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## **Planetary Consciousness: Multispecies Justice and Myth in *Gun Island***

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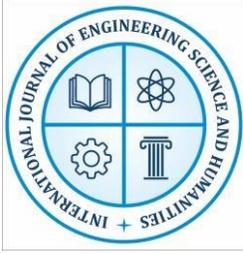
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Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island* fuses Bengali folklore, the Gun Merchant myth, and Sundarbans ecology to reframe the Anthropocene climate crisis. This paper shows how the novel blends cli-fi with planetary consciousness, linking Little Ice Age history to modern upheavals like rising seas, cyclones, species displacement, and human migration. By dissolving myth-science binaries and critiquing anthropocentrism, Ghosh exposes ecological injustice and multispecies vulnerability, advocating relational stewardship and transnational solidarity. Situated in ecocritical discourse, the paper reveals the novel's ethical call for humility, collective action, and reenchanted human-nature bonds amid global precarity.

**Keywords:** Cli-fi, planetary consciousness, Sundarbans, Anthropocene, ecocriticism.

This novel explores the contemporary climate crisis through a blend of Bengali folklore and environmental science. The protagonist, Deen Datta, follows the myth of the Gun Merchant, a journey that connects the 17th-century "Little Ice Age" to the modern Anthropocene. Set in the ecologically fragile Sundarbans, the narrative highlights the interconnectedness of rising sea levels, species displacement, and forced human migration. By weaving history with current ecological upheaval, Ghosh transcends standard disaster tropes. He presents climate change not as a future threat, but as a complex entanglement of socio-economic precarity and environmental degradation.

The narrative dissolves the boundaries between rational science and ancient myth, suggesting that modern logic alone cannot solve the climate crisis. By emphasizing a "planetary consciousness," the novel advocates for multispecies justice that includes both human and non-human beings. This research aims to examine how *Gun Island* utilizes "cli-fi" to depict ecological degradation and climate-induced migration. By analysing the interplay of history and folklore, the study situates Ghosh's work within the Anthropocene discourse. Ultimately, the paper demonstrates how the novel serves as an ethical intervention, urging collective action, sustainability, and a reimagined relationship with the natural world.



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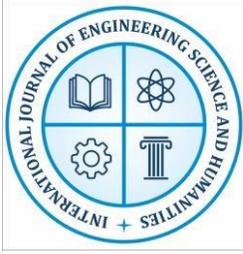
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*Gun Island* presents the climate crisis as an immediate, tangible reality rather than an abstract concept. The novel uses fragile mangrove ecosystem of Sundarbans as a global microcosm for ecological collapse. It details the devastating impacts of rising sea levels, soil salinization, and intensified cyclones like Aila, which dismantle local livelihoods and biodiversity. By highlighting the breakdown of historical seasonal rhythms, Ghosh illustrates how environmental volatility forces both human and non-human displacement. Ultimately, the text underscores the inescapable link between ecosystem degradation and the systemic vulnerability of frontline communities. The narrative details the devastating impacts of rising sea levels, soil salinization, and intensified cyclones, which dismantle local livelihoods and biodiversity. By highlighting the breakdown of historical seasonal rhythms, writer illustrates how environmental volatility forces both human and non-human displacement. Ultimately, the text underscores the inescapable link between ecosystem degradation and the systemic vulnerability of frontline communities facing an unpredictable Anthropocene.

The illustration of physical restructuring of coastlines through rising sea levels, which trigger land loss and the submergence of villages in the Sundarbans. This UNESCO World Heritage site serves as a critical example of dual vulnerability, where both biodiversity hotspots and human habitations are under siege. Parallel to human displacement, the novel highlights species migration as a consequence of climatic shifts. Through characters like Piya, writer explores how altered breeding patterns and migratory routes of marine life disrupt ecological balances and local fishing economies. This multispecies narrative underscores that no organism is insulated from environmental upheaval. By linking the forced movements of flora and fauna to human precarity, *Gun Island* conveys a planetary scale of disruption and emphasizes the shared fragility of all life forms. Ghosh portrays cyclones like Aila dismantling livelihoods, as when Moyna notes, “Sometimes... both land and water were turning against those who lived in the Sundarbans” (Ghosh 83).

