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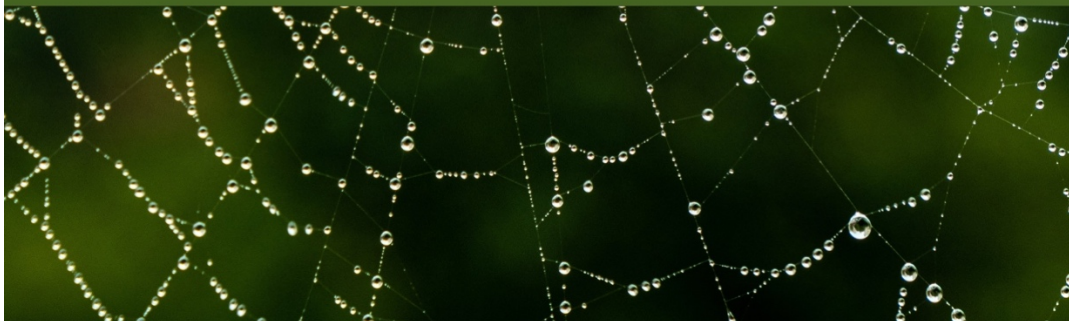
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Of Devouring Waters and Unforgiving Lands: An Analysis of Premonition Ecology in two Wetland Narratives from West Bengal

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Abstract

Biren Sasmal's *Jolkor (The Water Tax)* (2019) and Dhrubajyoti Ghosh's *The Trash Diggers* (2017) are anthropocene narratives that vividly detail the degradation of aqua-littoral wetland ecosystems of the Sundarbans and East Calcutta wetlands in West Bengal, India. Sasmal's fiction written in Bengali and Ghosh's anglophone nonfiction forcefully engage with the inequalities of speciesism and the implications of urban indifference regarding the 'ecosystem people' inhabiting these ecologically sensitive threshold regions. This paper will articulate the pervading sense of 'ecopremonition', a term we have coined to describe the anticipatory fear of ecological collapse caused by rapid and unpredictable changes in the geomorphology of places like Sundarbans and East Calcutta. This paper expands the framework of fearism proposed by Subba in his work, *Philosophy of Fearism* where he defines fear as the "director of life and civilization" (Subba 11) by proposing the concept of ecopremonition that calls for a heightened engagement with environmental degradation in new ways that use fear as a proactive tool to promote greater earth stewardship and sustainability.

Keywords: Ecopremonition, fearism, geomorphology

Literary narratives that offer insights into the habitat destruction and biodiversity of littoral ecosystems play a vital role in understanding anthropogenic transformations that are responsible for endangering these global habitats. These liminal water-landscapes that, "are hybrid and multivalent...a continuum between terra and aqua" (Howarth 520) are essential to the health of the planet because of their capacity to regulate water cycles, aid carbon cycles and moderate climate change. The threat faced by littoral ecosystems is vital to the understanding of the transformation and degradation of wetlands that are global habitats. Wetlands serve as biodiversity markers and are essential for ensuring the survival of mangrove forests and other species that thrive in these coastal habitats. This paper analyses two wetland ecosystem narratives from the Southern districts of West Bengal, India, that map the denigration of natural wetlands into manufactured anthropocene-scapes ravaged by excessive human 'terrigoing' (Pak 284) and encroachment. Biren Sasmal's novel, *Jolkor (The Water Tax)* (2019), written in Bengali and Dhrubajyoti Ghosh's non-fictional narrative, *The Trash Diggers* (2017) are representative works of specific endangered ecosystems in West Bengal. These narratives eloquently comment on the repression of the 'ecological unconscious' by the city dwellers who live in proximity to the wetlands and yet choose to ignore the dire environmental impacts on these places.

This paper attempts to map the denigration of natural wetlands through contemporary regional narratives that highlight the multiple ways in which ecosystem damage leads to disequilibrium in human lives and livelihoods. These narratives depict how the encroachment of urbanisation and development-related activities like extensive mining, saltwater aquaculture and untreated sewage disposal play a crucial role in the collapse of ecological balance and slow decay of the lives of people whose material realities are inextricably intertwined with these fragile environments. This paper defines *ecopremonition* as a corollary of ecofear, a term we have coined to describe the task of environmental augury or prophecy.

