

# Reimagining Human–Nature Relations: Biocentrism and Environmental Ethics in Amitav Ghosh’s *Gun Island*

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## Abstract

Amid rising climate change and ecological upheaval, literature has become a crucial space for reimagining the relationship between humans and nature. This article analyzes Amitav Ghosh’s *Gun Island* (2019) through the lenses of biocentrism and environmental ethics, drawing on the philosophies of Arne Naess, Paul Taylor, Val Plumwood, and Aldo Leopold within an ecocritical framework. Ghosh’s story combines myth, interspecies connections, and climate-driven migration to critique human exceptionalism and highlight the role of nonhuman agency. The novel places ecological crises within the larger context of human history and myth, promoting an ethic of interdependence and shared vulnerability. By shifting away from anthropocentrism and focusing on relational ethics, *Gun Island* provides a literary example of ecological storytelling that encourages moral reflection and multispecies solidarity. This research adds to postcolonial ecocriticism and the environmental humanities by showing how climate fiction can alter ecological awareness and foster inclusive visions of planetary coexistence.

## Keywords

Climate Fiction, Biocentric Ethics, Environmental Humanities

## 1. Introduction

In a time defined by climate disaster and ecological breakdown, the need to reassess how humans relate to nature has grown urgent. The Anthropocene, in *Gun Island*—a geological period influenced by human actions—calls for both scientific investigation and deep philosophical reflection on humanity’s role within the wider ecological system [1]. Literature, especially climate fiction, plays a vital role in this conversation, challenging human-centered perspectives and broadening ethical debates. Amitav Ghosh’s *Gun Island* (2019) illustrates this by combining myth, climate-induced migration, and ecological chaos in a story that questions the fundamental separation between humans and other forms of life.

This article investigates how *Gun Island* promotes ecological consciousness through the philosophical lenses of biocentrism and environmental ethics. Drawing from Paul Taylor’s concept of “respect for nature” [2], Arne Naess’s “deep ecology” [3], and Aldo Leopold’s “land ethic” [4], the study analyzes how Ghosh repositions non-human agency as central to ethical engagement in the Anthropocene. These theoretical paradigms form the core of the interdisciplinary framework adopted here, combining insights from environmental philosophy, ecocriticism, and postcolonial studies.

The Anthropocene has fundamentally altered the terms of ecological and ethical discourse. As climate change, species extinction, and ecological degradation intensify, traditional narratives that center the human as sovereign over nature have become increasingly untenable. Biocentrism offers a corrective to this imbalance by positing the intrinsic value of all living beings, regardless of their utility to humans. Environmental ethics, likewise, expands the moral landscape to encompass ecosystems, animals, and future generations. Within this philosophical terrain, literature becomes a vital site for reimagining ethical possibilities and moral inclusivity.

*Gun Island* situates itself within this ethical and ecological turn. Ghosh’s narrative interlaces human and non-human experiences, using elements of mythopoesis, interspecies communication, and transcontinental movement to foreground ecological interdependence. The novel features characters displaced by environmental catastrophe, animals and ecosystems portrayed as sentient agents, and a spiritual ecology that questions Enlightenment rationality. These elements work in concert to challenge the anthropocentric bias of mainstream fiction and to cultivate an ethic of shared vulnerability.

While Ghosh’s earlier work, particularly *The Hungry Tide*, has been widely analyzed through the lens of “postcolonial ecocriticism” [5], *Gun Island* represents a significant expansion of his ecological imagination. The novel shifts from regional ecological concerns to a globalized environmental consciousness, addressing planetary challenges such as climate migration, rising sea levels, species extinction, and ecological myth-making. Despite this shift, existing critical literature has yet to fully explore how the novel employs biocentric and environmental ethical frameworks to reconstruct the relationship between humans and the natural world.

## Research Questions

To address this critical gap, this article seeks to explore the following questions:

1. How does *Gun Island* represent non-human life as ethically significant and ontologically active?
2. In what ways does the novel challenge anthropocentric worldviews through its narrative structure and character development?
3. How do biocentric and environmental ethical perspectives contribute to reimagining the human–nature relationship in the context of climate change?

