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From Padma's Bank to Gun Island: A Narrative of Ecological Witnessing

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Abstract

In 2016, when Amitav Ghosh's *The Great Derangement* came into prominence, he made an argument through this book that climate change is not only a problem of politics or science but also a crisis of literature and imagination. To him modern bourgeois fictions view the non-human or the environment as a mere background to stage human drama. As a result the modern fictions that was initiated in the 19th century and still dominating the literary world, fail to confront or bear testimony to phenomena like climate change. The reason he provided, was that of modern fictions inclination towards "probability," "realism," and "regularity of bourgeois life," which he calls "derangement." However, this paper challenges Ghosh's diagnosis or his argument, which is basically based on modern English fiction, by discussing four fictions from Bengal delta. It ranges from Manik Bandyopadhyay's *Padma Nadir Majhi* (1936), to Adwaita Mallabharman's *Titash Ekti Nadir Naam* (1956), to Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2004) and *Gun Island* (2019) through a single, evolving practice of ecological witnessing. This essay uses these texts as counter-archive, where it will try to establish that fictions from Bengal Delta never rejected or neglected its non-human part ever. This essay tries to read this dialectic through a special lens, called 'ecological witnessing'. By the term 'ecological witnessing' I mean a voice, a record in literature on behalf of those who find it difficult or fails to raise their voice in front of the word. It is a testimony that refers to harm, damage or catastrophe done to a body of non-human. It could be a river, a forest, animals, insects or the very body of flora and fauna. Therefore the key thrust of this essay is to see the drying up of river, gradual degradation of mangrove forest, decrease of fishing stocks, rise of silt bed on river or beached dolphin not as the setting or the symbol of a human drama. Instead the paper will see them as 'ecological witness' that literature preserves or bear. In order to make the argument clear, this paper draws together testimony theory of Giorgio Agamben, Shoshana Felman and Laub, Rob Nixon's account of slow violence, Stacy Alaimo's trans-corporeality, Dipesh Chakrabarty's thesis of geological agency, and Ghosh's own argument from *The Great Derangement*. In so doing this paper shade light to a riverine and mythic tradition where non-human holds a position of an agent.

Keywords: Ecological witnessing, Slow violence, Multispecies harm, Riverine fiction, Trans-corporeality, the Sundarbans

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In *The Great Derangement*'s main point of contention, Ghosh raises a major accusation against his own medium of art or his own realm of artistic creation, the fiction. In this book he argues that: "It was in exactly the period in which human activity was changing the earth's atmosphere that the literary imagination became radically centered on the human. In as much as the nonhuman was written about at all, it was not within the mansion of serious fiction but rather in the outhouses to which science fiction and fantasy had been banished" (45). Here two terms are very important to note and they are "nonhuman" and "serious fiction." According to Ghosh, modern fictions that have emerged over the last two centuries, especially polite bourgeois realism, have rendered the nonhuman only as mere backdrop or inert entity. Because of its reliance on the practical laws of real life or "probability," or "regularity of bourgeois life" it raises complaints. Therefore, when a flood, wild animal, storm or other nonhuman entity suddenly acts with its own purpose, the fiction feels ashamed to call it "serious fiction" and relegates it as a mere melodrama or cheap surprise. In other words, if a writer tries to write about nonhuman, for instance the death of whale, during this period of climate change, he faces difficulty to gain recognition as a writer of "serious fiction." Anyway, What Ghosh is trying to argue that this human-centricity in literature is actually kind of "derangement." To him, when we are dependent on our environment for day to day living and constantly witnessing its harm, and if literature ignores this nonhuman or environment, it actually weakens our effort to survive. If the complexities of human life become the sole subject of literature then any narrative of climate disaster appear to us as mere imagination or fantasy.

