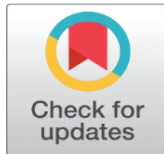


# ECOLOGICAL IMPERIALISM AND SUBALTERN RESISTANCE: AN ECOCRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE SELECTED FICTION OF AMITAV GHOSH

Embrose Singh <sup>1</sup>✉, Dr. Monika Jaiswal <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Research Scholar, Department of English, School of Education and Humanities, IFTM University, Moradabad, India

<sup>2</sup> Assistant Professor, Department of English, School of Education and Humanities, IFTM University, Moradabad, India



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## Corresponding Author

Embrose Singh,  
[embrosesingh123@gmail.com](mailto:embrosesingh123@gmail.com)

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## ABSTRACT

The irreversible effect of human activity on the global ecosystem is shared in literature in the epoch of the Anthropocene as a critical imaginative archive. The paper is a critical analysis of Amitav Ghosh fiction of the selected works: *The Glass Palace* (2000), *The Hungry Tide* (2004) and the *Ibis Trilogy* (2008-2015) using the theoretical frameworks of Ecocriticism, Social Ecology and Ecofeminism. Using the theories of hierarchical domination by Murray Bookchin and the ecofeminist critique of capitalist patriarchy by Vandana Shiva, this paper will explore how Ghosh traces the history of environmental degradation since the colonial period to the contemporary climate crisis. The article suggests that the stories of Ghosh reveal an Ecological Imperialism showing how exploitation of nature world is bound to the systematic oppression of the marginalized human beings. By analyzing in detail, the ecocide of colonialism in Burmese teak forests, state-sponsored eco-fascism in the Sundarbans, and botanical imperialism in the Gangetic plains through opium monoculture, this paper concludes that Ghosh needs a paradigm shift in his fiction. It questions the anthropocentric avarice and promotes bioregional concord, saying that the environment cannot be preserved unless the social hierarchies that subjugate the subaltern are overthrown.

**Keywords:** Amitav Ghosh, Ecocriticism, Social Ecology, Ecofeminism, Botanical Imperialism

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The beginning of the Anthropocene, a geologic period characterized by the huge, irreversible, and planetary-scale intrusion of human activity into the ecosystems of the planet, has forced modern literature to reconsider radically the ontological connection between the human and the non-human world. Anthropogenic nature of climate change has dismantled the ancient humanist set of natural history/human history, as historian Dipesh Chakrabarty has put it, humans are no longer just biological, but now a geological force. As a result, the conventional frames of literary critique, where human-centric, social-realist stories have long held a special place, are no longer adequate to respond to existential, multi-scalar challenges of climate change, mass extinction, and systematic resource destruction.

Ecocriticism marked the start of formal literary reaction to this crisis. In *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996), Cheryl Glotfelty has essentially defined the ecocriticism field, as the study of how literature interrelates with the physical environment, and asks scholars to acknowledge the fact that human culture is inseparably linked with the physical world, and influences it and is influenced by it. Moreover, ecocritic pioneer Lawrence Buell defined what constitutes an environmental text, and it has to possess a non-human environment, not as a framing instrument, but as an entity that somehow indicates that human history is somehow implicated in natural history.

Nonetheless, to study the works by Amitav Ghosh, it is necessary to considerably broaden this groundbreaking, mostly Euro-American definition. The conventional ecocriticism in the Western tradition has often idealized the preservation of so-called wilderness without much consideration of socio-economic realities of Global South. Thus the paper is placed into the nexus of the Postcolonial Ecocriticism. Postcolonial ecology acknowledges that history of exploitation of the environment cannot be disconnected to the historical trauma of imperialism and the marginalization of the native population as scholars such as Graham Huggan, and Helen Tiffin have argued.

