CHAPTER THREE

Dislocation and Dissociation: the Crisis of Climate Migrants and Refugees in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island*

The previous chapter posits that the transformation brought about by climate change is the greatest challenge the earth confronts today and the selected novels for this study have raised this issue with the help of the representation of various facets of environmental transformation. Natural disasters are becoming more common, putting human life at risk and reminding us of our vulnerability in the face of rapidly changing environmental conditions. Contemporary fictions showcase the ability to raise awareness about the issue that climate change transforms not only the environment, but also human identity by rendering them dissociated from their familiar culture and environment. A growing number of climate fictions or 'Cli-fi', which are stories that highlight particular aspects of the contemporary society in which we live, demonstrate how our planet is increasingly becoming the victim of uncontrolled climatic imbalance. These narratives offer thought-provoking perspectives concerning the underlying stimulus that results in the dislocation of individuals as an outcome of shifting climate conditions. Human relocation stories, both actual and imagined, provide a unique lens through which the signs of changing climate become apparent within the context of contemporary culture. This culture in turn shapes our knowledge about the processes that eventually lead to environmental deterioration. The surge in popularity of stories pertaining to the climate refugee crisis can be attributed not solely to their unique mode of transmitting cautionary messages, but also to their profound socio-cultural value. Although diverse geographical locations and people are impacted by the phenomenon of changing climate in varying degrees, one of the most significant consequences is the mass influx of refugees from their homes as a direct result of the shifting environment and the disruption it causes to their means of subsistence. Climate-induced migration, notably the problem of refugees, is receiving greater attention in global environmental governance. A wide range of negative consequences are being brought about by climate change, ranging from the hardship of refugees and migrants to the exploitation of those who are already victims. To put it another way, this particular group of disaster victims is classified as 'climate refugees', whose cross-border migration induces a sense of discontentment among global governing bodies. This chapter investigates the various ways that the refugee crisis and the plight of those fleeing their homes

are portrayed in *The Hungry Tide* (2004) and *Gun Island* (2019) by Amitav Ghosh. While these texts highlight critical considerations about climate change and migration, it is argued that they also push us to reimagine the causes behind socio-political displacement of a significant number of people. These stories present characters, a significant portion of whom experience displacement either internally or beyond national borders. These narratives under study also present moral and representational concerns since these novels focus on the everyday nature of dislocation in order to humanise the experiences of refugees.

The portrayal of "climate refugees" in any discourse is particularly problematic since it is still considered by a group of intellectuals and government agencies to be a hypothetical concept with contradictory legal definition. Such a condition is facilitating simplified interpretations of migration and casualty, which is hardly addressing issues of ecological concerns. However, another group of scholars assume that the trajectory of population movement patterns originating from South Asia is expected to experience a notable upsurge in the forthcoming years as a result of socio-economic, political turmoil, as well as suffering caused by climate change, population expansion, and government policies based on remittances. Literature opens up the possibility to examine contradictions regarding this issue of climate refugees and unveils silenced aspects of their pitiful condition. The recent visible interest in this concept within the realm of environmental humanities, and more specifically in literature, has to a great extent substantiated the predicament of displaced individuals as climate refugees or migrants. Any given definition of a "refugee" can evolve over time. A number of heterogeneous factors stemming from the ever-evolving nature of global politics, economy, geography, society, and overall planetary environment exert a profound influence on every instance of conflict or cause for human dislocation. This means that the globally connected community's strategy to tackle dislocated individuals is continually being adapted to deal with specific instances. In 1985, Essam El-Hinnawi offered a definition of "Environmental Refugees" who are "those people who have been forced to leave their traditional habitat, temporarily or permanently, because of a marked environmental disruption (natural and/or triggered by people) that jeopardised their existence and/or seriously affected the quality of their life" (El-Hinnawi 4). For El-Hinnawi, the meaning of "environmental disruption" is a discernible change within the ecological system or the natural resource base making it unfit for human existence, either temporarily or permanently, in terms of its physical, chemical or biological components. El-Hinnawi in this book concerning

"environmental refugees" elaborates that "the United Nations 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, as amended by the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees", refers to 'refugee' as someone who "owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country" (3). The formulation of the 1951 UN Convention took place within the specific context of Europe following the war, a period characterised by the presence of countless displaced individuals who found themselves caught in complex legal challenges arising from boundary alterations and governmental transitions. But, the term 'refugee' today encompasses not only the persecuted individual but also entire groups of people fleeing hazardous conditions. The Organisation of African Unity's Convention on Refugees, which was enacted by the OAU in 1969, was a key tool in achieving this goal. The OAU accord incorporated and expanded on the previous concept of a refugee defining it as: "every person who, owing to external aggression, occupation, foreign domination or events seriously disturbing public order in either part or the whole of his country of origin or nationality, is compelled to leave his place of habitual residence in order to seek refuge in another place outside his country of origin or nationality" (El-Hinnawi 3). Another category was first introduced in 1983 by the Ford Foundation, which defined "alien" populations as those who were looking for a makeshift "safe-haven" from wars or environmental calamities. Environmental refugees, El-Hinnawi argues, are a set of individuals who venture beyond their native soil temporarily or permanently with a hope of gaining better living conditions elsewhere in the world (El-Hinnawi 5). The main cause for their migration is the degradation of the natural habitat's resource base that has reached a critical threshold, rendering it incapable of meeting the basic requirements of its inhabitants. (El-Hinnawi 5). The UN Refugee Agency's, *UNHCR Global Report 2016* states "Violent conflict and persecution, compounded by rising food insecurity, environmental degradation, poor governance and countless other factors, drove more than three million people to leave their countries as refugees or to seek asylum in 2016, joining millions of others already in exile" (6). Due to climate change, several thousands of refugees, along with migrants, felt obliged to embark on perilous voyages across land and sea, risking their lives in the hope of attaining a more secure future. They were confronted with protection hazards and uncertainty in nations where they sought asylum. The UNHCR 2016 Report further elaborates that the impacts of

changing climate have affected nearly 20 million people. For a long time, UNHCR is supporting and aiding the people across the globe dislocated by global warming and its consequent climate change.[1] The UNHCR report (2021) on 'forced migration' projects that changing climate is "driving displacement and increasing the vulnerability of those already forced to flee. Forcibly displaced and stateless people are on the front lines of the climate emergency. Many are living in climate "hotspots" where they typically lack the resources to adapt to an increasingly inhospitable environment" (9).[2] An agreement titled The UN Global Compact for Migration, received formal endorsement in 2018 by officials from 164 nations at a meeting in Morocco, highlights climatic shifts as prime generators of displacement and encourages nations to collaborate to begin planning for migrants moving because of natural catastrophes and climate change.[3] According to Asmita Naik (2009), John R. Wennersten & Denise Robbins (2017), Alison Heslin et al. (2019), and Manisha Deb Sarkar (2022), the environment exerts a substantial influence on the mobility pattern exhibited by individuals who are subjected to loss and damage caused by sea-level rise, erosion of coastal soil, rising heat-waves, tropical storms, brackish water infiltration, high precipitation, etc. A growing number of people are fleeing their homelands in search of protection and security because of the interrelated dynamics of food scarcity, misery, climate change and displacement. The findings of above mentioned reports and researches align with Amitav Ghosh's endeavour to portray that humans in the contemporary world have left with no choice but to address the climate refugee crisis on a global scale.

This conflict-driven issue of climate migration and the state of being a refugee has garnered a significant amount of interest from public intellectuals, social scientists and literary authors across the world. The consequences of climatic shifts are perceptible in contemporary culture, and these manifestations, along with real and imagined narratives of human dislocation, impact our perception of the challenges posed by climatic variations. This chapter aims to analyse how Amitav Ghosh's texts bring up climatic issues through narrating survivalist ideologies while facing dire situations, examining causes of human displacement and investigating the requirements for authoritative initiatives to ensure the safety of climate migrants. This study will take into consideration the underlying socio-political and climatological predicaments that are presented in Amitav Ghosh's fictions. As such, this analysis provides a critical evaluation of South Asian literary works that play an important role in posing questions about and representing a topic that is still in the process of evolving into a full-fledged

literary genre called climate fictions or "Cli-fi", thereby providing the groundwork for further research. This chapter will show that Ghosh's former novel *The Hungry Tide* indicates towards the future possibilities of refugees relocating domestically, whilst his more recent novel *Gun Island,* is an extensive research on the topic of crossborder migration that our present world confronts to a great extent.

