

Framing Amitav Ghosh in Environmental Humanities: An Introduction

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Abstracts: Environmental Humanities is a multidisciplinary field that explores the entangled relationships between human culture and the wider material world. If the Environmental Sciences investigate the material factors that contribute to our ecological crisis, the Environmental Humanities explore, in transformative dialogue with the sciences, the aesthetic, imaginative, religious, and ethical components that not only drive our crisis but also provide us with the cultural tools to bring about healthy, flourishing futures. Keeping this in view, Amitav Ghosh (1956--) is one such prolific contemporary Indian writer, who has demonstrated a keen interest in environmental issues and climate change through his literary works. In addition to providing an elaborated introduction to Environmental Humanities, this paper aims to explore the nuanced manifestations of climate concerns in Ghosh's writing, unraveling the depth of his narratives in depicting the ecological challenges faced by humanity.

Keywords: Environmental Humanities, Human Culture, Ecological Crisis, Framing Amitav.

1. INTRODUCTION

Environmental Humanities is a multidisciplinary field that explores the entangled relationships between human culture and the wider material world. If the Environmental Sciences investigate the material factors that contribute to our ecological crisis, the Environmental Humanities explore, in transformative dialogue with the sciences, the aesthetic, imaginative, religious, and ethical components that not only drive our crisis but also provide us with the cultural tools to bring about healthy, flourishing futures. Humanity is heading towards a global crisis that has been brought about by the domestication, exploitation and degradation of the natural environment. Apart from sciences, this problem is closely interconnected with social structures and processes, and with cultural representations thus with history and politics, too. Therefore, historically, politically, aesthetically, and ethically reflective approaches that require the expertise of the humanities and social sciences are essential. This is precisely where the environmental humanities came into play.

Environmental Humanities is interested in rethinking the links between human beings and their environment, between nature and culture. Environmental Humanities bridges the traditional gap/divide between the sciences and humanities by using literature, history, philosophy and other humanities disciplines to address environmental problems.

Ecocriticism is a literary and cultural theory that explores the relationship between literature and the natural world. The roots of eco criticism can be traced back in the 1960s with the beginning of environmental movements and the publication of a phenomenal book titled *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson published in 1962. However, it actually started emerging the 1970s and 1980s as an interdisciplinary field of study drawing on concepts from ecology, environmental sciences and literary criticism. It examines how nature is represented in literary works and the way literature reflects and shapes human attitudes and perceptions towards the environment. Ecocriticism, as it has developed so far, has achieved its great success at what might broadly call the thematic level (Buell, Future): It has opened new canons of writing dedicated to nature for literary analysis. Ecocriticism has read classical literary text-from William Shakespeare to Thomas Pynchon, and other numerous writers across the world interested in nature, and in humans' impact on nature. Moreover, this field has tried to reinterpret the connection between imperialism and ecological degradation across vast gamut of postcolonial literature. Moreover, it has generated a new type of attention to the role of nonhuman forms of agency in literary texts, the agency of plants, animals, landscapes and the weather as has been argued by Ursula K . Hesis in a paper entitled "Comparative Literature

and Environmental Humanities”.

Needless to say, environmental study is mostly concerned with natural sciences, and the segment of social sciences that concerns itself with the policy, public opinion and environmental law. The humanities which include a great number of crucial interdisciplinary fields are rarely represented in such programs. Over the last decade, environmental humanities have emerged as an intellectual framework those connections between various humanities disciplines. (Ursula K Hesis

With the emerging technology and human population growth at fast speed resulting in unprecedented loss of environment, the current recognition of the environmental crisis and, more broadly, man's use of nature have to be a primary concern for humanistic research. Envisioning the environmental humanities, therefore, does not just mean identifying shared environmental concerns and concepts across various disciplines but also discovering similar environmental concerns—the concept of land, the portrayal of toxicity, the role of environmental justice etc.

Literary studies have become one of the most active areas of the environmental humanities. A large number of writers had thought of the environment and had written about it in their writings. It would be pertinent to mention that literature helps us to think about human relationship with the environment, nature, places, animals, weather events and the planet. Ecocriticism and the environmental humanities form a part of an array of new interdisciplinary areas that have emerged across the humanities and qualitative social sciences over the last two decades. For comparative ecocriticism, the emergence of the environmental humanities has opened up an enormously rich and varied field of exchanges with anthropologists, geographers, literary scholars and historians.

Literature and the arts have always been drawn to portrayals of physical environments and human-environment interactions. The modern environmentalist movement as it emerged first in the late-nineteenth century and, in its more recent incarnation, in the 1960s, gave rise to a rich array of fictional and nonfictional writings concerned with humans' changing relationship with the natural world. Only since the early 1990s, however, has the long-standing interest of literary studies in these matters generated the initiative most commonly known as 'ecocriticism'-- a literary theory that examines the connection between literature and the environment. In such areas as the study of narrative and image, ecocriticism converges with its sister disciplines in the humanities: environmental anthropology, environmental history, and environmental philosophy.

