



DOI: 10.17846/aa-2026-18-1-17-39

From myth to reality: Rewriting environmental derangement and the refugee crisis in Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island* (2019)

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Abstract:

*The long-term alteration of the Earth's climate patterns associated with increasing levels of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases have impacted the Earth's atmosphere. South Asian countries are witnessing the severe effects of climate change in the form of climate-induced migration. Amitav Ghosh reworks the Bengali folk legend (Bonduki Sadagar) into an autochthonous story and draws a parallel between the "Little Ice Age" of the 17th century and today's planetary crisis. The author has juxtaposed the past with the present to intensify the calamity and evaluate how humans and nonhumans are witnessing the precarity through migration from one country to another for survival. The changing climate is already affecting the physical and emotional security of vulnerable communities in South Asia, as exemplified in *Gun Island*. This paper re-examines the impact of the "refugee crisis" through the idea of climate realism and argues that the refugee crisis is the problem of the postcolonial state. We furthermore delve into climate-induced migration, the uncanny and calamity in the nonhuman*

world, and the importance of climate justice from the perspective of the Global South. The research article is based on a standard approach of ecocriticism and thoroughly examines migration related to human predicaments in the Sundarbans as perceived by Ghosh.

Introduction

Climate change is one of the most alarming threats the world is facing at this critical point in human history. Different organizations (the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate [IPCC]; United Nations [UN]; and Climate Action Network [CAN]) have defined climate change in various ways. The IPCC defines the dreadful effect of climate calamity as the impacts of climate change are visible on all continents and oceans, and it has emphasized making choices on risks in a changing world (Jolly and Ahmed, 2019, p. 16). The chief scientific advisor of the UK (from October 2000 to December 2007) asserted that climate change would be “a far greater threat to the world’s” stability than international terrorism (BBC News online, January 9, 2004). While climate change represents one of the most significant challenges of our time, climate fiction has become a vital means of confronting this difficult truth. Climate fiction distinguishes itself from other literary genres by foregrounding substantial consequences of both natural and anthropogenic climate change. In *The Great Derangement* (2016), Ghosh addresses the question of why “serious” modern fiction is finding it challenging to accommodate the climate crisis in contemporary writing. However, Ghosh points out that “fiction that deals with climate change is almost by definition not of the kind that is taken seriously by serious literary journals” and “mention of the subject is often enough to relegate a novel or a short story to the genre of science fiction” (Ghosh, 2016, p. 9). In the end, he trickily argues that climate change poses a challenge to what is currently considered as serious fiction. Indeed, fiction tries to inform us in advance about environmental derangement, such as Indra Sinha’s *Animal’s People* (2007), Dana Stein’s *Fire in the Wind* (2010), Barbara Kingsolver’s *Flight Behaviour* (2012), Clara Hume’s *Back to the Garden* (2013), Nathaniel Rich’s *Odds Against Tomorrow* (2013), Kim Stanley Robinson’s *The Ministry for the Future* (2020), and Siddhartha Deb’s *The Light at the End of the World: A Novel* (2023).

Ghosh argues that the failure to acknowledge human impacts on the environment is the root cause of the inability to recognize the immediate threat posed by nature. Human activity has significantly influenced the Earth’s climate in a manner that might lead to irreversible consequences. For Ghosh, a tone of uncanniness is encountered frequently in the novel. Uncanniness means “stranger in his own essence” (Haar, 1993), and Heidegger defines it as “unhomeliness and uncertainty” (Withy, 2015, p. 8). Furthermore, this uncanniness has

impacted the human realm and is evident in the nonhuman world. Concentrating on ecological disruptions in the Sundarbans mangrove forest, Ghosh explored the effects of human-animal conflicts in his previous work, *The Hungry Tide* (2004). In *The Hungry Tide*, the author delves into the clash between the government and the refugee crisis stemming from the Morichjhapi massacre and Project Tiger. While taking the initiative to formulate a new fiction on climate-induced migration and refugee crisis, Ghosh challenges the notion of nationality as a way to define belonging beyond borders, a concept questioned by the present “refugee crisis” and world literature. Analysing the modern world through the lenses of global literature and the refugee crisis reveals a significant relationship between individual and state identities within a broader global framework that includes both a sense of belonging and a state of crisis. The research article explores how *Gun Island* (2019) rewrites environmental derangement and the refugee crisis by intertwining myth with reality. Ghosh’s narrative suggests that the current ecological breakdown and human displacement are not unprecedented but are deeply connected to historical and mythological patterns of upheaval. By doing so, the novel challenges conventional perceptions of climate refugees and repositions them within a continuum of human migration driven by environmental forces.

Climate reality

The research article spotlights Ghosh’s perspective on climate change, focusing on his use of the concept of “climate realism” to address the issue of climate-induced migration and refugee crisis. Ghosh contends that there is a growing apprehension regarding the inseparability of the fossil fuel industry and its production from the political ecology and biophysical realities of climate change. More specifically, climate realism suggests that how we interact with the material world, objects, and subjective experiences can be evaluated and utilized to comprehend and negotiate the challenges posed by climate change, ecological complexity, and planetary instabilities. In this sense, this approach recognizes the need for a collective effort to navigate the far-reaching consequences of these issues on our thinking, politics, understanding of existence, and appreciation of beauty (Badia et al., p. 5). The fundamental proposition of climate realism is that the unusual weather patterns observed today are not only considered strange due to their deviation from the expected seasonal norms but also because they highlight aspects of the current state of affairs that challenge the foundations of meteorology, philosophy, realist aesthetics, and cultural criticism. Moreover, climate realism illuminates the unique origins of realism and focuses on its historical connections with energy, environment, and weather. In an interview, Ghosh argues that human actions contribute to the increase in carbon