In the current geologic epoch, the Anthropocene, one of the most troubling problems is climate change. The scale of the issue has not been predicted before, and there has been a widespread failure in the handling of environmental degradation causing it. The portrayal of the degrading ecological conditions in these two literary works by Ghosh elucidates the correlation between the deteriorating ecological state and the consequential phenomenon of human mobility. Benoit Mayer's (2018) observation affirms, "[I]n the Anthropocene, human mobility is being affected by our impact on the global environment" (89). The issue of changing climate patterns transcends mere environmental and social dimensions as it also signals a deficit of imaginative faculty and consequently becomes a crisis of culture. This problem is acute, yet it is ambiguous at best and quite challenging to conceptualise in any meaningful way. Herein remains the most challenging mission that has been entrusted on the writers, who are tasked with concretising reader's perception about this global catastrophe and raising awareness on a mass scale. In terms of combating climatic alterations, it is now abundantly evident that one of the many challenges that policymakers face is the problem of migration. Ghosh's attempt to consider this problem involving refugees created by the climate crisis and their representation in contemporary literature demonstrates that the issue has multifaceted potentialities in reshaping society and cultural identity, and that it must be dealt with seriousness. In his novels, Ghosh addresses the problem of how harsh climatic conditions, rising sea levels, and degraded ecosystems might jeopardise the safety and livelihoods of people worldwide. Ghosh's choice of the Sundarbans as a backdrop for his two novels is particularly striking as the region is significant due to its geographical location as well as its fast shifting ecosystem and climate. As a result of the recurrent climate disasters, a group of characters in these novels have fled from the Sundarbans, both internally and across borders in the pursuit of a better life. The geographical scope of climate change gets intricately intertwined with Ghosh's long held curiosity about migration on a global scale. The novels highlight the shifting perspectives towards the ever-changing lives of

ordinary folks who are going through the experience of being dislocated from their own culture and ethnicity.

Audra K. Grant et al. (2014) argue that agricultural activities, cattle, and access to water are all negatively impacted by changing climate conditions and environmental deterioration, which in turn negatively impact economic factors (164). As the first novel *The Hungry Tide* indicates, in addition to other factors such as political and social causes, unfavourable climatic conditions serve as drivers of migration of refugees from the camp in central India to the Sundarbans. As a result of their inability to adjust to the environmental conditions of the camp and continuous engagement in their customary methods of agriculture, it is conceivable that the people in the novel fleeing the camp have become climate refugees who went to the Sundarbans for better living conditions. In *The Hungry Tide*, the author has deftly exposed the repressed history of 1979, a period in which the destitute and downtrodden refugees of Morichjhapi (three times relocated after the division of the nation) were brutally killed by the government of West Bengal. Ghosh addresses pressing issues in this incredible work, including the interplay between humans and the natural world, the everyday battle for survival in an unpredictable tidal country, and the protection of refugees from terrible suffering. Through a fictionalised account, the novel depicts the journey of people who had relocated from central India to the archipelago of the Sundarbans. In the narrative, a large number of refugees from Madhya Pradesh headed out towards the swampy regions of the tide country, evoking a sense of future emergency. The novel shows that since the Bhola Cyclone in 1970 and the formation of Bangladesh in 1971, a constant influx of Bangladeshi refugees has been flowing into India. The government had transported the refugees to Dandakaranya, a place in Madhya Pradesh, which resembled a prison or a concentration camp. The settlers found themselves encircled by security personnel, thoroughly confining them within the walls of their camp. Any attempts made by them to circumvent this imposed restriction were met with unrelenting chase and capture. They showed a lack of familiarity with the language of the region, and the natives looked at them with a sense of hostility for being 'intruders': "attacking them with bows, arrows and other weapons" (Ghosh, *Hungry Tide* 118). The arrival of refugees from various ethnic and cultural origins in host regions may cause significant social and class tensions. Zygmunt Bauman (2004) opines that 'organized society' sees such refugees as "scroungers and intruders, charges them at best with unwarranted pretences or indolence, often with all sorts of wickedness, like scheming, swindling,

living a life hovering on the brink of criminality, but in each case with feeding parasitically on the social body" (40-41). The severely attacked poor lower caste refugees in the novel were sent to the camps in the dry, arid area of central India, but later they decided to migrate to the Morichjhapi island of the Sundarbans. Due to the weather conditions of the region, they were unable to practise their traditional cultivation: "The soil was rocky and the environment was nothing like they had ever known" and so they felt displaced and alienated in a new environment (Ghosh, *Hungry Tide* 118). The desolate landscape appeared to be a "dry emptiness" as though the earth had been "stained with blood" (*Hungry Tide* 165). Horrible living conditions in that place forced them to re-evaluate their current status as refugees living under government's cold-blooded decisions. As a result, hundreds of refugees arrived in the Sundarbans in boats, dinghies and bhotbhotis nearly overnight. Laura Westra (2009) comments that ecological refugees face serious issues that include a loss of cultural integrity and identity. By giving reference to the Arctic Inuit people in Nunavut, Arctic Bay, Westra claims that this happens principally due to a lack of sufficient land base and the loss of their traditional knowledge (144). In the novel, the refugees were unable to pursue their traditional knowledge of agriculture due to harsh weather conditions in central India, which became a primary factor for their migration to the Sundarbans. The painful depictions of the refugees' harsh circumstances offer a testimony to the hurdles faced while adjusting to an entirely different physical environment. Their sufferings not only discourage the present and preceding generations from clinging to their customary practices, but they also reveal even more dire consequences for the younger generation. One character Kusum in the novel came across a flock of refugees moving towards east, "like ghosts, covered in dust, strung out in a line, shuffling beside railtracks. They had children on their shoulders, bundles on their backs" (Ghosh, *Hungry Tide* 164). However, to the reader's relief, the refugees had come from the Sundarban's outskirts, so they were at ease in the tide country mud. Nirmal reflects on the plight of the refugees, stating: "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. I saw them coming, young and old, quick and halt, with their lives bundled on their heads" (Ghosh, *Hungry Tide* 165). The reflections of Nirmal on the arrival of refugees in groups presents a realistic image of the real plight of refugees as they move from one place to another. The unapproved occupation of Morichjhapi island led to a direct confrontation with the West Bengal government, resulting in terrible violence. The government took a firm stance against the

occupation of the island by squatters since it belonged to the Forest Department. The refugees expressed a resolute determination to defy the governmental decree, as they yearned to possess a small piece of land upon which they might settle. The conflict between ecological conservation and social justice requires a distinct method to promote human causes and preserve rights; the refugees were denied all. The governing bodies sought to enforce their relocation to the designated resettlement camp in Madhya Pradesh loading them on trucks and buses, but they resisted. The local inhabitants of central India harbour a negative sentiment towards the refugees, perceiving them as intruders whose mere existence poses a threat to their safety. This perspective finds resonance among certain government officials, further consolidating the prevailing negative sentiment. Lindsey Stonebridge, in *Refugee Imaginaries* (2020), states that if refugees are noticed in any way, they are considered as "victims of circumstance rather than of political decision-making; unfortunate others in a humanitarian crisis to be solved, rather than fellow citizens in transit" (15). The West Bengal government's political motive to evict the refugees from the Sundarbans rendered them victims of brutal measures taken against a group of helpless people. The refugees of Morichjhapi did not leave the area with the intention of turning it into a safe haven for the country's most downtrodden and marginalised people. In response to the crisis provoked by these 'unfortunate others', the government made aggressive attempts to quell the unrest.

