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## ECOLOGICAL DISPARITY AND DIASPORA IN THE HUNGRY TIDE AND GUN ISLAND

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### ABSTRACT

Ecology is the study of the relationships between living organisms, including humans, and their physical environment. It seeks to understand the vital connections between plants and animals and the world around them. The portrayal of the interactions between the physical and human environments in literature is now offer focused on. While the third millennium is heralded as “the century of the environment”, ecocriticism is a thriving and belligerent academic field within literary studies (Love A. 1). It investigates relationships between human beings and the non-human environment. After all, ecological stability is a prerequisite to preserving a sustainable world. Located in the Bengal Delta basin, South Asian countries in particular, are exposed to natural disasters such as floods, storms, etc. In this region, the environment is constantly threatened by human and natural calamities. Occupying both Bangladesh and India, the Sundarbans, the largest mangrove forest in the world, the Sundarbans is increasingly vulnerable. Inevitably, the lives of the people living around them are also volatile. Indeed diasporas are common since the beginning of the history of the Sundarbans because of such vulnerability. Amitav Ghosh, a great South Asian writer and environmentalist, notes how ecological imbalance impacts on its inhabitants’ lives.

**Keywords:** Ecology, Ecocriticism, Diaspora.

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

The global dislocations of men and animals from their accustomed homes emerge as a dominant theme in *The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island* – two eco-conscious novels by Amitav Ghosh. The movements of migration, immigration, or exiles are century-old traditions that are known as diaspora in twentieth-century contexts. In *Theorizing Diaspora*, Jane Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur note that the term diaspora “historically referred to displaced communities of people who have been dislocated from their native homelands through the movements of migration, immigration, or exile” (1). During the Middle Age, the Jewish diaspora took place for religious purposes. They were forced to live outside Palestine. In the sixteenth century, Black African diasporas took place to work as slaves in North American countries. The movement of Rohingya refugees from Myanmar to Bangladesh due to political provocation is a very pertinent example of a present-day diaspora. After all, people migrate from their homelands for reasons that are not always voluntary.

In the two novels of the Sundarbans trilogy (*The Hungry Tide*, *Jungle Nama*, and *Gun Island*), Amitav Ghosh illustrates how climate disorder threatens the normal way of life of the inhabitants of this area. To accentuate the issue of migration, Ghosh connects mythological, political, and economic issues with human trafficking. As an anthropologist, he also forecasts the ensuing apocalypse that may occur due to human negligence.

Though Ghosh chiefly depicts the climate disorder of the Sundarbans in West Bengal, parts of Bangladesh are facing similar consequences as the country occupies a major part of

the mangrove forest. Bangladesh is already in an extremely vulnerable condition due to the impacts of climate change. We regularly experience floods, cyclones, storms, droughts, and other extreme climate events. Moreover, Bangladesh is endangered by the risk of sea-level rise due to global warming. Thus, the impact of ecological imbalance is already noticeable in the country. What is really alarming is that mother nature has already started taking its revenge on human beings by extinguishing or relocating some of the species. Recent newspaper reports drew my attention and made me connect the ecological problems of my country with the two above-mentioned books by Amitav Ghosh. In this paper, I will show how Ghosh gestures at the ecological disorder as the cause of migration in his two sequel novels: *The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island*, and show how climate change affects the movement

## 2. THE INTERDEPENDENCE BETWEEN MAN AND NATURE

Considering the inescapable connection between humans and non-humans, Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist Richard Powers asserts in an interview that “we are not alone on this earth and the rest of creation is not there simply to be a resource to us”. He emphasizes the creation of fiction that pays equal attention to man and nature. He declares this type of fiction as a “third kind of drama” (the first is psychological and the second is socio-political) “which is, we human beings may want something that the rest of the living world is at best indifferent to and may be hostile toward or at least incompatible with.” (Power 01:15-01:55). Such a close connection between man and nature displays their interdependence. His *The Overstory* is an effort to bring “people and non-humans back together into the same negotiating space.” In his book, he states how nature can take revenge on humans because of their ill-treatment. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BIfWvIdJNz0>)