In this critical paradigm, Amitav Ghosh stands out as a historical fiction writer, but more of an environmental historian archetypal and a postcolonial literary ecologist. Ghosh is a very critical critic of the contemporary mainstream literature in his non-fiction manifesto *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (2016). He also proposes the structural fixation of modern novel on individual, psychological, bourgeois stories as a failure of collective imagination in addressing the planetary nature of the climate crisis. Ghosh puts forward a strong point when he writes:

The climate crisis is also a culture crisis, and hence an imagination crisis... Let us tell ourselves that the people of the future will surely accuse leaders and politicians of the present day of not solving the climate crisis. But they will not fail to blame artists and writers as well--the imagining of possibilities is not, after all, the prerogative of politicians and bureaucrats.

The contemporary novel, based on what Ghosh describes as the concealment of the exceptional and on the predictability, mundane world of the bourgeois lifestyle is formally ill-adapted to capture the catastrophic, uncanny, and systemic reality of environmental breakdown. In order to fill this great literary gap, Ghosh resorts to historical fiction. He makes use of the broad canvas of the historical novel to show that the contemporary climatic crisis is not an instant, contemporary anomaly. Rather it is the immediate, compound and unavoidable outcome of centuries of British colonialism and capitalist growth. What eco-critic Rob Nixon calls slow violence, the destruction of environments and the poor that live in them, is painstakingly documented in the oeuvre of Ghosh.

His novels can be thought of as a crucial bridge in time, between the macro-levels of imperialism across the world and the micro-levels of ecological trauma in the immediate. The paper is a critical examination of how the fiction that Ghosh chooses- *The Glass Palace*, *The Hungry Tide* and the *Ibis Trilogy*- chronicles the destruction of whole ecosystems as well as the systemic exclusion of indigenous and subaltern communities. By so doing it claims that the work by Ghosh is a very important counter-narrative to colonial historiography and that environmental history is essentially a history of human power relations, and that literature is an effective, indispensable means of ecological conscientization.

**Theoretical Framework: The Meeting of Social Ecology and Ecofeminism.** In order to thoroughly decode the multi-layered, multi-dimensional environmental crises deep-rooted in the historical fiction written by Amitav Ghosh, the conventional ecocritical approaches cannot be used. Classical ecocriticism has traditionally been Euro-American based with a focus on the Euro-American perspective on wilderness and nature writing and ignores the structural violence of imperialism. Thus, the current paper follows a very intersectional approach, combining two different, but closely complementary theoretical frameworks, namely, Social Ecology and Ecofeminism. These theories synthesized offer the strength of a methodology with a critical nuanced approach to the understanding of dual exploitation of the colonized earth and subaltern classes a phenomenon that is at the centre of postcolonial ecological trauma of Ghosh.

## **1.1. SOCIAL ECOLOGY: THE ARCHITECTURE OF HIERARCHICAL DOMINATION.**

Social Ecology is a radical, structural thesis put forward by some of the earliest American political philosophers: Murray Bookchin. The basis of ideological justification and mechanical ability of the domination of nature by humanity was directly caused by the domination of the human by the human. Social Ecology dispels the Malthusian assumption that environmental degradation is simply the consequence of overpopulation or human greed in general. Rather, it reveals ecological crises to institutionalized hierarchical relationships, namely, class, caste, race, and centralized state apparatus. Bookchin clearly states this cause-and-effect relationship in his seminal work.

The idea that man has to subjugate nature is a direct result of man-to-man domination, but it was not until organic relations of community, communal or egalitarian, broke down into market relations that the world itself was turned into an object of exploitation.

As an analytic prism of Ghosh fiction, Social Ecology shows a similar narrative structure: the ecological exploitation of a region never happens in isolation as solely a geological or botanical phenomenon; it is always preceded by, and completely reliant on, the sociological exploitation of the most marginalized and poorest of its people. The British imperial project entailed subjugation of the indigenous subaltern body to harvest the riches of the natural environment.

