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**Colonial Carbon Footprints: Amitav Ghosh's Postcolonial Ecologies and the Modern Climate Discourse.**

Ms. R.M. Kavitha (Research Scholar)<sup>1</sup> and Dr. N.S Vijayalakshmi<sup>2</sup>

1) Assistant Professor of English, Jamal Mohamed College Tiruchirappalli

2) Associate professor, P.G & Research Department of English, Government Arts College, Tiruchirappalli

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**Abstract**

*In the year of the growing speed of climate change, the issues of justice, responsibility, and sustainability cannot be discussed outside of the history of the inseparable complex between colonialism and capitalism. The fiction of Amitav Ghosh crosses these past and present crises and discloses that the ecological exploitation of the environment by the imperialists brought about the contemporary ecological inequalities. The Glass Palace (2001) and Sea of Poppies (2008) are analysed in the present paper regarding the ecocriticism and postcolonial theory in dual terms. Inspired by Cheryl Glotfelty, Alfred Crosby, Vandana Shiva, Graham Hogan, Helen Tiffin and Rob Nixon, it places the novels of Ghosh into the contemporary arguments about the ethical issues of climate and global justice. The paper is based on that colonial environmental injustice based on deforestation, monoculture, and resource abuse is still present in the Global South in the form of environmental racism and climate injustice in the present day. The bonding between land, labour and life has been dramatized by Ghosh who reinterprets the conquest of empire as an environmental disaster. His stories encourage a decolonial interpretation of environmental responsibility and reveal the moral naivety that divides the industrialized world and its colonial heritage of carbon. Ghosh reminds the us that the environmental crisis facing the humanity is not merely a scientific or technological issue but a very historical, moral and even literary one.*

**Keywords:** colonialism and capitalism, exploitation, ecological inequalities, climate ethics, global justice, environmental racism, industrialized world.

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**Introduction**

The twenty-first century has entered the so-called Anthropocene as scientists call an epoch where humanity has become the powerful force of geology that forms the systems of the planet. However, as Amitav Ghosh demands in "The Great Derangement": Climate Change and the Unthinkable (2016), this epoch change is not global and equally distributed. According to Ghosh, the crisis of climate change is also a crisis of culture, and hence imagination (9). The ecocides of the current ecological meltdown with glaciers melting, desertification, rising seas are inseparable with the historical events of colonialism and capitalism that created them. The Anthropocene, as Ghosh perceives it, cannot be separated with what would be perhaps better

called the Colonialising: the era where imperial conquest and exploitation reprocessed not just human cultures but the whole eco-system too.

The environmental and social injustices developed by postcolonial Indian writers are not a new observation. Ghosh is unique in this regard because he worked tirelessly to relate the politics of empire to the politics of ecology. His historical fiction helps him regain the historical restructuring of natural landscapes into a tool of capital formation by imperial domination. His novels show that the processes of deforestation, monoculture and displacement were not by-products of the empire but aren't unintentional. The ability of the readers to think of the continuation of both the nineteenth century imperial resource economies and the global capitalism of the twenty first century is prompted by Ghosh imaginative re-presentation of the colonial ecologies.

### **Ecocriticism and Postcolonial Ecology.**

According to Cheryl Glotfelty, the concept of ecocriticism, in its turn, is the study of the interaction between literature and the material environment (The Ecocriticism Reader xix). It requires its readers to perceive literature as a cultural object and reaction to the ecological situation. This framework would gain new meaning in postcolonial settings: it reveals the way that colonial history of conquest and capitalism rearranged the human and nonhuman world. The ecological imperialism concept proposed by Alfred Crosby fulfils its description of the process of spreading biota, economies, and diseases to the colonized regions turning them into ecological resources of the colonies ( Ecological Imperialism 7). Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Development (1988) by Vandana Shiva adds to this argument further by determining the patriarchal and economic systems by which both the women and nature have been made mere objectifiable items.