It is a profound accusation. However, this accusation is entirely based on the European or English tradition of literature. When we bring this theory of Amitav Ghosh to this region of Bengal delta, of which Ghosh is also a part, the scenery changes completely. It is high time we should remember how Manik Bandyopadhyay in 1936 depicted the river in his *Padma Nadir Majhi* (The Boatman of the Padma). As Bandyopadhyay notes:

In the evening one could see from the jetty hundreds of dots of light moving about on the river like ever-glowing fireflies. Those were the lights in the fishing boats; all through the night they would flit about in this way looming like arcane signs in the faint mysterious darkness of the river...the holds of the boats dead silvery ilish would keep piling up. In the light of the lantern, their scales would glint and their staring eyes look like transparent bluish gems...somehow to huddle together during rain or storm (3-4)

In this brief account, it becomes clear that Bandyopadhyay puts a magnificent scenery. The Padma at night surrounded by tiny dots of light from fishing boats, as if the narrator depicts a magical scenery in front of us: "the faint mysterious darkness" (Mallabarman 3). It seems fireflies are plying on the dark water. However, besides this magical scene it also carries a sense of darkness or death. As the narrator shows, "The holds of the boats [filled with] dead silvery ilish" or how they huddle through storm (3-4). This contrast at the very beginning shows a profound truth that the river is not just a background elements in the narrative, rather it is something, which is associated with fishermen's labour and death. The fishermen who relies on the rivers' mercy bound to it like a living being.

In *The Great Derangement*, Ghosh's main accusation was that modern novels had lost the ability to present nonhuman properly, was already being written in Bengali in 1936. This is the key discussion that this paper is doing where it will be shown that the tradition of novels from this Bengal delta have not neglected or expelled nonhuman part. To do that this paper will discuss four fictions from Bengal delta written in eighty years apart, one after another. In so doing it also observes how damage or destruction to that nonhuman world have been testified through human voice.

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The connection that brings these fictions together is not the delta or the confluence of Sundarbans, instead there is a similarity of 'ecological witness.' In other words: how literature holds or bear witness to environmental harm, decay or compromised life of organism associated with their environment. General reading of these novels emphasises on human suffering, poverty, riverbank erosion or dispossession. My reading shifts it attention elsewhere. I want to see how literature bears witness to non-human entities. A river that is dying day by day, a forest that is losing its natural demeanour, beaching of dolphins or gradual decrease of fishing stocks getting a voice inside these fictions or not? Here, in the discourse of nonhuman, the displacement or impoverishment of people is actually a symptom of final and visible environmental damage or can be called an aftershock of environmental degradation. Again, one thing need to be mentioned here that placing the nonhuman at the centre of discussion does not mean to neglect or expel human; rather it means to understand human suffering in its correct sequence, which actually begins with water.

The word 'witnessing' is not an ordinary or neutral by any means, there is a deep theoretical weight and profound sense of responsibility. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub describe this beautifully. In *Testimony* (1992) they describe that 'witnessing' is an act, where someone experiences a horrific incident or catastrophe and survive. This survival brings with it the responsibility to speak or bear testimony for those, who are lost or who cannot speak for themselves. Although Felman and Laub define this 'witnessing' in a context of plague like epidemic, this is quite relevant and significant to my discussion to make sense how the process, testimony works after witnessing. However, it becomes problematic when we shifts our attention to the damages done to environment. Here the problem becomes twofold. First, the damages inflicted on environment do not happen overnight or become visible instantly but happen through a slow process, invisible to eye. Thinker Rob Nixon call it "slow violence." In *Slow Violence and Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011), he argues that "slow violence... occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction...dispersed across time and space...not viewed violence at all" (Nixon 2). Second, those who suffer much in any catastrophe or environmental destruction, simply lack the ability to speak. In *Remnant of Auschwitz* (1999) Giorgio Agamben makes this point quite clearly. Here he argues that whoever has gone under any catastrophe, cannot become the witness to give testimony or even if he survives he returns mute. According to Agamben it happens because they are "The submerged, the complete witnesses" (33) and therefore we should "speak in their stead, by proxy" (34) or bear testimony on their behalf. When we transposed this discourse on the Bengal delta, we see that, the drowned fishermen, the land spoilt by saltwater, gradual erosion of riverbank, drying up or the beached dolphin are those "submerged" and "complete witnesses," who cannot speak for themselves. This is where literature or fiction comes to play. It is literature or fiction that "speak in their stead, by proxy" (Agamben 34). My entire focus is on those mute victims, whom many modern critics often mistake for mere background.

