International Journal of Recent Development in Engineering and Technology
Website: www.ijrdet.com (ISSN 2347-6435 (Online) Volume 15, Issue 05, May 2026)

Ecocriticism and the Literary Imagination of Amitav Ghosh: Narrating the Nonhuman World

Dr. K. Lakshmi Priya

Assistant Professor, Shrimathi Devkunvar Nanalal Bhatt Vaishnav College for Women, Chennai, India

***Abstract*-- This article investigates a comprehensive ecocritical examination of Amitav Ghosh's literary corpus, tracing how his novels, essays, and non-fiction works participate in - and profoundly deepen -contemporary debates about climate change, ecological catastrophe, species extinction, and the troubled relationship between human civilizations and the nonhuman world. Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of ecocriticism as developed by scholars such as Lawrence Buell, Rob Nixon, Stacy Alaimo, and Timothy Morton, the article analyses key texts including *The Hungry Tide* (2004), *The Shadow Lines* (1988), *The Glass Palace* (2000), *River of Smoke* (2011), *The Ibis Trilogy*, and most centrally, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (2016). It argues that Ghosh's writing constitutes one of the most sustained and philosophically rich engagements with ecological crisis in contemporary postcolonial literature - one that refuses to separate environmental catastrophe from histories of empire, capitalism, and cultural imagination.**

***Keywords*-- Ecocriticism, Postcolonial Ecology, Climate Change, Nonhuman Agency, Slow Violence, Anthropocene, Sundarbans**

I. Introduction: Ecocriticism In The Postcolonial Frame

Ecocriticism, broadly defined as the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment, has undergone substantial transformations since its emergence in North American academic discourse in the 1970s and its formal institutionalisation through the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) in 1992. In its earliest iterations, ecocriticism was largely preoccupied with wilderness writing, Romantic nature poetry, and pastoralism - a set of concerns that reflected the demographic and cultural anxieties of its Anglo-American origins. Scholars such as Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, whose landmark anthology *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996) helped consolidate the field, foregrounded questions of place, nature, and environment that were predominantly Eurocentric and often blind to the entanglements of ecology with colonialism, race, and global capitalism.

The past three decades have witnessed a decisive expansion and politicisation of the field. What is now termed "second-wave" or "postcolonial ecocriticism" insists that ecological thinking cannot be separated from the political histories that have shaped human relationships with land, water, forests, and animals. Rob Nixon's pathbreaking concept of "slow violence" - the gradual, attritional, and often invisible environmental damage inflicted upon the world's poorest communities - opened the field to questions of environmental justice, neoliberalism, and the sacrificial geographies of empire. Stacy Alaimo's theory of "transcorporeality" dissolves the boundary between human bodies and toxic environments, insisting on the material flows that connect human flesh to the chemical and ecological systems surrounding it. Timothy Morton's notion of "dark ecology" challenges the consoling narratives of nature and environmentalism, proposing instead an ecology defined by uncanny interconnection, mourning, and the collapse of human exceptionalism.

It is within this expanded theoretical landscape that the work of Amitav Ghosh - Indian novelist, historian, and essayist - emerges as exemplary and indispensable. Ghosh's writing is animated by an unusually deep awareness of the nonhuman world: its rhythms, its agency, its irreducibility to human purposes, and its vulnerability to human violence. His literary imagination is simultaneously ecological and historical, attentive to the ways in which environmental transformation is inseparable from the histories of colonialism, migration, and global trade. Across a career spanning four decades, Ghosh has produced a body of work that constitutes one of the most searching literary responses to the ecological crises of our time.

II. The Great Derangement: Naming The Cultural Crisis

No discussion of Ghosh's ecological thought can proceed without engaging *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (2016), the non-fiction work in which he directly confronts the relationship between climate change and literary culture.

International Journal of Recent Development in Engineering and Technology
Website: www.ijrdet.com (ISSN 2347-6435 (Online) Volume 15, Issue 05, May 2026)

The book is divided into three parts - "Stories," "History," and "Politics" - and its central argument is that contemporary literary fiction has largely failed to reckon with the reality of climate change. This failure, Ghosh argues, is not merely a matter of neglect; it is a symptom of a "Great Derangement," a collective cultural psychosis in which the forms and assumptions of bourgeois literary realism have made it structurally impossible for writers and readers to fully inhabit the truth of ecological catastrophe.

