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An Open Discourse On Ecocriticism Contextualizing Amitav Ghosh's *The Living Mountain: A Fable Of Our Times*

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Abstract: *The Living Mountain: A Fable of Our Times*(2022) is an epoch making work of the age. It is a fictional story that is the representation of critical insight of human-environment relationship in the form of a fable. The growing insurgence of human towards nature is fruitfully depicted through eco-critical lens. Eco-criticism is a field of literary studies that includes the importance of environmental consciousness and intricate relationship between humans and their environment. Though the term eco-criticism came in 1950s and 1960s yet it gained popularity in the twenty first century. This century is viewed as the period during which human activity has been the dominant influence on climate and environment. As a result, environmental degradation is more visible nowadays. On this context, this paper explores a discourse on eco-criticism by explaining the relationship between “Varvaroi” and the great mountain, between “Anthropoi” and the great mountain in the Himalayan region in relation to the work *The Living Mountain*. In addition to that, it will include how ecological imperialism and its aftermath violates harmonious cohabitation between human and nature.

Key words: Eco-criticism, deep ecology.

Introduction: Environmental degradation and ecological crisis compel to think humans on earth. Amitav Ghosh's *The Living Mountain: A Fable of Our Times*(2022) is a work of fiction on ecological issues. And this is the most concerned issue in this age called Anthropocene. As Lawrence Bwell in his work *The Ecological Insurgency* says, “...as human civilization enter the fin-de-siecle, ‘environment’ looms up as a more pressing multifarious problem than ever before.” So, various devastating natural calamities are occurring frequently all across globe. India encountered too, such as fatal flash flood in Uttarakhand (august,2025), catastrophic landslides in Wayanad (July,2024) and destructive cyclones etc. This are causing harm to humans and their surroundings . Moreover, Ghosh once argued in his non-fiction *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*(2016) that modern humanity is falling to grasp the scale of climate crisis treating it as an “unthinkable” issue excluded from literature, history and politics. Along with this, he mentioned the collective failure to recognize, to act upon and represent the impending ecological crisis as “derangement”. If it is like this, in the language of W.E.B.DuBois, “the key problem of the twentieth century has been the problem of the colour line, it is not at all unlikely that the twenty first century’s most pressing problem will be sustainability of earth’s environment-and that the responsibility for addressing this problem, or constellation of problems, will increasingly be seen as the responsibility of all human sciences, not just of specialized disciplinary enclaves like ecology or law or public policy.” Through the presentation of the fictional world in *The Living Mountain*, Ghosh tried to exhilarate the mindset of the people towards eco-consciousness. This paper will necessitate a profound connection with the natural world.

Literature Discussion: Many esteemed scholars have researched about how eco-critical perspective gives us an eye to look at text like *The Living Mountain: A Fable of Our Times* (2022) by Amitav Ghosh. Thakur et.al.(2024) talked about green imperialism and explored the detrimental effects on the environment of the land of the colonized by

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the colonizers in an article. They examined how colonizers destroy their culture, abuse their land and use resources, devalue traditional knowledge except the psychological change of the colonized. Their “original” state could never be back with them inherently but could be mingled as Bhaba, the post-colonial critic termed as “hybridity”. Khanal (2023) published an article where he emphasized the importance of indigenous knowledge for climate actions, suggesting it is essential for developing sustainable solutions of climate crisis. Chander and Bagerwan (2023) explored the eco-critical nexus. Sharma (2025) discussed colonial imposition and ecological menace further analyzed anthropogenic hubris and ecological destruction.

Though all of them talked about various issues related to colonialism, ecological imperialism, degradation of nature etc., this paper is going to give a short glimpses of discussion on deep ecology in respect to eco criticism.

Objectives: There are lots of research on the magnum opus of Amitav Ghosh *The Living Mountain: A Fable of Our Times* (2022), but there are many fields still unexplored. However, my objectives of writing this article are...

1. To analyze the text through the lens of eco-criticism and to create a discourse.
2. To aware people through discussion of deep ecological characteristics and bring back human conscience.
3. To increase the value of Mother Nature in our life so that we maintain a sustainable lifestyle.

Discussion on deep ecology as a part of Eco-criticism:

The term “eco-criticism” was first used in William Rueckert’s 1978 essay *Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Criticism*. Eco-criticism is the interdisciplinary study of literature and physical environment. It examines how human nature relationship are presented, understood and critiqued in cultural texts. And deep ecology is a developing field within the study of criticism. Arne Naess, a philosopher from Norway coined the term to foster ecological awareness and a sense of harmonious coexistence between humans and non-humans. Deep ecologists view humans as they are one species among many other in nature, not any superior species. This notion that mankind is “superior” is leading towards human-caused destruction. Amitav Ghosh’s *The Living Mountain: A Fable of Our Times* (2022) is an intricate interplay between humans and the natural world, with a specific focus on the Himalayas.