footprint, as our aspirations are primarily related to carbon. According to Ghosh, the degradation caused by the worldwide economy's reliance on carbon emissions has reached a critical point. Even if we were to take immediate action and completely cease using fossil fuels today, certain repercussions would still be unavoidable (Ghosh, 2017). In his assessment, Ghosh reinterprets literary texts within the contemporary ecological context, scrutinizing the relationship between planetary aesthetics and literary history. Ghosh accentuates the challenge of accurately depicting the unpredictable nature of climate change in our current era using the techniques found in realist novels (Badia et al., p. 5). According to them, the most effective way to illustrate climate realism is to elaborate on the concept of a global carbon budget. Increasingly carbon-intensive human activity has warmed the atmosphere (greenhouse effect) since the beginning of the industrial revolution. To communicate the environmental derangement, Ghosh, outlines the unsettling reality that the wild has become the new norm in his novel *Gun Island*. The protagonist, Deen – a dealer of rare books and Asian antiquities, presents an explanation for climate change, asserting that global warming is occurring due to excessive carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. Deen argues that this change is a natural occurrence (Ghosh, 2019, p. 214). However, Cinta, a humanist, strongly objects when Deen refers to global warming as a natural phenomenon. She questions the origin of these gases and raises concerns about human-made sources such as cars, planes, factories, and household appliances. Cinta questions the naturalness of our dependence on these modern conveniences that were non-existent a century ago (ibid., p. 214).

With a comprehensive and intellectually open approach to the severe consequences of climate change, *Gun Island* embraces individual and collective interests that transcend borders and countries. While the text has been defined as climate fiction, we contend that it is “climate refugee fiction”, where Ghosh has applied “serious” climatic elements to exemplify refugee crisis. The concept of the “climate refugee” has gained traction in recent years as environmental degradation forces populations to flee their homes. Kluwick encapsulates it as a “nexus between climate change and refugee crisis” (Kluwick, 2020) The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that by 2050, up to 250 million people could be displaced due to climate-related tragedy. Contemporary refugee fiction has begun to reflect this reality, shifting from war and political persecution as primary drivers of displacement to ecological collapse. Novels such as *Exit West* (2017) by Mohsin Hamid and *Migrations* (2020) by Cormac McCarthy employ speculative elements to imagine worlds where borders dissolve under environmental pressures. To fully situate *Gun Island* within climate refugee fiction, comparing it with other contemporary works is instructive. Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* employs

magical realism to depict migration through mysterious doors that transport refugees across borders. While Hamid's novel focuses on geopolitical conflict, Ghosh's narrative centres on ecological collapse as the primary driver of displacement. Both, however, challenge the notion of fixed borders and suggest that climate change will render national boundaries obsolete. To this end, migration due to climate change has been a concern of researchers and policy experts for the last two decades. Security officials have predicted that the significant single impact of the climate crisis could be on human migration (Rajan and Bhagat, 2018). As a result, extreme weather patterns, sea-level rise, and changing weather conditions have been expected to escalate migration and population displacement. In academia, climate-induced migration has been dominated by futurology (Baldwin et al., 2014, p. 121). On the other hand, climate-induced migration has interlinked politics and security (Baldwin et al., 2014, p. 122). Migration is another central theme in the 2014 Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Since the 2000s, the UN Security Council has observed climate change as a security issue. Ghosh sharply underscores the profound social and ecological transformations sweeping the Global South, arguing that these shifts are giving rise to a distinct emotional response to the planetary crisis – a phenomenon that Rakibul Khan defines as “Planetary Environmentalism” (Khan, 2024, p. 2). While some may dismiss this emerging disposition as mere sentimentality, Ghosh and Khan compellingly assert that it represents a critical, politically charged engagement with environmental degradation. Ghosh intentionally has made symbolic and physical connections between his settings – the Sundarbans region, Los Angeles and Venice, to emphasize precarity, which is visible in both the local and the global arena. In *Gun Island*, the author draws our attention to the fact “that any hope of the global climate justice depends upon affluent global north populations (and especially governments) adopting a planetary consciousness, and understanding how their carbon-rich lifestyles are affecting Global South regions” (Gilson, 2022, p. 4). The position of the Global South depends on the North's apprehension, as it is not capable of ingenious thinking and takes for granted what is imposed on it.

Entanglement between past and present: The Gun Merchant, migrants, and the Sundarbans

Amitav Ghosh in *Gun Island* uses the autochthonous Bengali myth “Manasamangal Kavya” – the tale of the vengeful snake goddess Manasa and Chand Sadagar. Chand Sadagar was reputed to be a wealthy merchant who suffered the loss of his fortune and loved ones, including his son Lakhinder, due to his refusal to pledge allegiance to Manasa Devi. Infuriated by his audacity,

she deliberately sank Chand Sadagar's vessels and dispatched a venomous serpent to assassinate Lakhinder on the evening of his nuptials. Ultimately, the responsibility of reviving her husband, Lakhinder, fell upon Behula. She accomplished this through her unwavering dedication, similar to a Greek mythological hero, and by pledging to persuade her father-in-law, Chand Sadagar, to worship Manasa. The story has endured through generations in Bengali oral traditions. It has been passed down through various mediums such as jatra (rural folk theatre), television serials, movies, and other forms of popular culture. Ghosh spotlights the "journey" of Chand Sadagar with the "migrants" of the modern age. During the 17th century, laskars, sailors and militiamen from Bengal, migrated to Italy to seek employment in the shipyards. More than three centuries later, the longing to journey from the eastern part of the world to the western part still exists, driven by environmental circumstances. In modern usage, "migrants" evokes poignant visuals of groups of individuals aboard vulnerable vessels, determined to reach lands that offer the assurance of security. Sometimes, a multitude of refugees are compelled to reside in deplorable conditions in encampments and enclaves throughout Western cities. However, the reality, as always, is much more intricate and not always immediately apparent.

