Interfacing Diaspora with Ecological Humanities in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*

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Abstract

The term "diaspora" is applied to an expatriate minority community whose members share certain characteristics but this concept has been a rapidly changing phenomenon in response to disparate kinds of demographic shifts, particularly during the past two decades. The increased mobility of capital and culture has made the earlier conceptualisation a problematic one. The concept needs to be recalibrated in view of the perceived challenge posed by new mobile strangers. Evidently, the movement, displacement and relocation of peoples in globalisation have increasingly accentuated the circulation of the local in the global and the new convergences have complicated the issues of citizenship and belonging.

As a polythetic term, diaspora has acquired a wide, inclusivist definition to include immigrants, expatriates, refugees, guest workers, exile community and overseas ethnic groups. In the emerging spectacle the "environmental" is increasingly embedded into the social, political and economic dimensions of displacement. This entwining is confirmed by the struggle for rights over access to natural resources and human habitats following the streams of migration, and hence the conceptual importance accorded to environment. The complex interplay of "environmental" categories such as water, land, habitat, forest, rivers with their social, political and material coordinates cannot be excluded from any disciplinary engagement with the dispersion of peoples in the "new world order."

This article examines the perspectives on the ecological disruptions and challenges of diasporic settlement depicted by Amitav Ghosh in his novel, *The Hungry Tide* (2004). The novel's essential narrative is the forcible eviction of thousands of Bengali refugees from the island of Marichjhanpi by the communist-led Left Front government of West Bengal in January-May 1979. The narrative offers a palpable ecological paradigm as well as centres on the issue of refugee migrants, and thus envisions a new form of belonging in the climatically challenged world.

Keywords

West Bengal, diaspora, refugees, forest ecology, postcolonialism, cosmopolitanism

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In their introduction to *Theorizing Diaspora* (2003), Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur argue that theorisations of diaspora "must emerge from [an eclectic mix of theoretical texts by scholars in Anthropology, Sociology, Culture Theory, International Relations, Globalisation, History and English], rather than purely postmodern theoretical abstractions of displacement and movement" (12). Yet the theorisation of displacement and exploration of the de-nationalised diasporas through transnational lenses form a focal point in diaspora theories. William Safran's six-point model includes the following features of diaspora: dispersal from the original homeland; retention of collective memory, vision or myth of the original homeland; partial (never complete) assimilation in host society; idealised wish to return to original homeland; desirable commitment to restoration of homeland; and continually renewed linkages with homeland (83-84). The strong homeland orientation in Safran's typological criteria has been de-emphasised by several theorists in the area of diaspora studies. Robin Cohen's study *Global Diasporas* (1997) modifies Safran's model by including voluntary movements as part of the diasporic dispersals although it retains the emphasis on homeland attachments among the characteristic features of diasporas.

The notion that diasporas are dispersed from the centre is questionable on the ground that there are circulatory movements of indigenous groups in several parts of the globe. Again, the collective memory of an original homeland is not strong in the case of the black diaspora in the Americas. Equally, the commitment to a homeland remains strong only for the first generation diaspora, not for their succeeding generations. Further, contrary to Safran's position on the integration of the diasporic groups in the host location, the professional transnational immigrants of the "third wave" seem to be quite acceptable there. Clearly, the diverse paths of human diaspora are caused by the unevenness of contemporary global movement. All migratory populations do not undergo the same experience and so these definitions do not describe the experience of all diasporic subjects. "Definitions of diaspora," as Bill Ashcroft has noted, "have had to keep constantly on the move to keep pace with their subject" (75).

