
**ECOLOGICAL IMPERIALISM AND LITERARY
COUNTER-DISCOURSES WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO
AMITAV GHOSH’S ‘THE LIVING MOUNTAIN’
Thippeswamy M.**

Assistant Professor, Department of English, BLDEAS COM, BHS
ARTS & TGP SCIENCE College, Jamkhandi.

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ABSTRACT:

This paper examines Amitav Ghosh’s “The Living Mountain: A Fable for Our Times” to understand the interconnections between colonialism and climate change. Ghosh’s narrative explores the brutality, systematic exploitation of nature as well as indigenous naïve people’s lives, and the impacts of colonial expansion on the environment, revealing a historical continuity that links colonial practices with the contemporary climate crisis. By employing an ecocritical framework, the paper analyses how Ghosh critiques colonialism’s destructive impact on nature and challenges modern readers to reconsider the long-term environmental consequences of imperialist endeavours. The paper further delves into how the novella depicts human relationships with nature and advocates a symbiotic coexistence.

KEYWORDS:

Environmental Concerns, Naïve Local People, Clash Between Adept, Anthropoi, Colonialism.

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Introduction

With remembering many environmentalists like Sunderlal Bahuguna, particularly Salumarada Thimmakka and her long-standing inclination over environmental safeguard, the way she inspired millions of young minds after her recent demise and majestic love towards environmental concerns is significant. Her legacy, commitment, huge love and reverence-like a mother she nurtured trees. Her dedication and unforgettable nature to nurture nature is remarkable.

Ecological Affection and Devotion in The Living Mountain

Amitav Ghosh is an Indian writer. He won the 54th Jnanpith award in 2018, India's highest literary honour. Ghosh's ambitious novels use complex narrative strategies to probe the nature of national and personal identity, particularly of the people of India and South Asia. He has written historical fiction and non-fiction works discussing topics such as colonialism and climate change.

Amitav Ghosh's Novella "The Living Mountain" unfolds as a grandmother's dream recounted to her grandchildren, serving as an allegorical fable about environmental hubris and colonial exploitation. Set in a Himalayan valley, it portrays warring indigenous tribes who live harmoniously under the sacred, unclimbed Mahaparbat—a living mountain that communicates through adepts and provides sustenance in exchange for non-interference. It's an urgent message to the younger generation to take immediate steps to preserve nature, his prime concern to bring awareness to many modern people, while he portrays how native people treat the mountain is amazingly superb; they never even put their foot near the living mountain because it's a sacred lifeline for them, holy for native people. These villages feud among themselves but unite in reverence for Mahaparbat, trading annually at the valley's edge while barring outsiders. Adepts interpret the mountain's "speech" via rituals, songs, and dances, maintaining ecological balance.

Ecological Imperialism

Ecological imperialism is depicted as the Anthropoi (representing Western colonizers/capitalism) forcibly imposing their extractive, profit-driven agricultural and technological systems on the indigenous Varvaroi and their sacred mountain (Mahaparbat), destroying the valley's delicate ecological balance and traditional, nature-aligned knowledge for raw materials, mirroring historical colonialism's violent appropriation of lands and resources. Leading to ecological devastation and the demise of indigenous ways of life. It is portrayed through an allegorical lens. While the term traditionally refers to the way European colonizers physically reshaped the environments of their colonies (by introducing foreign species and extractive industries), Ghosh uses the fable of the Mahaparbat to explore the psychological and systemic violence of this process.

The De-sacralization of Nature

Before the arrival of the "Anthropoi" (the outsiders/colonizers), the indigenous valley people viewed the Great Mountain as a living, sentient being. Their relationship was governed by a sacred law: they could enjoy the mountain's gifts-like the miraculous "Magic Tree" and its rare mushrooms, nuts-but they were strictly forbidden from climbing its slopes.

Imperialist Shift: The Anthropoi dismiss these beliefs as "benighted" and "credulous." By reclassifying a sacred living entity as a mere "resource" or "dead matter" to be mined and scaled, they exert a form of epistemic imperialism-imposing their own worldview to justify exploitation. Some more illustrations could be found in the notion of colonialism and imperialism.

Extractive Capitalism and the "Climb"

The vital, prime notion of imperialism is expansion, grabbing, giving mental as well as psychological torture to the native people. Apart from that, as Lenin said, imperialism is nothing but the highest stage of capitalism. The Anthropoi are passionately driven by the enthralling scent of the rare nuts, rich natural minerals, and

the belief that the mountain hides vast mineral wealth. Their arrival represents the historical transition of nature from a source of sustenance to a commodity.