Ghosh intertwines the anthropogenic climate crisis with the current era of planetary upheaval. Deen, an antiquarian book dealer, deconstructs the mystery of Bonduki Sadagar (Gun Merchant); being an expert on Bengali folklore, Deen has unfolded the meaning of Bonduki Sadagar through the gradual plot development. Ghosh's premodern mythical hero, the Gun Merchant, whose homeland is eastern India, was struck by drought and floods caused by the climate disruption of the "Little Ice Age": "In any event, many parts of the world had been struck by famines, droughts and epidemics in the seventeenth century" (Ghosh, 2019, p. 122). In his influential non-fictional work, *The Nutmeg's Curse* (2021), Ghosh critically evaluated colonial and terraforming exercises on Banda Island and commented on the Little Ice Age. Recent research proclaims that the "catastrophic decline in the population of the Americas that collapsed suddenly with the European onslaught might have contributed in some degree to the drop in global mean temperatures that occurred in the Little Ice Age" (Ghosh, 2019, p. 53). In *Gun Island*, as the progression of the plot unfolds, Deen learns about the Bonduki Sadagar and a "wonder tale about fantastic places and people" (Ghosh, 2019, p. 137). However, *Gun Island* anticipates ecological derangement on a global scale, focusing on how this myth views ecological conflict and how the unity of events juxtaposes with one another. Ghosh comprehends that these old legends underwent the same hostile situation that we have been going through. So, the author has orchestrated the methods of "implausibility, coincidences

and ancient myth” to accentuate climate reality and planetary crisis. Ghosh has just increased the tempo of the 17th century from the perspective of world history. In Los Angeles, a speaker talked about the topic, “Climate and Apocalypse in the Seventeenth Century” (Ghosh, 2019, p. 121), where the speaker addressed a brief history of the 17th century. HR Trevor-Roper exhorts that “the crisis of the mid-seventeenth century did not come by surprise, out of sudden accidents: it was deep-seated and anticipated, if only vaguely anticipated even before the accidents which launched it” (1959, p. 32). Indeed, Ghosh affirms that the perils of environmental disruption will affect every region of the world without exception. The calamity has previously ravaged the planet, which is currently experiencing a comparable condition. Ghosh abruptly shifts the topic to the eminent intellectuals of the 17th century, indicating his intention to discuss contemporary experts and the significance of intellectuals in today’s society. Katrina Forrester (2018) explores the importance of intellectual disciplines in envisioning the future. It depicts the need for these disciplines to address contentious normative issues regarding the relationship between the past, present, and future. Forrester examines the rise of the intergenerational issue that has become severe in modern analytical philosophy. She examines a conflict (explored by philosophers in those discussions) that arises from two contrasting perspectives on the future. On the one hand, there is the view that the future is a continuation of historical progression, but with ethical beliefs that are difficult to envision. On the other hand, the perspective treats future individuals as equal to present ones without any significant differences in ethical considerations.

Following Haren’s arrival at the shrine, Deen gets some fragmented story about the Gun Merchant related to “the figure of the Gun Merchant” and “the symbol that he was paired with.” In the chapter “Gun Island”, Deen comprehensively solves this “wonder tale” with the help of Cinta, an expert on Venice. The Gun Merchant has been brought to Goa by a Jewish sailor named Nakhuda Ilyas, with whom he went to the Maldives Islands, where they captured a cargo of cowrie shells. Deen solves the mystery of “the Land of palm sugar candy” and “the Land of Kerchieves”, which refer to Egypt and Turkey, respectively. Nakhuda Ilyas and the Gun Merchant have gone through both countries and reached an “Island within an Island”, which means Venice. Cinta affirms that “at the time when your merchant came here, in the 1660s, Venice was a shrunken, haunted city. Its best days as a commercial power were over – they had ended with the discovery of the new sea routes, to the Americas and to the Indian Ocean” (Ghosh, 2019, p. 220). Alexander Koch (2019) argues that human activities impacted carbon dioxide levels and the rising of global temperatures in the 16th and 17th centuries, right prior to the Industrial Revolution. Additionally, he also claims that these atmospheric carbon

dioxide levels were responsible for the Great Dying among the indigenous peoples in the Americas.

