



## Gopinath Mohanty's *High Tide, Ebb Tide*: An Eco-spiritual Study

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### Abstract

Eco-spirituality is the foundation of the affinity between religion and environment. It is basically the manifestation of the spiritual connection of human beings with nature. This article explicates those ecological attributes manifested in famous Odia writer Gopinath Mohanty's novel *High Tide, Ebb Tide* (2007) translated into English by Bikram K.Das. The novel depicts how nature forms an integral part of the spiritual voyage of his characters. This realization forms the foundation of eco-spirituality, fostering a deepened sense of love and significance attributed to all natural entities. It also aims to demonstrate the pivotal role of nature in shaping the spiritual essence of contemporary individuals and delves into the potential for recognizing the interconnectedness and harmonious structure of the external world beyond the confines of human ego. Against this backdrop, the paper analyses the book to illustrate how diverse human consciousness aligns with the unified principles of nature, and how the sacredness of nature can be realized in the process of self-discovery as an extension of natural unity. After employing the qualitative research paradigm and close content analysis, all the arguments put forth are substantiated by textual evidence from the selected work.

**Keywords:** Eco-spirituality, Environment, Religion, Nature, Self-Discovery

### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1 Author's Biography

Gopinath Mohanty (1914–1991), was born in Cuttack. He is celebrated as one of the foremost figures of modern Odia literature. He earned his education at Ravenshaw College before joining the Odisha Administrative Service. His long tenure in the tribal regions of Odisha profoundly influenced his writing, enabling him to capture with authenticity the lives, struggles, and ethos of marginalized communities. Mohanty wrote with remarkable psychological depth and social realism, blending humanist concerns with a keen observation of cultural transitions in rural and tribal landscapes. His major works include *Paraja* (1945), a landmark novel on tribal oppression and resilience. His work titled *Amrutara Santana* (1947), was declared the winner of the Sahitya Akademi Award, and *Danapani* (1955), an exploration of bureaucracy and modernity. He also produced significant short stories, essays like *Adibasi Jeevanara Chitra*, and translations of world classics into Odia. For his outstanding contribution, he became the first Odia writer to receive the Jnanpith Award (1974) and was honoured with the Padma Bhushan (1981). Mohanty's literary legacy rests

on his ability to universalize local experiences and place Odia literature in dialogue with world traditions. His works have been translated in many languages over the last few years to wide popularity and critical acclaim.

#### 1.2 Eco-Spirituality

Spirituality is often conceived as a condition in which detachment from the material world is the only true path toward transcendence. This perspective assumes that through renunciation, one may approach Truth or the Divine. Such a pursuit remains non-institutional and apolitical, seeking a direct, experiential relation to ultimate reality. Eco-spirituality, however, departs from this model. It locates the sacred not beyond the world but within it, affirming the inherent sanctity of the natural order. Here, God is not a remote, transcendent authority "controlling the universe from a vantage point" but the immanent cause expressing itself through all beings, all matter, and every event. In this sense, true spirituality is not withdrawal from the present world but immersion in its intricate processes, recognition of human responsibility toward fellow creatures, and acceptance of the charge to sustain life. Eco-spiritual values have deep roots in

traditional Indian practices. Rituals, penances, and festivals historically acknowledged rivers, trees, mountains, and cosmic elements as dwelling places of divinity. Within this worldview, human beings occupy no privileged center but are bound within an “intricately interrelated and interconnected web of life.” Human consciousness, as self-aware energy, is not contained by bodily limits but belongs to the larger order of existence.

This paper approaches human life not merely as a biological unfolding but as what may be called a holocoenotic process (meaning *acting in concert* or the condition where all factors within an environment—such as living organisms, physical elements, and their processes—interact as an integrated, interdependent system), shaped and animated by the timeless forces of nature—sun, sky, moon, and sea. These agencies expand human sensibility, preparing consciousness for a deeper grasp of the cosmic equation. It is in this context that Gopinath Mohanty’s *High Tide, Ebb Tide* is read as a profound exploration of eco-spiritual themes.

## 2. Research Methodology

In this research the qualitative research paradigm rooted in close content analysis of the novel was employed to examine its eco-spiritual contours. The primary text was studied in depth to identify patterns, symbols, and thematic resonances that reveal the interconnections between nature and spirituality. To enrich and substantiate the analysis, secondary sources such as books, research papers, and critical essays were consulted, providing theoretical and contextual frameworks that guided the interpretation.

