Rethinking Anthropocentrism: Nature, Voice and Responsibility in Amitav Ghosh's *The Living Mountain*

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ABSTRACT

Amitav Ghosh's *The Living Mountain: A Fable for Our Times* presents a powerful ecological allegory that challenges the anthropocentric worldview responsible for environmental degeneration. The text narrates the story of Mahaparbat, the Living Mountain, and the people who once lived in a harmonious relationship with it. Through the invasion of the Anthropoi and their extractive desire, Ghosh exposes the violence of modern development, colonial exploitation, capitalist greed, and human arrogance towards the non-human world. This paper examines how *The Living Mountain* rethinks anthropocentrism by granting nature agency, voice, and moral presence. It argues that Ghosh's fable does not merely represent nature as a passive background but as a living entity with memory, power, and ethical significance. The study further explores the responsibilities of human beings towards the natural world in the age of ecological crisis. By drawing on eco-criticism, post-humanism, and de-colonial environmental thoughts, the paper shows that Ghosh's text calls for a radical transformation of human consciousness from domination to coexistence.

Keywords: Anthropocentrism, eco-criticism, nature, voice, responsibility, post-humanism, de-colonial ecology

INTRODUCTION

The present ecological crisis has forced literature and criticism to reconsider the bond between nature and human beings. Modern civilization has often placed the human subject at the centre of existence, treating forests, rivers, mountains, animals, and other non-human beings as resources for human use. This human-centred attitude is generally known as anthropocentrism. According to Anthropocentrism, human beings hold central position, above all and superior to all other forms of life and that nature exists primarily to serve human needs. In the context of climate change, biodiversity loss, deforestation, and ecological collapse, such a worldview has become deeply problematic. Amitav Ghosh's *The Living Mountain: A Fable for Our Times* is an important literary intervention in this debate. Published in 2022, *The Living Mountain* is officially described as a cautionary tale about human exploitation of nature and environmental collapse. Written in the form of a fable, the text tells the story of Mahaparbat, the Living Mountain, the indigenous valley communities who live in its shelter, and the destructive arrival of the Anthropoi, who seek to exploit the mountain for commercial benefit. The power of Ghosh's fable lies in its simplicity and symbolic richness. The mountain is not merely a geographical object; it is alive. It has presence, memory, and agency. The people who live near it understand its rhythms and respect its sacredness. However, the Anthropoi approach the mountain with greed, calculation, and technological arrogance. Their attempt to conquer and extract from the mountain results in destruction. Thus, Ghosh turns the mountain into a moral and ecological figure through which he critiques human-centred modernity.

Objective Of the Study

This paper examines *The Living Mountain* as a critique of anthropocentrism. It focuses on three major aspects: nature, voice, and responsibility. Firstly, it analyses how Ghosh represents nature as a living and active presence. Secondly, it studies how the text gives symbolic voice to the non-human world and to indigenous ecological knowledge. Thirdly, it discusses the ethical responsibility of human beings in an age of ecological

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crisis. The paper argues that Ghosh's fable invites readers to move beyond human superiority and embrace a more humble, relational, and responsible way of living with the earth.

METHODOLOGY

The paper follows qualitative textual analysis of Amitav Ghosh's The Living Mountain. It employs analytical and interpretative methods based on Eco-criticism, Post-humanism and De-colonialism theories to study the text. The text of the novel is used as a primary source and various theoretical books, scholarly papers, articles and pertinent online resources and materials are used as secondary sources.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Eco-criticism studies the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Cheryll Glotfelty defines eco-criticism as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (Glotfelty, 1996, p. xviii). It questions literary traditions that treat nature as a mere setting or background for human drama and instead examines how texts represent ecological relationships, environmental crisis, and the ethical value of the non-human world. Anthropocentrism is one of the prime issues of eco-critical thought. Val Plumwood (2002) argues that Western rationalist culture has often created a hierarchy where reason, culture, masculinity, and humanity are considered superior to nature, emotion, femininity, and non-human life. This kind of western thought celebrates human supremacy and domination over nature. In the similar fashion of thought, post-humanist thinkers like Donna Haraway, Cary Wolfe and Rosi Braidotti have disputed the idea of human exceptionalism. Rosi Braidotti (2013) argues that the human subject must be reconceived in relation to animals, machines, environments, and planetary systems rather than as an isolated and superior existence. Ghosh's writings are deeply linked with these issues. In '*The Great Derangement'*, he argues that modern literature and politics have failed to adequately respond to climate change because modernity itself is built upon a separation between human history and natural history (Ghosh, 2016). He suggests that the climate crisis reveals the agency of non-human forces that modern thought has often ignored. *The Living Mountain* extends this argument in fictional and allegorical form. The mountain is not imagined as a dead object but as a living entity. It undercuts the anthropocentric assumption that only humans are gifted with agency and meaning. The text may also be read through a de-colonial ecological perspective. De-colonial environmental thought emphasizes that ecological destruction is closely connected with colonialism, capitalism, and the erasure of indigenous knowledge. Rob Nixon (2011) describes "slow violence" as the gradual, often invisible environmental destruction experienced by vulnerable communities. In *The Living Mountain*, the destruction of Mahaparbat reflects such slow violence as well as sudden catastrophe. The invasion of the Anthropoi represents not only ecological exploitation but also cultural domination.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Nature As A Living Entity