Ghosh begins with a provocation: climate change produces exactly the kind of events - sudden, extreme, improbable - that literary realism has historically excluded from the domain of the "serious." The modern novel, he argues, is governed by a regime of probability and interiority. Extreme weather, floods of unprecedented scale, mass die-offs, the eruption of the nonhuman into human life - these belong, in the conventions of literary realism, to the realm of the sensational, the melodramatic, the pulpy. "The issue," Ghosh writes, "is not that writers are unaware of climate change. It is that they have difficulty integrating it into their narratives in ways that feel serious." This difficulty, he suggests, is not accidental but structural: the rise of the novel as a literary form coincided with the rise of bourgeois individualism and fossil-fuel capitalism, and both depend upon the same premise - the separation of the human from the nonhuman, the stability of the world as background to human drama.

The concept of the "Great Derangement" thus implicates not just literature but the entire range of cultural forms - cinema, journalism, urban planning - that have been shaped by modernity's assumption of a stable natural backdrop to human history. What makes Ghosh's diagnosis so powerful is that he is himself a novelist, and the book is as much an act of self-examination as cultural criticism. He reflects on his own fiction, asking how and to what extent his novels have managed to escape the derangement he diagnoses. This autobiographical dimension lends the argument an unusual candour and urgency.

The Great Derangement also offers a historical account of how the West's particular relationship with climate and nature produced the conditions for ecological catastrophe. Ghosh draws on the history of carbon capitalism, the unequal distribution of development, and the way in which Asian and African nations are being asked to constrain their own industrialization in the name of a planetary crisis they did not primarily cause. This intersection of climate politics and postcolonial justice is central to Ghosh's vision: the ecological crisis cannot be understood apart from the histories of extraction, dispossession, and inequality that produced it.

III. The Hungry Tide: Agency, Ecology, and the Sundarbans

If *The Great Derangement* is Ghosh's most direct engagement with climate and ecology, *The Hungry Tide* (2004) is his most fully realized ecological novel - a work in which landscape becomes not background but protagonist, where the nonhuman world asserts itself with a force that reorders all human relationships and meanings. Set in the Sundarbans, the vast mangrove delta straddling the border of India and Bangladesh, the novel traces the journeys of Piyali Roy, an American cetologist of Indian descent studying the Irrawaddy dolphin, and Kanai Dutt, a Delhi-based translator who has come to read his uncle Nirmal's journals. They are guided through the tidal labyrinth of the delta by Fokir, a local fisherman with an intimate, embodied knowledge of the waterways.

The Sundarbans function in the novel as what the theorist of place Edward Casey might call a "gathering" - a site where ecological, historical, political, and spiritual forces converge and collide. Ghosh's rendering of this landscape is remarkable for its attentiveness to nonhuman agency. The tides that give the novel its title are not mere meteorological backdrop; they are a governing presence, determining what is possible, what is dangerous, what is visible and invisible, alive and dead. The Sundarbans, Ghosh shows, is a world that actively resists human mastery - it swallows boats, devours villages, shifts its channels overnight, and harbours tigers that regard humans as prey. This is landscape as Tim Ingold's "taskscape," a world constituted by the mutual, entangled activities of human and nonhuman beings rather than a passive stage on which human dramas are performed.

The figure of the tiger is central to the novel's ecocritical argument. Tigers in the Sundarbans kill dozens of people each year, and the question of how to respond to this violence — whether to cull the tigers in the name of the human communities who depend on the delta's resources, or to protect them in the name of biodiversity and conservation — is one of the novel's central ethical dilemmas. This dilemma is crystallised in the historical episode that Nirmal's journals narrate: the forcible evacuation of the island of Morichjhãpi in 1979, when the West Bengal government violently expelled thousands of Dalit refugees - who had fled the Partition and resettled on this uninhabited island - to maintain it as a protected tiger reserve. People were shot; boats were sunk; a community was destroyed in the name of conservation.