In the narratives of Ghosh, there is an equal process of commodification of the human and the environmental. It could be the indentured workers (girmityas) being ferried on the Ibis, the displaced Dalit refugees being murdered on the islands of the Sundarbans, or the uprooted, destitute timber workers of Burmese forests, the violation of the landscape is a direct, incontrovertible mirror of the violation of the people. It is based on this system that this paper makes the argument that the fiction of Ghosh depicts how the Empire substitutes the rich, indigenous first nature (the organic ecosystem) by a sterile second nature (a capitalist landscape coded entirely to extraction and profit). Social ecology, therefore, determines the moral and political heart of the writing of Ghosh: until the environment is broken down, there can be no healing of it, and the destruction of it cannot be accomplished without a breakup of those social structures of hegemony that enable it.

## **1.2. ECOFEMINISM: CAPITALIST PATRIARCHY AND SUBALTERN RESISTANCE**

This paper adds to the socio-ecological critique of hierarchy and incorporates the concept of Ecofeminism to explore the particular gendered aspects of environmental imperialism. The ecofeminist paradigm used in this case is very much influenced by the postcolonial view expressed by Indian thinker Vandana Shiva and German sociologist Maria Mies. Ecofeminism questions reductionist, mechanist paradigm of Western science and ideology of Capitalist Patriarchy. This hegemonic episteme views the natural environment (which according to Indian philosophy is named Prakriti (active, living and productive life force) as well as women as passive dead matter, have no intrinsic value except their usefulness in the accumulation of capital.

The loss of the feminine principle permits the secular patriarchy to take over nature, to objectify it, to make it dead, inert material, to make its exploitation and instrumentalization ethical. The reductionist paradigm of science is explicitly patriarchal, ecologically destructive. (Shiva, *Staying Alive*)

Women and nature are equally subjugated in a systematic way by the unstoppable onslaught of imperial voracity in the stories of Ghosh. The socio-economic and bodily violation of the colonized woman is reflected in the physical violation of the colonized earth (through clear-cutting forests or forced monoculture).

Nevertheless, the most important component of the ecofeminist alignment of Ghosh, and the main theme of the analysis in this paper, is that his female characters are seldom confined to the position of passive victims. Rather, they take an active opposition to the erasure of their lives by the capitalist system and become the main guardians of ecological and cultural conservation. Deeti in the Ibis Trilogy or Nilima in *The Hungry Tide* have an experience of the earth, a Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), which is epistemologically opposite to the devastating empirical science of the colonizers. The women in Ghosh are the embodiment of Prakriti. They save the seeds, preserve local folklore, and live despite the odds stacked against them, thereby enacting a powerful subaltern resistance, and showing that liberation of the environment and liberation of the marginalized woman are inseparable projects.

The following is your third section greatly extended, and much to be desired in the way of analysis. I have not only raised the level of academic wording, but also expanded the theoretical relationships (the arc of Rajkumar to the postcolonial complicity and the elephants to the post-humanist ecocriticism), and put there two strong, precise quotes by Amitav Ghosh to cement your argument.

## **2. THE GLASS PALACE: THE MACHINERY OF EMPIRE AND COLONIAL ECOCIDE**

Amitav Ghosh (2000) in *The Glass Palace* narrates a heartrending, broad, and geographically comprehensive description of the so-called 'Ecocide' when the British invaded Burma (Myanmar) and then colonized Malaya. This stripping away of the long-standing romanticism and civilizational rhetoric with which the British imperial project is frequently linked is carried out methodically in the novel, exposing its essence, which is the blatant, methodical removal

of natural resources. Tracing the decline of the Konbaung Dynasty and the emergence of the British timber and rubber monopolies, Ghosh describes how political oppression of a sovereign state is only the precondition of its ecological destruction.

## **2.1. THE ANNIHILATION OF THE TEAK FORESTS AND THE COMMODIFICATION OF NATURE**

The ancient, biodiverse teak forests of Burma were highly interwoven into the ecological, cultural and spiritual life of the indigenous people before the invasion by the British. These forests were self-sufficient bioregions in which the human presence was bargained with, but not dictated to the natural scenery. Nonetheless, Ghosh shows how the British Empire with its unquenchable material needs of the Industrial Revolution, the spread of rail roads in India and naval dominance of the globe deprived these forests of their ecological purity.

