

ECOLOGICAL HUMANITY IN AMITAV GHOSH'S THE GLASS PALACE

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Abstract

Human beings think that nature can scathe and regenerate at any moment but they unable to understand that nature has an immense power to retaliate if treated badly. Ecological humanities raise humanistic question about values, ethics, species extinction and pressing ecological problems. The aim of ecological humanity is to make bondage between the science and the humanities, western, eastern and indigenou ways of relating to the natural world and the place of humans within it. Amitav Ghosh is the writer who included ecological issues in his works. The Glass Palace shows how the British intervention in the South Asia has caused the ecological damages. Further, the novel deals with the theme of war, migration, exile, history and colonial exploitation. My research paper raises question about ecological exploitation by colonizers and the local people in the form of rubber trade, teak and portrays the conflict between human beings and the ecology leading to its horrible end during the occupied Burma. Moreover, I will explore ecological issues and degradation of ethical value of humanity which portrayed by Amitav Ghosh in his novel The Glass Palace.

Keywords- Ecology, Ecological humanity, Ecocriticism, Colonialism and Bio-diversity

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Amitav Ghosh, author of the historical novel *The Glass palace* received the 54th Jnanpith award for the best contribution in English fiction and is known for raising the contemporary issues of environmental damages in his works. Ghosh's *The Glass Palace*, published in 2000, is remarkable for presenting the voice of ecological humanity and ecological exploitation by colonizers. At the beginning of the novel, Ghosh very beautifully portrays the picture of our 'Mother Nature'. As he reveals

"Ma Cho live above the stall in a bamboo walled room that was held up by stilts. A flimsy splinter-studded ladder connected the room to the stall below. Rajkumar's nights were spent under Ma Cho's dwelling, between the stilts, in the space that served to seat customers during the day. Ma Cho's floor was roughly put together, from planks of wood that didn't quite fit." (TGP p.8)

Through these lines, Ghosh wants to convey a message to the people about the significant of nature in the life of human beings. Further, he throws the light upon the tiny use of natural resources in our life. As, Ma Cho lives in bamboo house and she served her customers at planks of wood. Actually, it is nature who serve every human being on the earth. Here, Ma Cho is taken as symbol to represent nature, where nature helps in upbringing the human beings and provides shelter to him, Ma Cho also does the same things. She provides shelter to the Rajkumar and lives in Bamboo house and serves their customers on wood's plank.

Since ancient time, especially in India, some occasions are based on nature like, we worship nature in 'Vat Savitri pooja'. In this pooja women used to worship banyan tree and they assume that their observation of fast will be incomplete without worshiping of banyan tree. Moreover, in Indian marriages, the pavilion is used to decorate with different leaves (like leaves of mango and banana) because people assume that the leaves of banana and mango brings fortune in the life of couples and it helps in completing all the ritual in proper manner. As, Kamala Markandaya expresses;

"I woke; I looked. A mud hut, thatched, small, set near a paddy field, with two or three similar huts nearby. Across the doorway a garland of mango leaves, symbol of happiness and good fortune of mango leaves, symbol of happiness and good fortune, dry

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rattling the breeze.” (NIS p.6)

But we can't ignore the harsh part of the society where there is conflict between Men and Nature. Nature always shows its strength upon the power of human beings in the form natural calamities like, flood, landslide, pandemic, epidemic and earthquake etc. In *The Glass Palace* Amitav Ghosh very accurately portray the irresponsible actions of human which resulted in irreparable damage to nature. As, Ghosh states in his work 'the Glass Palace':

“Anthrax was common in forests of central Burma and epidemics were hard to prevent. The disease could lie dormant in grasslands for as long as thirty years. A trail or pathway, tranquil in appearance and judged to be safe after lying many years unused, could reveal itself suddenly to be causeway to death. In its most virulent forms anthrax could kill an elephant in a matter of hours. A gigantic tusker, a full fifteen arms' length off the ground, could be feeding peacefully at dusk and yet be dead at dawn. An entire working herd of a hundred elephants could be lost within a few days. Mature tuskers were valued in many thousands of rupees and in many thousands of rupees and the cost of an epidemic was such to make itself felt on the London Stock Exchange. Few were the insurers who could gamble against a disease such as this.” (TGP p.92)

