



## **JUNGLE NAMA: A TALE URGING A BALANCE BETWEEN NEEDS AND WANTS LEADING TO ECOLOGICAL BALANCE**

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### **Abstract**

*Amitav Ghosh's Jungle Nama – a retelling of a myth implicates a profound and intricate relationship between nature, human needs and ecological crisis. It messages a balance between human needs and existence of earth's ecology through the myth of Bon Bibi showing her as a protector of forest. Through vivid descriptions and evocative imagery, Ghosh crafts a compelling portrait of the interconnectedness of all life forms and the pressing need to restore harmony with our environment.*

*Ghosh's The Sundarbans trilogy, comprising "The Hungry Tide," "Jungle Nama," and "Gun Island," stands out as the pinnacle of his work, combining his personal voice with a factual and precise depiction of the mangrove forest. An eco-aesthetical perspective allows us to marvel at the profound beauty and resilience of nature while also acknowledging the destructive forces that threaten its existence. Within the narrative, Ghosh skilfully interlaces stories of loss, displacement, and ecological devastation, serving as a poignant reminder of the profound impact of human actions on the natural world.*

*In this era of fast growing development Jungle Nama becomes more relevant because of its urge of balancing between human needs and existence of nature. Exploitation of earth's properties by humans is leading to many planetary crisis global warming, climate change earth's ecological disbalance extinction of many species etc. So now it is very necessary for humans to get aware of nature's importance for their existence and to learn how to have a balance between their needs and nature's existence. Through the narratives of Jungle Nama Amitav Ghosh has become successful to convey the message of pertaining balance between human needs and existence of nature. Furthermore, "Jungle Nama" prompts us to question prevailing paradigms of progress and development, which often prioritize short-term gains over long-term sustainability. Through poetic language and introspective narratives, he invites us to contemplate our responsibilities as custodians of the Earth and reconsider our relationship with the natural world.*

### **Introduction**

Amitav Ghosh is known for his commitment to addressing environmental and ecological issues in his works. One of the central ecological concerns highlighted in "Jungle Nama" is the impact of human actions on the natural world. Ghosh's retelling emphasizes the consequences of these actions on the ecosystems and wildlife of the mythical landscape. Ghosh often weaves themes of climate change, deforestation, and the exploitation of natural resources into his works, and it's likely that "Jungle Nama" incorporates these themes to some extent, even in the context of a retelling of an ancient myth. Through his narrative, Ghosh encourages readers to reflect on the contemporary ecological challenges facing the world and the need for responsible stewardship of the environment.

Ghosh's "Jungle Nama," published in 2021 by HarperCollins India, is a return to poetry, offering a poetic retelling of the central folk narrative of The Sundarbans, the Bon Bibi Johuranama. This



narrative has two late 19th-century versions, one by Munshi Muhammad Khatir and the other by Abdur Rahim Sahib. "Jungle Nama" is intertextually connected to the 17th-century "Raymangal" by Krishnaram, which introduces the tiger god Dokkhin Rai, who is eventually reconciled with Gazi Khan and Gazi Kalu. This reconciliation leads to an agreement to share human homage. This syncretism and interfaith solidarity, amidst the backdrop of clashing fundamentalisms, are particularly notable within the context of the inhospitable environment of the Sundarbans. Ghosh's "Jungle Nama" represents his robust return to poetry and highlights the unique cultural and religious aspects of the The Sundarbans and convey the message of balance between human needs and nature through its retelling of the myth - Bon Bibi Johuranama.

Amitav Ghosh's most of literary works consistently reflect his deep concern for the environment. He highlights that the ecological imbalances and crises faced by humanity today are largely a result of human actions, as people have disrupted the delicate balance of the Earth's land, water, and air. This disruption has led to a range of alarming consequences, including the shrinking of the Arctic, mass displacements of people and animals, extreme weather events like abrupt cold spells and intense heat waves, and an increasing frequency of climate change-related effects. In his exploration of environmental issues, Ghosh brings attention to the often unnoticed world of plants. He reveals that plants have their own universe, characterized by intricate behavioural and emotional patterns that were previously unrecognized by humans. Deforestation, in particular, has played a significant role in causing climate change. The removal of forests has contributed to problems such as flooding, the release of more greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, and a host of environmental challenges that threaten the planet's well-being.

"Ghosh's 'Jungle Nama' begins with a captivating tale that paints the deep mangrove forest as the dominion of a menacing demon king, Dokkhin Rai, who once terrorized the wilderness and preyed upon innocent villagers by taking on the guise of a tiger. Hearing the desperate pleas of the frightened villagers, the legendary figures Bon Bibi and her warrior brother, Shah Jongoli, embark on a journey from distant Arabia to rescue the people from the horrors of Dokkhin Rai. In an epic showdown, they defeat their formidable adversary and establish strict boundaries for his forest domain. Following this heroic legend, the locals of the Sundarbans, including woodcutters, honey collectors, and fishermen, invoke the blessings of Bon Bibi for protection before venturing into the forests.

