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## Reconceptualizing the Human-Nature Relationship: An ecocritical analysis of *The Hungry tide*, and *Gun Island* by Amitav Ghosh.

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**Abstract:** Among the most notable representatives of contemporary Indian English literature, Amitav Ghosh has been discussing the multi-dimensional relationship between humanity and nature. Examples of his strong sense of ecology can be found in his novels, *The Hungry Tide* (2004) and *Gun Island* (2019), are his criticisms of anthropocentrism in the era of climate change. This paper provides an ecocritical discussion of these two novels to explore how Ghosh recreates the relationship between humans, nature and culture in a fast-changing ecological world. Relying on the ideas of ecocriticism, postcolonial studies and environmental ethics, this paper puts focus on how Ghosh represents the ecological degradations, displacement, migration, and myth as interrelated aspects of the world ecological crisis. He uses local and global narratives through the local Sundarbans setting and the global transcontinental to reveal the socio-political aspects of environmental injustice. In both novels, the connection between myth, memory, and ecological consciousness is shown to counter the loss of nature as the driving force behind human-focused discourse. Finally, this paper maintains that the Ghosh environmental vision is beyond the confines of literature, in that we should re-examine the ethical and moral obligations of human responsibility to the environment. Turning fiction into an environmental activism tool, Ghosh places the literature in the potent position of environmental enlightenment and cultural sustainability during the Anthropocene era.

**Keywords:** ecological consciousness, anthropocentrism, environmental ethics, myth, ecological crisis all over the world, Sundarbans, environmental injustice, cultural resilience.

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### Introduction

The issue of environmental crisis has become a pressing concern in the twenty-first century, and it redefined human civilization and natural world relations. As a cultural consciousness, literature has been more and more an avenue to express ecological anxieties and ethical issues of the Anthropocene-era, the epoch of human agency as the very significant driver of climate and environment. Amitav Ghosh is one of the authors who have successfully combined narration with environmental awareness. His works cut across geographies, histories, and mythologies to address the role played by humanity alienation to nature in the ecological and cultural destruction that the modern world is being marked by.



The fiction by Amitav Ghosh does not follow the standard genre. His style of narration is a mixture of realism and mythology, anthropology and history or science and spirituality. In this poly-dimensional technique, Ghosh anticipates the inter-relationship between ecologies and human society. Two of his most widely acclaimed novels, *The Hungry Tide* (2004) and *Gun Island* (2019) represent the thematic continuum of his vision of the environment. The novels both challenge the role of humanity in nature, politics of nature destruction, and ethics of the co-existence with other non-human life forms. Although *The Hungry Tide* sets its action in the vulnerable ecosystem of the Sundarbans, *Gun Island* extends the ecological discussion to a transnational level, connecting environmental degradation, migration, mythology on the other side of the planet.

The importance of researching the ecological vision of Ghosh consists in its deep integration of artistic literary work and the ecological philosophy. His works do not only dramatize the human effects of changing the environment, but they also criticize the cultural and epistemological systems that distinguish the human progress and the ecological balance. Ghosh fiction challenges the anthropocentrism of modernity the assumption that humans are the centre and the gauge of everything. Rather, he depicts a world of profound mutuality, in which human destiny cannot be woven out of the cycles of the world and the action of other non-human beings.

Moreover, Ghosh has an environmental imagination that goes beyond the scope of national and disciplinary horizons. His narratives are a mix of the local and the global, the mythical and the modern, showing that the destruction of the environment is a planetary and cultural process. Ghosh mediates the wisdom of ancient ecology and the modern-day environmental issues by employing myth and folklore as a narrative technique. His fiction makes readers think of the linear view of modernity in a new way, and the author urges readers to begin to perceive survival and coexistence holistically. Thus, Ghosh makes literature an ecological activism- a moral and intellectual reaction to the climate crisis.

The current paper will examine the ecocritical vision of Ghosh as an environmental thinker by reading *The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island*. It addresses the way in which these novels re-establish the connection between human beings and the natural world through the mosaic of ecology, mythological symbolism and social-political commentary. The discussion places Ghosh fiction in the context of ecocriticism and Anthropocene discourse in the given way that his work critiques the shortcomings of the humanist viewpoint. Following the development of the environmental thought of Ghosh since *The Hungry Tide* to *Gun Island*, the paper highlights his contribution to making Indian English literature a crucial location of environmental awareness.