The most important feature of *The Living Mountain* is its representation of nature as alive. The title of the novel is a clear declaration of the main idea that the mountain is not simply a mountain, but a living presence. It startles the so-called modern perception and attitude that that mountains, forests, rivers, and minerals are inert object. Nature is often perceived as territory, property and resource in colonial and capitalist point of view. Ghosh reverses this logic by presenting nature as a living presence that demands respect. The valley communities in the story do not treat Mahaparbat as an object. Their relationship with the mountain is based on reverence, fear, gratitude, and restraints. They comprehend that their survival depends on maintaining balance with the mountain. Such a relationship reflects many indigenous ecological worldviews in which land is not a commodity but a living ancestor, protector, and source of identity. Ghosh's fable therefore questions the modern separation between human society and natural environment. The Anthropoi, by contrast, see the mountain as a storehouse of wealth. They have no respect for the "Law of the Valley" (Ghosh, 2022, p.14) and no reverence for the mountain. Instead they have considered it to be possessing "great riches—minerals, metals and the like—were hidden within the mountain" (2022, p.14). Their sole intention is to extract all these resources for their interest and profit. The name Anthropoi itself suggests "human beings," but in the text they represent a particular form of humanity: aggressive, exploitative, and self-centred. They do not listen to the

mountain. They do not respect its sacredness. They approach it through the language of profit, conquest, and extraction. Their attitude reflects the anthropocentric belief that nature has value only when it can be used by humans. Instead the indigenous valley people had a very positive eco-friendly approach to the mountain. "The mountain was called Mahaparbat, Great Mountain, and despite our differences all of us who lived in the Valley revered that mountain: our ancestors had told us that of all the world's mountains ours was the most alive; that it would protect us and look after us—but only one condition that we told stories about it, and sang about it, and dance for it—but always from a distance. For one of the binding laws of the Valley, respected by all our warring villages, was that we were never, on any account, to set foot on the slopes of the Great Mountain" (2022, p.7). By making the mountain alive, Ghosh also expands the idea of agency. In conventional human-centric narratives, only human beings act, speak, and decide. Nature remains passive. But in *The Living Mountain*, nature responds. The mountain is not silent in the sense of being powerless. Its silence carries force. Its presence shapes the lives of the valley people. Its disturbance leads to disaster. Thus, Ghosh invites readers to recognize that the non-human world has its own modes of existence and response. This idea is closely related to Ghosh's larger ecological thinking. In *The Great Derangement*, he argues that climate change forces us to recognize the agency of non-human forces such as storms, oceans, rivers, and landscapes (Ghosh, 2016). *The Living Mountain* fictionalizes this argument through the figure of Mahaparbat. The mountain becomes a symbol of the earth itself: patient, generous, but not infinitely submissive.