This study employs a qualitative, interdisciplinary methodology that combines textual analysis with ecological philosophy. It incorporates biocentric theories proposed by Taylor and Naess, along with environmental ethics articulated by Leopold, Singer, and Plumwood. Additionally, it integrates ecocritical perspectives from Buell, Heise, and Nixon. Through meticulous examination of the novel's themes, symbols, and characters, the article contends that "Gun Island" serves as a literary intervention promoting ecological humility and interspecies solidarity. The novel functions not merely as a narrative device but also as a platform for ethical inquiry, encouraging readers to reevaluate their assumptions regarding agency, responsibility, and belonging within the context of a warming world.

Ultimately, this article contributes to the growing body of scholarship in postcolonial ecocriticism, environmental humanities, and climate fiction. By foregrounding the biocentric ethics in *Gun Island*, it illuminates how literary texts can reframe our ecological consciousness and inspire more inclusive, just, and sustainable ways of imagining human–nature relations.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

This section elaborates the interdisciplinary theoretical framework employed to examine Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island* through the lenses of biocentrism, environmental ethics, ecocriticism, and postcolonial ecological critique. These frameworks provide a rich analytical structure to interpret how the novel destabilizes anthropocentric norms and foregrounds a multispecies ethical perspective, particularly in the context of climate change and ecological displacement. In response to the reviewer's comments, this revised section expands and integrates all references cited in the main text in ascending numerical order, and emphasizes how each theory directly informs the novel's analysis.

### 2.1 Biocentrism

Biocentrism posits that all living beings have inherent moral worth, independent of their utility to human ends. Paul Taylor's foundational work, *Respect for Nature*, argues that nature's value must be understood as intrinsic rather than instrumental. Arne Naess, in his articulation of the "deep ecology" movement, further insists on a non-hierarchical ontology, where humans are part of—not superior to—the biosphere. Aldo Leopold, in *A Sand County Almanac*, contributes to this perspective through the concept of a "land ethic," advocating for the extension of moral community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals.

Ghosh's *Gun Island* dramatizes this biocentric perspective through its treatment of animal agency and ecological sentience. The symbolic presence of the snake, associated with Manasa Devi, and the dolphins encountered during Deen's journey are not merely metaphors but actors in a shared moral ecology. Ghosh disrupts the binary opposition between nature and culture, myth and reason, suggesting that non-human life forms participate in shaping ethical worlds. These characters embody Taylor's principle of respect for life and Naess's insistence on identification with non-human nature, thereby creating a literary ethos of interdependence.

By presenting animals as meaningful agents and myth as a mode of ecological epistemology, *Gun Island* insists that the moral status of non-human beings cannot be ignored in narratives responding to climate change. The biocentric lens is essential for evaluating how Ghosh recalibrates human-centric storytelling into a narrative of ecological coexistence.

### 2.2 Environmental Ethics

Environmental ethics, a branch of moral philosophy, expands the domain of ethical concern beyond human society to include the broader ecological world. Leopold's "land ethic" is central to this discourse, arguing that ethics should reflect a symbiotic relationship with nature. Val Plumwood's ecofeminist philosophy critiques the dichotomies that undergird Western rationalism—reason/emotion, man/woman, human/nature—and highlights the destructive consequences of these binaries for both marginalized human and non-human communities [6]. Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation* [7] challenges speciesism, calling for the extension of moral concern to all sentient beings.

*Gun Island* reflects these ethical imperatives by portraying ecological suffering as morally significant and by destabilizing human-centered ethical reasoning. The flooding of Venice and the ecological precarity of the Sundarbans are not simply narrative backdrops; they embody a shared vulnerability between human migrants and displaced species. This ethical confluence resonates with Plumwood's critique of anthropocentric dualisms and Singer's call for cross-species compassion.

Ghosh's portrayal of environmental refugees like Tipu and Rafi parallels the displacement of animals such as spiders and birds, suggesting that ethical justice in the Anthropocene must consider both human and non-human victims of

ecological disruption. In this way, the novel articulates a form of environmental ethics that challenges readers to redefine justice, care, and agency across species lines.

