



## Environment and Indian English Novel: A Critical Study with Reference to Amitav Ghosh's Novels

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### Abstract

*The intricate interdependence of life on Earth and its environs highlights the critical role that natural items play in ensuring the existence of living organisms. Trees are the most important of them all since they provide a wide range of species with the food, shelter, oxygen, and raw materials they require to live and grow. However, people have regularly abused nature due to our self-interest and constant pursuit of scientific and technological advancement, which has resulted in major environmental issues that endanger the continuation of life on Earth. In response to these expanding concerns, writings on environmental issues have proliferated, offering insightful viewpoints and increasing awareness. Eco-criticism, which studies the relationship between literature and the natural environment, has grown in popularity as a field of study. The paper examines how environmental concerns are portrayed in Amitav Ghosh's Novels and examine how these literary works both reflect and comment on the era's environmental consciousness. The study will shed light on how Amitav Ghosh's Novels contribute to the larger conversation on environmental sustainability and the pressing need for ecological balance by analyzing the stories and characters in these novels.*

**Keywords:** English Literature, Fiction, Amitav Ghosh's Novels, Environment.

### 1. Introduction

The environment, in all its social and natural aspects, has been a major theme in Indian English writing. India is a great area to research environmental concerns because of its diverse cultural and social backdrop and landscapes. The intricate relationship between humans and their surroundings is examined, covering subjects such as postcolonial identity, urbanization, ecological degradation, and colonial exploitation. It's not limited to how the actual environment is shown. Environmental issues have long been explored in Indian English writing throughout a wide range of genres, including essays, short stories, drama, poetry, and novels. Each genre has a unique viewpoint on the environment, highlighting the different ways that environmental concerns and the natural world are entwined with Indian philosophy and culture. Anuradha Ghodke and Dr. Vinay Bhogle comment: "Literature and nature has close connection between each other. This relationship reflects with many poem and other literary genres." (Ghodke and Bhogle, 769) Social and political issues frequently connect with

environmental themes in Indian English drama. Prominent playwright Mahesh Dattani tackles urbanization and its effects on the environment in works such as *Bravely Fought the Queen* and *Final Solutions*. His plays usually show the collapse of old spaces and the rise of contemporary metropolitan settings that are generally detrimental to the environment. The devastation of natural ecosystems and people's estrangement from the natural world are potent symbols for more significant societal shifts and disputes. Indian English poetry has always praised nature, taking its cues from the country's varied topography. Poets that have explored personal and cultural identity through natural imagery include A.K. Ramanujan and Jayanta Mahapatra. The complex interactions between people and environment are frequently reflected in Ramanujan's poetry, which emphasizes themes of continuity and change. Poetry by Mahapatra, as those in *The False Start* (1980), beautifully depicts the Orissan landscapes, fusing contemplations on history and the human condition with the beauty of nature. This



heritage is carried on by the poetry of modern poets like Ranjit Hoskote, who tackles concerns like ecological degradation and climate change. Indian English short stories showcase the country's many landscapes while examining environmental topics and the relationship between humans and nature. In addition to addressing problems like pollution, water scarcity, wildlife protection, and climate change, they also support sustainable living and diverse cultural viewpoints. Certain narratives use mythical and folkloric aspects to promote activism and environmental issues. "The Blue Umbrella" honors nature, while *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* highlights the deadly effects of civilization. *The Night Train at Deoli* by Ruskin Bond juxtaposes modern transience with pastoral simplicity. Indian authors of essays offer critical analyses on environmental challenges, frequently referencing cultural backgrounds and personal experiences. The groundbreaking book *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Development* by Vandana Shiva, published in 1988, challenges Western development paradigms and promotes sustainable methods based on conventional ecological knowledge. *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*, written by Amitav Ghosh in 2016, questions how the literary community has responded to the issue of climate change, contending that it hasn't done enough to confront it. Indian English literature eloquently conveys the deep relationships that exist between people and their surroundings in all of these genres. It is a moving indictment of ecological exploitation and a call to action for sustainability and conservation in addition to celebrating India's natural beauty. Indian writers make significant contributions to a broader comprehension of the global environmental issues of our day and the pressing need to establish a more peaceful coexistence with the natural world through their literary works. Dr. Rakesh Patel illustrates: Literature has undergone a massive change with the course of the time. It holds the mirror up to nature. Environmental crisis is one of the major hazards encountered by the world today. Literature now addresses the current ecological crisis prevalent all around the globe. Ecocriticism has emerged as a new branch of study which observes the

interrelationship between literature and environment. (Patel, 1) [1-5]