Ecopremonition can be understood as foreboding or apprehension of place/life threatening conditions that disrupt the harmony of ecosystems. Rooted in affective ties to the bioregion, it involves the understanding of the socio-geographical and climatic (of people, landscape and climate) situations of a particular region and its people who subconsciously feel an uncanny and compelling sense of fear. The fear of ecocatastrophe is triggered by sudden, abrupt environmental changes that reconfigure the spatio-material and temporal relationships between humans and their environment. In this sense ecopremonition gestures at the tipping point of gradual, ongoing environmental damage and also at human fear of nature and natural catastrophes that have their origin in an excess bred from mindless cornucopianism. These novels do not use ecopremonition as an apocalyptic tool to magnify the fear and panic caused by environmental trauma. On the contrary, ecopremonition has a distinct advocacy function which forces the characters to look both inwards as well as outwards to identify the ‘dark ecology’ (Morton 5) and detritus of their habitats.

The paper will contextualize the concept of ecofear in these narratives by defining the idea of ecopremonition regarding specific places like Sundarbans and the urban wastelands of Dhapa adjoining the east Calcutta Wetlands and how it is intuited in the everyday lives of people who witness the gradual decay and transformation of these life-places. It will also articulate how ecopremonition mediates the pervading pessimism and apprehension of fear by focusing on the conditions of social coherence and coordination with respect to specific environments. It reinforces the idea that the fear that portrays the possibilities of human extinction from hostile environmental conditions should also act as a constructive catalyst that helps create and cultivate a new paradigm of symbiotic coexistence.

Ecopremonition follows an intense experience of geomorphological affect: “nontechnologically mediated experiences of affective and fearistic energy that causes people to feel with the land” (Arnold 97). Premonitory fear caused by geomorphological affect generates “latent ecological energies” (Arnold 97) triggering “the connective tissues that exist between interdependent webs of human and other than human life form” (Arnold 97). Premonition and solastalgic fear emanating as a result of close contact with distressed ecological scapes are intertwined states of cognition that materialize into dominant forces of influence when they interact with the spatio-temporal realities of fissured earthscapes. Ecopremonition is an initial stage in the process of experiencing ecofear. However, it is not an alternative mode of defining ecofear. It is a transient but continuous experience that is a feature of diseased environments and one of the different manifestations of fear in which individuals are instilled with an uncanny sense of foreboding about an impending ecocatastrophe that can severely affect their existence.

Yi-Fu Tuan's influential work, *Landscapes of Fear* (2013) which explores specific places ravaged by severe ecological conditions like droughts, floods and cyclones that devastate the lives and livelihoods of the inhabitants hints at ecopremonition. It highlights various instances of supernatural visions by soothsayers and witches who predict ecocatastrophes and interpret them as agents of nature's vengeance meted out as fitting punishments for human hubris. For the inhabitants of Sundarbans and Dhapa, the fear of their environment stems from different sources. The deltaic coastlines of Sundarbans are battered by the relentless seawater that encroaches the land and establishes new boundaries whereas in the east Calcutta wetlands adjoining Dhapa, the uncontrolled disposal of garbage contaminates the soil, water and air. Both the places face an ecosystem decline due to large human ecological footprints and uncontrolled acts of "environmental despoliation" (Fisher 16). Premonition functions as a pervasive element which heightens the existential crisis of the people before nature's wrath. This paper will analyse how fear, predicted by premonitory consciousness, acts as an interlocutor in the understanding of the ecological reality which is advertently linked to human actions.

In *Jolkor*, ecopremonition is mediated through the complex liminal figure of Bishu 'pagol' (Bishu, the mad man) whose visionary bardic fervour is the source of many grim forebodings about the fate of the land. Bishu's apocalyptic outpouring is not without reason since the salt-saturated landscape of the Sundarbans, induced by the emerging 'bheri' culture (salt water aquaculture for tiger prawn cultivation), has lost its fertility and the capacity to resist erosion. The other threat is the urban waste-water discharge from Kolkata that has accumulated in the marshlands thereby contaminating and destroying the mangrove roots that aerially spread over an extensive region around the delta. Bishu predicts a terrible catastrophe that will decimate the Sundarbans archipelago and erase it from the face of the Earth unless humans cultivate an ecological awareness and take steps to stop the 'slow violence' (Nixon 6) meted out to these biologically diverse waterlands.