The Sundarbans not only holds the distinction of being the biggest mangrove delta in the world, but it also serves as the sole natural barrier against the formidable tropical cyclones originating in the Bay of Bengal. In *Gun Island*, the Sundarbans are depicted as a place where social and environmental predicament exacerbate one another. Nature has power over people's means of sustenance. Moyna's testimony in the novel reveals Aila's enduring consequences: vast embankments, extending for hundreds of kilometres, collapsed, letting the sea invade areas that had never been vulnerable before. Additionally, large areas of formerly arable land are submerged by saltwater, making them unsuitable for cultivation for at least one generation, if not indefinitely (Ghosh, 2019, p. 48). The fertile soil has become contaminated by the intrusion of saline water, rendering it unsuitable for agricultural purposes. Horen, a fisherman hailing from the Tide Country, was compelled to switch professions following the unfortunate loss of two of his trawlers and other vessels during the devastating Aila storm in 2009. This is the narrative of the majority of individuals residing in the Tide Country. Due to their inability to secure jobs, women in the Sundarbans Delta region are compelled to engage in prostitution, so exposing themselves to extreme vulnerability. The occupations and means of subsistence of the people living in the Sundarbans region have been affected by the changing climate and its aftermath. These environmental issues remind us of the notion of "slow violence" as presented by Rob Nixon. We wish to offer a reading of *Gun Island* which brings the postcolonial dimensions that we have outlined to a deeper level later on, well rooted in discussions on climate change and the refugee crisis. Slow violence, Nixon explains, is a form of violence that takes place gradually and is not immediately visible. It involves the slow devastation that occurs over time and in many locations. This type of violence is sometimes not recognized as violence at all (Nixon, 2013, p. 2). The Tide Country has recently encountered notable cyclones and climatic dangers, including Aila in 2009, Bijli in 2009, Phailin in 2013, Bulbul in 2019, Amphan in 2020, Yaas in 2021, and Remal in 2024. Ghosh's non-fictional work, *The Nutmeg Curse*, vividly recounts his encounters, illustrating the lethal consequences of Amphan. He acknowledges,

Over the next few days, as Cyclone Amphan intensified into the most powerful storm ever recorded in the Bay of Bengal, I was constantly on the phone with my sister. We went over the preparations in the minutest detail: how doors and windows were to be secured; how leaks were to be prevented; what kinds of food and medicine were to be stocked. (Ghosh, 2021, p. 136)

Avijit Mistri (2020) explores the extent to which the Sundarbans people rely on agriculture and fisheries for survival. Climate change, health problems, and underdevelopment in the Sundarbans make livelihoods more complex and vulnerable. Also, out-migration is the best way to survive for livelihoods. Ghosh notes,

Making a life the Sundarbans had become so hard that the exodus of the young was accelerating every year: boys and girls were borrowing and stealing to pay agents to find them work elsewhere. Some were slipping over the border into Bangladesh to join labor gangs headed for the Gulf. (Ghosh, 2019, p. 49)

Climate change displacement and the “refugee crisis” in *Gun Island*

The Sundarbans have been subjected to several natural calamities, such as tropical cyclones, flooding caused by storm surges, and the rise in sea levels. Floods are a recurring phenomenon in the Sundarbans, resulting in the submersion of low-lying areas during the monsoon season. This occurs as rainwater from the Indian subcontinent drains through the Brahmaputra, Ganges, and Meghna River basins. The rural populations of Bangladesh and India primarily rely on agriculture, fishing, and aquaculture ponds as their primary sources of revenue and subsistence. Bangladesh is often portrayed as a region extremely susceptible to climate change’s impact. Its coastal residents are described as individuals affected by climate change and forced to migrate to escape the dangers of rising sea levels or cyclonic events (Jolly and Ahmed 2019; McDonnell, 2019). The classification of those migrating to Bangladesh and India as “climate refugees” fails to acknowledge the longstanding and ongoing phenomenon of movement among agrarian communities (Farbotko and Lazarus, 2012). Over the past few years, the floodwaters have risen well over their normal levels, severely harming the livelihoods of the impoverished islanders. The dynamic environment can serve as a catalyst for migration and may directly contribute to the occurrence of migration.

In this discussion, we have demonstrated why the term “climate refugee” should be adopted. Far from mere semantics, this precise terminology is essential to confront the urgency of the crisis. We contend that the term unflinchingly captures the severity of the issue – and highlights how a vulnerable population is systematically stripped of their most basic right: the right to a dignified and sustainable life in their own homeland. These are not passive victims of circumstance but those disproportionately burdened by a crisis they did not create, and the language we use must reflect that injustice. The term “climate refugee” refers to individuals

who, due to circumstances beyond their control, are compelled to abandon their homes and exhibit resilience and bravery in their pursuit of a better life elsewhere. The debate on the continued relevance and suitability of the 1951 convention is significant, but it is not the focus of our discussion here. Nevertheless, we must not permit this outdated artefact to determine the remedies for present and future migrants, particularly those such as climate refugees, who were anticipated by the creators of that agreement.

Climate refugees, as described by Behrman and Kent (2018), are expected to face two distinct categories of challenges. Initially, environmental changes and calamities have impacted resources and land. Additionally, certain governments may prioritize specific segments of their citizens over others for relief and internal interests. Conversely, the least developed nations will likely be unable to accommodate all of their citizens who have been displaced due to the effects of climate change (Behram and Kent 2018, p. 11). The challenges of survival in the Sundarbans are exacerbated by climate change, livelihood issues, and significant infrastructure shortages. Ghosh's take on writing about migration is perceivable as he intentionally shows Deen's timing of arrival in Kolkata to "coincide with the annual migration that occurs when the weather turns cold in the northern climes" (Ghosh, 2019, p. 4). While interacting with Tipu, Deen learns about the susceptible condition of the people of the Tide Country. The tidal people's traditional ways of existence have been made more difficult by the increasing salinity brought on by climate change. According to Tipu,