The effects of climate change in my country are observed and mentioned by Professor Fakrul Alam in his article “Doing Environment Criticism from Where We Are”. In his essay, he states that the problems aroused by climate change “is getting more and more unbearable”. Accentuating the importance of ecocritical criticism Fakrul Alam notes in his essay that we must raise consciousness among our present students as well as “the coming generations of students across the discipline to think of ways of balancing progress with environmental preservation”. Ecocriticism is important as it establishes integrity between man and his society. In their thought-provoking essay “Eco Centricism is the Nucleus for Development: An Ecocritical of Amitav Ghosh’s *Hungry Tide*” Ben J. Milton and J. Sundarsingh note “Ecocentrism as a discipline attempts to register the fact that man is the reflection of ecology and he is the mere representation of ecology. The remedial aspects to redirect man from the existing unawareness is the prime objective of Ecocentrism” (Milton and Sundarsingh 2). Emphasizing the importance of ecocriticism in *The Hungry Tide*, they aver:

Literature acts as a tool and a medium to link nature and man and also strives for effective commencement of actions to mankind. Ghosh has remarkably included the elements of caution through every character deployed in the novel. Ecology has proved to be a striving force throughout the novel which alters the way of life people lived in the past and also featured in the present. (4).

The reciprocal relationship between humans and nature is emphasized in the novel. In the literary works of Amitav Ghosh, nonhuman entities acquire equal importance and perform important roles in his novels. To sustain a human-friendly ecosystem, Ghosh advocates the necessity of a balanced relationship between man and nature.

The intricacies of man-nature relationship are also examined by Murari Prasad. In “Interfacing Diaspora with Ecological Humanities in Amitav Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide*” Prasad critically examines the ethical obligations of justice for displaced diasporic communities

and the preservation of the wildlife of mangrove forests in *The Hungry Tide*. Considering the book as the equilibrium between human and nature Prasad asserts:

Ghosh seems to have set up a dialectic on the tension between animal and human rights and not wanted to come down reductively on either side. The novel offers a complex debate about environmental ethics and so it should not be read as a crude ecological thesis novel” (Prasad 282).

The tidal forest is the dwelling place for humans and animals, both desperate to uphold their rights. On the one hand, the preservation of the natural atmosphere is essential for animals. On the other hand, landless humans want a piece of land to live on. Thus, the tension between human and animal rights suggests a further ethical consequence. In his book review “A Perennial philosophy: Amitav Ghosh’s ‘Jungle Nama’, Professor Huq accentuates the connection between myth and climate change, noting “Bon Bibi propagates a perennial philosophy that humankind would do well to heed” (Haq). Addressing Ghosh as a “socially conscious fashioner” of narratives in *The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island*, he connects the moral of the myth of Bon Bibi with the present situation that enhances the possibility of a catastrophic end of the world due to the emission of carbon from some rich countries of the world. He links the motif of the myth with a contemporary crisis that the rich want to be richer like the affluent countries of the world who do not want to sacrifice their advantages for the benefit of the other. As Ghosh says in *The Jungle Nama*:

All you need do, is be content with what you’ve got;  
to be always craving more, is a demon’s lot  
A world of endless appetite is a world possessed,  
Is what your munshi’s learned, by way of this quest” (Ghosh)

To curb our personal needs and pay attention to others, bring salvation to all. Emphasizing the moral value of the myth of Bon Bibi, Haq assumes that Ghosh applies the myth in the postmodern context accentuating the uncompromising attitude of capitalist society. He associates the local mythology of the Sundarbans with the crisis created by the effect of climate change in that region. The myth of Bonduki Sawadagar of *Gun Island* is also recurring, as mentioned by Cinta, one of the novel’s major characters. Alluding to the Little Ice Age of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, Ghosh forecasts future disasters that may destroy civilization.

Historically the Little Ice Age followed the Medieval Warming Period (roughly 900–1300 CE) and preceded the present period of warming that began in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Though some scientists use it to distinguish only the period 1500–1850, when mountain glaciers expanded to their greatest extent, the phrase is more commonly applied to the broader period 1300–1850. The period is best known for its effects on Europe and the North Atlantic region. During this time the Alpine glaciers advanced far below their previous (and present) limits, obliterating farms, churches, and villages in Switzerland, France, and elsewhere. Frequent cold winters and cool, wet summers led to crop failures and famines over much of northern and central Europe. In addition, the North Atlantic cod fisheries declined as ocean temperatures fell in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. (<https://www.britannica.com/science/Little-Ice-Age>). Ghosh associates such ecological annihilation with the socio-political turmoil of the age.