Human beings became soulless to full fill their greed and able to break every limit for their profits. In *The Glass Palace* we can trace the green vista of Burma destroyed within a year without any hesitation. Further, after the colonisers war in Burma, even people ready to kill the animals who helps in their day to day activity and make their lifestyle easy. Instead of showing humanity and sympathy for non-human, people became gambler in their greed and they are ready to sell the organs of dead animals to earn money. Therefore, people became a wanderer on the face of the earth. They wander here and there for their profit. Aftermath, the colonizers war of the Burma is the best illustration of human greed which is artistically portray by Amitav Ghosh in *The Glass Palace*. Moreover, in 'The Glass Palace' the colonizers have interpreted the history of Burma according to their conveniences. Later on, it is very easily accepted by native of the Burma. As Ghosh states;

“... Yet until the Europeans came none of them had ever thought of using Elephants for the purposes of logging. Their elephants were used only in Pagodas and palaces, for wars and ceremonies. It was the Europeans who saw that tame elephants could be made to work for human profit. It was they who invented everything we see around us in this logging camp. This entire way of life is their creation. It was they who thought of these methods of girdling trees, these ways of moving logs with elephants, this system of floating them downriver. Even such details as the structure and placement of these huts, the plan of the tai, the use of bamboo thatch and rattan- it was not the oo-sis with their hoary wisdom who thoughts of these

things. All of this came from the minds of men like this one setting in this tai- this who is not much older than you.” (TGP pp. 74-75)

Thus, in *The Glass Palace* the invade of British in Burma leads hazardous environmental damage and resulted in natural calamities. We see that after the invasion of Britishers in Burma, the scenery of Mandal Palace has totally change. As Britishers destroyed the garden and building of Mandal Palace and converted it into according to their conveniences. But Natives are innocents they love nature and adjust themselves according to the nature. As, Rajkumar vey innocently reveals the purpose of Britishers behind the war for trees;

“If the British were willing to go to war over a stand of trees, it could only be because they knew of some hidden wealth, secreted within the forest. What exactly these riches were he didn’t know but it was clear that he would never find out except by seeing for himself” (TGP p.58)

Further, Ghosh very artistically conveys the message that the environment and human are two part of one coin. No one can live without the help of others, as he says, “It’s nature: the nature that made these trees and the nature that made us.” (p.233) Of course, nature not only created us but also helps us in upbringing. Somehow through this line, he states that although human beings know that they are doing wrong with nature but they became blind for profit so they destroy natural resources without focusing upon sustainable development.

Therefore, Ghosh is crying upon the ignorance of humanity and he tries to get understand the people that this is a time where we should serve nature and protect nature because if we want to live long in the planet earth, we will have to accept nature and live with nature. We should not use natural resources at immense level for our profit. We should not destroy environment. Like in *The Glass Palace* for the profit in the trade of teak tree and rubber, people want to compete each other. So, they destroy jungle and become cruel against animals. Even they don’t hesitate to kill elephant and the behaviour of people become unnatural for the animals as Doh Say conveys with Rajkumar;

“The carbuncles are most numerous around the hindquarters and as they grow they have the effect of sealing the animal’s anus. Elephants consume an enormous amount of fodder and must defecate constantly. The workings of their digestive systems do not stop with the onset of the disease; their intestines continue to produce dung after the excretory passage has been sealed, the unexpurgated fecal matter pushing explosively against the obstructed anal passage.” (TGP pp. 92-93)

People have forgotten humanity and sold their soul to the devil because they became blind for money and they can do anything for money. As, Ghosh states through Doh Say;

“The Pain is so great, said Doh Say, that a stricken elephant will attack anything in sight. It will uproot trees and batter down walls. The tamest cows will become maddened killers; the gentlest calves will turn upon their mothers” (TGP p.93)

People has crossed every limit to complete their hobbies. They know very well that there is an immense pain for elephant in this process but they ignore the pain because it is a matter of profit and loss. They don't think about the pain of elephant because this creature does not belong to human beings' community. In this way human beings slowly and gradually took the path of immoral, unethical and made their behaviour rude for animals resulted in extinction. As James Rachels writes;

"We kill animals for food; we use them as experimental subjects in laboratories; we exploit them as sources of raw materials such as leather and wool; we keep them as work animal. These practices are to our advantage, and we intended to continue them. Thus, when we think about what animals are like we are motivated to conceive them in ways that are compatible with treating them in these ways. If animals are conceived as intelligent, sensitive beings, these ways of treating them might seem monstrous. So humans have reasons to resist thinking of them as intelligent or sensitive."s (TCILATE p.179)

Aftermath we need to create love and compassion for animals and think that non-humans have also feelings and emotions, they also get hurt with the irresponsible activity of human beings. Therefore, human beings need to generate humanity for ecology because its real time to think that ecological balance is significant for human beings to survive. Disturb in ecology leads to imbalance in ecology and ecological imbalance creates a trouble not only for human beings but also affect the atmosphere. Moreover, the disturbance in ecology creates disturbance in every stage of ecology and its development which is really dangerous for human communities because ecological disturbance leads to ecological imbalance which brings natural calamities like, flood, earthquake, cyclone, landslide, Drought, extinction of species, hole in ozone layer, global warming and starvation etc.