One thing need to be discussed here, is that the 'ecological witnessing' on behalf of non-human entity is after all a position of standpoint or a question of perspective. Now the question is who is there to witness the catastrophe or damage of environment? Or who is positioned to see it? Who has the language to report it or record it? And for whom the report ultimately speak? These are the real question. This paper argues that, these four novels provide different answer to these questions and there is a specific pattern behind these differences. These are by no means random thing. As we go through Bandyopadhyay to Mallabarman and then to two novels by Amitav Ghosh, two things come to our view. First, the scale of catastrophe or damage gest bigger and wider gradually. For instance, the narrative of catastrophe moves from the life of common fishermen of Padma, their difficulties, poverty, to a narrative of climate catastrophe, where it covers the sense of planetary. Second, it changes the

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position of witness. The witness who started the narration in Manik Bandyopadhyay and Mallabarman, was an embedded narrator, specially, in first two texts. From there, the perspective shifts to an educated outsider, who enters into this world of delta with knowledge of science and translation. Towards the end the witness takes the form of a cosmopolitan individual, whose main responsibility is to bear the testimony or testify on behalf of this non-human entity because environment and animal lack the ability to speak for itself. Therefore, if we read these four novel together, we will see how giving voice or testify on behalf of non-human changes its demeanour without losing its authenticity or purpose. Beneath this lies the tragedy that overturns Ghosh's own argument that the fictions from Bengal delta never expelled nonhuman to a relegate position.

When Manik Bandyopadhyay depicts the life of a fishing community at the beginning of *Padma Nadir Majhi (The Boatman of the Padma)*, he basically brings the unbreakable bond between the river Padma and the fisher-folk of Ketupur. Padma, here is not just a background or natural scenery; rather it is at the centre of fishing communities life and society, a fundamental elements that holds the lifeline. However, beside the pictorial depiction of the river, it holds its own darker side. The description of the boat, the technique of casting fishing net, and the rules to divide the catch, all these show that the river's beauty and the exploitation on fishing community are actually two sides of the same coin. It is true that the river provides them with sustenance to support their life, but it also puts them through ordeal for that very sustenance: "huddle together during rain or storm" (Bandyopadhyay 4). Manik Bandyopadhyay reminds us that the river supports life as well as remains indifferent to the impoverished condition of fishing community. As narrator notes: "It was pointless to keep standing on the riverbank; even if one kept one's eyes peeled, none of yesterday's boatmen would be seen. Those who had drowned were gone for ever; but until the Padma calmed down not even the stranded ones could possibly return" (71)

However, the violence that we witness in the *Padma Nadir Majhi (The Boatman of the Padma)* that could be her benevolence, indifference, crashing down its own banks, disappearance of "half-a-century-old extensive tract" (13) or rise of sandbank somewhere, are mostly "slow violence" and the poor fishermen live on its bank by her rule without any protest. The protagonist of the novel is Kuber, a fisherman, who is poorest of the poor and belongs to the most neglected community. He is a nama-shudra Dalit. Through him Bandyopadhyay reveals a poignant truth of the society, where everyone tries to snatch away or deprive him from his minimum share that he needs to survive. As if depriving a character like Kuber has become a norm. During monsoon, situation gets much worse. His poverty, the leaking of rain water through his thatched wall, his wife's childbirth on wet floor, all in all, the weather seems to have become another creditor to his wretched condition (Bandyopadhyay 44). Ramachandra Guha and Joan Martinez-Alier call this "the environmentalism of the poor." In *Varieties of Environmentalism* (1997) Guha and Martinez-Alier call this environmentalism of the poor as a "question of sheer survival" (101). It means that the relationship between the river and marginalized people like Kuber is not a relationship of comfort; rather the river is their source of living as well as source of difficulty. Kuber does not dream about the beauty of the Padma; rather he lives at her mercy. Therefore the actual tragedy is not any specific instance of flood or monsoon but the very process of losing things gradually and it goes on like the ebb and flow of the river. There is no escape from it.

