Cultural and Ecological Identity in Amitav Ghosh's Gun Island

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ABSTRACT

Amitav Ghosh's novel Gun Island links cultural identity and ecological consciousness by merging ancient Bengali folklore with contemporary global climate crisis and migration. [1, 2]

Key Themes of Identity and Ecology

- Myth as an Ecological Archive: Ghosh reinterprets the legend of Bonduki Sadagar (the Gun Merchant) and the snake goddess Manasa Devi, showing how ancient myths record real historical and environmental disruptions like the Little Ice Age. [1, 2, 3]
- The Sundarbans as a Shifting Homeland: The vulnerable mangrove delta represents a fragile cultural anchor where rising seas, erosion, and storms threaten entire generations, memories, and traditional ways of life. [1, 2, 3]
- Eco-Spirituality vs. Anthropocentric Greed: The narrative contrasts modern, profit-driven human exploitation of nature with an eco-spiritual worldview where rivers, animals, and natural forces act as living, reactive agents rather than passive resources. [1, 2, 3]
- Transnational Migration and Hybridity: The journey of protagonist Dinanath Datta (Deen) and modern refugees parallels the ancient travels of the Gun Merchant, binding local Indian histories to global networks of displacement, survival, and cultural transformation
KEYWORDS-Amitav Ghosh,ecology, culture, Gun Island, myth

INTRODUCTION

The concept of “Eco spirituality” is an umbrella term, which connects the science of ecology with spirituality. Many writers all over the world emphasize the need for eco spirituality through their writings. Amitav Ghosh, an Indian diasporic writer accentuates the essence of environmental awareness in all his writings. His novel, Gun Island has the trace of eco spirituality in its narration, characters and plot. The novel focuses on the adventures of narrator Deen Dutta, an Indian rare books dealer living and working in America, as his fascination with the Bengali folk legend of the Gun Merchant unexpectedly connects him to a varied cast of people, cultures, and countries.[1,2,3]

Globalization has intensified cultural exchanges, migrations, and transnational interactions, leading to the emergence of hybrid cultural identities. Literature provides a powerful medium through which the complexities of globalization can be examined. This article explores the process of cultural hybridization in Gun Island by Amitav Ghosh. The novel brings together folklore, migration narratives, ecological crises, and global capitalism, revealing how local traditions intersect with global forces. The study argues that cultural hybridization in the narrative emerges through the reinterpretation of myth, the movement of people across borders, and the interaction between indigenous knowledge and global modernity. The legend of the merchant Bonduki Sadagar functions as a cultural bridge linking the Sundarbans to global

migration networks extending to Europe. By analyzing narrative structure, mythic symbolism, and character experiences, the article demonstrates how globalization transforms cultural identities while simultaneously preserving traditional cultural memory. The novel ultimately suggests that hybrid cultural formations are not merely consequences of globalization but also creative responses to ecological and social transformations in the contemporary world.

By examining the legend of Bonduki Sadagar, the novel reinvents myth not as fantasy but as a vital mode of understanding ecological and historical crises. Drawing on Ernesto de Martino's ethnographic theories, Ghosh challenges Enlightenment rationalism, validating myth as a lived, phenomenological reality, particularly for marginalised and colonised communities. Using comparative literary analysis, the chapter situates Gun Island alongside works by T.S. Eliot, James Joyce, Toni Morrison, and W.B. Yeats, showing how Ghosh's mythopoetic method departs from Eurocentric traditions. Unlike modernist uses of myth to critique spiritual or cultural decay, Ghosh deploys myth for ethical urgency and planetary survival. Through philological decoding and cross-cultural narrative mapping, the Gun Merchant's story is revealed as a record of climate migration and historical trauma during the Little Ice Age. Ultimately, the paper argues that Ghosh restores the mythic imagination as a cosmopolitan grammar of survival, turning myth into a medium of historical recovery and ecological consciousness in the Anthropocene.