Ghosh uses narrative structure and content to bring this criticism in *The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island*. His characters are forced to deal with the environment that is dynamic, unpredictable and, in most cases, hostile, in the instability of the Anthropocene world. However, instead of describing nature as a passive victim or a passive environment, Ghosh gives the landscape a voice and moral agency. The Sundarbans in *The Hungry Tide*, as an example, is not merely an actual place but a character independent of any human-made nature, which has its own way in human fate and cannot be controlled or treated as an ordinary phenomenon in need of moral consideration. Similarly, the cross-continental relocation of people and animals in *Gun Island* enables the realization of how ecosystems around the world are interconnected and that all species are exposed to climate change.



The fusion of myth and folklore in eco-narratives by Ghosh has been consistent with trends of theory of ecological-spirituality and deep-ecology. Deep ecology is a term popularized by Arne Nass who believes that all living things have an inherent value, and not just in relation to their usefulness to human interests. It demands moral redirection in which the life forms are interdependent. This philosophy of ecology is reflected in the myths which Ghosh employs, specifically the myth about Bon Bibi in *The Hungry Tide* and the myth about the Gun Merchant in *Gun Island*. His mythology helps connect the rational and the spiritual and insists on the necessity of ecological harmony, which must involve a scientific approach but also cultural and moral imagination.

Another overlapping of ecocriticism with the postcolonial theory in the work of Ghosh is the latter. Environmental degradation is not only a natural process but also a colonial process and capitalistic modernity.

### **Human-Nonhuman Relationships**

In *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh complexly sets up affections to eraser the characters between the human and the nonhuman. The study by Piyali of the extinct Irrawaddy dolphins is used as a metaphor of co-existence and inter-species empathy. The fact that she is so infatuated with the dolphin's language shows that she desires to feel connected with the dismembered world. The smart but slippery dolphins are metaphors of a nonhuman mind that is hard to control but welcomes the human curiosity. Ghosh dispels this by using them to propose that the fields of language and rationality are both human ones.

The connection between nature and Fokir is represented as symbiotic. He is neither a master nor a slave of his surroundings but an actor in its moves. When the storm kills him, it is very symbolic: it highlights the helplessness of the poor as well as the spiritual equality between man and the nature. The death of Fokir is not a tragedy of supremacy but it is a sacrifice; he dies defending Piyali, which is a conflation of human affection with the ecological love. The storm that takes his life also represents the inexorable authority nature- another lesson that man is never allowed to do what is beyond the reach of the earth.

### **Language, Power and the Ecological Representation.**

There is a major role of language and communication in the ecological vision by Ghosh. In the novel, the issue of language translations between languages, human beings, and nature, systems of knowledge, are ever present. The Kanai, the interpreter of various languages, can symbolize the intellectual who would like to be able to mediate between the worlds and is frequently not able to experience the emotional richness and ethical aspects of them. Piyali and Fokir are unable to express themselves verbally, which emphasizes the fact that ecological knowledge stands beyond the word of language. Their nonverbal communication is expressed by the gestures, silence, and paying attention to the world around them which makes them have a deeper ecological empathy.

This theme echoes the idea of Timothy Morton, the mesh, the interlocking tangle of all creatures in which there is no distinction of human and nonhuman. This mesh-like structure is reflected in the narrative technique of Ghosh: there are several story lines, voices, and time periods that interlude like the Sundarbans rivers. The changing narrative viewpoints resemble the waves and support the idea of interconnection and the impermanence. In this respect, the novel form turns into an ecological gesture, a liquidity and relationality, which it conceptually promotes.

### **Ecological Justice and Femininity.**



It portrays women in *The Hungry Tide* who stands at a crucial point where gender and ecology converge. Kusum, Moyna, and Piyali are some of the characters who are an expression of various reactions to environmental and societal restrictions. The gendered oppression of the displacing violence against women is revealed through Kusum memory of the Morichjhapi massacre, and human ambitions to receive education is seen through Moyna, who needed to overcome the barriers that the world of poverty and geography placed on her. As a scientist who is a diasporic woman, Piyali represents the cognitive and emotional interposition between the local and the global.

According to the ecofeminist approach, the novel takes the same element of women exploitation as nature exploitation. They both fall prey to patriarchy and capitalism. Nevertheless, Ghosh does not reduce this relationship to the sentimentality, but he depicts females as the creatures of environmental consciousness and strength. The reconstruction of Piyali as a cold spectator into an empathetic one demonstrates the ways of how it is possible to reconcile rationality with empathy. Her dead process is a reflection of the ecological message of the novel: it is survival that is based on dismemberment rather than power struggle.

