



# CLIMATE-INDUCED MIGRATION AND CULTURAL LOSSES: A Study of Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island* and *The Hungry Tide*

AJIT KUMAR DASH

RESEARCH SCHOLAR

P.G. DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

SAMBALPUR UNIVERSITY, SAMBALPUR, ODISHA, INDIA

**Abstract:** Migration is always an important issue that deliberately gathers attention in the modern era. The migration can be based on the Partition or the climate change. That process of moving one place to another had included many problems and crisis. The cultural dimension also gets hampered due to these displacements. The displacement of place takes away the cultural indigenousness as well as the identity. The novels of Amitav Ghosh always based on the Indian dimension of studying environment and the collapse of literary tradition. His depiction of Indian picture to a global level is another setback in literary history. The book *The Hungry Tide* (2004) depicts the issue of climate induced migration based on the Bengal delta of Sunderbans. The characters in the novels are the instances of the certain climatic conditions by which affected a certain generation. The similar picture can be seen in the novel *Gun Island* published in 2019. The book is must like the sequel to *The Hungry Tide*. The animals and species in both the novels are also equally suffers the climate havoc. The climate induced migration also produced the climate refugees not limited to the humans only it affects the whole surrounding including the animals and forests. Through his essays and non- fictions Ghosh reflected the issues related to climate change and migration. In the paper the image of the displaced and the climate distressed community been reflected based on their pain and pangs. The political supremacy over the environment and native is another matter that is discussed. The post displaced situation and the struggle of a climate refugee through the characters are also addressed.

**Keywords:** Climate Induced Migration, Culture, Refugee, Politics, Anthropocene,

Migration has several dimension in general but climate induced migration is a burning issue of the present generation. My writer Amitav Ghosh is the flag bearers among the Indian novelists to bring out the exigent issues that affected the human as well as its surrounding. Through his fictions he broods over the ecological degradations. His masterpieces are *The Hungry Tide* (2004), *The Shadow Lines* (1988), *The Ibis Trilogy* (2008, 2011, and 2015), *Gun Island* (2019) as well as the recent one *The Living Mountain: A Fable of*

*Our Times* (2022). His prose pieces are more subjective on the issues like Climate change, travelogues, mass migrations and colonial effect on climate change etc.

*The Hungry Tide* is an understructure of *Gun Island*. In *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh tries to replicate the issues of the living being in the everchanging land of Sundarbans. The geographical location of the Sundarbans serves as a significant metaphor in these novels. The physical environment is a representation of an active force that connects plant, animal, and human life. They are affected by one another directly or indirectly. The relation between the human and the non-human is very much connected to the uncanniness of the ecological parameters of the area.

In the novel *The Hungry Tide* various types of people who are co-existing face the same consequences while encountering the environment which comprises dense forests, rivers, snakes, tigers, and also natural disasters like the cyclone and terrible storms. The local characters in the novels are the personifications of an unfortunate, difficult and precarious situation. Piyali Roy is representing westernized culture and is also influenced by the westernized idea of the environment. In contrast to that Fokir represents a whole ecosystem. He considers his surrounding as his habitat. He challenges the biocentric view of the antagonistic relationship between society and nature where nature is represented as a self-regulating pristine wilderness that is threatened by the usage of unsustainable resources and the ecologically harmful lifestyle of the local population. The eviction of Morichjhapi residents is decided as a result of culturally coded hostility. Nirmal, the protagonist, is acutely aware of the expelled residents. Therefore, he kept track of everything in his diary, which he later gave over to Kanai, who has the power to bring these issues to the attention of the world. Nirmal's persona is always attentive to the plight of refugees. He saw the refugees and their spirits as they attempted to create their utopia. Nirmal serves as a cultural bridge between two communities, one of which is led by his wife and accepts government regulations. On the other hand, the residents of Morichjhapi are opposed to accepting themselves as refugees.