Voice And the Non-Human World

The question of voice is central to *The Living Mountain*. According to Anthropocentrism, only humans are gifted with consciousness and voice. Nature is regarded as inanimate and voiceless. In *The Living Mountain*, Ghosh refutes this assumption by creating a narrative structure in which the mountain speaks through memory, myth, dream, and consequence. The mountain may not speak in ordinary human language, but it communicates through signs, relationships, and ecological reactions. The fable form is important here. A fable often gives moral meaning to animals, trees, rivers, or other non-human entities. By choosing this form, the novelist enters a tradition in which non-human beings can carry wisdom. However, *The Living Mountain* is not a simple children's tale. It is a philosophical and ecological fable for the Anthropocene. It uses simplicity to express a complex truth: the earth has been speaking, but human beings have ignored or forgotten how to listen. The voice of nature is also linked with the voice of indigenous communities. The valley dwellers possess knowledge of the mountain that is experiential, ethical, and communal. They know how to live in tune with nature. Their traditions teach them to revere mountain and this tradition should not be broken. In this sense, indigenous knowledge becomes a medium through which nature's voice is heard. The devastation begins when this knowledge is ignored and replaced by extractive rationality. This conflict between indigenous ecological wisdom and modern materialistic exploitative philosophy is central to de-colonial readings of the text. The Anthropoi do not merely exploit the mountain; they also reject the worldview of the people who revere it. This reflects a long historical process in which colonial and capitalist powers have treated indigenous communities as primitive, backward and obsolete while exploiting the lands they protected. As Nixon (2011) observes, environmental violence often affects communities whose suffering remains politically and culturally invisible. In *The Living Mountain*, Ghosh restores visibility to such communities by showing that their relationship with nature is not primitive but wise. Their knowledge is not anti-modern, ignorance; rather, it represents an alternative ethics of coexistence. *The Living Mountain* therefore asks readers to rethink what counts as knowledge. Scientific and technological knowledge may be powerful, but when separated from humility and responsibility, it can become dangerously destructive.

The Anthropoi and The Critique of Human Arrogance

The Anthropoi are central to Ghosh's critique of anthropocentrism. They symbolize a form of humanity that believes in endless growth, mastery, and extraction. Their desire to climb, conquer, and exploit Mahaparbat reflects modern civilization's desire to dominate nature. They are not satisfied with living in relation to the mountain; they want to possess it. The term "Anthropoi" also reminds us of the Anthropocene, the proposed geological epoch in which human activity has become a major force shaping the earth's systems. Although the Anthropocene is often described as the age of "humanity," critics have pointed out that not all humans are equally responsible for ecological destruction. Industrial capitalism, colonial expansion, militarism, and consumerism have played a greater role than small-scale indigenous or rural communities. Ghosh's fable

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reflects this distinction. The valley people are human, but they are not detrimental in the same way as the Anthropoi. The Anthropoi have different views towards the valley. "They had laughed at our inherited ideas, of the Mountain's sacredness: that was all ignorant, pagan superstition" (2022, p. 26). The text does not condemn humanity as such; it condemns a particular human attitude. The novelist does not suggest that all human relationships with nature are necessarily exploitative. Instead, he has demonstrated here two models of human attitudes and existence. The first is relational, reciprocal and respectful, represented by the indigenous dwellers of the valley. The second is extractive, arrogant and over-exploitative represented by the Anthropoi. The tragedy occurs when the second model destroys the balance maintained by the first. The Anthropoi also represent the ideology of development. Development is often presented as progress, but Ghosh shows that progress without ecological wisdom can become very dangerous. The desire to conquer for wealth and expansion leads to the destruction of the very conditions of life. This critique is highly pertinent in the contemporary world, where mountains are mined, rivers are dammed, forests are cleared, and indigenous lands are taken in the name of development. In this way, *The Living Mountain* becomes an alarm against the bogus promise of progress and development. It implicates that without consequence human beings cannot endlessly extract from the earth. Ecological destruction is not external to human life; it returns as disaster, displacement, and loss.

Responsibility And Ecological Ethics

The final and most important concern of the text is responsibility. If nature is living and if human beings are part of a larger ecological community, then human responsibility must be redefined. Responsibility cannot mean merely managing resources for future human use. It must mean recognizing the intrinsic value of the non-human world. Ghosh's fable asks readers to move from ownership to guardianship. The valley dwellers do not own Mahaparbat in the modern legal or economic sense. They belong to it as much as it belongs to them. This relational understanding of belonging is central to ecological responsibility. It challenges the idea that land is a commodity and replaces it with the idea that land is a living relation. Responsibility also involves listening. The failure of the Anthropoi is not only greed but deafness. They cannot hear the warnings of the mountain or the wisdom of the people who live with it. In the age of climate change, this deafness is visible in the refusal of governments, corporations, and consumers to respond seriously to ecological warnings. Ghosh's fable therefore becomes a moral lesson about attention. To be responsible is to listen to the earth before catastrophe occurs. The text also suggests that responsibility is collective. Ecological crisis cannot be solved by individual moral purity alone. It requires a transformation of social, economic, and political systems. The Anthropoi's destruction of the mountain is organized and collective; therefore, resistance must also be collective. Ghosh's allegory points toward the need for communities, cultures, and institutions that value restraint, reciprocity, and ecological justice. In *The Nutmeg's Curse*, Ghosh (2021) connects modern ecological crisis with colonial histories of extraction and violence. He argues that the modern world has treated the earth as inert matter, available for conquest and profit. *The Living Mountain* may be read as a fictional companion to this argument. It dramatizes the consequences of seeing the earth as dead matter. By contrast, the idea of a living mountain demands an ethics of respect.