The novel portrays ecosystems as delicate, interconnected webs destabilized by pollution, deforestation, and exploitative economic models. Using the Sundarbans as a focal point, the narrative critiques profit-driven systems that accelerate degradation, evidenced by expanding aquatic “dead zones” that threaten biodiversity. Furthermore, the novel problematizes technocratic solutions like embankments, arguing they often disrupt natural hydro-dynamics and exacerbate vulnerabilities. By highlighting the failure of purely mechanical interventions, Ghosh advocates for environmental stewardship that harmonizes scientific insight with traditional knowledge. Ultimately, the text calls for a shift away from human dominance toward an integrated ecological balance that respects the complexity of natural processes.

A layered critique of the climate crisis, framing human-induced degradation as a catalyst for shattering ecosystems and triggering cascading social upheavals is portrayed creatively in the novel. Ghosh dramatizes rising sea levels and forced migrations to highlight the shared



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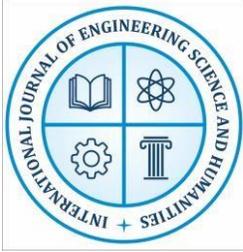
vulnerability of all species. Beyond documenting environmental loss, the novel serves as a searing meditation on ecological injustice, specifically focusing on the suffering of marginalized communities disproportionately burdened by collapse. By emphasizing these interconnected crises, the narrative demands a fundamental shift in human-nature relationships. It ultimately advocates for collective, multispecies responses and global recognition of the Earth's fragility in this unfolding emergency.

The ecological breakdown is inextricably linked to industrial exploitation and the pursuit of modern economic growth in the novel. The emergence of aquatic "dead zones" illustrates the irreversible toll of pollution, which simultaneously destroys biodiversity and the livelihoods of fishing communities. This environmental degradation fuels a burgeoning crisis of "environmental refugees," as families in the Sundarbans flee rising seas and soil salinity. By humanizing these migrations, *Gun Island* frames displacement not just as a survival strategy, but as a consequence of systemic injustice. The narrative compels a reckoning with the intersectional nature of climate change, poverty, and cultural loss.

The novel frames the climate crisis as a global matrix of ecological injustice, where the legacies of colonialism and capitalist extraction disproportionately burden the Global North's marginalized populations. By linking the Sundarbans' localized suffering to planetary dynamics, the novel illustrates that environmental harm transcends national borders, rooted deeply in economic globalization. Through the myth of the Gun Merchant, Ghosh critiques human hubris and the futile attempt to bypass ecological limits. This interlacing of historical memory and contemporary reality demands an ethical shift from exploitative paradigms toward stewardship. Ultimately, the narrative calls for a political and moral re-evaluation of our responsibility to the Earth.

Ghosh rejects anthropocentric views, cantering non-human agency and multispecies justice within his environmental critique. By illustrating how ecological degradation disrupts interspecies relationships, the narrative reframes human survival as part of a collective planetary predicament. This broader lens emphasizes shared vulnerabilities across all life forms entangled in nature's web. Ultimately, *Gun Island* presents the climate crisis as a systemic global emergency necessitating cross-border cooperation and structural reform. It exposes the failure of piecemeal policies, advocating for an integration of ecological sustainability with human dignity. Ghosh's narrative compels a moral reimagining of justice to address the sociopolitical ramifications of our unfolding environmental reality.

*Gun Island* can be placed at the forefront of ecocritical literature as it bridges narrative art with urgent debates on climate ethics and planetary justice. By humanizing victims of ecological collapse, the novel compels accountability and transformative resolve against systemic harm. Central to this framework is the legend of the Gun Merchant, a Bengali myth that functions as a vital conceptual tool rather than mere ornament. This folklore intertwines with contemporary



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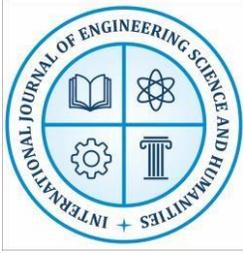
reality to map the entangled histories of migration and environmental disruption. Ultimately, the myth serves as a symbolic bridge, linking metaphysical themes with material planetary changes to enrich the novel's ecocritical depth.

The story of Gun Merchant depicts humanity's encounter with an unpredictable, violent natural world where climatic upheavals unsettle both landscape and society. By repurposing this liminal figure, Ghosh critiques the modern illusion of ecological control, highlighting themes of displacement and survival. Folklore serves as an epistemological tool, contesting dominant technocratic narratives by centring knowledge rooted in cultural memory. Recounting myth alongside scientific data creates a narrative palimpsest that challenges linear, rationalist approaches to climate change. This strategy invites readers to embrace ambiguity and recognize the profound interrelations between human histories and the metahuman world.

