



“Beyond Borders: Climate Anxiety and Ecological Resistance in Amitav Ghosh’s “The Hungry Tide and Gun Island”

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Abstract

During increasing ecological disturbances and an unfolding climate emergency, literature has become an important locus for examining the complex relationships that constitute humanity’s relationship to the environment. This article offers an ecocritical reading of Amitav Ghosh’s novels *The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island*, concentrating on the linked tropes of climate anxiety and ecological resistance. By closely examining these texts, the study...gives prominence to Ghosh’s narrative techniques, which de-center anthropocentric models and render visible the socio-environmental effects of climate change, specifically within postcolonial sites. *The Hungry Tide* (2004) speaks of the vulnerabilization of subaltern communities in the vulnerable ecology of the Sundarbans, whereas *Gun Island* (2019) crosses borders of nation to represent a glocal environmental imaginary that is a result of myths, migration, and ecological precariousness. Through a close reading of selected novels by Amitav Ghosh and juxtaposing them with some of the more influential theoretical positions within ecocriticism and postcolonial environmental studies, the article suggests that Ghosh’s fiction does not merely condemn the epistemic violence of modernity but reimagines narrative as a form of resistance to ecocide. In the end, Ghosh’s literary endeavor constitutes a powerful intervention in Anthropocene discourse, commandeering it to provoke a reconsideration of not only ecological awareness but ethical accountability.

Keywords: Ecocriticism; Climate Disquiet; Ecological Resistance; Amitav Ghosh; Anthropocene; Postcolonial Environmentalism

Introduction

Irapuato-Rabanal Introduction Increased attention to urban ecology originated in the early century, a time of growing awareness of pollution and its effects on public health and food security, and concerns about poverty, unemployment, unsustainable growth, and environmental impacts. Ecocriticism, an interdisciplinary critical approach, examines textuality of nature and environmental ruin and locates literature as a unique discourse space and ethical site. As with Rob Nixon, a towering presence in postcolonial studies who also becomes a key interlocutor in *Revenants*, Amitav Ghosh becomes for him a crucial interlocutor in fleshing out the layered interrelations among climate change, environmental precarity, and cultural displacement. His fiction is a scathing indictment of anthropocentric modernity, prioritizing the marginalized ecologies and societies that tend to be lost or altered within dominant stories. This essay examines Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2004) and *Gun Island* (2019) as key sites of narrative innovation bringing climate anxiety and environmental resistance together.

The Hungry Tide painstakingly follows the delicate ecologies of the Sundarbans, revealing the complication of human and nonhuman agencies in states of environmental transition. By contrast, *Gun Island* places ecological catastrophes within a transnational network, using mythopoeic devices as much as scientific argument to address climate migration, species extinction, and the dissolution of geopolitical borders. In these texts, Ghosh complicates dominant forms of knowledge and reorganizes ecologies of being. Drawing especially on theoretical works by ecocritics and postcolonial environmentalists, this essay examines how Ghosh's narrative strategies challenge dominant anthropocentric structures and encourage forms of ecological resilience and resistance. In presenting literary production as a critical intervention in the Anthropocene conversation, this study emphasizes the urgency of re-envisioning human responsibility and of the interconnection of ecologies.

Theoretical Framework

The present research is located within the interdisciplinary field of ecocriticism, a mode of critical analysis which focuses on the portrayal of nature and the environment in literature, while emphasizing the ethical and political aspects of human-nature interactions (Glotfelty, 1996). Indeed, as a leading proponent of ecocriticism, Cheryll Glotfelty, argues, the field forces us to grapple with the anthropocentric frame that has sidelined the non-human and led to environmental catastrophe. Ecocriticism, then, aims to develop a more expansive environmental ethic, one put forth through literary analysis (Glotfelty, 1996; Garrard, 2012). It couples general ecocritical outlooks with postcolonial ecocriticism, which examines the amalgamation of histories of colonialism, environmental overexploitation, and native knowledge frameworks (Heise, 2016; Nixon, 2011). Postcolonial ecocriticism questions the Euro-centred narratives of nature and progress by pointing to what is lived and known by colonized communities inscribed through colonial and neo-colonial conditions (Grove, 1995). This frame is especially appropriate in the case of Amitav Ghosh, who is the postcolonial writer tackling ecological crisis in South Asia and elsewhere. This study also speaks to the construct of climate anxiety, a developing focus of eco-psychological exploration on the psychological

