

A Perspective of Eco-Critical Postcolonial Study of Amitav Ghosh's the Living Mountain: A Fable for our Times

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Abstract:

This research paper is going to be the eco-critical postcolonial study of Amitav Ghosh's *The Living Mountain: A Fable For Our Times*. In this paper, ecocriticism and postcolonialism will be defined. Ecocriticism is the theory through which literary and cultural scholars try to investigate the crisis that have appeared in the environment by studying the connection between literature, culture and the physical environment. Postcolonialism is the theory that tries to examine the effects of colonialization on the lives, culture and the consciousness of the colonized people. In both the theories, land and greed play an important role for changing the lives as well as the environment of colonized countries. In eighteenth century when more than half of the world was getting suffocated under the regime of the ruling powers, at that time not only the human resources of those countries were exploited but also their natural resources also that lead to the ecological disturbance. Now in the present times, this colonization has become the cause of global ecological disturbance. In this novel, Amitav Ghosh has tried to trace the effects of ecological balance that the tribes who were living under the shadow of the Mahaparbat are dominated by the Anthropoi then how not only their lives get transformed but their ecological balance also.

Keywords: postcolonial, consciousness, Mahaparbat, Ecocriticism.

Man and the ecology or the nature are inseparable to each other Both have the survival value and both depend on each other for their survival. Man depends upon nature for many things like water, fruits, air, mineral resources, etc. It is the storehouse of the precious. gems and due to all these qualities inherent in the nature, man relies upon the nature. Man now not only relies upon the nature but also has started exploiting it to satisfy his greed, to accumulate more and more wealth and for the fulfillment of this purpose, man needs more and more land. Man has become inhumane towards the nature.

Man had exploited both the nature and his fellowmen also by subjugating the people of those countries where the men were living a fulfilled and life full of calmness in the lap of the nature. After establishing his dominance over the colonized countries, the colonizers had exploited the nature also and in this way, disturbed the ecological balance of the nature. "In the 21st century, we are more self-convinced than ever that we have not just entered but have moved much further in the age called "the Anthropocene" where incidents of floods, droughts, landslides, cyclones, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions have become regular features of our world. These effects of the cataclysmic changes to our climate no longer seem as extraordinary events because of their casual visibility. We live in a society

where our immediate environments are characterised by the presence of toxic waste, mountains of garbage, polluted pools of water, stinking drains and toxic bodies. It references an age where human activities have been so pervasive and influential that they're shaping the Earth's natural systems. Most importantly, these tales of our remote past teach us about how and when our earth started facing acceleration in anthropogenic destruction.” (Kumar 2). Now-a-days, this issue has become a thing of major concern for all as the ecological imbalance is affecting not only a handful of the people but has affected the world globally and Amitav Ghosh, a prolific writer in his seminal works like *Gun Island*, *The Nutmeg's Curse* and *The Living Mountain: A Fable for Our Times* has tried to put forth this idea in his works that the colonialism and the postcolonialism has disturbed the nature the most. The postcolonial ecocriticism theory can be easily applied to his works.

Ecocriticism is the critical theory that connects the humanity or mankind with the nature or the ecology using literature as one of its tool. It tries to generate awareness about the ecological imbalance caused due to the manhandling of the nature by the human beings, so that the human beings can mend their ways to protect the nature that has degraded due to the insensitivity and greed of the mankind for land and has become the cause of the global climate crisis. The main aim of the ecocritics is to create awareness among the humanity so that they can start working for the improvement of the nature by becoming compassionate towards it as the human actions have inflicted much damage to the environment as ecocritics hold a deep reverence towards the nature.

The term ecocriticism was first of all coined by William Rueckert in his essay *Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism* in 1978. But the movement gained its momentum in the late twentieth century. Ecocritics admire the nature with all its beauty.

