26/9/2025

Eco-Cosmopolitanism and Eco-Magical Realism

in Amitav Ghosh's Selected Fiction

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FACULTY OF LANGUAGES AND LITERATURE

INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY, ISLAMABAD

2024

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULLFILLMENT OF THE

REQUIREMENT OF THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

IN ENGLISH

To

Department of English, Faculty of Languages and Literature

International Islamic University, Islamabad

ACCEPTANCE BY THE VIVA VOCE COMMITTEE

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Title of the Thesis: **"Eco-Cosmopolitanism and Eco-Magical Realism in Amitav Ghosh's Selected Fiction**

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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my original work submitted for the degree of Master of Philosophy and has not been submitted, in whole or in part, to any other institution previously for any degree or diploma. I have properly acknowledged and cited all sources of information used in this research work.

Shazma Faiz

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DEDICATION

To my beloved father who has always been my support system and whose guidance and affection have eased my every life challenge. Though his death has left an unhealable wound in my heart, the strength, courage and love he gave me continue to guide me every day. To my brother, who uplifted me when I was shattered and whose unwavering support helped me to rise again. And to my husband, my constant companion, thank you for standing by my side as I navigate both academic and life challenges. This work is attributed to all of you.

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Acknowledgements

I am gratified by the constant support, encouragement, and assistance of my supervisor, **Dr. Neelam Jabeen**. I am forever indebted to her for the generous help, instructions and assessment at each step of my research work and specially for providing a cooperative and welcoming environment. This research would not have possible without my friends, Tayyeba and Uzma, who uplifted my spirits each time I felt down and made this journey effortless for me.

Abstract

The global environmental despairs, with their sweeping impacts and interconnected repercussions cannot be comprehended through a purely scientific discourse. This research study seeks for the merging of science and local folklore in providing an understanding of the environmental problems as interconnected. For this, I have selected the magical realist novels of Amitav Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island* that foreground traditional South-Asian myths centralizing powerful mythical figures to offer a cosmopolitan understanding of environment. I argue that the texts incorporate the culturally rooted myths, spiritual beliefs, and folklore of South-Asia to highlight relationship between human and their natural environment and to present an interconnected world. I have employed Catherine Belsey's "Textual Analysis as a Research Method" to inform my textual analysis of the selected texts, examining them through the lens of eco-magical realism and eco-cosmopolitanism. To achieve this, I established a nexus between Charlotte Roger's concept of "eco-magical realism" and Ursula K. Heise's "eco-cosmopolitanism" which suggests a "de-territorialized environmental vision" (10). I build on the theoretical insights of Maggie Ann Bowers to discern upon 'folkloric magical realism' (87); Ben Holgate who builds a connection between magical realism and ecocriticism; and Ursula K. Heise's "sense of place" and "sense of planet" (3) to carry out my research. Firstly I study the environmental aspects of the selected texts through the lens of magical realism to comprehend the significance of local folklore in highlighting globally significant ecological issues. I shift attention to the environmental cosmopolitanism specific to selected novels arguing that Ghosh offers an inclusive approach that consider both the local and global needs. Additionally, this study highlights that in the selected fiction, ecological problems; climate change, species extinction, slow violence, environmental injustice, etc. manifest

themselves across the globe crossing the seemingly disconnected geographical locations. Furthermore, I also examine how Ghosh shows connectedness between the local and the global by centralizing traditional South-Asian myth. This scholarship is an extension of not only eco-magical realism but also of the recently developing eco-cosmopolitanism as it sees the environmental despair of the contemporary interconnected world as transcending the seemingly disconnected regional and cultural boundaries.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This study aims to identify and investigate a conjunction between eco-magical realism and eco cosmopolitanism through the exploration of shared environmental themes in the selected fiction. I argue that the selected novels, *The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island*, have expertly intertwined magical realism with the discussion of climate change, slow violence and eco-justice. This research claims that the locally rooted magical realism can be used as a narrative tool to highlight the transcultural and global environmental concerns and climate change. This study discovers that in highlighting environmental challenges, the contemporary South-Asian magical realist writer, Amitav Ghosh, has tried to present the man-made boundaries between regions and cultures as permeable where there is constant material exchange. It can, therefore, be precisely argued that he urges towards the possibility of a transcultural, eco-cosmopolitical and planetary approach towards environmental concerns. This research is delimited to two fictional works of Amitav Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island*.

The present study draws on Catherine Belsey's conceptualization of textual analysis and employs the critical environmental approaches of Ursula K. Heise' eco-cosmopolitanism and Ben Holgate's magical realism and environmental discourse. Heise's eco-cosmopolitanism, according to Nasrin Yavas, considers "the social, political and cultural" association "between the local and the global in an age of unprecedented mobility and global modernity" (1). This thesis extends Holgate's conception by noticing the shared theme of a planetary and eco-cosmopolitical approach towards environmental issues that is evident in the selected magical realist environmental discourses. Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin elucidate upon the functionality of postcolonial ecocriticism that it "performs an advocacy function both in relation to the real world (s) it inhabits

and to the imaginary spaces it opens up for contemplation of how the real world might be transform" (13). South-Asian Magical realist texts, thus, juxtapose magic, 'fantastic' or 'unreal' with the "historically connected" material realities which in turn creates fluidity and a third space and in so doing the texts "admit a plurality of worlds" but at the same time situate a "liminal territory" (Durix 79, 80 and Bowers 40). This research uses Durix and Bowers' arguments that magical realism enables the authors to construct a dynamic world where everywhere there are junctions and connections suggesting that actions taking place in one part of the world definitely affects the other.

Ben Holgate integrates ecocriticism and magical realism by stating that through the employment of "cultural and spiritual aspects", magical realist texts seek for "connections" (Holgate 28-30). The exploration of shared "environmental concerns" that Heise calls as a planetary or global vision is one among other significant "thematic similarities" that eco-magical realists texts share (Holgate 20, Heise 210). Eco-magical realist writers employ localized fantasies, magic, myths and other spiritual beliefs to present "dual vision of the Earth"; a vision of "different earths that are shaped by varying cultural context" and a global vision of which the former is a constituent (Heise 210). This twofold image of the planet Earth leads to develop an alternate environmental vision which is neither locally grounded nor against it. Heise calls this approach as "eco-cosmopolitan environmentalism" which "implicitly or explicitly, highlight the imbrication of local places, ecologies, and cultural practices in global networks" (210).

Keeping in view the daily emerging global connectivity, Heise's identifies the need of a cosmopolitical approach towards the environmentalist thought which, my study considers, eco-magical realist fictional writings have thoroughly reflected upon. This research, thus, attempts to study eco-cosmopolitanism evident in *The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island*. It particularly identifies

how Ghosh uses the technique of magical realism to envision a possible global ecology. Such an approach to South-Asian fiction has not been undertaken yet. The reason for this might be the conception that magical realism, folktales, traditional myths, etc., are mostly culture specific and regionally grounded.

Climate change being one of the most apparent problems of the contemporary industrialized, over-populated and globalized world which eco-conscious novelists tend to emphasize in artistic ways. This study is an attempt to emphasize the elements of magical realism in the selected novels by Amitav Ghosh. The blend of real and imaginary in the selected texts is a distinctive mode to discern upon the existing environmental devastations. The aim of this study is to focus on magical realism employed by the author, through which he is critiquing the present unusual and unavoidable climate change, depletion of natural reservoirs, global warming, species extinction and other ecological defilements as a result of the rapid mechanization. The objective is to understand the significance of an eco-cosmopolitical perspective towards the stated issues.

This research aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of Amitav Ghosh's innovative use of traditional South-Asian myths in his environmentally oriented novels, *The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island*, to address global ecological crises. It explores the application of eco-magical realism in understanding a cosmopolitical perspective towards environment, the perspective which transcends geopolitical boundaries. This study delves into the nuanced interplay between eco-magical realism and eco-cosmopolitanism by arguing that Ghosh's literary magic, grounded in local traditions, has the potential to align more explicitly with eco-cosmopolitanism by emphasizing a universal responsibility in a rapidly globalizing world. This research sheds light on how eco-magical realism in Ghosh's literature can further enrich the discourse on eco-

cosmopolitanism, ultimately contributing to a more profound understanding of the interconnectedness of global environmental issues.

I explore how Ghosh presents an "amalgamation of a rational and an irrational worldview" (qtd. in Bowers 79) through intermingling South-Asian myths, fantasies and spiritual beliefs to situate the environmental despair as a global issue. It can, therefore, be argued that through the "conjunction of two worlds" (Bowers 79), Ghosh urges for a cosmopolitical world citizenship as he tends to connect the local and the global. Here, cosmopolitanism is used in the meaning of globalization in which local communities and regions are impacted by changes happening worldwide.

I borrow the term "eco-magical realism" from Charlotte Rogers to discern upon the theme of environment in the selected magical realist novels. Roger explains the term as "the author's mode of narrating ecological phenomena as events that are literally incredible, seemingly impossible to believe, but they are nevertheless depicted as concrete occurrences" (1580). I argue that the contemporary writers employ eco-magical realism as a tool to reflect upon the present-day environmental demolition and the consequent climate change as global issues. In so doing, they tend to discern upon the global ecological problems, "slow violence" and "environmental injustice" in particular. Ghosh's 2004 novel *The Hungry Tide* highlights the endangered wildlife of West Bengal which his 2019 *Gun Island* continues to highlight in the form of a constant threat to river water and fish as a result of the chemical waste from factories and other pollutants dumped into water. Through the blend of real and imaginary, the novel moves from Sundarbans Island (Bengal) to the city of Venice tracing the climate change. This study, therefore, builds on Heise's 'eco-cosmopolitanism' to seek for ways that visualize "localism from a globalist environmental perspective" (9). While Heise primarily underscores the idea of globalization in American and

German environmental writings, this research takes magical realist texts originated from South-Asia as the "processes of exploitation involve them deeply in globalization." (qtd. in Heise 52)

Fredrick Jameson, while reflecting upon the notion of magical realism in films, argues that the genre now draws upon the village or even tribal myths (302). I would infer in Jameson's argument that Ghosh employs his distinctive style of magical realism to offer a cosmopolitical worldview towards the twenty-first century environmental conditions. He incorporates the elements of traditional Indian myth and magic to highlight the change in climate and environmental condition of specific locations from a cosmopolitical perspective. It is through magical realism that he transcends the geographical boundaries and comprehend the injustices done towards the nonhuman environment and the consequent impacts of such acts on animal species and climate.

1.1. Problem Statement

Thinking about the permeability, fluidity and interconnectedness of the contemporary world, this research project takes on board ecological issues as dynamic and co-related. It traces how Amitav Ghosh's outlook towards the locally grounded environmental issues can be regarded as cosmopolitical and planetary. I explore the ways in which the environmental despairs, highlighted in the selected fiction, manifest itself across the globe crossing the seemingly disconnected geographical barriers between and among nations. I examine how Ghosh shows connectedness between the local and the global environmental despairs through the employment of South-Asian myth and magic. This thesis aims to explore how Ghosh foregrounds magical realism to present an eco-cosmopolitical perspective to environmental issues.

1.2. Research Objectives

i. To find out how magical realism is significant to ecological discussion in *The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island*.

ii. To identify the ways in which Amitav Ghosh's selected novels seek for an eco-cosmopolitical worldview towards environmental problems.

1.3. Research Questions

i. How does Amitav Ghosh's use of magical realism facilitate environmental concerns in *The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island*?

ii. In what ways Ghosh's selected novels seek for an eco-cosmopolitical approach towards globally significant environmental calamities?

1.4. Methodology

This research is a qualitative study in which a close textual analysis of Amitav Ghosh's two novels, *The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island*, is carried out in order to examine how the writer has foregrounded South-Asian myth and magical realism as tools to propose the possibility of a cosmopolitical approach towards the contemporary ecological problems. For carrying out literary research, textual analysis is considered as a significant qualitative research method where primary texts are interpreted in their cultural, historical and social contexts. In this study, I utilize textual analysis as defined by Catherine Belsey in her essay "Textual Analysis as a Research Tool" as "a research method that involves a close encounter with the work itself, an examination of the details without bringing to them more suppositions than we can help" (160). According to Belsey, textual analysis involves a close and detailed examination of a text to understand how it creates meaning. This approach prioritizes the text and the reader's response, recognizing that interpretation is

influenced by both the text itself and external factors, such as cultural background and secondary sources. This method is well-suited for carrying out research in literature, as it acknowledges the multifaceted nature of textual meaning and prioritises the importance of the reader's interpretation, allowing diverse readings and multiple meanings to emerge from the same text. By prioritizing the text and the reader's response, textual analysis enables a nuanced understanding of how narratives affect and engage audiences.

While Belsey' s approach prioritizes the text itself, she also acknowledges the significance of extra-textual knowledge in shaping interpretation. As she notes, reading is never "pure" or isolated, but rather informed by a complex interplay of cultural context, personal experiences, and secondary sources (160). According to Alan Mckee, textual analysis is a way for researchers to gather information about how other human beings make sense of the world and where members of various cultures and sub-cultures make sense of who they are, and of how they fit into the world they live in (1). Its aim is not to find the one "hidden" or "true" meaning of a text, instead its objective is to generate a multiplicity of plausible meanings, acknowledging the complexity and "significance" of the examined material (Fursich 1, Mckee 135). The purpose of textual analysis, according to Mckee, is to identify plausable interpretation, not in deciding which of them is the most correct one (Mckee 63). Likewise, Besley asserts that any serious textual analysis depends on the grasp of how meaning is not at the disposal of individual, nor is it a straightforward reflection of authorial intention. Instead, meaning is shaped by the pre-existing language and cultural context rather than a matter of intention, an insolatable 'idea', fully formed prior to its inscription. We acquire meaning from outside, from a language that always pre-exists us. Effective textual analysis involves understanding something from the text that is done by "understanding

the process of interpretation as the effect of a relation between a reader and a text (Besley 163, 166).

With this understanding of textual analysis as a nuanced and contextualized approach, this research excavates the ecological themes and cosmopolitical undertones in Amitav Ghosh's selected novels. The primary theorists of this particular research include Ben Holgate who builds a nexus between magical realism and ecocriticism in his book *Climate and Crises: Magical Realism as Environmental Discourse* and Ursula K. Heise who terms "eco-cosmopolitanism" to suggest a "de-territorialized environmental vision" (10) to the present-day ecological hazards in her composition *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global*. Additionally, the research draws upon Rob Nixon's conception of "slow violence" to discern upon the recurring themes of climate change and other ecological dilemmas of the contemporary industrialized, but then again globalized, world in the selected fiction. This research method involves a three-step approach. To conduct this research, I adopt a three-step methodology. First, I undertake a close analysis of the selected novels and relevant scholarly works to identify key themes and character developments. Next, I gather evidence from the texts to support my research argument. Finally, I synthesize the evidence to highlight the importance of myth in shaping ecological consciousness and cosmopolitical undertones. By following textual analysis, I aim to build a robust argument and gain a deeper understanding of the complex relationships between literature, ecology, and cosmopolitanism.

1.5. Significance

The significance of this particular research is not limited merely to the explanation of environmental degradation and climate change depicted in the selected novels as apart from doing so, it equally directs attention towards the urgent need of a de-territorialized and planetary

approach towards the stressed issues. The reason of selecting Amitav Ghosh's work lies in the fact that he belongs to under-developed yet more vulnerable country to devastating natural disasters; climate change, floods, earthquakes, species extinction, etc. This research contributes in extending the scope of magical realism beyond specific cultural boundaries. Likewise, it adds to the recent scholarship of eco-cosmopolitanism by seeing the environmental despair of the contemporary world as a global rather than regional phenomenon. The research builds on Heise' "eco-cosmopolitanism" to propose how globalism is promoted through locally based magic realism. This not only shows the interconnectedness between local and the global environmental concerns but also paves the way for a shared eco-cosmopolitical worldview that transcends boundaries and regions.

