

## Caring For The Indigenous, Challenging Materialism: Embracing The Ecological Sacred In Amitav Ghosh's The Living Mountain: A Fable For Our Times

Dr. K. Santhi Maheswari <sup>1</sup>, Dr. M. Anand <sup>2</sup>, Dr. M. Anish Alfred Vaz <sup>3</sup>, Dr. S. Gomathi <sup>4</sup>, Dr. G. S. Sujantha <sup>5</sup>

### Abstract:

*Amitav Ghosh's work consistently brings up issues about the environmental problem in these aftermath epidemic days. His most recent work, The Living Mountain, suggests the horrifying truth of the ecosystem's total collapse, which is being gradually destroyed by humanity. Ghosh conveys his grave concerns about the widespread signs of environmental degradation in a brief story. He alerts humanity to the excessive and illogical exploitation of natural resources through his perceptive story, which employs references. In light of this indigenous fable, Ghosh questions the legitimacy of European meta-discourses of modernity and globalization. He suggests that the colonialist binaries are still important in various ways and need to be addressed endlessly in order to understand the native belief system and the ecological sacred, which supports the eco-system and nurtures human life. The native lives are hurriedly destroyed by the materialist and commercial mind systems. This article aims to prove that the ecological sacred has the ability to resist hegemonic and capitalist transgression by examining both the protective and destructive qualities of nature in Ghosh's tale The Living Mountain.*

**Key-words:** *Ecological sacred, epidemic, native, materialist, environment, hegemonic, transgression.*

### Introduction

Since the colonial era, India's environment has been subjected to excessive consumerism and exploitation. Colonial powers would take control of indigenous regions in order to satisfy their capitalist demands. By entering "primitive territories," they eradicated the indigenous knowledge systems and anchored their own discourses of capitalism and development, making the once unutilized native lands exploitable. Natural disasters, environmental degradation, and global climate change are the most dangerous byproducts of this predatory imperialist machinery. Farhana Sultana argues, "As frequencies and strengths of climate-fueled natural hazards such as tropical cyclones grow, the structural violence [sic] of colonialism are further felt corporeally, communally, politically economically and ecologically" (4). Along with the dogmatic Christian views of the relationship between man and nature, Lynn White, Jr. blames the current "ecologic crisis" to the "democratic culture" (6) and "dynamic technology and science" (14) of the western world.

---

<sup>1-5</sup>Ramco Institute of Technology, Rajapalayam - 626 117, India.

In the wake of a global epidemic and the ongoing environmental crisis, the works of renowned author Amitav Ghosh have emerged as a powerful voice in addressing the pressing environmental issues of our times. Ghosh's latest creation, "The Living Mountain," serves as a haunting reminder of the precarious state of our ecosystem, a stark truth gradually eroded by human actions. In this abstract, we embark on a journey into the profound themes embedded within Ghosh's narrative, which express his deep-seated concerns regarding environmental degradation and the unsustainable exploitation of natural resources. His storytelling prowess, enriched with literary references, not only captivates readers but also serves as a clarion call to humanity, imploring us to reflect on our actions.

Further, Ghosh challenges a critical analysis of European meta-discourses of modernity and globalization within the parameters of this indigenous story. By highlighting the necessity for ongoing investigation to gain a deeper understanding of the indigenous belief system and the ecological sacred, which preserves both the ecology and human life, he questions the lasting significance of imperialist dichotomies. In addition to highlighting the obvious conflict between commercial interests and environmental preservation, the story highlights the rapid destruction of native lives at the hands of materialistic and commercial attitudes.

The main objective of this article is to show that the ecological sacred has the capacity to withstand the powers of capitalism and hegemony by nature. This resistance is investigated by a thorough examination of the two sides to nature's personality in Ghosh's story, "The Living Mountain." This introduction lays the groundwork for a more thorough examination of Amitav Ghosh's story and the insightful observations on the environment and society it provides during these times.

### **Literature Review:**

This paper focuses on the important concepts and issues that Amitav Ghosh has addressed throughout his career, especially in his most recent book, "The Living Mountain." This analysis centers on Ghosh's engagement with environmental issues, his investigation of the decline of the ecosystem, his worries about environmental deterioration, and the important questions he poses about the European meta-discourses of globalization and modernity. It also highlights the importance of colonialist dichotomies in comprehending indigenous belief systems and the ecological sacred, as well as the pressing necessity to resolve these problems in order to save both the environment and human life. In the context of the post-epidemic world, Ghosh's body of work continuously explores environmental issues. He uses "The Living Mountain" to highlight the disturbing fact that the ecosystem is on the verge of collapsing and links it to the slow devastation caused by human activity. Through his storytelling, he demonstrates his concern for the environment by deftly combining allusions and narratives to highlight the seriousness of the situation.