The Violence of Progress: This can be seen utterly; we have to condemn the ruthless deed of Ecological imperialism in the book. It is not just about taking resources; it is about the “climb” itself. The Anthropoi force the locals to act as porters and servants, breaking their own taboos to facilitate the mountain’s destruction. This mirrors the historical reality of how colonial powers forced indigenous populations to participate in the ruin of their own lands for the benefit of the global market.

The Myth of Development

A central theme in Ghosh’s critique of ecological imperialism is the seductive nature of Western “progress.”

Internalized Imperialism: Over time, the valley people begin to emulate their oppressors. They start to believe that they, too, must climb the mountain to be “modern” or “advanced.” Effectively the Tragedy of the Commons illustrates that once the formerly colonized adopt the same extractive mindset as the colonizers, the destruction of the environment (the destabilization of the mountain) becomes inevitable. This critiques the modern global order where “development” is often just a continuation of imperialist environmental practices under a new name.

Displacement of Indigenous Knowledge

Ecological imperialism works by erasing local wisdom. In the fable, the Adepts (mostly women who maintained the oral traditions and songs of the mountain) are marginalized.

Scientific Hegemony: The Anthropoi replace ancestral knowledge with their own “savants” and “science.” Even when these scientists later warn of the mountain’s collapse, they do so from a position of authority that still treats the mountain as an object to be managed rather than a being to be respected.

Ecological Imperialism in the Novel:

Destruction of Indigenous Knowledge: The Anthropoi dismiss the Varvaroi's traditional reverence for the living mountain and their practices, replacing them with exploitative methods.

Land Transformation: Forests are cleared for mass cultivation to benefit the colonizers (Kranaai), disrupting the natural ecosystem that sustained the valley.

Resource Extraction: The Anthropoi treat the mountain as a resource to be plundered, extracting materials and specimens, a clear parallel to colonial extraction.

Imposition of Western Epistemology: The novel critiques how a Western, capitalist worldview (anthropocentric, exploitative) overrides indigenous understandings of nature as sacred and interconnected.

“Green Imperialism”: Ghosh critiques how supposedly environmentally friendly policies (like the “bad way” of climbing) become justifications for further control and extraction, a form of green colonialism.

In Ghosh's story, the ‘Anthropoi’ utterly resembles Eurocentric domination, exploitation of native people, like many East and Asian tribes by white people. Their rude manners authentically look like the British colonizers who tried their best to make us believe that they were only the enlightened ones. The ‘Anthropoi’ does not try to understand the indigenous people's customs, lifestyles, legal system, and environmental attachments. The Mahaparbat is like any other mountain for the ‘Anthropoi’ that just needs to be “...climbed if only the climbers were strong enough, intelligent enough, resolute enough” (Ghosh 26). Only by climbing, exploring, and extracting resources from the Great Mountain, they believed they were going to bring development to that region. This idea of the development of the Anthropoi is a “disguised form of neo-colonialism” (Huggan, Tiffin 27).

The primary purpose is to extract commercial benefits of the Great Mountain and in no way is this development sustainable. The story does not end with the ‘Anthropoi’ climbing and exploiting the Great Mountain. It ends on an even more catastrophic note when we see the indigenous Valley people also joining the race of greed with the ‘Anthropoi’. The result is the mountain becomes destabilized. The combined weight of all the climbers unsettles the snow, resulting in a “series of devastating landslides and avalanches” (Ghosh 24) across the Valley. Environmental catastrophe unfolds all across the Valley. Even after realizing that the race of greed is a threat to their survival, they cannot stop because climbing the Great Mountain has become “like a drug to them” (Ghosh 30) and that eventually takes them to their doom. So, Amitav Ghosh’s *The Living Mountain: A Fable for Our Times* (2023), is a postcolonial ecological fable that critiques the neo-colonial western ideologies of development.

Ghosh shows that the extractive idea of development that the ‘Anthropoi’ believes in is just a myth. It is a myth of gigantism that not only fails to deliver what it promises but also causes irreparable environmental catastrophe in the age of the Anthropocene. Ghosh’s *The Living Mountain: A Fable for Our Times* (2023) creates a counter-developmental narrative, where the aim is to acknowledge the existence of alternative social and environmental pieces of knowledge of the natives that are never appreciated or understood by the development masters in the West. The strangers from Ghosh’s *The Living Mountain* resemble us – we who now function as the mindless deeds of post-colonial India. But we often do not realize that we are reluctant to agree that greediness is the root of all evils as said in the Bible, which is responsible for the destruction of the entire ecosystem at a terrifying rate in the name of development. Hence an environment-centric fable like Ghosh’s *The Living Mountain* is a need of the hour that has the potential to make us imaginatively engage with the ecological crisis of the age of the Anthropocene. It’s an urgent message to the younger generation to think about environmental issues.

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