1.6. Chapter Division

My thesis comprises of five chapters and they are coherently arranged in accordance with the objectives of the research. Chapter one of this dissertation entitled as "Introduction" offers a detailed overview of my study, introducing main theorists and the key terms used in this project. Besides a brief summary of Amitav Ghosh's selected texts, this chapter covers problem statement, research objectives and questions, methodology used to carry out this research and highlights the significance of this work in the field of ecocriticism.

Chapter two provides a comprehensive analysis of relevant literature and theoretical insights used in this research. The chapter is divided into six subsections where the first primarily draws upon Maggie Ann Bowers and Jeanne Delbaere and discusses the importance of local myths and folklore in the genre of magical realism. The second subsection discusses the nexus between magical realism and ecocriticism recently presented by Ben Holgate. The third portion shifts attention to the cosmopolitical citizenship offered by Ursula K Heise considering contemporary

interconnected world. The fourth part gives insights to the existing research on Amitav Ghosh's selected novels and identifies a significant gap in considering the importance of both locally grounded folklore and cosmopolitical environmental issues. Moving on, the fifth section bridges environment cosmopolitanism and eco-magical realism that develops the analytical approach through which the selected texts will be analyzed in later chapters. The final subsection concludes with identifying gap in the research carried out on Ghosh eco-conscious novels who is called as "*sui generic*" (Holgate 134) magical realist and so an investigation of how he uses this genre to offer a unique insight to global environmental issues is needed.

In the third chapter, I analyze Amitav Ghosh's selected novels: *The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island* as eco-magical realist texts. Through a critical textual analysis, this chapter addresses the first research question of this study that seeks for eco-magical realism in the texts. The first section draws upon Bowers and Holgate to discuss the significance of folklore and myths in magical realism while the second section draws on Holgate and Rogers to discuss how the selected fictional works have foregrounded traditional South-Asian myth and folklore to offer an exclusive insight to the discussion of contemporary environmental problems and the resultant environmental injustice.

In fourth chapter, I elucidate upon the idea of environmental cosmopolitanism apparent in *The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island*. In the first section, I analyse the cosmopolitical citizenship of the central characters via Heise' "Sense of Place and Sense of Planet" and in the second part I expand the idea of Ghosh's eco-cosmopolitanism by focusing on the permeable world presented in the texts. Moreover, I also discuss the comparison made between apparently distinct islands; the place based needs of people and challenge the notion of home. Through a thorough analysis of the

texts I conclude that though Ghosh urges towards a cosmic citizenship but not at the expense of negating the place based needs of both people and animals.

The last chapter of this research concludes the major insights derived from the analysis of *The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island* through eco-magical realism and eco-cosmopolitanism. It comprises of the findings of this particular research and suggests recommendations for potential future researches.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents a comprehensive overview of the relevant literature and the theoretical insights that form the basis for my exploration of eco-cosmopolitical encounters within the selected magical realist works of Amitav Ghosh. The primary aim of this chapter is to delineate the key concepts that collectively constitute the conceptual framework underpinning this study, eco-magical realism and eco-cosmopolitanism. To begin this exploration, this literature review takes an interdisciplinary approach as it delves into the intersection of magical realism as a literary genre, particularly in its recent connection with ecocriticism. This chapter begins by introducing magical realism as a genre that has gained newfound relevance within the realm of ecocriticism and moves on to shed light on the commencement of these concepts and elucidate the unique position that this research occupies within the emerging cosmopolitical framework. Since there exists an apparent lack of research pertaining to eco-cosmopolitical encounters within eco-magical realist texts, therefore, this literature review emphasizes the interweaving of these transdisciplinary conceptual strands underpinning Amitav Ghosh's selected novels.

2.1. Exploring the Influence of Myth in Magical Realism: An Introduction

Within the discourse of literary criticism, magical realism as a narrative technique has often been defined in various ways. Most of the critics approve the literary style as an amalgamation of real and the unreal. Chanady is of the view that the contrasting terms—'real' and 'unreal' are "autonomously coherent" as the former is "based on an 'enlightened' and rational view of reality, and the other on the acceptance of the supernatural as part of everyday reality" (21-22). The key characteristics of this kind of writing is the juxtaposition of the real and the fantastic in a way that

the latter appears as part of the everyday life. A magical realist writer consciously integrates the extraordinary as an ordinary situation in order to avoid "shock" from the reader (Hambsch).

Maggie Ann Bowers distinguishes magical realism as a form of writing that "relies most of all upon the matter-of-fact, realist tone of its narrative when presenting magical happenings" (Bowers 3). She emphasizes that this distinctive narrative style often leads to the misconception that magical realism is often confused as a "variation of literary realism" (3). She goes on to state that its only characteristic that distinguishes it from literary realism is that "it fuses the two opposing oxymoron (the magical and the realist) together to form a new perspective" (3). She considers the word magic in magical realism as synonym for "mystery, an extraordinary happening, or the supernatural and can be influenced by European Christianity as much as by, for instance, Native American indigenous beliefs" (Bowers 4). Magical realist texts significantly foreground mystical and miraculous beliefs of a specific culture in such a way that the characters consider the supernatural as part of their reality.

This thesis builds upon Ben Holgate's definition of magical realism who identifies three characteristics as must prevailing in a text in order to categorize it as magical realist. The first and foremost among them is the employment of mythopoeia (inclusion of traditional myths, legends, etc.), the second one is intertextuality where the magical part of text mostly present and the third one is the presence of pre-modern elements (20). For Bowers, anything that is "unaccountable by rational science" is magic and it includes "ghosts, disappearances, miracles, extraordinary talents and strange atmosphere" rather than something like a magic show (Bowers 19). She distinguishes the genre from science fiction on the ground that the latter provides "a rational, physical explanation for an unusual occurrence" (Bowers 28). In magical realist texts, unusual or magical

events are presented without a rational, scientific explanation. Instead, these events are portrayed as part of the ordinary reality blurring the line between the real and the magical.

Magical realist writers often weave magical elements into their narratives in a subtle and matter-of-fact manner. Holgate is of the view that "magical realism emanates out of realism and is not oppositional to it" (15). These elements are presented as part of the characters` everyday lives, making them appear ordinary despite their fantastical nature. "In contrast to the fantastic, the supernatural in magical realism does not disconcert the reader, and this is the fundamental difference between the two modes. The same phenomena that are portrayed as problematic by the author of a fantastic narrative are presented in a matter-of-fact manner by the magical realist" (Amaryll Chanady qtd. in Bowers 25). These novels are "mixture of real and hallucination" as these texts take "imaginary as an ordinary part of reality" (Bowers 29). The incorporation of myth and legendary stories, is among various ways through which these writers blur the line between the real and unreal. Bowers contends that "originating from the mind and not present in the material world of recognizable reality" but these instances are "accepted as a part of material reality" (Bowers 29).

Magical realism, a genre that blurs the boundaries between the ordinary and the supernatural, has been a subject of fascination for scholars and critics since time. One intriguing aspect of this literary mode is its profound relationship with mythological elements, which often play a pivotal role in shaping the narrative. This section of the literature review delves into the intricate interplay between myth and magical realism, exploring how authors employ myths to offer deeper insights to contemporary circumstances. It also examines the various interpretations and definitions of magical realism in relation to myth, shedding light on the how the genre often incorporates mythological elements.

In *A Companion to Magical Realism,* Stephen M. Hart and Wen-Chin Ouyang quote Elleke Boehmer that "they [postcolonial writers in English] combine the supernatural with local legend and imagery derived from colonialist cultures to represent cultures which have been repeatedly unsettled by invasion, occupation and political corruption" (Hart and Ouyang 6). They are of the view that the extraordinary in some texts are taken from "local myths and traditions" (17). They are discussing various magical realist writers who have incorporated myths "whereby the myths were no longer viewed as exotic and foreign ... but rather were seen, as it were, from the inside" (25). For instance, Borges has used classical myths i.e., Minitaur in his fictions; Carpentier has employed the classical myth of Orpheus in *The Lost Step* while the Afro-Caribbean myth of Mackandal in *The Kingdom of this World*; Asturias has foregrounded Mayan folklore in *Men of Maize*; Juan Rulfo has combined Christian and Mesoamerican mythologies in *Pedro Paramo* while Gracia Marquez has foregrounded Americanist myth in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (Donald L. Shaw qtd. in Hart and Ouyang 25).

Magical realist writers tend to foreground traditional mythical stories which according to Bowers' view is not only to "repeat folkloric mythologies from their cultural community" but also to "promote a greater depth of understanding of the present circumstances" (Bowers 89). According to Zamora and Faris, magical realist texts primarily unearth "myths, legends, ritual... (sometimes oral and performative, as well as written) practices that bind communities together" (qtd. in Bowers 85). Ato Quayson offers a different perspective by asserting that the term 'magical' in magical realism denotes "elements drawn from mythology, fantasy, folktales, and any other discourse that bears a representational code opposed to realism" (qtd. in Holgate 22). Fredrick Jameson, while reflecting upon the notion of magical realism in films, argues that the genre now draws upon the village or even tribal myths (302). This form of magical realism is categorized by

Jeanne Delbaere as “folkloric magical realism” where magical realist writers often bring age-old myths and tales into their narratives (Bowers 87).

Magical realism tends to highlight concerns ranging from socio-political issues to colonialism, gender relations, as well as the recent environmental dilemmas. For Chanady, magical realism usually serves a higher purpose as she says that “magical realism is not just for one’s aesthetic pleasure, it plays a more crucial role in building allegories about our world and criticizing the society, as well as building the collective imagery of the oppressed and marginal cultures” (434). The succeeding section of this literature review provides background of how magical realism has emerged as a narrative context for addressing environmental issues of the contemporary world.

2.2. Analyzing the Nexus between Magical Realism and Ecocriticism

Ben Holgate in *Climate and Crises: Magical Realism as Environmental Discourse* has established a cohesive connection between the literary genre of magical realism and ecocriticism. He argues that “magical realism enables writers to portray alternative intellectual paradigms, ontologies and epistemologies and epistemologies that typically contest the scientific rationalism derived from the European Enlightenment and the exploitation of natural resources associated with both capitalism and imperialism” (Holgate i). He argues that “the authors of magical realist fiction utilize the narrative mode to depict time in either a long-term historical manner or a mythical manner in order to address the environmental crises” (Holgate 6-7). He states that “A magical realist text does not necessarily have to present extreme weather events of climate change as the magical elements. Indeed... portrays [them] in the apocalyptic setting in a matter-of-fact manner, that is real” (Holgate 7). They do so that these phenomena do not appear “un-heard” or “improbable”, as Amitav Ghosh states that “to treat them as magical ... would be to rob them off

precisely the quality that makes them so urgently compelling – which is that they are actually happening on this earth, at this time" (qtd. in Holgate 9). Magical realism, thus, represent the often imperceptible yet profound impacts of slow violence, particularly those associated with climate change.

Magical realism emerges as a significant tool for reshaping not only the formal aspects but also the cultural narratives used to depict climate change. In doing so, it opens new pathways for engaging with and addressing the pressing environmental dilemmas of our time. In "The Monster of Representation: Climate Change and Magical Realism in *Beasts of the Southern Wild*", Ali Brox argue that formal and thematic elements of magical realism can bridge reality and fantasy in particularly productive ways when dealing with the imaginative challenges of representing climate change and environmental injustice (141). They contend that "the decolonizing aspects of magical realism narration can highlight inequalities associated with environmental injustices" (Brox 149). "The way a story is told matters and magical realism functions as one possible way to shift the formal and cultural modes for the narratives that are used to depict climate change" (152). By utilizing the decolonizing aspects of magical realism, the narrative can shed light on the profound inequalities associated with environmental injustices. Magical realism can be regarded as a genre well-suited for the discussion of the multifaceted environmental problems. Ali Brox are of the view that magical realism offers a unique aptitude for creating symbols and stories that vividly represent the tangible aspects of slow violence, effectively bringing them into the visual forefront and thus this genre can express the subtle alterations resulting from climate change visible (145).

Bowers believes that magical realist texts originating from the once colonized world are mostly about the marginalized people. In accordance with Bowers' claim, it can be contended that magical realist texts centered upon ecocriticism mostly employ this narrative technique to vocalize

the contemporary issues of environmental injustice and slow violence particularly impacting the countryside. South-Asian writer, Amitav Ghosh, in the same vein, incorporates elements of magical realism to speak for the climate-stricken people and the slow but constant threat to natural reservoirs, flora and fauna. Ghosh's foregrounding of magical realism can be a unique way to uncover slow-violence and environmental injustice in his eco-conscious texts.

2.3. The Greening of Cosmopolitanism/ From Cosmopolitanism to Eco-Cosmopolitanism

The previous section briefly explained how magical realist texts, such as those by Amitav Ghosh, function as a narrative tool to address environmental issues. This sub-section diverts attention from the realm of eco-magical realism and the exploration of environmental injustice to the recent theory of eco-cosmopolitanism that provides a planetary vision of the stated issues. It offers an academic exploration of the emergence of eco-cosmopolitanism within the realm of ecocriticism, tracing its evolution from the traditional cosmopolitanism in response to contemporary global interconnectedness. It is significant to provide a background for eco-cosmopolitanism, a different approach to ecological thought where environmentalists create fresh perspectives traversing the limits of localities.

In the contemporary discourse of global interconnectedness, the concept of cosmopolitanism has emerged as a significant theme. Cosmopolitanism underscores the idea where individuals tend to transcend their local affiliations and strive to embrace a sense of global citizenship. The idea of cosmopolitanism finds it origin in the renowned proclamation by Greek philosopher Diogenes, who boldly declares himself as "citizen of the cosmos" and thus rejecting any "local, political affiliation" (Nelson 11). Sunil Samuel Macwan, however, provides a nuanced perspective on cosmopolitanism, distinguishing it as a variation of "utopianism, escapism, or

condescension" (15). He emphasizes that the twenty first century needs a kind of cosmopolitanism "that can address the paradox of a world defined by instant connectivity, opportunity and enterprise, and media and market technologies on the one hand, and millions of refugees, migrants and exiles driven out of their homes due to impoverishment and threat to life on the other hand" (20). In brief, it can be said that the interconnectedness of contemporary world and the distressing experiences of the marginalized underscores the inevitability of a cosmopolitanism that is both progressive and practical enough to address the complexities of the contemporary global milieu.

Globalization has converted the world into a global village where everything is connected to everything else as there is constant exchange of people and material between and among places. Anthony Giddens' "disembedding" is of significance in the study of modernization and globalization process. He states that as a result of globalization, "locals are thoroughly penetrated by and shaped in terms of social influences quite distant from them" (qtd. in Heise 128). Heise explains this notion in terms of 'systems of exchange' where their "material bases and institutions may not be visible in particular places and may be far removed geographically" (128). This research work extends this idea in terms of climate change and ecological disasters, the impacts of which are not limited to a particular geographical area but spread across time and spaces in the upshot of global connectedness.