*The Hungry Tide* is exactly the understructure to the utopian idea envisioned by Ghosh in the conclusion of *Gun Island*. The new dimension that Ghosh added in the recent novel is the global picture of human trafficking and migration due to the ecological domination on the human world. Previously in *The Hungry Tide* the history of the characters and their pain and pang of becoming a refugee are underscored. The politically disruptive behaviour of the-then Government is responsible for giving them the new identity of a refugee. The 1979 massacre in Morichjhapi takes its origin from the 1947 partition between India and Pakistan as a result of which the communal violence affected settlers from Bangladesh evicted as refugees to the Dandakaranya in the central India. Later the sense of alienation brings them close to their home Sundarbans. The dubious policy of tiger preservation brought by the West Bengal Government and the eviction took the form of a massacre later. The most pathetic situation appears when the settlers have to bear the wrath of the nature, the Bhola Cyclone of 1979. The the-then chief minister stated that these settlers are illegal trespassers on the Reserve forest of Sundarbans. These so called trespassers are in search of a suitable place to resettle but the arrival of the government policy made them refugees and put them in a physically and politically displaced horizon. Rather they have a stark faith on the newly formed communist government that it will provide them a place that is inhabitable for them. The government gave them a historical surprise by killing and slaughtering on the name of tiger preservation. The voice of Kusum is significant in this sense where she says –

“Who are these people, I wondered, who love animals more than they are willing to kill us for them? Do they know what is being done in their names? Where do they live, these people? Do they have children, do they have mothers, fathers? As I thought these things it seemed to me that this whole world had become a place of animals and our fault, our crimes was that we were just human beings, trying to live as human beings always have, from the water and the soil.” (Ghosh, 261-262)

These homeless people became the permanent residents of the sundarbans archipelago along with the continuously disappearing lands, the wild man eaters and they are also habituated to the natural havocs. The natural calamities became a reeks of tradition for them. In *Gun Island* the characters have to endure the same but this time they made an exit to the milieu and migrated to a place which is very much similar to the sundarbans, Venice. According to Amitav Ghosh the city is its submerged state due to the sea level rise. The

migrated ones were convicted of a much unsocial life. The living and the livelihood as a migrated soul is very much challenging for them. Along with the continuous battle between the sense of alienation and the sense of belonging their lives were struck. The cultural and social outsiders the lives and their emotions are not durable. It's very hard for them to adopt a new climate, new tradition, new culture, and new ideas. The character of Rafi and Bilal are the significant examples of the suffering of a migrant after being migrated.

The inanimate objects in the novels are the mark of the transformation as well as the excruciating force of the landscape. The water, the landscape, the forest, the mud, and the tides all the non- human objects are an active force that embroidered the daily lives of the humans inhabited in the Sundarbans. The mangrove forest in the Sundarbans always plays hide and seek and destroys the lives of the settlers. The mud of the land energised itself with an oppressive force. Piya in *The Hungry Tides* says while walking in the mud 'the grip of the mud pulled her ankles backwards, away from her centre of gravity (Ghosh 151). Kanai and Deen also felt the oddity while they encountered with the mud. The tides are the most disruptive force that always decides the future of the villages situated in the banks as well as the people. Perhaps that's why Amitav entitled the novel as *The Hungry Tide*. These forces are the sole victims of the climate change and the disappearance of the landscapes of Sundarbans. In *The Great Derangement* Ghosh asserts about the Sundarbans that the land of Sundarbans is demonstrably alive and acts as a protagonist. Giving an active agency to all these inhuman subjects Ghosh urges about the existence of the non human objects in the life of the human being. These human and non – human and their direct connection cast a reason of the destructive happenings in the relevant area. Ghosh through this subjective connection urges the two forces to be at one and reconnect with each other.

