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**A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF EASTERINE KIRE'S *SON OF THUNDERCLOUD* AND AMITAV GHOSH'S *THE HUNGRY TIDE* AS ECO-NARRATIVES.**

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Human & Nature have coexisted on our planet Earth since primitive ages. The identity of nature has not just been limited to the flora & fauna, but it is also seen as the provider & protector of mankind. However, in recent times, man's anthropocentric attitude has led to the ruthless exploitation of this biodiversity. What was supposed to be a "Symbiotic relationship" between mankind & nature has now turned into a totally exploitative policy where we have reduced nature to an economic commodity. As a reaction to these circumstances a new technique of capturing the plight of nature through art and literature has now emerged as a mode of eco-narratives. This mode of literature is extremely important in the present times as it helps to bring in environmental consciousness amongst the readers.

According to critic, Cheryll Glotfelty's *The Ecocriticism Reader* – the term is the study of the relationship between literature & physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language & literature from a gender-conscious perspective, similarly Eco – criticism looks at literary works with an environmental approach. Eco – narrative is an extension of eco-critical projects where the ecological crisis is captured in the narrative structure. It highlights a problem in the dominant plot created by a conflict due to our anthropocentric habits. Eco-narratives are critical towards the Eurocentric approach to nature which merely "Commodifies" it for personal

benefits and proves detrimental to the biodiversity in the long run. In the contemporary period, owing to the crisis of environmental conservation, most of the writers have adopted this technique of “Eco-narratives” to use their works to create an ecological awareness.

This paper will take two Indian writings in English, that discuss the issue of environmental depletion and bring forth an ecological consciousness amongst the readers. The first is *The Son of Thunder Cloud* by Easterine Kire, the mesmerizing story that bifurcates into 25 chapters about the conflict between animistic Naga faith and Christian ideology in the state of Nagaland. It interweaves the issue of indigenous culture and ecology, both of which are suffering under the present framework due to man’s excessive self-centered and limited attitude. The other one is Amitav Ghosh's novel *The Hungry Tide* the bio-centric text where the local tribes as well as nature are categorized as subalterns who are mere pawns in the hands of the powerful. The importance of indigenous tribes and their harmonious relationship with nature has been highlighted by both the novels. Since ages, local tribes have co-existed in a perfect balance with nature and this “balance” is found in their culture and folkloric traditions. For them, nature is a revered territory-their protector and destroyer, and instead of attaching economic value to it, they see it with a sense of fear and respect.

In the novel *The Son of Thundercloud*, Easterine Kire constructs the central protagonist Rhalie, as a hybrid of both- animistic and Christian faith. It is he who kills the tiger, that was seen as a symbol of the commodification of nature in this particular context. Apart from this, the various characters in the text represent elemental forces of nature and this is done by the author to validate the existence of humans along with nature . Kire displays her opposition to the Eurocentric ideology for nature symbols through the symbol of tiger and farmers in the novel. It is only through these Naga rituals and traditions that nature is able to rejuvenate itself. The rain brought by the birth of

protagonist Rhaelie or the floods that lead to agricultural prosperity are some of the ways in which the text expresses the importance of indigenous ways of nature conservation, where the locals through their rituals of constructing nature as a sacred territory are actually maintaining the much needed “Symbiotic relationship” with it. The same sense of ecological conservation runs in Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* which deals with “tiger conservation programme” in Sundarbans.

By Encompassing the folklore of Bonbibi – a local folk tale that stresses a sustainable equation with nature in its own way where nature is respected as well as feared, Ghosh highlights how these local tribes have been living in complete harmony with the biodiversity of the mangrove delta. Certain islands in the Sundarbans, that these tribes see as the Bonbibi islands are actually the niche of exotic flora & the Royal Bengal Tiger, which has been allowed to exist without any human tampering. The character of Fokir becomes representative of these indigenous tribes and their sustainable involvement with nature. It is only by the interruption of the colonialist approach to nature, which is propagated by the state that a disturbance in the Sundarbans delta is created. The novel throws light over the contemporary theory of “Green post-colonialism” where nature & local tribes both become victims under the state power that exposes a sense of ownership & exploits them.

Both the texts, *The Son of Thunder Cloud* as well as *The Hungry Tide* are in that sense Eco-narratives that highlight the destruction of nature under the veil of the modern narratives of development. They also stress on the relationship of the indigenous tribe with biodiversity and see it as a perfect example of harmonious existence with nature.

However, Ghosh's novel along with this pattern of thought, also brings in a very different nuance to this debate of environmental conservation. As Ghosh belongs to the generation of postmodern writers who question anything that acquires a sense of centrality, so he brings in the new

perspective of Eco-cosmopolitanism in his text as a parallel to local methods of nature conservation. The importance of local knowledge for nature conservation is not presented as the “be all and end all” but merges along with the need of global & technical knowledge & it is here that the text turns into an Eco-cosmopolitanist narrative.

The term originally offered by Ursula K. Heise, in her book *Sense of Place & Sense of Planet* works as an inclusive policy that establishes the conceptual connection between theories of globalization, eco-cosmopolitanism, and nature. According to her, in the contemporary period of globalization, people need to be made conscious of the entire planet & its ecology, instead of having a topophilic approach that promotes awareness only about a particular setting. It stresses the importance of bringing in theories of eco-cosmopolitanism & eco-criticism, that will help to bring an Eco-centric attitude rather than anthropocentric attitude, and will also relate to the larger context of the entire planet.

Ghosh’s text endorses the same sensibility akin to Heise’s theory & he presents characters like Piyali & Kanai who are the quintessential migrants, not belonging to the domain of Sundarban but still they bring in their own methods of ecological conservation. The character of Piyali, the outsider – who is a marine biologist conceptualizes the theory of eco-cosmopolitanism as she presents a broader approach of conserving natural biodiversity around the world and not just her immediate locale. The technical advancement, that her character brings along is essential for the conservation of the Irrawaddy and Oracella dolphins of the delta. Through the death of Fokir-the indigenous who fails to fight the natural forces, Ghosh tries to show that often locale, concrete & place based knowledge too is not enough. As the novel progresses it brings about the merging of both – The local & global knowledge that is desirable to deal with the ecological crisis the world is facing.

Hence, Ghosh resists from creating a clean cut dichotomy of the local & the global & neither does he try to establish any particular method as superior. Instead, he brings forth the interaction between the two that is the need of the hour. So while both eco-narratives run in the same strain of valuing the conventional & indigenous methods of conserving ecology, it is with its eco-cosmopolitan approach that Amitav Ghosh's appears more comprehensive in the present framework of time that calls for a holistic natural conservation program.

However, I would also like to say that we cannot really create a binary by placing one text and its approach as superior than the other, as both the texts cater to their particular contexts. The ideology, genre, context, influence the approach Kire and Ghosh bring in their texts. Ghosh's text, situated in a contemporary setting calls for such an approach to the environmental crisis where technology has to be merged with local knowledge. While the indigenous conservation methods that Kire brings in her text through folklore and animistic faith, is apt for the context of her work.

#### References:

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