episode from the Myth of Bonbibi. The myth of Bonbibi is a folklore and legend that emerged from the Sundarbans. Indigenous communities living in Sundarbans have a strong faith in that myth. The Myth of Bonbibi is a sacred narrative that highlights the coexistence of humans, tigers, crocodiles, and other species. The myth prioritizes ecological and social harmony. It highlights the importance of good governance and the responsibility of state power to act in the best interests of both society and the ecology of the Sundarbans. The myth also emphasizes the need to prioritize the well-

being of the vulnerable segments of society whose lives and livelihoods depend on the region's ecology. Unfortunately, modern nation states, Western environmentalist groups, and NGOs often overlook the concerns of these indigenous communities. Moreover, they wrongly blame the indigenous communities for the destruction of ecology. In reality, they are victims of climate change and have little influence in decision-making processes related to the Sundarbans' ecology. Industrialization is largely responsible for climate change and ecological disaster. The modern nation States follow the western model of development. According to acclaimed social theorist Ashish Nandy, a modern nation State often prioritizes economic growth at the expense of ecological and social concerns. Many intellectuals, researchers and academics have already spoken and written about the ecological and social problems that emerged in the Anthropocene period, as a result of the Carbon-based economy, rapid urbanization, Industrialization, Globalization, and Development programs. The impoverished local people in the Sundarbans follow their age-old traditions and culture. Most of them do not want industrialization and they do not approve of the western model of development which is adopted by the State. They have long spoken about their opinion which goes against the dominant narrative of development of the modern nation State. However, their indigenous knowledge about ecology and ecosystem is hardly given any priority. The State power often exclude their opinions during decision making about Sundarbans. The historical suppression of dissent by modern nation states like India, is discussed by social theorist and psychologist Ashish Nandy in his collection of essays, titled *Romance of the State and Fate of Dissent in the Tropics*. In his book, Nandy highlights the ongoing tensions between the state's pursuit for power and control and the freedom of citizens to express their opinions and challenge authority. Nandy further explores the social and psychological factors that contribute to the rise of terrorism, and he emphasizes the importance

of understanding the underlying grievances and aspirations of marginalized groups in order to provide solutions to these issues. In the final essays of his book, he mentioned about the future of modern nation states in the tropics. Nandy signified the need for a more inclusive, sustainable, and decentralized governance in the tropics. He critiques the dominant models of development that prioritize economic growth at the expense of social and environmental well-being. Nandy advocates for alternative paths of development that value indigenous knowledge, and indigenous cultures. According to his theory, repressing dissent can lead to ecological imbalances and social crises, such as terrorism, human trafficking, and smuggling. Informed by Nandy's theoretical model, this thesis aims to explore the complex interplay between ecology, state power, and society in Amitav Ghosh's writings on the Sundarbans, with a focus on the marginalized indigenous communities.

The ecological and social concerns of the marginalized indigenous communities of the Sundarbans have largely been neglected by State media and State power. Amitav Ghosh used his literary ingenuity and creativity to speak about the most oppressed and vulnerable section of the modern nation State of India. There is a lack of comprehensive understanding regarding the treatment of ecology, state power and society in Ghosh's writings on the Sundarbans. This research aims to address this problem by examining Ghosh's depiction of the plight and struggles faced by the indigenous communities, the impact of state power on their lives and their relationship with environment and wildlife, and finally the broader societal implications. By examining these factors, this thesis contends that addressing the concerns of marginalized indigenous communities is crucial for modern nation-states to effectively promote ecological well-being and societal welfare in the region.

Through a comprehensive overview of the Sundarbans, the struggles faced by the marginalized indigenous communities, Amitav Ghosh's literary contributions, the relevance of the myth of Bonbibi, the problem statement, and the thesis statement, this introductory chapter sets the stage for an in-depth exploration of the treatment of ecology, state power, and society in Ghosh's writings on the Sundarbans.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

Amitav Ghosh's writings on the Sundarbans deals with a wide range of phenomena such as climate change, migration, environmental degradation, Folklore, Culture, Myth, Ecology, State power, and society.

Amitav Ghosh's *Hungry Tide* portrays the environmental issues and political realities in the Sundarbans. In 2007, Rajendra Kaur published a paper in the journal *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*. In her paper Kaur sheds light on Ghosh's critical views that the nature conservation programs in Sundarbans were undertaken mostly to brag about in election campaigns. (129) According to Kaur eco-conservation programs like Project Tiger are ways to win international approval and raise governments image as an environment conscious one. Similar to Kaur, Dr. Divya Anand published a paper in 2007 that located the politics of the environment and the exploitation in Ghosh's *Hungry Tide*. In 2013, Laura A. White published a paper in the journal *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, in which she focuses on the environmental issues raised by Ghosh about Sundarbans and how literature and politics have a role to save Sundarbans. According to White, we need to look at Sundarbans from a holistic point of view. White says that no one really cares about saving the forest and its inhabitants. White says conservation programs are part of politics. White mentions how Ghosh used his story to depict the bloody incident of Marichjhapi that took place due to the nature conservation program in Sundarbans. According to White, fiction is a necessary first step that

enables responsible decisions (516). In 2018, Gaurav Mishra published a paper in *Quest Journal* which also spoke about the Marichjhapi Massacre, the hypocrisy of Project Tiger and the politics of the environment. In 2018, Dr Sreelatha published a paper on Ghosh's *Hungry Tide* that also spoke about problems of conservation programs and the urgent need for inculcating fair environmental policies. Shafiqur Rahman, a researcher of Aligarh Muslim University, published a paper in 2021, on *Hungry Tide* that also explored the grim political realities and environmental concerns of Sundarbans revealing the flaws of the conservation programs in Sundarbans.

Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island* vividly portrays ecological destruction, climate change, and human impact on the environment, highlighting the significance of eco-consciousness. Ursula Kluwick published her research paper in 2020 that explores the representation of climate change and ecological destruction of Sundarbans in Ghosh's *Gun Island*. She referred to *Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island* as *Anthropocene Water Fictions*. (1) In her paper she explored how Ghosh highlighted the issue of climate change and ecological destruction of the Sundarbans by portraying flood, cyclone, and the use of aquatic language. The research scholar, Shaveta Gupta published a paper in 2020 on Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island*. In her paper, she analyzed the novel from the perspective of ecocide. Her paper explored how Ghosh portrayed the extent of damage done to the environment by human beings and how it ultimately affected the physical environment, the wild life, as well as human beings. She spoke about the crisis of displacement and migration of humans as well as animals. In 2021, Dr. Panchal Dnyaneshwar Anantrao published a paper titled "Gun Island: Not a Fiction but a Prediction." His paper sheds lights on Ghosh's prediction of wildfire in Los Angeles and how it manifested in reality. There is paper by

Nupur Pancholi and Sanjit Kumar Mishra in which they explored the impact of human activities on global climate change as depicted in Ghosh's *Gun Island* and *Great Derangement*. The article spoke about Ghosh's nonfiction book *Great Derangement* and discussed the separation between culture and nature as a root cause of ecological destruction. The article emphasized the Eco consciousness exhibited by the characters of Ghosh's novel *Gun Island*. The article also mentioned about carbon-based economy, unpredictable changes in habitats and behaviors of different species, forced migration of human and animal. (1)

The articles on Amitav Ghosh's latest work, *Jungle Nama* collectively focus on several common themes that include ecological and feminist perspectives, representations of the environment, and the transformative power of myth and storytelling. Sayantani Sengupta and Mafruha Ferdous's articles adopt an ecofeminist lens, analyzing female characters challenging patriarchal norms while engaging in environmental activism. Ferdous contextualizes the pandemic's impact on the Sundarbans, urging a reevaluation of human-nature relationships during crises. Bendetta Vistalli's comparative ecocritical analysis focuses on non-human agency, advocating for storytelling's restorative role in the face of the great derangement. Ruma Banerjee examines the ecological consequences of desire in the Sundarbans. Sulagna Sengupta highlights mythology's significance in reimagining humanity's relationship with nature. Elena Anna Spandri's paper delves into Ghosh's incorporation of the Bonbibí legend, revealing the ecological and cultural importance within the Sundarbans Trilogy.

In conclusion, the primary focus of all these research papers seems to be on environmental issues, human-nature interactions, social and cultural aspects, ethical dilemmas, feminist

perspectives, and the representation of climate change and ecological destruction in Ghosh's works. Despite their insightful analyses, a research gap exists as only a few articles explicitly address the treatment of state power in Ghosh's writings on the Sundarbans. There seems to be a lack of comprehensive analyses that connect these themes across Ghosh's multiple works on the Sundarbans.