... there's a whole bunch of dirt-poor, illiterate people scratching out a living by fishing or farming or going into what they used to do. But now the fish catch is down, the land's turning salty, and you can't go into the jungle without bribing the forest guards. On the top of that every other year you get hit by a storm that blows everything to pieces. (Ghosh, 2019, p. 60)

The recurrent cyclones have affected people's means of subsistence through three primary mechanisms: tidal surge, wind destruction, and precipitation. Tidal waters, conversely, result in a reduction in soil organic matter and an elevation in salinity levels. Myers (2002) states that poverty is influenced by various "push" factors such as high population density, unemployment, landlessness, urbanization, diseases, and government mismanagement. Distinguishing between refugees resulting from environmental factors and those caused by economic recessions might be challenging in some circumstances. In this work of fiction, Ghosh develops agencies that have relocated abroad in search of greater prosperity. Ghosh

exemplifies that migration is a continuum, and climate change intervenes in human vulnerability.

Despite dropping out of school, Tipu is an internet and smartphone whiz, and he beseeches Deen that the phone has become a necessary tool for migration. Dalals are the persons who are contracted for migration over phones, and the phones tell them which route will open and which will remain closed. Their phones help them to find suitable shelter: “The Internet is the migrants’ magic carpet” (p. 61). Even though the planetary crisis takes up most of the narrative, it also discusses the effects of globalization. Modern information and communication technology’s (ICT) strength is strong enough to make this possible. Tipu and Rafi decide one evening to travel to Dhaka by way of the Raimangal river. With just a backpack, some clothes, and around 250 US dollars, they cross the Indian border and reach the immigration checkpoint. Tipu used to call the Dalals “jackals” because men like them are called so in America. After staying three days at Connection House, they cross the Indian border and reach Pakistan. They leave Connection House after three days and enter Pakistan by crossing the Indian border. Afterward, Tipu and Rafi travel through Iran and Afghanistan to Turkey. They part ways in Turkey, and Rafi shows up in Venice. The IPCC (1990) warned in the early 1990s that human migration would be the most significant effect of climate change, displacing millions of people due to severe drought, flooding along coastal areas, rising sea levels, and agricultural disruption. In 1990, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and Refugee Agency published a report titled “Migration and the Environment”, stating that the desertification of migration would increase in the coming years as large areas of the world would be depopulated. There is proof that climate-related displacement is driving female trafficking in places like the Sundarbans, a link recognized by the Paris Agreement. In *Gun Island*, the author reflects it: “The Sundarbans had always attracted traffickers, because of its poverty, but never in such numbers as after Aila; they had descended in swarms, spiriting women off to distant brothels and transporting able-bodied men to work sites its faraway cities or even abroad” (p. 49). South Asian nations now acknowledge that migration is also influenced by climate change. Climate change was acknowledged as a top priority at the SAARC (2011) summit, and most of the South Asian nations have implemented national plans and policies in this area.

The uncanny and calamity in the nonhuman world: The Sundarbans, Venice and worldwide

In *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh articulates a profound concern for the fragile ecosystem of aquatic species in the Sundarbans, a theme he explores through the perspective of Piya, a marine biologist. Ghosh later revisits and reconfigures this ecological consciousness through the protagonist of *Gun Island*, further extending her engagement with environmental precarity. The extinction of the Irrawaddy dolphins in this region underscores a broader ecological crisis. Ghosh's work delves into the unsettling dynamics of the nonhuman world, revealing the far-reaching consequences of biodiversity loss. Such ecological disruptions not only inflict irreversible damage upon the Sundarbans but also provoke global apprehension regarding environmental degradation. One particular chapter of the novel "Visions" highlights the uncanny of the animal world:

Things about animals, and fish, and the water – he'd tell me that I didn't need to learn what he knew because the rivers and the forest and the animals are no longer as they were. He used to say that things were changing so much, and so fast, that I wouldn't be able to get by here – he told me that one day I would have no choice but to leave. (Ghosh, 2019, p. 86)

Anthropogenic climate change has profoundly disrupted the global nonhuman ecosystem; a phenomenon starkly illustrated in *The Sixth Extinction* (Kolbert, 2014). One notable consequence is the displacement of wildlife from their natural habitats, exemplified by incidents such as Tipu's encounter with a king Cobra in the shrine – an event linked to shifting ecological conditions. Climate change is projected to exert multifaceted pressures on species worldwide with biological systems already manifesting observable effects. As a biologist, Piya investigates behavioural adaptations in the Sundarbans dolphins, attributing these changes to rapid shifts in aquatic chemistry. As the sea level increases, saltwater infiltrates further upstream, causing specific sections of the water to become excessively saline and unsuitable for dolphins. Dolphins have altered the waterways which they frequented before. Piya further elaborates to Deen on the phenomenon of Oceanic dead zones. Victor Paine (2012) argues that dead zones are large areas of water that exist in the ocean, lakes, or rivers that do not have enough oxygen to support marine life. This "hypoxic" (oxygen deficiency) state is usually caused by eutrophication, an increase in the level of chemicals in the water. Dead zones are found worldwide, but most are located near areas where heavy agriculture and industry cause nutrients to enter the water and affect the water cycle.

