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Reimagining the Earth: Exploring Nonhuman Sentience and Ecological Agency in Amitav Ghosh's *The Living Mountain*

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Abstract: Amitav Ghosh's *The Living Mountain* inextricably reimagines the spiritedness of the Earth through a layered Himalayan fable, wherein a sentient mountain transpires as a mighty nonhuman agent approached with the persistent intrusion of humanity. This paper investigates how Ghosh effectively challenges anthropocentric narratives by endowing the topography with consciousness and exploring themes of ecological retaliation, thereby compelling readers to rethink the notion of sentience beyond human compass. Ghosh animates the "Great Mountain" (Mahaparbat) as an ominous entity, imbued with complex sentiments, profound wisdom, and a peculiar capacity for communication. This communication is often mediated through a young girl who acts as a significant bridge between the mountain and her tribe. The vivid portrayal decentered the entrenched Western dualism of nature and culture, subject and object, and human and nonhuman, positioning the mountain as a rhizomatic, sentient actor capable of dominating humanity. The author draws on indigenous ontologies and imbues the relationship between humans and nature with deep ecology, as well as the spiritual significance of the mountain as a character in the fable. The story contrasts capitalist exploitation, which reduces nature to a mere resource, with artfully delineated phases of human relations: harmony, disruption, and reckoning. It illustrates the mountain's resistance to mining and the modernisation imposed by outsiders, creating a dynamic conflict between the mysteries of the natural world and human desires. Ghosh uses an allegorical framework to engage with the Anthropocene, revealing the ecological agency of the Himalayan region in the context of climate change. This complex interplay accentuates the impression of symbiosis, in which the traditional practices of the community and tribe foster a balance of mutual dependence and advocate for decolonial ecological ethics. This paper is explored through the posthumanist and ecocritical framework and presents a critique of the dominant pattern of modernity, which aligns with the purpose of climate fiction. Indigenous knowledge systems emerge as the foundational pillar for achieving harmonious coexistence. *The Living Mountain* serves as a powerful fable for the recognition of the nonhuman sentience and urges collective endeavour to build sustainable agency within the invisible systems of the Earth.

Keywords: *Nonhuman Sentience, Ecological Agency, Climate Fiction*

Introduction

In a time when ecological crises are becoming increasingly urgent, literature has emerged as an important way to rethink how we relate to the natural world. The term "Anthropocene" describes a geological epoch shaped by human activity, which has led many scholars to question the traditional view that puts humans at the center of existence, often overlooking the value of nonhuman life. Within this context, genres like climate fiction (cli-fi) and ecocriticism have become significant for highlighting different ways we can coexist with nature. Amitav Ghosh's *The Living Mountain* (2022) is a powerful example of this exploration. Through its Himalayan fable, the book invites us to reconsider the boundaries between humans and the natural world, culture and nature, and subjects and objects, challenging us to embrace a more interconnected understanding of life. This paper looks at how *The Living Mountain* reimagines Earth as a living, aware being, symbolized by Mahaparbat, the "Great Mountain." By using a posthumanist and ecocritical lens, the study shows how Ghosh challenges human-centered narratives and emphasizes the importance of nonhuman experiences in our understanding of ecology. The text critiques the harms of capitalist exploitation and the mindset of extracting resources, while also reconnecting with indigenous ways of knowing that highlight a more harmonious relationship between people and nature. Through storytelling, Ghosh connects the ecological crisis to the historical impacts of colonialism and capitalism, calling for a shift toward ecological ethics that respect and honor both the land and its diverse inhabitants.