Ghosh's critique of Eurocentric ideas of modernity and globalization is also covered in the review. By means of his story, he raises doubts about the validity of these meta-discourses and implies that colonialism divisions still exist in different ways. In doing so, Ghosh advocates for a continuous discourse and analysis of these dichotomies in order to gain a deeper understanding of the indigenous belief system and the ecological sacred. He contends that these components are essential to maintaining the ecosystem and sustaining human life.

The author analysis of how commercial and materialistic attitudes speed up the annihilation of indigenous lives is among the most powerful features of his work. This draws attention to the conflict that exists between ecological sustainability and economic

development and stresses the significance of reconsidering our relationship with the natural world.

The literature review introduces the main argument of the paper, which is that the ecological sacred can withstand the sins of capitalism and hegemony in the setting of Ghosh's story "The Living Mountain." It attempts to show how resilient nature is and how it may fight back against the forces that harm it by examining the narrative's portrayal of both protective and destructive aspects of nature.

In conclusion, Amitav Ghosh's examination of environmental challenges, the effects of human activity on the ecosystem, and the important questions he poses regarding modernity, globalization, and colonial legacies are all insightfully summarized in this literature review. It offers a solid basis for comprehending the relevance of Ghosh's work in tackling contemporary environmental issues and the capacity of nature to withstand exploitation and degradation.

Amitav Ghosh's literary work consistently brings up the environmental catastrophe in these post- disastrous times of chaos. Rob Nixon was actually concerned that postcolonial writers "had tended to shy away from environmental issues as if they were soft, western, bourgeois concerns," but Ghosh makes up for it. (Nixon, "Environmentalism and Postcolonialism" 242) According to Rachel Hartnett, "the effect of colonization and the theft of land, resources, and the robbery of labour still shape economic situation within the developing world" (146).

It is vital, according to Nixon, to consider "slow violence... a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all" (Slow violence 2). Through *The Living Mountain*, Ghosh attempts to make the case that environmental considerations are crucial in this era of advanced technology and cyber culture.

*The Living Mountain* (2022) suggests the terrible truth of the ecosystem's complete collapse, which is being continuously destroyed by the world of capitalist humans. Ghosh conveys his grave concern on the widespread signs of environmental degradation. He alarms humanity about the overuse and irrationality of natural resources and their looming consequences in his perceptive and suggestive story. In light of this indigenous fable, Ghosh questions the legitimacy of European meta-discourses of modernity and globalization. He suggests that the colonialist binaries are still important in many forms and require endless discussion since they underpin both the ecological sacred and the native belief system, which preserve the ecosystem and support human existence. The indigenous people's lives are hurriedly destroyed by the materialist and capitalist mentalities. According to Bill Ashcroft, postcolonial studies of the environment are finding greater relevance in the idea of the indigenous sacred. In order to challenge Western authority over the environment, the indigenous sacred is used as a "empowering feature of post-colonial experience". (Ashcroft 212)

This fable is presented by Ghosh as being intricately linked to the reality of the twenty-first century and is told as a "story within a story form". A classic allegory of the environmental collapse brought on by the Anthropocene world is Mansi's "horrible dream," which is triggered by a book she reads about "some poor people on a remote island who suffer a terrible fate." This dream shows the ominous effects of the environmental degradation brought about by greedy capitalism. Mansi is growing up in a village hidden in the Himalayas in her dream. All of the valley's warring communities are united by the reverence for the Great Mountain held by the native people. For them, the Mountain is a living thing, a sacred unifier. It is the

birthplace of the magic tree, which maintains the valley's ecological equilibrium and their health. The Great Mountain's holiness is protected by "the law of the valley," (Ghosh, *The Living Mountain* 11) which prohibits anyone from climbing it.