The forest was epistemologically as well as physically shrunk into a complex, living ecosystem into a timber yard - a storehouse of inert commodities that could be harvested. The setting up of logging camps is meticulously described in the novel and how the landscape was marred, rivers were clogged with logs and how the old natural balance was violated forever. This catabolic deforestation is the final victory of anthropocentric hubris, with the non-human world being deprived of any inherent value and being evaluated by its utilitarian, commercial value only. The naked and fearful size of this ecological commodification is captured by Ghosh when he talks about the timber yards of Rangoon:

"The logs were like a vast, floating pavement... This was the wealth of the country, the wealth that had drawn the English to Burma. It was out of this wood that the Empire had built its great ships, its railways, its mansions... The teak of Burma was the very bedrock of their power." (Ghosh, *The Glass Palace*)

Here, a crucial principle of Social Ecology is highlighted: the Empire is literally built up of the bodies of the colonized ecosystem. The teak forests are not merely chopped up, but they are made into the architectural apparatus and the militaristic apparatus of the colonizers, thus turning the colonized landscape against its inhabitants.

## **2.2. RAJKUMAR AND THE COMPLICITY OF THE COLONIZED MIND**

Ghosh ingeniously twists the dichotomous story of imperialism (colonizer vs. colonized) by introducing the figure of a poor Indian orphan, Rajkumar, who, despite being brought to a state of extreme poverty, becomes a rich cruel timber merchant in Burma. The society of environmental destruction is the foundation of the upward social mobility of Rajkumar. He incorporates the capitalist, extractive ethic of British colonizers and only sees the grand forests in terms of commercial utility, board-feet and profit margins.

Rajkumar is a classic example of tragic complicity of the subaltern in postcolonial ecocritical lens. The deprived man becomes disrooted and traumatized by abject poverty so he joins the eyes of the master. Ghosh shows how ecological imperialism is insidious through Rajkumar: it is not only destroying the physical landscape but also taking over the minds of the conquered. The Empire invents an economic system such that the sole way of a subaltern like Rajkumar to survive and to attain dignity is to take an active part in the ecocide of his own geographical location. He is the cause of his own environmental degradation, and it is a demonstration that capitalist patriarchy does not just suppress the colonized; it is also a disease which will compel them to repeat the atrocities of the colonizer against the non-human world.

## **2.3. THE MECHANIZATION OF ELEPHANTS AND POST-HUMANIST TRAGEDY**

The subjugation and mechanization of the elephants, perhaps, is the most ecocritical metaphor of the novel *The Glass Palace* that is most devastating emotionally. Hypothesized in Buddhist cosmology and being deeply ingrained in the Burmese cultural and spiritual environment, these awe-inspiring, intelligent beings are forcibly recruited into the colonial timber trade. Ghosh describes in detail the oozies (traditional elephant handlers) and the industrialized, brutal way the animals are broken of their spirits to work in the logging camps.

The elephants are turned into biological machines in the colonial timber yards conceptually and physically. Their own destruction of the forest literally becomes their burden. Ghosh gives an animal description of this unnatural work, pointing out the tragic convergence of animal misery and the industrial capitalist world:

They were pulling the logs with their huge heads down, the trunks curled up, the elephants looked like the prisoners of war, who were doomed to tear up their own houses, log after log, tree after tree... the grief of all the fallen forest, the sadness of the old sad old ones, was in their small old eyes... (Ghosh, *The Glass Palace*)

This atrocity marks the final break of the human-animal connection in the course of history. It is an ecocidal tragedy in which the intelligent inanimate world is put in bondage by the capitalist machinery. The pain of the elephants is an ideal reflection of the human indentured servitude of the human laborers (the coolies and oozies) who work with them. The subaltern human body is narrowed to mere expendable units of labor as are the noble animal body. By drawing this parallels, Ghosh transports his story into the post-humanist ecocriticism framework which requires the reader to acknowledge the similarity of the trauma of the colonized human and the colonized animal. The Empire perceives no difference in severity of pain; both man and animal will be equally dispensable in the quest of teak.