With the advent of the Left Front government in West Bengal, a significant shift in the political landscape occurred, prompting a sense of anticipation among the refugees. These individuals, seeking a fresh start, likely harboured hopes that the government would offer unrestricted support as they sought to establish their lives in the remote settlement of Morichjhapi. However, it was discovered to be a miscalculation when the government designated Morichjhapi island, where the refugees chose to settle, to be a protected reserve forest for tigers, leading to settlers' eviction. The government viewed them as "land-grabbers" who should not be permitted to stay in the territory they had just taken over (Ghosh, *Hungry Tide* 190). The settlers came to the conclusion that to "enlist the support of public opinion" would be their greatest line of defence against government initiatives to remove them from the land (Ghosh, *Hungry Tide* 189). In the novel, Nirmal explained to Nilima about "their plans, their programme for creating a new future for themselves, of their determination to create a new land in which to live" (Ghosh, *Hungry Tide* 189). Nirmal noted in his diary that in the short span of a

few months, the refugees built huts, began cultivation, planted tubewells, dammed water for fisheries, established boat-builder's workshops, founded a pottery, established an ironsmith's shop, and formed a small marketplace in Morichjhapi. They extended invitations to a large number of dignitaries from Kolkata, including authors, intellectuals and the professionals of the press, to show them what they had accomplished since settling on the island. These were not appreciated by the government, which desired conservation of the location in order to preserve the tiger population.

The refugees were helpless before the power of the West Bengal government. There was no one to help them because, "anyone suspected of helping them was sure to get into trouble" (Ghosh, *Hungry Tide* 122). Numerous police boats began to monitor the island, and the refugees were terrorised with tear gas and rubber bullets. To get the refugees off the island, criminals and gangsters were hired. During the siege, they were stopped from transporting rice or water to the island by means of coercion, and a number of individuals had been killed. The conflict between these two groups took place in 1979 and culminated in a horrible massacre. Infliction of violence makes matters worse, instead, in the words of Jane McAdam (2012):

> There is a need to develop a suite of policies that focus on preventing displacement (through adaptation, education, and support for livelihoods); assisting those who are displaced (particularly through the right-based framework of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement); and viewing migration itself as an acceptable form of adaptation (including through planned, rights-respecting resettlement schemes involving the participation of affected communities). (185)

Owing to the unfavourable socio-cultural and ecological situations in the resettlement camp in central India, the Dalit refugees in the novel were compelled to relocate to the Morichjhapi island of the Sundarbans. On the other hand, McAdam (2012) opines that every nation has a responsibility to provide protection for its citizens who are forced to relocate due to changing environmental conditions.

The impact of an in-depth exploration into the crisis of climate migration has been a significant factor that has influenced Ghosh's decision to incorporate this pressing issue also

within the narrative of the novel, *Gun Island*. Through his novel *Gun Island,* Amitav Ghosh takes the readers on a wild and magnificent journey through the swamplands of the Sundarbans to the sinking city of Venice, full of poisonous creatures and cataclysmic events, where climate change, migration, and the current state of the world are interwoven flawlessly. Through this novel, Ghosh boldly ventures into the realm of climate fiction, a literary genre that has garnered insufficient recognition from authors, particularly in South Asia. This geographical expanse finds itself exposed to vulnerability owing to its economic status and various other determinants, and is disproportionately affected by the escalating onslaught of climate-related catastrophes. Ghosh's novel depicts a world in which characters practically flee from fire to flood, with each action taking place in a new disaster zone. As the story progresses, two concerns stand out: climatic shifts and migration; and the numerous contexts in which they are interconnected. In *Gun Island*, Ghosh's interest in international migration becomes intrinsically linked to the geographic scope of climatic shifts. The Sundarbans, a prominent setting in *Gun Island,* functions as a key element around which the narrative revolves. Characters such as Tipu, Rafi, and the Gun Merchant in some other time find themselves propelled into different stories, their trajectories influenced by the powerful and destructive centrifugal pull of climate-induced calamities. After being driven from the punitive land of the Sundarbans, these characters are enticed by prospects of other refuges, other hopes, and other accounts of life in the West that make up the surface narrative of *Gun Island* and feature Dinanath, the rare book-dealer; Piya, the cetologist; and the Italian historian Cinta as playing major roles. Due to rising sea level and increased salinity in the freshwater bodies, inhabitants of the Sundarbans are compelled to leave by giving up their homes and forsaking their customary modes of existence. Tipu and Rafi are symbolic of these people. In the text, the author explores the contemporary phenomenon of unauthorised migration, focusing on the marginalised individuals residing in the Sundarbans and other regions across the globe. These individuals are driven to leave their land of origins in pursuit of a more advantageous existence in the Western world, a trend that has emerged amidst the backdrop of globalisation and human-induced climate change. Before starting *Gun Island,* Ghosh visited migrant camps in Italy and conducted interviews with young people who had travelled the perilous route across various European countries driven by the aspiration of attaining a better life.[4] Ghosh discovered that the South Asian migrants' motives for leaving their native countries included considerations about climate change. Some had witnessed encroaching

saltwater turn their agricultural lands infertile, while others had experienced drought. Dr. Indrila Guha and Chandan Roy (2016) argue:

> The northern most part of the east coast of India, where the Ganges and the Brahmaputra have created the largest delta of the world, which is unfortunately above sea level and most vulnerable. Bulk of this Ganges-Brahmaputra deltaic system (Sundarbans) is situated in Bangladesh, and the rest in the Indian state of West Bengal. Environmental impact like sea-level rise is so severe in the area that creates displacement of residents on islands for many generations and making them homeless and destitute. A lot of migration has been induced by climate change related extreme weather events and sea level rise in Indian Sundarbans. Sea levels are rising faster than global average and extreme events such as tidal surges and severe cyclonic storms are becoming more frequent. In Indian Sundarbans, four islands namely Bedford, Lohachara, Kabasgadi and Suparibhanga have been submerged nearly 6,000 families became homeless and turned in environmental migrants. In future, this area will be the hardest hit by climate change and many people will be forced to leave their homes temporarily or permanently. (45)

Guha and Roy's findings show that the Sundarbans is indeed affected by extreme events caused by climate change leading to human displacement. In this similar vein, *Gun Island* illustrates the tribulations of the indigenous people of India's Sundarbans, who are forced to endure immense suffering and resort to unauthorised migration. At the same time, it portrays the plight of people all over the world who are forced to flee illegally across national and international borders. They are compelled to go through painful torture, horrific trauma and the loss of their identity as part of the process.[5] Due to the fact that they do not possess a social identity in foreign countries, they are classified as refugees. The plot of the novel focuses on the daring, perilous and unlawful attempts to cross international borders made by a notable multitude of individuals hailing from Africa, Bangladesh, Pakistan, India, and Middle East, embarking upon journeys towards the urban centres in the Western region. The cause behind the illegal movements of refugees from Africa and Middle East are not made explicitly clear in the novel with the exception of the migration that takes place from the Sundarbans and Bangladesh. However, the struggles of the refugees from the Sundarbans of India and Bangladesh are poignantly shown; these are primarily

inhabitants affected by climate vagaries and disasters, and they seek a more favourable lifestyle in the West. Kanai Dutta, one minor character in this text, sheds light on the status of the Sundarbans as- "the frontier where commerce and the wilderness look each other directly in the eye" (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 8). Kanai further comments, "[E]very merchant who's ever sailed out of Bengal has had to pass through the Sundarbans- there's no other way to reach the sea" (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 8). One noteworthy location to rethink is the shrine dedicated to Goddess Manasa, situated upon a marshy island within the Sundarbans. This particular site is characterised by a dense forest teeming with numerous kinds of serpents. It is within this unique setting that the perpetual conflict between human gain and the preservation of the natural world unfolds (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 8). This shrine is gradually devoured by the encroachment of the sea as a sign of rising sea level. In the novel, being concerned about the 'dhaam' or shrine of Manasa Devi in one of the vulnerable islands, Nilima Bose comments, "The islands of the Sundarbans are constantly being swallowed up by the sea; they are disappearing before our eyes" (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 18). Nilima appeals to Dinanath to inquire upon the shrine before it gets washed away by rising sea levels because "temperatures are rising around the world because of global warming" (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 214). She is concerned that the shrine will be lost and with it the legend of Bonduki Sadagar will be forgotten forever. The consequences of the shrine's disappearance extend beyond mere physicality, encompassing the gradual loss of the place's identity and the values intrinsically tied to its religious faith. This raises serious issues regarding the lasting worth of constructions designed by humans when confronted with the unpredictable forces of nature.

