

From Vedic Ecology to Climate Fiction: Sacred Nature and the Human–Environment Relationship in Amitav Ghosh

Daya Vaghani

Research Scholar, Dept. of English, M.K. Bhav. Uni.

Abstract

Amitav Ghosh's representation of the sacredness of nature and humanity's relationship with the natural world (both in his work on climate fiction and its Indigenous roots) exemplifies how modern climate fiction can embody ancient Indian ecological philosophy. The research will use traditional Vedic teachings, including the cosmic harmony of ṛta, the concept of the natural order through prakṛti; the idea of the Earth as a nurturing mother through pṛthvi, and the notion of the interconnectedness among all things. Vedic ecological philosophy provides a valuable and enduring basis for thinking about the environmental crises we face today. The Vedic perspective does not position human beings as being above all others on Earth or to see ourselves as the ultimate rulers over all creation but rather as co-participants in a sacred and interrelated Union of creation that is governed by moral and cosmic laws/ The Vedic perspective is in strong contrast to anthropocentric modern industrial capitalism, which has played an enormous part in creating today's environmental crises.

*Through the detailed analysis of some of the literary works, especially *The Hungry Tide*, *Gun Island*, and *The Great Derangement*, this paper demonstrates Ghosh's contribution to the revitalization of the native ecological awareness of climate fiction as portrayed in *The Hungry Tide*, *Gun Island*, and *The Great Derangement*. It argues that Ghosh's narratives address the agency of nature, the fragility of ecology, and the spirituality of nature, challenging the conventional Western perception of nature as merely a resource to be exploited. It argues further that Ghosh acts as a bridge between the ancient concept of ecology and the contemporary concept of the effects of climate change by presenting the cultural and moral issues of the discourse of climate change by linking the concepts of myth, modernity, sacred landscapes, river systems, and mythical creativity, re-vitalizing nature and restoring the ethical place of nature in the contemporary era. It adds that Ghosh not only enhances the postcolonial ecocriticism of the field of environmental humanities, but also that the exploration of Vedic ecological principles may offer a novel perspective on solutions to the problems of the Anthropocene era.*

Keywords: Vedic ecology, climate fiction, Amitav Ghosh, ecocriticism, sacred nature, environmental humanities.

Introduction

The modern world is experiencing an unparalleled ecological catastrophe characterized by environmental degradation, increasing sea levels, biodiversity loss, climate change, and extreme weather occurrences. Numerous scientific publications caution that human actions, including industrialization, deforestation, the use of fossil fuels, and unbridled consumerism, have upset the planet's natural equilibrium. Although science offers information and answers, literature is just as crucial in fostering ecological consciousness. In addition to reflecting concerns about the environment, literary works can challenge human perceptions of nature and provide alternate scenarios for cooperation. In this regard,

ecocriticism and the environmental humanities have become significant multidisciplinary fields that study the connections among ecology, culture, and literature.

The rich, ancient philosophy originating from what we now call India has a deep ecological ethic, often referred to as “Vedic Ecology.” In Vedic cosmology, nature is not seen as a resource to be used, but rather as a sacred, living entity connected with the human experience. The five elements are earth (Prithvi), water (Ap/Jal), fire (Agni), air (Vayu), and space (Akasha), and all of these are considered divine forces that provide for the continuation of existence. Rivers, mountains, trees, and animals are all very highly valued; ṛta (cosmic order) reflects the belief in living in harmony with the order of nature. Environmental ethics evolves from this way of thinking about the human connection to nature. Environmental ethics emerge from respecting, creating balance, and connecting humans and the environment spiritually. As a result, the relationship between humans and the environment in Vedic teachings is reciprocally moral, not hierarchically based.

On the other hand, modern industrial society mainly supports an anthropocentric worldview that puts man at the center and treats nature as a commodity. As the environmental crisis got worse, modern literature has begun to review climate change through a newly emerged genre called Climate Fiction (Cli-fi). Cli-fi focuses on the social, political, and psychological effects of man-made environmental disasters. It demands that readers face ecological truths and reconsider the position of humanity in the system. Loose conventions surrounding Cli-Fi invariably portray disastrous futures, displaced climate populations, and failing ecosystems, constantly analysing the need for ecological accountability.

Amitav Ghosh holds an important position in the field of environmental humanities among modern authors. Through his writings, *The Hungry Tide*, *Gun Island* and *The Great Derangement* non-fiction work, he investigates the climate crisis and its effects on cultural life. Ghosh claims that contemporary literature frequently does not sufficiently tackle climate change because of its emphasis on realism and individualism. His narratives establish connections between environmental disasters and two different sources which include mythology, historical events and indigenous wisdom traditions. Ghosh uses his stories to restore ancient ecological knowledge while exploring various cosmological systems that reflect traditional Indian beliefs which already incorporate Vedic ecological principles.

