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## Human–Nature Interface and Environmental Justice: An Ecocritical Study of Selected Novels by Amitav Ghosh and Arundhati Roy

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### Abstract

The ecological crisis of the twenty-first century has intensified scholarly attention toward the relationship between literature and the natural environment. Ecocriticism, as an interdisciplinary field, explores how literary texts represent ecological concerns and shape human attitudes toward nature. This study examines the human–nature interface and the concept of environmental justice in selected novels by Amitav Ghosh and Arundhati Roy. The analysis focuses on *The Hungry Tide* (2004) and *Gun Island* (2019) by Amitav Ghosh and *The God of Small Things* (1997) and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017) by Arundhati Roy. These novels portray diverse ecological landscapes—including the Sundarbans, Kerala, Venice, Delhi, and Kashmir—thereby highlighting the complex relationship between human societies and fragile ecosystems. Using an ecocritical framework, the study analyses how these texts depict climate change, environmental degradation, biodiversity loss, and the socio-political consequences of ecological exploitation. The paper argues that both authors emphasize the disproportionate impact of environmental crises on marginalized communities, thereby foregrounding the concept of environmental justice. While Amitav Ghosh’s narratives stress global ecological interconnectedness, climate change, and ecological migration, Arundhati Roy integrates environmental concerns with issues of caste, political conflict, and social marginalization. Through a comparative analysis of these works, the study demonstrates how contemporary Indian fiction contributes to ecological awareness by critiquing anthropocentric perspectives and advocating a more sustainable and ethical relationship between humans and the natural environment.

**Keywords:** ecocriticism, human–nature interface, environmental justice, climate change, environmental degradation, contemporary Indian fiction, Amitav Ghosh, Arundhati Roy.

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## Introduction

The relationship between human beings and the natural environment has become a major concern in contemporary discourse. In the twenty-first century, the world faces serious ecological challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss, deforestation, rising sea levels, and environmental pollution. These environmental crises threaten not only ecological balance but also social, economic, and political systems worldwide. As a result, scholars increasingly examine how human societies interact with nature and how cultural narratives shape environmental awareness. Literature, as a powerful form of cultural expression, plays a significant role in influencing human attitudes toward the natural world.

In literary studies, ecocriticism has emerged as an important framework for examining the relationship between literature and the environment. Ecocriticism studies how literary texts represent nature, ecological systems, and environmental crises. According to Cheryll Glotfelty (1996), ecocriticism can be defined as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment.” This approach challenges anthropocentric perspectives that prioritize human interests over ecological sustainability and instead promote a more balanced relationship between humans and nature. Through ecocritical analysis, scholars explore how literature shapes environmental consciousness and encourages ethical engagement with the natural world.

Environmental concerns have become increasingly prominent in contemporary Indian literature. India’s diverse landscapes – forests, rivers, coastal regions, and mountains – have long influenced its literary traditions. Modern writers continue this engagement while addressing contemporary environmental challenges such as urbanization, industrialization, and climate change. Their works often reveal how environmental degradation is closely connected with social, economic, and political inequalities.

Among contemporary writers, Amitav Ghosh and Arundhati Roy are prominent voices who address ecological issues in their fiction. Their novels explore the complex relationship between humans and nature while also engaging with themes of social justice, cultural identity, and political conflict. By portraying fragile ecosystems and diverse landscapes, both authors highlight the interconnectedness of environmental and social realities.

Amitav Ghosh frequently focuses on environmental change and the climate crisis. His novel *The Hungry Tide* (2004), set in the Sundarbans mangrove ecosystem, portrays the dependence of local communities on ecological balance while also revealing tensions between conservation policies and human survival. His later novel *Gun Island* (2019) addresses the global dimensions of climate change by linking ecological disturbances in South Asia with environmental events in Europe, thereby highlighting issues such as ecological migration and rising sea levels.

Similarly, Arundhati Roy’s fiction engages deeply with environmental and social concerns. Her novel *The God of Small Things* (1997) depicts the natural landscape of Kerala while exposing the gradual degradation of ecosystems caused by human activities such as pollution and industrialization. In *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017), Roy expands this ecological perspective by portraying environmental and political transformations in urban and conflict-affected regions such as Delhi and Kashmir. Her narratives emphasize the connections between environmental destruction, political conflict, and social marginalization.

A central concept emerging from these texts is environmental justice, which refers to the fair distribution of environmental resources and the equitable treatment of communities in environmental decision-making. Marginalized populations often experience the most severe consequences of ecological degradation despite contributing the least to it. Both Ghosh and Roy highlight this issue by portraying communities whose lives are deeply affected by environmental crises.