Environmental crisis is currently one of the biggest worldwide challenges, and to address it, there is a pressing need to move beyond the scientific contexts to cultural forms such as literature, religion, arts, and folklore that transcend rational understanding. Amitav Ghosh, in his fictional work Gun Island, engages with it by establishing an intersection between the changing ecological scenario and the Bengali folktale of the Gun Merchant and the snake goddess Manasa Devi. The tale portrays the goddess' desire to command his devotion, which the Merchant refuses. This results in the goddess subjecting him to divine punishment, as natural disasters and poisonous creatures pursue him. This article attempts to analyse how Ghosh offers an alternative viewpoint for interpreting the legend by interweaving it with current ecological challenges. The paper explores how these Indian myths, legends and folklores are storehouses of ecological wisdom, and Ghosh, by weaving the events of the legend into the present, highlights the enduring significance of such eco-narratives. [4,5,6]

DISCUSSION

Drawing on Amitav Ghosh's novel Gun Island (2019) together with his nonfictional The Great Derangement (2016), the article strives to present that while advancing endless desires, human-centric culture and the idea of 'good life' drive climate change and environmental deterioration. It seeks to enumerate the devastating consequences of changing climatic conditions and degenerating ecosystems and their cumulative impacts on the humankind and non-human world. It aims to locate how human life at the margins has been affected by these cataclysmic consequences through analysing Ghosh's Gun Island. It attempts to show that human interventions had significantly fuelled the global climate crisis in the seventeenth century, decoding the myth of Bonduki Sadagar that Ghosh identifies in Gun Island.

Amitav Ghosh's novels have frequently addressed environmental issues and the current ecological crisis. In this regard, one of his most famous novels is The Hungry Tide, set in the Sundarbans. In his novel Gun Island, environmental themes are tackled with renewed strength and impressive imagination, granting the book the status of a fully-fledged ecocritical novel. This paper will investigate two aspects of man's behaviour in the Anthropocene as portrayed by Deen, the main character of Gun Island. Firstly, his rationality and fear of the supernatural will

be analysed and explained, by making reference to specific passages of the novel. The analysis will also revolve around some of his reactions to the legend of the Gun Merchant and will try to explain them by making reference to Deen's behaviour towards the supernatural. The second aspect of interest is Deen's tendency to marginalise nature and consider it a mere backdrop of his life. Therefore, by quoting passages of the novel, his attitude towards nature will be underlined and brought to the foreground. In addition, light will be shed on his multi-layered, gradual personal evolution throughout the plot, which changes his beliefs, certainties and behaviour. This paper will also highlight the importance that Deen's metamorphosis may have on readers. Amitav Ghosh's Gun Island (2019) is an important piece of writing about climate change and human migration. Ghosh uses myth, narrative craft and folklore to portray this grave environmental degradation. The novel presents Deen Datta, a Bengali Indian living in Brooklyn, as a rare book dealer. [7,8,9]His journey from the Sundarbans to Venice demonstrates the global dimensions of the climate crisis and human displacement. Using the legend of the Gun Merchant, Ghosh connects the past and the present to show how climate change shapes human lives and migration. He expresses his sensitivity towards environmental destruction. He creates an effective combination of culture, history, myth and fiction to bring out the environmental themes in the novel. The novel presents a grim picture of environmental collapse that leads to problems such as global warming and the climate crisis, which consequently give rise to migration and the displacement of humans and other species across the world.This study embraces an ecocritical framework to explore the complex relationship between environmental degradation and human precarity in the novel.Further, it assesses the climate-induced displacement with full emphasis on how this climate-induced displacement reshapes identities, alters cultural traditions and enhances social and economic inequality across borders.The paper argues that Gun Island not only points out the urgency of the climate crisis but also redefines migration as an ecological and cultural event.Ultimately, this paper delves into deep reflection about human-nature relationships as well as a reconsideration of human attitudes towards natural resources in the face of the increasing environmental crisis.[10,11,12]

RESULTS

As the world comes to terms with the grim truth of climate change and environmental destruction, literature is more important than ever in both reflecting and shaping our awareness of these complex issues. With massive environmental crises like rising sea levels, deforestation, and the extinction of organisms unfolding on worldwide stages, the deep connection between human societies and the world of nature has never been more evident. Literature, therefore, is a mirror to our common acts and stimulates reconsideration of how we treat the environment we live in, the impact of our actions and decisions in the long term. Amitav Ghosh’s The Gun Island tells such a story, sad, as stated above, very sad, and as powerful, using instead a background of history, myth, and ecological disaster. Against the panorama of honey-hunters and school fire and a world essentially collapsing with the land upon which it lives, the novel traces Deen’s quest, from continent to continent as he requests a freedom, he’s not convinced he can handle and, in the process, uncovers not just personal fights, but the personal fight. Through his journey, Ghosh charts the plight of climate refugees, the world’s dynamic ecosystems and how the degradation of the natural world has contributed to the devastation that we are now facing. The way the novel intertwines mythical with urgent real-world concerns highlights not just the profound, invisible links between human behaviour and the environment, but the fundamental relationship between these two-and the way in which such symbiosis can quickly sour. This article offers an ecocritical analysis of The Gun Island by analysing Ghosh’s portrayal of the