### Chapter 3

#### *Jungle Nama: Myth as Cultural Paradigm*

Amitav Ghosh's latest literary work on the Sundarbans *Jungle Nama*, addresses themes of state power, dissent, ecology and society, while exploring the story of Bonbibi. The story of Bonbibi is regarded as a myth and legend because it is a sacred narrative that tells of the creation of a society and incorporates certain historical elements. The story of Bonbibi holds a special place in the lives of the marginalized indigenous communities of the Sundarbans, and it goes beyond being just a cultural narrative. Ghosh's English verse translation of Bon Bibi's story can tap into the collective unconscious of readers, offering universal themes and symbols that resonate across diverse cultures and time periods. The legend serves as a perennial philosophy (Haq). Ghosh mentioned in his Afterword that the central tenets of the story are about limiting greed and preserving a balance between the needs of humans and other beings. The story can evoke powerful emotional responses and provide moral and political insights. At a time of great derangement, Amitav Ghosh resurrected the legend of Bonbibi in his English verse translation *Jungle Nama*. Ghosh decided to write *Jungle Nama* during the global COVID-19 pandemic, when societal structures throughout the globe were unraveling and many accustomed expectations and beliefs were shaken. Ghosh had previously mentioned the myth of Bonbibi in his novel *The Hungry Tide*. Ghosh's prior engagement with the legend of Bonbibi demonstrates his understanding of its ecological and cultural significance. However, it was during the pandemic that he recognized its broader socio-political significance and worldwide relevance. The extraordinary circumstances brought about by the pandemic ultimately led him to employ his artistic talent to write *Jungle Nama*. *Jungle Nama* explores the notions of power, authority

and good governance. The verse narrative highlights the role of state power in the betterment and welfare of the ecology and society in the Sundarbans. There is an epigraph to the book, which illustrates the ecological significance and beauty of the Sundarbans region emphasizing the interconnection between rivers, land and ocean. The epigraph highlights the importance of the rivers as the source of life and biodiversity in the region. Global warming and climate change have largely destroyed the ecology of Sundarbans. Every day the area is becoming increasingly inhospitable and unforgiving for both the inhabitants and wildlife. Social concerns are arising in the region, such as human trafficking, smuggling, sex trafficking. Modern nations are paying little attention to the plight of the marginalized communities living in the Sundarbans. Marginalized communities in the Sundarbans, who are referred to as Dalits are the most poor, vulnerable and impoverished segment of modern nation states. Dalits have very little to no political representation. The state often turns a blind eye to their misery and social concern. What is even more horrifying is the fact that they are often victims of state power. If they attempt to argue or express disagreement with the state, the state utilizes its power to crush their voice and persecute them. There is a romanticized perception of the modern nation state among the urban people. The real lived experiences of the Dalits in the Sundarbans inform us about the grim realities of modern nation state and power.

Ghosh's verse translation can be interpreted to reveal the contrast between the grim realities of state power and the idealized perception of state power.

Ashish Nandy's theoretical framework in his book *Romance of the State and Fate of Dissent in the Tropics*, examines the relationship between the state and dissent. He critically analyzes the role of the state in suppressing dissenting voices and the implications this has for society and the

ecology. Nandy's theory highlights the tension between the state's pursuit of power and the freedom of individuals to express their opinions and challenge the status quo. One of Nandy's central critiques is directed towards the romanticized perception of modern nation-state power as the sole driving force behind societal advancement. He argues that in the pursuit of absolute power, control, and dominance, the modern nation state often employs strategies and actions that suppress dissenting voices and impose homogenous norms on a diverse population. In response to these concerns, Nandy advocates for a governance approach that is inclusive and decentralized. He emphasizes the need to prioritize social and ecological concerns while protecting cultural diversity and indigenous knowledge. Nandy's theory posits that the state's authority and power should not be absolute, centralized, or beyond question because it can lead to the persecution of dissent and the minorities. Instead, he advocates for a system that values dissent and encourages the participation of diverse individuals and indigenous communities in decision-making processes. Analyzing *Jungle Nama* through the lens of Ashish Nandy's theoretical framework allows us to examine how Ghosh's *Jungle Nama* portrays the contrast between idealized perception of state power and the grim realities of state power. This analysis will eventually reveal how *Jungle Nama* offers guidelines for modern nation states to utilize power in a way that promotes betterment and well-being of ecology and society in the Sundarbans.

There are seven chapters in *Jungle Nama*. In the beginning of Chapter 1, the narrator introduces us to a mighty and fearful spirit called Dokkhin Rai, who ruled people by instigating fear and terror. The author narrates that Dokkhin Rai preyed on humans as a tiger avatar, and whomever he wanted, he would take for his shikar. This suggests that Dokkhin Rai is a shape-shifter who possesses significant power, and by taking the shape of a tiger, he becomes a formidable

predator, instilling fear and helplessness among the human population. The sentence further suggests that Dokkhin Rai exercises his power arbitrarily taking whomever he wants for his "shikar". This implies hunting or capturing humans without any regard for their rights or well-being. People were so much terrorized and helpless because of Dokkhin Rai that they ended up praying to the heavens. (Ghosh) This suggests a lack of autonomy and a sense of helplessness among the people under the rule of Dokkhin Rai.

Then in Chapter 1, we are introduced to the protagonists, Mistress of the Forest Bonbibí and her brother Shah Jongoli. They are powerful entities who came from Arabia to rescue people from the tyranny of Dokkhin Rai. The author describes them as calm, compassionate, and self-possessed. When they arrive, Dokkhin Rai is immediately informed. "Nothing in his realm escapes his unblinking eye," narrates the author. This indicates Dokkhin Rai's nature of surveillance and his strong sense of territoriality. He is always alert and watchful, which tells us something significant about his insecure and skeptical nature. The author then describes Dokkhin Rai's thoughts, which reveal a mix of curiosity, arrogance and defensiveness regarding the newcomers. He wonders who they are and questions their presence in his forest, suggesting that he is protective of his territory and views them as potential intruders. The calm and self-possessed demeanor of the stranger surprises Dokkhin Rai, which reveals to us that he expects everyone to be fearful and submissive in his presence. The composed nature of Bonbibí challenges his assumption of dominance. Dokkhin Rai narrates, "Do they think they can enter without permission? It seems that this pair is asking for a lesson." This sentence reveals his possessive and dominant nature, his sense of territoriality, and his inclination to respond with aggression when he perceives his authority or territory being challenged. The passage then narrates the events that occur when Dokkhin Rai, the powerful spirit, dispatches a ghostly army

to confront the strangers, Bonbibi and Shah Jongoli. The decision to dispatch a ghostly army without any real threat or hostility from the strangers, reaffirms Dokkhin Rai's aggressive and authoritarian nature. Dokkhin Rai underestimates the strangers and imagines that his ghostly army will quickly dispose of them, but he is wrong; his army of ghosts fails miserably, which informs us about the extraordinary power of Bonbibi and Shah Jongoli. Dokkhin Rai scolds his ghostly army upon their failure and decides to fight the strangers alone. This again reaffirms his overconfidence and inflated sense of self. Then in the passage, we witness the fierce confrontation between Dokkhin Rai and the strangers. From the description of the battle, we can infer that Bonbibi and Shah Jongoli's power is far greater than Dokkhin Rai. This is why the pair manages to defeat and subdue him. The narrator then tells us that Dokkhin Rai thought he would be killed by Bonbibi, but he was wrong because the intention of Bonbibi and Shah Jongoli was not to terminate him but to end his tyranny. Bonbibi and Shahjongoli did not kill him, and instead, they drew a boundary. Dokkhin Rai was given the Jungles of the South where he could live lavishly with pride. Bonbibi and Shah Jongoli made a law that no human would go to the territory allocated to Dokkhin Rai, and neither could he go outside his territory. The author ends Chapter 1 by saying that Bon Bibi's landmark decision brought peace, harmony, and balance to all the beings of Sundarbans, and everyone's needs were satisfied.

