

Climate Change and its Effects in Gun Island

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Abstract:

Climate Crisis has become a global issue in today's era. Environment has taken sudden change in everything and the prominent cause of these environmental changes is human's interference in nature's balancing world in the form of nature destroying life style. Both human centric nature and lifestyle at the expense of nature has become the crucial reason for the climate change and environmental displacement. The issue of climate change and biodiversity is increasing in the world on daily bases. The present paper explores theme of climate change and its effects drawing its attention in Gun Island by Amitav Ghosh. The novel deals with ecological crisis, environmental displacement and global inequality. The paper attempts to analyze ecological crisis presented in the Gun Island by Amitav Ghosh from eco critical lenses. The present paper highlights eco critical issues reflected in Sundarbans especially issue of climate change by Amitav Ghosh. By focusing on examples of ecological degradation and climate induced migration, this paper highlights the novel's contribution to eco critical theory and its relevance to contemporary global climate discourse.

Key words: Climate Change, Environment, Eco criticism, biodiversity, Literature, Gun Island

Introduction:

Ecological imbalance in the world is the burning issue. From environmental lenses the world is facing numerous crisis related environment and climate change. Human beings are destroying the nurturing of nature with their disastrous actions. It is because of Nature we are living in this world and our co-existence with nature will create more peaceful living for each and every human. Instead of protecting nature and its eco cycle, modern day men are destroying it in order to adopt a better life style which is contradict to nature's nourishment.

As a result, the world is dealing with several ecological crisis like climate change, environmental imbalance, disturbance in eco cycle, biodiversity, etc.. Among them Climate change has emerged as one the urgent challenges of twenty first century, affecting human society, ecosystem and cultural consciousness globally.

In literature there are numbers of literary works in which some thought provoking issues of environment have depicted by authors. Literary works have increasingly responded to environmental degradation through ecological narratives. Amitav Ghosh has been portraying human connections with geographical elements with the powerful backdrop of climate change. Almost all his works attempt to highlight the issue of climate change and by doing this he tries to make the world aware about the situation the planet is being threatened by various climate related catastrophes. Amitav Ghosh's Gun Island (2019) stands as a remarkable work positioning climate change at core of its plot and themes. The

novel depicts the anthropogenic climate crisis in the era of socio economic and cultural globalization and its effects. The broken relation between man and nature is the root of human centric culture and degradation of nature. Ghosh foregrounds in the text that climate change has been increased by an anthropocentric lifestyle of human being. The novel Gun Island has been the fundamental thought provoking scenario of environmental issues in the mind of each and every environmentalist reader.

Climate Change and its Effects in Gun Island:

Amitav Ghosh's Gun Island narrates the story of the narrator and protagonist of the novel whose name is Dinanath Dutta, who is Brooklyn based rare book dealer whose original genes connected to Bangladesh. He visits the shrine of Mansa Devi- the goddess of snake and poisonous creature, in the Sundarbans- the place depicted in the legend of the Gun Merchant (Bounduki Sadagar), a famous Bengali Folklore. The reason behind his visit to Mansa Devi shrine is that he was told a story by his relatives about Bounduki sadagar who turned into the devotee of Mansa Devi. In Bangla Bouduki means gun and in order to know about Bounduki sadagar or Chand sadagar's reality he visits Sundarbans and his journey explores series of events of climate change and immigration based on climate crisis. However, the text brings light to the ecological problems that the Sundrabans is going through. Sundarbans is located in the west coast of Bengal and on the border of India and Bangladesh.

Here we are discussing some of the events that highlight the problem of climate change depicted by Amitav Ghosh in the areas of Sundarbans. In the novel the narrator described about the cyclone Alia which hit the Sundarbans in 2009. The novel includes detail description of that cyclone as,

Alia's long term consequences were even more devastating than those of earlier cyclones. Hundreds of miles of embankment had been swept away and the sea had invaded places where it had never entered before; vast tracts of once fertile land has been swamped by salt, water, rendering them uncultivable for a generation. The evacuation too had produced effects that no one could have foretold. Once been uprooted from their villages many evacuees had decided not to return, knowing that their lives, always hard, would be even more precarious now. Communities had been destroyed and families dispersed.... (Ghosh 48)

The description throws light on the harsh reality of people facing after the cyclone Alia and that is dues to this cyclone and other intense storm people are leaving the Sundarbans because cyclone after effect has made the land infertile and that is the reason that makes them to do immigration for better life elsewhere. However there are people like Rafi and Tipu in Sundarbans who find their reason to live in that place only and they are the one who helps to Dinanath to unravel the folklore of Bounduki Sadagar. Rafi is a fisherman who guards the temple of Mansa Devi and Tipu is tech genius and educated from abroad who finds difficult to live with this lifestyle but adjust everything and work as a helper of immigrants who helps them in immigration from Sundarbans for a better life. Rafi in the novel repeats his grandfather's words as a foreshadowing of his impending migration.

