



The Mountain from Reverence to Ruin: Cli-Fi Narrative of Amitav Ghosh's *The Living Mountain*

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Abstract

*Environmental degradation and the result of human haughtiness in the face of nature have become the most important issues in the contemporary era. The Earth is facing an expansion of ecological catastrophe from rising sea levels, melting glaciers, extreme weather changes because of deforestation. Humans greed, exploitation, industrialization are endangering not only the environment but also the future of mankind. This reality has deeply influenced contemporary literature and the writers across the world are using poems, fiction and essays as a tool to reflect destruction relation between humans and nature. Literature has become a powerful tool through which the writers can critique human supremacy over nature, domination of technology and raise the voice for nature. In many literature works, nature has become a predominant theme. Tales like Amithav Ghosh's *The Living Mountain* describes not only about the environmental crisis but also highlights the cautioning about ignorance of ecological knowledge. Amitav Ghosh an Indian writer whose novels features the connection of human lives and the environment. His writings go beyond the narration to involve deeply with realities of environmental crisis, climatic changes and human relationship with nature.*

Keywords: environment, catastrophe, literature, caution, harmony

Literature is a powerful medium that voices human emotions and social realities. Through narration, poetic expression writers explore the depths of humans encountering like love, loss, hope, despair, liberation, suppression. Literature not only entertains but also educates and transform. Literature has the power to bring awareness to the people. Writers create relatable characters, plots and make the readers to feel and reflect. It serves as a moral and philosophical lesson on the consequences of human intervention towards nature, reminding us that survival depends on harmony and respect for the nature. In this modern world there are many ecological crises spreading widely, from extreme weather events to rising sea levels, melting of glaciers, population, deforestation,

industrialization, extinction of species are all visible in every part of the world. This topic has become very important in current period because it not only affects the environmental world but also human health condition.

Human activities are the main cause of environmental crisis. Urban expansion, deforestation, industrialization, excess burning of fuels led to ecological imbalance. The natural resources are being pushed beyond their limits and scientists warn that they are approaching irreversible tipping points. This issue has become not only scientific but also moral and ethical. It challenges humans to rethink about living and association with nature. The emergency of the crisis has sparked a developing movement among



scientists, educators, activists, writers and artists to use their platforms to raise awareness among people. Literature has become a significant space for environmental contemplation. Through climate fiction, writers started explore the emotional, social and philosophical aspects of climatic changes. Climate fiction is rapidly developing genre in contemporary literature.

Climate fiction is also known as cli-fi. It explores the impact of climatic change and environmental degradation on humans and the world. Many writers started to incorporate cli-fi themes in their works to voice out and raise awareness on the environmental crisis. Authors like Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Ministry for the Future*, Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam Trilogy*, Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Water Knife*, Barbara Kingolver's *Flight Behaviour* and Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island* and *The Living Mountain* highlights climate catastrophes, ecological collapse, socio- political consequences of global warming and human's disconnection from nature.

These writers project a dystopian future by using scientific reality, cultural criticism to caution against inaction and historical insight. Also these writers challenge predominant narratives. They give voice to nature.

Amitav Ghosh born on 11th July 1956 at Calcutta, West Bengal. He studied in The Doon School, Dehradun also he earned a doctorate in social anthropology at the University of Oxford. He worked in many academic institutions and also at the Indian Express newspaper in New Delhi. He often contributes to *The New Yorker*, *The Guardian* and other leading publications. He is known for his narrative innovation and thematic depth. He holds an important place in literature canon particularly in postcolonial and climate literature. His notable works are *The Circle of Reason* (1986), *The Shadow Lines* (1988), *In an Antique Land* (1992), *The Glass Palace* (2000), *The Imam and the Indian* (2002), *The Hungry Tide* (2004), *Sea of Poppies* (2008), *River of Smoke* (2011), *Flood of Fire* (2015), *Gun Island* (2019), *The Nutmeg's Curse: Parables for a Planet in Crisis* (2021), *The Living Mountain* (2022).

He has won Sahitya Akademi Award, Jnanpith Award, Padma Shri and Commander of the Order of Arts and Letters (France). His voice echoes globally, not through his works but also through lectures and essays support for environmental justice. By entwining history, mythology and environmental importance widely recognized for his interdisciplinary approach to literature.

The Living Mountain take on allegorical form rooted in native cosmology and oral traditions. The novella challenges the modern mindset of conquest and exploitation through the lens of climate fiction. The plot is set in an unnamed valley and story begins with a narrator Maansi narrates a tale told to her in childhood about a sentient mountain Mahaparbat respected by her people as a living entity. Also how the mountain Mahaparbat was profaned by outsiders known as the *Anthropoi*. The protagonist cum narrator recalls, "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 on condition that we told stories about it, and sang about it, and danced for it – but always from a distance" (7). This myth serves not only as tale frame but also as a counter communication to enlightenment period and scientific reasonableness which vision nature as stationary matter to be exploited.