The contrast between the idealized perception of state power and the grim realities of state power in the Sundarbans is vividly portrayed through the characters and events in Chapter 1. Dokkhin Rai represents the grim realities of state power in the Sundarbans, whereas Bonbibi and Shahjongoli represent the idealized perception of state power. Dokkhin Rai embodies the oppressive, aggressive, and dominating aspects of state power. He rules through fear and terror, preying on humans without regard for their rights or well-being. His tyrannical and arbitrary

exercise of power reflects the darker side of leadership, when individuals in positions of authority often abuse their power to control, oppress and exploit others. Dokkhin Rai's constant surveillance and strong sense of territoriality align with the grim realities of state power where rulers employ extensive surveillance mechanisms and seek to assert control over specific territories. This is often done to consolidate authority and maintain dominance over the governed population. Dokkhin Rai's watchful nature, arrogance and defensiveness, regarding the arrival of newcomers reveal his insecurity, anxiety and skepticism. This is a grim reality of state power. State power often persecutes dissent because it is insecure, anxious and skeptical about the intention of dissent. State power often treats dissent as an enemy that needs to be annihilated or in softer words, brought to book. Just like Dokkhin Rai, state power often employs radical measures against dissent, without even enquiring about their true intentions. Dokkhin Rai's excessive pride and overconfidence in his abilities further demonstrate the pitfalls of an unchecked state power. The defeat of Dokkhin Rai in Chapter 1 highlights the fact that the state doesn't possess absolute power in theory or in practice. It also highlights the fact that oppressive nation states may eventually break down because of their ignorance and inflated sense of self. According to Ashish Nandy, the romanticized perception of state power refers to an idealized and glorified view of the state and its authority. In this perception, the state is often portrayed as an all-powerful, legitimate and benevolent entity that works solely for the welfare of its citizens, providing security, protection, and guidance to the citizens irrespective of their gender, race, class, caste. Bonbibi and Shahjongoli represent the romanticized or idealized perception of state power. Bonbibi and Shah Jongoli are introduced as powerful entities who have come to rescue the people of the Sundarbans from Dokkhin Rai's tyranny. They are depicted as calm, compassionate, and self-possessed, symbolizing the Idealized form of state power. Bonbibi and

Shah Jongoli used their power to save the innocent, vulnerable beings from the tyranny of Dokkhin Rai. They did not use their power for domination or oppression of the weak. Bonbibí and Shah Jongoli even spared the life of their enemy, Dokkhin Rai. Moreover, they let Dokkhin Rai have his own territory where he was allowed to live with pride and plenty of resources. Such compassion, mercy and humility can only be found in the Idealized perception of State Power. Bon Bibi's landmark decision led to the formation of a healthy and inclusive society in Sundarbans where every being had a place and where every one's need was met. This again reaffirms that Bonbibí symbolizes the Idealized perception of State power.

Chapter 2 of *Jungle Nama* introduces us to a character called Dhona, who is also referred to as The Rich One. He is extremely greedy and desires more wealth despite his immense fortune. He plans to go to the mangrove forest with seven ships to collect honey, wax, and timber for free. However, his brother Mona, content with his current life, advises against such a risky and greed-driven venture. However, Dhona is persistent, and so Mona says he will help him to find a crew, ships, and other things he requires for the expedition. Mona was able to recruit many lascars for the expedition. However, they were still one man short when Dhona remembers about their poor, unemployed cousin called Dukhey. Chapter 2 ends with Dhona deciding to recruit Dukhey for the expedition.

In Chapter 3, Dhona approaches his nephew Dukhey, convincing him to join the expedition with promises of wealth and a future wedding. Dukhey's mother was apprehensive about the expedition, and she did not want Dukhey to go with his uncle. However, she eventually allows him to join the expedition when Dhona makes a promise to her. "Forlornly, the old woman

helped Dukhey prepare," narrates the author. She warns Dukhey about the dangers of the forest. She tells Dukhey that the mangrove forest belongs to Dokkhin Rai, a hungry shape-shifter who hunts humans in the disguise of a tiger. She explains to Dukhey that Dokkhin Rai is a demonic entity who leads the demons and speaks in an inhuman tongue. Dukhey's mother narrates, "He loves to prey on souls that are meek and humble; a good lad like you he'll find irresistible." She further said that Dokkhin Rai not only desires flesh, but he loves to ignite greed and to awaken the demon in man is Dokkhin Rai's greatest need. "He won't just snatch you; he'll wait for a betrayal; whetting avarice, he can set men's heads awirl," narrates Dukhey's mother.

Dokkhin Rai's nature, as described by Dukhey's mother, resembles the grim reality of state power. The most weak, vulnerable, and impoverished segment of the population is usually the victim of state power. Just like Dokkhin Rai, state power often nurtures the dark side of the human soul, igniting greed in people for wealth and materials. State governing bodies or authorities in the tropics often speak in a very crude and aggressive manner, resembling Dokkhin Rai's way of speaking.

In the end of Chapter 3, Dukhey's mother tells him that there is only one entity that can save Dukhey from Dokkhin Rai, and that is the mighty Bonbibi. However, she tells Dukhey that he needs to call Bonbibi earnestly, using a certain verse meter, and only then will she come to rescue him. Once again, in this chapter, we can see that Bonbibi represents the idealized perception of state power. The idealized perception of state power is that it will save its citizens whenever they call for help in an official and earnest manner.

Chapter 4 begins with Dhona and Dukhey setting out on their expedition. While exploring the forest, they unknowingly cross into Dokkhin Rai's territory. Once again in this chapter, we see

the watchful, anxious, and skeptical nature of Dokkhin Rai. Dokkhin Rai is immediately alert to the arrival of Dhona, Dukhey, and the lascars in his territory. Dokkhin Rai's vigilance resembles the surveillance power of the State. Surveillance provides the state with significant control over its citizens, and this power is often abused by those in authority to suppress dissent and target specific groups. Dokkhin Rai says, "They have not asked for my leave nor made an offering; they want the forest wealth in exchange for nothing". Then Dokkhin Rai decides to play an evil trick with Dhona and his team. He used his power of illusion and deception to exasperate and baffle them for many days. This again symbolizes the fact that if an individual enters the mangrove forest unknowingly, then State power will most likely penalize him and bring him to book. This chapter also illustrates the fact that the State is always looking for a chance to exercise its power to exploit, punish or discipline someone.

Later in this chapter, Dokkhin Rai appears in Dhona's dream. Dhona encounters the fearful and ferocious entity, who demands a human sacrifice. Dokkhin Rai tells Dhona that in exchange for a chosen victim, he will grant him immense resources. Dokkhin Rai chooses Dukhey to be his victim, saying that he loves young, tender human beings, like Dukhey. This sheds light on the fact that the weak, innocent and vulnerable individuals tend to be the victims of state power. This is because individuals like Dukhey are less able to defend themselves or assert their rights, making them easier targets for exploitation and abuse. Dhona refuses to sacrifice Dukhey at first because he made a promise to Dukhey's mother. Dhona makes a counter offer. He offers to sacrifice a lascar instead of Dukhey. But Dokkhin Rai refuses his offer. Dhona even wants to sacrifice himself instead of Dukhey. However, Dokkhin Rai refuses again and threatens to kill everyone if he cannot have Dukhey. Later, out of fear and extreme greed, Dhona eventually agrees to leave Dukhey behind as a scapegoat. Dukhey overhears parts of the conversation and

fears that his uncle might give him up to Dokkhin Rai. This is how Chapter 4 ends. The conversation and bargaining between Dokkhin Rai and Dhona portray state power corruption. From this we may infer that corruption of state power can destroy family relationships. By offering immense wealth to Dhona, Dokkhin Rai ignites extreme greed in him, so that finally Dhona agrees to sacrifice his own nephew, a poor sad lad! Dokkhin Rai will grant immense resources from the forest to Dhona in exchange for Dukhey. This signifies that state power corruption can be the reason behind the loss of natural resources and destruction of ecology.

In Chapter 5, Dhona follows Dokkhin Rai's instructions and enters the jungle with his men, all blindfolded. He witnesses Dokkhin Rai fulfilling his promise by filling the ships with honey and wax. Then Dokkhin Rai offers Dhona even more wealth by providing wax, and Dhona eagerly accepts. The jungle becomes a hive of activity as the bees work on loading the ships with wax. This event illustrates the enormous power and resources bestowed upon the State. This event once again highlights State power corruption and its negative impact on ecology and society. Later in the chapter, Dhona reveals the treasure to his men, who are astonished and eager to leave. However, Dhona insists on waiting until the next day because he needs to fulfill the bargain with Dokkhin Rai. Meanwhile, Dukhey is filled with anxiety, knowing that Dhona intends to leave him behind as a scapegoat. This chapter indicates that corruption of State power not only results in the loss of the nation's wealth but also destroys family relationships.

In Chapter 6, the author narrates how Dhona deceives Dukhey, leaving him alone in the jungle. Dokkhin Rai, disguised as a tiger, prepares to attack Dukhey. Dukhey was panic stricken when he saw the demonic entity disguised as a tiger. However, when he began to use the meter of wonder to call Bonbibi, it began to work like a magic spell and Bonbibi and Shah Jongoli came

to rescue him in a flash. Based on Bon Bibi's command, Shah Jongoli struck a huge blow at Dokkhin Rai. Dokkhin Rai is badly hurt and so he runs away. Meanwhile, Bonbibi used her power and sends Dukhey to her home, so that he recovers from the trauma. Bonbibi commands Shah Jongoli to go bring Dokkhin Rai, and Shah Jongoli tracks him down and brings him back to Bonbibi. "Dokkhin Rai, repentant, lay prostrate before her; swearing he'd be her loyal servant forever" narrates the author. Later we see that Dokkhin Rai is eventually forgiven by Bonbibi. Bonbibi then teaches him how to control his desires with the magic of meter. Dokkhin Rai repents and upon Bon Bibi's command, he bestows great wealth upon Dukhey, forming a newfound bond between them. This chapter illustrates many aspects of an idealized perception of the state. When Dukhey seeks help from Bonbibi, she comes like lightning to save the poor and innocent boy from the demonic entity. This portrays the idealized perception of a state, which uses force to protect its poor and vulnerable segment from vicious criminals like Dokkhin Rai. Bonbibi used her power to take proper care of Dukhey, so that he could recover from the trauma. This illustrates that an ideal state utilizes its power to support victims of abuse. Bonbibi once again grants mercy to Dokkhin Rai, this shows us that the ideal state is merciful to the ones who repent and acknowledge their crime. The only punishment that Bonbibi gives to Dokkhin Rai is that he needs to learn the proper way of communication. It is difficult for Dokkhin Rai, but eventually he learns the meter of wonder. This event emphasizes the importance of treating offenders in a proper civilized way. The grim reality of state power in the tropics is that it often resorts to punitive measures. Bonbibi represents the idealized perception of state power, under which the offenders are rehabilitated in society through educational programs, community service or counseling.