Postcolonial is one of the main branches of ecocriticism along with Pastoral ecocriticism and Feminist ecocriticism. Before having the study Amitav Ghosh's *The Living Mountain: A Fable For Our Times* as a eco-critical postcolonial study, it is necessary to define Pastoral ecocriticism, Feminist ecocriticism and Postcolonial ecocriticism.

Pastoral ecocriticism is the branch of the ecocriticism that connects the literature with the beauty and calmness of countryside in order to get out of the chaos of city. It often focuses on Western literature in order to promote the idea that human beings have connection with the nature and they should work in a certain direction to protect it. It has mostly rural setting that is greatly an ideal place in comparison to the city life full of chaos. Feminist ecocriticism is that branch of the ecocriticism that investigates the subjugation of the women by the patriarchal society and the subjugation of the ecological world by the human beings having a faith that the natural world is basically feminine and this becomes the solo-cause of women creating a connection with nature. The ecofeminist critics have a strong faith that the patriarchal society particularly in the West only works for the benefits of the men thus depriving the fair sex and nature of their rights. Due to this, the ecofeminist critics have a deep inclination towards the women and the nature.

Postcolonial ecocriticism is that branch of ecocriticism that investigates the relationship between the nature and the postcolonial world. According to it, the roots of disturbance in nature lies in the colonialism and the countries that have remained under the dominance of some European or British power, the ecological balance of that country was disturbed by the colonial powers and even

after gaining the independence, the ecological balance of these countries continued to worsen and this ecological imbalance occurred due to the greed of the colonial powers for land to dispose off their manufactured goods that were manufactured in bulk in the eighteenth century due to the industrial revolution happened in the countries of the colonizers. In order to achieve their selfish motives, they searched for the new markets and made the other countries their subordinate and when these Countries became the colony of the Western powers, they started exploiting the natural resources of these colonized countries and disturbed the nature or the ecological balance of the colonized countries.

This research paper is going to be the postcolonial ecocriticism study of Amitav Ghosh's *The Living Mountain: A Parable For Our Times*. In this novel, Amitav Ghosh has talked about a warring tribe through the dream of one of the main characters, Maansi, Maansi was the book club buddy of the narrator and Maansi had introduced the word 'Anthropocene' to the narrator but they had never met personally, having interaction only online and they met each other through an online book club that was started by Maansi where the members were not allowed to talk about themselves but they have to talk about the book on the topic that had been decided by the club every year. But soon only Maansi and the narrator were left in the group because of this rule. In this way, the word "Anthropocene' was chosen by Maansi but the narrator and Maansi both did not know the meaning of this word. The sole reason of choosing this word stated by Maansi to the narrator was, " My company's adopted it as its fashion theme for the year" (Ghosh 3). She did not even know its pronunciation. So after searching the pronunciation of this word as "AN- thropocené", Maansi promised the narrator that she would send her a reading list the next day morning. But after one week, Maansi was able to message the narrator and told been about the dream that she had about the warring tribe.

In her dream, she visualized herself growing up as a young girl in a valley "that was home to a cluster of villages high in the Himalaya having a snowy mountain whose peak was always wreathed in snows" (Ghosh 9). The name given to this mountain was Mahaparbat having the faith that this mountain was a living mountain for that used to take care of the warring tribes. This mountain was a sacred mountain for these warring tribes and the reason of their reverence. Their this reverence showed their love and respect for the nature and the environment. Their life revolved around this Nahaparbat and to keep it happy, they used to sing and danced to it and believed that this Mahaparbat talked to them. This Mahaparbat was the storehouse of the natural minerals and the gems that these warring tribes were unaware of. This mountain provided the gifts to the people in the form of "the miraculous nuts, rare mushrooms, fine honey, fine herbs and the like" (Ghosh 9). The people were not allowed to set their foot on the slopes of this Mahaparbat. The warring tribes who used to fight each other over many things, they unanimously agreed to one thing, "The strangers would never be allowed to enter our Valley" (Ghosh 8) and in order to protect Mahaparbat from the outsiders, they had portcullis.. Once in every year on the melting of the snow, the Eldermen and the Elderwomen of the valley used to visit the outsider merchants for the Trade Week and exchanged the precious gifts the valley people received from the sacred mountain to the merchants for the things they required for themselves. After the Trading week, they used to make sure that every trader had departed from their place and " post a squad of sentries to guard the portcullis for the rest of the year" (Ghosh 9). The Valley people used to host the ceremony of the gratitude in order to offer their thanks to the mountain. They used to offer their prayers in the form of the singing and the dancing and in this way, they used to establish