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The selected novels provide an important framework for exploring the human–nature interface in contemporary Indian fiction. Through their depiction of ecological landscapes and social realities, these works reveal how environmental concerns intersect with questions of power, inequality, and cultural identity. Examining these narratives through an ecocritical perspective demonstrates how literature contributes to discussions about environmental sustainability and ethical responsibility toward nature.

This study therefore analyses the representation of the human–nature interface and environmental justice in selected novels by Amitav Ghosh and Arundhati Roy. Using an ecocritical approach, it examines how these authors portray ecological landscapes, environmental crises, and the complex relationship between humans and nature. Through comparative analysis, the paper highlights how contemporary Indian fiction engages with global ecological concerns and encourages readers to reconsider their relationship with the natural world.

### **Research Questions and Objectives of the Study**

#### ***Research Questions***

Clearly defined research questions guide the direction of academic research and identify the key issues explored in a study. They provide a framework for analysing the selected texts and structuring the overall argument. This study examines the representation of the human–nature interface and environmental justice in selected novels by Amitav Ghosh and Arundhati Roy from an ecocritical perspective.

The research is guided by the following questions:

1. How do Amitav Ghosh and Arundhati Roy portray the relationship between humans and nature in their novels?
2. How do the selected texts represent environmental degradation, ecological imbalance, and climate change?
3. In what ways do the novels highlight environmental justice and the struggles of marginalized communities affected by ecological crises?
4. What role do ecological landscapes such as the Sundarbans, Kerala, Delhi, and Kashmir play in shaping the narratives?
5. What similarities and differences exist in the ecological perspectives of the two authors?

These questions aim to explore how contemporary Indian fiction engages with environmental concerns and contributes to discussions on ecological sustainability and human responsibility toward nature.

#### ***Objectives of the Study***

The primary objective of this research is to analyse how selected novels by Amitav Ghosh and Arundhati Roy portray the relationship between humans and the natural environment. Using an ecocritical framework, the study examines the representation of ecological landscapes, environmental degradation, and the socio-political dimensions of ecological crises in their works.

The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

- i) To examine ecocritical perspectives in selected novels by Amitav Ghosh and Arundhati Roy.
- ii) To analyse the human–nature relationship in the Sundarbans as depicted in *The Hungry Tide*, with particular attention to conservation, environmental change, and local livelihoods.
- iii) To investigate the representation of climate change and ecological migration in *Gun Island*.

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- iv) To explore ecological degradation and its connection with social inequality in *The God of Small Things*.
  - v) To examine the impact of human intervention, urbanization, and political conflict on ecological landscapes in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*.
  - vi) To compare the ecological perspectives of the two authors and evaluate their contribution to environmental discourse in contemporary Indian literature.

Through these objectives, the study seeks to highlight how literature contributes to understanding environmental challenges and promoting ecological awareness, while also encouraging a more sustainable and ethical relationship between human societies and the natural world.

### **Theoretical Framework: Ecocriticism and Environmental Justice**

The present study is grounded in the theoretical framework of ecocriticism, an interdisciplinary field that examines the relationship between literature and the natural environment. Ecocriticism emerged in the late twentieth century as environmental crises such as climate change, deforestation, and biodiversity loss gained increasing global attention. Literary scholars began exploring how literary texts represent nature and how these representations influence human attitudes toward the environment.

The term *ecocriticism* gained prominence with the publication of *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (1996), edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm. Glotfelty (1996) defines ecocriticism as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment.” This approach focuses on how literary texts portray landscapes, ecosystems, and environmental crises, as well as the interactions between human and non-human worlds.

A central aim of ecocriticism is to challenge anthropocentrism, the belief that human beings occupy the central position in the natural world. Traditional literary interpretations often treated nature merely as a backdrop for human actions. Ecocriticism, however, views nature as an active presence that shapes human experience and cultural narratives. By shifting attention from human-centered perspectives to ecological relationships, ecocriticism encourages readers to reconsider their ethical responsibilities toward the environment.

Lawrence Buell emphasizes that literature plays an important role in shaping readers’ environmental imagination. According to Buell (1995), literary representations of nature can influence how individuals perceive ecological issues and foster a sense of environmental responsibility. Similarly, Greg Garrard identifies recurring themes in ecological literature, including wilderness, pollution, pastoral landscapes, environmental crisis, and sustainability, which help scholars analyse how literary works engage with environmental concerns.

In recent years, ecocriticism has expanded to incorporate perspectives such as postcolonial ecocriticism and environmental justice studies. Postcolonial ecocriticism examines how colonial histories and economic exploitation have contributed to environmental degradation in many regions. This perspective is particularly relevant in South Asian contexts, where ecological issues are often linked to colonial legacies, social inequality, and political conflict.

The concept of environmental justice is another key dimension of contemporary ecocritical studies. Environmental justice refers to the fair distribution of environmental resources and the equitable treatment of communities affected by ecological problems. In many societies, marginalized groups—including indigenous communities and economically disadvantaged populations—experience the most severe consequences of environmental degradation despite contributing the least to it.