Ghosh refuses to offer an easy moral resolution. The Morichjhãpi massacre exposes the violence that can lurk within conservation discourse - the way in which wildlife protection can become a mechanism for the dispossession of the poor and the marginalised, often replicating the logic of

International Journal of Recent Development in Engineering and Technology
Website: www.ijrdet.com (ISSN 2347-6435 (Online) Volume 15, Issue 05, May 2026)

colonial game reserves in which forests were cleared of human habitation to preserve them for elite hunting or, later, for tourist wildlife viewing. But Ghosh also does not dismiss the ecological stakes of conservation; the Sundarbans tiger population is genuinely endangered, and the novel does not pretend that the interests of human communities and nonhuman species can always be harmoniously reconciled.

This ethical complexity positions Ghosh within what scholars have called "third wave" ecocriticism - a strand of ecological thought that moves beyond both simple anthropocentrism and deep ecology's tendency to idealize wilderness by refusing human presence. In the Sundarbans, human communities and nonhuman ecologies are inseparably intertwined; neither can be preserved at the expense of the other. The tragedy of Morichjhãpi arises precisely from the false choice - imposed by state violence - between human survival and ecological integrity.

Piyali Roy's cetological work adds another dimension to the novel's ecocriticism. Her patient, empirical attention to the Irrawaddy dolphins - logging their movements, decoding their behavior, learning to read the tidal world through their eyes - models a practice of listening to the nonhuman that is distinct from both colonial mastery and sentimental romanticism. Dolphins, in Piya's scientific imagination, are not symbols of nature's purity but complex agents with their own needs, habits, and intelligence. The novel suggests that this kind of attentive, non-appropriative engagement with nonhuman others is itself an ethical and ecological practice - a way of inhabiting the world that refuses both the mastery of the colonizer and the nostalgia of the preservationist.

Fokir's knowledge of the delta represents yet another modality of ecological engagement - one rooted not in scientific methodology but in embodied, intergenerational practice. He knows the tides, the channels, the behavior of fish and dolphins through a lifetime of inhabiting the waterscape, and his knowledge is inseparable from his survival. Ghosh's juxtaposition of Piya's scientific gaze and Fokir's embodied knowing anticipates the debates in contemporary science studies about indigenous ecological knowledge and its relationship to western scientific epistemology. The novel suggests that both forms of knowledge are partial and that ecological wisdom requires the patient work of translation across incommensurable ways of knowing.

The novel's devastating climax - a cyclone that kills Fokir while he uses his body to shield Piya from the storm - is the most powerful expression of Ghosh's ecological vision. The storm is not a metaphor; it is a geological event of terrifying indifference to human meaning and moral order.

That Fokir dies saving a woman who cannot communicate with him in language - their relationship conducted entirely through gesture, glance, and shared attention to the nonhuman world - suggests that the deepest forms of ecological kinship may lie beyond language, beyond the conventions of bourgeois literary interiority that Ghosh diagnoses in *The Great Derangement*.

IV. The Ibis Trilogy: Empire, Ecology, and the Opium Economy

Ghosh's monumental *Ibis Trilogy* - comprising *Sea of Poppies* (2008), *River of Smoke* (2011), and *Flood of Fire* (2015) - is primarily received as a historical epic of empire, migration, and the Opium Wars of the nineteenth century. Yet read through an ecocritical lens, the trilogy offers one of the most sustained and historically grounded accounts of how colonial capitalism transformed Asian ecologies on a massive scale, with consequences that reverberate into the present.

The first volume, *Sea of Poppies*, centers on the transformation of the Gangetic plains of Bihar by colonial opium cultivation. The British East India Company's imposition of poppy cultivation on previously diversified agricultural landscapes produced what we might today call an ecological monoculture - a vast simplification of biodiversity in the service of profit. Ghosh describes the visual transformation of the Bihari landscape with extraordinary precision: the blue-green haze of the poppies stretching to the horizon, beautiful and deadly, displacing the variety of crops - rice, lentils, vegetables - on which peasant communities had long depended for food security as well as ecological balance. This landscape is not merely scenic; it is an argument. The poppy monoculture that enriched British merchants and financiers impoverished the soil, depleted the peasant families who were compelled to grow it, and created the conditions of famine that would periodically devastate the region throughout the colonial period.

The ship *Ibis* - the central symbol of the trilogy - is itself an ecological entity, a nexus of human and nonhuman forces. It carries coolies bound for Mauritius, opium bound for China, and a motley crew of sailors from across the Indian Ocean world. The ocean through which the *Ibis* sails is not merely a medium of colonial passage; it is a world teeming with life - with whales, flying fish, storms, and currents - whose rhythms and energies impose themselves upon the human actors with an authority that no colonial hierarchy can entirely contain.