However, the myth of Bon Bibi originated in the 17<sup>th</sup> century as well but set at a time when the Portuguese had already formed their plans for the “New World”. They looked for ways of expanding their spheres of influence and developing the world outlook. To gain economic superiority over their neighbors, the Portuguese looked for ways of expanding their spheres of influence. Their main tool was international trade. With this mission, they sailed to different parts of the world. By the seventeenth century, Europeans established their first colonies in India after many upheavals. Ghosh’s concern about the demolition of natural

resources and its consequences can be found in his interviews (footnotes) where he mentions *The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island* as elucidations of his thoughts.

That human beings have become constant threats to the ecological balance system is portrayed again and again in the fiction and nonfiction of Amitav Ghosh. What is significant in *The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island* is that he concentrates mainly on the Sundarbans, the only mangrove forest shared by both Bangladesh and India. Though he concentrates on the Sundarbans located in West Bengal, the situation in Bangladesh is encountering more problems. The flora and fauna of this part of the Sundarbans are threatened by global warming, river erosion, agricultural effluents, etc. Besides, the unplanned setup of factories, mills, and refineries is also disrupting natural phenomena. As a result, the animals of the Sundarbans have become more and more vulnerable.

### 3. ECOLOGICAL DISRUPTION AND THE TRANSMUTING NATURE OF THE BENGAL DELTA BASIN

In *The Hungry Tide* Ghosh delineates the ever-fluctuating fortune of the Bengal delta Basin. The natural phenomenon of the tidal-dominated forest, the Sundarbans, is directed by the ups and downs of the tides, as the primary source of life in the area. Similarly, the lives of the people are also directed and motivated by the tides. As Ghosh observes:

When the tides create new land, overnight the mangroves begin to gestate, and if the conditions are right they can spread so fast as to cover a new island within a few short years. A mangrove forest is a universe unto itself, utterly unlike other woodlands or jungles (Ghosh 7).

Such a hostile environment could not prevent people from making it their home ground. From the colonial period, the Sundarbans became a promising place for landless people, as East Bengal was even then one of the most densely populated countries of the world. Moreover, the poverty rate was high. As a result, nothing could stop its inhabitants to settle wherever they could get a free piece of land.

As we know from the novel, Sir Daniel Hamilton, a Scottish fortune seeker, was fascinated by the vastness of the mangrove-covered islands. Born and brought up in “a harsh and rocky place, cold and unforgiving” of Scotland `S`Daniel was mesmerized by “the crab-covered shores of the tide country; he saw not mud, but something that shone brighter than gold” (49). He dreamt of turning the forest into a habitation as “almost every island in the tide country has been inhabited at some time or another” (Ghosh 50). These islands were once inhabited but later deserted because of storms, tides, crocodiles, and tigers. Realizing the topographical importance of the islands, he bought ten thousand acres of land and welcomed people from all around India to there. His mission was to build a secular society of people who were willing to work together without discrimination. Though initially, Hamilton did not get any response, since the Sundarbans was seen as a land of “mud and mangrove” and it was believed that “everywhere you looked there were predators- tigers, crocodiles, sharks, leopards” (51), gradually people started to come to the region as they “were desperate for land” (51). Thus began human settlement in these islands this come of an existential fight between human beings and animals. These diasporic men were desperate to get some land to live in and to earn their living from it. Thus, the islands turn into a second homeland for diasporic people.

In an interview, Ghosh underscores the colonial attitude towards human settlements in the coastal areas. According to him, any habitation beside the sea is highly vulnerable as it is constantly threatened by natural disasters. He provides examples of Mumbai and New York city which were not initially inhabited by the natives. Both cities were established in 1660. While ancient port cities were not established on the sea as they were prone to natural

calamities, during colonial expansion government encouraged the natives of Mumbai and New York to populate these uninhabited areas (Ghosh, 12:30-12:55). This colonial temperament led to deaths and destruction of property for dwellers of this area. After all, human settlements next to the seashore can be vulnerable to flooding in the event of a major storm surge.