In "Jungle Nama," Amitav Ghosh rekindles his reverence for the natural world as a wellspring of artistic inspiration. This work is Ghosh's poetic rendition of the medieval Bengali legend centered on the Forest Goddess of the The Sundarbans, Bon Bibi. The myth of Bon Bibi is deeply ingrained in the folklore of the The Sundarbans' villages and holds a special place in the hearts of the local populace. According to the legend, Bon Bibi is the daughter of a sultan who becomes lost in the impenetrable wilderness of the The Sundarbans. Raised by the animals of the forest, she learns to communicate with them. As she matures, she assumes the role of protector of the forest and its inhabitants, particularly the humans who venture into the forest to gather honey, fish, and wood. Bon Bibi is revered as the 'Lady of the Forest' and is regarded as a guardian and guide for those who venture into the woods.

The name 'Bon Bibi' is a linguistic amalgamation, bridging two distinct regions: 'Bon' in Bengali signifies 'forest,' while 'bibi,' rooted in Urdu, translates to 'queen.' This name aptly encapsulates the duality of the The Sundarbans' identity, where land and water, forest and rivers, and linguistic and



religious influences converge. Notably, it also reflects the confluence of the Hindu and Islamic faiths, as both religious communities in the The Sundarbans venerate Bon Bibi with a shared belief in her ability to ensure survival and livelihood in the face of the region's challenging natural environment.

The aesthetic elements in "Jungle Nama" are unparalleled. The sheer beauty of nature is celebrated as one of the most enchanting aspects of the world. At its core, "Jungle Nama" narrates the tale of a young and melancholic lad named Dukhey, whose name reflects his disposition. Dukhey is offered the opportunity to amass a fortune in a single night, courtesy of his brothers, within the forbidden territory of a man-eating tiger-infested forest. The narrative is deeply intertwined with the people's history of salvation by the forest goddess, Bon Bibi, whose benevolence has ensured their survival in the face of the formidable forces of nature.

Additionally, 'Jungle Nama' weaves the story of a greedy merchant named Dhona, a poor boy named Dukhey, and Dukhey's mother. Consumed by his insatiable desire for wealth, Dhona sets his sights on exploring the enigmatic mangrove jungles in search of legendary treasure. Accompanied by a fleet of seven ships arranged by his brother, Mona, who declines to join him on this perilous journey, Dhona embarks on an expedition to the southern jungle, which is the realm of Dokkhin Rai. The narrative also delves into the tale of the impoverished Dukhey, who is persuaded to accompany his affluent uncle on the quest for valuable resources, including wax, honey, and wood. As the story unfolds, it explores the intricate relationships between these characters and their adventures within the mystifying and unpredictable wilderness of the The Sundarbans."

Dhona, whose name means "the Rich One," is driven by greed and the desire for more wealth. He intends to lead a fleet of seven ships into the forest to exploit its resources. However, his brother Mona, whose name means "heart," refuses to accompany him on this expedition. With the crew short of one member, Dhona persuades a poor relative named Dukhey, whose name means "the Sad-Lad," to join the expedition. Dukhey is the only child of a widow, and he agrees to sign up. Unfortunately, they enter the realm of Dokkhin Rai without performing the necessary propitiatory rites, leaving them at the mercy of this powerful forest deity. As they journey through Dokkhin Rai's domain, they experience surreal and mystical encounters. Eventually, Dhona strikes a deal with the tiger god: in exchange for shiploads of valuable wax, he agrees to leave Dukhey behind to be devoured by Dokkhin Rai.

In a critical moment, Dukhey recalls his mother's advice and appeals to Bon Bibi using the Johurnama, a magical verse form. This plea for help, with its meter and rhyme, carries magical power. Bon Bibi and her brother, Shah Jongoli, intervene and once again humble Dokkhin Rai, compelling him to release Dukhey and provide Dhona with immense riches. Dukhey returns home to find his mother in deep grief. He uses the magical verse form to call her, reviving her, and their joyful reunion is followed by Dukhey's happy wedding.

Ghosh alters the roles of Dokkhin Rai's mother, Narayani, and Gazi Kalu to provide a more focused narrative. In the afterword, Ghosh emphasizes the significance of this tale in the context of climate change, suggesting that Bon Bibi's wisdom and teachings, which emphasize a harmonious coexistence with nature, hold a timeless message that humanity should pay attention to. The story underscores the importance of respecting the natural world and living in harmony with it, especially in an era marked by ecological challenges.



In a fine conceit, the discipline of verse comes to represent the sense of proportion that conduces to contentment; as Bon Bibi lectures Dokkhin Rai:

Count your syllables, it'll help rein your appetites in,  
the yoke of meter will give you discipline.  
It's the chaos in your mind that unbridles your desires,  
by measuring your thoughts you'll learn to quench those fires.

