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## THE HUNGRY TIDE AS A NEO-COLONIAL MACHINE

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### ABSTRACT

The study of Amitav Ghosh's 'The Hungry Tide' as a neo-colonial machine locates the text in the world and the world in the text by using Barthes's idea that the text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of culture. However, it improves upon Barthes hypothesis by bringing in the concept of machines developed by Deleuze and Guattari's and develops it further through the study of development of machines from cosmic to earthly, from non-living to living and from biological genes to linguistic genes.

'The Hungry Tide' by Amitav Ghosh is a product of so many machines and is plugged into many other machines. The novel is a complicit machine of neo-colonialism because it questions the validity of India as a nation state and then finding a solution to the problems of subaltern through the establishment of NGO, a neo-colonial institution. Very ironically, the social institutions shown benevolent in the novel have always been major force behind the exploitation of subaltern in past as well in present.

**Keywords:** Amitav Ghosh, Colonialism, Linguistic Engineering, Neo-colonialism, Social Machines, Socio-linguistic Genes, *The Hungry Tide*.

### INTRODUCTION

Indian writing in English especially by India Diaspora has emerged as a promising field for both intellectual and monetary investment. This paper locates Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* in particular and all writers in general in colonial and neo-colonial machines and vice versa and finds that these are the major forces responsible for the emergence and canonization of Indian diaspora literature. Analysis of this location expands the scope to study Indian diaspora writers by including things from past to present, publishers, readers, critics, and many other elements. Therefore, writing becomes a "tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture" which becomes "a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original; blend and clash" (Barthes, 2001), very much like sexual reproduction in which biological genes developed through so many generation blend to form a new organism.

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### METHODOLOGY

The world and the text have a very complicated relationship with each other as "any text, if it is not immediately destroyed, is a network of often colliding forces, but also that a text in its being a text is a being in the world" (Said, 1975). This research paper takes a slightly different position here the text's very production is an amalgam of innumerable texts and forces. World is located in the texts in the form of their internal structure – choice of subject matter, its treatment, linguistic choices their arrangement; and the texts are located in the world i.e. their success in the outside society such as the number of copies they sell, the number of awards they get, social machine's adoption and adaptation of the texts. Therefore, the linguistic machines-writer, text, reader etc.; the organic machines- human body, other organisms and inorganic machines plugged into each other and into innumerable other machines of past and present are creating new machines and being created by them simultaneously.

To justify the author and the text as machines it is necessary to understand that whole of the universe, cosmos to smallest unit, concrete to abstract, is

composed of machines, which are “real ones, not figurative ones: machines driving other machines, machines being driven by other machines, with all the necessary couplings and connections” (Deleuze, 1983). Human brain, the origin of all discourses, is a machine that converts all perceptions and experiences, external realities, physical derives, and thrusts created by hormones into codes i.e. linguistic genes. It becomes “a receptacle for seizing and storing up numberless feelings, phrases, images, which remain there until all the particles which can unite to form a new compound are present together” (Eliot, 1994). Unlike Eliot, here brain is an active ingredient because “...the ability to use language symbolically has phylogenetically affected the human brain, not in a direct cause and effect manner, but indirectly through its effects on human behavior and on the changes that human behaviour brings about in the environment (Kramsch: 241). The new compounds produced here are discourses of various kinds, which come out in the form of linguistic genes and move from one brain to another horizontally and vertically. The interconnectivity of brains that takes place through linguistic genes across time and space leads to the formation of “social machines” that has “man for its parts” and “undertakes a variety of interventions” (Deleuze, 1983). Through interaction with each other and under the pressure of other machines, they undergo mutations that manifest in the emergence and development of new social forms.

This paper studies *The Hungry Tide* as a neo-colonial machine and looks at it as an extension of capitalist machine that emerged in Europe due to a particular configuration of linguistic genes. When supported by external circumstances it led to the emergence of a particular social form that led to the appearance and development of a new self, which was “expressive, oftentimes, violently willful bourgeois individual, who sought wealth and power in the evolving world of early market capitalism” (Rivkin, 2002). Slowly this social form started dominating because it had the exceptional ability to adopt, adapt, and appropriate all social production. The author is constituted of various machines therefore, in this age of capitalism author is more enslaved than before because the capitalist machine provides, “a small amount of subjectification” that seems to take its subjects “away from mechanic enslavement, but a large amount brings” them “back to it” and constitutes a large part of author.

Apparently capitalism seems to play no role in the formation of author however it functions through the processes of “normalization, modulation, modeling, and information that bear on language, perception, desire, movement, etc., and which proceed by way of micro-assemblages. This aggregate includes both subjection and enslavement taken to extremes, as two simultaneous parts that constantly reinforce and nourish each other” (Deleuze, 1987). It does not mean that the authors became machines only with the advent of capitalism rather they had always been the machines however, the capitalist machine that developed through author machine has been organizing various societies as a comprehensive unit. In this situation authors like “the television viewers are no longer consumers or users, nor even subjects who supposedly “make” it, but intrinsic component pieces, “input” and “output,” feedback or recurrences that are no longer connected to the machine in such a way as to produce or use it” (Deleuze, 1987). Social structures constituted of individuals become powerful by capturing individuals in a “web like inclusiveness of power which is employed and exercised through a net-like organization”. Authors “circulate between” society’s “threads; they are always in the position of exercising this power. They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are also the elements of its articulation” (Foucault, 1990).

#### **THE HUNGRY TIDE AS A NEO-COLONIAL MACHINE**

Amitav Ghosh’s particular position in the power network canonizes him as a major writer. Capitalist neo-colonial structure chooses bourgeois to set the example for he is “more utterly enslaved than the lowest of slaves, he is the first servant of the ravenous machine, the beast of the reproduction of capital, internalization of the infinite debt” (Deleuze, 1983). All the choices made by Amitav Ghosh in the representation of history, politics, environment, untouchables, NGOs, and scientific institutions conform his location in the neo-colonial capitalist machine.