The shrine bears witness to the saga of the Gun Merchant, who endured the most formidable manifestations of climatic perils. Dinanath, or the narrator of the story, who spends his time between Kolkata and Brooklyn, meets a distinguished Italian historian named Giacinta Schiavon, also known as Cinta, in places like California, the Midwest United States as well as in Kolkata and Venice. Cinta helps Dinanath uncover the mystery of a legendary merchant Bonduki Sadagar or Gun Merchant, who may have been pursued by the snake goddess Manasa Devi. This mythical figure, who exists somewhere between legend and history, is said to have escaped to a place called "Gun Island" after drawing the wrath of the snake goddess due to his steadfast refusal to embrace the role of a committed worshipper. Tormented by serpents, famines, storms and various other disasters, the Gun Merchant travelled abroad to avoid the goddess' rage. With

Cinta's guidance, Dinanath traverses the labyrinthine corridors of time, unearthing fragments of forgotten tales like the legend of the Gun Merchant and piecing them together to form a coherent narrative. According to the legend, the Bonduki Sadagar was chased away by poisonous snakes and natural calamities, and travelled from Bengal through unfamiliar lands with fantastic names like 'Taal-misrir-desh' or Land of Palm Sugar Candy (indicating Egypt), 'Rumaali-desh' or the Land of Kerchieves (indicating Turkey), 'Shikol-dwip' or Island of Chains (indicating Sicily) and 'Bonduk-dwip' (indicating Venice). Dinanath discovers that the shrine of the goddess Manasa Devi was built by the Gun Merchant between 1605 and 1690, and following the line of Cinta's guidance, he retraces the origin of the Gun Merchant narrative to the 17th century climate anomaly. During this period called Little Ice Age, the merchant's native land situated in the eastern region of India was subjected to a series of calamitous events like floods, aridity etc. Dinanath came to know at a scholarly gathering held in the city of Los Angeles that during the 17th century: "temperatures across the globe had dropped sharply, maybe because of fluctuations in solar activity, or a spate of volcanic eruptions - or possibly even because of the reforestation of vast tracts of land" (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 122). In any case, famines, droughts, and diseases had plagued several regions of the globe in the 17th century. The present predicament we find ourselves in is ominously prefigured by the 'global crisis' of the seventeenth century. A character in the novel posits that it is plausible to argue that the trajectory leading us to our current situation was set in motion during the Little Ice (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 124). It was around this time that Londoners apparently started to rely on coal for heating, which marked the beginning of our dependency on fossil fuels. During this Little Ice Age, the Gun Merchant lost everything, including his family due to the goddess' wrath and finally decided to travel abroad in order to recoup his loss. Dinanath realises as the narrative unfolds that the legendary Gun Merchant himself must have made his way to Venice. The etymological description of the locations Cinta mentions aids in tracing the Gun Merchant's voyage, which turns out to be the same route travelled by refugees in the twenty-first century. In *Gun Island*, Ghosh weaves its plot around the backdrop of humanity's historic migration stories, predating the development of present-day nation-states. Ghosh situates the age-old legend of Banduki Sadagar and Manasa Devi within this larger historical context of migration and contemporary reality. The migration of climate-driven victims from the past, such as the Gun Merchant, and the current exodus of the

impoverished native people of the Sundarbans and Bangladesh to search for better opportunities in the West have analogous ramifications.

In the author's description of the disappearing brilliance of the shrine due to frequent climate hazards, there is a clear intention to prompt readers to contemplate the degrading ecological conditions that afflict the fragile islands of the Sundarbans. The phenomenon of water sources undergoing acidification and contamination, coupled with the escalated number of dead zones and conflict between irreconcilable forces like the ecosystem and humanity are the visible outcomes of lasting effects of manmade activities and climatic shifts. Diaz and Rosenberg (2008) elaborate:

> Further expansion of dead zones will depend on how climate change affects water-column stratification and how nutrient runoff affects organic-matter production. General circulation models predict that climate change alone will deplete oceanic oxygen by increasing stratification and warming as well as by causing large changes in rainfall patterns, enhancing discharges of fresh water and agricultural nutrients to coastal ecosystems. (929)[6]

Diaz and Rosenberg's view resonates in the novel as Piya is deeply concerned about everything that occurs upriver; because the river brings evidence of those events downstream. She is quite certain that the expansion of dead zones in the waters of the Sundarbans is directly attributable to the residues left behind by chemical fertilisers and effluents from agricultural practices. She informs that the dead zones are:

> [T]hese vast stretches of water that have a very low oxygen content- too low for fish to survive. Those zones have been growing at a phenomenal pace, mostly because of residues from chemical fertilizers. When they're washed into the sea they set off a chain reaction that leads to all the oxygen being sucked out of the water. Only a few highly specialized organisms can survive in those conditions- everything else dies, which is why those patches of water are known as 'dead zones'. And those zones have now spread over tens of thousands of square miles of ocean- some of them are as large as middle-sized countries. (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 95)

According to Piya, dead zones are no longer confined to the open waters in the middle of the ocean; rather, they have begun to develop in rivers as well, particularly in the places where rivers empty into the ocean. The effluents from agricultural activities ultimately make their way into the ocean via rivers. In addition to agricultural effluents, she also blames the refinery that is located near the river for polluting the water of the area. The refinery is poisoning the water-bodies of the Sundarbans. Piya is unable to stop the damaging actions of the refinery, despite having the support of the Badabon Trust and an alliance of environmental protection NGO groups. This is because the refinery is controlled by certain influential people who have the favour of politicians, the police and paid goons. They have been quite secretive in their efforts to conceal the activities of the refinery. To clarify the effects of chemical reactions in water bodies, Jon Erickson (2002) notes:

> Only a small fraction of the fresh-water supply is available for human needs, however, most of which is used for agriculture. Agricultural chemicals such as fertilisers and pesticides are carried off by the drain water, which empties into streams and rivers and then finally flows to the ocean. There, if concentrations are high enough, the chemicals can kill and other marine life. (40)

In the Sundarbans also, there have been enormous fish kills as a result of the water pollution: "It's when you find thousands of dead fish floating on the surface or washed up ashore. It's happening all round the world with more and more chemicals flowing into rivers. But here I'm pretty sure that it's the refinery that's responsible" (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 96). Dolphins and other species of river and sea life in the Sundarbans are among those that have perished as a direct result of aquatic pollution and the existence of dead zones in its water bodies. In this context, Piya's remark is poignant as she declares, "We're in a new world now. No one knows where they belong any more, neither humans nor animals" (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 97). The marine biologist Piya's research entails tracing river dolphins that are abandoning the waters of the Sundarbans and moving to other places due to a mysterious fate propelled by anthropogenic climate change. According to Piya's research, even the animals are migrating. When fish die off,

it has a negative impact on the livelihoods of hundreds of native fishermen who rely upon natural resources to make a living. The author has poignantly portrayed how the harmful effects of anthropogenic water contamination worsen the state of native people already struggling with poverty by harming their occupations and compelling them to migrate to a new location in order to survive.