Then comes the entry of Moynadwip into the narrative and through whom a valley of death enters into the narrative. Moynadwip is a remote island situated in the estuary of Bengal delta, where we see the mysterious and powerful character, Hossain Miyan. He lures the poor fishermen with piece of land and utopian life and entraps them. Rasu's escape from that island and the story of his survival, his family falling victim to tigers, snake and crocodile prove that this island is actually a trap designed

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to destroy the poor. It requires a special attention to talk about Moynadwip because the idea that this island pushes, on one hand, hope of new life and stability, on other an inevitable death, which creates a profound connection between these old texts of 1930's and 2000's. This new colony of Hossain Miyan, as believed by poor fishermen that no human ever set foot on it since the very beginning of this world, is actually a false utopia founded by a powerful man. However, its prices are getting paid through impoverished character like Rasu, who came here with a hope but ended with loss of his family.

Almost after seven decades when Amitav Ghosh unravels the history of Morichjhanpi in *The Hungry Tide*, he actually returns to the same old structure, that in 1930s lured poor people with better life into the island. Ghosh calls it *bhatir desh* (world of ebb and flow). Like Moynadwip, Morichjhanpi came with promises too but turned out a grave for those, who stepped on it, whether through their fight with crocodile and tiger at the beginning of settlement or through their fight with Sate and its administrative apparatuses. The residence of Lusibaari, who were under the control of Sir Daniel, and the refugees or settlers at Morichjhanpi are actually lost families like Rasu's, are being rewritten at a later period in the history of Bengal delta. Both Bandyopadhyay and Ghosh knew this very well that to see this delta is to experience or witness the inevitable lure by a prospect of better life again and again. The way delta has been elevated as a salvation to impoverished people and how it crashes them down, shows how a non-human environment and state apparatuses can become one.

Now, it is important to notice, what it means to Ghosh's theory. The Padma in Manik Bandyopadhyay, acts as a living character with specific demeanour. She provides, she takes back. Similarly Moynadwip acts as hunter and evicts its refugees. Here, every entity of non-human (forest, island, river) acts as an active agent with a purpose. In other words, what Ghosh argues in his *Derangement* that modern novel requires active participation of non-human, is actually written already through Bandyopadhyay. However, the main difference between the two is of scale and the vocabulary of expression. In Bandyopadhyay, catastrophe is local, imbedded, social and has not been defined by any modern climate science. It revolves around rural economy and caste order.

The purest form of this aspect can be seen in Mallabarman's *Titash Ekti Naadir Naam* (*A River Called Titash*). Here the narrative brings the river Titash at the centre and depicts how alteration or transformation of the river is directly connected to the very existence of Malo fishing community. The narrative does not begin with the any human but with river: "Titash is the name of a river. Its banks brim with water, its surface is alive with ripples, its heart exuberant. It flows in the rhythm of a dream" (Mallabarman 11). It is actually a knowledge of water that Malo fishing community carries across generations. In their collective understanding of the river, it carries different demeanour. The Titash is a river of moderation, which provides a sense of ease, the river Bijoy dries up during summer and the Malo's who live on its bank equally suffer like the river. Their stranded boats on the bank of Bijoy reflects their poignant living condition during summer. On the contrary, Meghna and Padma are terrible and violent. They swallow their bank, as well as fisherman often and also hold crocodile in their bosom. Their name itself carries a sense of awe. So, to know the rivers in this way, means to submerge oneself with the demeanour of the river. In other words, it is the river that determines the fate of this fishing community who are dependent on the river. Mallabarman then widens his canvass to show us that this entire land of "Bengal draped with rivers and their tributaries, twisted and intertwined like tangled locks, streaked with the white of foamy waves" (Mallabarman 16).