Anthropocene and its varying representations and criticism against human's exploitative attitude towards their environment. Combining personal stories with an insistence on the larger environmental tropes,[13,14,15] Ghosh brings down hard on the need to fix our environmental mess. In so doing, the novel prompts a critical reconsideration of our relations, personal, political, and ecological and a radical change in orientation towards our environmental crises The anthropologist, journalist, educator, and scholar Ghosh desired to examine the past. Postcolonial issues of the Indian subcontinent are his primary area of interest, such as diaspora, emigration, migration, cultural blending, exile, displacement, the search for identity, and trans-border sentiments that lead to "Vasudhaika Kutumbam". The writings of Ghosh illustrate the modest lifestyles of the Indian subcontinent's middle class, peasants, and refugees. He captures the diversity of life's customs, norms, and transformations. Ghosh reveals the unknown, documents the undocumented, creates the lost, and seeks the 'self.' He places a great deal of stress on mysticism and self-contradiction, comparing them to the awareness and behaviour of untrained subcontinental people. The historical facts impacted by the West are presented with an emphasis on the East. Reason and rationality are employed to combat the West. Each of Amitav Ghosh's novels employs a unique method of story-telling to accommodate its respective subject matter. He does so with skill. Ghosh's efforts with various story-telling techniques provide a new depth to Indian English fiction, which becomes the dominant voice of a oncecolonized nation. Ecological concerns are woven intricately throughout the novels of Amitav Ghosh, including The Shadow Lines, The Glass Palace, and The Gun Island. These concerns reflect Ghosh's commitment to exploring the complex relationship between humans and the natural world, as well as the impact of historical and contemporary events on the environment. Each of these novels engages with ecological themes in distinct ways. In The Shadow Lines, Ghosh subtly intertwines ecological motifs with broader narrative arcs. The novel's exploration of borders, both physical and psychological, reflects how human actions and decisions can lead to environmental consequences. The Naxalite movement, a significant backdrop to the story, is rooted in issues of social justice and land rights, which are inherently connected to ecological concerns, particularly in the context of resource exploitation. The novel demonstrates how borders, whether national, cultural, or environmental can contribute to conflict and disruption. The Glass Palace weaves historical events with personal stories, drawing attention to the economic and environmental transformations of the 20th century. The teak trade and the exploitation of natural resources in Burma (now Myanmar) serve as focal points, highlighting the impact of colonialism and war on the environment. Ghosh depicts the loss of forests and ecosystems due to these activities, and the resultant ecological imbalance resonates with broader themes of displacement and change.[16,17,18] The novel highlights the intricate connections between human lives, economic pursuits, and the natural world. The Gun Island explicitly engages with contemporary ecological issues, particularly the effects of climate change and environmental degradation. The novel follows the protagonist's journey from the Sundarbans to Venice, and their encounters with changing landscapes emphasize the vulnerability of coastal areas to rising sea levels. Ghosh probes into the scientific and cultural dimensions of environmental concerns, exploring the stories and myths that shape human perceptions of nature. Through this novel, he highlights the urgency of addressing ecological crises on a global scale. The Gun Island contributes to his overarching exploration of ecological concerns. Through diverse settings, characters, and historical contexts, these novels highlight the intricate relationship between humans and the natural world, while raising important questions about environmental ethics and the consequences of human actions. In Gun Island, Amitav Ghosh's