Sasmal's narrative progresses with intermittent spaces where Bishu's character oscillates between premonition and reality. Bishu's imagination is fundamentally premonitory as his experiences of the delta's ecosystemic condition in reality projects an apocalyptic future of deluge and destruction. *Jolkor* interprets how the recent developmental projects in Sundarbans are constantly focusing on raising the economic standards of its people and thereby mindfully deviating from the issue of preserving the balance of this fragile deltaic ecosystem. It represents the consciousness of the island dwellers who are in dire need of financial stability and are equally worried about the conservation of the delta. The novel explains how the new industrial endeavours aided by urban and corporate investments is gradually affecting the geomorphology of the place. There is a conscious but subdued element of fear for one's surrounding environmental collapse in this narrative that is surpassed by the prevailing strides of industrialisation and development. The sense of fear is reinforced by Bishu's premonitory monologues that reveal the humans as the primary agents who are facilitating the collapse of the delta. Deforestation of mangroves and sand draining enterprises are weakening the natural defence barriers of the delta from frequent cyclones. The ecofear in Sasmal's novel cannot be identified as an exclusive fear of hostile environmental conditions. It is also a fear of the human element that is involved in the creation of circumstances where nature is impeded from defending what it chooses to.

Ecofear in *The Trash Diggers* is embodied and metastasized in the extensive wastelands of Dhapa, an urban waste disposal land at the margins of Kolkata, that severely affect the East Kolkata wetlands that was created in 1879 with the objective of revisioning solid waste management practices. Central to this garbage scape are the ‘trash diggers’ or the waste pickers who stand testimony to the manufactured landscape shaped by garbage that is produced in and transported from Kolkata. This manufactured wasteland of Dhapa offers testimony to Timothy Morton’s idea of ‘dark ecology’ (Morton 5) where the garbage mountains are enmeshed within the memory of the trash pickers by ‘perpetually interconnecting’ (Alaimo 476) with the corporeal dimensions of their reality which in turn generates a pervading sense of ‘ecophobia’ (Estok 2). Ecopremonition comes naturally to the waste pickers whose lives are submerged in the landscape of trash. Their livelihood battles are characterised by the explicit fear about their health and the deterioration of the adjoining wetlands.

“The denizens of this waste scape are inheritors of an ecology that is subjected to many mutations...”

The Dhapa wasteland is a typical example of a landscape that has undergone relentless repetitive modifications from a self-sustaining wetland-community based on recycling biodegradable solid waste to a mountain of stench and trash. The degradation of the East Calcutta Wetlands in the course of the last century has a discernible effect on the population who reside in the adjoining areas of Dhapa. The uncontrolled garbage disposal has transformed the soil into a garbage substrate filled with chipped bricks, stones, glass pieces, nails and plastics. There are instances where trash diggers are sucked into the garbage gyres and their corpses are discovered after days. The transformation of this wetland ecosystem into a wasteland ecosystem evidently indicates the immediate effects of urbanization in Kolkata that encroaches on specific natural landscapes that had been once looked after by sensible and insightful people striving to maintain the ecological balance and biodiversity at the margins of the city. Ghosh’s depiction of the trash diggers negotiating in multiple ways with their bounded universe of trash powerfully resonates with the idea of ‘storied matter’ advanced by Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann in their work, *Material Ecocriticism* (2014). Hence the story of trash is “matter’s “narrative” power of creating configurations of meanings and substances, which enter with human lives into a field of co-emerging interactions. [M]atter itself becomes a text where dynamics of “‘diffuse’ agency and non-linear causality are inscribed and produced” (Cohen 10).