The purpose of this research is to explore the connection between Vedic ecological ideas and contemporary climate writing, particularly in the works of Amitav Ghosh. It also tries to understand how the sacred cosmology and traditional ecological views can offer important perspectives on understanding the current ecological issues. This research will attempt to analyze how the works of Amitav Ghosh reflect, restate, or correspond with Vedic ecological ideas on the relationship between human beings and nature.

The main objectives of this study are:

- To explore the idea of Vedic Ecology and its perspective on the relationship between humans and nature.
- To examine the development and traits of Climate Fiction as a literary reaction to climate change.
- To examine Amitav Ghosh’s impact on environmental humanities using specific texts.
- To examine the connections between holy ecological practices and modern environmental stories.

The primary research inquiries directing this investigation are:

- In what way does Vedic ecological philosophy understand the relationship between humans and nature?
- In what ways does Amitav Ghosh reinterpret or connect with sacred ecological traditions?
- In what ways does climate fiction confront contemporary anthropocentrism?

Theoretical Framework

A. Ecocriticism

Ecocriticism is a cultural and literary theory that examines the connection between literature and the natural environment. It started as an established field in the 1990s when *The Ecocriticism Reader*, edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, was published. Glotfelty describes ecocriticism as “an examination of the connection between literature and the natural world” (Glotfelty xviii). This method disputes human-centered thinking and encourages ecocentrism, acknowledging the inherent worth of non-human existence.

Lawrence Buell broadens ecocritical thought by pinpointing features of texts focused on environmental themes. Buell argues that a text aware of environmental issues sees the nonhuman environment as a dynamic force and perceives human history as connected to natural history (Buell 7–8). This concept is significant when reading Amitav Ghosh, whose stories frequently portray nature not just as a setting but as an active force influencing human fate.

The practice of ecocriticism evaluates how modernity, capitalism and colonialism work together to create environmental deterioration. Greg Garrard emphasizes important ecocritical ideas including pollution, wilderness, apocalypse, habitation, animals, and the planet (Garrard 4–5). Ghosh uses these themes to study climate change impacts which include rising sea levels, cyclones and environmental displacement. Postcolonial studies and ecocriticism share a connection. Rob Nixon presents the idea of “slow violence,” which denotes the incremental environmental harm that unfairly impacts marginalized populations (Nixon 2). This idea is key to grasping Ghosh’s portrayal of climate injustice, particularly in South Asian and Global South scenarios.

B. Vedic Ecological Thought

Vedic ecological philosophy provides a native theoretical basis for comprehending the spiritual connection between humanity and nature. The Vedas, Upanishads, and various ancient Indian writings depict the natural world as sacred, interconnected, and deserving of respect. The Rig Veda presents the concept of Rta, which describes cosmic order as the system that maintains equilibrium between humans, deities, and all elements of the natural world. Rta signifies the ethical and natural order that upholds the universe (Prasad 23). The system maintains its equilibrium until disruption causes both inequality and distress. The principle represents an early ecological understanding that considers environmental balance to be necessary for spiritual practice. The Atharva Veda describes Prithvi (Earth) as a maternal figure who states, “Mata bhumiḥputro’hamprthivyaḥ” (I am a son of the Earth; she is my mother) (Atharva Veda 12.1.12). The metaphor creates a relationship between people and the Earth which establishes a moral duty for environmental protection instead of exploitation.

Upanishadic philosophy deepens the sense of ecological oneness by identifying Brahman, the supreme reality, as being present in all living beings. The Isha Upanishad teaches the virtue of renunciation as well as being the rational and aware consumer of the world: “Isavasyamidamsarvam” (Everything, whatever exists in the universe, is infused by the Lord) (Isha Upanishad 1). This attitude results in non-attachment and thus an environmentally friendly lifestyle is strongly encouraged. Present-day scholars argue that the philosophical systems of India have planted the seeds of environmental ethics which are based on non-dualism and a general reverence for life (Dwivedi 35). Vandana Shiva brings out that the traditional Indian view of the cosmos saw nature as divine and deeply connected, a stark contrast to the mechanistic Western models of control (Shiva 38). This study situates Amitav Ghosh’s environmental imagination in the context of a broader cultural and spiritual milieu through the integration of Vedic ecological thought. Ghosh’s images of rivers, forests, cyclones, and holy places thus become his way of both continuing and transforming the ancient ecological consciousness.