According to Khachig Tololyan, the founding editor of *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, the semantic domain of diaspora may well extend to immigrants, expatriates, refugees and exiles as well as guest workers and overseas ethnic community (4-5). The variety of diasporic peregrinations in Amitav Ghosh's novels suggests his evident disagreement with the assumptions of the dominant conceptual categories used in reading the conditions of migrancy and diaspora. In *The Hungry Tide* (2004), he engages with the lived reality of diasporic life in the precarious zones of the Sundarbans, the "tide country" of southern Bengal, in the deltas of the Ganga and the Brahmaputra Rivers. As Pablo Mukherjee notes, "… Ghosh's novel is primarily engaged in displacing metro/cosmopolitanism with a historically differentiated refugee condition as the paradigm of postcoloniality"(188). It explores the issue of unjust and inhuman environmental policy of the colonial state and the current cosmopolitan concerns in the subaltern space of the remote islands. As Ghosh parlays the Morichjhapi massacre into a thematically capacious narrative with his ingenious imagination, the text also becomes a critique of postcolonial "governmentality" (to borrow Foucault's coinage for the techniques of modern government), an extension of its colonial predecessor, in that it operates on the same logic of surveillance, coercion and control.

Terry Tomsky argues that Ghosh's novel urges readers to exercise their ethical obligations affectively and socio-politically "in the face of civic inequalities and suppressed histories" (64). The ethical obligations of justice to a displaced and precarious body of the undocumented migrants and the preservation of the ecological space in response to the exigencies of a world cultural market frame the narrative focus and form the conceptual texture of *The Hungry Tide*. With its suitably excavated context in an amphibious location, Ghosh's fictional engagement with the theme of distressed migration, evident in his earlier novels, especially *The Circle of Reason*, *In An Antique Land* and *The Glass Palace*, gains a new dimension here. At the very beginning, Ghosh takes us to the "tide country," a place located at the margins of the nation and standing back from the mainstream India. Kanai, a forty-year old man from Delhi and one of the protagonists in the novel, arrives by train at the Sundarbans for a visit to his aunt, Nilima, who runs a philanthropic project, Badabon Trust, in Lusibari, the farthest of the inhabited islands in that region. He reads about these islands interposed between the sea and the plains of Bengal from an old sheet of paper:

> 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. A mangrove forest is a universe unto itself, utterly unlike other woodlands or jungles…. Every year dozens of people perish in the embrace of that dense foliage, killed by tigers, snakes and crocodiles. There is no prettiness here to invite the stranger in: yet, to the world at large this archipelago is known as the 'Sundarban,' which means 'the beautiful forest.'
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> There are some who believe the word to be derived from the name of a common species of mangrove – the sundari tree, Heriteria minor. But the word's origin is no easier to account for than is its present prevalence, for in the record books of Mughal emperors this region is named not in reference to a tree but to a tide – *bhati*. And to the inhabitants out of the islands this land is known as *bhatir desh* – the tide country – except that *bhati* is not just the 'tide' but one tide in particular, the ebb-tide, the *bhata*. (*The Hungry Tide* 7-8)

Kanai had earlier been to Lusibari in 1970, when his uncle Nirmal, the headmaster of the local school, was alive. The tidal mangrove forest areas underwent a traumatic episode in 1979, when the fleeing refugees seeking settlement were forcibly evicted by the communist-led Left Front government of West Bengal from the large island of Morichjhapi, on the southern edge of the Sundarbans and one of the biggest in the archipelago. The government took the refugee settlers as criminals on the plea that they were competing for scarce resources against other animals, the mangrove forest and so on. Nirmal, a poet and scholar whose dreams of socialist revolution are first dashed and then revived by his affective reaction to the besieged and bewildered settlers in the quiet recesses of the tide country, has left some writings in a sealed packet for Kanai's eyes. Nilima earnestly wants Kanai, now a translator by profession, to see the newly recovered notebook. This is why she has asked Kanai to come over and deal with the packet of Nirmal's. On his way to the tide country from Kolkata, Kanai happens to meet Piyali Roy, aka Piya, an American cetologist of Bengali origin. Her particular field of expertise concerns the freshwater river dolphins that are to be found in Asia's great waterways – especially the Irrawaddy and the Ganges. She is travelling to the tide country to track the migratory patterns and habits of the Gangetic River Dolphins. Piya happens to meet Fokir, son of Kusum, a Bangladeshi refugee in the Sundarbans, and is amazed by his intuitive understanding of the local river and ecosphere. The stark struggle of the settlers in the aftermath of their mobility, migrancy and uprootedness permeates the world of the novel.