Theoretical Framework: Posthumanism and Ecocriticism

Posthumanism encourages us to rethink the notion that humans are exceptional compared to other forms of life. Thinkers like Donna Haraway and Rosi Braidotti highlight how important it is to see subjectivity as something that is connected and intertwined with nonhuman entities (Haraway 58; Braidotti 190). This perspective challenges the idea that humans are at the top of a hierarchy, promoting a more inclusive view of agency that recognizes the importance and value of all living beings. Ecocriticism is all about exploring how nature is portrayed in literature and the ethical relationships between humans and the environment. According to Lawrence Buell, ecocriticism looks closely at the connections between literature and the environment, emphasizing the importance of stories that highlight our ecological interconnectedness (Buell 7). Deep ecology, which is a part of ecocritical thinking, goes even further by arguing that all living beings have intrinsic value. It challenges those utilitarian views that see nature simply as a resource for human use (Naess 95). Ghosh's work delves into these ideas by depicting the mountain as more than just a scenic background; it plays an active role in the narrative. This concept resonates with Jane Bennett's notion of "vibrant matter," where nonhuman entities are seen to have their own agency and energy (Bennett xvi). In this light, Mahaparbat comes to life as a sentient presence, capable of communication, resistance, and even retaliation.

Mahaparbat as a Sentient Nonhuman Agent

At the core of *The Living Mountain* lies the figure of Mahaparbat, a mountain that feels alive, filled with consciousness and emotional depth. Rather than simply being a backdrop, Ghosh brings this mountain to life, portraying it as a character with its own will and spirit. This representation challenges the traditional view that divides mind and matter, suggesting instead that the ability to feel and think isn't something reserved just for humans; the mountain has its own stories and emotions to share. The mountain's spirit comes alive through a young girl who acts as a link between humans and the natural world. This storytelling choice highlights the possibility of communication across species while also showing how limited our human understanding can be. As the girl hears the mountain's whispers, she transforms into a vessel for profound ecological wisdom, embodying what Val Plumwood calls an "ecological self," a recognition of our deep connection to the world around us (Plumwood 137). When we give the mountain human-like qualities, we aren't just slapping on human traits to a nonhuman thing. It's more than that; it's a clever way in literature to shine a light on the mountain's own sense of agency. The emotions it experiences—like anger, sadness, and strength—aren't just our human feelings imposed on it. Instead, they reveal a different kind of consciousness that truly deserves our acknowledgment and respect.

Decentering Anthropocentrism

One of the most impactful aspects of Ghosh's work is how it criticizes anthropocentrism, or the belief that humans are the most important beings on the planet. The story brings to light the damaging effects of treating nature merely as a resource for our benefit. When outsiders come to mine the mountain, it represents the encroachment of capitalist modernity into the lives of indigenous people. This intrusion disrupts the deep bond that the local community has with the mountain, leading to ecological imbalances that can ultimately result in disaster. Ghosh's depiction of this conflict really captures Rob Nixon's idea of "slow violence." This term refers to the gradual and often hidden environmental harm caused by industrial and capitalist practices (Nixon 2). In the story, the mining operations symbolize this slow violence, slowly eroding the landscape and its integrity. Over time, this buildup leads to the mountain pushing back in a powerful and dramatic way. In his work, Ghosh gives the mountain a voice, challenging the usual power dynamics between humans and nature. The way the mountain stands firm against exploitation reminds us that the natural world isn't just a helpless victim; it's an active player in the ecological dance of life. This new perspective invites us to rethink our relationship with the environment and recognize that there are limits to what we can control.

Indigenous Ontologies and Ecological Harmony

The story emphasizes the importance of indigenous knowledge systems as an important alternative to capitalist modernity. The local community's bond with Mahaparbat is rooted in respect, mutual

support, and a deep sense of interconnectedness. This way of thinking reflects indigenous values that see nature as a living being, filled with spiritual meaning and significance. Scholars such as Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin emphasize the importance of including indigenous perspectives in postcolonial ecocriticism to challenge the dominant Western narratives (Huggan and Tiffin 12). In Ghosh's writing, we see a powerful example of this idea, as he portrays the indigenous community as true stewards of ecological balance. Their practices reveal a deep wisdom about the interconnectedness of all living things, showcasing a commitment to sustainability instead of exploitation. The way external forces disrupt the natural balance emphasizes the colonial roots of environmental degradation. When outsiders ignore the mountain's sacredness, it echoes the colonial mindset that values profits over the preservation of nature and culture. In this light, *The Living Mountain* becomes a powerful critique of colonialism and its ongoing impact in today's global capitalist system.