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Rob Nixon's concept of "**slow violence**" further explains how environmental destruction often occurs gradually and invisibly, disproportionately affecting vulnerable communities over time. Unlike sudden disasters, this form of violence unfolds slowly and remains largely unnoticed, making literature an important medium for exposing hidden environmental injustices.

This theoretical framework provides an effective lens for analysing the selected novels by Amitav Ghosh and Arundhati Roy. In *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh portrays the fragile ecosystem of the Sundarbans and highlights tensions between conservation policies and the livelihoods of local communities. His novel *Gun Island* explores the global dimensions of climate change and ecological migration.

Similarly, Roy's works demonstrate strong ecological awareness. In *The God of Small Things*, the natural landscape of Kerala plays a central role, while the pollution of the river symbolizes the destructive impact of human activities. In *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, Roy depicts the ecological consequences of urbanization and political conflict in regions such as Delhi and Kashmir.

By applying ecocritical theory and the concept of environmental justice, this study examines how these novels represent the human-nature interface and highlight the ethical responsibilities of human societies toward ecological sustainability. Through this framework, the research demonstrates how contemporary Indian fiction contributes to environmental discourse by revealing the complex relationships between nature, culture, and social justice.

### Literature Review

The increasing environmental crisis of the modern era has significantly influenced literary studies, leading to the emergence of ecocriticism as an important critical approach. Ecocriticism examines how literary texts represent nature and explores the relationship between human societies and ecological systems. In recent decades, scholars have applied this approach to analyse literature addressing environmental issues such as climate change, ecological degradation, biodiversity loss, and environmental injustice.

The foundations of ecocriticism were established by scholars such as Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm. In *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (1996), Glotfelty defines ecocriticism as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment." This definition highlights the central aim of ecocritical studies: to examine how literary narratives represent nature and influence environmental awareness. Glotfelty and Fromm (1996) argue that literature can shape ecological consciousness by encouraging readers to reconsider their relationship with the natural world.

Lawrence Buell further developed ecocritical theory in *The Environmental Imagination* (1995), emphasizing that literature plays an important role in shaping environmental perception. According to Buell, literary representations of nature encourage readers to recognize the ethical responsibilities associated with environmental degradation. Similarly, Greg Garrard, in *Ecocriticism* (2012), identifies major themes within ecological literature, including wilderness, pastoral landscapes, pollution, environmental crisis, and sustainability. His work demonstrates how literary texts reflect cultural anxieties about environmental destruction while also imagining possibilities for ecological balance.

Ecocritical studies have also expanded to include perspectives from postcolonial studies and environmental justice. Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, in *Postcolonial Ecocriticism*, emphasize the relationship between environmental degradation and colonial histories. They argue that colonial exploitation of natural resources has significantly contributed to ecological crises in postcolonial societies, making it necessary to examine environmental issues within broader historical and political contexts.

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Another significant contribution to environmental justice studies is Rob Nixon's concept of "slow violence," introduced in *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Nixon explains that environmental destruction often occurs gradually and disproportionately affects marginalized communities. Because this form of violence unfolds slowly and remains largely invisible, literature plays an important role in bringing attention to the experiences of communities affected by ecological exploitation.

Within the context of Indian literature, ecocritical scholarship has increasingly focused on contemporary writers who address environmental concerns in their works. Amitav Ghosh has received considerable attention for his exploration of climate change and ecological interconnectedness. Scholars note that his works combine historical, cultural, and environmental perspectives to illustrate the relationship between humans and nature. His novel *The Hungry Tide* (2004) has been widely analysed for its portrayal of the Sundarbans mangrove ecosystem and the dependence of local communities on ecological balance.

Ghosh's later works, including *Gun Island* (2019), further explore the global dimensions of climate change by linking ecological disturbances across continents. These narratives reflect his broader concern with humanity's inability to adequately address climate change in cultural and political discourse.

Similarly, the works of Arundhati Roy have been widely studied for their engagement with social and political issues. Scholars increasingly recognize the ecological consciousness present in her works. *The God of Small Things* (1997) has been analyzed for its vivid environmental imagery and its depiction of the natural landscape of Kerala, where the polluted river symbolizes both ecological and social deterioration.

Roy's later novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017) portrays diverse landscapes such as Delhi and Kashmir, highlighting the connections between environmental degradation, urbanization, political conflict, and social marginalization. Through these narratives, Roy emphasizes the interconnected nature of ecological and political struggles.

Despite the growing scholarship on both writers, most studies focus on individual texts or specific themes rather than offering a comparative analysis of their ecological perspectives. While Ghosh's works are often examined in relation to climate change and Roy's novels in relation to social and political issues, relatively few studies explore the human-nature interface across the selected novels of both authors.