C. Climate Fiction (Cli-Fi)

Climate Fiction, also known as Cli-Fi, is a new literary form that focuses on climate change and its impact on the social, political, and psychological levels. The term gained popularity in the early twenty-first century when climate change became an important topic in public discourse. According to Adam Trexler, climate fiction can be defined as stories that forecast the consequences of human-caused

climate change and analyze its implications for both human and non-human realms (Trexler 3). Such works of fiction often depict extreme weather events, displacement, ecological collapse, and a new future.

Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*, *Gun Island*, and his non-fiction piece *The Great Derangement* directly address climate change. In *The Great Derangement* Ghosh argues that modern literary fiction fails to present climate change because it prioritizes individualism and realistic storytelling which depends on actual events (Ghosh 10-11). He believes that new storytelling methods should be developed to demonstrate both the size of the environmental emergency and its unpredictable nature. Climate fiction uses realistic elements together with legendary stories, folklore and supernatural elements to create complex portrayals of climate change. Ghosh demonstrates how *Bon Bibi* stories from *The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island*'s mythical elements create authentic traditional stories that exist with modern environmental problems.

Cli-Fi focuses on the aspects of climate justice, displacement, and inequality on a global scale. It talks about how the disadvantaged are affected the most by natural disasters. This is in line with Nixon's idea of gradual violence and the moral need for climate stories. Through the lens of Climate Fiction, this paper will analyze how Ghosh weaves together mythology, history, and scientific knowledge to represent the climate crisis. The combination of ecocriticism, Vedic ecological thought, and climate fiction gives a holistic perspective on the analysis of Amitabh Ghosh's works. Ecocriticism is a method of analysis that helps in understanding the connection between literature and nature. Vedic ecological thought is a philosophical and cultural perspective that is based on the concept of divine ecology. Climate Fiction helps in locating Ghosh in the contemporary global discourse on the environment.

Vedic Ecology: Sacred Cosmology and Environmental Ethics

The ecological imagination in ancient Indian philosophy is, in essence, Vedic cosmology-based, in which nature is not mere matter but living and divine. The Vedic perspective provides a holistic view of the world, in which human beings are inextricably connected to the universe. This is a deeply respected cosmology that provides a sound foundation for understanding environmental ethics in Indian tradition and is a much-needed corrective to the exploitative development paradigm of the modern era. In tracing Amitav Ghosh's engagement with environmental concerns, this Vedic ecological sensibility provides a crucial intellectual and moral backdrop.

Nature as Divine Manifestation

The Rig Veda is one of the first documents of human history that has survived till today. It shows how intimately the natural elements were revered by the people back then. They were worshipped as gods. Agni (fire), Varuna (cosmic order and waters), Vayu (wind), Surya (sun), and Prithvi (earth) are five deities that reflect different aspects of nature not only from a mythological perspective but also as primary sources of nature that are essential for human survival. The Vedic rishis through the chants of their hymns elevate these powers to the level of divine manifestations of the supreme reality.

From the Atharva Veda—specifically, from the Prithvi Sukta (a hymn dedicated to the Earth)—the sentiment expressed towards Mother Earth as a loving parent (or as Mother Earth) is best articulated in the following verse: “The Earth as my Mother; therefore, I (am) her son.” (Atharva Veda 12:1). This analogy signifies a connection between human beings and the environment (earth) based on familial relationships and care—not on authority/control. Likewise, calls upon Varuna (e.g., protector of *ṛta*—the universal order that governs both natural and moral laws) (Rig Veda 1:25). A violation of the natural order is an ecological destruction along with the violation of a moral obligation. People like Raimon Panikkar are pointing out that the Vedic point of view sees the world as “cosmotheandric” unity, where the cosmos, God, and man are the same (Panikkar 54). Human beings and nature are not separate entities but are united in a sacred whole. This viewpoint is opposite to the Cartesian dualism, which is the foundation for most of the current industrial exploitation.

Concept of Ecological Balance in Ancient Indian Philosophy

The core of Vedic ecology is the concept of *ṛta*, which symbolizes the notion of universal harmony and balance. *Ṛta* is the order that governs the cycles of the seasons, rainfall, and procreation.

Human activity has to be in accordance with this universal order to maintain balance. Imbalance generates disorder—drought, famine, or social unrest. The Upanishads further develop this ecological insight by postulating the existence of Brahman, the essence that pervades all of existence. The Isha Upanishad says: “Ishavasyamidamsarvam” (“Everything—everything that exists in this world—is surrounded by the Lord”) (Isha Upanishad 1). This view encourages moderation and a distance from excessive consumption. The verse also says: “Tena tyaktenabhunjitha” (“Experience through giving up”), implying a principle of sustainable consumption. One of the current nature-friendly philosophers, Vandana Shiva considers these teachings as ways of life being in harmony with nature’s diversity and ecological sustainability (Shiva 38). The idea of the connection between all things in the Vedas is in agreement with the ecologic science nowadays, which also emphasizes the dependence of systems on each other.