In Chapter 7, Dhona returns from his expedition, leaving Dukhey behind in the jungle. Dukhey's mother, devastated, pleads for his return. Bon Bibi hears her prayers and sends Dukhey home on a crocodile. Upon his return, Dukhey's mother, initially motionless, revives after hearing the metered words of Bon Bibi. Dukhey forgives Dhona as instructed by Bonbibi. Later Dhona arranges Dukhey's wedding. With Bon Bibi's teachings, Dukhey finds contentment and happiness, realizing that craving more than what one has is a never-ending pursuit.

The final chapter sums up the central tenets of the book, which aims to limit greed, be merciful and kind, and to preserve a balance between the needs of human and other beings. In our contemporary world, where environmental degradation, social injustice, and abuses of power continue to be pressing issues, *Jungle Nama's* message resonates as a reminder of the collective responsibility we hold to create a sustainable and harmonious future. The core tenets of *Jungle Nama* serve as a timeless philosophy that calls for responsible stewardship of the environment and society, urging modern Nation States to exercise their power with wisdom and empathy.

## Chapter 4

### Part A

#### Treatment of ecology, state power and society in Amitav Ghosh's *Hungry Tide*

The novel *Hungry Tide* vividly portrays the intricate and delicate ecology of the Sundarbans. The narrator describes the Sundarbans as an ever-changing landscape with no clear borders between water types. Every day the tides extend far inland and powerful currents alter and re-shape the island, changing the topography and scenery of the landscape. The people who inhabit the region refer to the Sundarbans as “Bhatir desh”, which means low tide country in Bengali. (Ghosh 14)

The narrator says that the life of the people living in the region is always at risk because of the wild and dangerous animals that reside in the dense forest of Sundarbans. The fictional town Lusibari is an important setting in the novel, which serves as a symbol of the harsh and challenging conditions faced by the inhabitants of the southern islands of the Sundarbans. The narrator spoke about islands being contaminated by salt water, floods destroying embankments, crops getting destroyed, settlers changing their livelihood to hunting and fishing for survival, settlers going to the forest to collect a small amount of honey and firewood despite the immense risk of being killed by tigers, crocodiles and snakes. There is a passage in the novel where the school headmaster Nirmal Bose explains to a young native boy called Fakir about the struggles of Fakir's ancestor to build the foundation of the embankment, which allowed settlement on the island. Nirmal Bose narrates how a devastating storm and rising water during a kotal gon threatened their efforts, invoking a terror worse than facing tigers. In that passage, Nirmal Bose warns Fakir that such an event will occur again, illustrating the vulnerability of the embankment,

which is surrounded by vast, impatient waters and burrowing crabs. (Ghosh 183) This passage highlights the complex and unforgiving ecology of the region. The character Nirmal Bose in the novel recounts a historical event involving Lord Canning's ambitious project to construct a port with the intention of generating substantial revenue. At the time, a shipping inspector named Henry Piddington had cautioned against the construction of the port due to his understanding of the intricate and complex ecology of the region. However, Lord Canning disregarded Piddington and unfortunately, the port's existence was short-lived as the mighty Matla river destroyed it within a mere year. In the novel Nilima Bose is the founder of the Women's Union in Lusibari and wife of Nirmal Bose. In one passage of the novel, Nilima explains to the character Kanai Dutta about the unique nature of the tigers in the tide country. Unlike tigers in other regions, the Sundarbans tigers attack humans even under normal circumstances, says Nilima. Nilima then reveals her extensive record-keeping of reports on tiger attacks, suggesting that over a hundred people are killed by tigers annually in the Indian part of the Sundarbans alone. Nilima narrates that most parts of the forest were subjected to daily submersions. The water washes away the scent marks of Tigers, thus confusing tigers of their territory and making them aggressive. There is a passage in the novel where a tiger jumps into the livestock pen of a village in an island of Sundarbans. In that passage, the narrator describes how the villagers brutally killed the animal. Such passages highlight the precarious relationship between human beings and tigers in the complex ecosystem which is shaped by the unique tidal ecology of the region. In the novel *Hungry Tide* Piyali Roy is a marine biologist who came to Sundarbans for her research on cetacean creatures. Throughout the novel, Piyali Roy expresses deep concern about the death and endangerment of Dolphins. She was horrified to find a dead dolphin calf that she suspects was killed by a motor boat of the forest guard. She also expresses concerns about the diminishing

number of crabs. She narrates the importance of crabs in the ecosystem and ecology of Sundarbans. The novel illustrates the fact that crabs are the keystone species of Sundarbans, which acts as the janitorial and sanitation force that clears the waste and debris of the region and helps the region to breathe.

State power emerges as a prominent and thought-provoking theme within Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*. Amitav Ghosh revealed significant insights about the exercise of state power in the Sundarbans region. In the first part of the novel, Piyali Roy the marine biologist, meets the character Kanai Dutta. During her conversation with Kanai Dutta, she tells him that it is very difficult to obtain a permit because of which there has not been comprehensive study on marine mammals in Sundarbans. She further tells him that a team of researchers sent their papers and did everything that was required to obtain a permit, however at the last moment their permit was withdrawn. Piya then tells Kanai that she will be able to manage a permit because her uncle holds an important position in the government. The fact that a team had their permit withdrawn at the last minute reveals the state's ability to abruptly cancel someone's application. It highlights the unpredictability and arbitrary nature of the exercise of state power. Additionally, Piya's assertion that her uncle's government influence could secure her a permit underscores how personal connections and relationships within the state apparatus can significantly impact an individual's ability to bypass government laws and regulation. Later in the story Piya upon receiving a permit, goes out in the river to do the survey, accompanied by an obnoxious forest guard and his friend Mejda. Mejda is the owner of a boat that Piya hired through the forest guard. Piya felt extremely uncomfortable, insecure and unsafe in the presence of the guard and Mejda. The attitude of the forest guard with Piya was extremely vulgar, rude and nasty. While Piya was in the steamer with them, they encountered a distant fishing boat. Piya notified the forest guard

about the fishing boat, because she wanted to interview the fisherman regarding the track of Gangetic and Irrawaddy dolphins. The forest guard realizes that the fisherman was catching fish in a reserved area, and immediately his demeanor changes as if the fisherman is a prey. The guard threatens the fisherman in a ferocious, cruel and aggressive manner. He then confiscates money from the small child of the poor fishermen. Piya discreetly attempts to give some of her money to the fisherman. While trying to hand over the money she falls in the water. Later the fisherman, Fakir rescues her. Piya decides she will not go back to the ship of Mejda. Then we see that the forest guard demands money from Piya in exchange for returning her belongings from Mejda's boat. She pays the money immediately; however, she sees that the forest guard stole her Walkman. Later the forest guard abandons her there with the fisherman. This passage reveals abuse, exploitation and corruption of state power. It reveals the lack of accountability of forest guards. Piya's feelings of discomfort, insecurity, and helplessness in the presence of the forest guard, reflect the significant power imbalance between individuals and state agents. The forest guard's threatening behavior and confiscation of money, particularly from a child, illustrate how state power can be used to instill fear and exert control over marginalized individuals. The plight of Fakir and his son symbolizes the plight of the weak, vulnerable, marginalized Dalits of Sundarbans. According to Ashish Nandy, minorities and vulnerable people are usually the victims of state power. The demand for money from Piya in exchange for her belongings, as well as the theft of her Walkman, highlights elements of corruption, exploitation and lack of accountability within the exercise of state power.