In the The Sundarbans region of Bengal, there is a rich folklore and mythology centered around Bon Bibi and Shah Jongoli, who are revered as the defenders of the forest and its inhabitants. They play a crucial role in the mythology of the The Sundarbans, and their stories are often invoked to underscore the importance of living in harmony with nature and respecting the forest. Bon Bibi and Shah Jongoli are twins born to the second wife of a Meccan. Due to the influence of the childless first wife, they are abandoned in the The Sundarbans, a dense forest in the Bengal region, as part of a divine plan. In this forest, they are tasked with a sacred mission. The narrative begins with Bon Bibi and Shah Jongoli's arrival in the The Sundarbans, where they face a challenge from Dokkhin Rai, who is known as the King of the South. The twins successfully overcome Dokkhin Rai and establish themselves as the new guardians of the forest. They set clear boundaries and regulations for the forest, ensuring the safety of those who rely on it for their livelihood. As a result, the people who venture into the forest for activities like woodcutting, honey collection, and fishing, seek the blessings and protection of Bon Bibi before entering. This tradition highlights the importance of Bon Bibi and Shah Jongoli as the defenders of the

### **The Sundarbans, safeguarding both the human inhabitants and the natural world within the forest.**

- **Bon Bibi:** Bon Bibi is often depicted as the protector of the The Sundarbans and its people. She is considered a deity or a spiritual guardian who looks after the well-being of those who venture into the forest. She is particularly associated with safeguarding people from the dangers posed by the wild animals of the region, particularly the man-eating tigers.
- **Shah Jongoli:** Shah Jongoli is Bon Bibi's brother in the folklore, and he also plays a protective role in the The Sundarbans. Like his sister, he is seen as a guardian figure. He is often associated with the well-being of fishermen and their safety at sea.
- **Defenders of the Forest:** Bon Bibi and Shah Jongoli are revered for their ability to maintain a balance in the The Sundarbans. They are believed to keep the forest and its creatures in harmony, protecting both humans and animals from harm. People often pray to them and make offerings before entering the forest or embarking on fishing expeditions.
- **Moral Lessons:** Beyond their roles as protectors, the stories of Bon Bibi and Shah Jongoli also convey important moral and ecological lessons. They emphasize the idea that humans should respect and coexist with the natural world, rather than exploiting it for their own gain. These stories serve as a cultural reminder of the need for sustainable practices and the importance of living in harmony with the environment.

The folklore of Bon Bibi and Shah Jongoli highlights the deep connection between the people of the The Sundarbans and their natural surroundings. It reflects the understanding that the forest is not just a resource to be exploited but a complex ecosystem that must be preserved and respected. These stories are a part of the cultural fabric of the region and continue to influence the way people interact with their environment in the The Sundarbans. Bon Bibi propagates a perennial philosophy that humankind would do well to heed:



All you need do, is be content with what you've got;  
to be always craving more, is a demon's lot.  
world of endless appetite is a world possessed,  
is what your munshi's learned, by way of this quest .

Ghosh underscores the impact of extreme warming, which has led to devastating wildfires in various regions of the world, resulting in the destruction of thousands of hectares of land. Greenland has experienced rainfall for the first time, pointing to the profound changes occurring in the Earth's climate. Additionally, many islands in the The Sundarbans, a critical mangrove forest area, are rapidly sinking due to the rising sea level and the increased occurrence of extreme weather events like cyclones and storms. Throughout his work, Ghosh has consistently voiced his concern about the eroding ecosystem of the The Sundarbans mangrove forest and its potential consequences for both the environment and humanity. His writings serve as a compelling call to action, emphasizing the urgent need for addressing environmental challenges and recognizing the profound interconnectedness of the natural world.

"Jungle Nama" is a retelling of an ancient Bengali saga set in the The Sundarbans, where the Ganga and Brahmaputra Rivers merge and flow through dense forests into the Bay of Bengal. The story begins with the forest under the dominance of Dokkhin Rai, a fierce tiger avatar who terrorizes and preys on humans, taking whatever he pleases. This leads to a state of constant fear and suffering for all the forest's inhabitants. As Dokkhin Rai's rule instills fear and despair, the forest's inhabitant turn to prayers, seeking relief and protection from his tyranny. These desperate prayers reach the ears of the powerful goddess, Bon Bibi. Filled with compassion, Bon Bibi, along with her brother Shah Jongoli, makes their way into the forest. Bon Bibi and Shah Jongoli confront Dokkhin Rai, ultimately subduing him and ending his reign of terror. They confine him within a specific boundary, thus restoring a sense of safety and harmony to the once-dreaded forest. Bon Bibi and Shah Jongoli's arrival and their actions symbolize the triumph of compassion and protection over fear and oppression in the The Sundarbans :

They drew a line, to mark a just separation,  
between the forest, and the realm of human...  
Every creature had a place, every want was met,  
all needs were balance, like the lines of a couplet.

## Conclusion

Thus through the myth we perceive that human need should not exceed to the limit where it leads to exploitation and destruction as the same case is with the today's world where human's excessive needs lead to earth's exploitation and destruction. Dhona's greed leads to the exploitation of natural resources have relevance in today's world. And Bon Bibi's lesson to Dhona conveys the world the message of balancing between needs and nature that leads to co existence of humans and non human.

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



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