Reverence for Rivers, Forests, and Biodiversity

One of the key features of the spiritual connection between ancient India and nature was that rivers, forests, and all kinds of biodiversity were subjects of reverence. Rivers such as the Ganga are not seen merely as sources of water but are, in fact, worshipped as living goddesses. People of old considered the rivers so sacred that it gave rise to a cultural habit of veneration and gratitude. In the Nadistuti Sukta of the Rig Veda, rivers are collectively praised, and the sources of this life-giving water are acknowledged (Rig Veda 10.75).

Forests play an equally respected role in the Indian belief system. The Aranyakas, literally “texts of the forest”, were written in hermitages in the forest and reflect a thoughtful engagement with nature. The forest is seen as a place of spiritual development, not just a wild area to be conquered. Devrai or sarna (sacred groves) in India are considered by the locals to have provided very ancient community-managed spaces that, through religious prohibitions, supported biodiversity (Gadgil and Vartak 314). The reverence for biodiversity is embedded in the classification of flora and fauna in the Vedic texts and the subsequent Ayurvedic texts. This reverence represents the “environmentalism of the poor” as described by Ramachandra Guha, which is based on subsistence values rather than industrial values (Guha 67).

Ritual, Sacrifice, and Sustainability

The Vedic rituals of yajna have been misunderstood as mere acts of sacrifice. In ecological terms, yajna is a relationship of give-and-take between humanity and nature. The Bhagavad Gita explains that the process of creation is sustained through yajna: “From food, beings are born; from rain, food is produced; from sacrifice, rain comes” (Gita 3.14). Instead of encouraging exploitation, ritual sacrifice highlighted appreciation and self-control. Offerings to Agni represented the act of giving back some resources to the cosmic powers. The ethics inherent in ritual practice emphasized that humans are participants in, rather than rulers of, ecological cycles. Modern academics reframe yajna as a preliminary expression of sustainability—recognizing that consumption needs to be matched by renewal (Shiva 42). In this regard, ritual acts as a cultural tool for ecological responsibility.

Amitav Ghosh and the Recovery of Sacred Ecology

A. The Great Derangement

A major contribution of *The Great Derangement* is its examination of narrative plausibility. Ghosh points out the so-called “uncanny intimacy” linking contemporary fiction and bourgeois individualism. He notes that modern novels often “exclude the unlikely” in favor of psychologically believable domestic realism (Ghosh 17). The climate crisis, nonetheless, manifests through severe occurrences that disrupt this aesthetic reasoning.

Ghosh states:

“In a substantially altered world, when sea levels rise and hundreds of millions are displaced, the life of an individual will become radically unpredictable. Yet the very form that is meant to explore human experience—the novel—has increasingly retreated into the predictable” (23).

This statement contains a contradiction. The contemporary novel makes this claim: it represents reality, but does not include the realities of cyclones, floods, and wildfires that define the Anthropocene.

This is not random but a deliberate choice. Ghosh argues that realism's "calculus of probability" renders climate disaster improbable (24). A careful look at this phrase, "calculus of probability," reveals Ghosh's hidden meaning. The word "calculus" evokes logical and mathematical reasoning. Modernity quantifies nature. Statistically, disasters are rare events; therefore, they are defined as narrative anomalies. But climate change makes the exceptional ordinary. The improbable becomes ordinary. Literature, under the influence of Enlightenment rationalism, does not develop.

Ghosh's analysis also engages with colonial knowledge systems. He points out that the expansion of empires and fossil fuel capitalism occurred simultaneously. The industrial revolution transformed not only energy sources but also discursive structures. The "division of Nature and Culture" (69) corresponds to colonial categorizations of the civilized and the primitive, and of the rational and the superstitious. Modernity replaces the animistic view of the world that previously attributed agency to landscapes by considering nature as inanimate matter.

In another significant excerpt, Ghosh wonders about the lack of literary fiction that tackles climate change: "Where is the narrative that addresses the climate emergency? ... Why do numerous modern novels neglect to deal with the most pressing issue of our era?" (11). The rhetorical questions emphasize the void. Ghosh is both cynical and mournful. His sorrow implies that the failure is not just thematic but also moral. Literature has relinquished its duty. Through diagnosing this "derangement," Ghosh reintroduces the realm of myth, epic, and non-realist styles. He asserts that premodern narrative traditions embraced unlikely occurrences because they acknowledged the influence of nonhuman forces. Cyclones, epidemics, and droughts were perceived as elements connected to human fate.