The shifting of inhabitants from their homeland because of ecological imbalance is further seen in *Gun Island*. As the tidal forest depicted in it was no longer a promising habitat for the young settlers due to the consequences of global warming and other ecological commotion, they decide to leave their primal home and commence on a perilous journey. The innumerable difficulties and life risks of the migrants and their struggle to get better life from the tidal areas of the Sundarbans to the European countries are no less precarious than the struggle of settlers of Lusibari, one of the settings of *The Hungry Tide*. The innumerable difficulties they face like the migrants risked and their struggle to enjoy a better life from the tidal areas of the Sundarbans to the European countries proved to be precarious.

The struggle of South Asian evicted people to get a piece of land to earn their living by destroying forests was portrayed many years earlier also by the Bengali novelist Bibhutibhushon Bondopadhyay in his fictional work *Aranayk*. In that book, the novelist illustrates human settlements in deep forest and how they turn that forest into a habitation. Being an estate manager, the protagonist was assigned to turn the wild habitable for humans. As a result, the destruction of trees was inevitable which ultimately created a sense of guilt and sadness in him.

#### 4. A COMPARATIVE STUDY WITH ARANAYK

In *Aranayk*, Bibhutibhushon Bandyopadhyay depicts the struggle of the newly arrived dwellers of Lobotulia Boihara with wild beasts and hostile weather that paradoxically imbibe them with courage to exist and survive. In this novel, Bibhutibhushon shows the destruction of nature and its sad consequences. He went to places like Azamabad — Fulkia — Lobotulia — Baihar in the state of Bihar from 1924 to 1930. During this period, he became moved by the natural beauty and the lives of dispossessed subsistence peasants, destitute Brahmins, migrant landless laborers, and *Adivasis*. These experiences motivated him to compose this classic novel. The protagonist is Satyacharan, who came to Lobotulia as an employee of a landlord. As an estate manager, his job is to reclaim the forest land and distribute it to the people to generate revenue from it. He has no other way but to destroy this wonderful creation of the forest Goddess (*Bon Devi*) and he would have to do it against his own will and distribute it amongst the local people. Ancient gigantic trees, as well as plants and herbs of rare species, were being destroyed to make way for human encroachment who cut the trees, begin cultivation on the land, and also build small cottages there. In this way, the jungle gradually turns into a human habitat. Satyacharan is shocked when the settlers cut down and burn a large number of trees for farming. On the one hand, deforestation provides dwelling places for humans. On the other hand, it mars the wild beauty of nature and destroys its flora and fauna.

The jungle of Fulkia Boihar or Lobotulia Boihar becomes a dwelling place for diasporic people coming from different parts of India such as Purnia and Torai, and the hilly areas of Joynty, and Uttar Bhagalpur. They are all poverty-stricken people who came in search of small temporary occupations such as cutting and processing crops. As soon as they finish their work, they leave the place and proceed to another place with the expectation of coming back in the next season.

The novel ends with a deep feeling of guilt and sadness in Satyacharan. The narrator declares to readers at the end of the book that “this is not a travel story but a novel. The dictionary meaning of a “novel” is an imaginary story. We are bound to obey the great

intellectuals who wrote the dictionary. But the plot of *Aranyak* is not completely imaginary” (187). The destruction of natural resources and its precarious consequences are inevitable which are foreshadowed in the narrator’s voice. Similar to Bibhutibhushon, Amitav Ghosh sadly observes nature’s revenge on humans.

In *The Great Derangement* Ghosh highlights the issue of climate change and its ominous consequences. Like the Bengali writer, he also feels the necessity of writing fiction about climate change to make people aware. To him, writing non-fiction is not enough to alert people to save natural elements. Rather he encourages to write fictional works. It is no longer a subject for non-fictional works. The consequences of deforestation are alarming as it can increase temperatures and defrost glaciers. Sea level rising from a warming climate may inundate coastlines around the world. For centuries nature has created a luminously beautiful world that is being destroyed by human beings again and again. Without considering nature’s needs, humans use it for the sake of their own use. They have taken it for granted that natural resources are God’s gifts to humans and they can do whatever they wish to serve their interests.

The protagonist of *Aranyak* has a deep feeling of loss at the destruction of the forest. The beauty of the forest captivated him so much that he did not want to go back to city life. Though the destruction of the forest was necessary for human settlements the enormous loss of natural resources is also undeniably unwarranted.