The text alludes to Sir Daniel Hamilton, a Scotsman, who bought ten thousand acres of the tide country in 1903 from the British government, where Nirmal and Nilima came in 1950 "in search of a safe haven" (76). These islands were sparsely and sporadically settled by successive waves of destitute refugees and migrants at the time of India's partition in 1947 and later from Bangladesh in the early 1970s. Hamilton's project of laying the foundation of a socialist/utopian community, in which the questions of gender, caste, religion, and class would not have been the causes for discriminations and conflicts, in which people could live in conditions of wealth and mutual aid, remained purely potential or outside the horizon of possibility. However, during the three decades since Kanai's earlier visit to his aunt's place in 1970 Lusibari has changed a lot with Nilima's initiatives and great sacrifices made in the public interest.

The Women's Union founded by Nilima on the island led to the formation of the Badabon Development Trust, coming from the Bengali word for "mangrove" and "offering an ever-increasing number of services – medical, paralegal, agricultural" (81). When Moyna, Fokir's wife and Kusum's daughter-in-law, shows him around the hospital, Kanai notices the evident change: "It was astonishing to think of how much had changed in the tide country since his last visit, not just in material matters but even in people's hope and desires. Nothing was better proof of this than the very existence of this hospital and the opportunities it provided and aspirations it nurtured" (134). However, Nirmal's diary written in May 1979, which Kanai is reading now, unfolds some tragic events connected with the occupation of the island of Morichjhapi by the Bangladesh refugees fleeing their camps in central India. Many of them were killed by the Indian government police and Nirmal too got involved in the troubles. The Morichjhapi episode dramatises the novel's central theme, which also splices Piya's elite environmentalism represented by her dedicated trip to the Sundarbans to track the migratory patterns and habits of the Gangetic River Dolphins.

Ghosh says that though the events in Morichjhapi (1979) were "widely discussed in the Calcutta press, English as well as Bengali" (402), it has practically disappeared from history and references to it in English are available only in Ross Mallick's article "Refugee Resettlement in Forest Reserves: West Bengal Policy Reversal and the Morichjhapi massacre" which was published in 1999 in the *Journal of South Asian Studies*. Later, the events leading up to the Morichjhapi turmoil were recorded in Annu Jalais' article "Dwelling on Morichjhapi: When Tigers Became 'Citizens,' Refugees 'Tiger-Food,'" which is based on interviews with the islanders and is an authentic piece of history. Jalais shared her knowledge of the Morichjhapi incident with Ghosh but her research paper appeared after the publication of *The Hungry Tide*. It throws light on how the refugees who had fled from the Dandakaranya camp in Madhya Pradesh and came to the island of Morichjhapi in the Sundarbans with the intention of settling there were brutally evicted in May, 1979.

> In 1977, when the Left Front came to power, they found that refugee supporters had taken them at their word and sold their belongings, and land to return to West Bengal. In all, 1, 50,000 refugees arrived from Dankaranya expecting the government to honour its word. Fearing that an influx of refugees might jeopardize the prospects of the state's economic recovery,the government started to forcibly send them back. Many refugees however managed to escape to various places inside West Bengal, one of these being the Sundarbans where they had family and where they would be able to survive by working as fishers. From the month of May the same year about 30,000 SC refugees, under the leadership of Satish Mandal, president of the Udbastu Unnayansil Samity, a former close associate of the Communist Party's refugee programme, sailed to Morichjhapi and set up a settlement there…. Unrepentant… [t]he government persisted in the effort to clear Morichjhapi of the settlers. On the January 31, 1979 the police opened fire killing 36 persons. The media started to underscore the plight of the refugees of Morichjhapi and wrote in positive terms about the progress they were making in their rehabilitation efforts…. Fearing more backlash, and seeing the public growing warm towards the refugees' cause, the chief minister declared Morichjhapi out of bounds for journalists and condemned their reports saying that these contributed to the refugees' militancy and self-importance and instead suggested that the press should support their eviction on the grounds of national interest. (Jalais 1757-62)