The subtle representation of the social and cultural difference among the subaltern agency and the western environmentalists is taken as a transcultural difference which is also the main reason behind the biodiversity as well as the cultural loss of the locality. The characters like Kanai, Piya, Deen signify the westernized picture and thoughts of environmentalism where as the local characters like Fokir, Horen, Rafi, Tipu, Kusum are articulating the local intellect and intelligence on the surroundings. In both the novels all the characters as well as the non-humans are the voices of the social and cultural concerns. The presence of non-human agency was seen in several western literary fictions. The Iliad and the Odyssey, both are filled with non-human agencies. Climate change is discussed in a technocratic way among the people where as it is imploding our lives in every possible way.

In *Gun Island* Tipu's casual question to Deen is about *Bhutas*. The Word 'Bhuta' originated from the Sanskrit word 'Bhu' which means 'to exist'. But the same word also refers to the past state of being. Tipu make the assumption that all the human beings are bhutas then. Here Tipu's realization to get the proper meaning is actually Deen's introduction to the uncanny just after his encounter with the mud. The alienated feeling that came to Deen when he fell in the mud and that gave him a sense of sanity. That sense of past existence is the metaphoric of the haunted past that the settlers have gone through in their lives. The sense of existence has a depth as the sense of belonging of the human beings is always attached with its past. The uncanny feeling is something odd that cannot be described. In both the novels there are the uncanny events that lead and affect the lives of the characters. Here the migrants' conditions are uncanny in order to speak of the dispossession for losing their sense of home. After being evicted by the partition they are actually in search of a place that feels like home to them. They are in search of a place that exactly similar to their old home. After being settled in the tide country area they became identified as the tide country people.

After being beaten by the snake in the temple of Manasa Devi, Tipu envisioned the shadow of snakes which is proof to the fact that Tipu is very much close to the non-human and the uncanny though they are continuously neglected. The continuous utterance of the name 'Rani', the name of a Dolphin that lives under Piya's protection is the emblematic of the fact that something bad is going to happen. There are several examples in both the texts that represents the sense of uncanny. The example of Cinta about the Aztec prediction and her own intuition is the stark symbols of the existence of the uncanny in the modern world.

The active agents in the novels play a significant role in the lives of its characters. The mud, the snakes, the tigers, the forests, the tides etc. all determined the direction of the lives of the inhabitants residing in the Sundarbans.

The myth of the Bon Bibi is very much famous among the inhabitants and they have a stark faith in that myth. This is a myth about the gun merchant who had been visiting the Sundarbans due to the extreme climate change and global warming. The goddess of the snakes, Manasa Devi and made him agree to build a temple of her in the landscape of the Sundarbans. The path that was taken by the Gun Merchant to reach his homeland from the Sundarbans is transversed with the same that the modern climate refugees take from Bangladesh to the Meditarrian. The situation of the Merchant echoes with the situations of Tipu and Rafi as they also got displaced because of the climate disturbances in their homelands. Explaining the harsh situations in the mud country Tipu said that fishing, farming, and collecting honey are no more a way of living for them it all went down as the land turned salty and one had to bribe the forest guard to enter the forest. Many people were so much obsessed to that area that they are absurdly waiting to starve to death. The Merchant had to leave India due to the ecological imbalance and he moved to Venice. But in the city of Venice the arrival of the epidemic Plague and the lockdown was imposed at that time. This situation of the epidemic is very much like the Covid situation of the present time. The Basilica of Santa Maria della Salute is reminded Deen of the legend of Manasa Devi and according to his assumption he compared this monument as a symbol of catastrophe of the Little Ice Age. Like the legend of Manasa Devi, the Minoan goddess of snakes has reminded him as the mediator between the human beings and the nonhuman.

Rafi envisioned the so called Gun Merchant in one of the events in the text with an ochre –coloured turban and walked in their direction to tell them that there is another road to their destination. The goddess Manasa Devi is a connecting link between the human and the nonhuman. She is the translator between the two species as they don't share a common means of language. The inhabitants and the natural both share a bond and the shrine made by the merchant is the symbol of that uncanny connection. Both have the same cultural ethnicity.