Furthermore, the concept of environmental justice remains insufficiently explored in comparative studies of their works. Both writers portray marginalized communities affected by environmental degradation; however, the broader implications of these representations for environmental justice discourse require further scholarly attention.

Therefore, this study contributes to existing scholarship by providing a comparative ecocritical analysis of selected novels by Amitav Ghosh and Arundhati Roy. By examining their portrayal of ecological landscapes, environmental crises, and marginalized communities, the research highlights the role of contemporary Indian fiction in addressing global environmental concerns.

### Research Gap

Although ecocriticism has gained significant prominence in contemporary literary studies, certain areas remain underexplored, particularly with regard to comparative analyses of contemporary Indian fiction. Scholars such as Cheryll Glotfelty, Lawrence Buell, and Greg Garrard have established important theoretical frameworks for understanding the relationship between literature and the environment. Their works emphasize the analysis of literary representations of nature, ecological crises, and environmental ethics.

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In the context of Indian literature, the works of Amitav Ghosh and Arundhati Roy have been widely studied from various critical perspectives, including postcolonial, cultural, political, and feminist approaches. Ghosh's novels, particularly *The Hungry Tide* (2004), have been examined for their depiction of the Sundarbans ecosystem and the complex relationship between human communities and the natural environment. Scholars have highlighted how the novel addresses issues such as displacement, conservation policies, and the survival struggles of local populations.

Similarly, Roy's works have received considerable scholarly attention for their exploration of social inequality and political conflict. *The God of Small Things* (1997) has primarily been studied in relation to caste discrimination, family dynamics, and social hierarchies, while *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017) has been analyzed for its critique of state power and its representation of marginalized communities in regions such as Kashmir.

Despite this growing body of scholarship, certain limitations remain. Most studies examine the works of Ghosh and Roy individually rather than providing a comparative analysis of their ecological perspectives. Although ecocritical readings of individual novels exist, relatively few studies systematically compare how both authors represent the relationship between humans and nature.

Another gap lies in the limited discussion of environmental justice within these literary works. While scholars acknowledge ecological themes in these novels, fewer studies analyze how environmental degradation disproportionately affects marginalized communities or how these narratives contribute to environmental justice discourse.

Furthermore, the selected novels portray diverse ecological landscapes – the Sundarbans, Kerala, Delhi, and Kashmir – each reflecting distinct environmental challenge. However, existing research rarely examines how these different settings collectively illustrate the broader human-nature interface in contemporary Indian fiction.

Therefore, this study addresses these gaps by offering a comparative ecocritical analysis of selected novels by Ghosh and Roy. By examining ecological landscapes, environmental crises, and the experiences of marginalized communities, the research highlights how contemporary Indian fiction engages with environmental justice and contributes to discussions on ecological sustainability.

## Methodology

The present study adopts a qualitative and interpretative research methodology to examine the representation of the human-nature interface and environmental justice in selected novels by Amitav Ghosh and Arundhati Roy. Since the research focuses on literary texts and thematic interpretation, a qualitative approach is suitable for exploring the relationship between literature, ecology, and social realities. The study primarily relies on textual analysis, comparative literary analysis, and ecocritical interpretation.

## Research Design

This study follows a descriptive and analytical research design. The descriptive component identifies ecological themes, environmental concerns, and representations of natural landscapes in the selected novels. The analytical component interprets these elements through the theoretical framework of ecocriticism to understand how the texts portray the relationship between humans and nature.

A comparative approach is also adopted, examining the ecological perspectives in the works of Ghosh and Roy. By comparing their narratives, the research highlights similarities and differences in their treatment of environmental issues and environmental justice.

## Selection of Primary Texts

The primary texts selected for this study are:

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- *The Hungry Tide* (2004) – Amitav Ghosh
  - *Gun Island* (2019) – Amitav Ghosh
  - *The God of Small Things* (1997) – Arundhati Roy
  - *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017) – Arundhati Roy

These novels were chosen because they engage strongly with ecological themes such as climate change, pollution, biodiversity loss, urbanization, and ecological displacement. They also portray diverse ecological settings – including the Sundarbans, Kerala, Delhi, Kashmir, and Venice – allowing for a broader examination of the human–nature relationship across different environments.

### **Analytical Framework**

The analysis is conducted using an ecocritical framework, drawing on the theoretical contributions of Cheryll Glotfelty, Lawrence Buell, and Greg Garrard. Ecocriticism provides tools to examine how literature represents nature, ecological crises, and human–environment interactions.

The study also incorporates the concept of environmental justice, which focuses on the unequal distribution of environmental benefits and burdens among social groups. This perspective enables the analysis of how the novels portray marginalized communities affected by ecological degradation.