Allegory and the Anthropocene

Ghosh uses allegory to delve into the intricacies of the Anthropocene, making his narrative both engaging and thought-provoking. As the story unfolds, we witness a journey from harmony to disruption, and finally to reckoning, which parallels the way humans have interacted with the environment over time. The mountain's eventual retaliation symbolizes the harsh consequences of ignoring ecological health, reminding us of the real threats we face, such as climate change, natural disasters, and the potential for environmental collapse. In *The Great Derangement*, Ghosh points out that much of today's literature struggles to fully capture the seriousness and urgency of climate change (Ghosh 11). In response to this challenge, *The Living Mountain* uses allegory to bring the abstract idea of the Anthropocene to life. Through the mountain's actions, the story illustrates ecological agency and emphasizes how deeply intertwined human and nonhuman systems are. The text has a fable-like quality that makes it easy to understand, allowing it to present complex ideas in a way that speaks to a wide range of readers. By weaving together myth, folklore, and ecological science, Ghosh crafts a story that breaks down the barriers between different fields of study. This approach invites us to connect with environmental issues not just with our minds, but also with our hearts.

Ecological Retaliation and Ethical Implications

The theme of how nature fights back is at the heart of the story. As the mountain responds to the harm that humans have done to it, the narrative prompts us to reflect on our responsibilities and the consequences of our actions. The devastation caused by the mountain's anger isn't portrayed as mere revenge; instead, it is seen as a vital step to restore harmony to the environment. This viewpoint resonates with Timothy Morton's idea of "ecological thought," which highlights how all living beings are connected and how our actions inevitably affect the environment. The mountain's behaviors remind us that what we do as humans is not done in a vacuum; our choices ripple through the entire

ecosystem, impacting everything around us. The ethical implications of this story are deep and thought-provoking. By depicting the mountain as a moral being, Ghosh invites us to reflect on our responsibilities toward the world beyond humans. The message is clear: true sustainability is only possible if we recognize the inherent value and agency of nonhuman entities. It's a call to care for our environment and acknowledge that every part of our ecosystem has its own significance.

Climate Fiction and Narrative Responsibility

The Living Mountain is part of the growing trend of climate fiction, a genre that tackles environmental issues through engaging storytelling. These stories, often referred to as cli-fi, are important because they help shape how people think about climate change and inspire them to take action together. Ghosh's writing beautifully illustrates how literature can raise awareness about our planet and encourage us to reflect on our responsibilities toward it. What makes this narrative unique is its focus on nonhuman sentience, which distinguishes it from many other climate fiction stories that mainly revolve around human experiences. By giving a voice to the mountain, Ghosh invites us to see the world from its perspective, broadening the conversation about climate issues. This approach challenges the common tendency to prioritize human experiences over those of the natural world, reminding us that we are not the only beings with stories to tell. This change in perspective is particularly important when we consider the Anthropocene, a time when our actions as humans have major and sometimes irreversible effects on the planet. By amplifying the voices of nonhuman beings, Ghosh invites us to see the bigger picture of ecological systems and encourages us to reflect on our own place within these interconnected networks.

Conclusion

The Living Mountain invites us to rethink our connection with the Earth, portraying it as a living, aware being. The story centers around Mahaparbat, a mountain that challenges our human-centered views and emphasizes the role of nonhuman forces in shaping our environment. By exploring ideas from posthumanism and ecocriticism, Ghosh encourages us to break down the barriers that separate humans from nature. This text inspires us to embrace a more interconnected and inclusive understanding of our existence alongside the natural world. The story delves into indigenous ways of understanding the world and critiques the impacts of capitalist modernity, highlighting the need for a more compassionate and respectful approach to our ecological ethics. As an allegory for the Anthropocene, *The Living Mountain* vividly portrays the effects of environmental exploitation and encourages us to rethink how we relate to the natural world around us. Ghosh's work serves as a reminder that the survival of the planet depends on our ability to recognize and respect the agency of the nonhuman world. By reimagining the Earth as a living, thinking entity, *The Living Mountain* invites readers to envision a future grounded in ecological harmony and mutual coexistence.

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