## 3. Discussion

Gopinath Mohanty’s novel *High Tide, Ebb Tide* (2007) is the English translation of his Odia novel *Laya Vilaya* which came in (1956). The text narrates the journey of Tarun Roy, a middle-class man from Kolkata, who travels with his family on a pilgrimage to Puri—the sacred land of Jagannath, “Lord of the Universe.” The novel is not merely a record of pilgrimage; it dramatizes a psychological and spiritual journey in which the protagonist gradually discovers his self as inseparable from the rhythms of nature and the larger human community. As Keats once insisted on “the true voice of feeling” (qtd. in Mohanty, xii), Mohanty depicts Tarun’s consciousness as it expands through contact with nature, evolving into an authentic spiritual unfolding.

### 3.1 Puri as the Abode of Union with the Divine

For Tarun Roy, Puri is not simply a religious destination but a space suffused with aesthetic and spiritual energy. The town epitomizes the sacred, symbolizing the meeting point of heaven and earth. The temple architecture itself, with its profound rhythm, induces an attunement of the devotee’s inner being: “his subtle body responds to the proportion of the temple by inner rhythmical movement.” Through this resonance, the devotee becomes one with the sacred space and thus prepared to encounter the Divine. Within this environment, Tarun undergoes a mystical experience in which all social boundaries dissolve. He reflects:

Nothing is real, nothing exists but this mortal creature’s awareness of the fullness and then the void; and above all, of that one single Life which is Creator as well as

Preserver. It has no language, no caste, no distinctions. Not just between man and man; it is that Life which holds all of Creation together like a thread. That is It. Jagannath! Jagannath!” (qtd. in St Pierre, 57)

For Tarun, then, the temple becomes a “monument to faith” capable of offering “paradise,” “salvation,” and “happiness.” The experience is not confined to ritual devotion but opens onto a recognition of the interconnectedness of all beings of this world.

### 3.2 Self-Realization through Nature’s Divinity

The novel demonstrates how natural forces—sea, air, sky—serve as agents of transformation for the entire Roy family. Tarun, in particular, emerges from these encounters with an expanded awareness of his relation to both the human and non-human world. The figure of Jagannath embodies this truth: the lord of the universe does not govern by decree but “pervades in all beings.” Existence itself is revealed as a manifold expression of the divine cause. Tarun thus discovers that he is not bound by structures of power but liberated through his connection to the whole. His identity shifts from the isolated ego to the integrated self, belonging simultaneously to humanity and to the natural order. Mohanty describes this state as “a harmony between his inner self and the world outside” (4). At the close of the day, watching the radiant sky, Tarun feels “tangibly connected to everyone he sees” and realizes that his presence belongs not just to the human community but also to “the sky, the light, wind, trees, animals.” This realization constitutes what the novel presents as the “spiritual unfolding” of the self.

### 3.3 Nature as the Breeder of Sacred Sensibility

Mohanty repeatedly emphasizes the role of nature in awakening divine sensibility. The natural environment elevates Tarun’s imagination and creative energy. He describes the mystery of the sea, the vastness of the sky, and the shifting colors of the land in emotive, almost lyrical language. Immersed in this environment, he and his family lose their sense of ego-bound identity and enter into a meditative joy. Ordinary objects acquire new depth: “symbols out of the commonplace” emerge, and surrounded by “mystic play all around,” they feel as though suspended in timeless meditation (24). For the Roy family, the sun, trees, sand, and sea are not inert matter but luminous presences, majestic in their sublimity. Tarun places his faith in Jagannath, whom he perceives as the sustaining center of existence. This faith, however, is not a retreat into dogma but a recognition that genuine religion is that which “inspires to live a life with dignity, and that justifies a life with respect for the living world.” Nature’s sublimity dismantles Tarun’s pride and replaces it with “absolute humbleness and peace.” Mohanty writes: “Tarun Roy broke free, found peace, floating in the vast ocean of human consciousness, floating to the music of waves” (41). This transformative awareness is not confined to Tarun alone. His wife, Kantimoyee, also experiences the unity of life: “Everything appeared new-born, tender; mingled together, inseparable.” (130) For both, the journey to Puri is not only a religious pilgrimage but a radical elevation of consciousness—a movement from individual existence toward an expansive awareness of cosmic unity.

#### 4. Conclusion

A careful reading of Mohanty's *High Tide, Ebb Tide* reveals the novel's central affirmation that there is "one life" permeating every corner of existence. This life is constituted by relations: between humans, non-humans, and even inanimate presences. The recognition of this interconnectedness yields joy, humility, and spiritual peace. More than a religious tale, the novel unfolds as a philosophical meditation on self-realization. Mohanty defines self-realization not as withdrawal into transcendence but as an embrace of the unity of life. In charting Tarun's journey from ego to integration, Mohanty addresses the existential anxieties of modern man, suggesting that genuine fulfillment lies not in escape from the world but in acknowledging one's belonging to the infinite continuum of nature.

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