### 1.1. Review of Literature

1. K. Ramanujan discusses Amitav Ghosh's epic novel *The Glass Palace* in Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace: Ecology and Imperialism*, highlighting the book's historical and environmental breadth. He contends that through rich ecological descriptions, Ghosh's story crosses generations and countries to expose the human and environmental costs of imperialism.
2. In *Narrating the Ecological: Amitav Ghosh's The Shadow Lines*, G. N. Devy examines how Ghosh uses storytelling to address historical events and environmental concerns. He points out that Ghosh's book highlights the effects of borders and wars on the environment by fusing political and personal histories with ecological concerns.
3. M. Prasad's *Ecological Narratives in Amitav Ghosh's River of Smoke* (2013) depicts the effects of the opium trade on the environment. He contends that Ghosh's book, which presents a historical account entwined with environmental issues, emphasizes the ecological cost of the opium trade.
4. Meenakshi Mukherjee in her article *Ecology and Environmental Concern in Amitav Ghosh's The Hungry Tide* (2014) highlights Ghosh's skill at fusing stories about people and the environment in the Sundarbans. She observes that Ghosh skillfully captures the fragile Sundarbans ecology, emphasizing how nature and human fate are inextricably linked in the face of climate change.
5. In their paper *The Era of Environmental Derangement: Witnessing Climate Crisis in Amitav Ghosh's Gun Island* (2021), Nupur Pancholi and Sanjit Kumar Mishra observe that Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island* illustrates how human-centric culture and the concept of the "good life" drive environmental degradation and climate change while advancing limitless desires. It lists the terrible effects of shifting climate patterns and deteriorating ecosystems, as



well as the combined effects these factors have on both the human race and non-human world.

## **2. Methodology**

The study Environment and Indian English Novel: A Critical Study with Reference to Amitav Ghosh's Novels uses thematic analysis and a comprehensive methodology to explore environmental themes in Ghosh's novels. It includes a review of relevant literary criticism and postcolonial perspectives, close readings of each novel for recurring motifs, and analysis of Ghosh's portrayal of landscapes and human-nature relationships within postcolonial contexts [6-9].

## **3. The Objectives of the Study**

This paper aims to examine the representation of environmental issues in Indian English literature analytically to identifying and examining the ways in which Amitav Ghosh's novels reflect the environmental concerns and consciousness to highlight the role that Amitav Ghosh's novels play in raising environmental awareness and fostering a deeper understanding of the urgent need for sustainable living practices

## **4. Discussion**

Indian English fiction incorporates environmental themes extensively into the plot and character development, illustrating the complex interrelationship that exists between people and their natural environment. Salman Rushdie's 1981 novel *Midnight's Children* critiques the ecological destruction that coincides with India's post-independence political turmoil through vivid environmental imagery. Rushdie's story emphasizes how social unrest and environmental deterioration frequently mirror each other, with both persons and environments changing. Anita Desai's novel *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) very delicately captures the socioeconomic and environmental struggles that a coastal town faces. He draws attention to the way Desai skillfully juxtaposes the grim reality of pollution and resource depletion with the beauty of the natural world. Desai's careful effort shows how environmental and human health are intertwined. Though in a more subtle way, environmental problems are also covered in Rohinton Mistry's 1995 novel *A Fine Balance*. The story, which is set in India

during the Emergency era, emphasizes the gap between urban and rural areas as well as the negative effects of growing urbanization on human societies and the environment. The God of Small Things (1997) by Arundhati Roy is praised for its accurate portrayal of Kerala's verdant surroundings. Roy uses environmental imagery to emphasize themes of degradation and loss, creating a complex relationship between the natural world and her characters' lives. The novel uses the degradation of traditional ways of life and the breakdown of cultures as a metaphor for industrial pollution and its effects on the river and the surrounding ecology. Apart from these well-known pieces, *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) by Kiran Desai illustrates how social inequality and environmental degradation coexist in the Himalayan foothills. Desai's story examines how colonialism affected people and environments, showing how environmental exploitation feeds into social and economic inequality. Indian English novelists have woven a complex tapestry of environmental themes through these works, capturing the urgency and complexity of ecological challenges in modern society. Their stories serve as potent critiques of human behavior and its far-reaching effects on the environment in addition to highlighting the beauty and fragility of the natural world. Anuradha Ghodke and Dr. Vinay Bhogle well interpret: Eco fiction is a branch of literature which study the nature and nature oriented or environment oriented which is nonhuman things works of the fiction. It represents encompasses the human impact on nature. The eco fiction which mainly deals with animal, nature, birds' metamorphoses and pastoral. It directly concerns with the environmental issues in literature. Ecocriticism is mainly deals with representation of nature and environmental related things in literature. It combines the interconnection between human and nature represented in literature. (Ghodke and Bhogle, 768). The celebrated environmental novelist Amitav Ghosh competently combines fascinating storytelling with ecological themes. He examines the effects of environmental deterioration, human displacement, and climate change in his paintings. Ghosh emphasizes the relationship between human life and environment through his vivid storytelling