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

In the novel Ghosh has intentionally depicts the process of migration especially climate induced migration of humans and animals. Creatures like Spiders, snakes, dolphins, etc are shown in the novel to do migration from Sundarbans to other places due to humidity or temperature issue because of some intense calamities. In the depiction of migration of creature there is description of migration of yellow bellied snakes who found in the shore of Venice. “These snakes generally lived in warmer waters, to

the south, but sightings in southern California had become increasingly common: their distribution was changing with warming of the oceans and they were migrating northwards” (Ghosh 134). Another incident of creature migrating is of brown recluse. Recluse is a kind of venomous spider with an extremely painful bite. “The brown recluse has been increasingly its range very quickly because it’s getting so much hotter in Europe” (Ghosh 204). All these incidents description in Gun Island makes us aware about how the immigration of animal and man can happen only because of climate change and it is thought provoking. Ghosh tries to give a strong message to his readers that it is only because of human beings’ actions climate is changing in the form of global warming and it is human who is disturbing the planet.

The character of Pia in the novel became the authoritative voice for depicting climate changes, Pia is a researcher in marine biology and a Bengali American teaching in Oregon who addresses in the novel environmental crisis like dead zones and rapidly changing migrating pattern of aquatic animals. Dead zones are vast stretches of water which has too low oxygen level for fishes to survive. Dead zones are created due to chemicals of factories are being dumped into water bodies. Dead zones are mostly found in Indian water bodies. This dead zone leads to massive fish kill scenario. “ it’s when you find thousands of dead fish floating on the surface or washed up ashore. It’s happening all round the world with more and more chemicals flowing into rivers.” (Ghosh 96)

Ghosh has made reference of Los Angeles’ wildfire erupted in 2018 by describing Dinanath’s journey to Los Angeles in the novel. During his journey Dinanath can observe the land from his seat on the plane. He could see the hillside and forests had been completely laid to waste that it looked like “Vast field of Ash”. (Ghosh 116)

The conference of Los Angeles in which Dinanath was present there opened with speech made by a young historian with hipsterish appearance about climate and apocalypse in the 17th century.

“The seventeenth century, declared the historian, was a period of such severe climatic disruption that it was sometimes described as the ‘Little Ice Age’. During this time temperatures across the globe had dropped sharply, may be because of fluctuation in solar activity or a spate of volcanic eruptions....In any event many parts of the world had been struck by famines, droughts and epidemics in the seventeenth century. At the same time a succession of comets had appeared in the heavens, and the earth had been shaken by tremendous outbreak of seismic activity ; earthquakes had torn down cities and volcanoes had ejected untold quantities of dust and debris into the atmosphere. Millions had died: in some parts of the world the population had declined by a third. (Ghosh 122).

When Dinanath listen the speech at conference he remembers storms, climate changes and all the degradation of nature in Sundarbans. He connects the speech and its concerns with the ecological situation of Sundarbans. Even Ghosh describes journey of Dinanath from Sundarbans to Los Angeles and from there to Venice in a sense of describing Climate catastrophes not only of Sundarbans but of the all over the world. During this journey Dinanath stayed at his friend Cinta’s home at Los Angeles, Cinta talks about the etymology of the word Venice, “through Arabic the name of Venice has travelled far afield, to Persia and parts of India, where to this day guns are known as bundook- which is, of course, none other than “Venice” or “Venetian”!” (Ghosh 137) After listening this from Cinta Dinanath suddenly conclude in his way that the meaning of the Bounduki sadagar in the folklore must not be the Gun Merchant but it can be the merchant who went to Venice. Cinta even helps Dinanath to solve the riddle of Gun Merchant and to explore the climate problems of not only of the Sundarbans but of the world wide areas. The information given by Cinta about the meaning of Venice made Dinanath to visit Venice from Los Angeles. In the novel the visit of Dinanath to Venice is not depicted as a normal journey by

Ghosh but the author described the extreme climatic cataclysms and struggles of immigrants in Venice too just like Sundarbans.

The end of the novel *Gun Island* is also a symbolic one. The novel ends with the introduction of new trope, the blue boat full of refugees stranded in the Eastern Mediterranean. According to Palash, a Bengali immigrant, the blue boat “has become a symbol of everything that’s going wrong with the world-inequality, climate change, capitalism, corruption, the arms trade, the oil industry. There is a lot of hope that this will be a historic moment. May be now, while there’s still time to make changes, people will wake and see what’s going on (Ghosh 199)

However at the end the migrants are being rescued by creature of nature as the whales, dolphins and birds who are migrating in the eastern Mediterranean created circles around the blue boat and all the migrants are safely rescued. Ghosh provides strong message by saying that human has to protect the nature because at the end there is the nature to protect use like the whales, Dolphins and birds.

Conclusion:

In this way, Amitav Ghosh has explored theme of Climate change and its effect of migration in the novel *Gun Island*. Though he has given happy end of the novel by giving impressionistic message that though human’s action turned environment into a worst condition, nature still helped the human when he needed. Human activities are the reason of degradation of Nature and it is described very impactful by Amitav Ghosh in *Gun Island*.

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