In addition to the increasing water pollution, the frequent occurrence of cyclones poses further trouble for the local inhabitants of the Sundarbans. At the very outset of the novel, the author informs the readers about the Bhola Cyclone of 1970, which devastated the Bengal Delta and caused damage in both West Bengal and East Pakistan (present Bangladesh). The Bhola Cyclone stands as an unparalleled cataclysmic event of the previous century, inflicting an immense toll on human life. While a conservative approximation places the casualties at three thousand, the actual magnitude of loss may ascend to a shocking half a million individuals. The occurrence of this tragedy resulted in a significant number of casualties, with a majority of them concentrated in East Pakistan. The delayed response from West Pakistan boosted the subsequent political dispute, which ultimately culminated in creating Bangladesh. Located amidst Bangladesh and India, the Sundarbans became the primary target of the cyclone's enormous destruction. The text shows Lusibari, an inland island, was severely damaged by the storm surge, which pulled a major section of the island away, including homes and all. Horen Naskar, a fisherman from Sundarbans, had been out at sea fishing and had personally observed the wreckage: "hamlets obliterated by the storm surge; islands where every tree had been stripped of its leaves; corpses floating in the water, half eaten by animals; villages that had lost most of their inhabitants" (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 13-14). The influx of refugees from East Pakistan, who sought to flee conditions of political upheaval such as the struggle for independence, social instability and the fear of genocide, contributed to the deterioration of the situation after Bhola Cyclone. The steady stream of people eventually turned into a flood, which brought a great number of additional hungry mouths into the area that was already suffering from a severe scarcity of food and freshwater. The unpredictability of climate and lack of a decent living condition in the Sundarbans' coastal region hindered people from developing, keeping them impoverished and socially ostracised. The significant impact of changing climate is sea level rise, which is attributed to specific causes like global warming and other anthropogenic factors. This change

will eventually have an effect on the mangrove forest as well as communities along the shore that are vulnerable. Aditya Ghosh et al. (2015) claim:

> Collapse of these embankments are widespread, though their frequency depends on the type of construction and its interaction with (changing) tidal pressures, cyclonic storms, rising sea level and various tidal events. Every time there is a major breach, human pressure on the ecosystem intensifies; affected households turn to water-based livelihood activities and become directly dependent on the riparian commons. Apart from exposing populations to inundation and destruction of assets, these breaches also lead to an increase in soil salinity, ruining prospects for agriculture, whilst also affecting the floral and faunal diversity of the ecosystem. (162)

Cyclone Aila, during the year of 2009, was another natural calamity that wreaked havoc in the Sundarbans. The lasting impacts resulting from this cyclone were notably more severe when compared to the impacts of previous storms. Over vast stretches of embankments spanning hundreds of miles, a considerable damage occurred, allowing the ingress of seawater into regions hitherto impervious to its reach; once productive land had been submerged under salt water, making it impossible to cultivate for generations. The warning systems for storms led to the planning of mass relocation in advance, and as a result, millions of people in India and Bangladesh were moved to safer locations. The novel shows that many evacuees had resolved to avoid returning after being uprooted from their villages. They were aware of their already wretched existence, which would be further hampered by a sense of uncertainty. Families scattered, social groups crumbled, and the young flocked to the cities, adding to the already overcrowded slums. Following Cyclone Aila, the impoverished state of the Sundarbans region attracted a huge number of human traffickers. They sped women off to brothels in other towns and transported willing men to labour sites in distant cities or abroad. Moyna, Tipu's mother, expressed her regret for the deteriorating state of the Sundarbans saying:

> [I]t seemed as though both land and water were turning against those who lived in the Sundarbans. When people tried to dig wells, an arsenic-laced brew gushed out of the soil; when they tried to shore up embankments the tides rose higher and pulled them down

> again. Even fishermen could barely get by; where once their boats would come back loaded with catch, now they counted themselves lucky if they netted a handful of fry. (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 49)

So, the outflow of young people from the Sundarbans was increasing at an alarming rate; they resorted to taking out loans and stealing for making payments to the traffickers for the purpose of seeking employment abroad. To join Gulf-bound labour groups, some were crossing the border into Bangladesh illegally. The people of Sundarbans have to deal with a life of constant struggle and adaptation due to the region's unpredictable climate change and growing number of storms and cyclones. Horen, the fisherman, had been in the fishing business and had a number of vessels under his ownership. However, Cyclone Aila was responsible for the sinking of his fleet including trawlers and a few more vessels. After that, he made the decision to leave the fishing business completely because his profits had been falling for several years, and it was becoming increasingly obvious that the situation would only continue to deteriorate. Nicole Molinari (2017) observes that climate change-exacerbated disasters in the Sundarbans led to mass out-migration and an increase in human trafficking. She further elaborates, "Climate change impacts compound and exacerbate the same factors that shape vulnerability to human trafficking. Climate change degrades the environment, diminishes income, assets, and land, dislocates rural livelihoods, entrenches flood insecurity, worsens impoverishment, fragments households, and displaces populations" (Molinari 65). *Gun Island* presents glimpses of these situations to show how the mangrove region's natural resources are depleted as an outcome of climate change and ecological deterioration, resulting in huge migrations from the Sundarbans.

Ghosh's novel brings to the forefront a paramount concern that has captivated the attention of international policymakers and intellectuals alike. This concern undoubtedly revolves around global human mobility, which is spurred by the gradual or abrupt alterations in environmental conditions. In order to amplify the significance of this assertion, Donato and Massey (2016) noted that:

> Rather than moving to increase earnings, diversify sources of income, or accumulate savings, they will be seeking to escape immediate threats from civil violence, crime,

> warfare, family violence, natural disasters, political upheavals, and economic catastrophe-events that often produce a stream of out-migration whose mobility is motivated by fear. Such people perceive a tangible risk and move rapidly to escape it, usually proceeding to the nearest and most accessible safe haven. (15-16)

The above statement indicates that disasters, be it natural or man-made, elicit an acute sense of fear, hence compelling people to embark upon perilous journeys in order to escape the risks in their homelands. A group of characters in the novel has also undertaken a perilous cross-border journey to flee the dire consequences of climate hazards in the Sundarbans. Individuals who unlawfully cross national or continental borders without adequate documentation are known as undocumented migrants (Bose and Satapathy 474). Overstaying a visa or work permit is a common occurrence for these individuals. Failed asylum applicants or illegal immigrants, who have exhausted their appeal and illegally extended their stay abroad, fall into this group (Bose and Satapathy 474). In the novel, the terrible tragedy of illegal migrants is based on the experiences of two youthful protagonists, Tipu and Rafi. People living in impoverished conditions in the Sundarbans are forced to make the decision to cross international borders unlawfully because they are unable to quickly get legally permitted documents such as passports from government offices. According to Tipu, there are a number of simpler methods of obtaining an unauthorised passport by paying large sums of money. Once they have made the decision to move, it is just necessary for them to save up enough money to spend the amount required from their lifetime savings. They can get to Bangladesh by illegally crossing the river. While trying to justify the Sundarbans' poor inhabitants' unauthorised migration, Tipu tells Dinanath that these destitute and illiterate people were eking out a minimal existence by agriculture, fishing or venturing into the dense forests to procure timber, honey etc. Because of cyclones caused by climate change and other deepening calamitous crises, fish catch is decreasing, the land is becoming salty, and the poor people lack financial resources to pay the forest guards to persuade them for obtaining permission to venture into the forests. In this regard, Bishawjit Mallick and Joachim Vogt's (2012) findings are apt as they state: "Both hazardous events (storms, floods, earthquakes) and changes in temperatures, precipitation regimes and sea levels often contribute to increasing peoples' levels of mobility. It has become accepted that increased disasters and

chronic environmental degradation will normally be followed by population movements" (219). As the number of climate-related risks increases, people are forced to flee to seek refuge elsewhere. Tipu and Rafi are two of many individuals from the region who have been compelled by the relentless onslaught of climate-related calamities to flee abroad. Tipu and Rafi are well aware that securing a sustainable career in the Sundarbans is practically impossible due to the region's frequent exposure to natural disasters. The persistent reiteration of the words of his grandfather by Rafi can be perceived as a prediction of his imminent illegal journey to abroad: "[H]e'd tell me that I didn't need to learn what he knew because the rivers and the forest and the animals are no longer as they were. He used to say that things were changing so much, and so fast, that I wouldn't be able to get by here - he told me that one day I would have no choice but to leave" (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 86).