It provides for all of the valley residents' fundamental necessities and sustains their way of life. The indigenous people hold a set of beliefs that are essential to the valley's ecosystem. Their environmental cloister is essential to their existence, and resource exploitation is forbidden within. This belief system has been passed down to them from their forefathers, and it is pure until the Anthropoi pervert it. Their strong belief in the ecological sacred, which also serves as a source of postcolonial resistance, is the source of the treasury of the environmental happiness. They follow a folk practice in which women play a major role in storytelling, singing, and dancing as a means of passing on their rituals to the next generation. The Indian subcontinent has a long history of storytelling, which is referenced in this dynamic. The sharp-witted ladies known as the Adepts possess the spiritual ability to communicate "through the soles of their feet" (*The Living Mountain* 9) with the Great Mountain. The Elder people are adamant about protecting the valley's holy riches and opposing strangers' attempts to encroach. For the residents of the valley, the notion of ecological sacredness will determine their future.

However, when traders from the Lowlands, called the Anthropoi, show in and lure them into their heartless schemes, things start to turn around. Through learning about the locals and their natural richness, they are able to delve deeper into the valley's self-contained system. These traders are drawn to the nut that the Magic Tree's fruit produces, and they give it a marketable worth. This "imaginative hegemony" (Grove 1) symbolizes the environmental exploitation that was a byproduct of colonization.

As the face of neocolonial authority, the Anthropoi yearn to subjugate, control, and mercilessly plunder the resources of the Great Mountain Valley people. Along with them are the Kraani, a physical force, and an army of discourse-makers, or savants. The savants criticize the native way of life and assert that their sacred stories and outdated beliefs are "foolish and fantastical" (*The Living Mountain* 34); they are weak and unproductive both physically and intellectually, unless they take advantage of their Great Mountain's special reservoir. The hapless valley dwellers are overrun by the Anthropoi, who then ascend the Mahaparbat. They want to steal priceless plants, nuts, honey, and "all that it contained" (*The Living Mountain* 10) by breaking through the inner fabric of their existence. The Adepts worry the valley's residents about the impending destruction the Anthropoi will bring upon them: "strangers are coming from afar, a horde of them, armed with terrible weapons" (*The Living Mountain* 13). The Adepts foresee the series of subsequent episodes and their consequences.

The Great Mountain is not the only target of the Anthropoi and their Kraani's attack; the eco-cultural sacred and the indigenous people's ancestral memory are also targets. The Kraani defeat the indigenous in war, and they submit to their speech and orders. The Kraani create a lustful language of power "by conjuring up terrifying illusions of omnipotence". (*The Living Mountain* 16). The Kraani forbid the "ceremonies and songs, stories, and dances" (*The Living Mountain* 16) of the native people. As new Eldermen are appointed and the Adepts are imprisoned, all potential resistance is rendered futile, and the spiritual strength of the aboriginal people weakens. During their dormant state, the Adepts possess the ability to educate the indigenous. They have the capacity to think, to speculate, and to imagine because they represent the essence of feminine transgression. Indigenous people's way of existence is seismically disrupted. As part of this deceptive scheme, the aboriginal people become indispensable. The traders learn that they will need the assistance of the villagers in order to successfully attack

the Mahaparbat. The locals eventually learn about it as well. The hegemonic project may succeed if the valley people's ecological sacred is taken away from them. In the words of the valley people, Ghosh describes this hegemonic maneuver: "And so it happened that we became the ones who made it possible for the Anthropoi to conquer our own sacred mountain; under the Kraani's watchful eyes we toiled in the fields to provide the materials they needed for the assault." (The Living Mountain 27). When the inhabitants see the rising, an unbreakable ambition blossoms in their imaginations. Like the Anthropoi, they too wish to climb the mountain and fully use its resources. To them, capitalism appears as a contagious disease, and as a result, it drives the Anthropoi and themselves into destruction. They abandon their revered practice of protecting the environment and turn to ruthless, unrestricted exploitation of the Great Mountain. They start to believe the fictitious narrative that the Kraani created for them—that "our bodies were not suited to the climb, we were not strong enough, our diets were enfeebling, our habits degenerate, our belief perverse, our minds weak, and our hearts lacking in courage" (The Living Mountain, 17) they turn into the agents of their own serenity. Through the use of this discourse, the Anthropoi are able to govern and manipulate the native people's way of thinking and to access their innate life energy. To create a sense of "otherness," a complex of inadequacy and fear is pressed into their minds. "A confirmation of the dominating culture and its "naturalization," as Edward Said put it. (Said 145–146)