Ghosh's option to narrate the plot through Maansi, a tribal woman lends control to non- western forms of knowing. In the following context, allegory becomes a medium for ecological resistance. As Elizabeth DeLoughrey says "Allegories of the Anthropocene [...] compel us to confront the material consequences of imperialism and extraction" (DeLoughrey 11). By turning to allegory, Ghosh gives cli-fi a form of cultural resistance.

The mountain Mahaparbat is a living entity, holy to the valley people. Its spiritual significance is such that it never to be touched. As the narrator narrates, "almost always wreathed in clouds" (7) and "the most alive" (7). Ghosh's pagan portrayal of the mountain destroys the Cartesian dichotomy of human and nature restore an ecological cosmology. This respect is in complete contrast to the scientific ideology of the *Anthropoi*. The writer stresses on the mountain as a



character repeats with his broader reasoning in *The Great Derangement* that modern literature and science have failed to treat bloodless actors with earnestness. As he states, “The real mystery is not in the facts of climate change but in the silence of literature.” (*The Great Derangement* 9). By treating the mountain as a holy subject, *The Living Mountain* reconstructs cli-fi toward correlation and humility, moving beyond techno fix narration that influences mainstream environmental address.

Amitav Ghosh’s analysis escalate with the arrival of the Anthropoi- a name derived from the Greek “anthropos” meaning human and resonating the term “Anthropocene”. These outsiders depict the colonial – scientific complex, equipped with maps, measuring instruments and the will to balance the forbidden mountain. Their language is filled with conviction, their minds closed to the insight of the valley. The narrator’s line “We burned with the desire to ascend those slopes ourselves”(Tint Journal) capturing the pride and arrogance of the Anthropoi. Their mission conceals as exploration and advancement, is in fact an act of environmental imperialism. Rob Nixon’s theory of “slow violence” the progressive harm got by environmental degeneration is applicable here. The Anthropoi’s gradual deletion of oral knowledge and their physical violation on the blessed landscape peak disaster. As Maansi describes “They knew a lot about how things work, but nothing about what they mean” (*The Hindu*). This line sets bare the novella’s ethical evaluation about knowledge without wisdom is threatening. The Anthropoi are blind to the culture and spiritual understanding of Mahaparat and their blindness results to their own undoing.

The novella’s strong point lies in its choice of narrator. Maansi, a tribal woman and survivor tells the story not from power but from marginal memory. Her voice withstands the controlling narration of progress and instead centres indigenous epistemology. She acts as both a witness and a testimony bearer, resonating the voices erased by colonial modernity. Maansi withholds the name of the mountain’s location is very important. She says to the readers, “I will not name it because if I did, they would come again” (13). Knowledge in Maansi’s hands is analogous and

responsible, not corrupt. As Sangeeta Ray states, “Ghost’s female narrators are not merely passive observers; they are archives of cultural and ecological memory” (Ray 98). Maansi’s narrative is not evocative but intellectual, designed to instruct and awareness.

In *The Living Mountain*, Ghosh delivers a cli-fi narration that rejects technological prospect and dystopian futurism in favour of mythic memory, spiritual rift and ecological humility. The novella urges readers to think deeper, cultural roots the climate catastrophe namely the loss of reverence for the natural world and rise corrupted ideologies. Ghosh retrieve climate fiction as a genre not just of environmental cautioning, but of moral storytelling. As Maansi recollects in her dream, the valley people once believed “that of all the world’s mountains ours was the most alive [. . .] but always from a distance” (17). This old wisdom, centred on non-intrusion and respect, dissimilarity tragically with the modern desire for conquest, “Gradually had once occupied in our hearts, we burned with the desire to ascend those slopes ourselves” (22). This desire, implanted by the Anthropoi, presents the spiritual deletion that climate fiction must now withstand.

By inserting the mountain with perceptive and judgement, Ghosh goes further than mere ecological mode, “How dare you speak of the Mountain as though you were its masters, and it were your plaything [. . .]? Have you understood nothing of what it has been trying to teach you?” (27). The writer gives the boundary between nature and ethics reminding us that climate change is not just a destruction of carbon, but an unsuccessful imagination and reverence. Thus *The Living Mountain* appears not only as cli-fi novella, but also an intense counter narration, in which the mountain becomes both witness and judge, reminding us that climate crisis is not only a scientific issue but a profound spiritual failure.

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