A brief comparison of *The Hungry Tide* with Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) will position it as a neo-colonial machine. *Robinson Crusoe* was both a product and processor of colonialism and capitalism both of which were in the initial stage at that time. In this novel all the linguistic choices, their arrangements, subject matter, and their treatment are product of colonialism and capitalism and expanded their base by converting a good number of readers into their allies by interpreting

the experiments of colonial rule and capitalism conducted in a non-European location as European man's struggle for perfection. The emerging capitalist society immediately adopted, adapted, and made it a big success. Unlike *Robinson Crusoe*, *The Hungry Tide* is a product of neo-colonialism, apparently it speaks for the subaltern however preaches only neo-colonialism and capitalism in a very subtle manner by providing solution in neocolonial machinery that is why; the dominant social structures of the day adopt it and make it a success with both subalterns and the neo-colonial rulers. The internal structure of the novel, location of the author, and history of locale outside text highlight its position as a product and processor of machines ranging from colonialism to neo-colonialism. Therefore, it is a machine complicit in the "imperial ecology of market environmentalism" that "iterates and consolidates what Guattari refers to as the 'uni-dimensionalizing' value system of the west", which is the "value system of capitalism only" (Sullivan, 2010). These international machines plug it into various machines within the machine known and recognized as India and replicate desired attitudes to generate support for neo-colonial projects that intend to territorialize, de-territorialize and re-territorialize the Indian nation state for maximum profit.

As a neo-colonial machine, it questions the validity of India as a nation state by foregrounding state's discrimination towards the subaltern as reflected in the eviction of migrant untouchables by the Communist Party led West Bengal government. Instead of finding fault with people in power he rejects the state apparatus as a whole by finding a solution to all the problems of subaltern through the establishment of NGO, a neocolonial institution that starts getting funds even from international sources when Piya is about to take the charge of this organization. Very ironically, the social institutions shown benevolent in the novel have always been major force behind the exploitation of subaltern in past as well in present.

To justify the neo-colonial international investment in NGO's and many other institutions he hides the fact that caste prejudices are the major reason behind the problems of subaltern. Not just in government and social sector in literary field, also whenever an Indian writer from upper caste tries to solve the problem of subalterns in most of the cases he/she diagnosis the problem wrongly therefore their solutions help the hegemonic

castes and classes instead of helping the subaltern. For example, Mulk Raj Anand in his *Untouchable* tries to solve the problem of untouchability by introducing flush toilet. Arundhati Roy tries to solve the problem of untouchability by introducing Television; similarly, Amitav Ghosh tries to solve the problem of untouchables by introducing NGO. A close study shows sale of flush systems, televisions, and establishment of NGO has helped only the upper castes. Amitav Ghosh presents neo-colonial institutions like NGO and transnational capital, benevolent to lower castes by erasing caste and class differences.

The author tries to project himself as pro-subaltern when he raises the question of land and people without land by highlighting state's antagonism towards subaltern. However, he overlooks the fact that the problem highlighted in this novel has its roots in the emergence of capitalism in Europe and establishment of colonies abroad. He does not highlight the impact of capitalism on European society, which manifested in the enclosure movement that converted the land into private property. It converted a large section of European society into colonizing machines by convincing them that "a privatized, enclosed piece of land is "a more efficient and cost-effective means of capital accumulation (and personal, moral development) than the Common-field system of land cultivation" (Forster, 1992). This enclosure movement at home led to colonial occupation abroad and "began to flourish at a time in history when the Dutch, the French, and the English were vying for sovereign control of the Indian subcontinent and the trade routes to the Far East" (Marzec, 2007).

Slowly capitalism reached other parts of the world through colonialism, enclosed lands, exploited both natural and human resources, which is evident from the letter written by Columbus when he reached America. He writes this island "is to be desired and very desirable....I solemnly took possession of all the others for our invincible king, yet I especially took possession of a certain large town, in a very convenient location, and adapted to all kinds of gain and commerce" (Columbus, 2005). Almost the similar thing happened in India after the fall of Mughal Dynasty when there was a political turmoil the European capitalists started enclosing land. They resorted to unrestricted exploitation of masses and squeezed as much money they could. The free flow of money further strengthened the capitalist machinery that

reached its height “when the English government was concentrating on the transformation of the East India Company from a merchant organization into a political apparatus for overseas domination” (Marzec, 2007).

Colonialism did not end even after the independence of former colonies because in the neo-colonial global world order, “enclosures of a different kind continue: most notably the passage of transnational corporations into third world countries, with the politico-economic organizations of the IMF and the World Bank setting the terms of development for these countries” (Broad, 1992). In the contemporary phase it fabricates “its allies by proposing a share of the center in a seemingly new way (not a rupture but a displacement): disciplinary support for the conviction of authentic marginality by the (aspiring) elite” (Spivak, 1993). As the author here belongs to “the (aspiring) elite” striving for a “share of the center”, he hides the role of dominant historical and contemporary forces in shaping the destiny of people on Sundarbans and uses his power of imagination to convince a naïve reader that all these forces were very benevolent. Therefore in his selection and representation of incidents from the unrecorded past of the region he makes this novel a suitable machine for preaching capitalism.