This myth provides a temporal depth, linking the Little Ice Age's historical fluctuations to modern global warming. This layering frames climate change as a persistent entanglement rather than a uniquely modern phenomenon, demanding a cultural reckoning over simple technological fixes. Furthermore, the legend serves as a metaphor for migration and mobility. The Gun Merchant links the Little Ice Age to today, where "the possibility of our deliverance lies not in the future but in the past, in a mystery beyond memory" (Ghosh 245). The Merchant's oceanic traverses anticipate contemporary displacement caused by environmental degradation. By mirroring the lived realities of modern climate refugees, the myth underscores the fluidity of borders and habitats under stress, illustrating how ecological upheaval inevitably precipitates human and non-human transit across a changing planet.

Ghosh uses the Gun Merchant's enigmatic disappearance to mirror the inherent unpredictability of climate-driven futures. This open-ended myth promotes humility over human dominance, suggesting that ecological resilience cannot be purely engineered. By integrating folklore, the narrative activates transdisciplinary knowledge that reveals deep interspecies interdependencies often ignored by human-centric history. This approach honours local traditions, successfully destabilizing the Western scientific monopoly on environmental discourse. Ultimately, the mythic framework fosters pluralistic perspectives on sustainability, moving beyond rigid technocratic models to create an ethical, inclusive space for pursuing global climate justice and respecting ecosystem complexity.

The synthesis of myth and science fosters a holistic empathy, transforming climate change from a physical data point into a disruption of cultural memory and ancestral connection. It ties through modernity and migration. Deen, estranged from Sundarbans folklore of Bonduki Sadagar, rediscovers it amid climate crises: "The story had come down to me through a long chain of tellings and retellings... but now it seemed that the chain had snapped" (Ghosh 12), symbolizing lost heritage reborn in uncanny migrations. This mythic axis allows the novel to expand beyond conventional literary representations of ecological collapse. By challenging rigid



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epistemologies, Ghosh advocates for a planetary consciousness rooted in historical depth and multispecies interdependence. Ultimately, this fusion amplifies the novel's message: the climate crisis is a moral challenge necessitating humility, storytelling, and a reconceived human role within the living earth. The climate crisis demands humility before nature's unpredictability, storytelling to revive forgotten wisdom, and a redefined human role as earth's stewards, not dominators. In *Gun Island*, Ghosh illustrates this as Piya warns Deen amid wildfires: "What our ancestors experienced is but a pale foreshadowing of what the future holds!" (Ghosh 116). This urges humble recognition of mythic-ecological cycles, narrative reconnection, and interdependent planetary kinship.

The narrative advances a profound ecological ethic by prioritizing multispecies justice over anthropocentric climate views. The novel depicts the mangrove forest as a vital nexus where human and non-human fates intertwine. Through characters like Piya, the narrative illustrates how shifting ocean currents and disrupted migratory cycles reveal a planetary web of shared vulnerability. This perspective challenges paradigms of human privilege, advocating for a holistic framework of reciprocal care. Ultimately, Ghosh portrays the climate crisis as an unravelling of interspecies balance, demanding collective stewardship that honours the mutual survival of all beings sharing the ecosystem.

He advocates for a shift from dominative control to relational accountability, critiquing the instrumentalization of nature for capital extraction. The intrinsic value of non-human life, the novel addresses ecological harms that transcend species boundaries and entrench systemic inequalities. Central to this critique is the portrayal of migration as a multispecies phenomenon. As climate change alters ocean temperatures and salinity, the resulting displacement of aquatic life destabilizes predator-prey dynamics and human economies alike. By highlighting these ecological ripple effects, Ghosh challenges human-centred immigration discourses, revealing the shared precarity and interconnected survival adaptations necessitated by global environmental duress.

The myth of Gun Merchant symbolizes multispecies kinship, envisioning ethical commitments grounded in reciprocal exchange rather than dominance. The Sundarbans' fragility illustrates how human-induced shocks, like deforestation and salinization, threaten tipping points that destabilize entire interwoven systems. Furthermore, the novel integrates eco-spirituality to disrupt secular modernist worldviews, treating nature as a sacred community of beings rather than inert matter. By aligning with indigenous knowledge, Ghosh advocates for a renewed sensibility of belonging and responsibility. Ultimately, the narrative stresses that planetary flourishing depends on repairing damaged ecological bonds through urgent, multispecies-aware policies and a deep respect for all life.