### **Method of Analysis**

The primary method employed in this study is close textual reading. This involves examining narrative descriptions, characters, and key passages to identify ecological themes and environmental concerns. The analysis focuses on the following dimensions:

- i) Representation of ecological landscapes, including rivers, forests, mangroves, and urban spaces.
- ii) Depiction of environmental degradation, including pollution, deforestation, and climate change.
- iii) Interactions between human communities and natural ecosystems.
- iv) The impact of ecological changes on marginalized communities and livelihoods.
- v) Narrative strategies used by the authors to convey ecological awareness and ethical responsibility.

Through this methodology, the study provides a systematic and comparative understanding of how contemporary Indian fiction addresses environmental concerns and the human–nature interface.

### **Comparative Approach**

In addition to textual analysis, this study adopts a **comparative approach** to examine how Amitav Ghosh and Arundhati Roy engage with ecological themes in their works. Although both authors address environmental concerns, their narrative strategies and thematic emphases differ. By comparing the selected texts, the research identifies the distinctive ecological perspectives of each writer while highlighting their broader contributions to environmental discourse in contemporary literature.

### **Sources of Data**

The study relies on both **primary and secondary sources**:

- **Primary sources:** Selected novels by Ghosh and Roy, which serve as the main material for analysis.

- **Secondary sources:** Scholarly books, research articles, and critical essays related to ecocriticism, environmental justice, and contemporary Indian literature. These secondary materials provide the theoretical foundation for interpreting the selected texts within a broader ecological and literary context.

### Scope and Limitations

This study focuses on four novels by Ghosh and Roy and examines them primarily from an ecocritical perspective. The analysis concentrates on ecological themes such as environmental degradation, human–nature relationships, and environmental justice. Other aspects of the novels – such as linguistic style or narrative techniques – are discussed only when relevant to environmental concerns.

Despite these limitations, the selected texts offer substantial material for exploring the human–nature interface and environmental justice in contemporary Indian fiction.

### Analysis and Discussion

#### *Human–Nature Interface in The Hungry Tide*

Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2004) presents a powerful literary depiction of the relationship between humans and nature. Set in the Sundarbans—a vast mangrove ecosystem spanning India and Bangladesh—the novel explores the fragile ecological balance that sustains both human and non-human life. The Sundarbans, with its mangrove forests, shifting river channels, and rich biodiversity, symbolizes nature's unpredictability and resilience.

The novel portrays the region as a dynamic ecological space where human survival depends on adapting to natural forces. The tides, rivers, and forests function not merely as background settings but as active elements shaping the lives of characters. Constant tidal movements and erosion highlight the fragile relationship between human settlements and the surrounding ecosystem.

Ghosh also emphasizes the deep connection between local communities and their environment. Inhabitants depend on fishing, honey collection, and small-scale agriculture for their livelihoods. These activities demonstrate the interdependence between humans and nature while also revealing the vulnerability of communities living in an unpredictable environment marked by storms, floods, and wildlife threats.

A central conflict arises from the tension between environmental conservation and human survival. Policies aimed at protecting endangered species such as the Royal Bengal tiger often restrict the activities of local communities who rely on forest resources. This creates an ethical dilemma in which biodiversity protection may come at the expense of human livelihoods.

The relationship between Piya Roy, a marine biologist studying river dolphins, and Fokir, a local fisherman with deep knowledge of the tidal ecosystem, illustrates the importance of integrating indigenous knowledge with scientific research. Piya represents scientific environmentalism, while Fokir embodies traditional ecological wisdom. Their collaboration demonstrates how diverse forms of knowledge are necessary to understand complex ecosystems.

The novel foregrounds environmental justice by depicting the struggles of marginalized communities in the Sundarbans. These communities often face displacement due to conservation policies, natural disasters, and political decisions that prioritize ecological protection over local livelihoods. Ghosh suggests that environmental policies must consider the rights and needs of communities who have historically coexisted with these ecosystems.

The unpredictability of nature – cyclones, tidal floods, and shifting landscapes – also challenges anthropocentric beliefs that humans can dominate the natural world. Additionally, the Sundarbans'

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biodiversity is highlighted for its ecological significance; mangrove forests protect coastal regions from erosion and storms while supporting diverse plant and animal species. Ghosh emphasizes the need to preserve fragile ecosystems vital for environmental stability.

Through its portrayal of the Sundarbans, *The Hungry Tide* demonstrates that environmental issues cannot be separated from social and economic realities. Sustainable environmental policies must consider both ecological preservation and human livelihoods. Ghosh's narrative contributes significantly to ecocritical discourse by highlighting the ethical and political dimensions of environmental conservation and encouraging readers to reconsider the relationship between humans and nature.