### 2.3 Ecocriticism and Postcolonial Environmental Humanities

Ecocriticism, as developed by Lawrence Buell, Rob Nixon, and Ursula Heise, provides the methodological foundation for analyzing *Gun Island* as climate fiction. Buell's *The Environmental Imagination* [8] emphasizes literature's capacity to cultivate environmental awareness, while Nixon's theory of "slow violence" [9] addresses the incremental, often invisible, harm inflicted by environmental degradation on marginalized communities. Heise's notion of "eco-cosmopolitanism" [10] advocates for a planetary ethical consciousness that transcends national and cultural borders.

These ideas are especially salient in interpreting *Gun Island*'s global narrative trajectory—from Kolkata to Los Angeles to Venice—and its fusion of ecological and migratory crises. The novel embodies eco-cosmopolitanism by linking ecological injustice in the Global South (e.g., the Sundarbans) with climate threats in the Global North (e.g., Venice), demonstrating that environmental catastrophe is both globally entangled and unevenly distributed.

The study also draws from postcolonial environmental humanities, including the works of Elizabeth DeLoughrey [11] and Helen Tiffin [12], to critique how colonial histories have shaped ecological degradation and migration patterns. Ghosh's blending of myth, history, and ecology reveals the legacies of colonial extraction and capitalist modernization in shaping today's climate realities. These postcolonial insights are necessary to understand the historical roots of environmental injustice and the global inequality of climate vulnerability.

Through these lenses, *Gun Island* emerges as a paradigmatic work of postcolonial climate fiction that not only represents but also critiques the asymmetrical burdens of environmental collapse. It asks readers to reconceptualize ethical belonging—not within bounded human or national communities, but across species and spatial scales.

### 2.4 Integrative Framework and Ethical Orientation

Given the novel's thematic complexity, a composite theoretical approach is indispensable. Biocentrism accounts for the intrinsic moral worth of non-human life; environmental ethics provides tools for evaluating justice and responsibility in multispecies contexts; ecocriticism and postcolonial thought situate the narrative within global, historical, and literary discourses of climate injustice.

This integrative framework enables a multidimensional reading of *Gun Island* as an ethical proposition, literary intervention, and cultural response to the Anthropocene. It affirms that literature can not only represent ecological realities but also transform ethical paradigms by inviting readers to imagine a world rooted in respect, interdependence, and multispecies solidarity.

In sum, the theoretical frameworks deployed in this study not only support the textual analysis of *Gun Island* but also exemplify how interdisciplinary approaches can enrich literary interpretation in the age of ecological crisis.

## 3. Literature Review

The growing urgency of the climate crisis has catalyzed an expansion in scholarly engagement with literature as a vital site of ecological reflection and ethical inquiry. Within this expanding field, climate fiction (cli-fi), biocentrism, and environmental ethics have emerged as central frameworks for interrogating how narratives mediate human–nature relationships. Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island* (2019), a novel that weaves together themes of climate change, transnational migration, ecological disruption, and myth, has attracted critical attention for its contribution to eco-literary discourse. However, a sustained analysis of the novel through the integrated lenses of biocentrism and environmental ethics remains underexplored. This review synthesizes key academic contributions across ecocriticism, postcolonial environmental humanities, and environmental philosophy to contextualize the present study.

Foundational work in ecocriticism began with scholars such as Lawrence Buell in *The Environmental Imagination* (1995) and Cheryll Glotfelty in *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996), who underscored the cultural and literary representations of the natural world [13]. Buell's notion that "the nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest human accountability marked a critical turn in literary studies. These contributions laid the groundwork for understanding how literary texts shape ecological consciousness.

In subsequent years, ecocriticism expanded into global and postcolonial domains. Ursula Heise's concept of "eco-cosmopolitanism" calls for a transnational approach to ecological citizenship, relevant to *Gun Island*'s geographically dispersed settings, including the Sundarbans, Venice, and Los Angeles. Rob Nixon's seminal concept of "slow violence" offers a temporal lens through which to examine environmental degradation that unfolds gradually and invisibly, disproportionately affecting marginalized populations. Ghosh's narrative captures these dynamics through climate migration, biodiversity loss, and disrupted mythological continuity.