and thoughtful analysis of ecological challenges. He is a key figure in eco-literature since his books make readers consider the pressing need for sustainable behaviors and a greater respect for the environment. Deforestation is a major environmental subject in Amitav Ghosh's novel *The Glass Palace*. The book describes how British colonial interests drove the forestry industry's ruthless operations in Burma. Once brimming with life, the verdant teak forests are gradually destroyed. When Ghosh writes: "The air was filled with the sound of sawing and the sharp crack of axes biting into wood," (112) it beautifully captures this tragedy. The unrelenting destruction of forests highlights the negative effects of colonialism on the environment by uprooting indigenous communities and wildlife in addition to upsetting the ecological equilibrium. The novel also discusses how conflict affects the environment. When the Japanese conquer Burma during World War II, a great deal of the country's infrastructure and scenery are destroyed. According to Ghosh: "The retreating British forces blew up oil wells and destroyed the forests to deny resources to the advancing Japanese." (321) this act of scorched-earth warfare emphasizes the idea that environmental devastation results from geopolitical tactics and human struggle. Ghosh discusses how animal and human life are intertwined in these changed environments. A recurrent theme is the predicament of elephants, which are essential to Burma's timber economy. As the book so tragically puts it: "Elephants, the most intelligent of creatures, were reduced to mere tools in the hands of their masters," (187) these gorgeous creatures are both venerated and abused. This demonstrates the nuanced interactions that exist between people and animals in dynamic environmental settings. Ghosh emphasizes the connection between political unrest, human behavior, and the natural world through the subtle integration of themes of environmental degradation and transformation in *The Shadow Lines*. The transformation of metropolitan areas as a result of political turmoil is one of the major environmental themes in Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*. There is a sense of loss in the depiction of the riots in Dhaka and Calcutta, not only of human life but also of the urban landscape. With striking clarity, Ghosh depicts

the devastation, writing: "There was glass all over the street...the pavement was littered with stones, bricks, broken bottles." (227) this imagery highlights the harm done to the environment and body by acts of communal violence, turning once-vibrant urban areas into abandoned and desolate places. The representation of water bodies as links and limits is another environmental feature. In the book, rivers and oceans stand in for the elasticity of political and cultural boundaries. According to Ghosh: "The waters of the Padma flowed past, shimmering in the sun, indifferent to the borders it crossed." (192) this draws attention to how the natural world disregards boundaries erected by humans, contrasting the arbitrary nature of political boundaries with the stability of environmental elements. Throughout *River of Smoke*, Ghosh deftly makes the connection between human economic endeavors and their effects on the environment, highlighting the significant and frequently disastrous effects of trade and colonization on natural areas. His in-depth explanations and historical background provide a nuanced viewpoint on the relationship between the environment and human endeavor. In Amitav Ghosh's *River of Smoke*, the widespread poppy planting for the opium traffic is a major environmental concern. The enormous fields of poppies in India are described by Ghosh as follows: "Every acre of fertile land in the region had been turned over to poppy cultivation" (89). In addition to damaging local ecosystems and depleting the soil, monoculture farming represents the exploitation of natural resources for colonial gain. The novel's research and gathering of plants, especially as seen through Fitcher Penrose's perspective, is another important theme. The love the age had with exotic flora is shown by Penrose's efforts to find and catalog uncommon species. Ghosh explains: "Strict descriptions of plants he encountered were filled Penrose's journals." (173) This emphasizes how colonial botany excursions affected the environment, frequently resulting in the eradication of native plants and the modification of ecosystems. The story also discusses the state of the ecology in Canton, the epicenter of the opium traffic. Trade ships are shown as swarming the city's harbor, which is dirty and full of garbage: "The waters were