### *Climate Change and Ecological Migration in Gun Island*

Ghosh's *Gun Island* (2019) presents a broader, transnational perspective on environmental issues, focusing on climate change and ecological migration. Unlike *The Hungry Tide*, which concentrates on the Sundarbans, *Gun Island* spans regions such as India, Italy, and the Mediterranean, demonstrating how environmental crises cross national boundaries and affect communities worldwide.

The novel explores the impact of climate change on both human societies and natural ecosystems, depicting unusual weather patterns, rising sea levels, and disruptions in natural habitats. These disturbances reflect the global climate crisis and illustrate how environmental transformations can alter ecological and social systems.

The protagonist, Deen Datta, a rare book dealer, gradually becomes aware of environmental changes around him. He encounters unusual ecological events, including rare animal species appearing in unfamiliar locations, symbolizing the disruption of established ecological patterns due to climate change.

A central theme is ecological migration, where environmental changes compel people to leave their homes. Rising sea levels, coastal erosion, and ecological degradation threaten vulnerable regions such as the Sundarbans. Many communities migrate to cities or abroad, highlighting the connection between environmental change and global migration patterns. Migrants traveling from South Asia to Europe, particularly Italy, encounter social and economic challenges, showing how environmental crises affect both developing and developed regions.

Another distinctive aspect of *Gun Island* is the blending of myth and folklore with contemporary environmental concerns. The legend of the Gun Merchant connects historical narratives with modern ecological crises, emphasizing the deep cultural and historical roots of humanity's relationship with nature.

Through its transnational narrative, *Gun Island* underscores the global nature of environmental crises, illustrating that ecological disruptions in one region can influence social and ecological conditions elsewhere. The novel also critiques society's inadequate response to climate change, highlighting the need for greater environmental awareness and cooperative global action.

Overall, *Gun Island* contributes to contemporary ecocritical discourse by illustrating the interconnected realities of climate change, migration, and global environmental transformation, encouraging readers to reconsider humanity's relationship with the natural world.

### *Environmental Degradation and Ecological Consciousness in The God of Small Things*

Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) portrays the complex relationship between human society and the natural environment in Kerala. While the novel is widely recognized for addressing social issues such as caste discrimination and family conflict, it also provides an important commentary on environmental degradation and ecological awareness.

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Set in Ayemenem, Kerala, the story is surrounded by tropical vegetation, rivers, and monsoon rains. Roy's rich descriptions of forests, rivers, and greenery highlight the beauty and vitality of the natural environment. Nature functions not merely as a backdrop but as a symbolic element reflecting the close connection between human life and ecological systems.

A key ecological symbol is the Meenachal River, initially presented as a life-giving force supporting the ecosystem and local community. Over time, the river becomes polluted due to industrial waste, urban expansion, and human neglect, symbolizing broader environmental decline caused by modernization and industrialization. Roy uses this transformation to show how economic development often occurs at the expense of ecological sustainability.

The novel highlights how social inequality exacerbates environmental degradation. Marginalized communities, particularly lower-caste groups, are disproportionately affected by ecological damage due to their dependence on natural resources. This links ecological destruction with social injustice.

Roy also critiques urbanization and commercialization, showing how industrial expansion leads to habitat loss and disrupts ecological balance. Her emphasis on **sensory experiences of nature** – sounds, colours, and textures – creates a vivid ecological atmosphere, portraying nature as active and living rather than passive.

From an ecocritical perspective, *The God of Small Things* reveals the hidden consequences of environmental exploitation and encourages readers to reconsider the ethical relationship between humans and nature. The novel demonstrates the importance of maintaining ecological balance and recognizing the interconnectedness of human societies and natural ecosystems.

### *Ecological Landscapes and Human Conflict in The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*

Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017) presents a complex narrative exploring the intersection of ecological landscapes, political conflict, and social marginalization in contemporary India. Unlike *The God of Small Things*, which is primarily set in Kerala, this novel traverses multiple locations, including Delhi and Kashmir, allowing Roy to examine how environmental degradation, urbanization, and political tensions affect both ecosystems and human communities.

The novel begins in Delhi, a rapidly urbanizing city where environmental neglect is pervasive. Roy portrays the city as a landscape marked by pollution, overcrowding, and the destruction of natural habitats, reflecting the ecological consequences of rapid modernization and uncontrolled urban expansion.

A significant ecological symbol is the graveyard where Anjum establishes the "Jannat Guest House." Situated within the chaotic urban environment, this space becomes a refuge for marginalized individuals while retaining elements of nature – trees, birds, and open land – that contrast with the surrounding cityscape. The graveyard functions as an alternative ecological space, demonstrating that human and non-human life can coexist despite the pressures of urban development.

Through the depiction of Delhi, Roy critiques development models that prioritize economic growth over environmental sustainability. Urban construction, industrial expansion, and population growth lead to polluted rivers, reduced green spaces, and loss of wildlife habitats, illustrating the environmental costs of modern development.