To preserve the serenity of the forest, some mythical figures are introduced by Bibhutibhushon such as Tarboro and Bon Devi. They play a vital role in the belief of the dwellers. It is believed that the Bon Devis used to swim in the tranquil water of the lake of the forest. The Bon Devis used to kill those who try to destroy their privacy. They are the personification of the power of the forest who do not want human interference. Tarboro is the savior of the animals, particularly, the wild buffalo. The protagonist hears about several incidents where it was shown that Tarboro had saved the wild buffalos when any human being tried to capture them. Bon Devi and Tarboro are nothing but representatives of the ecological system and fight to preserve the balance between humans and nature. Ghosh also introduces some mythical characters to emphasize the importance of ecological balance.

## 5. THE NATURE OF THE SUNDARBANS AND THE MYTH OF BON BIBI

In the myth Bon Bibi “possess a special streak of vitality” in its soul that comes time and again in whole Sundarbans trilogy (Ghosh 6). As depicted in *The Hungry Tide*, the islands of the mangrove forest rise during low tides and vanish during high and to become shelters for landless people. On the one hand, there are threats from natural forces like tides, storms, etc. On the other, there are the constant extortion of predators. There is a story in every house that tells the sad memory of a family member lost in a tiger attack. When they go to the forest to collect honey or look for wood or fishing, they are vulnerable to attack by predators. To save themselves from the predators they worship the goddess of the forest, Bon Bibi, who is very responsive to her devotees. In Ghosh’s novel, the myth of Bon Bibi is pervasive among the dwellers and helps connect the notion of ecological balance with the human world. It is the guardian spirit of the forests venerated by both Hindu and Muslim residents of the Sundarbans. Before its arrival, the country of eighteen tides (the Sundarbans) was under the control of the demon king, Dakkhin Rai. Bon Bibi defeated the demon after a long battle. But out of mercy, she returned half of the previous kingdom of Dakkhin Rai to the king. While the inhabited part of the Sundarbans is believed to be the realm of Bon Bibi, Dakkhin Rai is believed to be the ruler of the deep forest.

Bon Bibi’s myth is deployed by Ghosh not only to emphasize the need of the equal distribution of the jungle but also to maintain ecological balance in the Sundarbans. The myth

of Bon Bibi will remain unfulfilled without mentioning the activities of dolphins, these are the marine mammals who provide valuable information to the goddess. As her messengers, dolphins move through the rivers and canals of the forest and bring her information required for its survival. Thus, they become both her eyes and ears.

The myth of Bon Bibi plays a vital role in Ghosh's sequels, *The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island*, and also in his poems, *Jungle Nama*. Dolphins, as the messengers of Bon Bibi, also play a significant role in the narrative. Ghosh delves into the aquatic life of the Sundarbans through the character of Piya. In both novels, she is presented as a cytologist. Her research topic is marine mammals, particularly dolphins. She comes to the Sundarbans to enquire about the sighting, abundance, behavior, and seasonal distribution of the dolphins. Both Gangetic and Irrawaddy dolphins are common to the area. Their nature and habitats and the effect of climate change on aquatic life play an important role in the novel

Deploying excellent narrative techniques Ghosh connects the myth of Bon Bibi with the ecology of the Sundarbans. The myth of the novel becomes immanent as it is observed that the dolphins of the Sundarbans find a pool near Garjontola, the island where there is a shrine of Bon Bibi. In *The Hungry Tide*, this pool becomes a safe habitat for both dolphins and crabs. Crabs are another important species of the mangrove forest. They play vital roles in the ecosystem of the tidal forest. With the brush of their feet and side, they remove diatoms and other edible matters. Thus, they perform the cleaning of the mangroves by removing floating leaves and litter. In this way, they keep the mangroves alive. Similar to crabs, dolphins are also good friends of humans as they help fishermen to find fish. They chase fish but let them come close so that a fisherman can get an easy catch. But due to global warming and the imbalance of saline and fresh water in the sea, aquatic life here is completely endangered. Consequently, dolphins start to beach themselves or change their routes.