In the novel, Ghosh sheds light on the gruesome Marichjhapi massacre which was orchestrated by the state of West Bengal to evict East Pakistani Dalit refugees from an island called

Marichjhapi. One important character in the novel, Kusum is portrayed as a victim of the Marichjhapi tragedy. The various characters' engagement, perspectives, and exchanges regarding Marichjhapi Island, the refugee settlement attempts, and tiger conservation unveil significant truths about the relentless power-seeking of the nation-state and the tragic outcomes for dissenting voices. The narrative highlights the harsh realities faced by those who challenge authority. *The Hungry Tide* vividly portrays the limitations and hypocrisy of conservation policies like "Project Tiger", shedding light on how they enable further persecution of marginalized indigenous Dalit communities under the pretext of preserving wildlife. These policies, driven by the state's pursuit of power, ultimately hinder the lives of these impoverished populations. Few acclaimed researchers have already written about the hypocrisy of conservation projects like Marichjhapi. Such policies and projects were implemented by the State for consolidation of power and vote bank politics. According to Dr. Divya Anand, Project tiger and the Marichjhapi incident were part of the politics of the environment. Dr. Divya Anand mentioned in a research paper that Ghosh raised philosophical and moral questions which are often ignored in conservation ethics. According to Dr. Divya Anand, conservation policies like Marichjhapi pits man against beast and also man against man. Divya Anand says that such environmental conservation policies require forceful eviction of the most poor and downtrodden humans thus revealing the controversy of conservation in a densely populated country like India. She also said that such conservation actions disregard social, political and cultural factors in the name of protection and preservation of wild life. Anand said that the use of state power to evacuate the impoverished people exposes environmental racism. In the novel the character Nirmal Bose is an ardent leftist and Marxist, who strongly believed in proletariat revolution. At the time of the Marichjhapi massacre, many of his leftist friends were in the government because

the left front was in power. This is perhaps the reason that he had an exaggerated perception and expectation of state. Nilima Bose, the wife of Nirmal knew the grim realities of the modern nation-state. In the novel Nirmal is the one who records the history of Marichjhapi in his diary. He is the one who supports the poor, impoverished refugees of Marichjhapi, until they were forcefully evicted. Nirmal's records the agony of the people of Marichjhapi in his diary. He records the lamentation of Kusum, who narrates "Who are these people, who love animals so much that they are willing to kill us?" (Ghosh 232) The character Nirmal could never believe that leftist government would end up massacring people in the name of saving wildlife. He was an old leftist, who had the romanticized perception of nation state and leftist politics. He was once detained by police for his political activity. This was long before the left front came to power in West Bengal. The Marichjhapi incident took place when the left came to power. Many of Nirmal's comrades and associates were part of the left front government. Nirmal Bose perhaps thought that a state run by left front will not exercise power against the poor vulnerable Dalits. However, he was wrong. His disillusionment caused him so much pain, that he ultimately died in the novel out of sorrow and trauma. Nilima on the other had little sympathy for the refugees who attempted to settle in Marichjhapi. Nilima is more practical and she knows how power dynamics work. She knew that the state would take any measure to execute its policies even at the cost of human lives. She knew these refugees were a burden for the state and so the state will do anything to remove them. She was concerned about Nirmal because she knew Nirmal's participation in the struggle of those people, will not only risk his life but also jeopardize her career and her efforts in upholding the rights of women in Sundarbans. This reveals how dissenting voices are crushed by the nation state in the name of saving the environment. The

Marichjhapi massacre became a footnote of history. The incident was treated like discarded bodies, left unnoticed and unattended.

This is the fate of those who disagree with state policies. The novel exposes the hypocrisy of West Bengal's Left Front, led by Jyoti Basu. While advocating for a classless society, equal rights, religious tolerance, and the rights of the poor, the Left Front also championed the cause of East Pakistan refugees. Promises, such as Ram Chatterjee's commitment to repatriate them upon assuming power, were persuasive tactics aimed at securing votes. Once the party comes to power, they apply policies that strengthen their authority, control and power. They enacted policies that prioritized economic growth and the growth of military, police at the expense of social and ecological concern. The modern nation state will take any measure in the pursuit of power and economic growth. Dissenting voices are not heard or deciphered, but identified as a voice that needs to be annihilated. Without even verifying the true intention of the dissent, the state identifies the dissent as the enemy and then punishes the dissent either through legal framework or other means. The refugees who attempted to settle in Marichjhapi were naïve and perhaps they too had a romanticized perception of state. They perhaps thought that the state would eventually let them stay, considering the fact that most of them were Hindus and Bengali. However, to the state they were weak, vulnerable, scheduled caste Hindus who can be easily disposable. Project tiger was a political strategy to consolidate power, gain international fame, and build a positive image as an environment friendly government. The Marichjhapi massacre stands as a haunting reminder of the lengths to which a modern nation-state will go to achieve its ambitions of power, leaving behind shattered lives and forgotten tragedies.

*The Hungry Tide* depicts a society of indigenous Dalit communities, forest guards, government-appointed teachers, NGO workers, and hospital staff. These Dalits practice a syncretic religion centered around the myth of Bon Bibi, emphasizing harmony with nature, contentment, and restraint from greed. The society faces various challenges, including limited education, lack of electricity, and the vulnerability of young widowed women who are often pushed into prostitution. Kusum's mother, for instance, falls victim to this fate. Widows in the tide country endure prolonged exploitation and abuse, symbolizing the societal struggles. (Ghosh 78) Amidst this, the community is plagued by apprehensions of climate change and the overreach of state power, adding to their burdens.

## **Part B**

### Treatment of ecology, state power, and society in Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island*

The novel *Gun Island* is a first-person narrative in which the central protagonist is Dinanath Datta, also known as Deen. Dinanath is a dealer of rare books and antiquities who holds a PhD in Bengali Folklore. He is a non-residential Indian residing in Brooklyn, New York, and he visits Calcutta every winter. During one such visit, Dinanath learns about the legend of the Bonduki Sadagar, a local legend from the Sundarbans region. This name is new to him, and he finds the name strange and amusing because the meaning of "Sadagar" is "merchant," and merchant is an important figure in Bengali Folklore. The English translation of "Bandooki Sadagar" is "Gun Merchant," a name that strikes Dinanath as both strange and intriguing. His interest in the legend grows when his cousin Kanai Datta informs him that Nilima Bose, a respected, and trustworthy lady, shared the legend with him. The story unfolds as Deen embarks on an expedition to uncover the mystery surrounding the legend and its associated shrine. Initially hesitant about the

journey, Deen grapples with doubt, suspicion, and fear throughout. The novel portrays how Dinanath, in the process of deciphering the enigmatic myth, goes through a psychological metamorphosis. Through this journey, he becomes aware of various aspects of ecology, state power, and society, spanning both the contemporary world and the 17th century when the legend originated. Throughout the narrative, mystical and unusual events occur. As Dinanath unravels the myth, it manifests itself multiple times, blurring the boundaries between reality and magic. Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island* masterfully presents this fusion. Through this artistic technique, Ghosh sheds light on deeper truths about ecology, state power, and society, providing readers with profound insights.

In Part One of the novel, when Dinanath visits Nilima Bose to hear the legend of Gun Merchant, she shows him a book record. In the record, there is an entry titled “Gun Merchant’s shrine” with a date below it: November 20, 1970. On November 20, 1970 Nilima visited the Sundarbans to engage in cyclone relief work. During her trip she encountered the shrine. Just eight days prior to her visit, on November 12, 1970, one of the deadliest cyclones in the history of Bengal, had struck the Sundarbans. The narrator described how the Bengal delta was ravaged by a Category 4 cyclone, which struck East Pakistan and the Indian province of West Bengal. Just one year later, the region of East Pakistan would go on to become the new nation-state of Bangladesh. Prior to 1970, storms had no names in this area. The narrator says that the Bhola cyclone was the deadliest natural disaster of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in which around half a million people died. The narrator further says that most of the people who died were from East Pakistan, where there were prolonged political tensions. The state of Pakistan’s laggard response to Bhola cyclone, further triggered the 1971 liberation war that ultimately led to the formation of the new nation state of

Bangladesh. The description of the ecological damage in West Bengal's Sundarbans is narrated in the passage as such, hamlets were wiped out due to the storm, trees were uprooted, half eaten dead bodies of humans floating in water, villages losing almost all of their inhabitants.

Moreover, the political turmoil in East Pakistan further intensified the situation, as more hungry and impoverished refugees arrived in the Sundarbans of West Bengal. (Ghosh 14) From this passage we may infer that the state of Pakistan's disregard for the ecological and social crisis in Sundarbans, ultimately led to the fall of East Pakistan and the creation of Bangladesh.

While engaging in relief work in 1970, Nilima Bose encounters the shrine of Gun Merchant, on an island close to the Raimangal river. The narrator explains that Nilima Bose typically avoided the Raimangal River, which formed the border between India and the then East Pakistan, due to its status as a hotspot for smugglers. Towards the end of the first chapter in the novel, Nilima tells Deen that the islands of Sundarbans are disappearing since they are constantly being eaten by the sea. This is why Nilima says to Deen that there should be a record of the shrine of Gun Merchant, since it is an important historical monument. Deen asked Nilima whether she contacted the Archaeological Survey of India. Nilima replied that she did contact them but they showed no interest at all. (Ghosh 18) This illustrates the modern nation state's disregard or lack of interest to preserve and explore, shrine or historical monument, associated with popular legends of the marginalized indigenous communities of Sundarbans.