Amitav himself acknowledges that he took the historical incidents presented in the novel from “Ross Mallick’s, *Refugee Resettlement in Forest Reserves: West Bengal Policy Reversal and the Morichjhāpi Massacre...*...Nilanjana Chatterjee’s... *Midnight’s Unwanted Children: East Bengali Refugees and the Politics of Rehabilitation...*and Annujalais’s article, *Dwelling on Marichjhampi*” (Ghosh, 2004). While using the secondary material on the incidents he is very selective and excludes everything that can highlight the role of British colonial project, American neo-colonialism, or Indian caste system in the marginalization of subaltern. For instance, he structures the novel to prove Communist Party of India responsible for all the sufferings of subaltern and saves the caste prejudices within the Communist Party of India, which are the major cause of all the problems mentioned in the novel. He neglects the fact that nature and functioning of any political party depends on the party members who carry prejudices and biases. The novel is structured to generate anger in the reader against state, political apparatuses and then gives a solution in the form of NGO’s, a neocolonial, neo capitalist apparatus.

To justify colonial rule of foreign powers in collaboration

with Indian privileged classes he re-presents the history of hundred years i.e. 1903 when Hamilton buys ten thousand acres of land from the British government up to the publication of novel in 2005. First, he creates a positive face of colonial capitalism through Hamilton’s project, which is shown working for the subaltern and then justifies neocolonial transnational capital when Piya gets money from abroad apparently for the welfare of subaltern.

He tries his best to show that these organizations work for the subaltern; however, composition of these organizations reveals that none of them involves the subaltern in the process of decision-making. Hamilton’s project and Nilima’s Badabon Trust are completely undemocratic institutions and exclude subaltern from policymaking process. On the other hand, state government is a democratic institution, and subalterns can become policy makers if mobilized politically and Amitav Ghosh had the example of Mayawati, a Dalit who became the youngest CM of Uttar Pradesh in 1995. He avoids the dimension of political mobilization of the subaltern that can challenge the hegemony of upper castes in India therefore he advocates for the institutions that are completely in the hands of upper castes.

The writer reprocesses history to highlight only the benevolent face of capitalism i.e. Hamilton’s project and neglects its brutal face i.e. colonialism. Sundarbans region, the locale of this novel has a long history of colonial occupation. The area was mapped by the “Surveyor General as early as 1764 following soon after proprietary rights were obtained from the Mughal Emperor, Alamgir II, by the East India Company in 1757.... The first Forest Management Division to have jurisdiction over the Sundarbans was established in 1869. The Sundarbans was declared a reserved forest in 1875-76” (Hussain, 1994). The colonial intervention enclosed it as a property of East India Company.

The year of 1764 is very important in the history of this region because not only Sundarbans region but also whole of the Bengal went under the rule of Company that started exploiting people. The last Indian ruler collected the land revenue equal to £ 817,000. On the other hand, “the company administration realized £1,470,000 from 1765 to 1766” which was 80 percent more than the revenue collected by the Indian ruler, furthermore “the permanent settlement was fixed in at £ 3,400,000” which was 300 percent of earlier revenue. The colonial exploitation siphoned off surplus very

systematically, therefore “the peasant cultivators had no reserves to fall back on when the crops failed. Many thousands of people were also affected by the deindustrialization, most so, perhaps by the collapse of the textile industry, but also of iron, glass, paper, pottery, and jewellery” (Tharu, 1991).

The colonial machinery worked in very subtle manner it evolved a new method of ruling over the orient. On the one hand, it destroyed the peasantry and working class on the other hand; it funded the orientalist project, which became the most powerful institution for ruling over the Orient. Warren Hastings the viceroy responsible for atrocities on masses summoned Brahmans versed in Shastras from all parts of India and paid each of them one rupee a day for teaching Sanskrit. The colonial authorities gave fellowship for learning Sanskrit and Persian and established a committee that “lay out above a lakh of rupees in printing Arabic and Sanskrit books” (Macaulay, 2005). This project increased the number of Orientalized Indians from amongst whom the intelligentsia emerged.

Author’s location in two major machines i.e. neo-colonial capitalism and Indian caste systems tops him from questioning the attitude of upper caste element in Communist Party Bengal Government towards the untouchables. Upper caste antagonism towards the lower castes has a long history that further increased with the advent of electorate-based politics that empowered the East Bengal Namasudra movement and “mobilized Untouchables politically in alliance with the more numerous Muslims and had kept the Bengal Congress Party in opposition from the 1920s. The exclusion of high-caste Hindus from power led the Hindu elite and eventually the Congress Party pressing for partition of the province at independence, so that at least the western half would return to their control” (Mallick, 1999). After partition, the situation for lower castes changed in Bangladesh because the orthodox Muslim Religious machine plugged itself into nationalist machine therefore it did not require their help as a swing-vote bloc between high-caste Hindus and Muslims. Therefore, despite their political alignment with Muslims it categorized them as Hindus and forced them to leave East Bengal and therefore the untouchables became marginalized minorities in both countries.

Amitav Ghosh neglects all these historical realities and blames the nation state instead of “the elite culture of

nationalism” that “participated and participates with the colonizer in various ways” (Spivak, 1988) and has been marginalizing lower castes, women, tribal and many other groups. The author does not highlight the particular attitude of upper castes and classes towards the lower caste people, which was reflected in both the policies of West Bengal government headed by Congress party on the one hand and the general attitude of middle and upper caste intelligentsia towards untouchable migrants. Later refugees whom Ghosh uses as a means to challenge the nation state belonged to the lower castes; they lacked the means to survive on their own and became dependent on government’s relief. The ruling elite was aware that if the lower castes got the opportunity to organize politically they will oust them from power therefore they dispersed most of the untouchable migrants out of the state. By doing so, the Congress government effectively dissolved the Namasudra movement and, thereby enhanced the dominance of the traditional Bengali tri-caste elite.