Stacy Alaimo's concept of "trans-corporeality" is quite pertinent here. In *Bodily Natures* (2010), she argues that human body "is always inter-meshed with the more-than-human world." We see the exact reflection in *Titash Ekti Naadir Naam*. Malos not only rely on the river for survival; rather their entire existence is the existence of the river. Whatever happens to the river, gets its reflection on

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their life. This is the reason when we see the gradual degradation of Malo community towards the ending, it feels poignant. The rise of silt-bed, gradual decrease of depth and of fishing stock, makes the summer long and never-ending. As the narrator notes: “The ebb tide that reduces their life-river is now in its all-draining last draft. The life wasting away bit by bit now runs out” (Mallabarman 254). The Malo community did not vanish overnight but gradually through slow processes, the way river died. The fear is visible through the narration: “what if their own river Titash someday became dry like that! Perhaps even before that their hearts and their lives would dry up and die” (Mallabarman 15). There can be no better example of “slow violence” than this. This witness of Mallabarman becomes more prominent and powerful, when we see the translator’s afterwords and appendix. Here Kalpna Bardhan records what she found during her visit to Gokanghat: “The Malo neighborhood of the village now has about fifty Malo households, as a result of the migration to West Bengal. The upper-caste groups, and the Kaibarta and the Namashudra fishing-caste communities, have all left” (270). Thus Translator’s witness stands close to the narrator’s witness and does not provide any sense of comfort to the reader.

When Amitav Ghosh returns to this delta through his *The Hungry Tide*, he actually inherits the riverine testimony of those ancestors’ whose life revolved around river. However, he moves this entire narrative of delta into the landscape of ebb and flow of Sundarbans, where he introduces a character, who came to view this world from outside. Earlier two novels did not need any intrusion. In describing Sundarbans, Ghosh says that here land and water constantly shifts its demeanour, the mangrove exists as a universe on its own, and any entry of human is always countered by attack from snakes, crocodile and tiger. Besides this, he unravels a strange truth that this land remains “half-submerged at high tide” and as the water recedes it “gives birth to the forest” (8). This narrative of Ghosh does what he argues about modern fiction to do, that the delta is not any inactive entity; rather an active agent who constantly makes and unmake itself.

The characters or witnesses of *The Hungry Tide* are standing at a situational crisis which neither Bandyopadhyay nor Mallabarman had to face because both of their narrations come from the inside of the society. However, in Ghosh, we see a cetologist named Piya who brought science, modern instruments, and knowledge to categories Irrawaddy dolphins’ movement. Besides Piya, we see another character named Kanai, a Delhi based businessman and a translator who has brought cosmopolitan ease to move between languages. On the contrary, the uneducated Fokir holds a profound knowledge of ecology that is absent to both Piya and Kanai. This specific hereditary knowledge to read ecology was also prominent with the fishing community of Malo in Bandyopadhyay and Mallabarman. However, the irony is that Fokir does not hold any institutional language to manifest his testimony and it has been acknowledged in the narrative without any filter that it is impossible to record his experience through the language of Piya and Kanai. In other words, the modern institutional language feels short to express the witness of Fokir. Ghosh has depicted this lack recurrently throughout the text and it is not a shortcoming of the novel; rather an honest confession that it is the witness who knows much but gets little or no space to deliver testimony to the world.

Again, with the bloody history of Morichjhapi, and the bounty hunting of tigers and crocodiles during Sir Daniel’s era, Ghosh shows how violent a land can be where it is impossible to separate the land from politics. We see, how state evicted refugees from the island of Morichjhapi in the name of conservation. Though there is an old history behind it, a history of false hope of free land that Lord Daniel used to lure this impoverished people. In reality it was their grave. Therefore to see this delta is to see its inflicted violence too. Those who were drowned or beaten during Morichjhapi massacre were synonymous to other victims of river, for whom the novel testifies. It again proves, the land here is not a mere background.

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The violent cyclone that arrives at the end of this fiction is actually a culminating moment of environmental testimony. Without finding any shelter when Fokir guarded Piya from the raging storm by tie their body to a tree and used his own body as a shield from debris, it created a bond between them so strong that life never could have given them, perhaps. Fokir died while protecting Piya. From the theoretical point this scene is the pinnacle of “trans-corporeality” where two bodies and the nature merge together. Again if we see through Agamben’s theory of witness, Fokir is the real witness who goes through the catastrophe and dissolves with it. He could not record his testimony and Piya, who survived the incident would carry the meaning, memory, and data. This is what forms Ghosh’s core ethical foundation and it rhythms through Rasu, who somehow returns from Moynadwip, Titash Malos, who simply dried up like their river and boat without anyone to record their witness except the author and later the translator.