Ghosh underscores the profound ecological repercussions of climate change on Arctic forests and their insect populations, which significantly destabilize these ecosystems. Notably, Lisa – an entomologist and former college roommate of Piya – conducts research on bark beetles, documenting their destructive behaviour as they infest trees from within. Her observations reveal that rising temperatures in mountainous regions have facilitated the expansion of bark beetle populations, leading to widespread forest degradation (Ghosh, 2019, p. 109). This proliferation has precipitated severe environmental consequences, including prolonged droughts and catastrophic wildfires in affected regions. Supporting this phenomenon, Heliovara and Peltonen (1999) argue that climatic shifts have induced dramatic transformations in Arctic Forest ecosystems and their insect inhabitants, particularly in areas experiencing substantial temperature increases. Their research further corroborates the link between global warming and the escalating disruption of these fragile ecological networks. Global warming will instigate the disturbance of natural communities and cause the elimination of population and species. Global climate change and global heating have resulted in an increased number of wildfires with greater intensity. While traveling to Los Angeles, Deen has seen the devastation of wildfires. Deen sees that thousands of acres of land have been incinerated for safety purposes (ibid., p. 115). *Gun Island* illuminates the physical landscape and the vulnerable condition of our biosphere: “Even more striking was the landscape that lay beneath our flightpath – a charred, smouldering stretch of forested hillside that had already been laid waste by the fires” (Ghosh, 2019, p. 116). Such conflagrations have precipitated environmental repercussions for avian populations, exacerbating biodiversity loss. Indeed, the 21st century has been marked by devastating wildfires across continents, exemplified by the Australian bushfires (2019), the unprecedented burning of the Amazon rainforest (2020), and Los Angeles wild fires (2025).

Gun Island earnestly explores the modern climate reality and long-lasting ecocritical demand for global awareness. Heise emphasizes the requirement of cultivating a “sense of planet” over a mere “sense of place”. She contends (Heise, 2008, p. 55) that the deterritorialization of local knowledge does not necessarily undermine environmentalist perspectives; rather, it opens new possibilities for fostering ecological awareness. For Heise, developing “ecological awareness” and “environmental ethics” is essential to nurturing these planetary sensibilities. It entails understanding how political, economic, technological, social, and ecological networks influence daily routines. Ghosh has theoretically and practically prioritized the planet and explored to “encourage avenues of inquiry into ecological connectedness that do not take their starting point in a familiarity with the local environment”

(Heise, 2008, p. 56). Ghosh's narrative relentlessly exposes the unsettling parallels between the Sundarbans and Venice – two seemingly disparate landscapes on the brink of ecological collapse. As an anthropologist, Ghosh does not merely observe; he forcefully argues that Venice, much like the Sundarbans, is hurtling towards disaster. Yet, while climate refugees flee the sinking islands of the Sundarbans in search of survival, they are met with the cruel irony of a Venice that is itself drowning – not just by rising seas, but by human arrogance and shortsightedness. How can a city that symbolizes resilience and cultural heritage be so blind to its own impending doom? The answer lies in the same destructive forces that have ravaged the Sundarbans: reckless industrialization, political negligence, and the global apathy towards climate-induced displacement. Ghosh's work is not just a warning – it is an indictment of a world that refuses to act even as both land and humanity slip beneath the waves. According to Arianna Varrani and Michael Nones (2018), Venice submerged 23 cm in the 20th century, including eruption eustatism. The combination of subsidence and sea-level rise have played an essential role regarding the flood vulnerability of Venice, as both have influenced the flooding probability that has extended the affected area. When Deen visits Cinta's apartment in the chapter "Rafi", after a 12-year absence, he notices that the marble floor of the lobby is underwater, water occasionally goes knee-deep and even the passerella is often swamped. The floods have become so frequent that the residents have more or less stopped using the front entrance (Ghosh, 2019, p. 164).

Venice is known as "a city of bridges", and wooden bridges are on the verge of collapsing. One of the friends of Cinta brings her to the Punta Della Dogana art museum, and Cinta visits the same place with Deen, where Cinta shows him that shipworms have eaten up the timbers from the inside, weakening the foundations of the city. Peter Paalvast and Gerard Vander (2013) have noted that shipworms could damage fir piles 15 cm in diameter in almost six weeks, and 10 m long and 25 cm thick oak pilings can be turned into rubble in 7 months. In 1995, damages exceeded approximately US\$200m, and attempts to protect wooden structures from shipworms for centuries have not been satisfactory. The invasive borrowing molluscs pose a dire and undeniable threat to Venice, mirroring the devastation already witnessed in the Sundarbans. Rafi's assertion that "it's just like the Sundarbans" (p. 235) is not mere hyperbole – it is a stark warning. These molluscs are actively eroding the embankments of both regions, accelerating ecological collapse (p. 235). The destructive impact of such species is not isolated; research by Sinead M Crotty (2020) confirms that the marsh crab *Seasarma reticulatum* is drastically altering the geomorphology of Southern US salt marshes. Rising sea levels have exacerbated this crisis, disrupted marsh ecosystems and distorted tidal

patterns in ways that traditional marsh structures can no longer withstand. To dismiss these changes as mere natural fluctuations is dangerously naive. Global climate change is wreaking havoc, and Italy is no exception. Extreme weather events – torrential rains in the North, violent winds, and the decimation of Sud Tirol’s forests – are not random anomalies but direct consequences of environmental degradation. Ghosh’s deliberate parallel between Venice and the Sundarbans is a powerful indictment of humanity’s role in this planetary crisis. The evidence is overwhelming: if urgent action is not taken, the erosion of these fragile ecosystems will only accelerate, leaving irreversible destruction in its wake. The time for debate is over – the crisis is here, and it demands an immediate response.