River of Smoke shifts the action to Canton and the Pearl River delta, where the mechanisms of the opium trade are exposed in their full complexity.

International Journal of Recent Development in Engineering and Technology
Website: www.ijrdet.com (ISSN 2347-6435 (Online) Volume 15, Issue 05, May 2026)

The novel's engagement with the natural history of China is notable: the Scottish botanist Robin Chinnery, who navigates the networks of the Canton trade in search of rare plant specimens, embodies the colonial relationship between botany and empire. The systematic collection and transportation of Asian plant species to European botanical gardens was an act of ecological extraction - a form of biopiracy that served both scientific and commercial ends. Ghosh's rendering of this history connects the natural history of empire to contemporary debates about biodiversity, seed banks, and the politics of genetic resources.

The trilogy as a whole can be read as an extended meditation on what Jason Moore has called "world-ecology" - the idea that capitalism has always been a project of reorganising and appropriating the energies and resources of the nonhuman world, and that the ecological crises of the present are inseparable from this history. The opium economy that Ghosh narrates was not simply a human drama of greed and suffering; it was also an ecological event of profound consequence - the transformation of Asian landscapes, the disruption of marine ecologies, and the initiation of global commodity chains whose environmental costs are still being reckoned.

V. The Glass Palace: Teak, Turtles, And The Colonial Forest

The Glass Palace (2000), Ghosh's sweeping historical novel set across Burma, India, and Malaysia from the colonial period to the postcolonial present, engages with the ecological consequences of empire through the specific lens of the teak trade. The forests of Burma were among the most ecologically rich and economically important environments in the British imperial system, and their systematic exploitation - the extraction of teak for shipbuilding, furniture, and railway sleepers - transformed Burmese ecology on a massive scale.

Ghosh traces the career of Saya John, a Christian convert from Kerala who makes his fortune in the teak business, and of the Indian family that becomes intertwined with his descendants over three generations. The teak business is not merely a backdrop to the human drama; it is a mediating structure through which Ghosh examines the relationship between colonial capitalism and ecological transformation. The elephants used to haul teak logs out of the forests are among the novel's most memorable presences - powerful, intelligent, and uncannily aware of the humans with whom they labor. Ghosh's rendering of elephant consciousness and sociality anticipates contemporary ethological research on elephant cognition and emotion, and positions these animals as agents in the ecological history of empire rather than mere instruments of human enterprise.

The forests of Burma, as Ghosh depicts them, are not wilderness but working landscapes - worlds in which human and nonhuman communities have coexisted in complex, mutually constitutive relationships over long periods of time. The arrival of colonial timber capitalism disrupts these relationships, imposing a logic of extraction that reduces the forest to a resource to be depleted rather than a community to be sustained. This is what environmental historians have called the "commodification of nature" - the transformation of living ecological systems into inputs for capitalist production - and Ghosh's novel narrates its human and ecological costs with great vividness.

The novel also touches on the broader environmental devastation of colonial warfare - the scorched-earth policies of retreating armies, the destruction of agricultural infrastructure, the displacement of human and animal communities by the violence of imperial conflict. These are forms of what Rob Nixon would call "slow violence" - environmental damage whose consequences accumulate over time and across generations, invisible to the short attention spans of conventional military history.

VI. The Shadow Lines: Urban Ecologies And Invisible Environments

The Shadow Lines (1988), Ghosh's second novel, is not primarily an ecological text - it is a meditation on memory, nationalism, and the violence of partition. Yet read ecocritically, it offers important insights into the relationship between urban environments and ecological imagination. The novel moves between Calcutta and London, tracing the narrator's family across several generations and political upheavals.

What is significant from an ecocritical perspective is Ghosh's attention to the urban environment - the streets, the air, the river - as ecological space. Calcutta, in Ghosh's rendering, is not a city that has replaced nature with culture; it is a city in which human and nonhuman processes are continuously interpenetrating. The Hooghly River, which shapes the city's geography, history, and everyday life, is an ecological entity as much as a social one - its seasonal floods, its silt, its fish and waterfowl, its industrial pollution all constitute the material reality of urban life in ways that conventional social realism tends to ignore.