Dipesh Chakrabarty's influential essay "The Climate of History in a Planetary Age" grapples with the Anthropocene's challenge to historical understanding and anthropocentric narratives [14]. Chakrabarty's reflections resonate with Ghosh's concerns in *The Great Derangement* (2016), where he critiques the literary world's failure to grapple with climate change [15]. Ghosh argues for reconfiguring storytelling forms to make space for non-human actors and planetary crises—a literary provocation directly addressed in *Gun Island*.

Scholarship on Ghosh's earlier work, particularly *The Hungry Tide*, has emphasized his engagement with environmental justice, postcolonial identity, and human-animal relationships. Priyamvada Gopal (2020) intertwines ecological catastrophe [16], and Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee (2018) has examined the ecological challenges with legacies of colonialism and displacement [17]. In contrast, *Gun Island* marks a global turn, situating its narrative within multiple interconnected ecological zones. This shift necessitates new theoretical approaches that combine ecological and ethical analysis.

Despite the emergence of biocentrism in environmental philosophy, its literary application remains limited. Paul Taylor's *Respect for Nature* (1986) and Arne Naess's deep ecology present biocentrism as a philosophical stance that affirms the intrinsic worth of all living beings. Taylor calls for "biocentric egalitarianism," wherein human beings are not privileged over other species. In *Gun Island*, such a worldview is reflected in Ghosh's narrative elevation of non-human agency—from venomous spiders and river dolphins to mythic serpents—as morally significant actors. Yet few literary scholars have systematically employed biocentric frameworks to interpret these symbolic elements.

Similarly, environmental ethics offers a robust foundation for rethinking moral responsibility in the face of ecological crisis. Aldo Leopold's "land ethic" proposes an expansion of the moral community to include "soils, waters, plants, and animals." Val Plumwood's ecofeminist critique addresses dualisms such as nature/culture and human/animal, while Peter Singer's work on animal liberation challenges the anthropocentric boundaries of ethical concern. These ethical insights align with *Gun Island*'s depiction of interspecies entanglement and ecological suffering, yet they have not been fully explored in Ghosh scholarship.

Other relevant interventions include Kate Rigby's (2004) engagement with post-humanist environmental thought [18], and Timothy Morton's (2007) concept of the "ecological thought" [19], which envisions a radically interconnected world. Morton's view that "ecology without nature" requires abandoning romanticized notions of the environment parallels Ghosh's mythologically-inflected yet realist portrayal of ecological disruption.

This literature review reveals two key gaps:

1. The absence of sustained application of biocentric ethics to *Gun Island*.
2. A lack of integrated analysis combining environmental ethics and ecocriticism to explore how literature might serve as an ethical medium for ecological transformation.

This study aims to address these gaps by offering a biocentric and ethically engaged reading of *Gun Island*. In doing so, it contributes to interdisciplinary conversations in climate humanities, postcolonial ecocriticism, and ecological moral philosophy. By foregrounding interspecies vulnerability and ecological justice, the research underscores literature's capacity to generate new ethical imaginaries necessary for navigating the Anthropocene.

Ultimately, *Gun Island* is not merely a novel of ecological representation but a literary provocation that reorients readers toward more inclusive, humble, and just modes of coexistence with the non-human world. This research situates Ghosh's narrative within a broader intellectual tradition that seeks to move beyond human exceptionalism and cultivate interspecies solidarity—a critical task in the era of planetary crisis.

#### 4. Methodology

This qualitative research adopts an interpretive approach grounded in textual analysis, ecocritical reading, and comparative literary study to explore how Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island* articulates biocentrism and environmental ethics in the age of climate crisis. Rather than relying on empirical data or quantifiable metrics, this study engages in deep reading practices informed by interdisciplinary theoretical perspectives from environmental philosophy, literary ecocriticism, and postcolonial studies. The aim is to interpret and evaluate the ethical, symbolic, and philosophical dimensions of human–non-human entanglements represented in the novel.