Amitav Ghosh very artistically interweaves the problems of the environment with various plot in *The Glass Palace* so that the heart of human beings can open for non-human, and human beings will become generous for other creatures on the earth. Moreover, he talks about various issues of the environment in 'The Glass Palace' but his voice for ecological humanity is remarkable. Ghosh wants to arouse the emotion of men for other creatures. So, he very beautifully expresses the scenery of nature in his work *The Glass Palace*. Like;

"Downstairs Dolly was running across the garden with the First princess, Chasing a lizard of a bright red colour. This was different from the mansion in Madras, much smaller but more welcoming. Here one could run and play hide-and-seeek between the trunks of leaning coconut palms. She came to a mango tree whose branches reached all the way up to a window on the top floor of the bungalow. Perhaps that would be her room, her window, with twigs scratching against the glass." (TGP p.61)

But Ghosh also question upon the orthodox thoughts of human beings. He also raises the question upon unethical activity of humans against other creatures. Somehow, He ask why

there is discrimination in thought of people for others creature? Even people have divided the society on the base of caste and income. Therefore, there is a discrimination among the people in their own community. Like, Men think that they are superior to women in every field and treat women as inferior and weak in compare to themselves. As Arjun reveals;

“One day I asked the adjutant, Captain Pearson. I said: “Sir, why do we never use umbrellas, even when it rains?” Captain Pearson is a short, tough, bull-necked fellow. He looked at me as though I were a worm. Nothing could have shut me up quicker than the answer he gave me. He said: “We don’t use umbrellas, Lieutenant, because we’re not women.”” (TGP p.285)

Further Ghosh criticizes for the unethical attitude of colonizers towards war, and the unnatural and immoral behaviour of colonizers for natives. Due to colonial wars, natural resources are destroyed at immense level and further lead to loss of moral and ethical value of human beings and raises a question upon the humanity. As in *The Glass Palace*, the colonial’s war damage environment at immense level and it destruct the entire habits, rather than each organisms and species. As Ghosh says “Burma, ‘the golden’ became synonymous with poverty.” (p.486) Earlier Burma was very rich in natural resources and people of Burma knew about the important of environment so they use natural resources according to their needs but colonizers increased the dream of Burmese and learned them technique to use natural resources at broader level. As Ghosh reveals;

“In the dry season, when the earth cracked and the forests wilted, the streams Would dwindle into dribbles upon the slope, barely able to shoulder the weight of a handful of leaves, mere trickles of mud between strings of cloudy riverbed pools. This was the season for the timbermen to comb the forest for teak. The trees, once picked, had to killed and left to dry, for the density of teak is such that will not remain afloat while its heartwood is moist. The killing was achieved with a gridle of incisions, thin slits, carved deep into the wood at a height of four feet and six inches off the ground (teak being ruled, despite the wildness of its terrain, by imperial stricture in every tiny detail) (TGP p.69)

Therefore, *The Glass Palace* is the best illustration to prove the term ‘ecological humanity’ which focus on the relationship between environment and humans while raising the humanistic questions about values, ethics and responsibilities to address environmental problems. In this work, Ghosh has given an ample evidence to prove that there was an ecocide in Burma which occurred during the colonial war. The main motto of British invasion over Burma is the teak forests where they wanted to convert teak forests into the timber yards for their commercial use and so the wood became the main reason for the war and the colonial intervention in South Asia which further resulted into deforestation, and the large species of flora and fauna were destroyed for money, timber factories and industries. Now, it is time to think very seriously about our activity towards environment. Human beings, who live and breathe, play and entertain, eat and drink the beautiful gifts of nature today, must

consider that it is our duty to leave this planet a cleaner and a safer to entire beings of the earth. Further, we must have respect and care for nature, the nature will care us and help in upbringing because men can only survive on the earth when he learns to live in harmony with nature.

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