The novel's engagement with air and atmosphere is also noteworthy. The smogs and monsoons that move through the novel's London and Calcutta sequences are not merely atmospheric mood-setting; they are ecological conditions that shape bodily experience and social possibility in concrete ways.

International Journal of Recent Development in Engineering and Technology
Website: www.ijrdet.com (ISSN 2347-6435 (Online) Volume 15, Issue 05, May 2026)

This attentiveness to environmental embodiment anticipates Stacy Alaimo's concept of transcorporeality - the idea that human bodies are not bounded entities but open systems continuously exchanging matter and energy with their environments.

VII. Climate, Colonialism, And Ecological Justice

One of the most distinctive features of Ghosh's ecocritical vision is his insistence on the connection between ecological crisis and colonial history. This connection is developed most systematically in *The Great Derangement*, where Ghosh argues that the climate crisis cannot be understood apart from the political economy of imperialism and its aftermath. The nations of Asia and Africa that are most vulnerable to climate change - through rising seas, intensifying cyclones, and desertification - are precisely those that were colonized by European powers and denied the opportunity to industrialize on their own terms.

Ghosh's argument resonates with what scholars of climate justice have called the "climate debt" - the accumulated debt that wealthy nations owe to poorer nations for the carbon they have pumped into the atmosphere through centuries of industrialization. But Ghosh goes beyond the language of debt to make a more fundamental point: the very culture that produced carbon capitalism is the culture that has made it so difficult to respond to its consequences. The "Great Derangement" is not simply a failure of political will; it is a failure of imagination rooted in the specific cultural forms - the novel, the city, the ideology of progress - that modernity has bequeathed us.

This cultural diagnosis leads Ghosh to a striking observation about Asian and African literary traditions. In many of these traditions, the natural world is not a backdrop to human drama but a living presence with its own agency, voice, and moral authority. The epics of India, the oral traditions of indigenous peoples, the animist cosmologies of many African cultures - these are forms of ecological knowledge that modernity has systematically devalued or suppressed, but which now appear, in the context of the climate crisis, as repositories of wisdom about how to live in a world that exceeds and overwhelms human control.

Ghosh's own narrative practice draws on these traditions. His novels are structured not around the logic of individual development and psychological interiority that governs the European Bildungsroman, but around the dynamics of community, place, and ecological relationship. Characters are defined not merely by their inner lives but by their embeddedness in specific landscapes, social networks, and ecological systems.

This is a narrative form more capacious than the realist novel Ghosh critiques in *The Great Derangement*, one better equipped to register the multi-scale, multi-species reality of ecological crisis.

VIII. Nonhuman Agency And Posthumanism In Ghosh's Fiction

Contemporary ecocriticism has been profoundly shaped by what is variously called the "ontological turn," "new materialism," or "posthumanism" - a cluster of theoretical developments that challenge the anthropocentric assumption that humans are the primary agents of history and meaning. Thinkers such as Bruno Latour, Jane Bennett, and Donna Haraway have argued that nonhuman entities - animals, plants, rivers, climate systems, microbes - are genuine agents whose actions and capacities shape human life in ways that conventional social science and literary criticism have systematically ignored.

Ghosh's fiction is remarkably congruent with these theoretical developments, though it arrives at posthumanist insights through literary and anthropological means rather than through philosophical argument. Across his novels, nonhuman agents - tides, tigers, dolphins, elephants, cyclones, forests - are consistently accorded a kind of narrative presence and authority that reorders the conventional hierarchy of human and nonhuman. These are not simply symbolic or metaphorical presences; they are material forces whose agency cannot be reduced to human purposes or projections.

In *The Hungry Tide*, the tide itself functions as a nonhuman agent whose rhythms organise the entire social and ecological life of the Sundarbans. The behaviour of the dolphins that Piyali studies is irreducibly their own - not a reflection of human concerns or a screen for human anxieties, but a genuine form of nonhuman intelligence and sociality. In *The Glass Palace*, the elephants' emotional and cognitive lives are rendered with a specificity that refuses the reduction to mere instruments of human enterprise. In the *Ibis Trilogy*, the ocean asserts itself as an entity with its own moods, patterns, and agencies that shape the fates of human and nonhuman passengers alike.