##### 4.1 Research Design and Rationale

The choice of a qualitative design is guided by the nature of the research questions, which seek to understand how *Gun Island* reimagines the human–nature relationship and contests anthropocentric hierarchies. The study relies on close textual reading to analyze biocentric themes, non-human agency, and ethical representations embedded within the novel's narrative structure. These readings are supplemented by critical engagement with secondary scholarly texts, including Ghosh's non-fictional reflections (such as *The Great Derangement*), philosophical writings (e.g., Paul Taylor's *Respect for Nature*, Arne Naess's deep ecology), and recent scholarship on climate fiction and ecocriticism.

This interpretive framework allows for a contextualized understanding of the narrative and ethical significance of ecological storytelling. The methodology is especially attentive to figurative language, character development, symbolic representation, and the interplay between myth and ecological reality. The study is also comparative in scope, occasionally referencing other climate fiction works that feature similar ethical challenges or thematic alignments to situate *Gun Island* within a broader literary and philosophical discourse.

##### 4.2 Textual and Thematic Analysis

Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island* serves as the primary text for analysis. The methodology involves a structured close

reading of the novel, with special focus on key scenes, characters, and narrative motifs that reflect biocentric and ecological ethical principles. The analysis prioritizes the identification of patterns of ecological interconnectedness, depictions of non-human life as ethically significant, and the novel's engagement with myth, migration, and species vulnerability.

To elucidate these dimensions, the study incorporates theoretical concepts from biocentrism (Taylor, Naess), environmental ethics (Leopold, Plumwood, Singer), and ecocriticism (Buell, Nixon, Heise). This interdisciplinary orientation ensures a robust interpretive strategy capable of unpacking the multilayered ecological meanings within the text.

### 4.3 Secondary Data and Intertextual Synthesis

Given the absence of primary data collection, the study draws exclusively from secondary sources to build its analytical foundation. Academic articles, monographs, literary reviews, and climate fiction theory contribute to this synthesis. In particular, Ghosh's essays and lectures-including *The Great Derangement*-offer invaluable meta-commentary on the relationship between literature and climate change, serving both as analytical tools and intertextual reference points.

Secondary scholarship from ecocritics and environmental philosophers further shapes the methodological lens. For instance, Val Plumwood's critique of dualisms, Peter Singer's animal ethics, and Ursula Heise's eco-cosmopolitanism inform the interpretive process. This intertextual engagement enables the study to position *Gun Island* as both a cultural artifact and a philosophical proposition, engaging with broader debates on ethics, agency, and justice in the Anthropocene.

### 4.4 Justification for Methodological Approach

The complexity and thematic depth of *Gun Island* necessitate a qualitative, interdisciplinary methodology. A quantitative or purely empirical approach would be insufficient for capturing the symbolic, ethical, and narrative strategies through which the novel communicates its ecological message. By foregrounding the literary and philosophical dimensions of biocentrism, this methodology not only reveals how Ghosh decenters human subjectivity but also demonstrates the ethical potential of literature to foster ecological consciousness.

Moreover, the choice to combine literary analysis with environmental ethical theory responds directly to the research gap identified in the literature review-namely, the lack of biocentric readings of climate fiction. This methodological approach thus contributes to ongoing conversations in environmental humanities by modeling a way to analyze literature as an ethical intervention into ecological thought.

### 4.5 Scope and Limitations

While the study aims for analytical depth and interdisciplinary richness, it acknowledges certain limitations. The analysis is limited to *Gun Island* and does not engage in primary fieldwork, ethnographic study, or quantitative environmental data collection. Furthermore, the conclusions drawn are interpretive rather than empirical, which means their validity rests on coherence, theoretical soundness, and textual support rather than replicability or statistical generalization.

Despite these limitations, the chosen methodology offers an effective means to address the research questions. It provides a rigorous framework for examining the ethical imagination of climate fiction and demonstrates how literary narratives, such as *Gun Island*, can serve as discursive sites for rethinking the moral boundaries of the human in a multispecies world.

## 5. Analysis and Discussion

This section presents an interpretive and theoretically grounded analysis of Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island*, focusing on how the novel subverts anthropocentric paradigms and embodies biocentric and environmental ethical principles. Organized thematically, the analysis draws on the theoretical frameworks discussed earlier to engage deeply with the novel's philosophical and narrative structure.