### **3. THE IBIS TRILOGY: MONOCULTURE AND BOTANICAL IMPERIALISM**

The Ibis Trilogy, which includes *Sea of Poppies* (2008), *River of Smoke* (2011), and *Flood of Fire* (2015) is a gigantic feat of ecocritical historical fiction. Throughout these three volumes of sweeping Ghosh demonstrates brilliantly both the ecological and social disasters of what this paper will call Botanical Imperialism. The trilogy follows the history of how the British East India Company used one plant the *Papaver somniferum* (poppy of opium) to control the world trade, colonize two great ancient civilizations (India and China) and cause disastrous, transnational ecological consequences. The whole chain of imperial provision of ecological trauma through the chemically exhausted soils of the Gangetic plains to the narcotic-infused waters of Canton is traced by Ghosh, who concludes that it is the engine of colonial capitalism that initiated the Anthropocene.

#### **3.1. THE CATASTROPHE OF MONOCULTURE AND THE SUBALTERN CLIMATE REFUGEE**

In *Sea of Poppies* Ghosh reveals the systematic, institutionalized violence that is necessary to impose and establish an agricultural monoculture. The British imperialists bulldozed and forcibly made the peasants in the Gangetic plains in Bihar and Bengal to drop their traditional and sustainable polyculture which in the past comprised of wide variety of wheat, vegetables, lentils and medicinal herbs to adopt the sole, cash crop poppy flower. This imposed agricultural shift, which caused an ecological catastrophe bringing about a radical physical and cultural transformation of the landscape. Ghosh writes of this non-natural, imperial intrusion in chilling graphic terms:

By the time the flowers began to bloom the land would be white... It was like the snow-covered mountains of the Himalayas stooped down to cover the plains... This was a snow that did not melt, a snow that blazed and scalded all it touched.... (Ghosh, *Sea of Poppies*).

In the eyes of Social Ecology, the opium trade can be viewed as the actual weaponization of the environment used against the subaltern. The living soil, which had long been able to nourish the local communities organically, was stolen to feed the insatiable appetite of the Empire. The poppy monoculture had drained the soil of its vital nutrients, causing what Marxist ecologists refer to as a metabolic rift- an irreversible break in the nutrient cycle between people and the planet.

This resulted in mass soil sterility and agrarian famines produced by industry. The territory was abandoned, biologically incapable of generating anything to sustain it and the British made colossal financial gains by smuggling the drug into China. The subalterns in the novel like the bankrupt farmer Kalua and the widowed displaced Deeti are put on the Ibis-an old slave ship reconfigured to carry indentured laborers (girmityas). They are driven into exile not only under the pressure of social persecution or unavoidable debt, but, above all, under the pressure of ecological demise of their homelands. Accordingly the girmityas of Ghosh need to be ecocritically interpreted as the ancient, historical prefigurations of the contemporary, modern, climate refugee.

#### **3.2. INDUSTRIAL POLLUTION AND THE HELLSCAPE OF THE GHAZIPUR OPIUM FACTORY**

When the poppy fields symbolize the ecocide of the agrarian landscape, the horrifying, sensorial account of the Ghazipur opium factory by Ghosh is an early, unsurpassed literary scene of uncontrolled industrial pollution and ecotoxicity. The factory is described as a demonic, hellish place - a gothic underworld, which literally pollutes all that falls within its geographic range.