Chapter 2 of *Gun Island* is titled *Cinta*. In this chapter, the readers are introduced to Deen's friend Giacinta, who is a renowned professor of history. The character Cinta is portrayed as an elegant lady and a brilliant historian. Cinta published an authoritative study of the Inquisition in Venice. Cinta's husband was an editor of an acclaimed newspaper in Italy who died in a car crash. The narrator tells us that the death of Cinta's husband got a huge media attention because

there was suspicion of a planned assassination. The narrator explains that Cinta's husband published a series of investigative reports exposing the Mafia, a year before the fatal car crash that took his life. This is why doubts and suspicion of wrongdoing emerged among the public. After his death the Italian parliament appointed a Judge to conduct an investigation. (Ghosh 27) This passage reveals that Mafia and criminal syndicates operate in the contemporary society of Italy. The state appointed a Judge which reveals the state's concern for providing justice to its citizens. However, in the novel, we do not get to see the result of the investigation, raising doubt and suspicion whether justice will ever be served or not.

In this chapter we also get to know about Deen's student life and his romantic affair with a girl named Durga. The character Deen was a Maoist back in his student days, when he fell in love with Durga who was a radical, and revolutionary Maoist. Deen was an avid reader. He supported the Maoist movement ideologically but he was not directly involved with it. On the other hand, Durga was directly involved with the movement. She used to carry messages to armed insurgents in the countryside. Deen was fascinated and moved by her selfless attitude and courage. Eventually they had an affair. But the affair could not last long, because Durga was shot dead by the police. Deen's uncle was a police man who told Deen that Durga was betrayed by her own comrades. His uncle said that Durga was killed probably because of Durga's relationship with Deen. Deen's uncle told him that someone planted Deen's name and address on her and this is why Deen needs to leave the city at once. (Ghosh 44) Later Deen leaves Calcutta and goes to New Delhi. From New Delhi he applied to foreign universities and finally moved abroad. This passage reveals the social crisis and political turmoil in Calcutta back in the days of Naxalite movement. During the Naxalite movement, the brightest and idealistic students were drawn to leftist politics. Individuals like Deen who had relatives in high positions within the state

bureaucracy, were comparatively safe despite their involvement with the movement. However, individuals like Durga who had no connection with state power, were not given a second chance. They were shot in encounters. People like Durga were killed during the movement and others like Dinanath fled. This is how the Maoist movement collapsed. This passage reveals how the state exercises power brutally to crush dissenting voices.

In Chapter 3 of the novel, the readers are introduced to the contemporary ecological and social crisis of Sundarbans. In the opening passage of this chapter, we are introduced to the character Moyna Mondol, who is a nurse in the Bada-Bon trust hospital run by Nilima Bose. The character Moyna was present in the novel *Hungry Tide*. Moyna was training to be a nurse in *Hungry Tide* and in this novel, she is a nurse. In that novel, Moyna's husband Fakir died during a storm, when he was out with Piyali Roy. Moyna's son Tutul Mondol also known as Tipu was a little boy in that novel and now he is a young man in *Gun Island*. In Chapter 3, Moyna explains to Dinanath about the horrifying and devastating consequences of Cyclone Aila, which struck Sundarbans in 2009. The number of casualties of cyclone Aila was comparatively less than that of 1970, because warning systems were placed and many people were evacuated. (Ghosh 48) However, Moyna says that the long-term consequences of Aila are far more devastating than that of Bhola cyclone. Miles of embankment was wiped out, the sea swooped in to places it never entered before, large areas of fertile land was destroyed because salt water invaded the land and left it barren for a century. (Ghosh 48) Many of the people who were evacuated did not return knowing that their life will be even more difficult, uncertain and dangerous. Cyclone Aila dispersed families and destroyed communities. The young people moved to the cities and started living in overcrowded slums. Many elderly people also moved to the cities and started begging in the streets. (Ghosh 49) After Aila, human trafficking and sex trafficking became rampant and

everyday occurrences. Even before Aila, Sundarbans was a hotspot of smugglers and human traffickers because of the region's poverty. However, after Aila human traffickers descended like swarms, transporting able-bodied men to faraway cities or foreign countries, and trafficking women to distant brothels. Most of the people who left were never seen again. "It seemed as though both land and water were turning against those who lived in the Sundarbans", said Moyna. The aftermath of cyclone Aila has left the Sundarbans grappling with dire circumstances. Efforts to dig wells have yielded contaminated water, embankments struggled against unrelenting tides, and fishermen struggled to find ample fish to catch. Moyna says that the situation has triggered a consistent outflow of the region's youth, who resort to borrowing and illegal means to escape for better work prospects elsewhere. Many seek opportunities in Bangladesh to join labor groups heading to the Gulf. Those who aren't successful often turn to traffickers for passage to distant lands like Malaysia and Indonesia. In the face of these adversities, education shines as a ray of hope. However, the young individuals growing up amidst the mangroves face an uphill battle. They lack the resources available to their urban counterparts, who enjoy the advantages of tutoring centers and easy access to the Internet. The disparity poses a significant challenge to their pursuit of education and a brighter future. (Ghosh 49) Later in the passage, Moyna tells Deen that his son Tutul Mondol, also known as Tipu, was sent by Piyali Roy to study at an expensive boarding school in Kolkata. There he faced racism and discrimination because of his Dalit identity. Ultimately, he could not study there as a fight broke out between him and a student. The student that Tipu fought with was from an influential family. This is why the school ultimately expelled Tipu. This very incident also reveals how power dynamics in the nation state of India works. It reveals the racism and discrimination faced by Namasudras in the urban cities of the modern nation state of India. The incident also

illustrates that education is not a viable option for the marginalized indigenous communities of Sundarbans. Towards the end of the chapter, there is a conversation between Tipu and Deen. Tipu tells Deen that it is very easy to cross into Bangladesh from India through the Raimangal river. Deen was surprised to hear this. Deen said the area must be filled with border guards and so it must be risky to cross illegally. Tipu replies that it is very hard to seal a border that runs through such a forest, in which half is land and half is water. Tipu says it is very easy for the locals to bypass the border guards and cross into Bangladesh. Tipu further says that if by any chance, someone gets caught it's just a matter of bribing the border security force. (Ghosh 64) This passage reveals state power corruption as well as the fragile border that runs between the two countries, resulting in rampant human trafficking and smuggling.

In the chapter titled "Vision," a gripping sequence unfolds. Tipu, Deen, and Horen Naskor make their way to a shrine, only to encounter danger as Tipu is bitten by a king cobra. Rafi, a local boy responsible for the shrine's upkeep, comes to their aid and assists Tipu during a critical boat journey to the hospital. As Tipu's condition deteriorates, he slips into a delirium, experiencing eerie visions. In his delusional state, he mentions the name "rani" and urgently instructs Rafi to contact Piya, emphasizing the need to warn her about someone named Rani. Eventually, Tipu loses consciousness, adding to the tension and uncertainty of the situation.

In the next chapter, the narrator reveals to us that Rani is the name of an individual river dolphin that the marine biologist Piyali Roy had been studying as part of her research on cetacean creatures of Sundarbans. Rani once got entangled in a nylon netting. It was Piya who cut her loose and after that the dolphin formed a unique bonding and relationship with Piya. In this passage Piya says that the tracks and movements of dolphins are becoming

increasingly unpredictable and irregular because of changes in the composition of the waters in Sundarbans. Sea levels are rising and fresh waters are diminishing, salt waters are swooping into the upper stream, making certain areas too saline for the dolphins. (Ghosh 92) Piya further says that now dolphins are moving further up river into heavily populated fishing areas. This is the reason sometimes dolphins get entangled in fishing nets and sometimes they are hit by motorboats and steamers, said Piya. Piya expressed concern about the extinction of dolphins because of climate change. Piya tells Deen that each river in the Sundarbans consists of innumerable streams and each stream has its own mixture of nutrients and minerals, that supports diverse lives. (Ghosh 95). This sentence highlights the ecological importance of the rivers in Sundarbans. Then in this passage Piya informs Deen about the increasing number of oceanic dead zones. She tells him that dead zones are wide stretches of water in which fish cannot survive because of very low oxygen content. Piya then says it is not just the agricultural effluents that are causing these dead zones. She blames a refinery that is launched upriver. This refinery, she revealed, had been a target of opposition by the trust and a coalition of environmental organizations for an extended period. Their struggle, however, faced fierce resistance from influential figures tied to a colossal conglomerate that held sway over politicians on both sides of the border. Piya says the conglomerate orchestrated a smear campaign, branding them as "foreign agents," attempting to sever their financial support, resorting to arrests of protestors, and unleashing both law enforcement and paid thugs to disrupt demonstrations. Moreover, she said that she constantly faces death threats, hate mail and trolling on social media platforms. (Ghosh 96) This passage illustrates the challenges faced by environmental activists and the extent to which state and corporate power are wielded to silence and discredit the dissent. Later in the passage, Piya tells Deen that thousands of fish are dying in Sundarbans because of the chemicals

and waste that are being discharged from the refinery. In the end of this chapter, we get to know that Rani and some other dolphins beached themselves to death on an island called Garjontola.