Augmenting the importance of climate justice: Context of the Global South

The term “Global South” is not merely a geographical designation but a political and economic critique, representing the systemic marginalization of developing nations in contrast to the industrialized, exploitative powers of the “Global North.” Climate change is not just an environmental crisis – it is a geopolitical upheaval that exposes and exacerbates the entrenched inequalities between these worlds. Amitav Ghosh’s *Gun Island* forces us to confront the urgent ecocritical concerns of the Global South, where literature and ecology are inextricably linked. The novel demands a radical rethinking of how we interpret literary narratives and humanity’s destructive relationship with nature. Critics who dismiss ecocriticism as an abstract academic exercise must reckon with works like *Ecocriticism of the Global South* (2015), which unflinchingly exposes how neoliberal economic policies have ravaged the environments and livelihoods of millions dependent on natural resources. Ghosh’s narrative goes further, implicating the Global South in the refugee crisis – a direct consequence of climate injustice and geopolitical exploitation. Gisa, Cinta’s niece, working on a documentary on migration, observes that in Italy and Europe, “Everyone is talking about the *rifugiati* and *immigrati*. Our new right-wing government came to power because they promised to be tough on migration” (p.145). Ghosh lays bare Europe’s hypocrisy: a continent that profits from the exploitation of the South now demonizes those fleeing its consequences. Italy’s right-wing government, with its xenophobic rhetoric and draconian immigration policies, is not an anomaly but a symptom of a broader, systemic refusal to acknowledge complicity in global displacement. To label such regimes merely as “anti-immigration” is a gross understatement – they are the enforcers of a brutal hierarchy that prioritizes borders over humanity. Ghosh’s indictment is clear: the same forces that plunder the Global South’s resources now criminalize its people when they seek

survival. If literature and ecocriticism are to have any real power, they must not just analyse but *condemn* these injustices – and demand accountability.

The 2016 International Law Commission’s Draft Articles on the Protection of Persons in the Event of Disasters highlight the adaptation and protection policy. The Draft Articles emphasize international obligations, especially towards affected people’s human rights. The Draft is “concerned with cooperation between states and the facilitation of assistance in the events of disasters” (Kent and Behrman 2018, p. 19). Another protection framework are international human rights laws, which have provided pitiful results in the context of climate-induced migration. It is stated that the main usefulness of human rights laws lies in the comprehensive protection of refugees regardless of their nationality. Adaptation to migration could not solve the problem as “climate-induce[d] movement raises serious concerns of human rights, sovereignty, identity, culture, values, psychological health and pressure on host community amongst others” (Rajan and Bhagat 2018, p. 52).

Gun Island also draws our attention to the “Mediterraneanism” that figures migrant vessels as invaders in the continent of Italy and articulates the gruesome stories of illegal migrants also. Here, “Blue Boat” becomes a symbol of climate-induced migration, corruption, social inequality, and capitalistic policies. The Slogans like “No room here; go home”; “We are Indigenous, the only owners of this Continent,” “Climate migration = invasion,” and “Send them back with birth control” (p. 272) intensified how complicated the situation is! Here “we” signify the racial superiority of the Europeans “on the discourse of indigenous protection and place-based identity” (Newns, 2021, p. 18). Ghosh contemplates the broader historical and political relationship between Europe and its past colonies (Cole, 2022, p. 144). Ghosh highlights that “the imperial powers had launched upon the greatest and most cruel experiment in planetary remaking that history has ever known: in the service of commerce, they had transported people between continents on an almost unimaginable scale, ultimately changing the demographic profile of the entire planet. But even as they were repopulating other continents, they had always tried to preserve the whiteness of their own metropolitan territories in Europe” (p. 279). In a similar vein, Franz Fanon (2005 [1967]) considers the notion of racialization, and it is a way in which Europeans differentiated between colonizer and colonized. Fanon’s idea of racialization is pertinent to Said’s (1978) point of view of racial ideology to justify European imperialism (Baldwin, 2012, p. 632). The dominant case is that climate-induced migration has now entered the arena of political discourse. It also plays an essential role in the national security of a country. In the last 30 years, Italy has witnessed a rising number of migrants seeking refuge on its shores. According to World Bank data, in

comparison with 1990, when international migrants formed 2.5 percent of the total population, in 2015, international migrants made up around 9.5 percent of the total population. Almost 104,000 migrants disembarked in Italy in 2022, interior ministry data shows, compared with 67,000 in the same period in 2021, 34,000 in 2020, and a peak of more than 181,000 in 2016 (Reuters; The Indian Express). Inequity is visible in Venice also as tourists visit Venice to fulfil their “fantasy” and perceive “Italian history and eat authentic Italian food”, but ironically, dreams and fantasies are made possible by Bengali refugees like Palash, “who are cooking their food and washing their plates and making their beds? Do they understand that no Italian does that kind of work anymore?” (p. 268).

Climate-induced migration and adaptation are categorically defined in two ways (Rajan and Bhagat, 2018, p. 44): one that promotes migration as an adaptation and the second one which does not consider migration as an adaptation strategy. An adaptation has been promoted in literature; migration as an adaptation (Mc Leman 2009; Barnett and Webber 2009) highlights the coping strategy for climatic disruption to socio-economic, cultural, and environmental change. On the other hand, migration reflects the failure to adapt (UNFCCC 2014, Agrawal and Perrin 2009) to climate change as people’s bonding to their land, local culture, and community cohesion have been negotiated, and it is considered as forced migration. Migration as an adaptation to climate change may be limited by differences in risk perception, distance from climate change, and the inability to connect their homes. In this fictional narrative, migration is depicted as a means of securing improved employment prospects and enhancing overall livelihood. Such labour-driven migration, in turn, can function as a mechanism that strengthens the adaptive capacity of the affected population; the question arises: can migration be considered positively as an adaptation process to climate change? In such cases it is believed that migration is strengthening the process of adaptation as it contributes to alleviating poverty. Sundari (2005) points out the same factor differently – that the poorest peoples sell their assets, lands, housing, and jewellery for a place that is more vulnerable than their previous place.