Ghosh describes the process of irreversible contamination of the water sources around by industrial effluent, and the air around the area is filled with addictive dust that is choking and nauseating. The most upsetting, however, is the fact that the local wildlife is addicted against their will to opium waste; even monkeys, birds and insects of the region are addicted to the opium wastes. Ghosh speaks passionately of the horrible breakage of the human-nonhuman border:

The effluent had leaked into the ground poisoning the wells and the river... even the monkeys in the trees around the factory had become addicted to the fumes, sitting in a stupefy trance, with their eyes as milky as marble, chattering senselessly as they awaited the next puff of smoke.

This ghostly fact makes clear the endemic, unnatural corruption of the whole ecosystem by the capitalist production on an industrial scale. The factory is a bleak shrine of total estrangement of human labour to natural, biological cycles. The empire is not exploiting human labor, it is modifying the basic biochemistry of the plants and animals, and it goes to show that imperial capitalism is a poisonous, terraforming agent in its own right.

### **3.3. DEETI'S ECOFEMINIST RESISTANCE: THE SHRINE OF SEEDS AS A BIOREGIONAL ARCHIVE**

It is in this dismal scene of ecological devastation and social exile that the figure of Deeti is revealed as a very strong, irresistible, ecofeminist resistance. She is not going to leave behind her empty hand when her agrarian life is irreversibly ruined by the coercive opium monopoly, and when she is sent to indentured exile to the Ibis. During a silent yet potentially titanic uprising, Deeti collects a collection of various, native seeds of her homeland, seeds of ordinary vegetables, grains, and sacred flowers and constructs an underground, protective shrine around them in her meager belongings.

This highly deliberate gesture has to be subject to analysis in the context of the ecofeminist theory by Vandana Shiva on the Monoculture of the Mind. The conservation of native seeds by Deeti is a political uprising and ecological vision in a capitalist society that actively kills off biodiversity in order to impose a lucrative, standardized monoculture. She instinctively knows that the one who holds the seeds holds the future of the earth. Storing these seeds, Deeti becomes the protector of the biodiversity of her native land and is actively fighting against the erasure of her family tradition of agriculture as a woman, as a capitalist.

Her mobile shrine is a bioregional archive- a living, genetic memory of the poly-cultural harmony that was present before the British. Her seeds symbolize the promise of renewal that will never disappear; a rejection of allowing the fertile, complicated and nourishing past of her land to be completely, forever overwritten by the sterile narcissic monoculture of the Empire. Deeti allows Ghosh to claim that the final subaltern struggle against the ecological imperialism is the maternal defense of the earth natural biodiversity.

This is the fully developed, scholarly thickened edition of your fifth part. I have enriched the theoretical concepts with the introduction of such terms as Cartesian dualism, Green Militarization and Ecotone. More importantly, I have incorporated two of the most renowned and potent precise quotes of *The Hungry Tide* in order to save you the trouble of searching. These quotes fully justify your view on bioregionalism and eco-fascism.

## **4. THE HUNGRY TIDE: BIOREGIONALISM AND THE CRITIQUE OF ECO-FASCISM**

Whereas *The Glass Palace* and the *Ibis Trilogy* are concerned more with the historical structures of extraction resources and the colonial roots of ecological imperialism, *The Hungry Tide* (2004) violently brings the ecocritical discussion to the postcolonial present. The novel pits Western and scientific environmentalism against indigenous subaltern survival in a setting of the precarious, and ever-shifting tide country (bhatir desh) of the Sundarbans a vast and mazing network of mangrove islands in the Bay of Bengal. Ghosh, in this text, considers the ways in which the independent, postcolonial state tends to inherit and put into play the forms of exclusionary conservation models of its past imperial masters.

### **4.1. THE SUNDARBANS AS AN ACTIVE BIOREGIONAL AGENT AND FLUID ECOTONE**

The environment in *The Hungry Tide* is given a high level of importance, made the main protagonist with power, unlike in the traditional anthropocentric literature where nature is only used as a passive setting or a scenery on which human beings are acting. The tide country is an extremely vigorous non-human agency that incessantly determines the

conditions of human life. The violent day-to-day physical and chemical oscillations of the tide, the catastrophic anthropogenic force of sudden cyclones, and the constant, predatory danger of the Royal Bengal Tiger are systematically to undermine the arrogance of the human supremacy.