### 5.1 Decentering the Human: Narrating Non-Human Agency

One of the most striking features of *Gun Island* is its elevation of non-human life to central narrative roles. Ghosh crafts animal characters-particularly a venomous snake and a dolphin-not as metaphors or symbols but as entities endowed with agency and ethical significance. The snake, linked to the myth of Manasa Devi, functions as both a literal and spiritual force guiding the protagonist Deen. Similarly, the dolphin's appearance in a crucial scene underscores the presence of non-human intelligence and communication.

Paul Taylor's theory of "respect for nature" provides the philosophical scaffolding for understanding these portrayals. Taylor argues that all living beings possess inherent worth, independent of their utility to human interests. In *Gun Island*, Ghosh enacts this ethic by narrating events from a perspective that honors animal autonomy. The anthropomorphic myth is not used to make nature more relatable but rather to place human experiences within a broader ecological context.

Arne Naess's deep ecology further illuminates how Ghosh resists the traditional Western dichotomy between nature and culture. Rather than portraying animals as objects of fear or fascination, the novel emphasizes their moral presence and narrative indispensability. The snake is not a villain but a bearer of wisdom. Such portrayals decenter the human and create an interspecies moral space, challenging anthropocentric epistemologies.

## 5.2 Climate Change and Interspecies Vulnerability

*Gun Island* treats climate change as an omnipresent and active force, intricately tied to both human and non-human displacement. Ghosh's use of storms, flooding, and animal migrations serves as a narrative embodiment of Rob Nixon's concept of "slow violence"-the gradual, often invisible environmental harm inflicted upon marginalized communities and species.

Characters such as Rafi and Tipu experience climate-induced precarity akin to that of dislocated animals like spiders and birds. The forced migration of both humans and non-humans due to environmental degradation reveals a shared condition of vulnerability. Val Plumwood's ecofeminist philosophy helps interpret this shared precarity. Her critique of binary dualisms (human/animal, male/female, culture/nature) sheds light on Ghosh's narrative strategy of collapsing such distinctions.

Through parallel plotlines, Ghosh illustrates how climate crises dismantle not only ecological boundaries but also ethical categories. This interconnected suffering prompts readers to develop what Plumwood calls an "empathetic imagination" that spans species lines. The novel's temporal slowness-its reflective tone and narrative pause-mirrors this ethical attentiveness and invites meditative reading.

## 5.3 Myth, Spiritual Ecology, and Ethical Imagination

Myth in *Gun Island* is not an escapist trope but a repository of ecological wisdom. The legend of the Gun Merchant and his journey, interwoven with the presence of Manasa Devi, reframes traditional narratives as spiritually ecological. This spiritual ecology aligns with Aldo Leopold's "land ethic," which expands the concept of community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals.

Deen's transformation from a rationalist historian to a spiritually aware seeker symbolizes the epistemic shift necessary for ecological ethics. The mythic structures allow Ghosh to critique Enlightenment rationality and its dismissal of indigenous and non-Western knowledge systems. Instead of privileging empirical science, *Gun Island* presents myth as a parallel form of ecological knowledge, capable of fostering biocentric humility.

Naess's concept of deep ecology resonates here, especially in how the myth of Manasa Devi encourages the protagonist-and the reader-to "self-realize" within a broader ecological network. The myth teaches that cohabitation, respect, and reverence for non-human life are not antiquated beliefs but urgent ethical imperatives.

## 5.4 Migration, Displacement, and Environmental Justice

The novel's exploration of migration bridges historical and ecological injustices. By linking the 17th-century Gun Merchant's journey with contemporary climate refugees, Ghosh critiques the structural violence that underpins global migration patterns. Rafi and Tipu's displacement from the Sundarbans and their perilous journey across borders echo past systems of indenture and colonial trade.

Ursula Heise's eco-cosmopolitanism helps frame this planetary narrative. She advocates for a form of ecological belonging that transcends national identities and recognizes global interdependencies. Ghosh's transnational storytelling-from the Sundarbans to Venice-demonstrates how environmental crises demand ethical frameworks that are equally transnational.