The postcolonial ecocriticism thereby brings together the issue of environmental ethics and the social justice. In Postcolonial Critics of Ecology (2010), Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin suggest that the proper ecological thinking should not ignore the colonial present of global inequalities (Huggan and Tiffin 13). Equally, the concept of slow violence by Rob Nixon through the gradual and unnoticeable degradation of environments and communities through time is a crucial understanding of how Ghosh presents her ecological damage in the long run (Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor 2). Dipesh Chakrabarty is more demanding that any conceptualization of the climate change should recognize the colonial history of climate change, because the global is also planetary (The Climate of History 214) Within this theoretical array of things, the novels by Ghosh become aesthetic intrusions into the ecological discourse of the world. In his works, he actualizes what Huggan and Tiffin describe as a literary ethics of responsibility in the interwoven histories of humans and nonhumans, and rediscovery of long-forgotten narratives of environmental dispossession. Ecological memory is an attribute of the colonial plantation, teak forest, the opium field, and the tidal river. By so doing, the fiction by Ghosh turns the very genre of novel into a history of the environment itself and a moral foundation to visualize climate justice.

### **In *The Glass Palace* the nature of colonialism and environmental exploitation are explored.**

*The Glass Palace* (2001) is a story of how the imperial conquest turned land and life into a commodity pitting the British annexation of Burma as a backdrop to the drama. The novel starts with the fall of Mandalay and the exile of King Thibaw and Queen Supayalat at the moment that presupposes forceful oppression of a people and a land simultaneously. Ghosh tells, they had come, the English, like a flood to the kingdom, and carried away by being washed away. The lust of teak, oil and minerals by the empire turned the once fertile the old world of Burma into ruins and mud only (The Glass Palace 27). This is an image that combines

military conquest and ecological catastrophe, which indicates that the empire as a whole was a sort of environmental inundation.

It is not that the British annexation of Burma was driven to forest their governance into industrial exploitation locations. According to Ghosh, the greatest treasure that Burma possessed was teak, and the British were hungry to consume it (115). The forest is then used as a metaphor of the metabolic logic of empire taking away nature to nourish capital. This paradox is embodied in Rajkumar, who is the main character of the novel. A thriving business as a trader in teak relies upon the systematic deforestation which underpins colonial industry. According to Ghosh, the forest, was made to look like a machine that ate its own foods .

This nature as a machine foresees the ecological effects of the contemporary form of capitalism the self-eating machines of extraction that the fossil-oil economy represents. When discovery of the Second World War breaks, Ghosh associates the blaze of the forest with the ruin of the human settlements. The trees were as dead bodies that were lying on the hillside, and the air had the smell of sap and smoke and death (347). Imperial modernity is unsustainable, the fall of empire, as is the fall of the ecosystem, is the display of unsustainability.

*The Glass Palace* is, therefore, a glimpse into the future of what can be described as colonial carbon capitalism the history of economic ambition, military takeover and ecological destruction. Following the lineage of extraction of colonial Burma to the world modernity, Ghosh has made the novel into both historical presentation and ethical allegory. His description of environmental overexploitation echoes with the statement put across by Alfred Crosby, that, how Europe managed to colonize certain places was equally biological and technological (Crosby 8). The colonization venture is a human tragedy in the world of Ghosh as also an ecological disaster.

### **Environmental Racism and Agrarian Crisis.**

*The Glass Palace* explores the ecological violence of deforestation, *Sea of Poppies* (2008) swivels to the agrarian ecologies of Bengal which reveals the colonial capitalism changing fertile lands into monocultural wastelands. Placed in the 1830s, when the opium trade was in full swing, the novel is a play of the human displacement, environmental degradation, and economic force. Agricultural dominance of the British East India Company is the prime example of what Rob Nixon refers to as a slow violence a gradual and invisible destruction (Slow Violence 2).