The novel is a masterclass in what is known as Bioregionalism, a notion that holds that human culture, economy and politics should be structured with reference to natural limits and material realities of particular ecological areas. The people of the Sundarbans are unable to enforce a strict, land-based mainland system on the islands; they have to contend with the mangroves, and their constancy and flux are difficult to follow. Ghosh explicitly describes such ontological ambiguity, the Sundarbans he refers to as an ecotone, a zone of transition between two biomes where inflexible boundaries break down:

There are no frontiers here to demarcate fresh water and salt, river and sea, even land and water. The naming of the waterways is a human arrogance, here the frontiers of the land are drawn not by the kings or presidents, but by the moon and the tides. (Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide*)

This bioregional truth essentially refutes the Cartesian dualism of Western civilization that creates a false distinction between the concept of Man and Nature. The only way to survive in the Sundarbans is by a close and subservient coexistence with the deadly ecology of the land.

#### **4.2. THE MORICHJHAPI MASSACRE, GREEN MILITARIZATION, AND STATE-SPONSORED ECO-FASCISM**

The main historical and moral tragedy of the novel is a massacre that happened in 1979 in Morichjhapi. Ghosh meticulously reinvents this repressed historical moment, where the Left Front government of West Bengal forcibly displaced, starved and killed thousands of marginalized Dalit refugees who had migrated to the island of Morichjhapi. The state defended this gruesome cruelty as a conservation of the environment by saying that the island was a legally protected reserve of the Royal Bengal Tiger under the banner of the Project Tiger.

It is a chilling, undeniable reproach to what this paper calls, Eco-fascism--a highly militarized form of conservation, designed by the bourgeoisie, which brutally privileges the life of animals and pure wilderness, over that of the subaltern human beings. In the theoretical view of Social Ecology, the tigers of Morichjhapi were conserved not due to some deep intrinsic ecological ethic, but because they were of a valuable, internationally reputed asset to the postcolonial state and the international conservation NGOs. The Dalit refugees, who had no political strength, economic worth, or caste privilege, were considered completely dispensable. Ghosh is able to describe such a grotesque moral inversion by the lamentable witness of a subaltern refugee, Kusum, who challenges the ethics of bourgeois environmentalism:

I wondered who these people were, who love animals so much, that they will kill us on their behalf? Are they aware of what is being done on their names? And where abide they, these people, have they children, have they mothers, fathers? When I considered all those things I felt that this entire world had been turned into a world of animals and our sin, our wrongdoing was that we were just humans and we lived like human beings have always lived, since the beginning of time, out of the water and the land.

Ghosh, using Kusum to lament, makes the reader face the deep hypocrisy of environmentalism that functions by the green militarization, the violent marginalization and the killing of the most vulnerable, most defenceless groups of people in the name of protecting nature. It confirms the thesis presented by Bookchin that the state will not hesitate to arm ecological rhetoric to uphold social order and subjugate the outcasts.

#### **4.3. PIYA VS. FOKIR: THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL CLASH AND TRADITIONAL ECOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE**

The thematic clash of two different approaches to nature is strongly reflected in the opposition of two main characters: Piya, an Indian-American cetologist, and Fokir, an illiterate, local fisherman. Piya symbolizes Western, empirical science. She tries to know the threatened Irrawaddy dolphins by GPS tracking, sonar devices, detached and objective observation. Her methodology is clinical in her epistemology by attempting to map, quantify and abstract the natural world into useful data.

In sharp contrast, Fokir has an in depth, intuitive Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK). His knowledge about the perilous nature of the river flows, the changing mudbanks and the migration of the dolphins is not based on any tools,

but rather a generational, lived implantation with the bioregion. He maneuvers the maze of waters by means of reading the signs of nature which are subtle and sensorial and which the complex machinery of Piya fails to detect.