The cautionary words uttered by Rafi's grandfather act as a foreshadowing of an age that awaits individuals who have been pushed into the future through the advancements of science and technology, also coupled with a deliberate disregard for the preservation of the environment. Through the experiences of the characters, the novel draws attention to the disadvantages or damaging effects that might result from improper use of technology and knowledge obtained through the internet. Images of exotic destinations that can be found on the internet often serve to pique the interest of those from less fortunate backgrounds. For example, young individuals like Tipu and Rafi appear to be proficient at using smartphones and other latest gadgets since they have had exposure to modern technology since childhood. They are being influenced to leave their own country in the pursuit of more favourable living circumstances by the allure of beautiful images of other countries they may access on their smartphones and the internet. The internet currently acts as a 'magic carpet' for those who are interested in migrating to new countries (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 61). Tipu says,

> You don't need a mainframe to get on the Net- a phone is enough, and everyone's got one now. And it doesn't matter if you're illiterate: you can call up anything you like just by talking to your phone – your visual assistant will do the rest. You'd be amazed how good people get at it, and how quickly. That's how the journey starts, not by buying a ticket or getting a passport. It starts with a phone and voice recognition technology. (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 61)

Tipu excitedly tells Dinanath that one of the most significant effects that the smartphone and social media have had is to provide people in impoverished areas with visuals of a better life elsewhere on the globe. The people willing to migrate see the pictures posted in social media by their neighbours or relatives who have already moved to a foreign land. Paul White (1995) remarks that after the first movers find a place to settle, subsequent waves of migrants typically tend to follow the paths taken by their former pioneers (4). The images posted by the migrants feed people's desires and newly discovered aspirations to the point where the only choice seems to be to get associated with a "connection man" who can turn those aspirations into reality for an expensive amount. In the novel, the characters from Sundarbans decide to migrate due to adverse climate conditions and their hope for a better living condition in Europe. Giovanni Sciaccaluga (2020) is of the opinion that, in reality, the act of migration is subject to a variety of complex factors that collectively shape an individual's choice. Diverse reasons behind the motivation of people to migrate have prompted Sciaccaluga to opine:

> An individual can be pushed to leave his or her country for different reasons: climatic, environmental, economic, demographic, familial, social, psychological, and so on. In turn, the same factor can have a different effect depending on the person it affects. It is often difficult to determine which factor has played the decisive role in leading a person to leave his or her home, and this is because different persons living in the same context can react differently to similar challenges. (28)

In his work, Ghosh endeavours to convey that instances of climatic shifts or environmental degradation, though comparable in nature, can yield disparate consequences with regards to the decision to migrate. The inquiry into the underlying factors that trigger the choice to migrate presents an immense difficulty. However, the refugees' compelling accounts detailing the impetus for their flight serve as a persuasive tool in securing the attention of the foreign authorities. In the case of this novel, the refugees need appealing stories related to 'Politics, religion and sex' to tell the authorities in other countries. So, Tipu states that "you've gotta have a story of persecution if you want them to listen to you" (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 62). When Tipu was

in the people moving business, he used to offer this help of conjuring up these stories for his clients to draw sympathy from the governments of foreign countries. Linhard and Parsons (2019) claim, "Oftentimes identities take on narrative form in accounts that emerge in a complex negotiation between stories migrants tell about themselves and those that others tell about them. In such stories, identities are inexorably linked to space and place" (9). On the other hand, Lava Asaad (2020) emphasises the importance of storytelling while determining the fate of individuals within the camp. The capability to craft a decent narrative becomes the determining factor in distinguishing those who would be rescued and those who would remain behind, facing an uncertain future (126). In the novel, the expert 'dalals' or connection men know their clients very well and understand what kind of story fits each of them. Once they begin their journey with a particular story backing them up, they never stop moving.

Tipu had previously made arrangements with certain dalals or "connection men" in Bangladesh over the phone. Both Tipu and Rafi headed to Dhaka one night after crossing Raimangal River. The money that they had amassed, the majority of which belonged to Tipu, was just about sufficient to pay for the most inexpensive type of voyage, which was overland, with a little left over to get them through the rest of their voyage. After they had stayed in Dhaka for two weeks, the dalal put them on a minibus with a number of other men and drove them away. A group of people who worked for the dalals or the 'jackals' as mentioned by Tipu, were on the bus with the migrants, and it was their responsibility to get others across the border. Rafi noticed, "They were tough, hard men, and you couldn't argue with them; you had to do exactly what they said" (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 237). From Dhaka they were taken to the Indian border at Benapol in West Bengal and then to Kolkata. They were escorted to a "connection house" and kept locked inside. They stayed there for three days in filthy conditions, twenty of them hiding in two rooms with only one bathroom to share. They were not even permitted to step outside for a moment. Rafi says, "If you complained, or asked too many questions, you'd be slapped or beaten; sometimes the jackals would hit you with pistol butts" (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 237). They again started their journey in a truck on the third night, and inside the vehicle, they were crammed in like cows and goats; there was just barely enough room for each of them to sit huddled. Car-sickness made some of them vomit inside, while the smell was so horrible that others did as well. They spent the majority of their journey being ignorant of where they were going. They were instructed to make arrangements for an additional payment of fifty dollars

individually if they wished to continue their journey after they had arrived somewhat near to the Pakistan border. They were taken aback because they believed they had already paid in advance and had not anticipated on using their dollars so early on in the trip. Tipu lost his temper and started arguing with the 'jackals'. As a result, he received a slap and was dragged into another room. Others were startled by the scream of Tipu when he was struck hard.

The following accounts of their suffering show the situation becoming more gruesome. They had to make further payments after they reached the Iranian border. While crossing Iran, Tipu had a strong suspicion that things were not going to go as planned. So, he warned Rafi, "if something happens to me and we get separated you must go on, no matter what" (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 239). Most of them had no warm clothes or shoes when they encountered extremely cold weather in Western Iran. They were held captive in a house in a small Kurdish village in the mountains together with dozens of other men, the majority of whom were Hazaras from Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. After a few days, some Kurdish men came and loaded them into a truck. They were instructed that as soon as the truck came to a stop, they had to run as fast as possible. Upon the arrival of the vehicle at the Turkish border, the migrating people immediately initiated their escape by running to safeguard their lives in adherence to the previously given orders and driven by the imperative to evade the lethal gunfire of the border security force. They heard the gunshots while they were running, and there were spotlights and red flashes following them. Some of their fellow men ahead of them were injured by the gunshots and lay on the track howling in pain. Others, on the other hand, continued to run, leaping over the bodies as if they were "fallen animals" (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 240). Rafi says, "There were maybe thirty or forty of us, running blindly, in a panic: it was like a stampede" (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 240). After the incident, Rafi got separated from Tipu. Tipu fell while scrambling downward and badly injured his foot. Rafi found himself seeking refuge within a hidden location alongside a group of Hazaras. As Rafi and Tipu got separated from each other, the former became confused and disoriented because he had no idea about the pathways or where to go after that. He had no choice but to proceed in the same direction as the rest. They were guided to a town by the Kurds, who pointed out where they could catch a bus to Istanbul. Later, Tipu called Rafi and advised him to get off the bus in an area near Istanbul and join a group of refugees walking to Europe. Rafi joined the group of refugees, which included some Bengalis as well as people from Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Somalia and possibly from other countries as well. Rafi followed the

refugees across the border into Bulgaria, then into Serbia, Hungary and Austria. Tipu advised Rafi that he should make his way to Venice as soon as possible. After enduring numerous terrifying ordeals during his illegal journey out of his home country, Rafi was finally able to make it to Venice, where he met a large number of other illegal migrants in the same situation as himself. The hope for a more promising life in a distant land was tragically shattered for the refugees who had initially been captivated by its allure prior to embarking on their daring adventure.