In the face of contemporary environmental dilemmas which increasingly transcend national borders, cosmopolitanism gains new dimensions when coupled with ecological consciousness. It can be said that cosmopolitanism is incomplete without an ecological mindfulness. Alexa Weik in "The Home, the Tide, and the World: Eco-cosmopolitan Encounters in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*", argues that cosmopolitanism is meaningless without being eco as it fosters "a deeper sense of meaning and solidarity" (121-122). Thus, the fusion of

environmental awareness and cosmopolitanism not only highlight the significance of a planetary vision but also develops solidarity among diverse communities. As cosmopolitanism embraces diversity and promotes a sense of global citizenship, the incorporation of environmental concerns accentuates the paramount significance of a planetary environmental perspective.

The notion of "cosmic citizenship" suggests an inherent interconnectedness of humanity that forms the basis of eco-cosmopolitanism—a revised perspective within eco-criticism that challenges the traditional notion of local rootedness (Nelson 11). Eco-cosmopolitanism embodies a worldview that transcends geographical boundaries challenging the traditional anthropocentric paradigm. With the world turning into global village, environmental studies also needed an approach that encompassed world as whole. Nelson considers eco-cosmopolitanism as "higher consciousness" as here human interconnectedness is favored over any 'spatial, religious, political, racial, gendered, economical, or any other' categorization (19). Nelson highlights an important notion of the "interconnectedness of humanity" that provokes the idea that humans are "*eco-cosmoplites"* (emphasis original) which means that they need to transcend their relation across the natural world (Nelson 13). This is suggestive of redefining cosmopolitanism that calls for a collective consciousness rooted in the interconnectedness of human and environment, obliterating the confines of conventional boundaries.

Besides advocating for global citizenship, eco-cosmopolitanism simultaneously underscores the pivotal role of local environments in the global context. In "Imagining the Global and the Rural: Rural Cosmopolitanism in Sharon Butala's *The Garden of Eden* and Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*", Emily Johansen defines cosmopolite as a person who sees himself as "having ethical and moral responsibilities to the world and a specific local place—or even places" (3). Johansen's definition highlights the relationship between the global and the local in such a

way that individuals embrace a cosmopolitan worldview while remaining rooted in, and committed to, the particularities of their geographic and cultural contexts. Likewise, Heise in the "Local Rock and Global Plastic: World Ecology and the Experience of Place", contends that "the environmentalist imagination might mobilize the affective charge that is associated with the local in favor of an attachment to the global" (150). This harmonious coexistence between the global and the local is the hallmark of the recent eco-critical theory put forward by Heise. Considering the contemporary globalization, she raises the important question of how "literary texts negotiate the juncture between ecological globalism and localism" (126). Melissa Lane, in *The Birth of Politics*, in the same vein expounds that cosmopolitanism offers an optimistic image of "cosmic citizenship" where "local forms of citizenship are subsumed but not abolished" (qtd. in Nelson 11). Though cosmopolitanism promotes a broader global perspective, it doesn't seek to eradicate the importance of local or regional identities. Instead, it suggests that local affiliations can coexist alongside a broader sense of global citizenship, enriching the overall understanding of belonging in an interconnected world. In this way, environmental cosmopolitanism seeks to explore the complex relationships individuals mediate between their global and local identities.

Shazia Rehamn in her article "Karachi, Turtles and the Materiality of Place: Pakistani Eco-cosmopolitanism in Uzma Aslam Khan's *Trespassing*", questions that scholars of cosmopolitanism frequently consider cosmopolitans as "rootless" (Rehman 264). However, eco-cosmopolitanism redefines the former thought as it promotes interconnectedness in such a way that the cosmopolitan remains committed to local concerns along with the global ones. Rehman rightly says that "the whole point of eco-cosmopolitanism is not to restrict it to one place" (277). This viewpoint challenges the notion of isolating environmental issues within the boundaries of a single locale and urges to perceive the environmental issues collaboratively. Rahman argues that

"Khan posits an eco-cosmopolitanism that is rooted in the local in such a way that it implicates the planet globally. The local rootedness is not nationalism but a materiality of place, and the global thinking not necessarily imperialist cosmopolitanism but rather a kind of planetary" (Rahman 262). While analyzing Khan's eco-conscious works, Rahman distinguishes eco-cosmopolitanism from both nationalism and imperialism as the former over emphasizes ideological boundaries and the latter presents a more homogenized perspective. For her, eco-cosmopolitanism is neither an extension nor an opposition of nationalism (Rahman 262). Rather, it is a global consciousness that respects the materiality and uniqueness of each place, while also advocating for a planetary perspective that recognizes shared responsibility for the well-being of the entire planet.

Johansen uses the term "*territorialized cosmopolitanism*" which is demarcated as "cosmopolitanism located in specific, though often multiple, places" (2). This perspective on cosmopolitanism departs from traditional notions that often present it as a detached and universal ideology. In alignment with Rahman's viewpoint, Johansen likewise underscores the importance of grounding cosmopolitan ideals within concrete geographical contexts. By emphasizing the significance of specific locales, Johansen's "territorialized cosmopolitanism" recognizes the complex interplay between global and local dynamics. In essence, it acknowledges that cosmopolitanism is not divorced from the physical and cultural environments in which it is practiced, but rather it thrives within and adapts to the diverse landscapes of the interconnected world. This concept challenges scholars and thinkers to explore the multifaceted manifestations of cosmopolitanism within the rich tapestry of global society, thus contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of contemporary cultural, social, and political dynamics.

Johansen identifies two forms of cosmopolitanism as superficial cosmopolitanism and territorialized cosmopolitanism where the former is understood as "a sophistication characterized,

even defined, by eating at ethnic restaurants and travelling to exotic destinations" while the latter is demarcated as "cosmo-multiculturalism" (Johansen 2). Cosmo-multiculturalism is a term introduced by Ghassan Hage as embodied by a cosmopolite who is "an essentially 'mega-urban' figure: one detached from strong affiliation with roots and consequently open to all forms of otherness" (qtd. in Johansen 2). For Johenson, however, a favourable cosmopolitanism is a worldview "that is affiliated simultaneously with the local and the global—and with the places in between" (3).

Along with rapid mechanization, migration, globalization, and technological advancements, recent postcolonial theories have also emphasized the fluidity, interaction, and interconnectedness of identities across geographical and cultural borders. In "Edging Towards an Eco-Cosmopolitan Vision", Chris Pak contends that "Theories of hybridity, creolization, *mestizaja*, migration, borderland, diaspora, nomadism, exile and deterritorialization provided counter models to essentialist, nation-based concepts of identity..." (Pak 137). These theoretical frameworks offer counterpoints to traditional, fixed understandings of identity, thereby aligning with the larger discourse of cosmopolitanism and paving the way for an expanded, eco-conscious perspective on human interconnectedness.

In summary, the evolution from cosmopolitanism to eco-cosmopolitanism represents a shift towards a more inclusive approach to environmental discourse. It recognizes the complexities of contemporary global challenges and seeks to bridge the gap between local and global concerns, emphasizing the interconnectedness of individuals and communities within the natural world. This comprehensive perspective calls for a new form of cosmopolitanism, one that remains firmly grounded in the local while embracing global responsibilities and ecological consciousness.

2.4. Intersecting Eco-Magical Realism and Eco-Cosmopolitanism:

In light of the critical examination of Amitav Ghosh's works in the preceding paragraph, it becomes evident that the concept of eco-magical realism, as defined by Charlotte Rogers, holds significant relevance. Ghosh's literary endeavors in *The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island* employ the distinctive magical realist technique to address pressing contemporary ecological issues, rendering ecological phenomena as events that are both incredible and concrete. This approach not only aligns with Rogers' interpretation of eco-magical realism but also underscores the interconnectedness of the globalized world within Ghosh's narratives. Furthermore, the discussion of eco-cosmopolitanism in Ghosh's works mirrors the cosmopolitical approach suggested by Rogers, as Ghosh's environmentally conscious magical realist texts delve into the long-term consequences of climate change and slow violence. Thus, through the exploration of eco-magical realism in Ghosh's literature, this thesis contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of both Ghosh's environmental narratives and the broader implications of eco-cosmopolitanism within contemporary literature.

Firstly, it is essential to define the key terms fundamental for this research—"eco-magical realism" and "eco cosmopolitanism". Charlotte Roger's 'eco-magical realism' implements that some magical realist writers use the distinctive magical realist technique to discern upon the most urgent environmental issues of the contemporary globalized world. In Rogers' definition, the term means "narrating ecological phenomena as events that are literally incredible, seemingly impossible to believe, but they are nevertheless depicted as concrete occurrences" (Rogers 1580). This study contends that such combination of factual and imaginary circumstances not only highlight recent environmental debates but promote the vision of an interconnected world. The main texts selected for this research are not only environmentally conscious magical realist texts

but also present a cosmopolitical approach towards the long-term effects of climate change and slow violence.

While discussing about the origination and limitation of magical realism, Bowers posits that magical realist writings cannot be "kept" to a specific geographical location as she characterizes this form as "expansive" which implies that it resists confinement to rural settings. As Holgate integrates ecocriticism and magical realism, Bowers' argument can then be reconsidered like this that certain magical realist texts unfold within regions characterized by dynamic influences from diverse geographical areas, displaying a fluidity that primarily manifests in their environmental settings as places are not fixed but keep changing mostly in terms of its environmental settings. Consequently, it can be posited that the instances of magical realism in Ghosh's works, while originating in South Asia, do not remain constrained by specific locations. This is because the presence of legendary stories, folklore, myths, dreams, and hallucinations propels the characters across the globe. Consequently, it can be asserted that through regionally anchored magical realism, a cosmopolitan narrative perspective emerges, transcending geographical boundaries.

This literature review contends that South-Asian magical realist texts juxtapose magic, 'fantastic' or 'unreal' with the "historically connected" material realities which in turn creates fluidity and a third space and in so doing the texts "admit a plurality of worlds" but at the same time situate a "liminal territory" (Durix 79, 80 and Bowers 40). It is for this reason that this narrative mode tends to explore as well as transgress boundaries whether these are "logical, political, geographical or generic" (Zamora and Faris qtd. in Bowers 3) This narrative mode, as discussed by Durix and Bowers, not only acknowledges the existence of a multitude of worlds but also creates an in-between space. Within this context, it can be theorized that magical realism is

characterized by its inclination to explore and transgress various boundaries, as articulated by Zamora and Faris. Cooper, likewise, claims that magical realist narratives typically "oppose[s] fundamentalism and purity; it is at odds with racism, ethnicity and the quest for tap roots, origins and homogeneity" (Brenda Cooper qtd. in Bowers 4). Eco-magical realist texts can, thus, be considered as employing a cosmopolitan perspective, emphasizing the interconnectedness between geographical settings as exemplified in the selected texts of Amitav Ghosh who foregrounds magical realist technique as a means to resist homogeneity.

Ben Holgate integrates ecocriticism and magical realism by stating that through the employment of "cultural and spiritual aspects", magical realist texts seek for "connections" (Holgate 28-30). The exploration of shared "environmental concerns" that Heise calls as a planetary or global vision is one among other significant "thematic similarities" that eco-magical realist texts share (Holgate 20, Heise 210). Eco-magical realist writers employ localized fantasies, magic, myths and other spiritual beliefs to present "dual vision of the Earth"; a vision of "different earths that are shaped by varying cultural context" and a global vision of which the former is a constituent (Heise 210). This twofold image of the planet Earth leads to develop an alternate environmental vision which is neither locally grounded nor against it. Heise calls this approach as "eco-cosmopolitan environmentalism" which "implicitly or explicitly, highlight the imbrication of local places, ecologies, and cultural practices in global networks" (210). The integration of ecocriticism and magical realism, as exemplified by Ben Holgate's emphasis on cultural and spiritual aspects seeking connections, underscores the thematic similarities shared by eco-cosmopolitanism. These narratives explore global environmental concerns while simultaneously celebrating the diversity of Earth's cultural contexts. This dual vision of the Earth ultimately gives rise to an alternative environmental perspective, characterized by an inclusive and interconnected

"eco-cosmopolitan environmentalism" that recognizes the intricate relationships between local places, ecosystems, and global networks.

Ben Holgate, in his *Climate and Crises: Magical Realism as Environmental Discourse*, argues that the presence of environmental themes in magical realist fiction are usually focused on the "cultural and spiritual aspects" of a society and generally there exists co-dependance between people and their local environment (Holgate 28). I argue that due to the emergence of global connectivity, contemporary magical realist texts might develop new forms of interaction that transcend specific cultural context as the selected texts of Amitav Ghosh can be rethought in terms of global connectivity rather than local rootedness. These texts suggest that the local environmental settings are permeable as there are continuous movements of people and constant deformation and reformation of the landscapes. Ursula K. Heise calls such "dynamic and interactive collage and montage" as "global" because they encompass the planet as a whole (10-11).

Ursula K. Heise considers the importance of "formal choices" on part of the writers in "the imagination and representation of the global" (65). My study takes the use of magical realism as a conscious attempt by Amitav Ghosh in his representation of the environmental despairs and injustices striking Sundarbans. Such environmentally oriented cosmopolitanism, according to Heise, is mostly shaped by "culturally specific assumptions" (65). Ghosh's magical realism serves as significant catalysts for the ecocritical discussions in the selected fiction. Since this narrative technique provides an exceptional way to see the real world, Ghosh draws on traditional mythology to articulate environmental problems and suggests interconnection of the material world (Bowers 87).

2.5. Global Ecological Issues and Local Myths:

This dissertation explores Ghosh's selection of traditional South-Asian myth as a focal point in bridging the gap between local narratives and global ecological crises. The study discusses how this integration of local myth and folk traditions into narratives about climate change, environmental injustice and 'slow violence' can probably act as a conduit for readers to perceive the far-reaching implications of the aforementioned issues. By merging the theoretical insights of eco-magical realism and eco-cosmopolitanism, this study aims to explore how presenting ecological challenges through the lens of cultural heritage, magical realist writers underscore the universal relevance of environmental concerns and promotes a collective responsibility for their resolution. The dissolution of geopolitical boundaries both within and between nations is prominently evident within the primary texts chosen for this research investigation.

Ben Holgate calls Amitav Ghosh as "*sui generis*" magical realist as he recuperates "localized knowledge" breathing life into the stories that have often been overshadowed by history's grand narratives (134). Holgate suggests that Ghosh's literary creations align with the genre of "historiographic metafiction," a classification that encompasses most magical realist texts. In Durix's words, magical realist texts introduce an intriguing "imaginary" dimension into the "realistic" portrayal of the world (79). This thesis claims that through this interplay between the real and supernatural, Amitav Ghosh not only revitalizes the long forgotten legendary stories but also gives voice to the "histories of the marginalized, the forgotten, the unrecorded" (A. S. Byatt qtd. in Holgate 136). This research seeks to unravel how Amitav Ghosh, through the fusion of the real and the imaginary voices the far-reaching impacts of slow-violence, the contemporary climate change and environmental injustice as recent global issues.

The 21st century environmental problems demands a fresh perspective in the wake of this unprecedented surge in global connectedness as they can no longer be examined in isolation. Philip Coventry and Chukwumerije Okereke emphasize that there exist significant differences in the vulnerability and contribution to climate change among nations (363). Shonkoff's notion of the "climate gap" brings attention to the unequal vulnerability of different racial and socioeconomic groups (366). Likewise, the concept of “ecologically unequal exchange,” (Roberts and Parks qtd. in Coventry and Okerere 366) underscores the disparities in the distribution of environmental burdens and benefits. Roberts and Parks emphasize that such ecological imbalances between developed and developing countries are rooted in ‘colonial history’ and the ‘asymmetrical geopolitical power’ dynamics (qtd. in Coventry and Okereke 364). To address these injustices, Coventry and Okereke argue that a fundamental reconsideration of the “hegemonic global economic system” is necessary (364). They posit that Climate justice, likewise, demands a comprehensive examination of the interconnected global climate issues.