The next chapter in the novel is called Brooklyn. In this chapter there is a conversation between Dinanath and Piyali Roy. Piya speaks to Deen about her friend Lisa. Lisa is an entomologist who lives in the mountains and teaches in a community college. Few years back, her research revealed that bark beetles were causing the trees in the mountains to become highly flammable. Upon finding this, Lisa immediately informed the town council about the threat of bark beetles in the mountains. Surprisingly no one paid any attention to her claim. They regarded her as an outsider who is trying to become famous by spreading rumors. However, a huge wild fire broke out in the mountains and the state had to declare an emergency. The wild fire claimed two human lives and destroyed several houses and properties. (Ghosh 109) After the fire, instead of recognizing her efforts and sincerity, the state began to doubt her. Law enforcement agencies began to suspect Lisa for wrongdoing. Lisa faced blame and hostility from the community. People started spreading rumors that she set the fire intentionally to gain funding for her research. After that Lisa became a target of death threats and harassment. An unknown person even fired a bullet towards her porch. (Ghosh 109). After mentioning all this Piya tells Deen that the way people attacked Lisa resembles how women were hunted as witches during the Dark ages. This passage reveals how the state, and society can ignore, harass and criminalize dissent. Even when her predictions came true, she faced blame and hostility, revealing the state's failure to acknowledge dissenting voices even when proven right. Piya's comparison of Lisa's experience to historical witch hunts highlights the societal dynamics and state mechanisms that demonize and persecute individuals expressing opinions contrary to the officially or commonly held beliefs. This underscores the tense relationship between dissent, state power, and society.

"Los Angeles" is the name of a chapter in the novel. In this chapter Deen attends a conference in a museum when a huge wildfire spreads across Los Angeles. The opening speaker at the conference was a young historian. The young historian spoke about the apocalypse and climate change in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In his speech he mentioned the little ice age, and discussed the ecological, social and political crisis of the 17th century. During his speech Deen suddenly realizes that Gun merchant's legend was probably born out of the tribulations of the little ice age. The speaker concluded his speech by raising concern about contemporary ecological and environmental crises all over the world. He concluded by saying that the little ice age was trivial compared to what is going to happen in the future. In between his speech and after he finished his speech, people in the audience which included book dealers and antiquarians mocked and made fun of him, referring to his findings as mere coincidences. (Ghosh 124) The audience's response to the young historian's speech showcases a complex mix of skepticism, dismissiveness, and even mockery. This reflects a broader societal tendency to downplay or trivialize warnings about ecological and environmental challenges.

Towards the end of this chapter, there is a conversation between Cinta and Dinanath which reveals her lack of faith in the state. Cinta says that the investigation of her husband's death is being delayed because the politicians and policemen are either afraid of their lives or they are in the Mafia's pocket. (Ghosh 133). Cinta's statement reveals a significant doubt about the integrity of the state and exposes the presence of corruption and abuse of power within its institutions. This chapter also illustrates the migration of yellow bodied sea snakes in Southern California. The extremely venomous yellow bodied sea snakes usually lived in the warmer waters of South, but due to climate change and global warming, they are migrating northwards. (Ghosh 134).

In the final chapter of part one, titled "Gun Island," the novel uncovers crucial revelations about the Gun Merchant legend, while also shedding light on the historical context of the Catholic inquisition in 17th century Europe. In this chapter, we finally discover that the character Nakhuda Ilyas was a Portuguese Jew, and this is why he brought Gun Merchant (Bandooki Sadagar) with him to Gun Island in Venice. Gun Island was basically a Jewish Ghetto in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. This unveils a deep historical layer, drawing attention to the plight of Jews during that era. The character Cinta tells Dinanath that, unlike other places in Europe the Jews were comparatively safe and secure in the Gun Island of Venice. Cinta tells that during the 17th century, the Republic of Venice was comparatively secular and progressive, then the rest of Europe. Cinta further tells that the fathers of the 17th century republic of Venice studied in the University where Galileo taught. Unlike other places in Europe, the republic of Venice was more tolerant and respectful of dissenting voices. This is perhaps the reason that the republic of Venice lasted until the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. This suggests that the states which oppress dissenting voices are likely to collapse earlier than those that acknowledge and respect dissenting voices. Towards the end of this chapter Deen receives a call from Cinta's cousin Gisa, who is a documentary producer. Gisa offers Deen to come to Venice in order to interview the Bengali refugees in Italy. Deen was surprised to learn that there are so many Bengalis in Venice. He happily accepts her offer.

Part two of the novel portrays the migrant trail of Rafi and Tipu, and the plight of the refugees in Italy. Social, economic and natural circumstances forced the characters Rafi and Tipu to leave their homes in the Sundarbans. Rafi and Tipu were desperate to move to Italy because of the ecological disaster in Sundarbans and also because they were Dalits and homosexual, both of which are marginalized and discriminated against in the Indian subcontinent. Legal and

documented migration was not a viable option for them. This is why they got in touch with an agent of the human trafficking syndicate. The agent asked them to pay money upfront, and only then would he make the arrangements for Rafi and Tipu. Agent or middleman is referred to in Bengali as 'Dalal'. Once they paid the money to the Dalal, they left home with just a bag-pack and 250 dollars each. At night time, they crossed the Raimangal river in Sundarbans and entered into Bangladesh. They arrived in Dhaka and spent 2 weeks there. After 2 weeks the 'Dalal' put them on a microbus with a group of people. A number of people in the group were members of a human trafficking syndicate. The microbus took them to the Indian border in Benapole, West Bengal. Rafi and Tipu walked through the immigration checkpoint without any obstacle because the immigration officers were bribed by the syndicate. On the Indian side they were put inside another microbus, with a new group of people. In the new group of people, once again there were people of the syndicate who were keeping an eye on them. The bus took them to a connection house in Kolkata, where they were locked inside a room for three days along with 20 people. The place in which they stayed was very small. There was only one bathroom. No one could complain because those people working for the human trafficking syndicate would beat anyone who complained or argued. They even had firearms. In the novel, the members of the syndicate are referred to as Jackals and Coyotes. After staying for 3 days in Kolkata, one night the Jackals told them to get ready. The Jackals loaded them in an old truck that was enclosed with wooden panels. They were packed like cows and goats in a small space. The truck headed towards the Pakistan border. During the day the truck was like an oven. People often got sick due to heat and dehydration. Days after days passed. Sometimes the truck would stop and let them out. The truck journey was horrendous and suffocating. After crossing Agra and Indore, the truck eventually brought them to a connection house in a desert near the Pakistan border. In the connection house,

they were informed that they can only cross the border if they pay 50 dollars each. Tipu got enraged and got into an altercation with the Jackals. Those Jackals were brutal and ruthless. The Jackals locked Tipu in a separate room and tortured him. They were going to shove a stick in Tipu's ass. Luckily it was when Tipu had experienced his seizure and they stopped. After this horrible episode, Rafi and Tipu paid 50 dollars each. Then they were finally allowed to get inside the truck. It was night time, when the truck stopped and they got to know that they have crossed into Pakistan. In Pakistan there were another set of Jackals. Those men led Rafi and Tipu inside a different truck. Just like in India, the truck would stop occasionally from time to time and at different safe houses. After many days, one night the truck came to a stop and they were told that they reached close to the Iranian border. Once again Rafi and Tipu had to pay and then were allowed to cross into Iran. In Iran there were another set of human traffickers. This time the jackals were Afghan and Kurds. After many days of driving, Rafi and Tipu were brought to a connection house located in a small Kurdish village. The Kurdish village is situated somewhere in the mountains of Western Iran. In the connection house they were kept along with many Hazaras. From the connection house they were loaded in a truck that took them close to the Turkish border. Crossing the Turkish border was the most difficult and dangerous part of their whole journey. When they were crossing the border, the Turkish Border Guards opened fire. Rafi and Tipu saw people getting shot in front of them. Nevertheless, Rafi did manage to get across. Tipu got hurt in his foot while he was crossing the border. This is why he had to crawl back to the Iranian border. After that Rafi had to go alone, since he could not find Tipu. In Turkey, Rafi met some Kurds who led him and the others into a bus which brought them to Istanbul. While he was on the bus, Tipu called Rafi and explained that Rafi needed to go alone since he was stuck in Iran. Rafi was instructed by Tipu to join a group of refugees who were going to walk into