Garbage as matter in the east Calcutta wetlands with its attendant meanings of visual and geomorphological transformation is constantly juxtaposed with the idealism that informed the preservation policies about the place in the past. The centrality of waste subsumes the narrative to such an extent that it blots out former memories of the landscape and acquires the status of a permanent reality that constantly impinges on the spatio-cognitive understanding of the waste pickers and evokes fear. *The Trash Diggers*, therefore, becomes a cautionary tale that predicts that these large mountains of garbage that will materialise into ‘dark artefacts’ (Hudson 82), that symbolise a periodic gesture of the anthropocene and also leave behind a legacy for the future earth community to study the material, spatial and temporal relations between the environment and humans. The trash diggers of Dhapa live in fear of their fellow humans who lack the imagination to enter into the squalid, stench-filled lives of the people who recycle, live and survive

in the wastes that they never created. The denizens of this waste scape are inheritors of an ecology that is subjected to many mutations and dark metamorphoses in which the things we take for granted like the visibility of soil, grass and a vista leading to the horizon are clearly absent.

“Beware! Can’t you hear something coming?”: Ecofear in Biren Sasmal’s *Jolkor*

Biren Sasmal’s *Jolkor* focuses on the slow death of the wetlands amidst the constant flux that the Sundarban islands are subjected to. In fact the element of fear in this novel is closely linked with the degenerate conditions of the delta’s ecology that stand in sharp contrast to the newfound financial prosperities of the island dwellers. These two opposing drives, namely the devolution of the ecocentric and the evolution of the anthropocentric, rupture the societal fabric of coexistence and shared wellbeing. Nicole M. Merola lists a whole spectrum of Anthropocene affects, of which fear is a major emotion, that characterise contemporary cultural forms.

The “avowal of the eco-unpleasant” (Merola 32) is therefore an important Anthropocene maker and these fear-based emotions create a ‘solastalgia’ (Richards 266), an affective emotional response of “free floating-mobile energy” (Arnold 97), an existential lament for irreparable loss when faced with attenuated environmental conditions. In these narratives it becomes an inherent characteristic in the collective consciousness of the deltaic population. The expansion of industrial activities erodes the delta’s soil and weakens the coastline thereby continuously exposing the land to the constant battering of the sea waters. There is a serious visual repercussion that is linked to the image of the sea moving closer to the interiors of the island. Surrounding atolls and deltaic lowlands frequently vanish due to minor cyclones that reinforce the sense of Sundarbans’ total submergence in the near future. It is in this context that a premonitory consciousness emerges in the figure of Bishu, a soothsayer who is tormented by the environmental exploitation in Sundarbans. Bishu’s incoherent ramblings comprise of truths and realities incomprehensible to the everyday human preoccupied with quotidian life,

... you are all a bunch of ingrates! Do you protect your Mother? ... All you do is ask. Give! Give! Sometimes you need to give back. How many of you have entered into the Sundarbans forest? What have you seen? ‘Bonbibi’ is suffocating...she cannot breathe. Ministers, bureaucrats and the ignorant rich intoxicated with greed are transgressing her holy sanctum. She is dying....Can’t you see? Can’t you choose to see? (Sasmal 66)

Bishu predicts an apocalyptic future of a natural catastrophe in which the delta will be deluged beyond recovery. Bishu is the spokesperson for the suffocating deltaic wetland of Sundarbans of which he is an organic extension. He stands at that crucial juncture in the environmental history of the archipelago where his grim auguries about the transformation of Sundarbans’ wetland ecosystem into a wasteland is more a material reality than a figment of a diseased imagination. The novel’s point of entry into the spreading environmental degradation of the Sundarbans is through the ‘bheri’ culture (commercial prawn aquaculture) practised across the islands of Sundarbans as a new profit making initiative. In order to meet the demands of a burgeoning international market extensive land areas used for agriculture were being converted into ‘bheris’ through a process wherein the salt water from the bay was channelled through pipelines into fertile lands turning them into breeding grounds for tiger prawn eggs. This renders

the once-fertile land unfit for agriculture and the image of lush rice fields is violently replaced by a beehive of emerging brickfields and quarries that dot the landscape of the archipelago with alarming intensity.

A brief fact file about the Sundarban's fragile ecosystem reveals, among other things an alarming rise in human population and a rapid disappearance of large areas of agricultural land. The increased levels of salinity in the topsoil, infiltration of salt water into fresh water ponds and a visibly weakening soil profile are the key factors that add to the inability of the Sundarbans to withstand storms and waves that frequent the deltaic coastline. The noxious cause-effect chain of the pollution scape is outlined by Visakha, a character in the novel, who has a keen sense of place since she is witness to the widening arc of the degradation process. She is a witness to the anthropogenic harm in the area that expresses itself in the multiple enterprises surrounding the delta like mines, quarries and salt water embankments.