As climate change rose to prominence on the global level, the parallels between the injustices embedded in the environmental and climate spheres became more apparent (365). Coventry and Okereke draw attention to how these injustices mirrored those from preceding decades. The environmental justice movement, which had already expanded to address local and national issues, was poised to adapt and confront the complex implications of climate change as scientific knowledge became more robust and widespread. In their quest for justice, individuals, communities, and groups worldwide have rallied around the causes of environmental justice and climate justice. Coventry and Okereke note that the pursuit of these ideals transcends regional boundaries in today’s globalized world (365). Routledge emphasizes the formation of “solidarities when place-based struggles connect through shared injustices and aligned objectives” (Coventry

and Okrere 366). This interconnected approach enhances the effectiveness of the justice movements in addressing the challenges of the contemporary interconnected world. Incorporating these perspectives on literature, climate justice, and environmental disparities provides a holistic understanding of the complex and interconnected challenges facing our world today. Amitav Ghosh's magical realist novels summon the explore and confront the pressing issues of climate and environmental justice striking not only the Sundarbans but throughout the world.

2.6. Existing Eco-critical Research on Selected Novels

A number of researchers have evaluated Ghosh's novels, highlighting the environmental insights he masterfully incorporates in his work. M. Sreelatha, in her work titled as "Ecological Consciousness in the Novels of Amitav Ghosh," finds that Ghosh works inform about the constant threat to the natural world that is vanishing rapidly under the guise of its preservation and thus suggestive of the urgency of maintaining ecological balance (88). Nicola Pilia analyzes the ecological concerns highlighted in Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*, by focusing particularly on how refugees and other marginalized individuals are more vulnerable to the harsh impacts of climate change and other environmental hazards (118). Pilia views the ecological changes of the countryside, Morichjhapi through the neocolonial lens considering its 1979 massacre as the consequence of 'Project Tiger' (118). On the whole, critics explore Ghosh's novels from historical and environmental perspectives greatly enriching his literary contributions.

Some scholar have approached Ghosh by providing cosmopolitical insights as they try to explore the concept of "border crossing" (Pradeep and Reddy 204) enclosed in his works. In "Literary Cosmopolitanisms of Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, and Arundhati Roy", Sunil Samuel Macwan argues that Ghosh promotes his own version of cosmopolitanism drawing inspiration "from the family and family-like bonds to establish cosmopolitan communities, capable

of transcending not only social but also religious and cultural differences" (Macwan 157). He states that "Ghosh's cosmopolitanism combines not only 'home' and 'world' but also 'family' and 'community' as well as 'land' and 'sea' in a unique vision of South-Asian littoral cosmopolitanism" (Macwan 165). He asserts that through a cosmopolitical insight, Ghosh "empowers migrants to resist the oppression unleashed on them by both the unjust social structures and the imperial system, especially British colonialism in India" (166). Pradeep and Reddy, in the same vein, emphasize his advocacy for "a human centered world which is devoid of caste, creed, race, sex and religion" (199). They explain how Piya and Kanai, the main characters, although come from distinct places but feel "homogenously at home in a place as remote and rural as the tide country" (205). In a nutshell, Ghosh tends to break down constructed divisions between nations and people and endorses a sense of interconnectedness and humanity.

A number of critics have argued that the deliberate use of language and time setting play a pivotal role in outlining Ghosh's cosmopolitical outlook. Some critics view Ghosh's portrayal of linguistic plurality as a form of cosmopolitanism since he set his novels in a particular locale where "linguistic and cultural differences are not only tolerated but celebrated" while other see the expanded and circular orientation of time as a conscious attempt by the writer as a tactic to seek cosmopolitanism (Macwan 206 and Pradeep and Reddy 200). *The Hungry Tide*, for instance, transcends temporal boundaries as the novel is not restricted to the present time events but also collects from books, journals, fairytales, etc. (Pradeep and Reddy 200). Another critic, Shaloo Manocha has provided a rather similar vision to Ghosh's cosmopolitanism but he substantiates him to be a post-modernist writer. He claims that the writer preoccupation inclines more towards "globalization rather than nationalism" since borders interrupt human communication causing wars among nations and so "post-modernists speak in favour of globalization" (Manocha 104).

The dominance of globalization as a recurring theme in Ghosh's literary works is suggestive of his being a post-modernist as he appears inclined toward transcending nationalistic constraints.

However, despite the wealth of scholarship on Amitav Ghosh's environmental concerns and cosmopolitan themes, there remains a significant research gap that requires exploration. This gap lies in the intersection of eco-magical realism and eco-cosmopolitanism within his novels. While existing research has delved into his cosmopolitan ideals, minimal attention, however, is paid to the fascinating realm of eco-magical realism in Ghosh's work. Therefore, a significant research gap can be the author's employment of magical realism as a narrative device to address pressing contemporary ecological issues. In response to this gap, this thesis embarks on an in-depth analysis of Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island*. Through this dissertation, I seek to unveil a cosmopolitical worldview within these novels, an area largely unexplored in previous research. By doing so, this dissertation aims to redirect scholarly focus towards the interplay of eco-magical realism and eco-cosmopolitanism in the selected texts, thus contributing to a richer understanding of his environmental narratives and their broader implications.

CHAPTER 3

ECO-MAGICAL REALISM IN GHOSH'S SELECTED FICTION

3.1. South-Asian Folk as Integral to Ghosh's Magical Realism

This chapter carries out textual analysis to examine how Amitav Ghosh experiments the genre of magical realism in *The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island*. The first and foremost instance of the employment of the stated genre is the incorporation of ancient South-Asian folk and myths in both the novels which, in alignment with Fredrick Jameson's assertion, is currently central to the genre (302). *The Hungry Tide* primarily focuses on the myth of Bon Bibi and Dukhein Rai while *Gun Island* foregrounds the myth of the Gun Merchant as a central narrative motif. The deliberate foregrounding of "myths, legends" whether oral or written, according to Zamora and Faris, has a profound impact on the literary structure and thematic underpinning of magical realist texts (qtd. in Bowers 85). This section seeks to unravel how Ghosh contributes to the broader discourse of magical realism through his unique storytelling technique—the incorporation of ancient cultural myths and folklore that enriches the textual fabric of his novels.

The inclusion of *The Hungry Tide* within the framework of magical realism has sparked considerable debate among critics. Ben Holgate, for instance, clearly claims that the novel merely contains any element of magical realism and adheres to the "conventional realist style" (140) but on the token of the same critic, I posit that the said novel can be suitably regarded as magical realist. I ground my assertion in the argument endorsed by Holgate himself that say that the inclusion of local myth—mythopoeia—is the primary characteristic of magical realism (20). To refute the claim that the said novel is primarily realist, I build on Bowers who claims that magical realist literature integrates the extraordinary in such a way that the genre is often misapprehended

as literary realism (3). Holgate himself appears to negate his claim as he argues that magical realism is not something that is opposed to realism, instead it "emanates out of realism" (15). This further challenges the notion to rigidly label the novel under consideration as a purely realist work. Bowers' contention that anything that is "unaccountable by rational science" is essentially magical and as the novel intertwines mystical and otherworldly elements, that science and rationality defies, into the narrative which eventually leads to the deduction that *The Hungry Tide* qualifies to be magical realist (19).

Cultural myths and legends being important aspects of magical realist texts are central to Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* as it incorporates the mythical stories of Bon Bibi and Dukhein Rai along with the legendary story of goddess Ganga. Ghosh seamlessly weaves myths and legends into the fabric of everyday reality as in *The Hungry Tide* he states that "In our legends it is said that the goddess Ganga's descent from the heavens would have split the earth had Lord Shiva not tamed her torrent by tying it into his ash-smeared locks" (6). The myth of the goddess Ganga and Lord Shiva's intervention is dictated as an established part of the narrative's world which blurs the boundaries between the mystical and the ordinary. Holgate explains Ghosh as a *sui generis* magical realist because of his typical style of blending the literary genres of fiction and non-fiction in the same texts (134). *The Hungry Tide*, for instance, exemplifies the supernatural descent of the goddess' from the heavens and a deity's intervention in a matter-of-fact occurrence. It can be asserted, here, that Ghosh has a "tendency to flirt" with the genre (Holgate 134) as he revises the conventions of magical realism to suit his own temperament. In doing so, he integrates the extraordinary and superstitious into the everyday without any sort of disbelief or skepticism. The novel takes an ordinary natural occurrence and imbues it with a sense of the supernatural, suggesting that the river's behavior is influenced by these mythical forces. The phenomena is

described as, “there is a point at which the braid comes undone; where Lord Shiva’s matted hair is washed apart into a vast, knotted tangle. Once past that point the river throws off its bindings and separates into hundreds, maybe thousands, of tangled strands” (Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide* 6). It reflects the magical realist approach to interpreting natural phenomena through cultural myths and legends. In this passage, the act of the river separating into many strands is described in a way that mirrors a mythological story about the goddess Ganga’s descent and Lord Shiva’s intervention. This blending of the mythological and the natural is a hallmark of magical realism, where cultural narratives and folklore are integrated into the narrative to create a sense of wonder and a deeper connection between humans and the environment. While reflecting upon Ghosh’s other novel, *The Calcutta Chromosome*, Holgate claims that the author “delves into the in-between spaces of magical realism, those gaps that lie between the magical and the real, to depict a third plane of reality that in itself reveals fundamental truths about the external world” (Holgate 137). This passage underscores the novel’s exploration of ecological themes and the mystical dimensions of the natural world, offering a unique perspective on the interconnectedness of culture, mythology, and the environment.

Ghosh’s magical realism can be rightly classified as “.magic realism” (Bowers 87) as he introduces Bon Bibi as “the goddess of the forest” and in Sundarbans “people believe she rules over all the animals of the jungle” (*The Hungry Tide* 28). As mentioned before that the incorporation of cultural myths and legends into the narrative is a unique way that Ghosh practice in his texts. The portrayal of Bon Bibi as a divine and otherworldly figure who governs the natural world, imbues it with a sense of the supernatural. It underscores how cultural myths and folklore become an essential aspect of the characters’ lives which in turn reinforce the idea that the mystical and the real coexist harmoniously in the narrative.

The narrative treats cultural myths and legends as an integral part of the characters' reality. At one place, when Kanai acts surprisingly to the mention of Bon Bibi, Kusum shocks and asks that "You mean you don't know the story of Bon Bibi?" as everyone in the tide country seeks her blessings, particularly when distressed (Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide* 101). This is the reason why Kusum wonders that "whom do you call on when you're afraid?" then (101). People in the tide country seeks her blessings when they are afraid reinforces the idea that the mythological and the supernatural are seamlessly integrated into the characters' everyday lives influencing and guiding them. Bowers distinguishes this sort of magical realism as 'narrative magical realism' which she explains as taking place in a "recognizably realistic setting" where both the real and unreal things are considered as "a part of material reality, whether seen or unseen" (Bowers 29). Ghosh, in the same vein, presents the myth of Bon Bibi not as a distant deity but as a figure with a tangible presence in the lives of the people in the story.

The Hungry Tide presents the pervasive influence of Bon Bibi, who is depicted as a powerful and revered deity who rules over the jungle and animals obey her commands is a manifestation of the magical realist approach to mythology, where the supernatural is seamlessly integrated into the characters' everyday lives. Nirmal explains that people in the tide country believe that "Bon Bibi rules over the jungle, that the tigers, crocodiles and animals do her bidding" and for this reason, they have built her statues in devotion to the deity since they believe "the imaginary miracles of gods and saints" (Ghosh, 102). This presence of shrines with statues of Bon Bibi emphasizes the role of myth and folklore in shaping the characters' beliefs and actions.

The Hungry Tide narrates the tale of a young boy named Dukhey who finds himself abandoned by Dhona, with the implicit intention of offering him as a sacrificial offering to Dokkhin Rai in the hope of securing material wealth. Upon becoming aware of his dilemma, he

recalls the counsel imparted by his mother prior to embarking on their journey. That is "he was to call on Bon Bibi; she was the savior of the weak and a mother of mercy to the poor; she was sure to come to his aid" (Ghosh 104). From a magical realist perspective, the mention of Bon Bibi as the savior of the weak and a mother of mercy carries a sense of the supernatural and mystical. Holgate claims that magical realism "has an important role to play in emerging discourse on human rights in fiction, in that the narrative mode often involves an appeal to intrinsic human rights..." (103). *The Hungry Tide* portrays Bon Bibi as a divine and otherworldly figure who has the power to intervene in the lives of the characters. Here, she becomes a source of hope and reliance for the poor boy Dukhey.

The Hungry Tide suggests a connection between their safety and the supernatural protection of Bon Bibi, a deity revered by the people of the tide country. At one place, Kusum reveals that "*Maybe Bon Bibi was keeping watch over me, for one night I heard tell of a great march to the east*" (Ghosh 165). Here, Bon Bibi is depicted as watching over Kusum when things get tough for her that suggests a connection between the supernatural and the characters' experiences. The deity is not merely a mythical presence in the novel but is interwoven in a way which carries a sense of spiritual guidance and protection in the everyday lives of the characters. Such phenomena is called as "emotional symbolism" by Kevin Gilbert (Holgate 51). Here, the writers of magical realism participate in the genre through the incorporation of "traditional oral storytelling" (51). I claim that although *The Hungry Tide* cannot be purely regarded as magical realist, it does participate in magical realism through 'emotional symbolism' as the traditional mythical story of Bon Bibi deeply foregrounds the narrative. Also, the characters deep-rooted reliance on myths and legends allow for the coexistence of the extraordinary and the everyday in a way that reflects the profound connections between culture and spirituality.

The concept of the "tide country" exclusive to *The Hungry Tide*, can be taken as an important aspect of magical realism prevailing in the novel. The setting of the novel Sundarbans, with its shifting tides, unpredictable waters, and hidden dangers, becomes a symbolic and mystical landscape. The Sundarbans' name is derived from "the ebb-tide, the *bhati*" and these tides are explained as "When the tides create new land, overnight mangroves begin to gestate, and if the conditions are right they can spread so fast as to cover a new island within a few short years" (Ghosh 7, 8). Such "transformative" and "magical" effects of natural phenomena are termed as eco-magical realist by Rogers in her scholarly exploration of Marquez's *The Autumn of the Patriarch*. In alignment with Rogers, I posit this transformative power of the tide as a magical quality that influence the events in the narrative.

Another instance that explains the non-questionability is a mysterious disruption resembling an animal's roar that was overheard by the villagers. When Kanai makes an estimate about the origin of the sound, Moyna promptly cuts him short by saying that "It's not to be spoken aloud" (Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide*, 155). The sound carries a sense of mystery and wonder, suggesting that it may have a supernatural or magical origin. The villagers' reaction to it, and Moyna's reluctance to discuss it openly, hint at a world where the boundaries between the natural and the supernatural are fluid and where the extraordinary is an integral part of everyday life.