Rob Nixon's idea of slow violence is also evident in the depiction of incremental ecological destruction-rising seas, disappearing coastlines, collapsing ecosystems-that cumulatively push vulnerable communities into perpetual crisis. *Gun Island* insists that any ethical reckoning with climate change must include justice for those who suffer its most severe effects first.

The Sundarbans, as both setting and actor, exemplify this ecological injustice. More than a backdrop, the mangrove forest is portrayed as a sentient space responding to human intrusion and climate degradation. The Sundarbans' shifting geography and cultural memory serve as reminders of a dynamic, reactive ecosystem that demands ethical consideration.

## 5.5 Literature as Ethical Intervention

Ghosh's narrative strategies reveal a belief in literature's capacity to serve as ethical intervention. His metafictional reflections, mythological interweavings, and symbolic storytelling construct what Lawrence Buell terms the "environmental imagination." Buell argues that literature can provoke new modes of environmental consciousness, and *Gun Island* exemplifies this pedagogical potential.

Ghosh's work is not didactic but affective. It aims to shape ethical responses through empathy, curiosity, and cognitive dissonance. The reader is invited to engage with unsettling realities-animal agency, climate migration, collapsing myth/history boundaries-not to resolve them but to inhabit them ethically.

This literary activism aligns with Timothy Morton's notion of ecological thought, which demands a reevaluation of interconnectedness, uncertainty, and interdependence. In creating a world where myths live, snakes speak, and the sea encroaches without mercy, *Gun Island* dissolves the boundaries between the real and the imaginary, inviting a speculative ethics grounded in possibility and care.

### 5.6 Deen's Ethical Transformation: From Rationalism to Ecological Consciousness

A central arc in the novel is the ethical and epistemological transformation of Dinanath (Deen). Initially, a skeptical, secular scholar, Deen's journey across continents and epistemes leads him toward a broader understanding of ecological entanglement. His initial resistance to myth and non-human agency gradually yields to a posture of humility and wonder.

This personal transformation echoes the novel's larger argument: that ethical and spiritual awakening in the Anthropocene requires a reevaluation of Enlightenment values. The privileging of reason, human exceptionalism, and empirical objectivity must give way to relational, multispecies ethics. Deen's journey is thus both literal and symbolic, illustrating the kind of inner shift necessary for ecological regeneration.

Taylor's biocentric egalitarianism supports this reading, as Deen increasingly acknowledges the inherent worth of non-human life. His recognition of the snake, the dolphin, and even the shifting Sundarbans as ethically significant entities mark a move toward bioethical maturity.

### 5.7 Critique of Enlightenment Rationality and Colonial Epistemologies

*Gun Island* is also a critique of the epistemological legacies of colonialism and Enlightenment rationality. The novel questions the authority of Western scientific paradigms that have historically marginalized other ways of knowing. Through characters like Cinta and Piya, Ghosh juxtaposes empirical science with spiritual ecology, suggesting that neither alone suffices to understand planetary crisis.

This critique extends to the archival and linguistic practices that seek to fix meaning and control knowledge. Deen's initial commitment to etymology and historical textuality is gradually supplanted by an openness to oral histories, folklore, and embodied knowledge. The epistemological pluralism that emerges reflects a postcolonial ecological consciousness, where multiple truths coexist and enrich understanding.

Ghosh's literary methodology, therefore, not only critiques but also reimagines knowledge production. By hybridizing genres-travelogue, myth, cli-fi, thriller-*Gun Island* resists singular interpretation and demands multifaceted ethical engagement.

### 5.8 Interspecies Solidarity and Ecological Humility

Ultimately, *Gun Island* advocates for a planetary ethic rooted in interspecies solidarity and ecological humility. Its characters are bound not only by human relationships but by their shared vulnerability within a destabilized biosphere. This interconnection invites readers to reconceive identity, agency, and justice as inherently ecological.