Environmental issues have become increasingly critical in the face of global challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss and environmental degradation. Literature as a powerful medium reflects and shapes societal attitudes towards nature and the environment. Out of all these environmental challenges; climate change stands as one of the most pressing challenges of our time, impacting ecosystems, societies and cultures globally. Literature as a mirror of societal concerns and aspirations often reflects the anxieties and awareness surrounding climate change. Tyrus Miller, Dean School of Humanities UCI argues, “Climate change is not only a scientific and technical problem. Climate change is caused by the collective behavior above by the rich and privileged of this world. Studying Environmental Humanities can ensure equitable solutions and spread positive action”. Arguably, climate change is one of the most concerning issues of this era we live in—the Anthropogenic. It is not only a scientific and environmental crisis; it also reveals a failure of thinking and imagination and is therefore a cultural crisis, too. As the situation started to worsen at an unstoppable pace, the measures taken to deal with it are insufficient in view of the consequences now evident.

Keeping this in view, Amitav Ghosh (1956--) is one such prolific contemporary Indian writer, who has demonstrated a keen interest in environmental issues and climate change through his literary works. This proposal aims to explore the nuanced manifestations of climate concerns in Ghosh's writing, unraveling the depth of his narratives in depicting the ecological challenges faced by humanity. Ghosh's unique perspective on environmentalism, intertwined with his narratives, offer a rich field of explorations and analysis.

Amitav Ghosh is an acclaimed writer, known for writing about environmental issues and concerns, especially climate change. Ghosh's literature deals more with the environment and the way climate change has started to impact the day to day life. His writings like *The Hungry Tide* (2004),), *The Iblis Trilogy*; consisting of the novels

Sea of Poppies (2008), River of Smoke (2011) and Flood of Fire (2015), The Great Derangement: Climate Change and Unthinkable (2016), Gun Island (2019), The Netmug: Parables for A Planet in Crisis (2021), among others, deal with climate change, the environment and the catastrophe the world is threatened by. In one of his interviews with NDTV, Ghosh says:

It is perfectly clear that the large part of India is heading towards disaster from climate change. Talking about Delhi, I think more than climate change; the real problem of Delhi in the long run will be water. Delhi has always been on edge of the desert; it is a water stressed area. We have become completely dependent on fossil water from the upper Ganga aqua fall and that is almost exhausted. Once it runs out, what are we going to do; it is the question we all need to ask. Here we are in the middle of catastrophe. Climate change is like a slow violence and that is why these things are not easy to write about. (Ghosh)

Ghosh goes on in his writings to talk about the destruction of the balance between nature and the ways humans interact with it. He narrates how forests are being exploited in the name of development interests. He questions the type of development in which hundreds or thousands of people have to lose their land, environment and livelihood and tells about the mountains that are being destroyed for the sake of mining.

Ghosh in his fiction and nonfiction explores the problems of conserving biodiversity and distrusts materialistic forces that plunder the earth's natural resources. Furthermore, Ghosh examines issues of biodiversity conservation, rejects materialistic forces that plunder the planet's natural resources, and participates in the newly emerging paradigm of taking a material turn in both his fiction and non-fiction works. In doing so, he considers potential approaches to the analysis of language and reality.

CONCLUSION /SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY:

Environmental Humanities holds significant scholarly and practical value by deepening our understanding of the intersection between literature, ecology, and climate change. By analyzing Ghosh's works, this study contributes to the growing field of Environmental Humanities offering insights into how literature can shape environmental discourse and inspire climate action. This research holds significant academic and practical value by shedding light on the intersection of literature, environmental issues and climate change. The findings will contribute to the growing field of ecocriticism and provide a deeper understanding of how literature can influence public discourse on climate and ecological challenges, thereby adding new vistas in environmental humanities. The study will contribute to the fields of literature, environmental studies, eco criticism and environmental humanities by providing insights into how literature can serve as a catalyst for climate discussions and environmental activism. The outcomes/findings of this research may inform educators, policymakers, and readers fostering a deeper understanding of the intricate relationship between literature and climate change.

Amitav Ghosh's contribution to environmental humanities lie in his ability to intertwine environmental themes with compelling narratives, encouraging readers to contemplate the intricate connections between humans, nature and the urgent need for environmental stewardship. Through his literary works, Ghosh has significantly enriched the discourse within environmental humanities, inspiring readers to confront environmental challenges with empathy, awareness, and proactive engagement.

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15379/ijmst.v10i3.3413>

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