After being displaced naturally the migrants have a fear of losing their culture and heritage. The cultural challenges have also imbibed on their story of eviction. The subsequent movement from their homeland came with many losses not limited to place only but they have lost the people, the nativity, the belief and hope. The harsh decision taken by Tipu and Rafi is the most relevant example of the situation which compels them to search for a new place suitable to breath. They have to adopt the new place, new climate and a new custom by forgetting the old ones. This feeling of being alienated from the homely environment can make the migrants feel like they don't belong anywhere. This is very much challenging to find balance between the new and the old cultures and this dichotomy makes it difficult to adjust their own lives. While looking for these cultural adjustments they have to lose their identity and the xenophobic feeling may come to their conscience. Some xenophobic public responses because of the higher cultural gap will be common. They have to breathe with a duality with ideas, customs, and beliefs.

The migration of different species also represented in both the novels. The specific places of the Orcellas have found to be effected because of the climate disruption of the Sunderbans delta. The yellow bellied snake in America migrates northwards because of the temperature of the water. The spider Deen notices on his computer in Venice which is the *Loxosceles recluse* which is increasing its territory very quickly as its getting hotter in Europe. Cinta's description to Deen about the monstrous shipworms in Venice is another significant example of the climate induced migration of other species. With the increase in the temperature of the logoon's water these shipworms have started invading the foundation of the Venice, the wood pilings. In *The Hungry Tide* Piya also highlighted in this particular matter by encountering about the pollution of the water for which the 'big crab die- off' happened on the mud bank. According to Piya these crabs are an important species in the Sundarbans. The parallels of the Bark beetles in Oregon due to the global warming eating up the trees from inside which may cause a drastic drought in the area. Along with the species the weather patterns also altering in a regular basis. There are several weather events mentioned in the novel that connotes about the universality of the serious issue of climate change. The storms and cyclones are natural and habitual in the Sundarban delta. The cyclone Aila as mentioned in the text struck the Sundarbans on 2009 and its effect become the reason of the migration of the people from the Sundarbans. The wildfire in the Los Angeles compared with a tsunami of smoke to give a global picture of the reigning climate events. Through these climate events Amitav set a connection between the different parts of the globe like Europe (Rome), Asia (the

Sundarbans), and America (Los Angeles and Oregon). At last the North America also came to the picture being hit by a tornado.

At the end of *Gun Island* the utopian imagery presented by Ghosh is the exact utopian world that Nirmal had envisioned much earlier in *The Hungry Tide* centred on the refugee settlers. The only difference that lies between the two is that he has imagined that view in a local milieu but in the recent novel it happened in a global extent. All the migrated species, not only human beings but also the non human are showing their consent for that universal union to be happened. The specific symbols are being drawn to show the scene in a global extent. The Blue Boat in the conclusive scene is exactly the symbol of the outcome of the human deeds over time. The people present in the scene have coloured their face with the colours of their football clubs and that showed their fears. That fear and anger is because of the oppression on the past years on them, they are there to support the refugee settlement. The Boat is the powerful symbol of everything that is going wrong with the world, with the migrants' community. The inequality, climate change, capitalism, corruption, the oil industry are the concurrent issues that needed to be highlighted.