The refugee settlers had cleared the land for agriculture, and had begun to fish and farm. They developed fraternal solidarity with the islanders, who were descendants of the earlier immigrants brought by the British in the 1930s and 40s from East Bengal. They began to gather energy for raising rural concerns. Their emerging identity might turn into an articulate "bid to reclaim a portion of the West Bengal political rostrum by the poorest and most marginalised" (Jalais 1759). Their bonhomie and evolving bonds alarmed the government, as Jalais suggests, and so it reacted to the refugees' movement into Morichjhapi by saying that their permanent settlement would [disturb] the existing and potential forest wealth and also create ecological imbalance in the area.

Morichjhapi, relatively easily accessible from the mainland, was part of the Sundarbans reserved for tiger conservation. Most of the refugees running away from their camps located deep in the forests of Madhya Pradesh were distressed Dalits. In Bangladesh they had been oppressed and exploited both by the Muslim communalists and the upper caste Hindus. In the resettlement camps they were shabbily accommodated amidst unfamiliar speech communities and hostile locals. They were beaten and humiliated and treated like undesirable interlopers. Before the final clash of mid-May 1979, the homeless migrants had had a string of confrontations with the government forces in 1978. In a parlous and precarious state they moved eastwards to settle in Morichjhapi, reckoning on the communist regime's reconciliation and compassionate land concessions. Nirmal was drawn to their plight and the course of resistance against the government because the revolutionary spark was still alive in him. While teaching English literature at Ashutosh College in Calcutta in the late 1940s, he had made "a name for himself as a leftist intellectual and a writer of promise" (76). Mesmerised by his radical idealism, Nilima married him in 1949 but now as a social worker in Lusibari she needed the support of the ruling dispensation. As she tells Kanai, the truculence of the Morichjhapi settlers has triggered Nirmal's revolutionary moment of his young days:

> Men like that, even when they turn their backs on their party and their comrades, can never let go of the idea: it's the secret god that rules their hearts. It is what makes them come alive; they revel in the danger, the exquisite pain. It is to them what childbirth is to a woman, or war to a mercenary. (119)

Nilima's estimation of her husband's obsession with the Morichjhapi issue sits easily with Nirmal's reflective record in the notebook. After his retirement from the Lusibari School, Nirmal happens to see Kusum in Morichjhapi. She recounts the story of how she joined the Bangladesh refugees' "great march to the east" (164) – from their shelters in central India after the 1971 war – to the Sundarbans' edge, a large empty island called Morichjhapi. As an old woman among the refugees rhetorically claims the tide country: "Our fathers had once answered

Hamilton's call: they had wrested the estate from the sway of the tides. What they'd done for another, couldn't we do for ourselves?" (165). Moved by empathy towards the disinherited and homeless populace, Nirmal becomes mentally a part of the dispersed subalterns: "In my mind's eye I 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" (165).

Nirmal's notebook records the growing contours of a well-planned human settlement in Morichjhapi. The embryonic shape of a real ideal society – something like a carryover from Hamilton's unfulfilled dream – fashioned by the collective and co-operative efforts of men and women without the props of learning and power stirs the imagination of the "aging, bookish headmaster" (171). Quite remarkably, the scheme of raising and firming up a settlement in the sprawling agora of the Sundarbans is a shared enterprise by the Morichjhapi migrants. Each ward of the upcoming island society is led by "a sharp, energetic man, no dreamer" with "euphoric reticence" (172) and quiet self-assurance. The foundation of this ordered community was futuristic and shrewdly designed in that the resources were fairly allocated to each of the thirty thousand families moving in Morichjhapi and reserving one quarter of the island for people from other parts of the tide country. But in spite of their assiduity and diligence, they needed to enlist the support of public opinion through people in the press as well as the help of policemen and politicians, failing which they were seen as squatters and land-grabbers.