The Western discourse on climate conflict, crisis, and climate-induced migration has consistently failed to address India’s distinct concerns regarding climate policy – a critical oversight that Ingrid Boas (2014, pp. 152-155) sharply critiques. Boas argues that Western models of climate-induced migration bear little resemblance to India’s realities, a fact underscored by the repeated rejection of such frameworks by successive Indian governments. Yet, while Boas rightly identifies “energy security” as a pivotal entry point for climate policy discussions, her analysis falls short in fully confronting the systemic marginalization of Global South perspectives. She does, however, make a crucial intervention by asserting that the Global

South holds indispensable insights for shaping climate security discourse—insights that could mitigate the looming threats of climate conflicts and mass migration. Equally significant is Maria Julia Trombetta’s (2014, pp. 132-137) examination of securitization approaches, which exposes the limitations of dominant Western frameworks. The Copenhagen School’s reliance on alarmist rhetoric and top-down speech acts stands in stark contrast to the Paris School’s sociological approach, which rightly shifts focus to media influence and everyday practices in securitization processes. Trombetta’s critique reveals a fundamental tension: while Western theories dominate the debate, their methodological biases often obscure more nuanced, practice-driven understandings of security. Together, these critiques expose a glaring gap in climate security discourse – one that remains stubbornly Eurocentric despite the urgent need for inclusive, context-sensitive frameworks. The failure to integrate Global South perspectives not only weakens theoretical rigor but also undermines practical solutions to the escalating climate crisis. If climate security discourse is to move beyond its current conceptual constraints, it must confront these exclusions head-on.

Alexander Betts’s concept of “survival migration” critically highlights a dire reality: “persons outside their country of origin because of an existential threat to which they have no access to a domestic remedy or resolution” (Betts, 2010, p. 362). Yet, while refugees like Rafi and Tipu may escape persecution or economic hardship, climate refugees remain glaringly excluded from formal protection. The stark injustice lies in the fact that climate displacement is not recognized under international refugee law, leaving millions without legal standing. How can we justify a system that grants asylum to some while abandoning those displaced by rising seas, droughts, or superstorms – crises they did nothing to cause? This legal gap is not merely an oversight; it reflects deeper structural inequalities. Climate vulnerability is inextricably tied to power imbalances – wealth, nationality, ethnicity, and gender determine who suffers most. The world’s poorest, often least responsible for carbon emissions, bear the brunt of climatic crisis, while wealthy nations evade responsibility. If the international community truly values human rights, it must confront this hypocrisy: climate refugees deserve the same protections as those fleeing war or persecution. To ignore their plight is to perpetuate a system that prioritizes legal technicalities over human survival.

Conclusion

As an extrapolation of our reading, it is evident that Ghosh expects that people could imagine apocalyptic scenarios, and climate change is testing our imaginations as well. Along with other writers, he also has emphasized envisioning our “ability to generate mental representations of

possible futures” (Milkoreit, 2017, p. 62) and remain concerned with our present as well as alternative future. Ghosh emphasizes the relevance of ancient myths in interpreting the outcomes of climate change, contending that these legendary accounts grappled with circumstances analogous to present-day environmental challenges. In *Gun Island*, he associates climate change with human and nonhuman migration and displacement, with a Bengali myth linking the Sundarbans to Venice. The novel contains a modern interpretation of the story of India where weather chaos has caused droughts and floods. Adapting to nature with an eco-centred approach and development model will blunt the claws of climate change. There should have been an ethic of cooperation between nature and humans that sees nature not only as a created resource for human use, but as a resource that represents collective effort to share helping hands, partnerships and cooperation between humans and nonhumans. Ghosh reflects that the ecological destruction that has taken place in the Sundarbans, Brooklyn, and Venice reveals an extension between the Global North and Global South which shows that the planet is on the verge of environmental derangement. The anthropogenic cultural model sees nature as a commodity that uses it to satisfy human desires. This situation is also accepted by today’s people, and we ought to follow the concept of climate realism. Given the unprecedented ecological degradation wrought by anthropogenic climate change, it is imperative to critically reassess contemporary modes of living and recalibrate the precarious relationship between human activity and the natural environment. The complexity of climate-induced migration also implies that many areas of law should be amended to make them relevant for any future solution to the problem. There are numerous conventions and soft law-based instruments and guidelines very relevant to the situation of climate refugees. The respective governments should take the initiative, monitor the issues, and solve this problem in a humanitarian manner. In *Gun Island*, the Admiral expresses his conscience while saving the refugees “I have acted in accordance with the law of the sea, the law of humanity and the law of God” (p. 284). As Ghosh has expressed in this novel implicitly, climate change is the root cause of these problems, and it enhances inequality and inequity among people as well. Accordingly, tracing the causes and policy-making behind climate change could provide an alternative to resolving it. Climate change and migration are multilayered phenomena and consistently in flux. Since it is entirely context-specific, geographical and cultural assessments are genuine ways to approach it for a possible solution.

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