communication with Mahaparbat or with the nature. The Adepts, who were the skilled dancers, used to tell them that "they had felt the Mountain speaking to them through the soles of their feet" (Ghosh 10). Dr Sangeeta says,

They decode the signal from Mahaparbat and believe on message which they understand. These signals mainly alert them from coming all positive and negative circumstances (36).

The things, the love for the nature or the mountain or the ecology continued till one year, Anthropoi, the traders of a different country in disguise but actually who wanted to have the hold on the sacred mountain and the people of the valley, to whom the Elderpeople have not met before arrived for the trade. These Anthropoi told them that "their savants had heard about our nuts and he had been sent on a mission to learn about our Valley, and all that it contained" (Ghosh 10). They wanted to visit the place and see all the things with their own eyes.

But the Elderpeople told them about the rule of the valley and expressed their inability to allow them to visit the valley. So, the Anthropoi requested them to tell him about their valley and noted down everything told to him by the Elderpeople of the valley with great care and left the place by saying them while parting that they would be able to see each other again. This became the cause of the worry for the Elderpeople believing that the intentions of the Anthropoi weren't good. For the next two years, the Elderpeople were not able to see the Anthropoi in the Trading Week, so they felt relieved. But one day, the Great Mountain began to give them warnings of the advent of the Anthropoi having terrible weapons by shaking and heaving and having the avalanches and opening up the rift in the Valley. The Anthropoi came with the purpose of making these warring tribes their servants or the colonized people. "They were not in many number but they had powerful weapons and were skilled in the art of war. They had stormed the portcullis and taken all the sentries captive" (Ghosh 14).

They came their to satisfy their greed for the metals, land, minerals, etc. and for this purpose, they started exploiting the nature of the valley by assaulting the Mahaparbat and for the fulfillment of this motive, they used the people of the valley by defeating them and making them their slaves and the Anthropoi made them believe that Anthropoi were not only completely different from them but also superior to them. The Anthropoi after dismissing all the Elderpeople of the Valley, appointed their own chosen ones as the Elderpeople of the valley and that was also only the men completely dismissing the women. They put the Adepts in the prisons and put a ban on all the ceremonies, songs, stories and dances of the people of the valley. According to them, all these things done by the people of the valley were worthless and the cause of their present state of the trouble.

They used these people to attack the Great Mountain or to bring the destruction of the nature as for the Anthropoi, the Great Mountain or Mahaparbat became the source of making them wealthy. With the help of their modern weapons, they, made the inhabitants to work for the Anthropoi against their will so that the Anthropoi could conquer that sacred mountain. The Anthropoi climbed Mahaparbat and the colonized people watched all these things spellbound as they were made to believe by the Anthropoi that they were inferiors to Anthropoi. "The lives of the Anthropoi seemed infinitely more exciting than our own wretched existences down in the valley " (Ghosh 18).

With the passing of the time, the attitude of the people of the Valley changed towards the nature or Mahabarbat. Now the nature or Mahaparbat that was revered by the people, was no longer a thing to be

revered but the people wanted to Ascend the slopes of Mahaparbat. For this purpose, they fought with Karani and the Anthropoi and became the masters of their own putting an end to the colonization period. It marked the beginning of the the postcolonial period but the nature had been disturbed by the Anthropoi and now the warring people continued to walk on the footsteps of the Anthropoi, creating more ecological imbalance in the nature and toa chieve their aim, they confined their own fellowmen "under the guns of newly formed legions of armed guards, picked from our own villages These were the Kraani of the Varvaroi" (Ghosh 21).