The narrative later shifts to Kashmir, presenting a contrasting ecological landscape characterized by mountains, rivers, forests, and valleys. Despite its natural beauty, the region is profoundly affected by political conflict and militarization. Roy illustrates that environmental landscapes are inseparable from political realities, as forests, rivers, and mountains become sites of struggle and control.

The militarization of Kashmir has significant ecological and social consequences. Military camps, surveillance systems, and ongoing conflict disrupt ecosystems and the daily lives of local communities, showing how ecological spaces are shaped by structures of power. Roy also foregrounds marginalized communities, including religious minorities and political dissidents, who experience both environmental degradation and social exclusion. Their experiences exemplify environmental injustice, in which vulnerable groups bear the greatest ecological burdens despite minimal responsibility for environmental destruction.

From an ecocritical perspective, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* demonstrates that environmental issues are deeply intertwined with social and political contexts. Roy suggests that ecological destruction often mirrors broader patterns of inequality and conflict. Through the contrasting landscapes of Delhi and Kashmir, the novel emphasizes the interconnectedness of human suffering, political violence, and environmental decline. Ultimately, Roy's narrative contributes to ecological discourse by highlighting that addressing environmental crises requires not only ecological awareness but also social justice and political transformation.

### Comparative Analysis of Amitav Ghosh and Arundhati Roy

A comparative study of Amitav Ghosh and Arundhati Roy demonstrates how contemporary Indian fiction engages with ecological concerns and the human-nature relationship. While both authors address environmental issues, their narrative strategies and thematic emphases differ, contributing uniquely to ecocritical and environmental justice discourse.

#### *Interconnectedness of Human Societies and Ecosystems*

A key similarity between the authors is their emphasis on the **interconnectedness between human communities and natural ecosystems**. In Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2004), the Sundarbans ecosystem profoundly shapes the characters' lives, with mangrove forests, shifting tides, and wildlife illustrating the dynamic relationship between humans and nature. Similarly, Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) portrays the natural landscape of Kerala as integral to the narrative, where rivers, forests, and monsoon rains influence both social and emotional experiences.

#### *Environmental Justice and Marginalized Communities*

Both writers foreground the **struggles of marginalized communities within ecological landscapes**, highlighting environmental injustice. In *The Hungry Tide*, local communities face displacement and economic hardship due to conservation policies and environmental hazards. Likewise, Roy's novels depict marginalized individuals whose lives are affected by social and ecological inequalities. These portrayals emphasize the ethical imperative of **environmental justice**, underscoring that vulnerable populations often bear the greatest ecological burdens.

#### *Divergence in Ecological Perspectives*

Despite these similarities, Ghosh and Roy diverge in their treatment of environmental issues. Amitav Ghosh frequently adopts a **transnational perspective**, presenting ecological crises as global phenomena. In *Gun Island* (2019), environmental disturbances in South Asia are linked with events in Europe, illustrating the worldwide impact of climate change and ecological migration. Conversely, Arundhati Roy emphasizes **local socio-political contexts**, exploring how environmental degradation intersects with political conflict, social inequality, and state power. *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017) examines ecological conditions in the urban landscape of Delhi and the conflict-affected region of Kashmir, situating environmental concerns within broader social and political realities.

#### *Narrative Strategies and Stylistic Approaches*

The authors also differ in **narrative style and technique**. Ghosh integrates historical research, scientific knowledge, and mythological elements, combining empirical and cultural perspectives to

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provide a holistic understanding of ecological crises. In contrast, Roy employs a lyrical and emotionally charged narrative style, foregrounding the lived experiences of individuals affected by environmental and social injustice.

### *Knowledge Systems and Ethical Responsibility*

Ghosh often emphasizes the importance of both **scientific and indigenous knowledge** for understanding ecological systems, exemplified by the collaboration between Piya, a marine biologist, and Fokir, a local fisherman, in *The Hungry Tide*. Roy, on the other hand, prioritizes the voices of marginalized communities and critiques dominant political and economic structures that contribute to environmental degradation.

### *Shared Commitment to Ecological Awareness*

Despite their differences, both authors share a commitment to **ecological sustainability and human responsibility toward nature**. Their works illustrate that environmental crises are deeply entangled with social, cultural, and political realities. Through their novels, Ghosh and Roy encourage readers to critically reconsider humanity's relationship with the natural world, demonstrating the role of literature in raising ecological awareness and advocating for environmental justice.

### **Findings of the Study**

The present study examined the representation of the human-nature interface and environmental justice in selected novels by Amitav Ghosh and Arundhati Roy through an ecocritical framework. Textual and comparative analysis of the primary texts revealed several key findings regarding how contemporary Indian fiction addresses ecological concerns.