Even though warned by Nilima to remain out of harm's way, Nirmal is empathetically, though secretly, drawn to the Morichjhapi settlers. Within the space of a few months he finds Morichjhapi developing at a brisk pace. With steady additions and improvements, it was an "astonishing spectacle – as though an entire civilization had sprouted suddenly in the mud" (191). Sadly enough, the settlers fail to get the powers that be on their side even after hosting a feast on the island for the high and mighty from Kolkata. The reason given for their evacuation from the island was that the illegal settlement was causing spoliation of the environment and squatting of the forest area. The polemical exchange between Nirmal and Nilima regarding the primacy of environmental preservation vis-à-vis the dire need of settling the homeless human beings is a major point of the novel's conceptual plot. Nirmal asks Nilima: "Were the dreams of these settlers less valuable than those of a man like Sir Daniel just because he was a rich shaheb and they impoverished refugees?" (213). Nilima's reply is defensive: "What Sir Daniel did happened a long time ago. Just imagine what would become of this whole area if everybody started doing the same thing today. The whole forest would disappear" (213). There is no neat resolution of this disputatious contention except that Nilima makes a plea for practical and pragmatic action. She says, "To build something is not the same as dreaming of it; building is always a matter of well-chosen compromises" (214).

The Piya-Kanai-Fokir narrative thread of the novel is interwoven with the controversial issue of ecological preservation at the expense of human survival. However, the critique of the globally-enabled, though non-territorialised, politics of eco-conservation is even-handed and eminently balanced. We encounter multiple and countervailing points of view. Accusing Piya of pushing her plan to protect wildlife in India without regard for the dispossessed tribals, Kanai is critical of his own involvement:

> And I'm complicit because people like me – Indians of my class, that is – have chosen to hide these costs, basically in order to curry favour with their Western patrons. It's not hard to ignore the people who're dying – after all they're the poorest of the poor. But just ask yourself whether this would be allowed to happen anywhere else? There are more tigers living in America in captivity, than there are in all of India – what do you think would happen if they started killing human beings? (301)

Piya presses her point that there is a big difference between "preserving a species in captivity and keeping it in its habitat" and that it has been designed "by nature, by the earth, by the planet that keeps us all alive" (301). She stands her ground:

> Just suppose we crossed that imaginary line that prevents us from deciding that no other species matters except ourselves. What'll be left then? Aren't we alone enough in the universe? And do you think it'll stop at that? Once we decide we can kill off other species, it'll be people next – exactly the kind of people you're thinking of, poor who're poor and unnoticed. (301)

John Thieme has rightly argued: "The suggestion is that human hubris is upsetting the natural order, and the steady decline in the numbers of animal species threatens to leave humanity living in solipsistic isolation, and while Ghosh's dialectical method lends credence to the opinion voiced by Kanai, this is more than counter-balanced by Piya's view" (165). Ghosh's anthropocentric perspective does not detract from promoting a strong animal rights agenda.

Piya's position is in line with the strand in the wilderness movement in the context of Amerian environmentalism known as "Deep Ecology." Environmentalists of this persuasion tend to embrace an ethic, termed biospheric egalitarianism. Those who subscribe to this radical ideology, as Ramachandra Guha points out, "would place humans on a more or less equal footing with other species" (116). In philosophical terms, "Deep Ecology" or biospheric egalitarianism corresponds to biocentrism, which rejects human-centred perspective, unlike anthropocentrism, the belief that "humans stand apart and above the rest of creation" (Naess, ctd. in Guha 116-17). The "biocentrist" line attributes the ecological disaster to excessive human interference with the non-human world. Arguably, the worth of non-human beings is not related to their usefulness for human purposes and so humans have no right to reduce, undermine or damage the richness and diversity of wild life. Saba Pirzadeh argues that the problematics of Western conservation programmes