The novel advocates for political frameworks that merge environmental and social justice, urging inclusive decision-making that respects non-human rights. By bridging scientific



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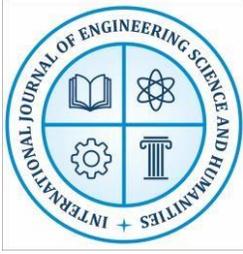
observation with mythic storytelling, Ghosh fosters a “multispecies citizenship” that transcends human-centred interests. This expanded justice framework necessitates cross-disciplinary dialogue to address accelerating ecological crises. Ultimately, the novel presents humans as a single thread within a complex ecological fabric. By centring care, equity, and reciprocal responsibility, Ghosh offers an urgent framework for global solidarity. Addressing climate change thus requires a fundamental ethical reorientation toward protecting the interconnected vulnerabilities and rights of all beings sharing our resilient yet fragile world.

Climate-induced displacement at the heart of *Gun Island*, depicting environmental refugees as resilient agents navigating a volatile world. The narrative identifies the Sundarbans as a primary site of upheaval, where rising sea levels, saltwater intrusion, and intense cyclones like Aila destroy traditional livelihoods. These stressors render ancestral lands uninhabitable, contaminating freshwater and eroding economic security. By detailing how ecological fragility triggers forced migration, Ghosh connects regional suffering to global patterns of environmental injustice. Ultimately, the novel illustrates how the breakdown of deltaic ecosystems transforms self-sufficient communities into displaced populations, highlighting the immediate human cost of the Anthropocene.

It frames climate migration as a “threat multiplier,” where ecological collapse interacts with systemic poverty and political neglect. This sociopolitical matrix amplifies precarity for Sundarbans residents, challenging narratives that view refugees in isolation from structural injustice. Beyond physical movement, displacement inflicts profound psychological trauma and the erosion of cultural identity. The novel captures the grief of severed ancestral ties and the breakdown of communal cohesion as families disperse. By portraying migration as an intersectional crisis of heritage and survival, Ghosh illustrates how environmental upheaval forces painful transitions between lost traditions and the harsh demands of new socioeconomic realities.

It portrays climate migration as a generator of complex feedback loops, where strained urban resources often trigger xenophobia and legal exclusion. However, he also highlights that displaced populations possess unique ecological knowledge vital for sustainability. Crucially, the narrative extends this movement beyond humans; Piya’s research on aquatic species reveals that climate-driven displacement occurs across all biological domains. By framing migration as a multispecies phenomenon, Ghosh links human precarity to broader ecological shifts. This perspective challenges anthropocentric policy, arguing for integrative responses that address the shared vulnerabilities and interconnected mobility of all life forms amidst planetary crisis.

A multilayered narrative strategy, interweaving intimate personal stories with broad systemic processes to honour individual refugee experiences. By utilizing the Gun Merchant myth as a metaphor for boundary-crossing, he situates modern displacement within a historical continuum of human and environmental flux. Furthermore, the novel’s global spatiality links the



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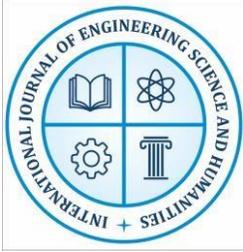
Sundarbans to hubs like Venice and Los Angeles, illustrating how regional degradation reverberates through transnational chains of interdependence. This framing emphasizes that climate migration is a global phenomenon rather than a localized crisis. Ultimately, Ghosh argues that these interconnected geographies necessitate international cooperation and solidarity to manage displacement and mitigate planetary harm.

Ghosh humanizes climate refugees by replacing reductive victimhood with portrayals of agency, resilience, and creativity. By depicting displaced individuals as active participants in shaping their futures, the narrative challenges global governance structures that deny them legal recognition or rights. The novel serves as a political critique, advocating for holistic policy responses—including relocation, disaster risk reduction, and livelihood restoration—that move beyond narrow technocratic fixes. *Gun Island* frames migration as an intersectional, multispecies phenomenon. It positions refugees as emblematic witnesses of the Anthropocene, demanding systemic solutions rooted in ethical attention and a global commitment to social and environmental sustainability.

The ecological crisis is a spiritual and ethical failure rooted in human alienation from nature. Novel advocates for the “reenchantment” of the environment, utilizing ancient wisdom and cultural memory to foster reverence over exploitation. Central to this awakening is the integration of folklore, specifically the myth of the Gun Merchant and the goddess Manasa Devi. By imbuing the natural world with agency and sacredness, these mythic elements challenge mechanistic worldviews. This spiritual lens rejects utilitarian conservation, instead presenting nature as a living entity whose intrinsic value demands a moral reorientation to inspire collective global action.