Amitav Ghosh in this novel presents only the pro-subaltern attitude of the press owned by the upper caste and class by putting down only the positive role played by media when a “young man had somehow made his way to Kolkata where he talked at length to the newspapers.” As a result of coverage in various newspapers “A furor broke out, citizens’ groups filed petitions, questions were asked in the legislature and finally the High Court ruled that barricading the settlers was illegal; the siege would have to be lifted” (Emphasis in original) (Ghosh, 2004). Here again the author hides how the anti-subaltern opinion was created among the masses by the “Cartoons” that “appeared in Calcutta newspapers revealing public apprehension regarding the costs of assisting a large population of East Bengali refugees.” For instance, “In *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, issue dated 14 January 1950; West Bengal was depicted lying in a hospital bed with various ailments including “refugee-it is”. A worried visitor was shown asking the attendant doctor, Chief Minister B.C. Roy, if the case was “hopeless” (Chatterjee, nd.). The powerful media associated the influx of thousands of East Bengali refugees with every malaise from overcrowding, squalor, social disintegration and soaring crime rates to unemployment and the rising cost of living and constructed an anti-Dalit Refugee public opinion. In this situation, “government’s “mistrust” of the refugees reflected that of the general West Bengali population’s” (Chatterjee, nd.).

Amitav Ghosh in this novel claims to voice the subaltern but avoids both colonial and caste dimensions of their pathetic situation. Colonial rule that empowered the upper castes by enclosing land in their favor on the one hand and transferring power to them at the time of independence was responsible for the eviction of untouchable migrants. When India became a nation state a large part of land and powers were enclosed with the state, which was largely owned by upper castes that is why when the upper caste Hindus migrated from Bangladesh and occupied vacant lands, their colonies were legalized immediately because they belonged to ruling castes. Nirmal, one of the protagonists “was originally from Dhaka but had come to Calcutta as a student. The events of Partition had cut him off from his family and he had elected to stay on in Calcutta,” (Ghosh, 2004) where he gets everything a name for himself, a teaching job as lecturer in English at Ashutosh College and a wife from a family well known for its tradition of public service. When he loses his mental stability, Nilima’s father who handled some of the affairs of the Hamilton Estate gets him the job of Head Master in the Lucibari School. Amitav Ghosh never specifies that all the good things are happening to him not because of his merit but because of his caste. On the other hand, when the lower caste people migrated to India the attitude of both people and state changed mainly due to high percentage of upper caste in administration and politics that had some antagonism towards the lower castes. However, the author locates this antagonism in the state apparatus and communist party when he makes a comrade speak “You can’t make an omelette without breaking eggs” (Ghosh, 2004) about the eviction of settlers. He never points out that this brutal attitude is coming not from the comrade part of his personality but from upper caste part of his personality.

The author does not point out the composition of first Communist government, which was “tilted towards tiny tri-caste Bengali elite that increased its Cabinet composition from 78% under the Congress (1952-62) to 90% under the Communists (1977-82)” (Mallick, 1999). In this way, the main reason behind the eviction of untouchable migrants was not the communist ideology, but the increased share of upper caste and their prejudices and fears towards the lower castes.

After depiction of assault on untouchable migrants, the author projects NGO as a solution to most of the problems faced by the natives and dismisses electorate

based political institutions. He overlooks the fact that most of the NGOs in India are run by the people from privileged castes, the very people responsible for atrocities on the subaltern. For instance Nilima’s father in the novel and Author’s uncle outside the text are linked to the NGO that claims to work among the subalterns but victimizes them as stated in the text “money went to the estate’s managers, and the overseers’ henchmen savagely beat settlers who protested or attempted to resist” (Ghosh, 2004). However, the author presents these facts in such a manner that an ordinary reader cannot relate them.

Amitav Ghosh projects Trust’s complicity with the political apparatus and caste system in very positive terms. While defending her decision of not extending help to refugees Nilima calls the untouchable migrants as “squatters”. According to her that land “doesn’t belong to them; it’s government property” (Ghosh, 2004), and “If they’re allowed to remain, people will think every island in the tide country can be seized. What will become of the forest, the environment” (Ghosh, 2004)? She further says, “I simply cannot allow the Trust to get involved in this. There’s too much at stake for us. ...The hospital’s future, its welfare — they mean everything to me, and I will not endanger them” (Ghosh, 2004).

The author’s location of NGO as a benevolent institution becomes clear when it is located in the discourses of globalization, transnationalism and neo-colonialism. The idea of NGO gained momentum during the cold war period when the capitalist nations feared they might lose to communism therefore they started Non-Government Organizations that generally worked among the have-nots of the society. The main idea behind the establishment of these organizations was to control any revolutionary development in the society. Ideologically “the formation of Non-Government Organizations is funded by Foucault’s idea of ‘micro-politics’, local and issue-based, and especially the rhetoric of ‘empowering’ without organizing politically” (Ahmad, 2011). Capitalist powers in America, the neo-colonial center and other parts of the Europe were afraid of electorate based politics so they authorized this kind of politics that has come to be practiced now on such a vast scale by the NGOs and the so-called social movements.

Emergence of NGO’s get its ideological support from Foucault’s idea that “society is composed of countless centers of power and great many institutions, and therefore instead of a unified political party a whole

plethora of agents addressing those multiple centers of power is required" (Ahmad, 2011). However, it resonates well with the very structure of the postmodern politics that have arisen in the form of identity politics. Capitalist machinery learned from the experience that it "is safest when it can fragment the opposition into diverse claimants competing for a share in the national revenue—atomisation of politics, so to speak—and most vulnerable when it has to face a united opposition to its rule" (Ahmad: 2011). Various NGO's promote identity politics and freeze communities in separate vacuums that fragment nation states and paves way for transnational capitalism's encroachment of nation states formed after the end of direct colonial rule. The Indian intelligentsia, which is a product of orientalist project, felt very comfortable with neo-colonial project and imported the idea of NGOs with postmodernist authority. After independence due to democratic form of government, there was a fear among the upper castes that untouchables and other subalterns can oust them from power if they are politically organized. Therefore when the "postmodern political forms in India typically take the shape of 'social movements', 'civil society organizations', and the funded NGOs" (Ahmad, 2011) their aim is not to empower the subaltern but to keep them away from power. It is due to this hidden agenda that "'Social movement' is contrasted to 'political movements'. Politics addresses the issue of state power, but if state is dismissed as realm of corruption and bureaucratic manipulation then political parties—even workers' parties which participate in the political field and fight for state power—are also seen as part of that corruption, as yet other kinds of bureaucratic machines"(Ahmad, 2011). Amitav Ghosh in his novel follows this agenda and dismisses state as if even an innocent person becomes criminal when he joins state apparatus despite the fact that when criminal minded people join state apparatus they use it for criminal activities.