The place Ghosh nationalizes is a place in Bengal Whose topography is replenished redrafted To suit the imperial drug business. According to the narrator, the poppy had been scattered around everywhere, and it had infected the land, just as it has oppressed the people (*Sea of Poppies* 73). The symbolism of poison is dualistic: the narcotic enclave poisons not people and land alone, but also ethics. The villagers that had been earning their living by growing food crops are now being pushed towards monoculture and that too without benefiting the stomachs of the poor people nor the conscience of the rulers. The irony of wealth in a place of famine is what Ghosh shows: fields were populated with white poppies, and starvation stalked the earth. This is due to a change of subsistence agriculture into a profit-centred export economy, which is an expression of how Vandana Shiva has criticized the monoculture as a type of ecological imperialism. In the book, *Staying Alive*, Shiva claims that colonial capitalism-imposed uniformity, which killed the diversity and self-sufficiency of the traditional farming systems (Shiva 112). This loss as experienced by Ghosh is dramatized not as being a vehicle of policy but rather as lived experience in the novel. The suffering of people who were caught in between the colonial economy is imposed on the character of Deeti. As far as her family opium quota increase exceeds the survival threshold, Ghosh gives an account by stating: The men who came to tally the plants were feasts of famine should they discover that one stalk was missing; the vengeance was fast and cruel.

*Sea of Poppies* environment is not a silent bystander to the imperial violence but an eyewitness to imperial violence. Rivers are turned into the ways of trade and ways to pain. The great Ganges, which is holy and life-giving, becomes the drain of the poppy factories bearing the effluence of the poppy factory sharp and bad smelling. Ghosh combines the imagery of nature with the indignation over the gradually decreasing ecosystems, presenting pollution as the embodiment of the spiritual pollution. Fall of the river portrays fall of the colonial conscience. The Ibis, the vessel which transports indentured workers across the Indian Ocean, is turned into a transitional paradise of ecological migrancy a microverted world of imperial globalization. Its human cargo, displaced in the poppy fields, has been the ecological migration which is the consequence of environmental and economic collapse. According to Ghosh, Ibis breathed in the wind which filled its sails and this breath was full of the smell of opium and hopelessness. This eerie sentence breaks the lines between the setting and atmosphere demonstrating how the ecologies of imperialism are written onto the human body itself.

Through the image of the opium economy as ecological and ethical disaster, Ghosh shows the way in which colonial capitalism normalizes the exploitation via the discourse of civilization and progress. The historical location of the novel foreshadows current day neo-colonial processes of international business of agricultural products, where the extraction of resources and the destruction of nature are unevenly distributed in the Global South. In this regard, *Sea of Poppies* turns the form of the story of empire into a statement of ecological inequality in the era.

Combined as such, *The Glass Palace* and *Sea of Poppies* demonstrate that environmental degradation as a result of colonialism was not an accident caused by the empire but its backbone. Ghosh reveals the continued prevalence of environmental racism, exemplified by the extraction, displacement and pollution of the resource, in postcolonial societies. His fiction asks us to envision what Nixon refers to as environmentalism of the poor (Nixon 4): a politics of endurance, memory and struggle.

#### **Ghosh Narrative Strategies: Memory, Temporality and Ecological Consciousness.**

Amitav Ghosh has a unique narrative style, which is the main concern of his ecological vision. His novels are not only focused on historical reconstruction but also on ecological remembering and recalling textual landscapes in which there is a fusion of memory and environment. Ghosh breaks down linear ideas about progress and reveals the protracted environmental injustice through the use of cross-cutting timelines, changing focal points and a broad geographical imagination. The way he tells a story re-enacts what Dipesh Chakrabarty refers to as the collapse of human and natural histories in the Anthropocene when the boundary between the past and the present is unclear.

