

ECOLOGICAL HUMANITY IN AMITAV GHOSH'S THE GLASS PALACE**Nakka Krishnaveni and Dr. Samir Khan**

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Corresponding Author Email: veni2812@gmail.com**Abstract**

Humans mistakenly believe that nature can regenerate and be damaged anytime, but they cannot comprehend that it has incredible power to retaliate if mistreated. Environmental humanities pose humanistic queries about morality, ethics, the extinction of species, and urgent ecological issues. Ecological society seeks to unite science and the humanities and western, eastern, and indigenous perspectives on the natural world and how humans fit into it. The author who first wrote about ecological issues in his works was Amitav Ghosh. The Glass Palace demonstrates the environmental harm brought on by British intervention in South Asia.

Additionally, the novel explores the themes of colonial exploitation, migration, exile, and war. My research paper poses concern about ecological exploitation by colonizers and the local population through the trade in teak and rubber. It illustrates how this conflict between people and the environment led to a terrible outcome while Burma was under British occupation. In addition, I'll discuss ecological concerns and the erosion of humanity's ethical standards as depicted in Amitav Ghosh's novel The Glass Palace.

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

The Glass Palace author Amitav Ghosh, who is renowned for bringing up current environmental concerns in his writings, won the 54th Jnanpith prize for the outstanding contribution to English literature. The Glass Palace by Ghosh, which was released in 2000, is noteworthy for giving voice to ecological humanity and conquerors' abuse of the environment. Ghosh begins the book by depicting our "Mother Nature" in a very lovely way. As he reveals

“Ma Cho lives 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)

Ghosh hopes to educate the public through these lines about the importance of nature in human existence. He also sheds light on how little natural resources we use daily. For example, Ma Cho served her clients on wooden planks while residing in a bamboo home. It is nature that serves every human being on the earth. In this case, Ma Cho is used as a metaphor for nature; just as nature helps raise humans and shelters them, so does Ma Cho. She lives in a bamboo home, gives Rajkumar refuge, and serves their clients on a wood board.

Some occasions have been based on nature since ancient times, particularly in India, where we worship nature during the "Vat Savitri pooja." Women used to worship banyan trees as part of this pooja, and they believed that fasting would not be complete without doing so. Additionally, in Indian weddings, the pavilion is decked out with various leaves (such as mango and banana leaves) because it is believed that these leaves bring couples good fortune and facilitate the

completion of all the rituals in the correct order. Kamala Markandaya says as;

“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 rattling the breeze.” (NIS p.6)

However, we can't disregard the harsh aspects of civilization when Man and Nature are at odds. Natural disasters like floods, landslides, epidemics, pandemics, and earthquakes, among others, serve as a constant reminder of nature's might over human power. Amitav Ghosh portrays the careless human behavior that caused irreversible harm to nature in *The Glass Palace* with great accuracy. According to Ghosh's assertion in “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)

To satisfy their desire and be able to exceed all boundaries for their riches, humans become soulless. Without hesitation, we can see how the lush landscape of Burma was destroyed within a year in *The Glass Palace*. During the colonizers' battle in Burma, even locals were willing to slaughter animals that aided their daily lives and made them more accessible. People have lost their humanity and compassion for animals, turning into gamblers ready to sell the organs of deceased animals to make a profit. People started to wander across the planet as a result. For their gain, they travel around. The conquerors' battle in Burma and its aftermath serves as the finest representation of human greed in Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace*. Additionally, in “*The Glass Palace*,” the conquerors have given their convenient interpretation of Burmese history. Later, the natives of Burmese are pretty amenable to accepting it. As Ghosh puts it;

“... 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 on-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)

Therefore, the British invasion of Burma in *The Glass Palace* causes dangerous environmental

harm and results in catastrophic disasters. We can observe that the Mandal Palace's surroundings have undergone a complete transformation since the British conquest of Burma. The Mandal Palace's grounds and structure were demolished by the British, who also altered it to suit their needs. Native Americans, however, are pure people who like nature and adapt to it. As Rajkumar Vey casually discloses the Britishers' motivation for the struggle 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)

Furthermore, Ghosh expresses wonderfully that the environment and people are two sides of the same coin. As he puts it, "It's nature: the nature that formed these trees and the nature that made us. No one can exist without the aid of others." (p.233) Nature not only gives us life but also aids our development. He somehow conveys through this sentence that although people are aware of the harm they are doing to the environment, they have been blinded by greed and, as a result, destroy natural resources without considering sustainable growth.