Piya, being Tipu's foster-parent, contacted an NGO that worked with refugees and migrants so that she could keep track of Tipu's journey. Someone from the NGO informed her that Tipu's case was not an unusual incident in the current globalised world, rather a very common one because, "over the last couple of years there had been a huge increase in reports of teenage boys and young men leaving home without informing their families" (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 183). The member from the NGO also informed that "the overland route from Pakistan through Iran to Turkey was a major conduit" for illegal migrants (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 183). Piya understood Tipu had embarked on a clandestine adventure with forged documents and ended up in Turkey. Piya learned about Tipu's preoccupation with Venice from the printouts discovered in the plastic bag in Tipu's almirah. Tipu is easily swayed by the "people-moving industry"- a major global concern, having an astonishing departure rate- and manages to hide it from both his mother Moyna and his legal guardian Piya (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 60). In the course of the narrative, however, Tipu turns from being a mediator of refugee mobility to becoming a refugee himself.

Cinta's niece, Gisa, was working on a television documentary, commissioned by a consortium of television channels, regarding the current influx of migrants entering Italy from across the Mediterranean and the Adriatic. She has discovered that refugees from Libya and Egypt are attempting to come across the sea on boats. Gisa informs, "Our new right-wing government came to power because they promised to be tough on migration" (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 145). In Gisa's opinion, the documentary is essential because no one knows why so many people are fleeing their homes: "Why are the migrants coming, in such dangerous circumstances? What are they fleeing? What are their hopes?" (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 146). Such documentaries are essential to make the authorities aware of the real cause behind the large

influx of people. But, it is necessary to acknowledge that this process of documentation also entail adverse impacts for the displaced people seeking refuge. Based on Dave Eggers oral-history series on human rights crises, James Dawes (2007) notes that when journalists or human rights workers or documentarians try to squeeze out the accounts of suffering from the victim refugees, they have the feeling that they have emotionally drained someone or 'retraumatized' them. They do not have anything in their hands to help the victims or the refugees. The victims only anticipate if there will be any help to improve their condition. The journalists only have the feeling that they have stolen something. The theft is of the story and thereafter there will be no revisiting to the victims once their stories are documented. But the person that the journalists took the stories from has mostly gotten nothing at all in return. Dawes further adds, "Choosing to represent people or, rather, to make them into representation, can in many circumstances function like coercion, threat, and violence" (189). During the making of the documentary centred on the plight of refugees, Gisa bore witness to the severest form of suffering and violence. It shows that because of the socio-political and cultural constraints, it is extremely difficult for journalists to create documentaries about refugees without the assistance of at least one credible medium. Gisa needs Dinanath's assistance as a translator while making the documentary because a significant number of refugees are from Pakistan and Bangladesh. In the novel, Gisa reports that a large influx of refugees from Bangladesh was entering Italy (146). For a long time, Bengalis have been moving to Venice. In Venice, they execute tasks such as preparing pizzas for visitors, cleaning hotels, and even playing the accordion on street corners. Dinanath accidentally meets Rafi working as a labourer in building construction in Venice. In the city, he is one of the considerable communities of Bengali refugees who are both from India and Bangladesh. They are involved in menial jobs without any legal protection to support them during adversities. However, even in the most terrible circumstances, migrants have some sort of agency. According to Stephen Castles et al. (2014), migration policies should not rely on treating migrants as passive victims, but rather provide them the opportunity to use their own agency (213). The refugees in the novel are seen to be availing work opportunities deploying their own agency. They try to prove themselves resilient in the face of adverse situations. Dinanath also meets a Bangladeshi lady Lubna Alam who runs a small travel agency in Venice. She is living there for twenty years and helping the other refugees by providing information about their rights under the law. Her ancestral home was in Madaripur district of Bangladesh. A fearsome cyclone

and flood caused by rising river water destroyed everything they had in Bangladesh. So, ultimately Lubna and her husband Munir realised they would not be able to live in their village anymore. Munir decided to go overseas through Russia, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and then landed in Italy. Lubna informs Dinanath about the miserable condition of the refugees in Venice. Most of them work all day long and barely get any sleep. Some of them are even unfortunate enough to not get permission to meet with the committee that decides on their present status as migrants. They have to remain extra careful because sometimes right-wing troublemakers watch their interviews and documentaries on television and get all worked up against them. Gregory White (2011) claims that out of the fear of expulsion, 'Transit migrants' often remain underground and move clandestinely. If they do any job within the nation they have migrated to, "it is most likely without documentation, and they are unevenly integrated or assimilated into society, if at all" (White 94). The refugees do not want to be treated as illegal outsiders in the society, rather, seek to be accepted as normal human beings with basic needs and desires. Lubna claims, "we have nothing to hide, and it might be good if people knew more about our lives. Perhaps they would learn to see us as ordinary human beings, with the same needs and desires as anyone else" (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 162). Still, the responses towards the protection of rights on humanitarian grounds are often complicated, sometimes contradictory and muddled.

The portrayal of ongoing crisis of climate refugees on European coasts also shed light on the issue that the nations are becoming increasingly inhospitable towards people without legal status.[7] In this regard, Amitav Ghosh (2016) envisages the climate crisis as a 'threat multiplier' (Ghosh, *Great Derangement* 192). He argues that this phenomenon has a tendency to intensify pre-existing divisions within societies and eventually raise an array of conflicts. He takes into consideration Christian Parenti's view on the presumed response of the security establishment of the West to the threats of dislocation. They would adopt the measures that Parenti refers to as the "politics of the armed lifeboat", which encompasses a combination of unrestricted resistance, military fortified frontiers, and aggressive law-enforcement against immigration. Ghosh states:

> The tasks of the nation state under these circumstances will be those of keeping 'blood-dimmed tides of climate refugees at bay and protecting their own resources: 'In this world view, humanity has not only declared a war against itself, but is also locked into mortal combat with the earth.' The outlines of an 'armed lifeboat' scenario can already be

> discerned in the response of the United States, United Kingdom and Australia to the Syrian refugee crisis: they have accepted very few migrants even though the problem is partly of their own making. (Ghosh, *Great Derangement* 192-193)

The prevailing anti-immigrant sentiment prompts the nations to adopt brutal measures against refugees to counteract their undesired access into their territories. Todd Miller in his journalistic account *Storming the Wall* (2017) incorporates the remark made by a retired air-marshal from India named A. K. Singh who stated, "when the migration starts, every state would want to stop the migrations from happening. Eventually, it would have to become a military conflict" (Miller). In the novel, Dinanath learns from Lubna that the navy has been given orders to prevent the Blue Boat carrying refugees from reaching Italy. In addition, all of the other nations in the Mediterranean have dispatched coast-guard vessels to ensure that the refugees are unable to find refuge anywhere else. Gisa believes that the refugees on the Blue Boat may have access to massive amounts of data about human trafficking. People involved in human trafficking have contacts everywhere, not just with the criminal organisations but also in the highest positions, among the police, politicians and even within the governments of European countries. These refugees have sufficient knowledge to expose all of these networks. Gisa says, "[T]his is the reason why so many governments don't want to accept the Blue Boat. This group of refugees may know too much" (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 263). The social dispute concerning the emergence of the Blue Boat consisting of refugees in Italy has become an emblem of the world's recognition that the refugee crisis and climate migration are growing exponentially as a result of human-induced climate change. Palash, a migrant from Bangladesh, shares the news with Dinanath that human rights advocates from all over Italy have decided to support the refugee boat that has been receiving a lot of attention recently. By sending their own boats, the human rights activists made the decision to confront the right-wing activists who had vowed to send the refugees back. Palash says, "If a fleet of civilian vessels shows up to support the refugees, maybe it'll speak to the world's conscience" (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 199). Rebecca Saunders (2001) claims when the 'global foreigners' appear in corporate space, the news, economic analyses or in the consciousness of the 'global citizen' –"they are uncanny, threatening, the unsettling sign of something society has ostensibly left behind" (88-89). Therefore, it is necessary to direct

attention towards the grim state of refugees, with the aim of awakening people's conscience. The case of these refugees would make an excellent human interest story, so Gisa urges Piya to do everything possible to "put a human face on those refugees" (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 277). It will also help to make the authorities aware about and reconsider the perpetual loss of identity of the refugees. In an unfamiliar territory, they find themselves subjected to the reality of being perceived as threatening intruders, thereby causing a gradual erosion of their sense of self and dissociation amidst a newly experienced culture. While reflecting upon postcolonial realities of the migration represented in Nigerian literature, Bernard Dickson and Chinyere Egbuta (2019) offer the same opinion that this is how the migrants usually experience:

> [A]n erosion of a valid sense of identity either due to their wilful or coercive removal from their homeland through migration or through cultural derogation by a presumably superior culture. The implication of the corrosion of an active and valid sense of self drives the migrant into a psycho-social condition of perplexity and role confusion and a pursuit of a clearer sense of self. (157)

Their lives are testimonies to the hardships they have through and to the loss of their identity while attempting to relocate to an alien country. In *Gun Island*, an enraged Italian mob with their hateful sentimentality towards the refugees on the blue boat, label them as climate refugees. At the cost of their individual identity, they find themselves transformed into mere unwanted refugees within an unfamiliar land.