This consistent attentiveness to nonhuman agency connects Ghosh's fiction to what Jane Bennett calls "vibrant matter" - the idea that the physical world is not inert stuff to be used by active human subjects but a multiplicity of vital, agentic forces whose capacities and trajectories are not determined by human intentions.

International Journal of Recent Development in Engineering and Technology
Website: www.ijrdet.com (ISSN 2347-6435 (Online) Volume 15, Issue 05, May 2026)

For Bennett, this recognition has political implications: it unsettles the anthropocentric hubris that underlies both capitalist extraction and the political philosophy of liberal individualism, and opens the possibility of a more democratic, distributive account of agency that includes nonhuman forces.

Ghosh's posthumanism is also evident in his treatment of human bodies as ecological entities - permeable to and constituted by the environments they inhabit. In the Sundarbans, human bodies are vulnerable to tiger attacks, cyclones, and tidal surges in ways that expose the fragility of the boundary between the human and the nonhuman. In the opium-scented landscape of *Sea of Poppies*, the bodies of the peasants who grow the poppy are transformed by the metabolic demands of a colonial monoculture - underfed, overworked, chemically exposed in ways that would today be recognized as forms of environmental harm. These are instances of what Stacy Alaimo calls "transcorporeality" - the material flows and exchanges that constitute human bodies as ecological entities rather than autonomous, self-enclosed subjects.

IX. Water, Flooding, And The Aesthetics Of Climate Crisis

Water is the governing element of Ghosh's ecological imagination. Rivers, tides, seas, monsoons, and floods recur throughout his fiction as the primary medium through which human and nonhuman worlds meet and interpenetrate. This is not merely a matter of geographical setting - though Ghosh does set much of his fiction in coastal, delta, and oceanic environments. It is a deep structural feature of his ecological vision, one that connects to the specific vulnerabilities of the Indian Ocean world to sea-level rise and extreme weather events.

The Sundarbans, as depicted in *The Hungry Tide*, is already a world of flooding - a landscape that exists at the boundary between land and water, subject to constant erosion, accretion, and transformation by tidal forces. Climate change is intensifying these processes: sea levels are rising, cyclones are becoming more frequent and more powerful, and communities that have lived at the edge of the tidal world for generations are being forced to relocate as their islands disappear beneath the waves. Ghosh was writing about these vulnerabilities in 2004, a decade before the climate crisis had entered mainstream public consciousness in India, and the novel's portrait of a world under ecological pressure has acquired an additional urgency with each passing year.

The monsoon, which is the governing meteorological reality of the Indian subcontinent, appears throughout Ghosh's fiction as a force of both creation and destruction - a nonhuman agency whose timing, intensity, and distribution determine the fate of agriculture, ecosystems, and human communities on a subcontinental scale. The failure or excess of the monsoon has historically been among the most devastating forms of environmental stress in South Asia, producing famines and floods of catastrophic proportto ions. Climate change is disrupting monsoon patterns in ways that scientists are only beginning to understand, and Ghosh's fiction - with its deep attentiveness to the rhythms and irregularities of rainfall, river, and tide - is uniquely positioned to register the cultural and ecological significance of these disruptions.

Water in Ghosh's fiction also carries the weight of history. The rivers and seas that his characters navigate are not natural spaces untouched by human history; they are sites where the histories of colonialism, migration, and commerce have left their marks. The Bengal delta is a landscape created and continuously reshaped by human activity - by the construction of embankments, the clearing of forests, the diversion of rivers - as well as by geological and climatic forces. To narrate its ecology is to narrate its history, and to narrate its history is to engage with the political conflicts over land, water, and survival that continue to shape the lives of its inhabitants.

X. Genre, Form, And The Limits Of Literary Realism

One of the most provocative aspects of Ghosh's ecological thinking is his analysis of the formal limitations of the realist novel as a vehicle for ecological imagination. In *The Great Derangement*, he argues that the genre conventions of literary realism - its probability calculus, its focus on individual psychology, its assumption of environmental stability - make it structurally resistant to the kinds of events and processes that define ecological crisis: extreme weather, species collapse, geological transformation, the entanglement of human and nonhuman agencies across vast scales of time and space.