The rebellious men of the Anthropoi are sacrificed on the ascending trajectory. The Great Mountain holds great significance for them in terms of material gain. This tendency affects the indigenous people as well. Such materialist aspiration starts to erode the cohesive unity of the ethnic groups. The residents of the valley's reverence and confidence in the Mahaparbat fade into blatant indifference. The indigenous people begin to harbor aspirations of climbing the Great Mountain, and the ecological sacred transforms into the sacred of materialism. A few of the indigenous people want to rule the Mountain. These indigenous climbers have such lofty goals that they yearn to outperform the Anthropoi on their "once sacred Mountain" (The Living Mountain 23). The sharp-witted Adepts who have used their intellect to withstand the ruthless attacks are demoted. The indigenous people, who have lost all memory of their own customs, music, and dances, pollute the Great Mountain after the Anthropoi. They no longer remember the rites, thanks to the Anthropoi. Apocalyptic devastation in the valley, climate change, and ecological sacred disturbance are all results of excessive and irrational usage of natural resources. When absorption of capitalism's methods occurs, the indigenous people's heartfelt concern for the environment disappears. Ghosh's subverts the structure of colonial discourse by suggesting that concepts such as "the illusion of omnipotence" (The Living Mountain 20) and "the myth making of modernity" (The Nutmeg's Curse 19) are merely hegemonic tropes. In the face of the holy Mahaparbat's fury and wrath, the Anthropoi are unable to endure and persevere. The savants are bothered by the fact that the mountain is not their "plaything" or "child," (The Living Mountain 35) but rather the sole living Adept, who makes them feel as though they are not in control of it. She gives a warning, asking them to interpret the Mountain's mystical messages. Against the heartless human meddling, the Great Mountain shows itself to be a formidable force. Before the Anthropoi corrupt them, it tends to the valley people and provides them with the necessities of existence. The Mahaparbat launches a counterattack, scotching and pulverizing both of the offenders. According to Ghosh, "the Mountain's sacredness" (The Living Mountain 26) undermines the "self-evident" meta narrative of capitalism and universalism.

## Conclusion

The stirring examination of environmental issues in Amitav Ghosh's writing, especially in "The Living Mountain," serves as a sobering reminder of the grave implications of ecological deterioration brought on by human activity. Ghosh questions the Eurocentric meta-narratives of modernity and globalization and emphasizes the urgent need to address the unsustainable use of natural resources through his incisive storytelling and insightful references. His research highlights the persistence of imperialist dichotomies and the importance of comprehending indigenous belief systems and the ecological sacred, which support both human life and the ecosystem. Though they also give hope in the form of the ecological sacred's resistance to hegemonic and capitalist breaches, Ghosh's stories highlight the increasing devastation of local lives as a result of materialistic and commercial attitudes. This paper emphasizes the possibility of a peaceful coexistence between people and the environment by analyzing the dual protective and destructive aspects of nature in "The Living Mountain," challenging us to reconsider our relationship with the natural world and advance sustainability in these post-epidemic times.

### **Future scope of study**

This research may also shed light on the ways in which literature can subvert established beliefs and motivate environmentally responsible behavior. In the end, though, it might make a big difference in today's cultural and environmental conversation, researchers can expand their ideas in the following topics:

1. Exploring Environmental Crises, Indigenous Perspectives, and the Ecological Sacred in Amitav Ghosh's Literature.
2. "Ecological Sacredness and Spirituality: Exploring the Interconnectedness of Humans and Nature".

### **Works Cited:**

1. Ashcroft, Bill, et al. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Routledge, 2002.
2. Ghosh, Amitav. *The Living Mountain: A Fable for Our Times*. Fourth Estate, 2022.
3. ---. *The Nutmeg's Curse: Parables for a planet in Crisis*. John Murray, 2021.
4. Grove, Richard H. Introduction. *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600-1860*, by Richard H. Grove, CUP, 1996, pp. 1-15.
5. Hartnett, Rachel. "Climate Imperialism: Ecocriticism, Postcolonialism, and Global Climate Change." *eTropic: electronic journal of studies in the tropics*, vol. 20, no. 2, 2021, <http://dx.doi.org/10.25120/etropic.20.2.2021.3809>. Accessed 30 Oct. 2023.
6. Nixon, Rob. "Environmentalism and Postcolonialism". *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond*, edited by Ania Loomba et al., Permanent Black, 2005, pp. 233-251.
7. ---. Introduction. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, by Rob Nixon, Harvard University Press, 2011, pp. 1-44.
8. Said, Edward W., *Orientalism*. Vintage Books, 1978.
9. Sultana, Farhana. "The unbearable heaviness of climate coloniality". *Political Geography*. pp. 1-14, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2022.102638>. Accessed 28 Oct. 2023.