While reflecting upon Ghosh's magical realism, Holgate points towards the excessive use of intertextuality in his novel *The Calcutta Chromosome* which in turn "underpins the novels' supernatural elements" (138). Ghosh continues this narrative strategy in *The Hungry Tide* as well where he adds magical ambiance through the deliberate inclusion of Nirmal's diary as a significant intertext. "Intertextuality" being an important feature of magical realist texts, allows Ghosh to epitomize the mythical dimension in the novel (Holgate 20). The diary not only revive the mythical

story of Bon Bibi but also highlight the miserable situation of Morichjhapi and climate refugees that will be discussed in the next section of this chapter. Another unavoidable inter-text is the Bengali script that Kanai reads on his way to Morichjhapi which narrates the descent of goddess Ganga and Lord Shiva to the rescue of sweltering earth (Ghosh 6).

Ghosh's strategic organization of *Gun Island* is characterized by the pursuit of unraveling the mystery of the Gun Merchant. In the very beginning, the story of Gun Merchant is introduced as "the legend of Banduki Sadagar is one of those, a local tale" (8). This deliberate inclusion of local myths and legends aligns with the central essentials of magical realism as expounded by Ben Holgate who, as mentioned earlier, considers the insertion of mythopoeia as crucial to such texts (20). Scholars emphasize that magical realist literature typically draw upon mythopoeia, indigenous beliefs, local legends, fantasy, and folktales (Holgate 20; Bowers 4; Hart and Ouyang 6; Zamora and Farris qtd. in Bowers 85; Jameson 302; Ato Quayson qtd. in Holgate 22). The presence of such elements in the novel positions it as a work of magical realism the effect of which is profoundly epitomized in the novel in form of shrines constructed in Sundarbans in devotion to the Gun Merchant which highlight the mystic aspect embedded within the narrative.

Namrata Bansal and Asghar Ali Ansari in "*Gun Island*: Fusion of Realism and Surrealism" claim that the novel is an amalgamation of real and surreal as it presents the actual disturbing conditions of the present day environment but also articulate the mysterious happenings taking place in Sundarbans (4223). Diwakar Singh differentiates between surrealism and magical realism on the ground that the former builds on 'automatism', 'fantasy' and 'mesmerism' when presenting reality while the latter merges the real and fantastic (3). Surrealist texts, likewise, balance conscious and unconscious—reality and dreams while magical texts evoke belief in the extraordinary (Singh 5). In accordance with these distinctive definitions, I argue that *Gun Island*

is more magical realist than it is surreal as it merges real and the unreal and the happenstances presented there are not something related to transition between the conscious and unconscious but the characters are depicted as believing in those mysterious incidents. Also, the 'mysterious happenings' which Bansal and Ansari take as surreal are claimed to be the magic part of the magical realist texts by Bowers (Bansal and Ansari 4223; Bowers 4).

Within magical realism, fantastical or supernatural elements are woven into the fabric of a realistic narrative in such a way that they are treated with nonchalance and matter-of-fact acceptance. *Gun Island* mentions the mythical story of "the Blessed Virgin" who is said to have rescued a whole city from a deadly plague that had detained the whole world (Ghosh 242). Here, "the Blessed Virgin" is presented not as a mere legend but as an established, unremarkable part of the novel's reality. People of Venice seem to have internalized the myth that the figure has actually saved their community from the deadly plague which means that they are "accepting the supernatural" as part of their material reality (Chanady 21). Another important mythical story is that of the "Venetian legend" who is described as some fictional figure who is said to have appeared in a busy city against excessive fishing (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 246). As in magical realism, the supernatural or mythical seamlessly intertwines with the everyday, here the mention of the "Venetian legend" as a pivotal mythical story blurs of boundaries between the real and unreal. It is presented with a matter-of-fact demeanor, mirroring the folklore and legends that are woven into the fabric of reality. Furthermore, the description of the "Venetian legend" as a fictional figure who intervenes in a bustling city to address the issue of excessive fishing emphasizes the magical realist focus on interconnectedness, highlighting the idea that even in the most bustling urban environments, supernatural and ecological forces can manifest to confront critical issues. Through

the portrayal of such figures, Ghosh contributes to the genre of magical realism as he treats the supernatural as an integral aspect of his narrative's reality.

In magical realist texts, the mystical and the mundane are blended in such a way that the extraordinary is treated as a natural part of the narrative. At one instance, for example, when Cinta's uncle Ruggiero tries to catch huge amount of fish with that new lantern, it disappears in a way as "if some large and powerful creature had caught hold of it and carried it away" (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 248). It suggests the possibility of a mystical or otherworldly intervention, as if a supernatural force is at play. The reference is presented matter-of-factly within the narrative, blurring the line between the ordinary and the extraordinary. Bowers calls magical realist texts as "mixture of real and hallucination" (29). This approach is characteristic of magical realism, where fantastical elements are seamlessly integrated into the everyday world without fanfare or disbelief. That powerful creature—*il /mostro* (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 246) seems to have been internalized as some marvelous being who appears on the bank of Punta della Dogana and is believed to rescue sea animals. The mention of a large and powerful creature seemingly snatching something away challenges conventional expectations and inviting readers to accept such occurrences as an integral part of the story's reality.

Another instance of magical realism is the appearance of unfamiliar images to Datta. At one point, he explains that "the image that appeared before me was that of an open palm sheltered by a cobra's hood" (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 253). It is a vivid and evocative description that encapsulates elements of both magical realism and symbolism within the narrative. This imagery is layered with meaning. The "open palm" can be seen as a symbol of vulnerability or receptivity, suggesting the protagonist's state of mind (253). The "cobra's hood" is a potent symbol of danger and protection, often associated with mystical and mythical connotations in various cultures (253).

In this context, the image reflects a merging of the protagonist's emotional vulnerability with the powerful and potentially dangerous aspects of the world around him. It hints at the mystical and unpredictable forces at play in the story. The choice to present this image as a matter-of-fact occurrence aligns with the conventions of magical realism, where the extraordinary and the supernatural are seamlessly integrated into the narrative, inviting readers to explore deeper layers of meaning. This quote is a striking example of how magical realism can enrich a narrative by infusing everyday experiences with profound symbolism and a sense of wonder.

Tipu's seizers can also be a compelling exploration of his sensory and perceptual experiences, and it reflects a core element of magical realism within the story. During his seizers, "He would hear voices, or sense a presence, or see a place – even places that he had never been to" (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 257). It suggests a blurring of the boundaries between the internal and external realms, where he not only hears voices but also senses presences and envisions unfamiliar places. This goes beyond the ordinary human sensory experience and hints at a connection with the supernatural or mystical. The matter-of-fact presentation of these experiences is a characteristic of magical realism, where the extraordinary is integrated into the everyday without being treated as inherently unusual. This passage contemplates the profound interplay between human perception, the environment, and the hidden dimensions of reality, reinforcing the sense of wonder and mystery that permeates the novel. It underscores the genre's exploration of the coexistence of the real and the magical, where the boundaries between the two are fluid and intertwined. Similarly, when people from the Venice were on the way to rescue the 'Blue Boat' and at once instance, they lost the track and suddenly an "unearthly apparition" arrives to show them a way towards Marghera which Rafi thinks is "him—Banduki Sadagar" (273-274). Some consider him to be a migrant but Cinta proclaims him to be the Gun Merchant who is "looking after" them as

they are going to rescue those trapped refugees (274). Cinta's statement emphasized the character's reliance on mystical or otherworldly forces for guidance and protection. This passage encapsulates the essence of magical realism, as it introduces the supernatural into the realm of the everyday with a matter-of-fact tone. The notion of an apparition beyond the earthly realm adds a layer of intrigue and mystery to the story questioning the boundaries between the real and the mystical.

Moreover, Tipu's sudden obsession with Venice, depicted as an aftermath of being bitten by a snake in Sundarban, can be seen as a manifestation of magical realism. This reaction to the snakebite is not presented as a straightforward cause-and-effect relationship but rather as a mysterious and almost mystical transformation in Tipu's character. His intense fascination with Venice seems unrelated to the snakebite and therefore "unaccountable by rational science" (Bowers 19). It blurs the lines between the natural world and the realm of the unknown, creating a sense of wonder and intrigue. In the same vein, Datta encounters an unusual spider that he explains as "just like snakes" (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 215). There can be no "rational" (Bowers 28) or scientific explanation for this 'unusual' resemblance between snake and spider. Here, the spider takes on qualities that defy the laws of nature, as spiders are not typically associated with snake-like characteristics. This encounter blurs the boundaries between reality and the supernatural, introducing an element of mystery and symbolism. The spider's unusual attributes challenge conventional expectations and invite readers to question the limits of the natural world within the narrative.

Tipu's obsession to find the woman he saw in a dream, described as "a woman, an Ethiopian... a *forishta*, an angel" in Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island*, serves as a pivotal and multifaceted aspect of the narrative (263). It embodies the essence of magical realism, as it explores the profound interplay between dreams, reality, and the supernatural. The dream is

presented as a transformative and authentic experience, blending the boundaries between the conscious and the subconscious. Tipu's relentless pursuit of this enigmatic figure can be taken as an intricate interplay between dreams and reality.

3.2. Magical Realism and Ecological Issues (Eco-Magical Realism):

Eco-magical realism describes a literary approach that combines elements of ecological concerns and magical realism. It often involves blending the supernatural or fantastical with environmental themes to explore the interconnectedness of humans, nature, and the unseen world. Charlotte Rogers defines the term as "the author's mode of narrating ecological phenomena as events that are literally incredible, seemingly impossible to believe, but they are nevertheless depicted as concrete occurrences (1580)." I argue that Amitav Ghosh skillfully employs eco-magical realism as a powerful tool to reflect upon the present-day environmental demolition and the consequent climate change in *The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island*. This section explains how the author has skillfully foregrounded magical realism, myths in particular, to highlight environmental problems.

Ghosh foregrounds the myth of Bon Bibi in *The Hungry Tide* to showcase his adept use of eco-magical realism in depicting the relationship between humans and the natural world. There is an entire chapter dedicated to this powerful mystical figure who serves as a source of guidance, justice and relief for the inhabitants of Sundarbans. It ratifies how her presence molds the collective consciousness of the Sundarbans' inhabitants with regard to their surrounding environment. Ghosh, thus, transforms mere folklore to become a leading entity and an enlightening force woven within the fabric of the story.

The mythological tale of Bon Bibi is explained to be originated in Arabia who, along with her twin brother Shah Jongoli, was born to a pious Muslim, Ibrahim, through a miracle. Their extraordinary birth introduces magic and mysticism in the novel as an emphasis is given to their divine connection with the natural world. They are described to have been sent for a godly purpose to "the country of eighteen tides" with the assignment to make it "fit for human habitation" (Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide* 103). As they arrive at the preordained place, they had to confront Dokkhin Rai, a potent demon king who claimed dominance over every being in that realm (103). I interpret the battle against the demon who controls everything in the region as symbolic for the materialistic and destructive human intervention which has led the natural world lose its natural harmony. Following their magnificent victory against this damaging demon, Bon Bibi affirms her authority and claims half of the forest to transform it as a hospitable place for human settlement (*103*). The victory exemplifies the notion of balance and harmony between human and the natural environment through only which the preservation of nature can become possible. It can be observed that mythological narrative goes hand in hand with ecological themes to vocalize a possible harmonious coexistence between nature and humanity. The novel intertwines the myth, superstition and environment which epitomizes the genre of eco-magical realism where magical and ecological components converge to educate about the current environmental transformations and the likelihood of a harmonious cohabitation between humanity and the natural world.

The inhabitants of Sundarbans are depicted to have strong affiliation with Bon Bibi who is introduced in the novel as "The goddess of the forest" (Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide 28*). The characters rely on this deity for protection and blessings and is believed to regulate all the affairs taking place in this forest and rule over all the animals (*28*). In another place the deity is described as, "Bon Bibi rules over the jungle, that the tigers, crocodiles and other animals do her bidding"

(*102*). Such manifestation of placing a supernatural being, who has agency over the living beings and is a caretaker of the forest, highlights the eco-magical aspect of Ghosh's narration. The presence of little shrines dedicated to Bon Bibi outside the villagers' houses emphasizes their belief in myths and superstition which is part of their everyday lives (102). The myth is intricately weaved in the characters' lives as explicit from the conversation between Kusum and Kanai when she expresses astonishment that other people do not know about the deity, she questions that "Then whom do you call when you're afraid?" (101). In this way, Ghosh crafts a connection between his characters and the cultural beliefs.

I claim that through the portrayal of Bon Bibi as a protective sovereign of the forest, the author demands justice for the poor and the most vulnerable to environmental challenges—the inhabitants of the tide country. As the novel is set in an ecologically fragile region which is frequently affected by huge unforeseen flooding and often by tiger attacks, Bon Bibi emerges as an emblem of hope and justice for those depending on the natural environment for shelter and sustenance. When Dhona offers an unfortunate child, Dukhey, to demon as ransom in exchange for financial gain, he recalls Bon Bibi whom his mother had assured him would "come to his aid" as she is "the savior of the weak and a mother of mercy" (Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide 104*). According to Holgate, the genre of magical realism serves a significant part in the "emerging discourse on human rights in fiction" (103). This is why, Ghosh seeks for justice through the presence of the mythological figure. When Dukhey is rescued from the brutality of the demon king, he says that "Thus did Bon Bibi show the world the law of the forest, which was that the rich and greedy would be punished while the poor and righteous were rewarded" (105). In this context, the act of offering a poor child to a demon for money is an exploitative and unjust act for which Bon Bibi transforms from an ordinary mythological figure to a resilient embodiment to endorse social equity.

There is a sudden and unexpected emergence of a violent storm that is described in a way that suggests a mystical or magical quality of the natural world. The storm is described as, "*With no warning, a violent storm arose and pursued the priest and his party into a creek*" (Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide* 147). Unlike a lifeless backdrop, the storm here is depicted as an agentic force that has the aptitude of targeting and squeezing human characters in mysterious ways and I believe that this portrayal of the storm adds a supernatural dimension to the narrative. Rogers studies the impacts produced by storms in Marquez's *The Autumn of the Patriarch* as an eco-magical instance in the novel by claiming that the agentic depiction of storm evokes wonder and makes "the environment a more-than-human agent of Caribbean experience" (1580). I identify the storm described in the novel as an example of eco-magical realism as it is almost personified and along with being a potent force, the storm is also believed to be the consequence of Dukkhin Rai's resentment when a human dares to enter his specified zone. The situation is described as, "*That's what happened, then. They crossed the line by mistake and ended up on one of Dukkhin Rai's island. Whenever you have a storm like that – one that appears so suddenly, out of nowhere – you know it's the doing of Dokkin Rai and his demons*" (Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide* 147). Horen, a native character, explains the storm not as an environmental hazard but because someone might have crossed the boundary set by Bon Bibi for human habitation which would have angered the demon and caused this violent storm. Through the attribution of storm to supernatural beings, Ghosh presents a different lens to view environmental phenomena. Rather than offering a scientific explanation, he decides to merge both the real and the supernatural realms and thus grounds the ecological realities in the rich tapestry of mythology and cultural stories.

The novel revisits the injustices faced by the inhabitants of the tide country who were displaced and compelled to seek refuge across the border. Moyna explains that "*When the war*

broke out, our village was burned to ash; we crossed the border, there was nowhere else to go" (Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide* 165). Moyna and Fokir had joined that group and eventually found refuge in Morichjhapi. Ghosh highlights the destructive impacts of war and the resultant human displacement faced by the tide country inhabitants. Kanai says that in mind he

> *saw them walking, these thousands of people, who wanted nothing more than to plunge their hands once again in our soft, yielding tide country mud... saw them coming, young and old, quick and halt, with their lives bundled on their heads*. (165)

As Moyna explains, Kanai envisions the miserable situation of the displaced population yearning to return to the familiar landscapes of their homeland. The text underscores the multifaceted nature of displacement that encompasses both physical and emotional dimensions.