#### *1. Literature as a Medium of Ecological Awareness*

The study found that literature serves as a powerful medium for fostering ecological awareness. The selected novels illustrate the complex interactions between human societies and natural ecosystems. Through vivid depictions of landscapes such as the Sundarbans, Kerala, Delhi, and Kashmir, both authors present nature as an active, dynamic presence rather than a passive backdrop. These narratives encourage readers to reconsider human responsibilities toward the environment and the ethical implications of ecological stewardship.

#### *2. Representation of the Human-Nature Interface*

The analysis highlights the interdependence between humans and the natural world. In *The Hungry Tide*, the lives and livelihoods of local communities are closely tied to the resources of the Sundarbans ecosystem. Similarly, *The God of Small Things* portrays Kerala's natural environment as an essential part of social, cultural, and emotional life. These representations underscore that environmental degradation has direct consequences for human well-being and social sustainability.

#### *3. Environmental Degradation and Ecological Crisis*

The novels strongly depict environmental degradation as a pressing ecological concern. Issues such as pollution, climate change, deforestation, and urban expansion are portrayed as threats to ecological balance. *Gun Island* illustrates the global impact of climate change and ecological migration, while *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* highlights the environmental consequences of urbanization and political conflict. Collectively, these narratives emphasize the urgency of addressing both localized and global ecological crises.

#### *4. Environmental Justice and Marginalized Communities*

A significant finding is the emphasis on environmental justice. Both authors portray marginalized groups—including rural communities, migrants, and socially disadvantaged populations—who often bear the greatest burdens of ecological crises. These narratives reveal the

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ethical necessity of equitable environmental policies that protect vulnerable communities and promote social and ecological sustainability.

### 5. Differences in Ecological Perspectives

Comparative analysis shows clear distinctions in the ecological perspectives of the two authors. Amitav Ghosh often adopts a **transnational outlook**, foregrounding the global dimensions of environmental crises, particularly climate change and ecological migration. In contrast, Arundhati Roy emphasizes **localized socio-political contexts**, linking environmental degradation with issues such as caste hierarchies, urban inequality, and political conflict. These differences highlight complementary approaches to ecological storytelling in contemporary Indian fiction.

### 6. Contribution to Ecocritical Discourse

Finally, the study demonstrates that the selected novels make substantial contributions to ecocritical discourse. By linking environmental concerns with social, cultural, and political realities, Ghosh and Roy illustrate that ecological crises are inseparable from broader historical and societal contexts. Their narratives foster awareness of environmental sustainability, social justice, and human responsibility toward nature, reinforcing literature's role as a medium for ecological and ethical reflection.

### Conclusion

This study examined the representation of the human-nature interface and environmental justice in selected novels by Amitav Ghosh and Arundhati Roy through an ecocritical lens. By analysing *The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island* by Amitav Ghosh, and *The God of Small Things* and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* by Arundhati Roy, the research explored how contemporary Indian fiction engages with ecological concerns and reflects the complex interrelationship between humans and the natural environment.

The analysis demonstrates that both authors provide vivid and compelling depictions of ecological landscapes and environmental crises. Their narratives underscore the interdependence between human communities and natural ecosystems, highlighting the consequences of environmental degradation for social, cultural, and economic life. Through representations of regions such as the Sundarbans, Kerala, Delhi, Kashmir, and Venice, the novels reveal how ecological changes shape human experiences and societal structures.

Amitav Ghosh's works predominantly focus on the global dimensions of ecological crises, especially climate change and ecological migration. His narratives link environmental events across different regions, illustrating the interconnectedness of global ecological systems and emphasizing the need for collective environmental responsibility.

In contrast, Arundhati Roy emphasizes the intersections of environmental degradation with social inequality. Her novels explore how ecological landscapes are influenced by urbanization, political conflict, and social hierarchies. By foregrounding the experiences of marginalized communities, Roy highlights the importance of environmental justice and ethical responsibility toward vulnerable populations.

The study further reveals that ecological crises cannot be understood solely as environmental phenomena; they are deeply entwined with social, political, and economic conditions. The selected texts demonstrate that environmental degradation often reflects broader patterns of power, inequality, and injustice.

Additionally, the research affirms the significant role of literature in fostering ecological awareness. By presenting nuanced narratives of environmental vulnerability and human responsibility,

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these novels encourage readers to reflect critically on their relationship with nature and cultivate a sense of ecological stewardship.

In conclusion, the works of Amitav Ghosh and Arundhati Roy make substantial contributions to contemporary ecocritical discourse. Their novels demonstrate that environmental sustainability requires a holistic understanding of ecological systems, social justice, and cultural responsibility. Through their storytelling, both authors challenge anthropocentric assumptions and advocate for more sustainable, equitable, and ethically conscious approaches to environmental management.

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