The possibility of an apocalypse due to climate change is portrayed through the myth of the gun merchant or Bonduki Sadagar in *Gun Island*. His shrine is located at Gorjontola, an island in the archipelago of the Sundarbans. According to the narrative, the gun merchant was forced to leave his homeland due to scarcity of food and water since the land was attacked by drought and flood. Like Chand Sadagar of Hindu mythology, Bonduki Sadagar avoided paying homage to the goddess of snakes due to his arrogance and his conviction that he was rich and clever. He fled with his family and fortune but was swept away by a giant wave. He built a house with his remaining wealth, but this time his family members are beaten by snakes. He tries to settle in various places but every time he is defeated. The unsettled life of Bonduki Sadagar is caused by ecological disorder. The goddess of snakes is actually a representative of Nature. Due to human negligence, it becomes destructive and the source of human suffering.

## 6. CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE MIGRANTS IN MARICHJHAPI AND ITALIAN COASTAL AREAS

Ghosh portrays the traumatic life of mangrove forest dwellers. In *The Hungry Tide*, the school headmaster, Nirmal, writes to Kanai, his nephew that people came to the tidal area to get a piece of land. They risked their lives to do so. Marichjhapi, a small island, became a promising habitat for diasporic people. Primarily coming from Bangladesh after the partition of 1971, the refugees were resettled by the central government of India in Dandakaranny, a deep forest in Madhya Pradesh. They would face the antagonistic attitude of local people who didn't understand their language and took them as intruders. The place was more like a concentration camp where refugees were guarded by security forces and forbidden to move freely. Moreover, the land was not appropriate for farming. So, they decided to flee the camp and move to Marichjhapi. Overnight, refugees made small huts and shacks with mud and other

available materials from the forest. They created embankments to save their homes. The tidal island was soon turned into a small village. The expatriates created their community of people who were prepared to ensure the continuity of the settlement. They were destitute, landless refugees who had lost everything but now dreamt about a new life with their own labor. People from every walk of life worked to build their lives anew. But the government soon decided to evict them as the settlement endangered natural forest life. The incumbent government declared Marichjhapi a reserve forest and evicted settlers from the place. The embankments they created overnight were very fragile. Storms and crabs made them weaker and weaker (206). These diasporic people evicted from their land once and then a second time dispossessed from Marichjhapi, ended up being killed by the security forces of the colonial government.

The diary of Nirmal, the schoolmaster of Lusibari, and Piya's research on aquatic life indicate too how climate change was affecting both animal and human life in the mangrove forest. In *Gun Island*, ecological disruption is further fictionalized. While *The Hungry Tide* was written in 2004, *Gun Island* was written in 2019. There are a lot of similarities between the two novels. Some major characters are common to both novels. Moreover, *Gun Island* continues with some issues that began in *The Hungry Tide*. So, *Gun Island* can be treated as the sequel to *The Hungry Tide*.

Ghosh's Bonduki Saadager was created to emphasize the new Anthropocene. By connecting the existing ecological imbalance in Gun Island with the 17<sup>th</sup> century "Little Ice Age" another period of severe climate disruption, he projects another apocalypse. Ghosh feels that "the legend was born of the tribulations of the Little Ice Age" and "It's as though the Little Ice Age is rising from its grave and reaching out to us" (123). In Arabic, al-Bunduqeyya is the proper name for Venice. So Bonduki Sadagar refers to the merchant who went to do business in Venice. In the sixteenth century, there was a place in Venice for the Jewish community to reside. Thus, Gun Merchant is a reference to Venice and Ghosh connects it to the merchant of Venice in Shakespeare's play which was written at the end of the sixteenth century. He characterizes the diasporic journey of the merchant in the novel as "an apocryphal record of a real journey to Venice" (123).

The novelist uses this myth against the backdrop of the twenty-first century when the world is being threatened by the consequences of global warming. The myth of Bonduki Sadagar is narrated by Kanai Dutt, a character originally from *The Hungry Tide*, to his distant relative, Deen, a rare book dealer and a researcher of Bengali folklore. Deen was invited by Nilima, Kanai's *masima*, to visit the *dhaam* or shrine of Bonduki Sadagar at Gorjontola. Deen accepted Nilima's invitation and agreed to come to Lusibari when Piya was also there. She used to stay at Badabon Trust when she came to Lusibari. Horen, an old boatman, along with Tipu, son of Moyna and Fakir, guided Deen to the shrine. On his visit, Deen had a cryptic encounter with a venomous king Cobra, who was believed to take hold of the shrine. Tipu was beaten by the snake. He was immediately taken to the hospital by Horen and Rafi, the last successor of the shrine of Bonduki Sadagar. Being dismayed by the unfriendly environment of the Sundarbans and fascinated by "the people-moving industry" (60) Tipu and Rafi secretly leave their homeland and began their journey to Italy in search of a "better life" (60). On their way to Venice, they travel through places as the traffickers made them do so. Rafi finally arrived in Venice but Tipu failed.