In *The Hungry Tide*, Amitav Ghosh very logically replaces the political by the social to highlight the benevolent nature of NGO and capitalism. The objective here is to bypass the issue of political power altogether instead of working toward a different kind of state power. Nilima's Badabon Trust in the novel claims to work for empowerment of subalterns. However, the composition of the Trust indicates that more than catering to the needs of subaltern, it caters to the needs of Nilima, an

upper caste from one of the ruling families who had no other way of feeling like a ruler.

*The Hungry Tide's* position as a machine plugged into the international political apparatus becomes clear when one looks into the large amounts that are funneled through European parties to promote anti-communist, anti-democratic NGOs not only in India but also across Asia and, especially, Africa. In all these parts, state, the political apparatus has started withdrawing from direct involvement in providing social entitlements; it has also started farming out some of its own work to NGOs. Over time, these "'social movements', armed with the rhetoric of 'micro-politics' borrowed from French postmodernism, have come to occupy more and more of the political space in the name of 'civil society' and 'the social'" (Ahmad, 2011). This atomization of politics, which undercuts the politics of organized unity against the ruling class and its state, is greatly favored by global capital itself. *The Hungry Tide* preaches this politics of atomization by portraying NGOs in very positive terms. There are three NGOs – the emerging NGO i.e. Nilima's Badabon Trust, the decaying i.e. Hamilton's project that was converted into a trust after his death, and the third one established by untouchables, which is destroyed by the government. The author has inducted these organizations with a definite aim.

Hamilton started his project like an NGO with all investment from his pocket. He develops these islands for 36 years from 1903 when he bought them until his death in 1939 with an apparent dream to make it a "country run by cooperatives," where "people wouldn't exploit each other and everyone would have a share in the land" (Ghosh, 2004). It is a place where "S'Daniel had made arrangements for electricity" when most of the Indians have not even heard the name of electricity, "In the beginning, there was a huge generator, right next to the school....There were even telephone lines here. Long before phones had come to Kolkata, S'Daniel had put in phones in Gosaba. Everything was provided for; nothing was left to chance. There was a Central Bank of Gosaba and there was even a Gosaba currency" (Ghosh, 2004). Despite all progressive things, it failed to uplift the level of consciousness and political awareness among the natives because "after his death it broke down and no one ever replaced it" (Ghosh, 2004). Who is this "no one" the author is talking about if the project was successful in making it a "country run by cooperatives," then this "no one" must be a native but why natives will like to

live in darkness after enjoying electricity and many gadgets and facilities for 36 years. It is evident that this "no one" is an outsider because Hamilton's project excluded natives from the power structure; they were subalterns in the beginning and remain same at the end. Despite its claims, the project denies the natives, power of knowledge, so their position on the island is like animals in a zoo that witness all modern gadgets but possess none. All the time the Estate is controlled from outside and the people for whom it claims to work have no say in its management that is why after the death of Hamilton "The estate was almost bankrupt. Although funds were said to have been earmarked for clinics, education and public works, very little evidence was ever seen of these"(Ghosh: 80). Nowhere in the text has the author blames Hamilton for his failure to constitute a management from amongst the residents, for keeping them away from the technical knowledge necessary for running the routine life properly, for not involving them in the economic affairs of the project. If he were interested in establishing a "country run by cooperatives", he would have created a whole army of technicians, economists, managers, and many other professionals from amongst the natives in thirty-six long years. As he failed to do so the project was a failure, rather he is responsible for the death of thousands who died while fulfilling his vision of utopia. However, the author neglects all these dimensions and praises this project as the positive aspect of capitalism.

Hamilton's project is not just only a fictional place it is a real institution in the Sundarbans region. Like Nilima's father in the novel author's "uncle, the late Shri Satish Chandra Ghosh, was for more than a decade the headmaster of the Rural Reconstruction Institute, the high school founded by Sir Daniel Hamilton in Gosaba.... he was also the manager of the Hamilton Estate."(Ghosh: 401). With the transfer of authority from so-called European visionary to upper caste Indians, having caste prejudices this utopia with all modern facilities turns into a dystopia where "Most families subsisted on a single daily meal"(Ghosh: 79). However, even during the phase described as utopian by the author the settlers were cheated because they "were mainly of farming stock who had been drawn to Lusibari by the promise of free farmland. Hunger drove them to hunting and fishing, and the results were often disastrous. Many died of drowning, and many more were picked off by crocodiles and estuarine sharks"(Ghosh: 79). The author

acts like a colonial machine because he does not link this statement to colonial exploitation that drove them to hunger rather he puts responsibility on individuals and hostile environment. Nor he highlights that Hamilton's vision of "country run by cooperatives," is actually a project to create a zoo with all modern facilities that has living human beings as its subjects who are in a bad state when the manager changes. This novel acts like a processor for neocolonial machinery to convince people that colonial/ neo-colonial presence is beneficial for them because they are not capable of managing their own affairs.