This climbing of Mahaparbat was more difficult for the Valley people and they had to be careful as the ecological balance was already disturbed by the Anthropoi by dirtying the slopes and covering them with trash. But even then they continued. They continued exploiting the natural resources of Mahaparbat with much speed as compared to their colonizers because they believed that they were equal to the Anthropoi and soon more people joined them.

"Our ascent was spectacular, performed in a much shorter time than the Anthropoi had taken" (Ghosh 22).

They wanted to be the first to set foot on the cloud- wrapped summit of Mahaparbat. So they continued exploring Mahaparbat resulting in unsettling the snow that led to the death of many fellow villagers. Now the returning was impossible, so they continued climbing the Great Mountain. In their vigour to climb the summit of the Great Mountain, they even ignored the signals given to them time to time by Anthropoi's savants. Finally when they paid attention to the signals pointing towards the Mountain itself, they saw that strange carvasses were opening up everywhere and their each step was setting off mudslide.

The situation became alarming and the Anthropoi joined their hands with Varvaroi to control the situation. They even shared their knowledge with the people of the Valley that the Mountain could support only a small number of the climbers and their knowledge, their reverence towards Mahaparbat that was dismissed earlier by the Anthropoi as unworthy to take into the consideration, was now the most necessary thing to save the ecology of Mahaparbat and asked them to take the help of Adepts, who always said that they should listen carefully to the Mountain using the soles of their feet instead of their brains. The Anthropoi put all the blame of ruining the ecology of the Great Mountain on the inhabitants of the of Valley. The comeback for the inhabitants of the Valley was impossible and the gap between the Anthropoi and them was reduced. Soon surpassing the Anthropoi, they came to understand that the leaders of the Anthropoi used their own people to climb so high and get benefitted. There was now no difference between the Anthropoi and the people residing in the Valley. Now to protect the ecology of the Mahaparbat, the Anthropoi asked the people of the Valley to go back to their roots and to try to find someone who had remembered their old customs.

After a long search, they came across one Adept. It was mot easy to persuade her to dance and listen to what the Great Mountain wanted to say to them but in the end, she agreed to perform. When she started performing, they were able to feel the revibrations of the Mountain under their feet signifying the answer to them from the Great Mountain. The Anthropoi and the Varvaroi came back as changed human beings. They said, "You were right! The mountain is alive! We can feel its heartbeat under our

feet. This means we must look after the poor, dear mountain; we must tend to it, we must care for it". (35).

The elder woman cried on this catastrophe. She reminded their rudeness toward them and their Mahaparbhat. "how dare you speak of the mountain as though you were its masters, and it were your plaything, your child? Have you understood nothing of what it has been trying to teach you? Nothing at all? (Ghosh 35)

Amitav Ghosh through his work *The Living Mountain: A Fable for Our Times* has tried to show that the ecology of the colonial world has been hit most by the colonization and the nature is the supreme power that can affect the people the most if the people continue to play with the ecological balance of the nature. The modern faith of the colonizers by dismissing the ancient belief of the colonized that the nature is a living force, has become the reason of the global ecological crisis and to occupy more and more land and exploit that land to make himself or herself wealthy has put the existence of the man in the dangerous situation. The countries who have remained the colonies of the other countries are the ones that have been the hit most. They are bereft of natural resources and the ecological balance of these countries have become the cause of worry for the whole world. Through this seminal work, Amitav Ghosh has pleaded that the people who have remained under the subjugation of the other countries should go back to their roots and try to retrieve / restore the ecological balance of the nature. Only then the human beings can survive on this planet signifying the close bond between the living beings and the nature that needs to be acknowledged by human beings by giving up the greed of occupying more and more materialistic things and considering the nature as God like figure.

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