The climate change is a catalyst for the migration and for the migrants internet serves as the magic carpet. The process of climate change is the backdrop of the long process of history and that impacted the course of human world now. The social inequalities created by the past became intensified in the effect of climate change. The term 'global climate justice' should be taken seriously and should be implemented on an emergency basis. The globe itself is in the edge of another pandemic much bigger than the Covid.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- [1].Bergthaller, Hannes. "Cli-Fi and Petrofiction: Questioning Genre in the Anthropocene." *Amerikastudien / American Studies*, vol. 62, no. 1, 2017, pp. 120–25. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44982310>. Accessed 31 Oct. 2022.
- [2].Das, Saswat S. "Home and Homelessness in 'The Hungry Tide': A Discourse Unmade." *Indian Literature*, vol. 50, no. 5 (235), 2006, pp. 179–85. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23340744>. Accessed 31 Oct. 2022.
- [3].Draga Alexandru, Maria-Sabina. "A Sea of Violence and Love: Precarity, Eco-Fiction and the American Factor in Amitav Ghosh's The Hungry Tide." *Angles. New Perspectives on the Anglophone World* 9 (2019).
- [4].Dutrieux, Mathilde. "Climate Change in Amitav Ghosh's The Great Derangement, The Hungry Tide and Gun Island." (2021).
- [5].Garrard, Greg. *Ecocriticism*. Routledge, 2004.
- [6].Ghosh, Amitav. *Gun Island: A Novel*. Penguin Books India, 2019.
- [7].---, Ghosh, Amitav. *The hungry tide*. Penguin Books India, 2005.
- [8].---, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*. Gurgaon: Penguin Random House, 2017. Print.
- [9].---, "The Great Uprooting: Migration and Displacement in an Age of Planetary Crisis." *The Massachusetts Review* 62.4 (2021): 712-733.
- [10]. Gupta, Shaveta. "Ecocide: A Study of Climate Change in Amitav Ghosh's Gun Island." *Language in India* 20.5 (2020).

[11]. Huggan, Graham, and Helen Tiffin. *Postcolonial ecocriticism: Literature, animals, environment*. Routledge, 2015.

[12]. Jaising, Shakti. "Fixity Amid Flux: Aesthetics and Environmentalism in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*." *ariel: A Review of International English Literature*, vol. 46 no. 4, 2015, p. 63-88. *Project MUSE*, [doi:10.1353/ari.2015.0028](https://doi.org/10.1353/ari.2015.0028).

[13]. Jones, Brandon. "A Postcolonial Utopia for the Anthropocene: Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* and Climate-Induced Migration." *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*, vol. 64 no. 4, 2018, p.639-658. *Project MUSE*, [doi:10.1353/mfs.2018.0047](https://doi.org/10.1353/mfs.2018.0047). Accessed 22 Oct 2021.

[14]. Kaur, Rajender. "'Home Is Where the Oracella Are': Toward a New Paradigm of Transcultural Ecocritical Engagement in Amitav Ghosh's 'The Hungry Tide.'" *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2007, pp. 125– 41. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44086561>. Accessed 31 Oct. 2022.

[15]. Kumar, Priya. "The Environmentalism of The Hungry Tide." *Ecocriticism of the Global South* (2015): 11-34.

[16]. Nayar, Pramod K. "The Postcolonial Uncanny; The Politics of Dispossession in Amitav Ghosh's 'The Hungry Tide.'" *College Literature*, vol. 37, no. 4, 2010, pp. 88– 119. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27917766>. Accessed 30 Oct. 2022.

[17]. Pancholi, Nupur, and Sanjit Kumar Mishra. "The Era of Environmental Derangement: Witnessing Climate Crisis in Amitav Ghosh's Gun Island." (2021).

[18]. THOMAS, JULIA ADENNEY, et al. "JAS Round Table on Amitav Ghosh, 'The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable.'" *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 75, no. 4, 2016, pp. 929–55. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44165215>. Accessed 31 Oct. 2022.

[19]. Vescovi, Alessandro. "The Uncanny and the Secular in Amitav Ghosh's The Great Derangement and The Hungry Tide." *Le Simplegadi* 17 (2017): 212-222.

[20]. Weik, Alexa. "The home, the tide, and the world: eco-cosmopolitan encounters in Amitav Ghosh's The Hungry Tide." *Journal of Commonwealth and Postcolonial Studies* Vols 13.14.1 (2006): 2006-2007.

[21]. White, Laura A. "Novel Vision: Seeing the Sunderbans through Amitav Ghosh's 'The Hungry Tide.'" *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, vol. 20, no. 3, 2013, pp. 513–31. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44087261>. Accessed 26 Oct. 2022.