Post-Human and De-Colonial Dimensions

The Living Mountain can also be understood as a post-human text because it challenges human exceptionalism. The post-humanist philosophy does not postulate hatred of humanity but it refutes the belief that human beings are separate from and superior to all forms of lives. Ghosh's fable shows the interconnectedness between nature and human beings. Human survival, according to Ghosh, depends upon mountains, forests, waters, animals, and unseen ecological systems. In this web of lives, human beings are parts and participants, not masters of the system. The text is also de-colonial because it criticizes the mindset of conquest and extraction. The Anthropoi's approach to Mahaparbat resembles colonial invasion: they enter, classify, exploit, and control. The indigenous valley people's view is very clear opposing this: "The most important thing in our Valley, the Elderpeople told him, is something that cannot be traded—our living mountain, Mahaparbat" (2022, p. 12). They dismiss local knowledge and impose their own system of value. They used the rhetoric of 'illusion of omnipotence' to subjugate and win the people of the valley. This mirrors the history of colonial resource extraction across Asia, Africa, and the Americas. De-colonial ecology reminds us that environmental crisis is not only a scientific problem but also a historical and political one. The mountain, therefore, becomes a site

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where several forms of violence meet: ecological violence, cultural violence, and epistemic violence. Ecological violence is committed against the mountain. Cultural violence is committed against the valley people's way of life. Epistemic violence is committed when their knowledge is treated as inferior. By bringing these together, Ghosh shows that environmental justice cannot be separated from social and cultural justice.

Narrative Form: The Fable As Ecological Alarm

The subtitle of the text, *A Fable for Our Times*, is significant. A fable is usually brief, symbolic, and moral. Ghosh uses this form to address a planetary crisis in an accessible yet profound way. The simplicity of the fable allows the text to speak across age, culture, and discipline. At the same time, its allegorical structure gives it deep interpretive richness. The dream-like quality of the narrative also matters. Dreams often reveal truths that rational consciousness suppresses. In the modern world, ecological crisis is known but often denied. The dream form allows Ghosh to present a truth that is both ancient and urgent: nature is alive, and human arrogance is dangerous. The fable becomes a mode of ecological remembrance. Unlike realist fiction, the fable does not depend on detailed social documentation. Instead, it works through symbolic concentration. Mahaparbat stands for mountains, forests, ecosystems, and the earth itself. The Anthropoi stand for extractive humanity. The valley people stand for cultures of ecological balance. This symbolic structure makes the text universal without removing its political force.

CONCLUSION

Amitav Ghosh's *The Living Mountain* is a powerful critique of anthropocentrism and a call for ecological responsibility. Through the figure of Mahaparbat, Ghosh challenges the idea that nature is passive, silent, and object for human exploitation. The mountain is represented as living, powerful, and morally significant. The valley people's relationship with the mountain offers an alternative to the destructive worldview of the Anthropoi. Their way of life is based on respect, restraint, and listening. The text rethinks anthropocentrism by shifting attention from human mastery to ecological interdependence. It gives symbolic voice to nature and to indigenous knowledge systems that modernity has often ignored. It also reminds readers that environmental destruction is connected with colonialism, capitalism, and the ideology of unlimited progress. In doing so, Ghosh's fable becomes both a literary work and an ethical warning. In the age of climate change, *The Living Mountain* asks a deeply urgent question: can human beings learn to live responsibly with the earth before it is too late? The answer depends on whether humanity can abandon the arrogance of the Anthropoi and recover the humility of those who know that mountains, rivers, forests, and all forms of life are not objects but relations. Ghosh's fable therefore urges a new ecological consciousness-one based not on domination, but on care, coexistence, and responsibility.

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