These activities require huge amounts of sand and clay to lay the base for brickfields and embankments. Large pipelines are constructed along the deltaic coastline that extract sand from the coast and transport it to the site of operations. Visakha witnesses the withering and eroding coastlines giving way to the bay water that enters into the mainland. Although Visakha is a mere housekeeper and helper in the laboratory where Nilratan, the ichthyologist works, she has the capacity to educate Nilratan about the links in this pollution chain. She explains how the brickyard chimneys dominate the landscape of the coastline like parasitic nostrils of a mammoth beast which devours the sand and soil from the flood plains. The brickyard chimneys contaminate the air surrounding the mangroves and dispose of substantial waste into the shallow waters that severely affect the biodiversity of the wetlands. This untreated sewage water is dumped into the Bidyadhari river which has been the major drainage system in the districts of Kolkata and North 24 Parganas. The Bidyadhari is responsible for carrying untreated urban wastes from Kolkata into the estuarine rivers like Raimangal and Kalindi that surround the Sundarbans archipelago. This staggering quantity of urban wastes that is dumped into the Bidyadhari has destroyed the mangrove ecosystem of the Sundarbans.

The suburban expansion of Kolkata was another major deterrent since it blocked the flow of the Ganges, the only source of fresh water into the estuarine rivers like the Raimangal and Bidyadhari. Due to rapid urbanization new courses were charted for these rivers that increased siltation and decreased their capacity for carrying fresh water from the Ganges. The insufficient amount of freshwater in the estuaries around the delta caused a massive imbalance in the salt and fresh water ratio which in turn adversely affected the survival of the mangroves and the wetland habitat.

The Sundarbans is located at a close proximity to the Bay of Bengal and the alarming rise of the seawater is consequently followed by the increase of salinity in the deltaic soil. In the later part of the novel, Bishu gives a speech at the conference of the Indian Waterworks Association where he shares his experience of witnessing the decaying mangroves that have perished due to high amounts of sea salt absorbance. Bishu points out that plankton, which play an important role in the marine food chain, are vanishing due to the incursion of urban wastewater into the wetlands. As a result, the other participants in the estuarine food-web that feed on planktons will gradually perish resulting in the dismantling of the entire mangrove ecosystem.

Sasmal's *Jolkor* is a perfect example of a Global South wetland narrative which is transforming into an unthinkable site of ecological disruption and continued human neglect. The profiteering prawn mafia and their cruel methods of extracting agricultural lands from poor farmers for 'bheri' culture completely ignore the ecological requirements for maintaining the balance of the wetland ecosystem. This form of 'terragouic' despotism and extractive practices have created a mercantile section in the population of Sundarbans who invest in the commercially successful ways of utilizing the soil and water without considering the adverse impact on the future of the delta and her ecosystem. The farmers and the fishers who live at the edge of these deltas are influenced by the corporate firms to give away their lands for salt water aquaculture.

Lack of foresight and the promise of abundant monetary gain lure the common landholders into selling their ancestral lands. These myopic human activities create a condition of contamination that insidiously destroys the health of natural wetlands and mangrove tracts around Sundarbans. The rampant destruction of mangroves that acted as a natural defence system against raging cyclones creates havoc across the archipelago. As a result, Sundarban's biodiversity is at an ecological threshold where a small change can trigger a cataclysmic fallout. The ecological uncanny embodied in Bishu's mad visions invokes a fear of the unknown since the not-too-distant possibility of the submergence of the Sundarbans also signals the loss of home and dwelling in the place. Bishu remembers a wetland that embraced a practical example of sustenance, interconnectivity of lifeforms and a symbol of an interstitial ecosystem that had endured its existence at the edge of land and water due to the once sensible human understanding about the difference between preservation and mindless utilitarianism. Bishu's poetic monologues confront humankind with an unsettling realization about our true place in the grand scheme of things. His presence evokes an eerie detachment to the vanity of human exceptionalism and a self-assumed anarchic dominance that is far less obvious than anyone can imagine.