thick with the refuse of countless ships and warehouses.” (342) This picture emphasizes how trade has an adverse effect on the environment and how human activity has deteriorated natural streams. Amitav Ghosh explores environmental topics in great detail in *The Hungry Tide*, concentrating on the Sundarbans, a distinct and delicate ecosystem. The novel highlights the nuanced relationship between the natural world and human narratives by weaving them together. The battle for survival in the Sundarbans, a region home to a variety of animals, including the endangered Bengal tiger, is a central issue in environmental studies. The habitat is continuously altered by tides. In the opinion of Amitav Ghosh: “The tide country’s very existence is an illusion, constantly remade by the river’s whims.” (41) As This highlights the environment’s dynamic and unstable qualities and highlights how closely life in the Sundarbans is correlated with the cycles of the natural world. The effects of development and human settlement on this fragile ecology are another issue. The conflict between local community needs and conservation efforts is depicted in the novel. Ghosh of the process by which settlers clear mangroves for cultivation and he explains: “They burned the mangroves and drained the land...each year the waters took back more of what the people had wrested from them.”(122) This draws attention to the way that human activity has deteriorated the environment and the ongoing conflict between human ambition and the natural world. Through the figure of Piya, a marine biologist researching the Irrawaddy dolphins, the story also tackles the issue of environmental conservation. “In these waters, the dolphins were the key to understanding the health of the ecosystem” (203) highlights the significance of protecting biodiversity and her scientific pursuits. The interdependence of species and the larger effects of environmental health are highlighted by Piya’s study. Ghosh skillfully captures the Sundarbans as a location of both beauty and peril in *The Hungry Tide*, highlighting the precarious balance that exists between human life and the natural environment. His compelling story highlights how crucial it is to live sustainably and with respect for the environment. Amitav Ghosh examines environmental concerns in

*Gun Island* by focusing on migration, climate change, and the interdependence of the natural and human worlds. The novel explores how shifting environmental conditions affect global ecosystems and human mobility. The impact of climate change on the natural world is one of the main themes. Ghosh highlights the seriousness of the climate catastrophe while describing the shifting landscapes and harsh weather occurrences. He notes: “The cyclone had left behind a trail of devastation...houses flattened, trees uprooted,” (72) for example. This illustration highlights how climate change is causing natural catastrophes to occur more frequently and with greater intensity. The dislocation of people and wildlife as a result of environmental changes is another important issue. Ghosh investigates the ways in which habitat loss and increasing sea levels compel migration. He elaborates: “Several villages had already been swallowed by the river’s encroachment.”(148) This emphasizes the suffering of refugees from climate change and the significant effects that environmental deterioration has on societies. The idea of the interdependence of the natural and human worlds is also explored in the book. Ghosh depicts the precarious equilibrium of ecosystems through the character of Piya, a marine biologist: “Every creature in the Sundarbans was part of a web of life...one thread broken, and the whole could unravel.” (211) This highlights the complex relationships that exist between species and the significance of biodiversity protection. Moreover, Ghosh demonstrates how old tales mirror modern environmental concerns by fusing mythology and history. He states: “The legend of Bonduki Sadagar seemed to resonate with today’s crises...a warning from the past.” (305) This link between myth and reality emphasizes how important environmental awareness has always been. Ghosh tells a gripping story in *Gun Island* that emphasizes the pressing need to address environmental issues and emphasizes how all life is intertwined and that we all have a shared obligation to safeguard the environment [10-15].

### Conclusion

*The Glass Palace*, *The Shadow Lines*, *River of Smoke*, *The Hungry Tide*, and *Gun Island* are just a few of Amitav Ghosh’s works that provide deep



insights into the nuanced interactions between humans and the natural world. Ghosh emphasizes in these pieces the widespread effects of industrialization, colonialism, and climate change on ecosystems and natural landscapes. The destruction of Burma's teak forests and the conversion of Malaya's terrain for rubber plantations, as depicted in *The Glass Palace*, demonstrate the negative environmental effects of colonial exploitation. *The Shadow Lines* examines how political upheaval modifies urban settings and the symbolic value of natural boundaries. Ghosh explores the effects of the opium trade on the environment in *River of Smoke*, showing how botanical expeditions and monoculture farming upset regional ecosystems. *The Hungry Tide* highlights the precarious balance between environmental preservation and human survival by eloquently illustrating the Sundarbans' sensitive ecosystem. Last but not least, *Gun Island* emphasizes the pressing issue of climate change by showing how environmental deterioration and extreme weather force people and wildlife to migrate. Together, Ghosh's books promote a better comprehension of environmental stewardship and the interdependence of all living things. Ghosh urges for sustainable and responsible relationships with the natural world while simultaneously criticizing past and present environmental exploitation through the combination of historical context, ecological concerns, and human narratives. His writings are a powerful reminder of our collective need to preserve the environment, which makes him a key player in the field of eco-literature in Indian English novels.

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