The novelist critiques Western-centric paradigms by foregrounding Sundarbans cosmologies, where nature acts as an active participant in human affairs rather than a passive backdrop. This local wisdom emphasizes reciprocal harmony, contrasting sharply with exploitative industrial practices. The river serves as a dual symbol of life and destruction, anchoring this eco-spiritual exploration in cultural memory. Ultimately, the novel transitions from spiritual insight to a call for transnational cooperation. By linking the Sundarbans to Venice and Los Angeles, Ghosh illustrates how regional disruptions create global ripples. This interconnectedness demands a collective, international response to mitigate climate change and protect the vulnerable, asserting that our shared planetary fate requires unified action.

He advocates for bridging the divides between science and spirituality, tradition and modernity, to foster comprehensive environmental solutions. By synthesizing scientific data with historical myths, the narrative champions an integrated knowledge system where human interaction with nature becomes ethically grounded and spiritually conscious. This transformation requires a shift from passive acceptance to active stewardship, recognizing humanity’s deep embeddedness within ecological networks. Ultimately, the novel envisions a



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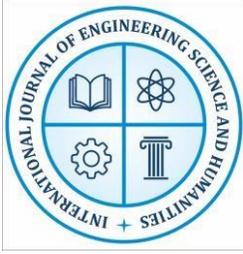
global movement that transcends cultural boundaries, uniting diverse communities through both rational understanding and reverence. This reconciliation serves as a vital intervention, urging a profound re-evaluation of ethical obligations to safeguard our shared planet.

*Gun Island* serves as a pioneering ethical intervention in climate fiction, moving beyond mere depictions of catastrophe to offer a holistic vision of the Anthropocene. Ghosh weaves history, myth, and science into a narrative that challenges anthropocentric dominance, instead foregrounding a planetary environmentalism. By centering the fragile Sundarbans, the novel illustrates the shared vulnerabilities of humans and non-human life, expanding traditional concepts of justice. This inclusive framework demands collective responsibility for global emergencies like habitat loss and rising sea levels. Ultimately, Ghosh demonstrates that ecological crises are not isolated events but interconnected phenomena requiring a fundamental shift in how humanity perceives its place within the earth's complex, fragile systems.

Ghosh integrates the Gun Merchant myth and Manasa Devi to disrupt linear, scientific climate narratives, advocating for a relational ontology rooted in environmental reciprocity. By treating nature as a sacred participant rather than a resource, the novel challenges modern nature-culture binaries through localized wisdom. Simultaneously, the focus on Sundarbans refugees illuminates the human cost of ecological breakdown, framing migration as a politicized crisis of justice. Displaced individuals emerge as resilient knowledge-bearers within a global system of environmental precarity. This motif extends to non-human species, reinforcing the idea that climate disruption triggers interconnected ripple effects across all life forms, necessitating inclusive, transnational policy responses.

*Gun Island* underscores that transnational crises like climate change defy borders, demanding cross-cultural cooperation over parochial technocratic fixes. By linking the Sundarbans to Venice and Los Angeles, Ghosh advocates for a pluralistic synthesis of science, activism, and tradition. The narrative meditates on human vulnerability and uncertainty, avoiding both simplistic mastery and apocalyptic doom. Through a blend of mystery and ecological reportage, the novel demonstrates fiction's power to foster "planetary consciousness." Ultimately, it serves as a vital call to collective action, urging an ethical engagement that recognizes our shared contingency within a complex, rapidly transforming global ecosystem.

The novel serves as a definitive intervention in contemporary climate fiction, dismantling anthropocentric frameworks to propose an inclusive, multispecies justice. By synthesizing myth, ecology, and displacement, Ghosh recontextualizes the climate crisis not merely as a series of technical failures, but as a profound moral and existential reckoning. The novel's strength lies in its "relational ontology," which bridges the gap between scientific data and spiritual tradition, compelling a shift from dominative control to collective stewardship. Ultimately, Ghosh illustrates that survival in the Anthropocene is predicated on recognizing our shared destiny within a larger ecological community. *Gun Island* thus transcends the limits of a "climate novel"



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to become a manifesto for planetary consciousness, demanding an ethical reorientation that is as much about cultural memory as it is about political action.

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