### **The Personification of Change as a Tide.**

The theme of the tide is one of the key metaphors in the novel. It implies motion, change, and the flowing borders between the land and the sea, self and others, human and no imminent. The fate of the characters is determined by the tides, taking away the limits and permanence. This touch of imagery shows how Ghosh used to philosophize on the temporality of human creations facing the circle of nature. The uncertainty of the tides is another allegory of the environmental crisis in the world, an ever-changing phenomenon that is uncontrollable and predictable.

Piyali, in one of the most climactic scenes in the novel, observes the dolphins going through the fierce waters, where their survival is relying on constant changes. Also, this picture is a summary of the ecological message of the novel: the key to residing lies not in the perfection of the environment, but in the harmony with it. The hungry and life-giving tide turns into the image of nature indifference and generosity- ecological paradox which determines the human predicament.

### **Local and Global Ecological Interrelation.**

Despite existing in the local geography of the Sundarbans, *The Hungry Tide* is close to global environmental issues. The negative effects of the rise in sea level, habitat loss, and forced migration are problems that do not fall within the national borders. The attention that Ghosh pays to Sundarbans foreshadows his future writing on Global Climate change *Gun Island*, in which it is made directly global. The Sundarbans consequently represent a miniature of planetary ecology -the domain in which the global ramifications of ecological negligence are reflected in the suffering of mankind. Describing the interaction between ecological and social systems, Ghosh shares the view of Ursula Heise who states that environmental literature needs to develop sense of planet her sense of the world beyond local affiliation.

### **The Environmental Knowledge and/or Irreality.**

In the end, *The Hungry Tide* expresses a vision of environmental awareness that tries to be modest. Ghosh shows the boundary of human understanding and the uselessness of the power over nature. The scientific know-how by Piyali is not adequate unless he understands how to empathize and respect the local environment. According to the novel, the true ecological knowledge cannot be achieved without rational investigation on the one hand, and emotional receptiveness on the other. Such a combination of science and spirituality is typical of what



elsewhere Ghosh calls the moral dimension of climate change, the acknowledgement of the fact that environmental degradation is both an ethical and a scientific crisis.

### **Conclusion: On the way to an Eco-Ethical Vision.**

*The Hungry tide* is a literary procession of environmental ethics. Ghosh gives the readers a challenge to reconsider the role that humanity plays in the natural order, through its complex depiction of the Sundarbans and its people. His story is against the blacks and whites of progress and preservation because it promotes a relational worldview founded on respect, understanding, and co-existence. Combining myth, science, and human feeling, Ghosh constructed a story that stands beyond the frontiers of academic disciplines and addresses the moral imagination. The ecological vision in the novel prefigures the broader environmental concerns of the world that appear in the *Gun Island*, where local waters of Sundarbans yield to the anthropocentric waters of the global world.

*Gun Island* (2019) by Amitav Ghosh expands the environmental and philosophical anxieties of *The Hungry Tide* (2004) to the extensive global level, changing the local ecological crisis into an account of the planetary one. The novel is the ultimate literary experience of the Anthropocene by Ghosh, which dramatizes the ways environmental disaster, migration, and myth interact in the contemporary world. In the event that *The Hungry Tide* is tracing the interaction of human and nature in the limited geography of the Sundarbans, *Gun Island* tracks the circulation of ecological trauma itself, a transnational climate change itself, with its reach spanning continents (Bengal) to Venice and Los Angeles.

### **The Climate Migration and the Anthropocene.**

The centre of *Gun Island* is the tale of Deen Datta a Bengali-American specialist on the subject of rare books who turns out to be an unforeseen participant in the developing ecological disaster. In his travels, Ghosh follows the human and nonhuman migrations which were caused by the fact of climate upheaval, which are the elevated seas, collapsing ecosystems, and human displacement. The title of the novel alludes to the legend of the "Gun Merchant" a Bengali local folk legend that Deen tries to decipher. This myth is similar to Bon Bibi myth in *The Hungry Tide* to the extent that it serves as a narrative tool to the comprehension of interaction between human greed, ecological crisis, and divine vengeance.