Nilima's Badabon Trust is the only NGO in the novel, which is treated like an NGO by the author and he invests a lot of energy to make it an appropriate institution to replace electorate based political institutions. It stands on the ruins of Hamilton's project. Like Hamilton who came to this region by chance and started his project, Nilima comes to this region by chance in 1950 and starts her NGO. Initially started as Mohila Sangothon or the Women's Union, it continues to grow, "drawing in more and more members and offering an ever-increasing number of services — medical, paralegal, agricultural. At a certain point, the movement grew so large that it had to be reorganized, and that was when the Badabon Development Trust was formed.... There, in the late 1970s, its hospital, workshops, offices and Guest House were to be built"(Ghosh: 81-82). There is a lot of contradiction between author's description of the trust and its impact on local people. Despite author's glorification in its history of more than fifty years, it could not raise the level of people's consciousness, none of its beneficiaries goes for higher education, expands the business, or goes for any other significant thing that people can achieve with active help. Absence of any such achievement highlights another face of NGO i.e. to keep the people backward and ignorant so that they can be ruled easily. The Badabon Trust in the novel corresponds to a real NGO that "succeeded in creating a range of invaluable medical and social services" (Ghosh: 402). Even this piece of information fails to convince a critical reader. They inspire one or two doctors to work among the poor it is an achievement. The achievement could be bigger if they had inspired at least 30 people in their whole history to become doctors, engineers, teachers, or anything that would have empowered people in real terms.



Amitav Ghosh categorizes all electorate based political institutions and advocates for non-electorate based political institutions. He projects Badabon Trust as a great help to the natives. Despite its tall claims of empowering women in its entire history of more than fifty years, its only achievement is education of Moyna who becomes a nurse with the help of the Trust. The surprising fact that it could inspire only one woman indicates that it has some other aim. The main reason behind its failure to inspire people is that it is an undemocratic institution working for safeguarding the interests of upper caste people.

Since its inception as a women's organization it has seen only one president i.e. Nilima. Throughout its history, it ensures that they should not become empowered enough to dream of becoming president of the Trust or administrator of any kind. During all these years, the state has seen many Chief Ministers belonging to different political parties but the delta region knows only one indirect ruler and there is hardly any political activity in more than fifty years. Nilima's position in the Trust and NGO's position on the island remains unquestioned because she is "capable of commanding prompt and unquestioning obedience — few would willingly cross her, for it was well known that Mashima, like any other figure of maternal nurture, could be just as inventive in visiting retribution as she was in dispensing her benedictions" (Ghosh, 2004). This description is not a critique of Nilima or the Trust because the author describes it as positive phenomena. Furthermore the author keeps the president i.e. Nilima alive until he gets a new outsider for the position of president. Towards the end, he indicates that Piya who has already become active socially by mobilizing funds from abroad in the name of Fokir who dies while saving her life, is ready to take the role of presiding this organization.

Nilima's Badabon Trust claims to have helped the poor women from Sundarbans in establishing small business so that they can become independent economically. Here he does not highlight the fact that women from lower strata of life contribute economically to their families either directly or indirectly and NGO can only bring out a change in the nature of their activities. However, the author projects as if the women in these parts were doing nothing up to the time the NGO taught them how to start business, which is not true. The major problem with these people is that land is not fertile; they are not very expert in catching fish as most of them migrated

from plains, collecting honey, wax and other forest products is very risky because forests are full of predators furthermore whatever they collect fetch only a meager sum of money when sold in the outside market. No business by women can make them prosperous until unless people on the island have some purchasing power and outside market is opened for their products and the trust is not working in any of these dimensions. The only big achievement of the Trust is the hospital that provides health services to the people. However if people would have organized politically they might have got even a bigger hospital in this place. The author did not explore this dimension so that NGO's presence can be justified.

The author presents one more short-lived organization mainly constituted of lower caste migrants from Bangladesh who run away from Dandakaranya where the previous governments shifted them. The author through this incident arouses anti-state feelings in the reader by portraying state as an unsympathetic institution when he says "the authorities had removed the refugees to a place called Dandakaranya", where they were "surrounded by security forces and forbidden to leave" (Ghosh, 2004) than in "1978 some of them organized themselves and broke out of the camp. By train and on foot they moved eastward in the hope of settling in the Sundarbans" because that year a Left Front government took charge in West Bengal. The Left Government however showed no sympathy to them and the authorities "declared that Morichjhāpi was a protected forest reserve and they had proved unbending in their determination to evict the settlers. Over a period of about a year there had been a series of confrontations between the settlers and government forces" (Ghosh, 2004). He targets the state and the left without revealing that the attitude of these institutions is actually a reflection of upper caste prejudices against the lower caste rooted in the history of this region.

Upper caste antagonism towards lower castes is evident from the fact that despite forcible eviction of untouchable migrants, and a lot of criticism in political circles Left Front emerged as the most powerful political party in the state. This party had the immense support of middle, upper middle and upper caste voters many of them had sympathy for the untouchable migrants but they were afraid the increased percentage of untouchables may revive Namasudra movement and then they will lose power that they are enjoying. Support of middle class, which was the strongest opinion maker,

was the biggest strength for the Left Front; it means the antagonism of the government had its roots somewhere else, which the writer does not highlight.

Central government appointed committee of Mehta, Pandey, and Visharat, Members of Parliament visit and investigate Marichjhapi prior to the eviction in their report, wrote "By their own efforts they established a viable fishing industry, salt pans, a health center, and schools over the following year" (Mallick, 1999). All this development reported by them seems improbable because these poor people did not have any resources otherwise they could have created this utopia even in Dandkarnaya however it cannot be questioned here. Amitav Ghosh puts this report in the diary of Nirmal who visits the place in the novel and records: "...there had been many additions, many improvements. Saltpans had been created, tube wells had been planted, water had been dammed for the rearing of fish, a bakery had started up, boat-builders had set up workshops, a pottery had been founded as well as an ironsmith's shop; ...All this in the space of a few months! It was an astonishing spectacle — as though an entire civilization had sprouted suddenly in the mud" (Ghosh, 2004).