The incident of cyclone also bring us face to face with a core theme that runs through the four novels. It is a conviction that human body is not separate from the non-human or water; rather an undistinguishable, a tran-corporeal entity. For instance, the return of Rasu from Moynadwip in tattered condition or exhaustion on Kuber’s body, the drying up of Titash as the gradual decay and impoverishment of Malo communities, Fokir’s merging with the tree and storm into a single entity, and in *Gun Island* the beaching of dolphins due to changes in the character of water. In all these it is the body that witness the catastrophe and become the truest form of it but the irony is that, it cannot speak for itself. Because of this the fiction must “speak in their stead, by proxy” (Agamben 34).

After fifteen years when Ghosh comes back to Sundarbans through his *Gun Island*, he reveals how the once invisible “slow violence” now taking a terrifying turn. Now, Piya witnessing the death of the same dolphins, on whom she had engaged her entire research. Through Piya, Ghosh explains the scientific reason behind it: “As sea levels rose, and the flow of fresh water diminished, salt water had begun to intrude deeper upstream, making certain stretches too saline for the dolphins” (101-102). As a result they are entering into water channels where they are either getting entangled in the fishing net or getting struck by boat propeller. However, the most terrifying incident comes when the remaining dolphins beached themselves on the shore, as if a collective act of self-sacrifice. After observing the corpses pointed towards a certain direction, Piya realizes that the dolphins did not die in water; rather they deliberately sacrificed themselves. She speaks of “oceanic dead zones,” “low oxygen content—too low for fish to survive” (*Gun Island* 104). Though there are other reason behind this transformation of water, a man-made reason that polluted the water by its industrial waste. Apart from it, what Ghosh is trying to unravel in front of us is not the story of human predicament but the poignant condition of those non-human, dolphins.

Most striking thing in the *Gun Island* is its reflection of Ghosh’s theory which he argued in *The Great Derangement*, that the non-human is not tolerating anything silently here; rather it gives its sense of agency and somehow playing the role of prophet. For instance, the beaching of dolphins align with Tipu’s trance like state due to snake bite, the appearance of venomous creatures in places where they don’t belong, and all these seems, as if the irritated warming Earth rearranging its non-human to create uncanny effects which remains a mystery for rational characters of the novel. Ghosh brings back this uncanny into the narrative deliberately, so that the non-human can have an agency in a narrative. Here, Dipesh Chakrabarty’s dialectic of globe and planet becomes pertinent. In “The Climate of History: Four Theses” Chakrabarty argues that “Anthropogenic explanations of climate change spell the collapse of the age-old humanist distinction between natural history and human history” (201) and therefore the dolphins death and refugees’ migration cannot be seen as separate narrative; rather they have become into a single narrative of shared history. However, we need to understand about this

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registered agency. Though, non-humans are exerting signals, they are unable to record testimony themselves. It is the human characters who must make sense of their ruin.

To make this understandable, Ghosh takes recourse to mythology. He has integrated an old myth of Gun Merchant, who fled across the sea just to escape the wrath of Manasa Devi (Snake goddess). This old story is actually a testimony of ecological trauma which Ghosh has revived just to make us aware about the present environmental crisis. Kanai captures the true essence of this situation when says “The Sundarbans are the frontier where commerce and the wilderness look each other directly in the eye; that’s exactly where the war between profit and Nature is fought” (*Gun Island* 9).