In the story by Ghosh, the legend about the Gun Merchant is used as an allegory of the Anthropocene era when human activity and material growth has let the genie out of the bottle. The movement of refugees over the oceans, the migration of animals into new territories, the increased occurrence of storms and wildfires are all evidence of an out of balance planet. Ghosh shows the connectedness of these issues through the journeys of Deen because environmental crisis is also moral crisis and cultural crisis a failure of humanity to connect to the Earth.

Migration caused by climate is one of the most burning themes in the novel. The Bengal refugees who have been displaced by floods and erosion are lost in a world that slowly grows hostile to migrants. Their situation is similar to that of the nonhuman refugees' dolphins that come out of the coast of Venice and snakes in new areas of residence that is an indication that ecological boundaries have broken. The comparison of human and animal movement by Ghosh brings up what Rob Nixon terms as a slow violence: the slow, unseen destruction caused by climate change that has overwhelmingly impacted the poor and marginalized in the world. Ghosh incorporates the concept of environmental justice in the centre of his narrative by repositioning migration as a human tragedy, as well as, an ecological symptom.

### **Entwining Myth and Modernity.**





Just as it was the case with *The Hungry Tide*, here in *Gun Island*, Ghosh employs myth as a narrative, as an ornament of the story but as such that delivers an ecological reality. The myth of the Gun Merchant, something Deen is at first inclined to regard as a folkloric myth, turns out to be piece by piece an ominous account of environmental vengeance. The escape of the merchant on the wrath of the goddess Manasa Devi protector of snakes is an allegory of how man has fled the real world of nature. The goddess as a symbol of the principle of ecological balance shows those who abuse and misuse the holy nature to be punished by her. The intellectual awakening of Deen is a reflection of the wider criticism of Ghosh about modern rationality the belief that myth and science, faith and reason are incompatible. Rather, Ghosh proposes that myth has ecological memory of ancestral warnings of the outcomes of hubris. Such a mixture of myth and science is in line with eco-narratology as coined by critics a narrative mode that cuts across the threshold between the real and the fantastic to expose ecological truths. *Gun Island* is part of the miraculous survivance of the supernatural, the strange coincidences, and cross-species understanding of humanity, but not escapist mechanisms, but metaphors of the interconnection of all life. The style of his narration thereby represents his message in *The Great Derangement* the inability of modern literature to envision the unrealistic potentials of climate change. In the process of reintroducing the marvellous into the realist tradition, *Gun Island* itself is a literary gesture of re-enchanting the world that has been decalcified in the modernity with awe and mystery.

### **Nonhuman Agency and Eco-Cosmopolitanism.**

One of the characteristics of *Gun Island* is the representation of nonhuman agency. Animals, weather conditions and even landscape itself are also performers in the narrative. The toxic snakes, the migrating dolphins, the destructive wildfires all demonstrate some form of agency as it undermines the anthropocentric assumptions. Natural world in *Gun Island* does not simply react to human action, it is vocal, opposes and requires recognition. This is the ecocritical notion of more-than-human worlds a phrase employed by academics including Donna Haraway and Bruno Latour to characterize interaction between humans and nonhuman beings in common ecologies.

Translocation of species across geographical borders also brings out the eco-cosmopolitanism a concept coined by Ursula Heishe to suggest the planetary environmental awareness that cuts across local identities. The experiences of Deen in Venice and Los Angeles demonstrate that the global south is not the only adversary of climate change; it is a problem that cuts across the board. The transnationalism of the novel is the interdependence of global ecology: what happens to the Sundarbans has the power to affect the destiny of other continents. Ghosh demolishes the myth about environmental distinctiveness by connecting the destiny of humans and animals in the countries in an interconnected borderless world.

Further, the international setting of the novel gives Ghosh an opportunity to investigate ways in which climate change enhances the existing disparities. The marginalized people and refugees suffer the effects of the collapse in ecology, and the privileged may always be cushioned. Ghosh pre-empted the moral aspect of the environmental crisis through the voices of migrant workplaces (such as Tipu and Rafi) who incorporates the question of who is to blame, and who will be the victims of environmental crisis? By placing *Gun Island* in the context of the expanding collection of climate justice literature, which analyses the convergence of ecological deterioration, race, and class, and migration, this moral geography explicitly places *Gun Island* in the context of climate justice literature. It is in the Ethics of Ecological Awareness that Deen offers transformation and talks of the ethics.