The novelist violates the principles of probability in narrating the success story of untouchable migrants. The structure of the novel fails to answer many questions for instance—they were not mechanics in Dandkarnaya than how they installed water pumps, from where they got pipes, engine, and mechanics? This development seems incredible because Nilima with all her links and donations she is receiving for around sixty years could not achieve this level of development when the novel closes in 2004 than how the untouchables could achieve it with no resources, no expertise, and a lot of hostility that too in eighties. When the novel's position in neo-colonial set up is taken into account, it becomes clear that strong nation states and pro-people institutions are the biggest obstacles in the path of neo-colonial transnational capitalism. The sudden emergence and destruction of this utopia in the novel acts like a machine that shocks and traumatizes the reader and directs the newly generated feeling of hatred towards any form of government elected by people and then introduces neo-colonial apparatuses as an alternative in a very convincing manner.

To enhance the shocking impact on the reader, which is produced by uprooting of this utopia, the author writes, "It was universally agreed that ... in Morichjhapi had

been planted the seeds of what might become, if not a Dalit nation, then at least a safe haven, a place of true freedom for the country's most oppressed"(Ghosh, 2004). He projects Nirmal as an embodiment of humanism, opposed to party and state. He does not highlight that Nirmal; an upper caste could think so because he is a migrant from East Bengal with no family ties and kids of his own and hence having no fear of Namasudra movement. However, other upper castes deeply rooted in their families and social structures are clearly afraid of anything that can empower Dalits. In the background of this particular situation Nirmal's description of Dalit, settlement has different connotations, especially because when B.R. Ambedkar raised almost a similar demand before the independence of India. This demand created a lot of fuss among the so-called nationalist leaders, who wanted to take power from the British but were unwilling to share it along caste and religious lines. Many of the mainstream leaders called Ambedkar an anti-national leader for this demand. It becomes even more important in case of Bengal because as mentioned above upper caste Hindus were instrumental in the creation of East Bengal, a region dominated by Muslims and Dalits. It is obvious that Upper caste intelligentsia of India is still dogged by this fear; even the writer himself puts these ideas in the mouth of Nirmal, a person with psychological instability, who carries no weight in the social circles. None of the powerful characters has this romantic notion. Even the characters who are full of humanism and want to serve these downtrodden, they want to do so only as rulers either as formal or as informal. When a foreigner like Hamilton or an upper caste like Nilima creates any such thing, the governments headed by British and later on Indian elite respectively tolerates it however, if it is demanded or done by others, lower castes or religious minorities, is not tolerated by the same government. The author does not highlight the role of the composition of the state power structure and blames the state as an apparatus. In this way, the upper caste antagonism towards the lower caste is projected as state's antagonism towards subaltern.

This novel as a machine plugged into postmodern capitalist structures directs frustration towards individuals especially when they are victims of the same neo-colonial capitalist system that provides them employment and saves them from becoming subalterns. In the novel Kanai blames Piya and himself when he

says, "it was people like you...who made a push to protect the wildlife here, without regard for the human costs. And I'm complicit because people like me — Indians of my class, that is — have chosen to hide these costs, basically in order to curry favor with their Western patrons" (Ghosh, 2004). Through this dialogue, the responsibility for all this mess transfers from system to individuals. Piya is not at fault because she is part of a neocolonial system that provides her money and work and will buy and use the information gathered by her for its own benefit. This apparatus has self-generated wisdom of choosing its components i.e. intellectuals like Piya in the novel and Amitav Ghosh outside the novel. Sympathies and sensibilities of both Piya and the writer are structured by their location in these machines and presence of all these machines in their personalities.

The working of capitalist neo-colonial machinery is very prominent in the creation of the character of Fokir. At one level, the structure of the novel indicates that he is an environmentalist, or a kind of cetologist who has a vast knowledge of aquatic mammals. Here the neo-colonialist machinery works in two ways first; it pays scientists like Piya so that the knowledge gathered by them can be used to exploit the third world resources including human resources, secondly it pushes the native populations on the margins by recoding the knowledge gathered from them in English and selling it through capitalist educational institutions. These institutions employ people like Piya for whom gathering knowledge is a kind of passion. Her educational tours funded by capitalism prove that this machine is not confined to one nation and in all cases, it exploits the poor people. As an individual, she is innocent in her passion for fishes but capitalism makes a profession out of her passion. The capitalist machine prefers rootless people therefore; it denies the same facility to Fokir, who unlike Piya is rooted in his place.

Amitav Ghosh as a complicit part of capitalism takes the discussion away from its real and dangerous aspect that does not want to pay subaltern for their services and depicts Fokir as a kind of spiritual person disinterested in money. Both Piya and Fokir are scientists but the author spiritualizes and mystifies the character of Fokir and conforms it to Indological constructions of Indians. Character of Fokir has vast potential and he could be represented as a cetologist having vast knowledge of sea life then it would have catered to the needs of subaltern, as is the case with *Robison Crusoe*. Amitav Ghosh's

depiction of Fokir caters to the aesthetic needs of cosmopolitan reader who will not like to see a scientist with empirical knowledge emerge from a community marginalized socially, economically and politically. If the writer has made Fokir a kind of rational and empirical person, it would have rendered it a weak novel in the eyes of dominant intellectual mafia to which the writer himself belongs. Here a conscious reader can predict how the big publishing houses will receive this novel if Fokir is presented as a person with scientific temperament, who uses the empirical knowledge gathered by him for monetary gain as done by Piya and many other scientists. There is an opportunity before Fokir, for making money out of the knowledge he has about flora and fauna of this region by selling this knowledge to the tourists and scientists like Piya who visit this region. Despite the fact that he is depicted as a poor man in dire need of money, the writer has put all disinterest for money in his character, which is in accordance with the orientalist notion of Indians and pushes them further on the margins.