Besides the myth of Bon Bibi and Dukkin Rai, another mystical story is that of the goddess Ganga. A Bengali script that Kanai reads on his way to Morichjhapi, tells the story of Lord Shiva and Goddess Ganga who is thought to have descended from heaven (Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide 6*). According to Hindu mythology, the goddess Ganga was sent to earth in the form of water to rescue the burning earth. Her immense waterfall hit Shiva's tangled hair and thus divided the water in seven fast flowing streams (Ghosh *6*; Tortora 1). Ghosh says that these rivers are split into thousands of islands in India and Bangladesh (Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide* 6). The story proceeds to highlight the current environmental situation as some islands "have lasted through recorded history while others were washed into being just a year or two ago" (7). The novel, thus, foregrounds the story of Lord Shiva and Goddess Ganga from Hindu mythology to reflect upon current ecological crisis.

The author, consciously, weaves the discussion of environmental perils into the fabric of the mythical narrative of the Gun Merchant in his eco-fiction *Gun Island*. While expounding the precarious fate of the Sundarbans islands, the author is cautioning that "who knows how much longer it will remain? The islands of the Sundarbans are constantly being swallowed up by the sea; they're disappearing before our eyes" (Ghosh 19). Through this evocative stance, Ghosh not only captures the imminent threat posed by environmental degradation but also sheds light on the broader issues such as environmental injustice and the displacement of communities due to climate change in particular. I argue that the eco-magical realism in *Gun Island* allows Ghosh to articulate for the rights of environment stricken people. A compelling instance of this advocacy unfolds in the conversation between Deen and Cinta about the practitioners of the snake goddess' rituals for whom "the story is not dead" (36). Cinta's questions, "You really do not care for ordinary people, do you?" (36), highlights the stark contrast between the indifference of certain individuals and the genuine concern for the plight of everyday people embedded in the narrative.

Gun Island gives insight to the profound repercussions of the 2009 Cyclone Aila that dreadfully impacted Sundarbans and its inhabitants. As articulated by Ghosh, mass evacuation efforts were organized ahead of the disaster and millions of displaced people were relocated both in India and Bangladesh (*Gun Island* 52). However, the cyclone left an indelible mark on the region, transforming the once-fertile land into barren desert unsuitable for cultivation for generations to come, if not for lifetime (52-53). The impact caused by cyclone was not limited to destructing land but it hugely inflicted deep wounds on the lives of the Sundarbans' residents. Ghosh reveals that the cyclone served as a catalyst for the enforced displacement of the "spiriting women to distant brothels" and of the "able-bodied men" to flung work sites in distant places even beyond the national borders (53). The aftermath of the cyclone birthed a demoralizing statement

that “only servant and whores came from the Sundarbans” which echoes the awful challenges faced by the Sundarban’s inhabitants (55). Due to the disgrace attached with this region, Moyna’s son, Tipu, was being denied even basic education in local schools (55). *Gun Island*, thus, not only highlights the physical devastation wrought by natural disasters but also delves into the profound and lasting social and economic repercussions that follow in their wake.

The novel blends the substantial themes of slave trade and the plight of climate refugees with the legendary tale of the Gun Merchant. *Gun Island*, by intertwining the supernatural with the harsh reality of human exploitation, unravels the long prevalent histories of oppression towards the most vulnerable towards environmental crises. This issue goes hand in hand with the journey of the legend who himself was being taken “to the island of Chains to be sold as a slave” (Ghosh 76). As the novel is majorly focused on the environmental injustices, ‘the island of chains’ can, according to my interpretation, be symbolic for the unjust societal systems that perpetuate injustices on marginalized communities. Thus, Ghosh not only informs about the injustices striking climate refugees but also captivates through his unique story telling technique.

The novel emerges as eco-magical realist as it seamlessly melds traditional Indian myths with a profound environmental discourse. As the story of Gun Merchant being central to unfolding the novel has various versions. Deen Datta, the protagonist, encounters diverse descriptions of the tale until he meets Horen, a native of the Sundarbans, where the core cause of the merchant’s misfortune discloses. Horen reveals that the misfortune of Banduki Sadagar was actually the consequence of a dreadful draught which forced him to abandon his homeland (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 60). The situation which compelled the legend leave his abode is explained as terrible to the extent that “the streams, rivers and ponds had dried up and the stench of rotting fish and dead livestock had hung heavy in the air” (60). I argue that this sort of narrative revelation is a conscious attempt

by the author to integrate traditional South-Asian stories and the present-day environmental upheavals.

I argue that the writer purposefully foregrounds the Hindu mythology of *pralaya* as a narrative device to direct attention towards climate change. Datta explains the Hindu mythology as, "demons take over is when the world ends. There's something called *pralaya* that happens – everything dissolves, even time" (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 121). I perceive the connection between the taking over of demons and the subsequent dissolution of the world within Hindu mythology as analogous to the awful challenges posed by climate change. By mirroring the catastrophic vision embedded within this ancient mythology, the author not only gives a cultural touch to his narrative but also cautions against the complications brought about by extreme shifts in temperature and climate.

Another important aspect of eco-magical realism in Ghosh's *Gun Island* can be traced in the discussion between Cinta and Datta on the significance of legends and stories for human consciousness. Cinta asserts that it is through legendary stories that the "invisible or inarticulate or silent beings speak to us; ..." (141). This emphasis becomes more important when it comes to the discussion of ecological perils as Cinta proclaims that through stories the universe finds a voice to converse with human beings (14). I observe that Ghosh's conscious attempt to incorporate mythological stories in the discussion of environmental dilemmas is to allow the natural world to articulate their anguishes, intricacies, mysteries and ecological truths. I claim that this approach positions stories as an effective medium to explore the connection between humanity and the environment and thus embraces the inherent magic in the ecological reality of this world.

There can be the intermingling of The Gun Merchant's myth with the discussion of rise in temperature as exemplified by Cinta and Datta when they were tracing the footsteps of the legend

to observe the difference between the past and present Venice (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 237). As preceding the walk, the novel discusses about the tangible shifts in global temperature, consequently, I interpret the long walk as emblematic for their attempt to see the change in temperature that is fancily called as climate change. The novel stresses how human race is constantly becoming less influential to tackle the shocking and monstrous manifestations of climate change. Ghosh acknowledges that "Everybody knows what must be done if the world is to continue to be a liveable place, if our homes are not to be invaded by the sea, or by creatures like that spider... though we were in the grip of forces that have overwhelmed our will; we see shocking and monstrous things happening all around us and we avert our eyes; we surrender ourselves willingly to whatever it is that has us in its power" (237). In this way, the novel not only artfully integrates myth and reality but also explores the real consequences of climate change through the lens of eco-magical realism.

CHAPTER 4

ECO-COSMOPOLITANISM IN *THE HUNGRY TIDE* AND *GUN ISLAND*

In this chapter, I examine an eco-cosmopolitical worldview depicted through the foregrounding of local myths and legends in Amitav Ghosh's two novels: *The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island*. With his unique storytelling technique, Ghosh has the ability to address ecological issues that impact not only his birth-place but the world as whole. In so doing, he establishes a kind of link between the global and local and thus presents a permeable, deterritorialized, and eco-cosmopolitical perspective. In the first section, I draw upon Heise's "Sense of Place and Sense of Planet" which Ghosh exclusively presents through eco-magical realism, and in the second section, I further the concept of environmental cosmopolitanism by focusing primarily on a permeable and de-territorialized world depicted in the selected texts. I build on the theoretical insights of Ben Holgate, Ursula K Heise, P. J. Marland and Charlotte Rogers to support my thesis.

4.1. Intersecting Eco-Magical Realism and Eco-Cosmopolitanism

This section deeply scrutinizes the notion of how Ghosh grounds the long forgotten mythical stories as "effective aesthetic templates" to picturize eco-cosmopolitical worldview in *The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island* (Heise 210). I tend to demonstrate how the novels build on traditional myths to offer new tools for the conceptualization and understanding of environmental cosmopolitanism. *The Hungry Tide* unfolds with the arrival of the protagonist, Kanai Dutt, in the mangrove wilderness of Sundarbans, which is an environmentally fragile place between Bangladesh and India. The novel contains an underlying narrative which centralizes the myth of Bon Bibi and Dakkin Rai while recalling the history of Sundarbans a few decades back. *Gun Island* narrates the "strange journey" of the protagonist, Deen Datta, from Kolkata to Sundarbans to Venice and through California and New York to the cosmopolitan Mediterranean Sea in order to

explore and envisage the story of "the Gun Merchant" and Manasa Devi—the snake goddess (Ghosh *Gun Island* 3, 6). The succeeding paragraphs highlight how Ghosh weaves mythology as his magical realist technique to offer a dual vision of citizenship, as a citizen of place and of cosmos which Heise precisely calls as "sense of place" and "sense of planet" that in turn generate the notion of environmental cosmopolitanism (Heise 56).

Heise contends that "Eco-cosmopolitanism" encompasses "more-than-human world—the realm of non-human species" and the "connectedness with both animate and inanimate networks of influence and exchange" (60-61). I argue that the main characters are clearly connected with local animals in a global context, but this relationship is not a direct one but mediated through mythical figures. According to Holgate, "The merging of the human and non-human is where magical realism and environmental literature intersect in *The Whale Rider*" (Holgate 101). The same interaction is also evident in the texts selected for this particular research where the relationship between human and animals is deepened through the incorporation of folklore. Through such mythically mediated connections, Ghosh's characters exemplify the ideals of Heise's eco-cosmopolitanism where the realm of non-human species and their interaction with humans hold significant position (Heise 60-61).

In both the texts, the main characters develop their cosmopolitical consciousness in association to other creatures who share the planet with them, particularly animals derived from mythical narratives (Rahman 274). *The Hungry Tide* centralizes the characters of Piya—a researcher and Fokir—a local fisherman who helps Piya find "the Gangetic dolphin and the Irrawaddy dolphin" for her scientific research (Ghosh 32). As she is new to the tide country and encounters a bad experience with the police officials assigned to help her out so she decides to hire Fokir who knows local species better. It was in Garjontola that Fokir reveals the actual reason why

he is able to find the dolphins. He explains that "These animals were also in my mother's stories: they were Bon Bibi's messengers...they brought her news of the rivers and *Khals*...became Bon Bibi's eyes and ears...if you could learn to follow the *shush,* then you would always be able to find fish (307). Here, again the bond between human and animal is mediated through the mythical figure Bon Bibi. Moreover, the cosmopolitical character Piya defines her home in relation with these messengers of Bon Bibi that will be discussed later in this chapter.

As *Gun Island* unveils the mystery of the Gun Merchant, human characters continuously encounter non-human species in mysterious ways. The most prominent instance of such mysterious interaction is present in the character of a young materialistic character, Tipu, who works as a "*dalal*"—human trafficker, who later gets bitten by a snake when he visits Manasa Devi's *dhaam* (Ghosh 65, 84). The aftereffects are astonishing as he constantly gets unusual visions, most of them about saving "Rani"—a river dolphin that Piya was researching on (92, 100). Similar to the feeling of "burning ember" insides Tipu's body after Cobra's bite, Deen has "burning sensations" after he visits Sundarbans (113, 88). In this way, Ghosh reveals bond between human and non-human species which is mediated through mysterious presences. It can, thus, be contended that unlike realistic eco-critics, Ghosh presents an eco-cosmopolitical world through eco-magical realism. Likewise, there is a reference to "shaman" who is someone who can understand animals as Horen's father used to do and the way Piya finds "gratitude in one of her dolphins" which she, although, does not associate with divinity because of her being a scientist (116-117). All of this mediation between human and non-human species is dedicated to Manasa Devi who is depicted as a "negotiator", "translator" or "a voice carrier" between species that had "no shared means of communication" (167). Ghosh, thus, ascribe the possibility of communication between different

species to a mythical presence, a goddess, and claims that without her "there could be no relationship between animal and human except hatred and aggression" (167).

Ghosh ascribes the possibility of human-animal connection to mythical figures in the selected novels as Manasa Devi is depicted as "mediator" in *Gun Island* and the messengers of Bon Bibi in *The Hungry Tide* to facilitate relationship between human and non-human species. Later in *Gun Island*, he expresses that Manasa Devi had to search for the Merchant—driven "by the quest for profit" because if people like him refuse her authority then human "would recognize no restraint in relation to other living things" (Ghosh 167). I interpret the significance of the mythical figures, Manasa Devi and Bon Bibi as an eco-cosmopolitical endeavor by Ghosh as he highlight the place and importance of non-human species in sharing the planet. Ghosh chooses mythical characters from the local folklore to convey a shared "sense of planet" where setting ethical boundaries is crucial in maintaining balance and harmony within the natural environment.

For Johansen, cosmopolite is someone who has "ethical" and "moral" duties towards place as well as planet which means that they acknowledge planetary responsibilities but not at the expense of local needs (3). In *The Hungry Tide,* the forces of the global interact powerfully with the local which results in an engaged globalism and an engaged localism. Such representation negates any kind of radical rootedness as well as complete approval of global environmental politics. Piya and Nirmal are the most apparent "*eco-cosmopolites*" in the text who transform their purely global way of thinking to a cosmopolitical once they understand the ground realities of Sundarbans where considering the well-being of climate refugees is as necessary as saving animal species (Nelson 13). Lawrence Buell terms this insight as *ecoglobalist affect* which is "a whole-earth way of thinking and feeling about environmentality" (227). Eco-cosmopolitanism, as proposed by Heise and apparent in Ghosh's work include the realms of more-than-human and their

coexistence with humans. *The Hungry Tide* highlights the tension between local human needs and global conservation policies and attempts to find a middle way where human and non-human needs are equally considered.

In Ghosh's novels, the local and global are not mutually exclusive as almost all the characters are visibly connected with local animals and geographies situated within a global context. I argue that folklore is central to the characters' planetary citizenship as well as suggestive of the fact that systemic way is not the only way to understand the working of the universe. For this, in *The Hungry Tide*, the myth of Bon Bibi becomes fundamental network through which characters shape and define their sense of belonging, relationship with non-human species and to navigate their environments. In *The Hungry Tide*, the central character Piya—a marine biologist is a cosmopolitical character who comes from America to India to study the rare species of dolphins. Although, her initial role as a cetologist was to research and preserve the rare species and thus represents a bio-centric worldview. However, after she arrives in Lusibari and comprehends the ground realities here where the well-being of marginalized communities has always been compromised by the global conservation policies, her initial cosmopolitical view changes. For instance, when encountering a tragic incident of killing a tiger, who Kanai explains to have "been preying on this village for years" (Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide* 294), she develops an alternative strategy where she takes into consideration both the wellbeing of human as well as non-human species.