Ghosh's own formal innovations can be read as attempts to develop narrative forms adequate to these challenges. His novels are characterized by a mobility across time and space that exceeds the bounds of conventional realism. They move between centuries, between continents, between individual and collective experience, and between human and nonhuman perspectives.

International Journal of Recent Development in Engineering and Technology
Website: www.ijrdet.com (ISSN 2347-6435 (Online) Volume 15, Issue 05, May 2026)

This formal mobility is not merely a stylistic preference; it is an epistemological response to the multi-scale reality of ecological processes, which unfold across geological time, oceanic space, and biological diversity in ways that no single perspective can comprehend.

The role of historical fiction in Ghosh's ecological project is particularly significant. By narrating the ecological transformations of the colonial period - the monocultures, the deforestations, the disruptions of indigenous ecological knowledge - Ghosh performs what Rob Nixon calls "slow violence" - making visible the gradual, accumulative environmental damage that conventional historical narratives tend to overlook. The deep temporality of historical fiction enables Ghosh to connect the ecological crises of the present to their origins in the historical processes of colonial capitalism, offering a form of ecological genealogy that scientific discourse alone cannot provide.

In this respect, Ghosh's fiction exemplifies what Ursula Heise has called "the sense of planet" - a form of ecological imagination that is able to hold together the local and the global, the historical and the contemporary, the human and the nonhuman in a single narrative framework. This planetary sense is urgently needed in the age of the Anthropocene, when the consequences of human action are registered at scales - geological, atmospheric, oceanic - that overwhelm both individual experience and national politics.

XI. The Anthropocene and Postcolonial Responsibility

The concept of the Anthropocene - the proposed geological epoch defined by the dominant influence of human activity on earth systems - has generated intense debate in both scientific and humanistic disciplines. For postcolonial scholars, the Anthropocene is a problematic concept precisely because it obscures the differential responsibility of different human groups for the planetary transformations in question. The term "Anthropocene" - derived from the Greek for "human" - suggests a universal human agency that erases the specific histories of colonial extraction, industrial capitalism, and unequal development that have actually driven the geological transformations in question.

Ghosh engages with this debate throughout *The Great Derangement*, arguing for what might be called a "postcolonial Anthropocene" - an understanding of the current ecological crisis that takes seriously both its planetary scale and its unequal causation and consequences.

The nations and communities most vulnerable to climate change - the peoples of the Sundarbans, the low-lying islands of the Pacific and Indian Oceans, the drought-stricken communities of sub-Saharan Africa - are precisely those who have contributed least to the accumulation of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. Conversely, the nations most responsible for historical emissions - the United States, the countries of Western Europe, China - are also the nations with the greatest resources to adapt to changing conditions.

This asymmetry is not merely a matter of contemporary politics; it has deep historical roots in the structures of colonial capitalism. The industrial development that drove carbon emissions in the West was financed in large part by the extraction of wealth, labor, and natural resources from colonized territories. The ecological debt that wealthy nations owe to the rest of the world is thus not simply a matter of future obligations; it is a function of the historical processes that created the current global economic order. Ghosh's fiction consistently illuminates these historical entanglements, offering a form of ecological memory that is also a form of political critique.

XII. Critical Responses and Ghosh's Place in World Literature

The ecocritical dimensions of Ghosh's work have attracted increasing scholarly attention over the past two decades. Critics such as Pramod Nayar, Amrith Suresh, and Upamanyu Mukherjee have examined his fiction through the lenses of postcolonial ecocriticism, environmental history, and the theory of the Anthropocene. His work has been read alongside that of other South Asian writers who engage with ecological themes - Arundhati Roy, Romesh Gunesekera, Indra Sinha - as part of a broader turn toward environmental consciousness in postcolonial literature.

What distinguishes Ghosh's ecological imagination from that of many of his contemporaries is its historical depth and its theoretical sophistication. He is not simply a writer who includes environmental themes in otherwise conventional narratives; he is a thinker who has engaged seriously with the scientific, philosophical, and political dimensions of ecological crisis, and whose narrative forms have been substantially shaped by this engagement. *The Great Derangement* is unusual in being a work of non-fiction ecological theory written by a major novelist who is willing to subject his own fiction to critical scrutiny, and its impact on both literary ecocriticism and the broader public conversation about climate change has been substantial.