In his journey from India to New York, California, and Venice, Dinanath encounters numerous signs of climate change and migration. Having visited the 'dhaam' of Manasa Devi at the Sundarbans, Dinanath is forced to encounter chance circumstances that eventually lead him to board a ship that aims to rescue a refugee-boat on the Italian shore. The novel investigates the issue of xenophobic ideology exacerbated by Europe's growing refugee crisis through the story of Tipu and Rafi's journey as refugees from India. The politicians believe that migrants are a threat to the society as they are considered to be a source of violence and crime and must be kept out of the way. The influx of refugees is associated with the fear of terrorism as a deterrent to globalisation. As it has been discussed earlier, the migration of huge numbers of individuals into

the territories of other nations causes nation-states to feel threatened and, as a result, provides justification for the infliction of violence, which in turn causes social unrest. Lava Asaad (2020) writes: "Globalizers often view refugees, despite their small number, as a threat to the purity of the nation-state, or even its demise. Once again, this is an incident of nationalistic tendencies, which also play on the chord that the nation-state is pure and unified against the alien presence of immigrants" (25). The novel portrays that the refugees are living entities who are looking for their lives to have meaning, but in the end, they are simply seen as undesirable outsiders who lack a unified sense of identity. Ghosh emphasises on the history of conflict-torn policies of imperial powers and adds a new dimension to the debate about climate justice. The connection between the climate-induced crisis and anti-immigrant policies of the developed countries stir extreme rightwing politics that support the anti-immigration sentiments. A well-founded fear of persecution prevails as the authorities do not allow the entitlement of citizenship to the refugees. Anja Mihr (2017) states: "These uprooted people are deprived of participatory rights and entitlements, so they cannot participate in decision-making processes and cannot express themselves or even assemble freely because they are held in camps and denied basic citizenship rights because of their foreign status" (52). The substantial claim by the human rights activists needs serious reflection on the protection of the uprooted refugees. The climax of the novel shows the tug-of-war among the right-wing politicians, Italian military force and the people bound for the rescue of a refugee boat. This scene portrays, in the words of Ben De Bruyn (2020), "the inhuman treatment of displaced people in the name of national security" (De Bruyn). The Blue Boat carrying flocks of refugees to the Italian coast symbolically signifies the instrument of mobilisation that defies enforced borders. The boat has become a symbol of "everything that's going wrong with the world – inequality, climate change, capitalism, corruption, the arms trade, the oil industry" (Ghosh, *Gun Island* 199). This has become a very common sighting in coastal regions where a variety of life boats carrying hundreds of refugees appear, drawing strong intervention from the government's coastal security forces. Tipu was also approaching the Italian coast in this Blue Boat and there he got reunited with Rafi and others like Piya and Dinanath. The boat is finally rescued with the help of the supporters amidst the atrocious resistance by the nativists.

There is a convergence of themes in *The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island*, such as displacement and dislocation, as well as climatic shifts, in which Ghosh crafts a medley of events

and voices from the past and present that are impacted by the dark and unfathomable forces of climate change and the unknowable. The author lays bare various aspects of illegal migration: environmental factors behind migration, the misuse of technology, struggle against the decisions of governments, human trafficking, pain-staking journey in inhuman conditions, the agony, the distress, the bribing, and then finally reaching the dream land as refugees at the expense of a secure life and legal identity. Fictions about climate change can be used as an emotive tool to promote empathy for climate injustice. Ghosh's novels convey the complexity of national and overseas migration patterns, the disparateness of refugee experiences and the similitude among many of those untold experiences. As these observations imply, his novels respond to climate disruptions and anticipated resettlements in an unequivocal and contemplative manner. In conclusion it can be said that Ghosh has tried to convey that no proper actions are taken by the governments of host countries to incorporate displaced people into mainstream everyday life and normalise the crisis. An overpowering sense of dissociation from one's own culture, race, and ethnicity obliterates identity formation. Nasreen Chowdhory (2018) states, "their existence in any state negotiates new identities for democratic space" as the refugees impact changes in sites of territorial governance (15). Climate strife imposes refugeehood on the people and threatens to create emotional distancing among the citizens beyond the limits of borders. In this sense Ben De Bruyn's (2020) statement can be considered appropriate that "climate change threatens to make environmental refugees of us all, with or without borders" (De Bruyn). Representation of climate change and refugee crisis in contemporary 'Cli-fi' or climate fictions provides the genre a unique way of influencing the reader's imagination towards the immediate need of international policy-making. Ghosh's novels point towards a more extensive view of current ecological and climatological factors and their literary representations that encourage the readers to consider the socio-political disparity prevailing in modern society. Such narratives bring under consideration the burning issue of global warming and help to promote awareness about displacement as everyday phenomena in the Anthropocene. Thus, after closely examining the variety of articulations why it is important to consider plight of the refugees as a major theme in contemporary literary praxis, it has been apprehended that the issue has to be dealt with seriousness owing to its multidimensional potential to reconfigure society and culture.

Endnotes

[1] The UNHCR is actively engaged in addressing the complex challenges posed by displacement situations linked to climate change. It aims to ensure that the needs and vulnerabilities of displaced populations or refugees are effectively addressed within the broader context of climate-induced migration.

[2] UNHCR report Global Trend: Forced Displacement 2020 asserts that there exists an undeniable interconnection and reciprocal influence between the dynamics of climate change, shortages of food, poverty, conflict and dislocation. This complex web of factors compels an escalating number of individuals to embark on a quest for security and protection (9).

[3] Carolyn Beeler, in her online article *UN compact recognizes climate change as driver of migration for first time* (2018) claims that the report Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (2018) put forth by Global Compact for Migration on 13 July, 2018 recognizes climate change as driver of migration. This article is available at https://theworld.org/stories/2018-12-11/un-compact-recognizes-climate-change-driver-migration-first-time.

[4] An online article by Rihan Najib titled "Amitav Ghosh through unquiet lands" published on 21st June, 2019 and available at https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/blink/read/amitav-ghosh-through-unquiet-lands/article28099001.ece/amp/ affirms Ghosh's visit to various refugee camps in Italy. He spoke to those who had undertaken the perilous journey from their conflict-torn homelands to a comparably unpredictable future. What left Ghosh astounded was the realisation that, contrary to the media's portrayal of the refugee crisis as predominantly originating from Africa or West Asia, the second largest influx of people arriving on the coasts of Sicily consisted of individuals hailing from Bangladesh.

[5] *Climate Change 2007: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability* (2007), a report edited by Martin Parry et al. and prepared by Working Group II contributing to the Fourth Assessment Report of

the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) shows: "Changes in socio-economic activities and modes of human response to climate change, including warming, are just beginning to be systematically documented […] Responses vary by community and are dictated by particular histories, perceptions of change and range, and the viability of options available to groups" (31).

[6] Diaz and Rosenberg suggests that the pivotal factor in mitigating the occurrence of dead zones depends on the effective management of fertilizers, ensuring their retention on land surfaces rather than their penetration into marine ecosystems.

[7] See David Wallace-Wells' *The Uninhabitable Earth: Life after Warming* (2019).

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