Ghosh eco-cosmopolitanism seeks for a middle way between strictly local and global by challenging dominant conservation policies that entirely neglect human survival, particularly more vulnerable to ecological distresses for the sake of wildlife. As Nixon explains that "the environmentalist advocacy of an ethics of place has all too often morphed into hostility towards

displaced people" (Nixon 239). In Nirmal's dairy, Kusum explains that environmentalist conservers were always favoring animal species at the cost of human life which is "worth less than dirt or dust" (Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide* 261). She complains that it's always the policeman announcing that "This island has to be saved for its trees, it has to be saved for its animals, it is a part of a reserve forest, it belongs to a project to save tigers, which is paid for by people from all around the world" (26). A few days after her conversation with Nirmal, Kusum is dead, one of several hundred victims of the police force that is evacuating the island. Her death, a result of the disconnectedness and indifference of "these people," recalls Piya's earlier statement that "once we decide we can kill off other species, it'll be people next—just the kind of people you're thinking of, people who're poor and unnoticed" (301). Once we cross "that imaginary line that prevents us from deciding that no other species matter except ourselves" (301) then there is nothing we won't do—to other species or to our own. This one-sided agenda dehumanize the less-privileged inhabitants of the Sundarbans that Kanai makes Piya understand that "Isn't that a horror too – that we can feel the sufferings of an animal, but not of human beings?" (Ghosh 301) In response, Piya presents her perspective that there is an order decided by 'nature', 'earth', 'planet' one that "keep us all alive" (301) which is her eco-cosmopolitical consciousness that includes both human and non-human world. Later she talks about crossing the "imaginary line"—drawn by Bon Bibi to bound humans and animals to their respective places (301). In short, Ghosh's eco-cosmopolitanism demands a balanced strategy that equally consider the needs of humans and animal species.

Eco-cosmopolitanism emphasizes not only the interconnectedness of all people regardless of their race or cultural background, but also highlights the relationship that exists between people and natural environment. Ghosh's text endorses sensibilities akin to Heise's understanding of eco-cosmopolitanism, the "attempt to envision individuals and groups as part of planetary 'imagined

communities' of both human and non-human kinds" (Heise 72). It also encourages to perceive human and ecological prosperity as co-extensive, moving past the kind of dichotomous thinking that require to choose between the two. An eco-cosmopolitan perspective on environmental injustice observe the rights and needs of both humans and non-humans which is the key motif highlighted in *The Hungry Tide* through the precise incorporation of the Bon Bibi myth that, as 1discussed earlier, divides the forest into two equal habitation parts for humans and animals. This thoughtful division disapproves any injustice intended towards human or animal others and favors a balanced environment. Ghosh's eco-cosmopolitanism, thus, offers a different conception of human and ecological sustainability as it places equal emphasis on both refugee migrants and ecological spaces proposing "a different idea of the universal" that Mukherjee suggests we need to discover—a universality that recognizes and respects non-European modernities and welcomes diversities rather than obliterating them (151).

Kanai's deceased uncle Nirmal cannot be simply categorized as local or global as he embodies both a "sense of place" and "sense of planet" illustrated through his biography that global and local concerns are coexistent. Originally a refugee from Dhaka and then—as most of the characters in the story—a resident of Kolkata, Nirmal left the city in 1950 because of the political climate of the time. Nirmal was formerly a refugee from Dhaka and later lived in Kolkata, like the most of the individuals in the novel, but due to the prevailing political condition, he fled the city in 1950. At first, he is depicted as a globalist who considers the Sundarbans not just in local terms but as part of a larger, interconnected world (Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide* 51). Every time, Mashima speaks for the benefits of the people of Morichjhapi, he seems uninterested but later it's him who constructs an effective shelter against the advancing storm, a shelter that turns out to save hundreds

of lives on Lusibari. Although a devoted globalist initially, he takes into consideration the place-based needs of people.

Nirmal's distinctive eco-cosmopolitical consciousness, as apparent from his notebook, develops when he witnesses a police speedboat preventing one of the simple rowing boats of the settlers from leaving the Morichjhapi while he was going there to rescue Kusum and her son Fokir. Rather than retreating, the climate refugees start to question their very existence in words "'*Amrakara? Bastuara*.' Who are we? We are the dispossessed" (211). This encounter serves a catalyst for the planetary citizenship of Nirmal as he questions his own existence as "Who was I? Where did I belong? In Calcutta or in the tide country? In India or across the border?" (211) The link that is drawn here between the settlers, himself, and all of humankind points toward the spirit of (eco-)cosmopolitanism that pervades Ghosh's novel. Nirmal's curiosity signifies his evolving cosmopolitan consciousness which highlights universal vulnerability of all people to the global environmental dilemmas. In a way, it seems the dispossessed settlers are, at least in Nirmal's and perhaps in Ghosh's eyes, linked to all other human beings in the world. It is only through his direct engagement with the local realities of Morichjhapi that he is able to adjust and correct his abstract political views. Like Piya, he needs the confrontation with the local and specific knowledge in order to fully develop his eco-cosmopolitan vision and the resulting strong relation and solidarity with the plight of the dispossessed.

It can be argued that singularity occurs not only in landscapes but also in physical bodies. When Fokir became shelter for Piya to protect her in that wild storm their bodies are described as 'one' as described as "She tried to break free from his grasp, tried to pull him around so that for once, she could be the one who was sheltering him. But his body was unyielding and she could not break free from it ... their bodies were so close, so finely merged, that she could feel the impact

of everything hitting him, ... the storm had given them what life could not; it had fused them together and made them one" (Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide* 390). The storm singularizes the bodies of Piya and Fokir which challenges the ideas of borders and belonging as this particular instance dissolves cultural and spatial distinctions. I interpret this merging of bodies during the storm as an eco-cosmopolitical strategy as here the storm—broadly environmental destructions—makes bodies one by bringing them on the same page that emphasize a more universal human experience.

As in the previous chapter, I have considered Nirmal's diary, which encompasses half of the novel, as magical realist, here I connect his ideas with eco-cosmopolitanism. As Kanai reads this dairy on his way back to Lusibari, he learns of Nirmal's imagination of the interconnection between the natural world and humans which he describes through mythology. He wishes to tell his students in the near future that goddess is what that is "*common between myth and geology*" (Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide* 180). He says that "*in geology, as in myth, there is a visible Ganga and a hidden Ganga: one flows on land and one beneath the water*" (181). His idea points towards an eco-cosmopolitical vision that favors both local beliefs—mythology here—and an apparent global perspective. I interpret this instance as Ghosh's invitation to understand global ecological phenomena through local myths.

He then says that the Greek goddess is the mother of Ganga in mythology. He states that,

> *There were no Himalayas then and no holy river, no Jamuna, no Ganga, no Saraswati, no Brahamputra. And since there were no rivers, there was also no delta, no flood plain, no silting, no mangroves – no Bengal in other words* (181).

Here, Nirmal points to the geological forces that shape ecosystems which are not primarily fixed boundaries. For instance, the very existence of Bengal Delta is a product of geological evolution as he describes as,

> *In other places it took decades, even centuries, for a river to change course; it took an epoch for an island to appear. But here, in the tide country, transformation is the rule of life: rivers stray away from week to week, and islands are made and unmade in days* (224).

Through the evolution of landscapes as a result of larger environmental forces, Nirmal presents his eco-cosmopolitical perspective which advocates for the fluidity of environment. This perspective is vividly illustrated in his depiction of the Indian subcontinent's geological history as,

> *They would see how their subcontinent had moved, at a speed no other landmass had ever attained before; they would see the Ganga emerging, as a brook on a rising hill. In front of their eyes they would see how, as India travelled, the Tethys shrank, how she grew thinner and thinner as the channel closed* (181).

This passage highlights the dynamic and interconnected nature of the Indian subcontinent's geological history. The text illustrates the fluidity of environmental boundaries, as the subcontinent moves and transforms, giving rise to new landscapes and ecosystems. The emergence of the Ganga River and the shrinking of the Tethys Sea serve as powerful metaphors for the interconnectedness of the planet's ecological systems. This perspective emphasizes the need to consider the Indian subcontinent's environmental history within a broader, planetary context, underscoring the intricate relationships between geological, ecological, and cultural processes.

Nirmal considers the presence of the river dolphin *shushuk* as a proof of the universality of the Indus and Ganga as he says that *"And do you know how you can tell that the Sindhu and the*

Ganga were once conjoined? ... Because of the shushuk – *the river dolphin*" (182). He develops his "sense of planet" through the presence of the dolphin that is not confined to any specific geographical location but materialize themselves in various places. The same perspective is presented by Piya when she associates her hominess with the presence of another river dolphin—*Orcaella* as "for me, home is where the Orcaella are, so there's no reason why this couldn't be it" (400). This is suggestive of negating the concept of man-made boundaries and favors a shared and planetary environmental view.

Nirmal's reflection on climate change further deepens his eco-cosmopolitical outlook as he observes the gradual changes in Lusibari as,

> *I remembered how when I first came to Lusibari, the sky would be darkened by birds at sunset. Many years had passed since I'd seen such flights of birds. When I first noticed their absence, I thought they would soon come back but they had not. I remembered a time when at low tide the mudbanks would turn scarlet with millions of swarming crabs. That colour began to fade long ago and now it is never seen any more* (Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide* 215).

He associates these changes to the larger environmental changes as Marland states that "no act or result of damage can be seen as purely local" (Marland 854). In the same vein Nirmal explains that,

> *The birds were vanishing, the fish were dwindling and from day to day the land was being reclaimed by the sea. What would it take, to submerge the tide country? Not much – a minuscule change in the level of the sea would be enough* (215).

His findings highlight how susceptible the tide country is to climate change, with even little changes in sea level potentially have disastrous consequences. Nirmal's recognition of these shifts

is indicative of an ecologically global and integrated vision, acknowledging the connection between local phenomena and planetary processes. His viewpoint highlights the necessity of seeing beyond man-made boundaries and taking into account the common effects of environmental deterioration on a worldwide scale.

I argue that in *Gun Island*, the protagonist Deen Datta is used as a vehicle to demonstrate the planetary realities of the climate crises through his implausible journey for seeking the truth about the Gun Merchant which can be viewed as a manifestation of eco-magical realism as Ghosh uses his search for the legend as informed about ecological calamities. Just as Deen slowly begins to make the mental connection between place and planet and appreciates the global continuities of the climate crises, the reader is encouraged to envisage desperate regions as part of the same transnational network, a kind of planetary consciousness that Johansen calls as "*territorialized cosmopolitanism*" that considers multiple locals as parts of the interconnected world (2). I analyze that as Deen comes to recognize the global scale of climate change through his exploration of the legend of Banduki Sadagar, the novel simultaneously juxtaposes geographically distinct islands as the writer draws comparison between the wilderness of Sundarbans and Venice—an advanced city to represent how environmental calamities affect both urban and rural places alike. Both the islands are depicted as equally vulnerable to environmental calamities which reinforce the idea that no place, whether rural or urban, advanced or underdeveloped, is immune to the effects of global ecological changes. While reflecting upon the harsh environmental calamities in Venice, Ghosh makes the readers wonder "How was it possible that in this most civilized of cities we should be so utterly alone and helpless, so completely at the mercy of the earth" (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 253). At one place, when asked about the flood condition in Venice, the Bengali migrant says "like home—we're used to floods" (255). Similarly, they say "It's just like the Sundarbans" (256).

Likewise, another comparison is made between the two places as "From that height it was possible to mistake the Venetian lagoon for the Sundarbans" (162). Thus, via drawing parallels between these regions and highlighting how their fates are intertwined, Ghosh challenges the artificiality of borders and highlights the global significance of climate crises. This connection extends to conclude the notion by the saying of Bangladeshi migrants in Venice where they finally question the idea of borders "'*desh koi* where's home?'" (178)

I argue that through Deen's quest of knowing about the legend of Banduki Sadagar, Ghosh purposefully makes a conscious link between the present and past as his journey reveal past mystic incidents linked to contemporary environmental issues. The foregrounding of this legend, highlights the relationship between environmental calamities in the 17th and 21st centuries. As Deen contemplates the possibility that the legend was "born of the tribulations of the Little Ice Age" (136). The myth functions as a channel via which Ghosh demonstrates how local realities are influenced by global climatic conditions providing an eco-cosmopolitical perspective. In addition to bridging the gap between different historical periods, the journey of Deen Datta also indicates that environmental disasters are connected across multiple locales.

The mythical story of the Gun Merchant plays significant role in drawing comparison between the Sundarbans and Venice and for this purpose, the serpent imagery—evoking the presence of Manasa Devi is apparent throughout the novel. This metaphor connects the magical and natural aspects as Deen's earlier dismissal of Tipu's warning materializes itself in the form of real and imagined snakes, both on the flight and when he has arrived in Los Angeles. At first, he sees a bird drop a snake from its mouth while gliding above the embers of a fire-ravaged forest, letting out an involuntary "scream" at the sight (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 129). He is later told by airport security that he had been unconsciously shouting the words "Snake! Snake!" while he fell

unconscious (130). Later still, when he had eventually made it to his hotel room in Los Angeles, he falls asleep and has a dream of a "glowing snake hurtling towards me, through the flames" (131). This recurrent serpent imagery is significant as it indicates the pervasive presence of the Bonduki Sadagar myth and particularly the snake goddess Manasa Devi. The imagery also makes alignment between Venice and Sundarbans that illustrates the planetary connections as the protagonist moves between these islands. Through this serpent imagery, *Gun Island* portrays the permeability of the world as the protagonist, Deen encounters an alien specie of snake in Venice, he contemplates that "It was as if the very rotation of the planet had accelerated, moving all living things at unstoppable velocities" (181). This line can be interpreted as Ghosh's direct attempt to encapsulate his eco-cosmopolitical theme underpinning his novel. The idea of Heise's "sense of planet" is significant here as the native species do not remain native but materialize themselves in unexpected places across the globe.

Deen is unable to escape environmental disruption even at Venice Beach, which is described as "fresher" as compared to other places (144). Here, he witnesses a non-native, poisonous yellow-bellied snake that bites and kills a dog owned by his expat Italian friend Gisa. This incident upends the popular perception of the beach as a vibrant, untroubled tourist trap. Cinta's incredulity at this event – "I don't believe it. The dog is dead, of a snake bite! Here in LA" – again suggests that regional knowledge systems will have to be revised as a result of ecological and atmospheric changes (145). The serpent imagery is again repeated as Gisa's son alarmed cries "*Serpente! Serpente!*" in response to the snake sighting similar to Deen earlier unconscious outburst on the plane (144). It can be claimed that the recurring motif of the myth of Manasa Devi transcends regional boundaries, implying that ecological disturbances are not merely isolated peculiarities but components of a broader, related ecological crises.

Besides Venice and Sundarbans, Deen's visit to Los Angeles functions as a transnational narrative that supports Heise's call for a "sense of planet" (56). The text depicts "place" as "planet" as Los Angeles not only exposes locally based ecological issues but a planetary condition. For Ghosh, material places are the various manifestations of the same global network as he positions Los Angeles as an indicator of a global climatic situation – connected to remote regions in its flux and precarity. This shows how the climate crisis has pervaded every place on Earth whether it is South or North, no matter how developed and illustrious that appears. In so doing, Ghosh uses aquatic imagery while describing the climatic situation in Los Angeles. The word 'tsunami' is mentioned three times in the chapter entitled as "Los Angeles" (133), associating the metropolitan with storms, coastal erosion and flooding that also occur in Sundarbans and Venice, the other two major settings of the text (134, 138, 144). These recurrent motifs highlight the interconnectedness of the world suggesting that merely by moving through human-constructed boundaries, Deen cannot escape climate crises. Through the metaphorical juxta positioning of geographically distant locations, the text shows that no single corner of the world is immune to the environmental unrests.