International Journal of Recent Development in Engineering and Technology
Website: www.ijrdet.com (ISSN 2347-6435 (Online) Volume 15, Issue 05, May 2026)

Ghosh's place in world literature is inseparable from his ecological vision. He is among the few contemporary novelists who have successfully integrated the local and the planetary, the historical and the contemporary, the human and the nonhuman in a narrative framework of both literary power and intellectual rigor. His work challenges the conventions of the postcolonial novel as much as those of the realist novel, insisting that the ecological is always already political and the political is always already ecological.

XIII. Conclusion: Literature As Ecological Practice

The foregoing analysis demonstrates that Amitav Ghosh's literary corpus constitutes a sustained and philosophically sophisticated engagement with the ecological dimensions of human life - an engagement that spans fiction, essay, and non-fiction and that has deepened and intensified over the course of a career now entering its fifth decade. From the tidal worlds of the Sundarbans to the opium-saturated landscapes of colonial Bihar, from the teak forests of Burma to the contested waters of the Pearl River delta, Ghosh's writing refuses the separation of culture from nature, of human history from ecological transformation, of literary form from political responsibility.

What makes Ghosh's ecocritical vision distinctive is its refusal of easy consolations. He does not offer a vision of pristine nature to be preserved from human encroachment, nor does he indulge in a nostalgia for pre-modern ecological harmony. Instead, his fiction inhabits the messy, contested, historically saturated zones where human and nonhuman worlds are always already entangled - where conservation can become dispossession, where colonial capitalism has irrevocably transformed the landscapes it exploited, and where the ecological crises of the present are inseparable from the histories of empire and inequality that produced them.

In this respect, Ghosh's work makes a contribution to ecocriticism that goes beyond literary analysis. It models a way of thinking about the ecological crisis that is simultaneously attentive to the claims of science, the imperatives of justice, the resources of cultural tradition, and the possibilities of narrative imagination. At a moment when the urgency of ecological crisis demands both intellectual clarity and cultural vitality, Ghosh's literary practice - with its expansive historical consciousness, its attentiveness to nonhuman agency, and its refusal of both anthropocentrism and ecological despair - offers one of the most compelling models available for the kind of thinking our planetary situation requires.

The "Great Derangement" that Ghosh diagnoses is ultimately a failure of imagination - a collective inability to fully inhabit the truth of our ecological situation and to respond to it with the creativity and urgency it demands. His own fiction is the most powerful evidence he offers that literature, reimagined and expanded beyond the conventions of realist individualism, can still be a vehicle for the kind of ecological wisdom our moment demands. In narrating the tides and tigers, the dolphins and cyclones, the forests and floodwaters of a world under pressure, Ghosh's writing performs what ecocriticism has always argued literature can do at its best: it makes us feel, think, and see differently - and in doing so, it makes us more capable of responding to the world as it actually is.

WORKS CITED

[1] Alaimo, Stacy. Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self. Indiana UP, 2010.

[2] Bennett, Jane. Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things. Duke UP, 2010.

[3] Buell, Lawrence. The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination. Blackwell, 2005.

[4] Ghosh, Amitav. The Shadow Lines. Ravi Dayal Publisher, 1988. - The Glass Palace. HarperCollins, 2000. The Hungry Tide. HarperCollins, 2004. Sea of Poppies. John Murray, 2008. River of Smoke. John Murray, 2011. Flood of Fire. John Murray, 2015. The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable. University of Chicago Press, 2016.

[5] Gun Island. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019.

[6] Glotfelty, Cheryll, and Harold Fromm, eds. The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology. U of Georgia P, 1996.

[7] Haraway, Donna. Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene. Duke UP, 2016.

[8] Heise, Ursula K. Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global. Oxford UP, 2008.

[9] Latour, Bruno. Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime. Polity, 2017.

[10] Moore, Jason W. Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital. Verso, 2015.

[11] Morton, Timothy. Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence. Columbia UP, 2016.

[12] Mukherjee, Upamanyu Pablo. Postcolonial Environments: Nature, Culture and the Contemporary Indian Novel in English. Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

[13] Nayar, Pramod K. Ecocriticism and the Indian Novel. Orient BlackSwan, 2019.

[14] Nixon, Rob. Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor. Harvard UP, 2011.