The changes in the personal life of Deen, his attitude towards scepticism and his way to belief is similar to the changes of the reader. At the beginning, he is introduced as a reasonable, unemotional researcher, negating the myth of the Gun Merchant as a folk lore and the mythic content deserving no attention by scientific researchers. Nevertheless, when he experiences formless events the snake attack, supernatural coincidences and the miraculous survival of the migrants he experiences a radical epistemological change. The awakening of Deen represents the call by Ghosh to broaden our view of the ecological world: to introduce, into it, the idea of emotion or faith, myth. This radical change is also an indication of the shift towards the so-called deep ecological self-realization, which is defined by Arne Naess.

The realization of Deen that his destiny is that of the planet is a demonstration of self-denial and an ecological interdependent Ness. In this respect, *Gun Island* is a melodramatic performance of the Anthropocene: the necessity to overcome human exceptionalism and adopt a planetary identity. The final sections of the novel where Deen reflects on how everyone in the world is all connected despite disasters of the natural environment recognize a moral outlook of empathy and humility.

### **Geography Mythic and Boundaries Collapse.**

*Gun Island* breaks down space and symbolic walls which separate land and water and past and present. The city of canals, Venice, it turns into a reflection of the Sundarbans: each of them are on the crossroads, facing the threat of the increasing waters. This is what the parallelism highlights as being the central ecological argument Ghosh is making, that the repercussions of climate change regard no boundaries. Thought to be a far-off spectacle, the flooding of Venice is the symbol of a similar planetary destiny.

Through these rivers of water and myth, Ghosh creates what could be termed as an aquatic cosmopolitanism which links Bengal to Europe. The sea, a traditional iconic sign of distance is transformed into a space of communication an orchidarium planetary of migration and memory. Therefore, water is a literal and figurative device of the ecological fantasy of the novel: this element of destruction of boundaries and painfulness of humanity. The repetitive use of the image of the rising tides makes the novel relate to the *Hungry Tide* and gives an impression of continuation of similar themes in the oeuvre of Ghosh. The tide that was localized in Sundarbans is now globalized in the form of storms, floods, and rainy icecaps.

### **Language, Narration and Ecological Imagination.**

In *Gun Island* storytelling is in itself an ecological activism. Ghosh employs narrative to fill the gap between the scientific facts as well as human experience. Epistemology The legend of the Gun Merchant is another form of way of knowing which espouses emotion, intuition and cultural memory. Ghosh questions contemporary distinction that there exists between narrative truth and empirical truth by mixing myth with modern crisis. His wording is an indication that survival of the planet is more of an imagination than technology.

This impression is reminiscent of the works of ecocritical critics like Kate Rigby, who have claimed that narrative imagination is the key to developing ecological empathy. As Deen tells the story of his experiences and as he gets involved with other characters Cinta, Tipu, Rafi Ghosh shows how stories can transcend inter-linguistic, inter-cultural, and inter-specific barriers. Telling and listening is an ethical act, a way of re-turning human perception of the nonhuman. *Gun Island* in this way turns literature into a moral ecology an eco-system of words and meanings that holds the prospect of hope.

### **Conclusion**



*The Hungry Tide* combined with *Gun Island* by Amitav Ghosh is a deeper literary reflection on the environmental state of the human race in the ecological sense. Fusing myth, science and storytelling, the novels have no discipline or geographic limits and have turned the fiction into a kind of environmental awareness. The environmental vision of Ghosh criticizes anthropocentrism and materialism and establishes the connection of everything in life. His works show that climate change is not merely a modern environmental phenomenon but also a culture and ethical crisis a symptom of the unhealthy relationship that humanity is currently in with nature.

In *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh portrays the personal conflict of the life in the tide ecosystem showing that only with respect to nature cycles, one will manage to survive. In *Gun Island* he is able to spread this experience of the locals into planetary migration, mythical, and world crisis. They all construct a spectrum of ecological consciousness: between regional and global, empirical observation and spiritual awakening. The two novels ascertain that ecological redemption is possible not through domination but through dialogue - between science and myth, between humans and nonhumans, between reason and imagination.

These stories reinvent the meaning of literature in the Anthropocene as practiced by Ghosh. His fiction is an object of moral thought and the force of environmental compassion. He offers an answer to the travelled lives and the landscaped silence of our own era by providing a voice to the silenced landscapes and uprooted lives of our era that binds the readers and calls them to a new ecology of morality recognition, where the Earth is alive and touches Finally, the environmental vision by Ghosh is a call to action and reflection to make us remember that human destiny cannot be separated with that of the planet.

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