> draw upon generalized notions and partial knowledge claims to co-opt and preserve environments in other parts of the world, especially in the global South. Policies made under such programs do not take into account social, material, or historical realities of the chosen regions and, as a result, end up protecting animal species, but at the cost of human lives, thereby indicating the need to critically examine the essentialist dimensions of natural conservation. (114)

Ghosh, however, seems to be seeking the middle ground between the competing models and agendas of cosmopolitanism and humanism as also between revolutionary dreams and pragmatic approach to social service in this novel. *The Hungry Tide* offers various visions of the possible ways in which a place can be shaped, viewing a supposedly remote region as a product of both its ever-changing physical geography and of human agency. The Morichjhapi episode points up the contested nature of land usage. Ghosh's representation of this episode may seem to suggest that dispossessed subalterns should be favoured over animals, but bearing in mind that Piya is investigating the behaviour of another unique animal species, the river dolphins of the region, and that there are numerous other references to animals that play their part in sustaining the delicately balanced ecology of the tide country, the issue is delicately negotiated.

The novel is also centrally engaged with how one sees and gives voice to the "glocal." The account of the eviction of the Morichjhampi settlers with its signifying transactions unfolds material for a larger ethical debate. Throughout Ghosh dramatises various possible positions, but ultimately the novel evinces a preference for collaborative initiatives, in which the middle class characters and subalterns work together, partially narrowing the gap between cosmopolitan elite and glocalised poor. Ghosh seems to be engaging in a "seamless entertwining" of the cosmopolitan and the local. When Piya hears that Kanai will be returning to Lusibari from Delhi, she is quietly delighted: "it'll be good to have him home" (399). So the novel ends on an optimistic note, though interspersed with Ghosh's humanist critique of the inadequacy of the postcolonial state. Nonetheless, he does underscore the possibility of collaborative social work between the privileged and the poor and the convergence of characters both across and within class parameters. Piya's local work will have the benefits of global technology and the synergy will sustain her rooted cosmopolitanism.

Piya is horrified when she sees Fokir in the mob which is setting a tiger on fire. The flaws in her pro-animal stance are realised by her only after Kanai tells her that Fokir is a fisherman, "not a grass-roots ecologist" (297). She acquires knowledge about the tide country and becomes a host there. Her knowledge makes the landscape more secure and marginally more like "home." While she remains briskly professional, she becomes eminently practical in alliance with the down-to-earth doer and pragmatic Nilima. It also turns out that neither local, concrete and place-based ecological knowledge nor cosmopolitan, abstract and mediated knowledge is in all cases superior over the other. Ghosh's book posits the interconnectedness between the two groups as against the fundamental disconnectedness of a state government that has to respond to the exigencies of a world cultural market. A just postcolonial government cannot afford not to balance the place-based needs of its own citizens and vulnerable ecosystems.

By plugging into the tangible experiences of the dispossessed and uprooted in India who have been refugee-ed Ghosh places the novel's principal narrative in dialogue with diaspora theory and highlights the importance of "recalibrating" or correlating it afresh with the precariousness of the contemporary disenfranchised. The cosmo/metro/politans, Kanai and Piya, traverse the distance from the global to the local and are transformed in the process of embracing the local ecologies and forging a new sense of belonging in collaboration with the subaltern migrants. The cosmopolitan elites have their perspective on eco-ethics amplified following their encounter with the local contexts. The novel remains, as Emily Johansen points out, "highly cognizant of the potential problems of a non-territorialized cosmopolitanism for rural places" (12).