Like Tipu and Rafi many people are forced to migrate due to climate change. Similar to *The Hungry Tide*, the myth of *Gun Island* is closely connected to climate change and narrates its consequences such as natural calamities, scarcity, conflicts, migration, etc. Lubna, a Bangladeshi-born woman, was forced to leave her homeland and come to Venice with her husband. Lubna's family was devastated by a "fearsome cyclone" (160). Like her many other



Bangladeshis migrated to Venice. Some migrated by crossing the ocean and risking their lives in search of a better life. Ghosh presents the gun merchant as a victim of ecological disaster. For this reason, his portrayal of the myth of the gun merchant is related not only to the past but also to the present. Ghosh makes us believe “the story was not over – that it would reach out into the future” (127). He compares the journey of the merchant to the journey of Odysseus (6). Like Odysseus, the gun merchant had to migrate to several places and encounter various difficulties until he reached his final destination.

But Ghosh’s merchant is not an explorer like the Greek hero. Rather, he is dislocated and displaced every time because of natural calamities and because he wants to make profit. The difficulties migrants face are visible in different parts of the world in different contexts. In the Sundarbans people usually live by fishing, farming, or collecting bamboo and honey. In recent decades due to global warming, water turns salty. As a result, farming is not profitable anymore, fishes not available as before, and storms every year keep blowing everything to pieces. So, people have been losing their ancestral occupations and have been gradually forced to leave their homes. Exasperated by the precarious way of life in the forest, Tipu, one of the dwellers of the village Lusibari, opines “If you’re young you can’t just sit on your butt till you starve to death. Even the animals are moving –find a way out” (Ghosh 61).

The hostile environment of the forest is further illustrated in the narrative of Moyna, Tipu’s mother who lost her husband in a cyclone. Living in the jungle, she dreams of a better life and of providing her son with a better future. With this aim in view, she educates herself and starts working for the hospital of Lusibari. The tragedy of these people is further illustrated when she mentions that sometimes both land and water turn against the residents of the tidal forest:

When people tried to dig wells, an arsenic-laced brew gushed out of the soil; when they tried to shore up embankments the tide rose higher and pulled them down again. Even fishermen could barely get by; where once their boats would come back loaded with catch, now they counted themselves lucky if they netted a handful of fry (Ghosh 49). (illustration)

The scarcity of food and drinking water makes human life miserable. As a result, the dwellers of the mangrove forest are forced to leave their habitats. The migration of Tipu and Rafi from their homeland to Europe exhibits the diasporic life of the mangrove forest. Tipu is portrayed as the present-day Bonduki Sadagar and Rafi as Nakhuda Iliyas, the Muslim friend of the merchant. Similar to the mythical characters, they also decide to leave their homeland as it is no longer a promising place for them. They are attracted to the comfortable life of western countries as they have seen through the internet. Tipu and Rafi are not interested in maintaining their ancestral occupations such as hunting, fishing, and honey collecting which are very becoming increasingly risky and tiresome. Without visas or passports, they plan to cross the ocean and go to any European or Middle East country. They even risk their lives to undertake the journey. But unfortunately, such illegal migration is not approved by any country. On the one hand, they are in danger of taking such a long sea journey in tiny boats. On the other, they run the risk of being imprisoned by coastal police. The maltreatment of the dalals or middlemen is also sometimes unbearable. But still, they are ready to leave the forest.