The myth has more function than a supplement to the plot, it provides a new form to time. The novel’s protagonist, Deen is getting unsettled again and again with the thought that the past is entering somehow into the present. The whole structure of the book is designed in such a way that it seems feasible. A seventeenth-century merchant’s flight is synonymous with a twenty-first-century flight from salt, storm, and ruined harvests. This is what Dipesh Chakrabarti calls the “collapse of the age-old humanist distinction between natural history and human History” (201) Here the epic Manasa Mangal becomes a testimony or record of an earlier age of environmental terror, which shows us how people witness the vengeful form of environment through the story of a vengeful goddess. The novels gives an indication that understanding the legend and the myth properly can be a way of bearing testimony to such incident that had happened in past and a reminder that environmental disaster is too large to hold in any single lifetime. That is why the old story is not a superstition standing opposed to science; rather it is a testimony in another key, and the novel asks us to receive it as such.

The narrative of *The Gun Island* ends in the lagoon of Venice. There is a boat called ‘Blue Boat’ filled with refugees and across it vast horizon appears a dark cloud of million birds. At the same time a herd of dolphins and whales summersaulting in the waves, and the water begins to glow with bioluminescence. Watching this spectacular scenery, Cinta says softly that she “had never thought” she “would witness this joy” with “her own eyes, pouring over the horizon” (*Gun Island* 306). On the other, Rafi sees this as the union with connection to ancient legend where creatures from both the sea and sky rise up together. Ghosh calls this *uno stormo* (a storm of living being) and it seems that the non-human entities are also witnessing the human. This scene of convergence makes the non-human perfectly visible to human world and it is the onlooker human who is having ecological witness for this non-human.

From this discussion one observation becomes quite clear, that it is the storm or storm like situation where “slow violence” erupts into visible events. For instance, seeping of monsoons’ water in Kuber’s thatch, in *Padma Nadir Majhi*, the never summer in *Tiatash Ekti Naadir Naam*, the cyclone that kills Fokir in *The Hungry Tide*, Tipus’ account of cyclone in *The Gun Island*, are moments which shows how years of environmental degradation and dispossession explodes into a dramatic event. While discussing “slow violence” Rob Nixon also makes an argument that a spectacular form of violence can overshadow the slow, invisible form of destruction. As a result, we pay less attention to decades of exploitation, degradation that left the victim vulnerable to changes. Bandyopadhyay and Mallabarman depicted this “slow violence” without taking recourse to any spectacular show: Kuber remains poor for his entire life and the Malo’s dried up like the river. On the contrary, “slow violence” in the *Gun Island* takes a spectacular form through it recourse to uncanny and myth. Following Nixon, it can be said that the two old Bengali fictions has depicted this “slow violence” more honestly than Ghosh’s fictions that directly address it through spectacular storm or old myth.

Nevertheless, one thing needs to be mentioned here that Ghosh’s return to old myth is actually a homecoming to his own tradition of myth and river. The myth of Manasa Mangal was already present

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within the realm of Bengali literature. That is why, when he speaks of “derangement” in the realm of modern literature were never present in Bengal’s tradition. The central of these four books is the same, it is the delta, the water body and their bond with the human. When water is harmed, people are harmed too.

When we look at these four text together the critical tension becomes clear. Though it seems that Ghosh’s planetary novels are simply a mature version of Bandyopadhyay and Mallabharman but that is not entirely true. Bandyopadhyay and Mallabharman refused to use any spectacle form violence and narrated from within. Since Ghosh is writing for his global readership, he has to view this world of delta through Piya’s science, Nirmal’s diary, old legend, and myth. As a result, Ghosh’s cosmopolitan witness can spread the testimony to the world and can safely return to home but Bandyopadhyay and Mallabharman’s don’t get much space do the same and sometimes they fail to. The final truth of ‘ecological witnessing’ is whose testimony is being recorded and who is recording it? Sadly, those who are likely to return safe from any catastrophe are the ones doing the job of testimony. Though, there is another history of dispossession and deprivation due to caste and social stratification. Kuber, Titash Malos or Fokir, all of them belong to the lowest strata of a society, they are Dalit and no one is there for them hear their testimony. Therefore, the political task of any fiction is to make those voices more prominent. The blue glow in the eyes of an ilish, Padma’s violent and benevolent demeanour, Kubers impoverishment, dried up Titash, Dolphins dead-body on the bank, all these scenes are ready to make us witnesses. The delta has been pouring out its own testimony to us for long. Now the question is whether we will agree to be a witness or not.

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