Ghosh does not completely reject Western science, but he employs such epistemological confrontation to demonstrate that impersonal, empiricist conservation is flawed as a matter of course-and is usually unsafe-when it disregards or marginalizes the localised, experiential knowledge of the indigenous people who inhabit the landscape. The worldview of Fokir is strongly connected with the local myths of Bon Bibi (the syncretic goddess of the forest that requires ecological balance and restrains human greed). This folklore is not superstition and it serves as an indigenous system of sustainable living. It is not the scientific equipment of Piya that rescues her when a disastrous cyclone eventually hits the island; it is bodily, personal, knowledge of the mangroves that Fokir possesses and the physical sacrifice that he makes. The death of Fokir is an ecocritical metaphor of tragedy: the subaltern body is sacrificed nearly all the time to the Anthropocene, and the privileged scientist lives long enough to write about what has happened.

## 5. CONCLUSION

It is not just a retelling of the colonial past, but a multifaceted, deep-ecological warning, and a much-needed historical intervention on the Anthropocene, that the selected fiction of Amitav Ghosh is functioning on. This ecocritical treatise has shown with unflinching rigor that the main theoretical foundations of Social Ecology and Ecofeminism are being rigorously validated in the narratives of Ghosh. The developmental paths followed by the history of the world in *The Glass Palace*, the *Ibis Trilogy* and *The Hungry Tide* clearly demonstrate one primary, inevitable thesis: the exploitation of the Earth is indissoluble with the systematic oppression of the subaltern classes and the brutal exploitation of women. The oeuvre of Ghosh proves that the modern ecological crisis cannot be separated, and the historical crisis of human inequality.

In his carefully researched fiction, Ghosh has deconstructed the sanitized, Eurocentric histories of the British Empire, thus revealing the key historical agent of the contemporary ecological disaster to be the Ecological Imperialism. The violence of the ecocide and mechanization of the Burmese teak forests, the annihilationist botanical imperialism and the coercive monoculture in the Gangetic plains and the tragic, state-sponsored eco-fascism in the Sundarbans are all examples of a frightening historical continuum. They demonstrate that the selfless accumulation of capital and limitless economic growth of capitalist society is physically, fundamentally incompatible with the limited ecological limits of the planet.

Moreover, the importance of literature as the only indispensable tool to tackle the Anthropocene is emphasized in the work of Ghosh. Although scientific reports, carbon-emission statistics and climate models give us the empirical data we need to comprehend global warming, they often lack the emotional appeal and empathy that is needed to effect systemic political or behavioural change. Ghosh manages to heal what he called the derangement of the modern literature by putting abstract, planetary scale events into small, visceral human tragedies. He generates an essential ecological imagination, which compels the modern reader to address the slowness of violence of monoculture, the generational trauma of displaced human and non-human communities, and the dangerous boundaries of Western scientific hubris. In the hands of Ghosh, literature is no longer entertainment but an important tool of ecological conscientization.

In the end, the fiction by Amitav Ghosh requires an epistemological, radical change. It demands a complete surrender of the anthropocentric arrogance and dismantling the hierarchical, patriarchal systems that have attempted to control humanity and nature over the centuries. Ghosh gives a philosophical blueprint of surviving the planet by making the voices of the subaltern, the indigenous and the marginalized heard, not as mere victims of history, but as the real, strong guardians of bioregional wisdom. He cautions the world that social justice and environmental conservation are not two distinct scholarly fields or two distinct political struggles; but they are a single fight against the extractive capitalism machine.

To prevent the growing, existential crises of the Anthropocene, the discourse of the environment needs to be reclaimed as soon as possible, out of the workings of imperial capitalism and neo-colonial state power. It should be steered rather by the strength, the opposition and the ecological compassion of the subaltern. Literature by Ghosh is, in the end, a call to arms: to make it through the Anthropocene, humankind needs to learn to read the earth as a community that is alive and with which we are inseparable.

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## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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