The fundamental essence of deep ecology lies in its foundational principles and beliefs...the well-being and flourishing of human and non-human life have intrinsic value in themselves. These values are independent of usefulness of the non-human world for human purposes. In *The Living Mountain*, Ghosh likewise shows non-human mountain as a living being according to their indigenous tradition: “The villagers spoke of the mountain as a living entity, but the outsiders saw only a resource to be conquered” (Ghosh, 50). That reflects eco-critical ideas that

consider nature as more than a resource, but as something with intrinsic value, an idea foreign to colonial ideologies (Merchant, 138). Next, richness and diversity of life forms contribute to the realization of the values and are also values in themselves. And humans have no right to reduce or destroy except to satisfy vital needs. In this context, the fable of our times, *The Living Mountain* has its richness and diversity of life forms (flora, fauna, and the mountain itself), are portrayed as having intrinsic value. And it serves as the foundation of a symbolic relationship with humans that, when respected realizes profound ecological, cultural and spiritual well-being. The richness and diversity as values are found in the mountain, is not mere a raw material but a living “being” with its own heartbeat agency and sacred status. Values and richness is found in the “magic tree”. The valley’s ecosystem is centered on a specific “magic tree” that provides diverse blessings—scented honey, nourishing mushroom and medicinal herbs without requiring destruction as clearly visible in these lines:

“We knew in our heart that our Mountain was a living being that cared for us, in the form of a tree that grew along the steams that descended from its slopes. This tree, which grew only in our Valley and nowhere else, produced things that were so miraculous that we called it the Magic Tree. Its leaves kept insects away; its wood was impermeable to water; its roots nourished rare mushrooms; its flowers produced exquisitely scented honey; and its fruits was delicious to eat. But the most miraculous thing of all was the nut that lay within the fruit: its fragrance was incomparable, and it had so many medicinal uses that traders from the Lowlands would travel long distances in search for it.” (Ghosh, 8).

The valley people contributed to this realization of values. They thrive following laws that prohibited them to set foot on the mountain, ensuring sustainability. This creates a value of “care based living” or “Symbiocene”, where humans and nature are interconnected. They performed to honor the mountain that enhances the quality of life fostering a sense of community and gratitude, which protects the environment over exploitation. The fable consequences of losing the value when the Anthropoi (modern exploiters) view the mountain merely as resource to be exploited, they destroy its richness, leading to natural disasters, loss of life-affirming values and ultimate collapse. The destruction of the diversity leads to cultural and spiritual emptiness of the people. Similarly, the portrayal of mining activities underscores this idea “With blast, the mountain shook as though it were a living thing in pain.” (Ghosh, 83). Ghosh personifies the mountain to emphasize the violence inherent in colonial environmental practices. Eco-criticism often uses such imagery to critique the anthropocentric mindset that legitimizes ecological destruction. (Garrard, 56). Present human interference with the non-human world is excessive from ecological perspective in the *The Living Mountain*, but its situation is rapidly worsening because of the capitalist exploitation of

the mountain Mahaparvat. Moving from traditional coexistence to the violent, high speed consumption of resources (when Anthropoi was overrunning the valley) leading directly to ecological and eventually human collapse. Ghosh critiques the long term ecological consequences of colonial intervention: “The mountain’s slow death had began the day the invaders first claimed it as their own”(Ghosh,34). The metaphor of “slow death” aligns with ecocritical theory, which suggests that colonial practices have inflicted irreparable harm on ecosystems(Glotfelty,xxiv). The ecological damage in the novel is also accompanied by the loss of indigenous knowledge systems which were closely tied to the land. Theoretical support for this view can be found in Vandana Shiva’s critique of colonial modernity, where she argues that “indigenous knowledge, once systematically displaced, leaves the land vulnerable to sustainable exploitation”(Shiva,41).Ghosh also draws a similar connection in the novel : “As the land withered under their control, so too did the traditions, the songs, the life that had once flourished here”(Ghosh,94)the intertwining of cultural and ecological decline reflects postcolonial ecocriticism, which argues that colonialism degrades both land and culture.(Huggan and Tiffin,84).

Conclusion: To conclude, the field of deep ecology suggest the dominant socio-political living situation must therefore end, as this will affect basic economic, technological and ideological structures. The ideological change is mainly that of appreciating quality (dwelling in situations of inherent worth) rather than adhering to an increasingly higher standard of leaving . there will be profound awareness of the difference between big and great. Despite the overwhelming damage ,the text hints at the possibility of resistance and ecological resilience. In *The Living Mountain*, Ghosh ends on a hopeful note: “The mountain though scarred, still stood tall, as though waiting for the day it could breathe again”(Ghosh, 123). This resilience of nature echoes ecocritical theories that emphasize the capacity of ecosystems to recover, if given the chance.(Glotfelty, xxv). At the end, Ghosh invites the readers to reflect on the consequences of human domination over nature.

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