

# *Re-Thinking Environment:*

Literature, Ethics and Praxis

Editor: Dr Shruti Das



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## Bonbibi and Cetology: The Confluence of the Mythic and the Scientific in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*

Maitrayee Misra

Amitav Ghosh's novel *The Hungry Tide* (2004), published quite coincidentally in the year of the Tsunami (26 December, 2004) in the Indian Ocean, is primarily set in the Sundarbans – the archipelago in the Ganges delta in the southernmost part of West Bengal. The abundance of 'Heriteria Minor' or Sundari trees has made this region literally the "beautiful forest" – the Sundarbans which holds the world's largest mangrove forest with a variety of flora and fauna. [Also known as the 'Bhatirdesh', this terrain has a 'mutating' and 'unpredictable' (HT 7) tidal eco-system that controls the biosphere as well as the life and cultural identity of the people living in that area. In this novel, Ghosh tells his readers that apart from the "kadaarbada – mud and mangrove" (HT 51) and the predators inhabiting the region, the cult of Bonbibi – the forest Goddess, shapes the religio-cultural life and the consciousness of the subaltern peasants of Sundarbans (for example, Fokir, Horen etc.). Alongside the introduction of this myth of Bonbibi, Ghosh craftily alloys the issue of modern science of cetology (study of the dolphins) through the fictional character of Piya (Piyali Roy), who manifests the current trends of research in