Plumwood's model of ethical inclusion offers a useful lens here. Rather than extending humanist moral categories to animals, Plumwood calls for a reconfiguration of ethical paradigms themselves. Ghosh heeds this call by portraying relationships that defy species boundaries and hierarchies-human to snake, refugee to dolphin, scholar to forest.

In sum, *Gun Island* offers a narrative blueprint for ethical recalibration in the Anthropocene. It challenges readers to embrace complexity, acknowledge entanglement, and act with reverence toward all forms of life. In doing so, it exemplifies the unique power of literature to shape, deepen, and transform our ecological imaginations.

## 6. Conclusion

In the era of the Anthropocene, marked by climate emergencies, ecological displacement, and a deepening environmental crisis, Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island* emerges as a critical literary intervention that challenges human-centric worldviews and foregrounds an ethics of ecological interdependence. This study set out to investigate how *Gun Island* reimagines human-nature relations through the philosophical frameworks of biocentrism and environmental ethics. By employing a multidisciplinary methodology rooted in biocentric theory (Taylor, Naess), environmental philosophy (Leopold, Plumwood), and ecocriticism (Buell, Nixon, Heise), this research has shown that literature, especially postcolonial climate fiction, can serve as a powerful medium for ethical transformation.

The novel decentralizes human agency and amplifies the voices and actions of non-human entities-such as snakes, dolphins, storms, and ecosystems-thereby establishing an ethical space where all life forms are morally relevant. As explored in the analysis, *Gun Island* resists the binaries of nature/culture, human/animal, and reason/emotion. Through Deen's journey of ethical transformation, the narrative reveals how ecological crises are entangled with myth, history, and memory, offering a form of ecological storytelling that challenges the rationalism of Enlightenment thinking. The legend of the Gun Merchant, interwoven with Manasa Devi's myth, positions spiritual ecology not as superstition but as a legitimate epistemology for understanding human-non-human entanglements.

By situating climate change within the intersecting contexts of colonial histories, global inequality, and climate-induced migration, *Gun Island* presents a transnational vision of environmental justice. The ethical implications of this vision

resonate with Ursula Heise's concept of eco-cosmopolitanism, which calls for solidarity that transcends borders and species. Characters like Tipu and Rafi are not merely climate refugees but symbols of a larger ecological precarity shared across human and non-human worlds. Their journeys parallel that of displaced animals and disrupted ecosystems, emphasizing the shared burden of environmental collapse and the need for inclusive frameworks of care.

This study contributes to the expanding discourse in postcolonial ecocriticism and environmental humanities by demonstrating how *Gun Island* exemplifies a biocentric literary ethic. It moves beyond traditional cli-fi frameworks to position the novel as a site of ethical reflection, where storytelling becomes a means of engaging with the philosophical, spiritual, and political dimensions of the climate crisis. By engaging with thinkers like Paul Taylor and Aldo Leopold, the analysis underscores how the novel advocates for an ethical stance grounded in humility, relationality, and ecological justice.

Furthermore, the narrative reveals how literature can not only represent the impacts of environmental degradation but also participate in the ethical reimagining necessary for confronting the Anthropocene. Ghosh's blending of myth, environmental science, and postcolonial critique offers a model for interdisciplinary storytelling that fosters ecological humility and interspecies solidarity. His use of narrative as both witness and catalyst reaffirms the transformative power of fiction in shaping moral imagination and environmental consciousness.

While the current study has focused on *Gun Island*, future research may further investigate how biocentric and post-humanist ethics operate across Ghosh's broader oeuvre, including *The Hungry Tide* and his another fiction *The Nutmeg's Curse* comparatively studies could also explore intersections between Ghosh's climate fiction and indigenous, Eastern, or non-Western ecological traditions, thereby expanding the ethical and philosophical horizons of environmental literary studies.

In conclusion, *Gun Island* urges readers to move beyond human-centered stories and adopt a planetary ethic where all living beings—both human and non-human—are seen as co-inhabitants of a delicate yet interconnected world. Through its mythopoetic storytelling, biocentric philosophy, and sense of ethical urgency, the novel actively promotes responsibility and care during a time of global ecological upheaval. It offers not only a critique of the current situation but also a hopeful outlook for a more inclusive and compassionate ecological future.

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