In fact, Bishu's character plays an integral role in identifying the Sundarbans within a socio-ecological structure where the geomorphological and climatic changes evokes fear and highlights premonitory conditions in the population. As a flood and cyclone prone delta, Sundarbans can be the exemplary material site to articulate and substantiate the concept of 'ecofear' in a wetland ecosystem.

In this novel, ecopremonition is instrumental to the understanding of a much required sensitization about conserving and preserving nature that is expressed through the premonitory monologues of Bishu. In his first conversation with Dr Nilratan, the ichthyologist, Bishu says,

This biodiversity that surrounds us across the 102 islands of the delta is extremely fragile. It can fall apart at the slightest flick of a finger, just as a glass breaks when it is hit by a pebble. A cyclone can literally suck these islands into its whirlpool and decimate their existence forever.

Inform Everyone! Tell them everything they have and everything they have seen will all be lost by the year of 2050. Ring the bells! Beware!"
(Sasmal 30-31)

Bishu's jeremiads use fear as a corrective and warning to rouse the ignorant island dwellers who will be the first to incur Nature's wrath. Bishu is the interpreter of Sundarban's malady and he understands how the deltaic wetland has evolved into a withered and eroded stretch of landform that will soon be consumed by rising waters. Bishu rambles before inspector Mazumdar at the local police station, "Can you hear? Something is coming! Beware! Listen carefully" (Sasmal 111).

Bishu says that the tree trunks resemble the parched, dry and eroded bones of the corpses. He also questions Mazumdar if he had ever inhaled the air of the primitive forest and listened to the lamentations of the rivers, air, soil and water in Sundarbans. The novel concludes with the surreal picture of dead fish being washed ashore as an apocalyptic deluge devours Sundarbans and the surrounding townships and coastal villages. Although Sasmal's narrative deals with the socio-historical background of Sundarbans from a diachronic perspective, it transforms into an environmentally apocalyptic text at its climax. The dead fishes poisoned with pesticides and the lashing waves from the sea creates an uncanny image where nature, subjected to slow decay by human activities, retaliates with an unreckonable primitive force.

The conclusion evokes a strange reality; surreal and uncanny, that intensifies the deluge in an unfathomable dimension. Apocalyptic narratives are essentially linked with the idea of complete destruction of civilization. But they also reinforce positive sensibilities that help in mitigating the hopelessness that hinders the much needed changes for creating new trajectories of environmental preservation. The manifestation of destruction in apocalyptic narratives are inherently fear-inducing as they uproot the possibilities of a sustainable future. Similarly, Sasmal's narrative goads and shocks the reader into a deeper understanding of the ecological reality of the Sundarbans that is gradually on the verge of total submergence. This is best expressed by Bishu Pagol's reprimanding tone when he is about to be driven out from the police station when he exhorts with great clarity, "No! I am not mad. You people are mad—mad after so many things! But not mad after the health of the delta" (Sasmal 109).

"Rotting garbage and billowing smoke": Anthropogenic fear signatures in Ghosh's *The Trash Diggers*

Waste narratives create a topographical defamiliarization and a new mode of understanding fear that relate to the lived experiences of people belonging to a specific place. Wastes are post-purpose objects that act as potential signifiers of the fear caused by anthropogenic signatures on the face of the earth. Waste can alienate and also defamiliarize everyday objects and landscapes, dismantling them and reassembling them in ways to shock and jolt the human mind into the recognition of earth's terrifying altered reality. A striking example in this context is the photography of Edward Burtynsky who in his documentary, *Anthropocene: The Human Epoch* (2018), attempts to portray the exponential accumulation of plastics, concrete and techno-fossils has left an 'indelible human signature' on the earth's processes. Burtynsky's photographs are witness to the strange realities of the twenty-first century phenomenon where the spatio-material dimensions surrounding human existence are constructed or shaped by garbage.

