



## TRACING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CLIMATE CHANGE AND MIGRATION THROUGH AMITAV GHOSH'S THE GREAT DERANGEMENT: CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE UNTHINKABLE

**Chingalembi Devi**

Research Scholar, Manipur University

Email: [chingalembi100@gmail.com](mailto:chingalembi100@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT:

Preserving the natural resources is the most potential way of preserving the future of the earth is a well prescribed academic itinerary. Unfortunately, the health of earth degrades gradually; causes are many and every tangible or intangible change in earth's temperature affects living beings especially humans. Disrupting the natural environment directly equals to harming oneself. Amitav Ghosh as a conscious writer in *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* deals with the background and involvement of humans in bringing down earth to its present condition. The writer has claimed that human development is inversely proportionate to earth's wellbeing. A re reading of the book will offer more interesting facts regarding the relation between climate change, development and deprivation of humans. Therefore, the paper is an attempt to study the contribution of humans in degenerating earth or themselves directly and the relationship between climate change and migration.

**Keywords:** Climate, Calamities, Earth, Degeneration, Migration

### INTRODUCTION:

The study of environment in relation to literature has gained much popularity towards the end of the twentieth century due to the degrading state of the environment. The branch of literature which explores the condition of the environment is known as Ecocriticism. Cheryll Glotfelty in the Introduction to *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* writes that William Rueckert first coined the term Ecocriticism in his 1978 essay "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecology." Glotfelty further writes that William Rueckert by the term ecocriticism means "the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature" (Glotfelty xx). The literary outputs of many writers exhibit the influence of environment subtly or vividly; amongst them, Amitav Ghosh can be considered as one of the most significant writers.

Amitav Ghosh is a renowned Indian author. He is well known for his meticulous research and fabrication of marvelous stories. He may be categorized among the new generation of writers who are equally aware of the past and present of issues and seek to find a better scenario for future. His oeuvre is an amalgamation of widely ranged subject matters: history, science, politics and also environment. His novels *The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island* deal with ecological issues and his nonfiction book *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* deals with the background and involvement of humans in bringing down earth to its present condition. The writer has claimed that human development is inversely proportionate to earth's wellbeing. A re reading of the book will offer more interesting facts regarding the relation between climate change and deprivation of humans. Therefore, the paper is an attempt to study the contribution of

humans in degenerating earth or themselves directly and the relationship between climate change and migration.

Sanjoy Hazarika has argued in *Rites of Passage: Border Crossings, Imagined Homelands, India's East and Bangladesh* that “the history of the world is migration” (75). Migration may be said to be as old as human civilization because the act of settling to a certain place came much later; initially nomadic life was the norm of living. They move from a place to another perpetually in search of better opportunity where life can be easier. In the course of time, nomads established themselves to certain areas according to their preferences. The movements of people after this phase of civilization can be termed as migration. There are many reasons of migration and migration affects the ecological balance of the new habitat. Hazarika asserts that people who seek refuge in a host country or state due to “threat to his life and liberty” are termed as “political refugee” (83). According to Hazarika, political refugees differ from migrants. He writes that “The former is regarded as a temporary traveler, while the latter is viewed as a settler and thereby a competitor for space in every form: land, water, services and jobs” (83). He further observes that the political refugees are likely to return to their homeland when the threat to their life and community abates. In this regard, he cites the instance of refugees from East Pakistan. He asserts that they returned to their homeland when it gained independence in 1971 as Bangladesh. However, identifying a homeland for citizens of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh is problematic because the second is the offshoot of the first and the third the offshoot of the second. Unsolved issues, territories and scuffle on

these unresolved issues continue till date. Among them, the issue of insider and outsider is of a serious nature. The continuing debate of whom to include and exclude as righteous citizens of Assam can be seen in the continuing enquiry of National Register of Citizens (NRC). According to Sangeeta Barooah Pisharoty, maintaining a citizens’ register is necessary “to have a record of residents of the state from which people had been flowing in and out of the border 1947 onwards” (Pisharoty 50). The then Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi suggested the student leaders 24 March 1971 to be the determining date of foreigners keeping in mind Nehru-Liaquat Ali pact of 8 April 1950. The pact “gave right to displaced people from both the countries to return and reclaim their property. That pact nullified the Immigrant (Expulsion from Assam) Act drafted exclusively for Assam” (Pisharoty 50).