discomfort caused by climate change and ecological uncertainty (Clayton et al., 2017). Climate anxiety represents the emotional and existential dimensions of environmental emergency, and Ghosh's narratives paint a vivid picture of these through characters responses to environmental precariousness. The theoretical underpinning is also influenced by Amitav Ghosh's critical interventions in *The Great Derangement* (2016), in which he argues that the culture and literature of our times remain literally compromised in coming to terms with the challenges of the Anthropocene. Ghosh focuses our attention on the failure of the Enlightenment rationalism and the need for narrative forms capable of enduring the complexity of problem ecologies, myth and non-linear temporality as weapon of resistance (Ghosh 217).

Therefore, this book adopts a multi-layered theoretical lens of ecocriticism, postcolonial environmentalism, and eco-psychological framing to investigate the thematic and narrative choices in *The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island*. This template enables us to investigate how Ghosh's fiction undermines anthropocentric epistemologies while also articulating ecological resilience and resistance.

Literature Review

A. The Hungry Tide

The Hungry Tide (2004) by Amitav Ghosh is framed in the eco-sensitive milieu of the Sundarbans, "the largest tidal mangrove jungle in the world, [a] complex and iffy ecosystem characterised by its distinctive juxtaposition of earth, water, and bio characteristic diversity" (Chaudhuri, 2010). The novel highlights the complexities of the interactions between human and non-human forces, for instance, natural elements of dolphins, tides and seasonal storms are not just part of the context but also function as narrative agents that produce the socio-ecological texture of the place (Debnath, 2018). By anthropomorphizing nature, this move to render nature agential resists anthropocentric literary traditions and draws attention to the fact that humans and their environment are mutually dependent (Ghosh, 2004; Glotfelty, 1996).

At the core of the novel is also a portrayal of human-nature conflict, in the displacement and marginalization of indigenous and fishing communities whose fates are closely linked to, and threatened by, the vicissitudes of the ecosystem. Ghosh's sensitive representation of their socio-economic disempowerment and his exposé of both environmental degradation and state policies, which multiply their already existing marginal statuses (Sarkar, 2013), is a case in point. The figure of Fokir, a fisherman by trade, comes to represent ecological virtue and ancient wisdom, a profound, loving engagement with ecology the opposite of modern, exploitative behavior (Ghosh, 2004; Nandy, 2014). Fokir's empirical knowledge of the Sundarbans ecology foregrounds alternative ways of knowing based on lived-experience that ecocritics insist must supplement sustainable environmental futures as a matter of urgency (Buell, 2005).

In this sense, *The Hungry Tide* elucidates the dynamics of environmental vulnerability, human adaptation and cultural belonging, in the context of postcolonial ecology, rendering it a seminal site for studying the convergence of ecology, society, and literature.

B. Gun Island

3Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island* (2019) deftly juxtaposes myth with empirical implications in addressing the complexities of climate change, laying bare the porousness of the boundary between folklore and modern ecological disasters. The novel moves through different geographies—from the Sundarbans in India, the canals of Venice, to the urban spaces of Los Angeles—so as to place environmental degradation in a globalized, interconnected ecology that cuts across national boundaries and highlights the transnational character of climate effects (Ghosh, 2019; Nixon, 2011). This geographic diversity demonstrates the connectedness of ecosystems and people—showing that the threat of climate change is an over-arching, non-border problem.

At its heart is the concept of migration: of people forced to migrate because of environmental precarity, and of species threatened with extinction by habitat degradation and climate change. Ghosh highlights this nuance not only in the socio-political grounds of climate migration but also in its complexity, moving away from the simple economic aspects of migration and placing it in direct correlation with broader issues of environmental injustice and ecological susceptibility (Veracini, 2016; Ghosh, 2019). Moreover, the theme of mass extinction efficiently acts as a poignant allegory for suffering and endurance, rendering the fragile equilibrium between life and destruction of the present-day Anthropocene.