There is a distinct element of fear that manifests in the photographs portraying extensive areas extracted by mining and quarrying. There are photographs showing extensive areas filled

with electronic wastes and used tyres. These abandoned landscapes are perfect representations of waste-scapes that completely lack the presence of humans and anything that is considered natural. These wastelands resemble the postapocalyptic landscapes that will inherit the earth unless humankind understands the urgency of a targeted change in their perception. In a similar way, Dhrubajyoti Ghosh's photographs in *The Trash Diggers* (2017) depict a Global South garbage-scapes in the dump site of Dhapa, Kolkata, and narrates the unimaginable lives of the waste pickers who are the permanent residents of the place. This dumpsite overlooking the 'East Calcutta Wetlands' is the largest waste disposal site in Kolkata and is also known for its recycling and solid waste management system.

Ghosh's narrative portrays mountains of trash, essentially non-biodegradable, accumulated in heaps around the site. Layers of trash disposal have created garbage substrates from which one cannot differentiate the soil. The premonitory undertone in this narrative runs parallel to the transformation of the landscape and it materializes at the end through the visualization of a dark ecology completely bereft of life. This prediction of witnessing an unending expanse of waste that devours nature and civilization aligns Ghosh's narrative with the idea of ecopremonition. Ghosh believed that garbage, its production and accumulation acts as an indicator of the "progress of civility of a community" (Ghosh 12). While elaborating on the difference between 'waste recycling communities' and 'wasteful communities,' he points out, "To what extent a community, a race, a nation, a country is civilized depends upon the amount of waste it has to throw away" (Ghosh 12). The concept of transcorporeality is essential to the understanding of the new forms of human entanglement with the wastes that shapes their everyday realities and aspects of existence. Stacy Alaimo defines 'transcorporeality' in a "materialist and posthumanist sense of the human as substantially and perpetually interconnected with the flows of substances and the agencies of the environment" (476). This entanglement is the inclusive whole of disparate elements which are forced to unite in a 'plastisphere' (Eriksen 153) or human-made plastic environments. The trash diggers are the residents of this exclusive ecological space without nature.

Landscape is imbricated in the understanding of culture since it is a vital element of the memory which identifies, interacts and coalesces to form the basis of nature and human relationship. Ghosh's narrative on garbage-scapes elaborates on this connection and explicates how garbage is not exactly 'a matter out of place' (Douglas 36) but an extension of the socio-material reality of people and the way in which they treat their places of existence. In her photographic essay, "Misplaced Matter" Cindy Godden-Bryson describes her experience in a 40 year old dumpsite located at the inner suburban area of Phnom Penh, Cambodia. It was a glaring instance where people were 'juxtaposed against the background of rotting garbage and massive trucks billowing smoke' (Bryson 84).

Bryson and Ghosh have both portrayed similar characteristics of dumpsites at the edge of two metropolises (Phnom Penh and Kolkata). Their documentation of the waste pickers and their surrounding environment is a witness to Global South garbage-scapes that are directly linked to the socio-materialist and consumerist realities of the urban dwellers in those cities. In the Introduction to her essay Bryson describes garbage affect as "Looking at the flattened mountains, a noxious miasma filling my nostrils, I was awestruck. Hundreds of waste pickers were sorting through rubbish, sometimes dangerously close to the rumbling trucks and menacing bulldozers" (84). Ghosh also puts forward identical experiences during his observation and research period at

the Dhapa dumpsite. He mentions the incident of 20 February, 2015, when Kalyani Mondal, a garbage picker was ‘crushed to death under a bulldozer while working on the Dhapa dumpsite’ (Ghosh 4).

The author’s shocking experience of looking at the vast, almost unending stretches of garbage heaps and mountains of trash looming dangerously over the everyday lives of the waste pickers became a highlight on the cover design of his book. The cover highlights Ghosh’s statement, “I saw her at the dhapa waste disposal ground. Chipped bricks, stones, wooden and glass pieces, nails and yet, she was working barefoot. It is a garbage substrate, we know-and still. I was bewildered... elephants walk barefoot. They have a callous layer of skin at the bottom of their feet. But humans?” (Ghosh 9). This bewilderment that Ghosh experiences is characterized by shock and fear. Ghosh observes the explicit erasure of the demarcation between the human and the non-human.