2019 novel published by Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, we meet Dinanath, or Deen, Datta, an intriguing book dealer originally from Kolkata, India who divides his time between Brooklyn and his hometown. To describe scientific and astronomical occurrences and to promote magic as the highest form of science, Satyajit Ray uses the word "magic" in a cryptic manner throughout his 1991 film masterpiece Agantuk. The protagonist is both a total stranger and not a stranger at all. Amitav Ghosh's Gun Island (2019) also strives for the same achievement, as the author revisits the fundamental Vedantic idea of 'ekam' or the oneness of species in order to un-distinguish the slope between the empirical and the nonempirical, the story-like and the religious, dreams and facts, as well as faith and ritual. In reality, he is trying to establish a global religion by breaking down barriers between peoples and cultures. Reminiscent of Loyal Rue's Religion Is Not About God, Ghosh speculates about what religion might look like in the future in a way he thinks it may touch on myths, folk, biological findings, and tending the environment and maintain that way of like other animals and the ecosystems. The new religion is mythical, "dharmic," and eco-aware. Ghosh draws upon the Upanishadic principle of 'Vaudhaiva Kutumbakam' (the world is a family) to suggest that a religion is anything believed globally without a 'god' but including a 'Bhuta'. Ghosh's attempt to find similarities in quasi-religious spaces exemplifies his argument in folk lore's and mythological symbols. In order to achieve this, he creates a mythological notion of religion, which is based on experience rather than dogma or ritual. This is more to do with the concept of 'dharma,' or the righteous path and is based on the premise that all living things on Mother Earth have a duty, or 'swadharma', to lend a hand in keeping the eco-system in balance and help each other to survive the climatic vagaries of life. (Bose 1988) In the field of religious studies theorists have been divided for too long over the ontology of religion. Since the beginning, detractors have tried to define what 'religion' truly is, calling it a social construct, an ideological motor and even a colonial tool. Fitzgerald asserts that "religion" is a social construct. According to Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1962), classical Sanskrit has no word for "religion," hence Hindu scriptures do not mention it. Pali doesn't have the word, so Buddhist scriptures don't either. Chinese, Japanese, Egyptian, and Native American languages have no religion word (92).[18,19,20] There are no religious terms in the Hebrew Bible or the New Testament written in Greek. It is unclear whether the Reformation's splintering of the Christian church or the information explosion about non-European cultures led to the development of the concept of "religion" in Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but only modern European Christians generalized or abstracted from their own practices to create the word "religion." (Smith 98) Faith or belief in an all-knowing deity is vital to religion, and thus requires the disciplined parading of a social society in Favor of the religion. Inculcating unquestioning adherence to its core ideas and practices, each religion uses rituals and myths to emphasize its superiority as the ultimate vehicle of spiritual or metaphysical thought. For every performance that is denied, there is another that proves its existence. Many different religions have been born and died over the years. Over the course of human history and beyond, people have worshiped various forms of a higher power. Religion, in all its forms from nature worship to underground cults, has undeniably enthralled the public and expanded their definitions of what it is to be human. Religion is a social institution that has used stories to influence the beliefs of the people it has sought to dominate.

CONCLUSIONS

Ghosh's storytelling prowess lies in his ability to illuminate the human experience within the framework of larger historical narratives. His novels are not only captivating stories but also nuanced reflections on the forces that shape societies and individuals. Through the Gun Island,

Ghosh reminds us that history is not a mere backdrop but an intricate mosaic of individual lives, cultural intersections, and the enduring echoes of past events. These novels stand as testaments to his skill in intertwining the personal and the historical, offering readers profound insights into the intricate connections that define our world. Ghosh calls for a shift in global mindset that concerns not just political and economic structures, but our personal behaviour. The book suggests that changing people's personal moral responsibility to consumption, conservation, and pollution is necessary to arrest further ecological decline. Ghosh evokes a networked world by bringing myth, history and the present-day environmental crisis together, evidencing that the future of one element is linked to the future of the whole.[19] This visionary perspective requires that humanity wakes up to the cataclysm of the environmental crisis & refocuses its priorities on a fairer, more sustainable and ecologically responsible planet. The Gun Island, in Ghosh's hands, makes a powerful case for addressing climate change and environmental abuse. And Ghosh underscores the global scope of humanity's crises through Deen's sojourn, the ravaging of the Sundarbans and the fate of climate refugees. His ecological philosophy calls for a fundamental shift in consciousness, towards an emphasis on sustainability, international cooperation, and the profound reverence due to the natural world. The novel encourages readers to reflect on their own responsibility for the crisis and argues for a radical change in our relationship to nature.[20]

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