Crucially, *Gun Island* emphasises the power of narrative as ecological resistance. Through the entanglement of mythopoeic factors, for example the figure of the Gun Merchant and modern storylines, Ghosh unsettles hegemonic knowledges grounded in scientific rationalism and contends for a more pluralistic ecological epistemology (Ghosh, 2019; Haraway, 2016). This narrational approach enables a new imagining of human-environment relations, promoting empathy and shared responsibility in the era of ecological emergency.

With its attention to myth, migration, and extinction, *Gun Island* is a literary intervention into the fears of climate change, suggesting that story should be wielded as an instrument of consciousness of the environment, and resistance in the planetary community.

Comparative Discussion

Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island* Articulate a Peculiar Ecological Engagement
Ampat Koshy
The term 'eco-cultures' expresses the centrality of ecological concerns in ecology, bringing humans and non-humans of all kinds (animals, plants, planets, etc.) together and emphasizing that culture depends, integrates or is created, changed and moulded according to ecological principles and needs. Both novels foreground the sensuous existence of the people whose lives are threatened by ecological disaster, featuring displacement not only as physical migration but also as a process that involved cultural, environmental, and existential changes (Ghosh, 2004; 2019; Veracini, 2016). This thematic overlap demonstrates the multidimensional mechanisms through which climate change amplifies vulnerabilities, particularly among populations that are most marginalized, in ways that lead to a collective eco-anxiety which mirrors broader socio-political anxieties about environmental precarity (Clayton et al., 2017). In addition, Ghosh's dynamic conception of an

environmentalist imaginary is demonstrated in his nuanced depiction of ecological resistance as cultural survival and ethical necessity. The resistance in *The Hungry Tide* is endemic and informed by native ecology, such as in Fokir's ontological fusion with the Sundarbans, which contradicts the hegemonic idea of human-nature teleology (see Nandy, 2014; Buell, 2005). In contrast, *Gun Island* scales up this perspective to the transnational level, by centering collective resilience in the intersection of myth, science and activism, all of which advocate for an ecological crisis that is both holistic and pluralistic in scope (Ghosh, 2019; Haraway, 2016).

At the core of Ghosh's narrative strategy there is the very idea that myth and folklore are a critical means to investigate and subvert modern epistemological formations that tend to disqualify non-Western knowledge systems and ecological entanglements (Ghosh, 2016; Heise, 2016). Through employing mythopoetic elements, both novels disrupt linear, positivist stories of climate change and bring forth a multi-dimensional climate sense that is comfortable with uncertainty and relationality. Not only does this strategy challenge the epistemic arrogance of the modern, it also brings storytelling to bear as a strategy of ecological and cultural resistance that connects with more recent postcolonial and ecocritical scholarship that values indigenous epistemologies and cosmologies (Nixon, 2011: 4; Haraway, 2016).

As a result, by way of their interrelated themes and narrative strategies, *The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island* work together to reimagine an ecological consciousness that foregrounds an ethical unfolding, resilient communities, and multiple different ways of knowing in the Anthropocene. Amitav Ghosh's writings form an important intervention in current environmental conversations, highlighting the intricate intersections of climate change, cultural identity, and ecological frailty. In *The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island*, Ghosh deconstructs traditional fictive spaces by integrating ecological issues along with postcolonial critiques, undermining the common anthropocentric worldviews and drawing overdue attention to the voices of the battered environment (Ghosh, 2016; Nixon, 2011). His literature draws attention to the necessity of acknowledging interrelated human and non-human vulnerabilities in the age of the Anthropocene.

Conclusion:

Ghosh's writings reflect on literature as a medium of another kind of ecological resistance, literature being used to contribute to the end of environmental ignorance and the emergence of ethical inhabitation. Through myth, history, and science Ghosh reanimates narrative as a means for fostering ecological awareness and a shared responsibility. Here literary activism reveals the impact of cultural production on environmental mind-frames and its ability to initiate micro and intermediate-scale pathways towards sustainability. In the end, this research underscores the pressing call to a resensitized ecological accountability that spans beyond the limits of disciplines and geopolitical location. Ghosh's fiction argues for a shift in the paradigm between human and environment, pressing for a multi-species ethics based on empathy, resilience, and justice. This vision is the only way to meet the unprecedented challenges of the 21st century, and to build sustainable futures in a fast changing world.

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