A very recent newspaper item that emphasizes the life risks of illegally migrated people seems to me worth instancing in this regard:

## The Daily Star



Libyan health workers recover bodies of drowned migrants, who were hoping to travel to Europe by sea, after a shipwreck off the beach in Sabratha, some 120 kilometres west of the Libyan capital Tripoli, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

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The newspaper footage validates the crisis of humanity. Poverty stricken people of lower gross income countries determine to change their fortune by migrating to developed countries. Unable to proceed legal ways they find the illegal method more convenient which is at the same time life threatening. Tipu and Rafi, the two young man of Lusibari, also decide to leave their ancestor's home in search of good fortune and undertake the perilous journey in the Mediterranean. Like humans, the lives of the animals of the Sundarbans are also in danger due to global warming. In Piya's research project the marine life of the Sundarbans is examined. During her early works, the pattern of the movements of the mammals was regular and predictable. As we see in *The Hungry Tide* she was inclined to start her research on marine mammals in the coastal area of the Sundarbans where the combination of water was suitable for both Irrawaddy and Gangetic dolphins. But she notices that with time, the regular movement pattern of the dolphins becomes asymmetrical. She highlights the rise of sea levels and the presence of more saline water in the deeper upstream as possible reasons for their unpredictable movements. She also notes:

As sea levels rose, and the flow of freshwater diminished, saltwater had begun to intrude deeper upstream, making certain stretches too saline for the dolphins, They had started to avoid some of the waterways they had frequented before; they had also, slowly, begun to venture further and further upriver, into populated, heavily fished areas. Inevitably some had been ensnared by fishermen's nets and some had been hit by motorboats and steamers. (Ghosh 92)



inhabitants of the place are quite acquainted with the nature of the tide. But climate change is caused by global warming and the resulting imbalance of fresh and saline water and fluctuations in the sea level, bring such changes in their lives that they can no longer stay where they are and continue their years' old occupations. Ghosh portrays the death of aquatic mammals and the killing of tigers in the forest resulting from the ecological imbalance. Just as the shipworm of Venice beach eats up the city's very foundation, the rise of sea level and imbalanced water level destroy the normal life of the coastal area of Bangladesh and India. Ghosh's novels signal a red alert to the impending catastrophe through his words.

In Ghosh's works, the mythical Manasa Devi turns out to be Mother Nature, who takes revenge on her disciples as they forget their duties and responsibilities to the world where they belong to. The continuous negligence of the dwellers of the earth is bringing the world on the verge of catastrophe. It is high time to pay attention and take the necessary steps to save our forests. With this aim in view, world leaders seat together to ensure diminishing global warming by reducing carbon gas as fuel in Glasgow Summit COP-26 from 30 October to 12 November. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) says that achieving global net-zero emissions by 2050 is the minimum needed to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. The Executive Secretary of the Framework Convention on Climate Change, Patricia Espinosa declares "the failure of this summit will be dangerous. It can destroy world security and sustainability. If they fail to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the increasing immigration and food deficiency will be the reason for conflicts and mismanagement" (Prothom Alo 31). It is clear that nature has started to avenge itself. We need not look into the future. The apocalyptic consequences are already noticeable.

## 8. CONCLUSION

Of South Asian writers in English, Amitav Ghosh is the most concerned about the environment. There are other writers like Arundhuty Roy, who have expressed their ideas about ecological disparity in non-fictional works. But Ghosh presents his concern about nature even in his fictional works. *The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island* are two such examples. Besides, in *The Great Derangement*, *The Nutmeg Curse*, and *The Moving Mountain* Ghosh exhibits his conviction about the consequences of ecological imbalance. Ghosh's portrayal of the conflict between men and nature in the Sundarbans in the two novels underscores the helplessness of man in front of the natural forces.

From the colonial to post-colonial period, rulers of the Sub-Continent never paid proper attention to preserving the balance of the ecosystem. The result is the loss of natural resources which ultimately becomes suicidal for human beings. Through his novels, Ghosh emphasizes that global warming is causing glaciers to melt, sea levels to rise, species to go extinct, and severe weather events such as floods, droughts, and hurricanes to increase. Scarcity, food deficiency, lack of occupation, and illegal migration have already begun. If we fail to lessen global warming to its dissemble temperature, the resulting heatwaves, droughts, floods, and rising sea levels would cause devastating loss of human life and lead to mass extinction of animals and plant species causing irreversible damage to our ecosystems. To save the mangrove forests and protect our land from natural disasters, we have no other option but to pay attention to stopping activities harmful to nature. For these reasons, the writings of Amitav Ghosh, need more and more attention.

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