B. The Hungry Tide: The Sundarbans and Nonhuman Agency

In *The Hungry Tide* (2004), Ghosh highlights sacred ecology within the dynamic terrain of the Sundarbans. The area is depicted as a locale characterized by change and unpredictability: "The tides extend up to two hundred miles inland, and daily, thousands of acres of woodland vanish beneath the waves, only to surface again after several hours" (Ghosh 7). This unpredictable landscape highlights human susceptibility and emphasizes the fluid power of water and tide. The book consistently questions the human-centered belief that people dominate nature. The tiger, specifically, serves as a strong nonhuman force. Following a tiger assault, Kanai contemplates the volatile force of the forest, understanding that "it served as a reminder that here, man was not the standard for everything" (Ghosh 292). The Sundarbans require humility instead of domination.

The holy ecology of Bon Bibi illustrates the relationship between the two religions through the story of the Forest Goddess's oath to protect the humble who enter the woods in reverence and humility. The legend teaches that the Forest Goddess told her followers, "Never forget that the Forest is owned by Dokkhin Rai and your existence will be dependent upon you following its laws." The myth provides a framework of ethics based upon respect, modesty, and the understanding of nature's rightness. Combining folklore with ecological truth, Ghosh reanimates the natural world's sacredness. The Sundarbans are not only the setting but also a living and morally potent force. Through the storm, tides, and tiger, nature governs human life; it should be considered a co-creator of history.

C. Gun Island: Folklore, Climate Migration, and Re-enchantment

In *Gun Island* (2019), Ghosh expands his ecologically concerned view of nature to the entire world situation affected by climate migration. The novel connects the Sundarbans with Venice as two different places affected by climate change, which is a phenomenon that crosses national and cultural boundaries. The relocation of the communities that are in danger of being affected by the environmental changes is a way of showing environmental stress's human cost. A character says, "The storms are intensifying...the water keeps on rising" (Ghosh 145), which metaphorically links the individuals' vulnerability to the ongoing unrest in the world.

The Gun Merchant myth, or the story of escaping the wrath of the gods, is central to the novel and is very much relevant to the displacement that is taking place in the present. Dinanath's investigation into the myth reveals that folklore is a repository of ecological knowledge. He finds that

myths often include truths of history, which means that “what we perceive as fantasy might actually document experiences that were once too mysterious to comprehend” (Ghosh 79).

The book also questions the rigid division between mythology and scientific knowledge. Strange ecological occurrences—like widespread dolphin beachings and the sudden movement of poisonous spiders—blur the line between logical reasoning and mythical significance. Contemplating these occurrences, Dinanath acknowledges that “the world had turned oddly vibrant in manners he had never experienced previously” (Ghosh 217). Nature seems lively, expressive, and engaged. By merging climate science and folklore, *Gun Island* brings a re-enchantment to the world. It counters the disillusionment tied to modernity and revives a feeling of awe and sacred connection. By doing this, Ghosh connects ecological consciousness with spiritual creativity, implying that thriving in the Anthropocene relies on redefining humanity’s role within a vital, sacred universe.

Conclusion

This research has examined how Amitav Ghosh reimagines traditional Indian ecological awareness within the context of modern climate discussions. Leveraging Vedic concepts of *ṛta* (cosmic order) and the sacred interconnection between humanity and nature, the paper asserts that Ghosh’s writings—particularly *The Hungry Tide* and *The Great Derangement*—revive a spiritual and ethical bond with the environment that contests contemporary anthropocentrism. The Vedas perceive nature as sacred and interrelated (Dwivedi 34), a perspective that aligns with Ghosh’s examination of capitalist modernity and ecological forgetfulness (Ghosh, *Great Derangement* 21).

Thus, Ghosh serves as a bridge between traditional ecological knowledge systems and the urgent issues facing us in the current era (known as the Anthropocene). The protagonists of Ghosh’s narratives are often members of disadvantaged communities, as well as animals, plants, and other non-human beings; his use of the stories is consistent with post-colonial ecocriticism’s call for a re-evaluation of Eurocentric environmental narratives (Huggan and Tiffin 12). In linking today’s climate crisis to cultural memory and sacred ecology, Ghosh revitalizes Vedic ecological teachings for contemporary society. In the field of environmental humanities, this study helps to better understand the role of indigenous philosophies in the shaping of global climate dialogues. Further research may look at comparative sacred ecologies in different South Asian writers or explore the use of myth and ritual as tools of ecological resistance in climate fiction.

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