Therefore, Ghosh is bemoaning humanity's ignorance, and he tries to educate the populace that now is the time to serve and protect nature because if we want to survive on planet Earth for a long time, we will have to accept nature and coexist with it. Natural resources shouldn't be abused to the point of profit. We must protect the ecosystem. People wish to compete with one another, much like in The Glass Palace, for gain in the trade of teak and rubber. They decimate the jungle as a result and start mistreating animals. As Doh Say explains to Rajkumar, even they don't hesitate to kill elephants, and people's actions have turned into something that isn't natural for animals;

“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 have gone beyond all bounds to pursue their passions. They are well aware that the elephant would suffer greatly as a result of this process, yet they choose to overlook the suffering since profit and loss are at stake. Because an elephant is not a member of the human race, they do not consider its suffering. In this way, human humans adopted an immoral, unethical path and became nasty to animals, which led to their extinction. According to James Rachels;

“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)

As a result, we must foster love and compassion for animals and consider that non-human creatures have thoughts and emotions of their own and are harmed by human irresponsibility. Because it is now more important than ever to believe that maintaining ecological balance is necessary for human survival, humans must develop a sense of responsibility for the environment. Ecological disturbance causes environmental imbalance, which causes problems not just for humans but also for the atmosphere. Furthermore, ecological disruption leads to environmental imbalance, which brings about natural disasters like floods, earthquakes, cyclones, landslides, droughts, extinction of species, hole in the ozone layer, global warming, starvation, etc. This ecological imbalance is dangerous for human communities.

In *The Glass Palace*, Amitav Ghosh skillfully incorporates environmental issues into the story's different subplots to open readers' hearts to other species and encourage compassion for them. Additionally, he discusses various environmental challenges in "*The Glass Palace*," but his voice for ecological humanism is extraordinary. Ghosh seeks to inspire men's compassion towards other species. So, in his piece *The Glass Palace*, he captures the natural world's beauty. Like;

“Downstairs Dolly was running across the garden with the First princess, Chasing a lizard of a bright red color. This was different from the mansion in Madras, much smaller but more welcoming. Here one could run and play hide-and-seek 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)

Ghosh, however, also challenges conventional human cognition. He also brings up the issue of human aggression toward other animals. He seems to be asking why there is prejudice in human understanding against other creatures. Even individuals have segregated society based on money and caste. As a result, there is prejudice among the residents of their neighborhood. Men, for example, see women as inferior and weak in comparison to themselves and believe they are superior to women in every subject. As Arjun explains;

“One day I asked the adjutant, Captain Pearson. I said: “Sir, why do we never use umbrellas, even when it rains?” He looked at me as though I were a worm. Nothing Captain Pearson is a short, tough, bull-necked fellow. 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)

Ghosh also condemns the conquerors' immoral and unethical treatment of the indigenous and

their unethical attitude toward war. Natural resources are devastated severely due to colonial conflicts, which also cause people to lose their sense of morality and ethics and cast doubt on humanity. Like in *The Glass Palace*, the colonial battle severely damaged the environment and destroyed human customs rather than individual creatures and species. According to Ghosh, the phrase "the golden" in Burma evolved to represent poverty. (p.486) Before colonization, Burma was highly wealthy in natural resources, and its citizens understood the value of protecting the environment, so they used these resources to meet their needs. However, conquerors stoked Burmese aspirations and taught them to exploit natural resources more broadly. As Ghosh explains;

“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 be killed and left to dry, for the density of teak is such that it 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)

The Glass Palace is the most outstanding example of "ecological humanity," which emphasizes the link between the environment and humans while posing humanistic concerns about values, ethics, and obligations to address environmental problems. Ghosh provides plenty of evidence in this essay to support his claim that Burma experienced ecocide during the colonial struggle. The main goal of the British invasion of Burma was to take over the country's teak forests, which they intended to turn into timber yards for commercial purposes. As a result, the wood became the main driver of the war and colonial intervention in South Asia, which further contributed to deforestation and the extinction of numerous large species of flora and fauna in favor of profit, timber factories, and other industries. It's time to give our actions toward the environment some severe thought. Humans nowadays must take into account that it is our responsibility to leave the globe a cleaner and safer place for all living things. We breathe, play, eat, and drink the lovely gifts of nature. Additionally, we must respect and care for the environment since it will look out for us and assist our upbringing. Only when man learns to live in harmony with the environment will he survive on this planet.

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