Makarand Paranjape, in an essay titled "Beyond the Subaltern Syndrome: Amitav Ghosh and the Crisis of the Bhadrasamaj," places Ghosh "in a lineage of influence going back to Satyajit Ray and Rabindranath Tagore, the two emblematic representatives of Bengali creative genius" (358). However, he notes that, unlike Tagore and Ray, Ghosh "seems to evade a full confrontation or face-off" with "the central conflict, whether personal or ethical," and the novel's narrative in *The Hungry Tide* drifts into "a romantic climax" (364). He further says that there are "several unresolved tensions including the debate between the rights of humans and animals competing for the same territory" (366). I wish to argue that Paranjape has missed the essential point in Ghosh's central preoccupation in this novel. Ghosh seems to have set up a dialectic on the tension between animal and human rights and not wanted to come down reductively on either side. The novel offers a complex debate about environmental ethics and so it should not be read as a crude ecological thesis novel. Diasporic flows of nomadic travellers and transient strangers have made the tide country a contested site for the imperilled biodiversity of its eco-system. The characters do respond to the crisis in the text with their psychological and material resources and the resolution wrought by them in the form of projects that bring together utopian thinking and pragmatic action is credibly anchored to the novel's plot dynamics. In *The Hungry Tide*, as John Thieme says, "Ghosh seems to be investigating possibilities for developing humanist alternatives to the present status quo. So the novel itself becomes a heterotopian site: as well as documenting perceived material 'realities', it promotes an idealistic vision of a more egalitarian poetics of space" (125).

Ghosh's novels are characterised by a consistent concern with the spatial and temporal displacements, though their diasporic reach and complexion sufficiently vary. These narratives remap diasporic experience as a struggle towards belonging and foreground the loss of roots and impediments to re-rooting and as such gesture towards loosening of the new diasporic paradigm embedded in the political agency of refugees from the conventional framework of demographic dispersal and migration. Simon Gikandi, in his essay "Between Roots and Routes: Cosmopolitanism and the Claims of Locality," challenges postcolonial theories of cosmopolitanism to refocus on refugees, "signs of a dislocated locality" (23), whose fragile location is on the fringes of what K.A. Appiah has called "the global tribe" (xiii). *The Hungry Tide* thus offers diasporic readings of refugee experiences and thereby the text empowers refugee-ed subjects/non-status migrants who do not possess the proper political subjectivity, i.e., state citizenship, and have been silenced by the material power that the nation-state mechanisms maintain. The novel exemplifies, as Krishna Sen states, Ghosh's "inclusive vision of human worth through the stories of one of the least known communities in the world" (155). The principal strands of the plot splice around the hinge-points of human interest and human accountability to the environment. The text's ethical orientation is embedded in the narrative of homelessness and dispossession around the questions of social and environmental justice, non-anthropocentric issues and biocentric egalitarianism which indicts, as Pramod K. Nayar puts it, "postcolonial colonisation" (Nayar 90) and shallow cosmopolitanism. While *The Hungry Tide* suggests the imminent ecological breakdown because of human incursions into the natural environment, it is reticent about apocalyptic proportions of climate change. In his non-fiction, *The Grea Derangement* (2016) and in his most recent novel, *Gun Island* (2019), Ghosh foregrounds the spectre of human catastrophe caused by ecological malfunction and global dysfunction. *Gun Island* may be read as a sequel to *The Hungry Tide* with many characters, such as Kanai, Nilima, Piya, Moyna, Horen and Tutul (mutated into Tipu) of the earlier novel re-appearing in it. This fascinating material must be reserved, however, for another article.

Acknowledgement

An earlier version of this paper was presented in absentia in an interdisciplinary international conference, "Recalibrating Diasporas: Asia and Pacific and the Spaces Beyond," at Murdoch University, Perth, Australia, on June 27-28, 2019. I am grateful to Dr. Gillian Dooley (Flinders University, Adelaide), Prof. John Thieme (University of East Anglia, UK) and Prof. Nalini Iyer (Seattle University, USA) for lending me useful materials in the course of writing this article.

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