In this section, I explained how the environmental cosmopolitan of the main characters is directed by local folklore, particularly their co-existence with non-human species. I analyzed how Ghosh has challenged an entirely bio-centric worldview and acknowledged the needs and rights of the climate refuges that are disregarded by global environmental perspectives in *The Hungry Tide*. I also explored that the writer foregrounds the myth of the Gun Merchant to show separate locations as fragments of the same earth and thus likewise affected by environmental catastrophes in *Gun Island*.

4.2. Permeability and Deterritorialization in the Selected Novels of Amitav Ghosh

In the previous section, I discussed how Ghosh playfully weaves mythical stories into his eco-fictional novels *The Hungry Tide* and *Gun* Island. Here, I explore how the texts centralize folkloric magical realism to present a world that challenges the traditional ideas of identity and belonging. I argue that Ghosh picturizes the porosity of cultural and physical borders through constant migration of humans and animals that ultimately pleads for a rethinking of place. The author presents a worldview which neither prioritizes the global nor the local but a cosmopolitical—encompassing all. In so doing, he brings together characters from diverse backgrounds—ranging from local villagers to international scientists—into his magical realist texts in a way that transform Sundarbans into a microcosm of the global environmental crisis in *The Hungry Tide*. Likewise, in exploring the myths and ecological shifts, he moves the protagonist from one island—Sundarbans to another—Venice to present a permeable and deterritorialized world.

I argue that through the incorporation of myths as his magical realist strategy, Ghosh presents a cosmopolitical perspective, one which is not only anchored in "place" but in "planet" as well. Heise contends that the "environmental imagination of the global" in contemporary fiction has been expressed "through the detailed exploration of the local site that on close inspection turns out to be linked to the global in unanticipated, and sometimes unsettling, and sometimes exhilarating ways" (Heise 210). The selected novels embodies Heise's notion of local sites as lenses for viewing broader global ecological concerns. The Sundarbans which are mythological and historical backdrop of *The Hungry Tide* serves as a microcosm of global environmental issues since rising sea levels threaten this locale due to the broader concern that climate change is affecting the world as a whole. The novel also connects the history of the Sundarbans with the

global history of colonialism that will be discussed later in this chapter. *Gun Island* expands on this exploration by explicitly tying the local with the global together while hopping between islands to create a transnational and trans-local narrative. I contend that in *The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island*, Ghosh illustrates both a "sense of place" and a "sense of planet" which challenge as well as accept the ideas of rootedness, borders and belonging (Heise 56).

The novels eco-cosmopolitanism is evident from the historical references given to the imperialist regimes and industrialization and their consequences in the form of climate change, unusual patterns of birds migration and reduction in animal species. "'Local disasters', writes Wai Chee Dimock, 'are the almost predictable side effects of global geopolitics. They are part of larger distributive pattern – a pattern of unequal protection that Ulrich Beck calls the global 'risk society' – with the risk faling on the least privileged, and being maximized at just two points where the resources have been depleted'" (Nixon 149). *Gun Island* is deliberately focused on such inadequacies as Piya observes the long-term impacts of refinery in the form of "shoals of dead fish; the decline of crab population, and so on" (Ghosh 194). This is suggestive of looking at environmental problems as cosmopolitical as here the products produced for the benefit of the metropolis leave drastic impacts on the countryside. The same sentience is the focus of Cinta and Datta's conversation where she schools Datta that global warming and the consequent climate change is not something natural but the upshots of human interventions. She questions where the gases, as causing agents of this situation, come from "Do they not come from cars and planes and factories ... whistling kettles and electric toasters and espresso machines?" (234) Here, the ascription of the global issue of climate change to the excessive usage of modern appliances imply that even individual choices can significantly contribute to larger global issues. Rafi confers that his grandfather did not teach him about "animals, and fish and the water" because forests and rivers

were constantly vanishing (95). In the subsequent chapters, the writer explains the reason behind such occurrences and declares that rise in temperature and the resultant species extinction is due to different human advancements and industrialization (234).

The Hungry Tide, likewise, initiates discussions on the disappearing of the once existed forests, the drowning of Canning, unfortunate environmental hazards, material extraction from the tide country, and the disappearing of fish and the extinction of their species as a result of using fine nets for catching "the spawn of tiger prawns" for the sake of money (Ghosh 6, 27, 50, 79, 134). Piya explains how dolphins are exploited for the sake of profit. She says that in 1970s, the Orcaella population of Mekong fell prey to American carpet bombing and later killed for extracting petroleum—"their fat would drip into buckets...to run boats and motorcycles (305). As a result of such activities, their population declined and now almost extinct. It can be said that the writer looks for human influences on environment and animals and therefore seeks for cosmopolitanism.

In addition to places impacting other places, Ghosh's cosmopolitanism is also evident from centralizing migrants and continuously travelling characters. The novels construct a dynamic world where everywhere there are junctions and connections especially in terms of cosmopolitan characters. Such cosmopolitan characters, although travel for some personal pursuits, hitherto develop "new forms of solidarity emerging out of global risk scenarios in their analysis of how such an eco-cosmopolitanism might link experiences of local endangerment to a sense of planet that encompasses both human and non-human worlds" (Heise 159). The constant movement and shifting locales of Ghosh's migratory characters highlight the porosity of the world, particularly in terms of environmental situations. Moreover, their movement is more than just a physical change but a representation of the interconnectedness of the world and the common threats that unite different peoples and areas.

Shazia Rahman writes that "Cosmopolitans are often critiqued as rootless" (264) and almost all the primary characters in *The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island* are travelling that further challenge the idea of borders and belonging. Whether topophilic locals or cosmopolitan globals, it is worth noting that none of the main protagonists in *The Hungry Tide* has actually been born in the tide country, not even the fisherman Fokir, who in many ways embodies local knowledge mostly derived from ancient myths, in the novel. Every major character in the novel, as Pablo Mukherjee puts it in a recent article on the novel, "operates under the sign of migration" (150). All of them have, like Fokir, moved, fled, or traveled to the Sundarbans, and are, therefore, not truly or fully "native" (150). In one way or the other, every character of *The Hungry Tide* is a migrant and thus "Mobility, migrancy, uprootedness," Mukherjee attests, "permeate the world of the novel," and their movements are also directed by "mobile" routes and towards "mobile" territories (150). In brief, it can be contested that the text disregards strict local rootedness and reinforces the notion of fluid identities.

As a second-generation immigrant to the United States, Piya is part of what Kavita Daiya calls a "migrant cosmopolitanism," a life-style and mindset that is marked by continuous or repeated displacement, and by "a desire for 'home'" (qtd. in Weik 127). Home, as Daiya explains with recourse to Henri Lefebvre, is "a place of comfort . . . a sense of rootedness and belonging . . . a future-time of a secure life" (127). As a migrant cosmopolitan, Piya lacks a place to which she feels truly connected. "I have no home," she says at one point to Kanai. "I have no home, no money, and no prospects. My friends are thousands of miles away and I get to see them maybe once a year, if I'm lucky" (Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide* 302). Her basic connection, then, seems to be neither to a locality nor to a group, but rather to the dolphins that are her object of study. Piya establishes attachment with dolphins which are global but based in Lusibari which she now calls

"home" (399). She recognizes the Sundarbans as her "home": a place where dolphins are (221). They undergo transformation because of their attachment with Lusibari and the Badabon Trust to which the outsider Piya calls "home" (399).

This idea of home is repeatedly challenged throughout Ghosh's texts where rather than a fixed place, home is instead shown as fluid and dynamic. For instance, in *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh narrates the experience of climate refugees who question their place and belonging in the face of environmental upheaval and the resultant forced migrations as "Where do we belong?" (254). Witnessing their displacement prompts Nirmal to question his own identity as he reflects on his life history where he has been a citizen of multiple places. His empathy towards their plight make him wonder "Who was I? Where did I belong? In Calcutta or in the tide country? In India or across the border?" (254) Such uncertainty about place and identity is also apparent in *Gun Island* where Bangladeshi migrants equally struggle with their belonging asking "'*desh koi* where's home? (178). Both the texts reveal a fluid and instable situation of home, pointing towards a broader sense of planet or shortly "cosmic citizenship" (Nelson 11).

To sum up, this chapter has discussed how the environmental cosmopolitanism portrayed in *The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island* is guided by local folklore and myths. The *ecocosmopolties* develop their "sense of planet" in association with animals derived from local myths. Piya is the most apparent cosmopolitan character in *The Hungry Tide* who develops a sense of belonging to planet in relation to dolphins that are described as Bon Bibi's messengers while Deen Datta's planetary citizenship is portrayed through the serpent imagery—indicating the presence of Manasa Devi throughout his journey. This chapter also highlighted the fluid nature of 'home' and the porosity of geographical borders which further reveal that Ghosh favors "cosmic citizenship" where people belong simultaneously belong to place and planet. Also, this sort of eco-

cosmopolitanism neither neglect animals nor the marginalized humans, instead promotes a worldview that encourages a harmonious relationship among all.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I synthesize the major findings that I explored in the blending of eco-magical realism and environmental cosmopolitanism in the eco-fictional novels of Amitav Ghosh *The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island*. I explored the significance of local folklore and myths in the depiction of eco-cosmopolitanism in the selected novels. In order to investigate the planetary citizenship of the main characters, I built on the theoretical insights of Charlotte Rogers's "eco-magical realism", Ben Holgate's "Magical Realism as Environmental Discourse", and Ursula K Heise's eco-cosmopolitanism. I explained that the writer has foregrounded mythical stories to present a twofold citizenship—local and planetary of the protagonists that lead me to conclude that Ghosh has considered an interconnected planet where every part is connected to other no matter how distant and different it seems. I discussed how the eco-cosmopolitanism specific to the selected novels is neither strictly local nor entirely global but it is encompasses both in order to have a universal worldview.

In the third chapter of this thesis, I focused on the significance of South-Asian myths for the depiction of environmental problems in the selected texts. I divided the chapter into two subsections: in the first part I explained the texts as (folkloric) magical realist in the light of the theoretical insights of Holgate, Bowers and Jameson. I analyzed the significance of folklore and traditional myths in shaping the perspectives of the characters regarding their surrounding environment. I identified that the myth of Bon Bibi and that of the Gun Merchant are extensively interweaved in their daily life matters in *The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island* respectively. In the second part, I built on Charlotte Rogers and discussed the importance of the stated mythical figures in presenting ecological issues. Through a detailed analysis of the texts, I comprehended that

selected texts cannot be strictly termed as magical realist but they do participate in the genre through the incorporation of mythopoeia and folklore that Holgate and Bowers contemplate as major characteristics of magical realism.

Moving on, in the fourth chapter, I analyzed the environmental cosmopolitanism embodied by the main characters in the selected texts. Firstly, I synthesized eco-magical realism and eco-cosmopolitanism that go side by side in Ghosh's novel to collectively shape the cosmopolitan consciousness of the main characters. In *The Hungry Tide*, I aligned the myth of Bon Bibi with eco-cosmopolitanism, particularly in the relationship between human and animals which is central to Heise's understanding of planetary citizenship. The mythical deity is the sole mediation between them as she has equally divided the forest into two parts for humans and animals. I have described Sundarbans as a micro representation of a connected world that is fluid and fragile and where myth and science have a joint function in understanding relationship with environment. I have illustrated upon the eco-cosmopolitanism employed by Ghosh as an amalgamation of local and global. It is the combination of science on the part of Piya and myth on the part of Fokir that the research on dolphins actually begins. Likewise, I interpreted that Ghosh's ecocosmopolitanism is rejecting being strictly global or local as the former suggest conserving wildlife at the expense of lowly humans while the later can easily burn a tiger as it arrives in human habitation. He is, then, pointing towards a different kind of universality that take into consideration both the local and global concerns. For this, I have extensively analyzed the characters of Piya and Nirmal who are more towards global interests at the beginning of the novel but after encountering the ground realities, develop a different worldview that encompasses both the global and local concerns. All this discussion points towards one simple division earlier by Bon Bibi where

everyone has its own respective space and none dares to enter another's or they have to face drastic consequences.

Likewise, in *Gun Island*, I analyzed the mythical story of the Gun Merchant as a representative of the eco-cosmopolitan consciousness of the main character—Deen Datta. I paralleled the local narrative with the porosity of borders in terms of how people, species and environmental despairs move across the human constructed screens. I discussed the recurring motif of serpents as an illustration of Manasa Devi who materializes her presence everywhere on the planet to symbolize the world as interlinked and porous. I compared the environmental situations of different and distant islands and found out that no matter how developed and illustrious a place is, it's equally impacted by ecological disturbances just like other parts of the world. Whether it is Sundarbans, Venice or Los Angeles, everywhere there are distressing environmental problems and unusual appearances.

I also provided insight to the constant human migrations and the rootlessness of the major characters in both *The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island*. Through such portrayal I discussed how Ghosh favors global citizenship instead of radical rootedness. The protagonist, Piya, associated her belonging and hominess with respect to a specie of dolphins that she was researching on. Nirmal questioned his sense of belonging as he related with the dispossessed status of the climate refuges. Deen was hampered in ecological problem everywhere he goes. The rescue of the Blue Boat that contained people from across the world points towards a cosmopolitan and planetary perspective as the admiral announced that he had saved those people in accordance with the "law of the sea" and "humanity" (*Gun Island* 310). In a nutshell, I conclude that in *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh employed mythopoeia to highlight a balanced and harmonious relationship between human

and non-human species while in its extension, *Gun Island*, he presented a broader worldview as he foregrounded the story of the Gun Merchant to portray a porous and interconnected world.

This research attempted to explore eco-cosmopolitanism directed by eco-magical realism in *The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island*. I focused on the mythical figures via which the author has presented broader environmental issues such as climate change, environmental injustice, species extinction, vulnerability of marginalized people. Bon Bibi navigate the characters' eco-cosmopolitanism in relation to other living beings and Manasa Devi act as a mediator between human and non-human communication. I highlight mythopoeia and local folklore as significant narrative tools to address globally significant environmental dilemmas. By linking folkloric magical realism with the cosmopolitan perspective on ecocriticism, I offered a new framework for analyzing Ghosh's eco-fiction. Through this unique blend of theory, I did a detailed study of the selected texts and noted that neither purely local nor entirely scientific perspective is enough to understand the working of the universe. It is, rather, the combination of the two to acknowledge dual citizenship of people, that is, one is a citizen of the planet as much as a citizen of place. Neither place-based needs nor the globally significant climatic conditions can be neglected and for this Ghosh has taken insights from both local myths and science in order to present a different ideal of universal.

5.1. Recommendations for Future Researchers

I suggest that future research in the field of eco-cosmopolitanism should explore indigenous sustenance perspectives on ecology, examining how they align with or challenge the concept of planetary citizenship. This would include the analysis of the ways in which local communities interact with their environment and non-human species. Such research can contribute

to develop sustainable approaches in their respective surroundings in the light of traditional sources of knowledge while at the same time willing to support global conservative standards. Additionally, a research in eco-magical realism can be carried out that challenge anthropocentric worldview and emphasize a different kind of environmental cosmopolitanism where local and global ecosystem run in accordance with the will of non-human agency. Beyond local folklore, myth and other knowledge sources, religion can also be a significant area of exploration for global environmental ethics. Such a study could also seek for similarities and differences among the beliefs of diverse religious groups regarding a balanced and harmonious environment as well as the role of a religious person in directing his sense of place and planet. In India and Pakistan, particularly, this sort of research can be carried out as here people belonging to different religions and different sects in a specific religion might have different beliefs according to their environment. I expect that these recommendations on both eco-magical realism and eco-cosmopolitanism will broaden research on ecocriticism, offering new perspectives and areas for scholarly exploration.

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