The dump site at Dhapa is an existing testimony of the rampant urban consumerism of Kolkata. This post-purpose detritus-scape is the representation of the social and collective sensibility of the city dwellers who revel in deluded cornucopian ideas of nature. The dumpsite abound in inorganic plastic wastes that give way to self-combustion due to high heat and humidity thereby causing caustic smoke to drift away from the plastic garbage heaps and contaminate the atmosphere surrounding the wetlands. All these factors are responsible for serious health hazards faced by the waste pickers who live in the middle of these inhuman conditions. Dhapa’s dumpsite ignites topophobia or fear of specific topographical features in the waste pickers when they come face to face with the giant heaps of garbage that blocks the clear view of the horizon. The quantifiability of waste, its mass and extension act like a devouring mechanism that gradually overshadows the lives of the waste pickers. This matter regardless of its composition and its materiality percolates into the life processes of the waste pickers. This garbage in its sheer magnitude becomes a cause of fear that someday can devour the miniscule lives who inhabit around it.

Fear in this narrative is highlighted by the normalization of this dreadful reality as a continuing way of life which will degrade the east Calcutta wetlands and take over the health and wellbeing of the waste picking population. The unending waste accumulation that occurs in the dumping yard conjures an image of conspicuous consumption which sets in motion perennial cycles of consumer regurgitation and acquisition. Individual acts of consumption may not appeal to our ecological conscience, but the augmentation of every isolated act of consumption proliferates into a shocking picture of the uncontrolled and widespread degeneration of the natural world. The photographs in Ghosh’s novel portray urban consumption and evaluate waste statistics that ‘visually connects’ with a fearful trajectory that projects a garbage ecology that supplants the ecosystemic balance in the area at the cost of a select population who act out of compulsion and unavailability of alternatives. The view of the east Calcutta wetlands and the Dhapa dumpsite portrays an unusual juxtaposition where the mammoth heaps of garbage almost resemble the waves of Tsunami that will engulf the wetland areas located at its proximity. Recent urban developments have shown a considerable encroachment of extensive wetland areas including salt marshes, meadows, sewage farms and settling ponds.

This situation is by far one of the most crucial examples of ecological disruption in a third world metropolis like Kolkata. A bird's eye view of this garbage landscape overshadowing the wetlands is a witness to the ever increasing footprint of the humans that can devour the wetland ecosystem and the processes of sustainable development practised among the wetland dwellers in east Calcutta. Ghosh's narrative invokes a sense of the ecological uncanny by highlighting the sense of ecofear that characterises the lives of the trash diggers in the plastic-scape, a spatio-material accumulation of anthropogenic disposal, a rapidly expanding hyper-object that devours and lays waste to the surrounding natural landscapes. It premonizes a dreadful reality where a non-natural force can obliterate the coexisting links between humans and their ecology.

This sea of garbage is an anthropogenic deluge that has the potential to reshape the environment and our understanding of natural landscapes. The plastic wastes in the Dhapa dumpsite can erase the traditional concept of what land looked like in the first place. According to Saari and Mullen, place-based pedagogy regarding 'dark ecological' (Morton 5) places "brings to the surface the short-circuits, objects and sources of anxiety inherent in ecological awareness, thereby challenging our notions of 'place' as bounded, identifiable and (intellectually) safe" (Saari and Mullen 1471). Hence these wastes are like material 'hyperobjects' (Morton 11) that run contrary to notions of place as homogenous, relational or knowable.

Sasmal's *Jolkor* and Ghosh's *The Trash Diggers* can be described as narratives of resistance, resilience and change that critique the foundations of anthropocentric consumerism. They actively engage with ecopremonition and ecofear as mediators to reconfigure the existing socio-ecological perception that can mitigate the complexities of sustaining and maintaining a balanced ecosystem. These novels are part of the Global South narratives that highlight the issues of environmentalism and ecological disruption. The authors have revised the current material realities of West Bengal's wetlands through their writings in order to sensitize the reader to the possibilities of real-time ecological fallouts and the attendant feeling of ecofear that characterises the lives of the poor who are dependent on the wetland ecosystem and the trash landscapes for their livelihood. Functioning as a deterrent to mindless consumption, ecofear becomes "a radical hyperobject" of sorts (Fisher 7) that complicates any easy connection between subject and object that reorients and questions complacent assumptions about our place in the world and the ways in which we forge our relationships with ourselves and non-human nature.

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