Europe. Rafi listened to Tipu and joined the refugees in a town near Istanbul. Rafi along with those refugees cross across Bulgaria, Serbia, Hungary, into Austria. From Austria, Rafi boarded a train and finally came to Italy. At first Rafi had to stay in a Reception Centre near Trieste. Then he was sent to a refugee camp outside the city. After a few days, Rafi left the refugee camp and came to Venice to find work. Later Tipu made a second attempt to cross into Turkey and succeeded. From Turkey, Tipu decided to take an alternative route to Italy. He decides to go to Egypt and then come to Italy across the Mediterranean Sea. When Rafi raised money for Tipu, Tipu was able to reach Egypt through an agent of the human trafficking syndicate. In Egypt, Tipu was taken to a connection house located in Mount Sinai. Later Tipu, along with an Ethiopian lady and other refugees freed themselves from the notorious human traffickers who held them captive. Under the instructions of the Ethiopian lady, Tipu along with others boarded a blue fishing boat. The migrant trail of Rafi and Tipu exposes how several states are involved with human trafficking. In Part two of the novel, Ghosh depicts how the refugees are exploited in Italy. The refugees do all sorts of odd and difficult jobs in Italy. They work really hard to make their ends meet. Ghosh depicts how the Mafia and syndicate in Italy ensures that the refugees are always in debt and economic crisis. In this way the Mafia turns the refugees into bonded laborers. Ghosh hints that in the southern parts of Italy, refugees are often made to work in slave-like conditions. There is a character called Lubna Khala in Part two of the novel. Lubna Khala is a Bengali who resides in Venice. The novel hints that in the Southern parts of Italy, refugees are kept as captive in farms. In the novel we get to see that Lubna Khala's husband Munir died in a car crash in Sicily. Her husband was a human right activist, who went to Sicily to enquire about the Bengali refugees that were kept as captive in a farm. The passage about Munir, suggests that Munir was probably assassinated by the Mafia. In that passage we are also informed that the

refugee reception center in Italy is a “big cash cow”, suggesting the corruption of state power and involvement of Italian state officials with the human trafficking syndicate. The refugees in the blue boat possessed a lot of information about the human trafficking syndicate. They were able to free themselves from the captivity of the human traffickers in Mount Sinai. After they freed themselves from the human traffickers, the refugees obtained vital information about the syndicate from the laptop and electronic devices of the human traffickers. This is perhaps the reason that several European states deployed their naval warships to stop the arrival of the refugees. This suggests that the European states are desperate to hide their involvement with human trafficking syndicates. Towards the last part of the novel, the attitude of the right-wing politicians and activists reveals that to them the refugees are better dead than alive. So many refugees cramped in a small blue boat, which could have drowned any moment. However, these powerful states sent their warships not to rescue these unfortunate people, but to stop their arrival. The interior minister of Italy said that the refugees won’t be allowed to set foot in Sicily. This reveals European nation states' lack of empathy and humanity. In the end of the novel, we get to see that the Venetian naval commander, Admiral Vigonovo, finally decides to allow the refugees when he witnesses a miracle. By allowing the refugees, the naval commander disobeyed the state’s command, yet he fulfilled his moral duty and ethical obligation as a human being and as a believer. The novel suggests that he will be prosecuted for not listening to the state. Immediately after his decision to allow the refugees, state media and journalists started questioning his integrity, indirectly accusing him of being a traitor. While the novel does not explicitly reveal the fate of the naval commander, it implies that he will eventually be held accountable by the state. The naval commander will probably face a court martial. The way modern nation states suppress dissent is similar to that of catholic inquisition. During the Middle

Ages Catholic inquisition was used by monarchs as a tool to consolidate and centralize their power. Catholic inquisitors used to target and victimize the dissent by labeling them as demonic, or possessed. Just like catholic inquisition, contemporary nation states also victimize the dissent by first labeling them as enemy of the state, traitor, foreign agent and then suppressing them through legal frameworks or other means.

Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island* has engaged deeply with philosophical themes and presented complex intellectual discussions, such as natural versus supernatural, possession versus awakening and chance versus fate. Dinanath Datta's conversation with Cinta in the novel portrays how people's lives in ancient days were more connected to nature. In those days people had to exert their presence and will at every sphere of life in order to survive. This is why possession was regarded as something demonic that makes people lose control of themselves. The technological advancement and the materialistic development of the 21st century made us passive and dormant. We no longer have to exert our presence, the way our ancestors did. The novel portrays how in the contemporary world, most of us are possessed by greed. Greed is the real demon as illustrated in the novel. Supernatural, in the contemporary world, refers not to magic but the materialistic lifestyle and consumer culture. Greed for power, wealth and materials is destroying this planet. In the pursuit of power and control, modern nation states often nurture greed among the citizens. Ecological destruction and social crisis that are depicted in the novel, is a direct result of human being's greed for power, wealth and material resources. From the legend of Manasa and the Gun Merchant, we may infer that Manasa is ultimately a protector and goddess of nature. Businessmen and merchants often exploit nature to accumulate wealth and material resources. The Gun merchant was a proud and greedy merchant who perhaps had little to no concern about nature, ecology, and society. The Gun Merchant represents the exploitative

nature of businesses and merchants who prioritize accumulation of wealth over ecological and societal concerns. Manasa is the nemesis of the Gun Merchant. She ultimately destroyed the inflated sense of self of Bandoori Sadagar. The triumph of the snake goddess Manasa, is the triumph of nature over greed. The proud Gun Merchant had to finally bow down and worship Manasa as a deity. In the novel, Dinanath's quest to solve the mystery of the legend ultimately led to his awakening.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusion

The Indian subcontinent was colonized by the British for two centuries. The decolonization process began in the 20<sup>th</sup> century leading to the formation of several nation-states. Dalits played a crucial role in India's struggle for independence from the British Imperial rule. Renowned leaders like B.R. Ambedkar and Jogendranath Mondol made substantial contributions, overcoming challenges along the way. While Jogendranath Mandal supported the creation of Pakistan with the hope of safeguarding Dalit's interest, his efforts were met with persecution and violence by the Pakistani State Power. (Haq) Amid the Bangladesh Liberation War, many Dalits sought refuge in West Bengal, India, only to face further adversity and relocation by the Indian nation-state, settling in harsh and unwelcoming regions such as Dandakaranya. (Haq) The Marichjhapi massacre serves as a chilling reminder of state-inflicted violence, where Dalits attempting to establish themselves on a designated island were brutally attacked and killed by the Marxist government in West Bengal. The Sundarbans, home to a population exceeding seven million, predominantly comprises Dalits who have inhabited the region for generations. These marginalized communities confront ongoing ecological and social challenges exacerbated by the escalating impacts of climate change and global warming. The indigenous wisdom held by these communities is often marginalized by modern nation-states, which prioritize economic growth over holistic environmental and societal well-being. Modern nation-states often fail to address the fundamental causes of climate change and global warming, which are rooted in flawed development projects, industrialization, and carbon-based economies. Conservation policies,

such as Project Tiger, can unintentionally scapegoat Dalits, perpetuating their exploitation and persecution. Amitav Ghosh's novel *The Hungry Tide* vividly portrays the limitations and hypocrisy of such conservation policies, shedding light on how they can enable the mistreatment of marginalized indigenous communities under the pretext of preserving wildlife. These policies, driven by the state's pursuit of power, ultimately hinder the lives of the impoverished. Renowned social theorist Ashish Nandy underscores the inherent tensions between state and the freedoms of its citizens, advocating for developmental trajectories that prioritize and respect indigenous knowledge and cultural practices. Within the Sundarbans, Dalits embody a philosophy of coexistence and ecological harmony, emphasizing the restraint of greed and the need for symbiotic living. Their modest needs and aspirations contrast sharply with the power-driven pursuits of modern nation-states. Despite their deep-rooted connection to nature's equilibrium, Dalit's face marginalization due to state policies and the looming specter of climate change—a direct consequence of rapid industrialization and flawed development projects. According to Ashish Nandy, repressing dissent can lead to ecological imbalances and social crises, such as terrorism, human trafficking, smuggling, sex trafficking. Nandy emphasizes the importance of understanding the underlying grievances and aspirations of marginalized groups in order to provide solutions to these issues. Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island* vividly portrays the pervasive and profound social crisis in the Sundarbans. Human trafficking and sex trafficking have become rampant and everyday occurrences in the region. Driven by poverty and desperation, local residents are increasingly falling victim to criminal syndicates operating within the Sundarbans.

Urgent attention is required to address the imminent perils facing the Sundarbans and the legitimate concerns of its Dalit inhabitants. History, along with the myth of Bon Bibi, serves as a cautionary tale, highlighting that while suppressing dissent may be a successful short-term

strategy, disregard for ecological and social crises could ultimately precipitate the downfall of nation-states or powerful ruling entities. Therefore, effective governance must prioritize the dissenting voices of the marginalized and acknowledge the pressing ecological imperatives for a sustainable and harmonious future.

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