The above discussion shows that migrants create a huge problem in the host country because they become contenders of the same opportunity and resources like job, place, water, land and so on and so forth. This paper will further focus on migration affected by climate change or ecological disturbances. Amitav Ghosh in *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* asserts that “My ancestors were ecological refugees long before the term was invented” (4). The ancestors belong to Bangladesh and the author is talking about the incident which took place in mid 1850s. According to the author’s father the Padma River “suddenly changed course, drowning the village;” and it resulted in their movement away from their home in search of better place and opportunity. Since their escape from their native land is basically ignited by

environmental factor; environment or ecological factors have become a matter of major concern involving social, political, economic and religious issues. Another significant term to be understood is 'ecological refugee.' Ecological refugee may be referred to as those people who are compelled to leave their natives place temporarily or permanently due to environmental calamities like flood, earthquake, so on and so forth. Amitav Ghosh's concept of ecological refugee may be said to be similar with Sanjoy Hazarika's notion of environmental displacement. Hazarika asserts that "Environmental factors are but one of a series of factors which force people to move" (Hazarika 77). He has given five types of migration instigated by environmental factors. According to him, the mass movement of people can be categorized into two: where there is possibility of return to the native land and where there is no possibility of return to the native land. Hazarika has given two conditions under which the people have no chance of returning to their native place. According to him, the natives have no possibility of return when "displacement is caused, for example, by dam construction and other large-scale development projects" and also when there is "a reference to irreversible natural phenomenon, such as desertification or rising sea water levels" (Hazarika 82). Therefore, the people who migrate due to environmental factors can be termed as "environmental refugee" (Hazarika 77). Furthermore, Hazarika mentions Weiner's term "Unwanted Migrants" which includes people who have "crossed international and domestic provincial boundaries in search of economic benefits, or those who have moved as a result of economic and environmental factors. They are unwanted

because they have been rejected by the host community" (Hazarika 92-93).

Regarding the climatic condition of the present age, Amitav Ghosh recollects Dipesh Chakrabarty's concept of "human-induced climate change" in the essay 'The Climate of History' (Ghosh 12). Amitav Ghosh asserts that it is an urgent requirement to know the reasons behind the inability of contemporary culture to encounter climate change because "the climate crisis is also a crisis of culture, and thus of the imagination" (Ghosh 12). Investigating further upon the basis igniting climate change, Ghosh posits that "This culture is, of course, intimately linked with the wider histories of imperialism and capitalism that have shaped the world" (Ghosh 13). Ghosh also adds that "In account of the history of the present climate crisis, capitalism is very often the pivot on which the narrative turns" (Ghosh 117). Moreover, Ghosh argues that "empire and imperialism" are major reasons of global warming. Accordingly, climate change may be linked to various colonial enterprises which is later backed by numerous developmental initiatives.

From the above analysis, it can be concluded that environmental issues and migration are close entities which affect one another. Climate change or environmental imbalance may be said to result from excessive infusion of carbon in the environment. Carbon footprints increase due to various developmental initiatives taken up by humans. Therefore, it has become high time to adopt the process of sustainable development because the earth is not our sole property; it also belongs to other living species and the future generations.

**REFERENCES:**

Glotfelty, Cheryl, and Harold Fromm. ed. *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1966.

Ghosh, Amitav. *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*. Haryana: Penguin, 2017.

Hazarika, Sanjoy. *Rites of Passagr: Border Crossings, Imagined Homelands, India's East and Bangladesh*. Haryana: Penguin, 2000.

Pisharoty, Sangeeta Barooah. *Assam: the Accord, The Discord*. Haryana: Penguin, 2019