The characters in this novel do not act on their own i.e. according to the principals of probability. For instance the migrant untouchables call Sundarbans their home but most of them belong to the interior parts of Bangladesh and are not adapt to life on water there is only one person Fokir's mother who was born in this part and lived here for a longer part of her life. As for others, they migrated from interior Bangladesh and were send to Dandkarnaya by Indian government and were living there for last 20 years or so. Even if they were from the coastal regions, originally except the older ones no one else can be longing for that. All the kids who migrated with them might have forgotten everything about coastal life; secondly, the kids born in new places cannot be expected to be familiar with coastal life because the life in Dandkarnaya is very different. Author's depiction of their immediate success in two months' time has a neo-colonial purpose.

Another important aspect of the novel is representation of Indian characters and society in confirmation with the Orientalism, which was the "distillation of essential ideas about the Orient—its sensuality, its tendency to despotism, its aberrant mentality, its habits of inaccuracy, its backwardness" (Said, 1979). Amitav Ghosh depicts all subaltern characters as superstitious and unscientific in temperament despite the fact that people living close to nature are bound to interact with

nature and use many principles of natural science for their survival. People in Sundar bans region are pitted against hostile nature in this situation some of them who have scientific temperament might try to conquer nature with their inventiveness. They may think of developing storm proof houses or ways to save themselves from Tigers and crocodiles, however the author does not use his imagination in this dimension because the capitalist neo-colonial social structure does not want to see them as self-reliant. Amitav Ghosh generalizes all of them as superstitious even in 2004; on the other hand, Defoe portrayed his hero Robinson Crusoe as a man with scientific temperament about three hundred years ago in 1719. Robinson Crusoe of Defoe is neither a highly educated person nor a technician of any kind but is shown inventing and developing a utopia on a deserted island singlehandedly but here the author presents people pitted in similar situation having only mythical mindset. This difference is due to different location of both writers: Defoe was catering to the needs of colonial capitalism that wanted to convert unscientific Europeans into scientific ones so that they can rule over the world. On the other hand, Amitav Ghosh is catering to the needs of neo-colonialism that wants to see subaltern as irrational and unscientific so that it can justify its rule over them that manifests in the number of area opened for multinational companies in the name of development in the former colonies.

There is no doubt that a significant proportion of rural population is superstitious but here again the capitalist machine of colonial powers played a very important role. The British colonialism destroyed the scientific temperament of Indian masses very systematically. At one level, the colonial authorities destroyed the Indian industry by cutting down the flow of money. At another level, they promoted all the projects related to mythology they translated and canonized many texts that were used to spread superstitious temperament among Indians. Macaulay in his Minute on Indian education indicates how a lot of money was invested in orientalist project when he says, "We are to teach false history, false astronomy, false medicine, because we find them in company with false religion"(Macaulay, 2005). If this statement of Macaulay is seen against the background of Warren Hastings' Orientalist project, it becomes clear that first, the British colonialism empowered the superstitious and unscientific elements and then they criticized whole of the Indian society for

unscientific temperament. Like the orientalists who could see only irrationality and superstition because they only wanted to see this aspect, Amitav Ghosh also depicts only superstitious nature of people. This attitude of the author resembles the European attitude of colonial period that treated "Oriental" as bin "into which all the authoritative, anonymous, and traditional Western attitudes to the East were dumped unthinkingly." Under the pressure of such hegemonic narrative traditions that were supported by all forms of social forces from economic, literary, political to military "one could nevertheless tell of experiences with or in the Orient that had little to do with the generally serviceable bin" (Said, 1979). The author as a complicit machine of neo-colonialism digs deep and searches for myths to confirm Western depiction of India that still sells readily in the metropolitan market. If he really wants to voice and empower the subaltern then first he might have presented how the colonial history and politics restructured the subaltern, orientalized the orient by replacing science with myth and history with religion and secondly he might have highlighted how some of the people have scientific temperament and how they make progress with some help.

One more aspect of this novel's complicity with orientalist discourse is that it freezes level of consciousness of natives in a kind of vacuum, even the presence of *Sir Daniel Hamilton High School*, which was setup in 1938 by Hamilton is not shown to bring out any change in the life of this region. To highlight the backwardness of the place the author nowhere gives details of the school's success such as number of students that have already passed out from the school, how many of them entered university education what happened to them after they passed out from here, how many of them got good jobs based on their education. Nirmal teaches in the village school until his retirement but his influence on the village is not taken into account by the novelist rather he describes him as a mystic despite the fact that education more than anything else has the power to transform any society and it could have done so even with the society of this place.

#### **CONCLUSION**

The novel supports neo-colonialism in a very subtle manner by highlighting the achievements of transnational capital and by invalidating the state apparatus. Without looking for potential to grow; the author has portrayed the natives as perpetual subaltern

for the enjoyment of metropolitan reader. This artistic takeover positions the metropolitan readers and writers as authority who pushes masses on margins through their economic policies and then deprives them of their right of self-representation by announcing, "No need to hear your voice when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself. No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own. Re-writing you I write myself anew. I am still author, authority. I am still colonizer the speaking subject and you are now at the center of my talk" (Hooks, 1990).

Therefore, the artistic representation caters to the needs of metropolitan reader and writer more than the needs of subaltern. Due to this location, subaltern representation and studies have assumed industrial proportions and acts like a big capitalist machine with neocolonial agenda.

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