Temporal layering *The Glass Palace* is an ecological metaphor. The sheer expanse of this novel 1885 to the end of the twentieth century is panoramic and the totality of the impact of colonial extraction is made visible. To Ghosh, history is sedimentary: every new generation inherits the bulk and content as well as residual morality of empire. In the process of writing, he says that the teak forests were lost, and in its place such phantom imagery makes deforestation a spiritual loss. Ghosh brings out not only the deprivation of nature but also the continuation of the memory the ecological unconscious continuing even after the physical world is destroyed.

In the same way, *Sea of Poppies* utilises polyphonic narration in anticipate subaltern voices suppressed by official colonial archives. The group of characters in the novel, Deeti, Neel, Kalua, Paulette, and many more, expresses the mass ecological awareness, which crosses the boundaries of classes and race. The voices give witness to different fragments of the environment and this has been called by Ghosh himself as a choir of the dispossessed. This plurality opposes the desire of imperial historiography to be universal and invokes in its place an ecological pluralism attribute to lived experience.

The ecological role is also played by the linguistic hybridity of the novel the mixing of Bhojpuri, Bengali, English and nautical jargon in it. The language in the world of Ghosh is organic, adaptive, and syncretic and this reflects the biodiversity that empire was trying to control. One of the characters reflects that the words they say are seeds that travel, they root and, at times, they grow in unnatural places (*Sea of Poppies* 402). In this case, linguistic creolization can be compared to ecological resilience; they both oppose homogenizing logic of colonial modernity.

Another aspect of Ghosh, the challenge of time imported by anthropocentric idea of a time that prevails in western realism, is presented through the narrative temporalities. His novels tend to melt human and non-human timeframes, indicating an ethics of living together. Rivers, forests, winds are not a dead place, they are living entities who have their paths of action. This story anthropomorphism brings back to mind the nature belief systems of the Indian ocean rim where nature is understood as a divine being. In that regard, the fiction of Ghosh is commensurate with what Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin refer to as postcolonial ecocriticism a shift that, though, not neglects the material and social inequities that irregularities of human-nature relations (*Postcolonial Ecocriticism* 22).

Ghosh reveals the illusion of progress as the linear development through connecting ecological degradation to the time of colonialism. Rather, he provides what could be described as an eco-historical spiral a genre of the text that turns back upon itself, compelling the reader to view the present in the terms of environmental memory.

#### **Ecological Politics and Postcolonial Philosophy.**

This fiction by Ghosh transcends to be representative and culminates into responsibility. His novels are call ethical interventions, he forces his audience to wrestle with the disjointed geographies of climate vulnerability. The modernity of climate change only tends to conceal its colonialities. Industrial countries make up most of the carbon emissions, but the South is the one being affected by flooding, drought and displacement which are the primary results of postcolonialism. The stories crafted by Ghosh reveal this hypocrisy that casts light on how imperial systems are part of global injustice that exists in the use of resources and the production of waste.

In *The Glass Palace*, the Burmese communities are already being robbed, portending the displacement of the local communities by the local modern development pursuits and deforestation in Southeast Asia. The forced movement of indentured laborers across the oceans in *Sea of Poppies* can be related to the climate refugees of today who are victims of escalating seas, cyclones, and the wars of resources. Through the dramatization of these past instances, Ghosh places environmental justice in a moral upsurge that stretches between colonial and modern times.

Ethical power behind the work by Ghosh is that he emphasized that the issue of the climate crisis is a matter of justice and not a matter of science. Unfortunately, he contends in “The Great Derangement” that natural history is deeply entangled with human history and that the Anthropocene requires us to recognize it. The identification of this makes literature a form of moral tool a way of reclaiming the muted discourses of land and labour. The novels of Ghosh therefore champion decolonial ecology an ecology that is striving to reconcile human and non-human worlds with the aid of historical responsibility.

Ghosh vision evokes the ideas of the environmental justice movements of the Global South that focus on the community resilience, native knowledge, and ecological sovereignty. Describing these values in a narrative manner, Ghosh helps close the divide between the world of knowledge and the pop imagination, turning fiction into a way of ethical reflection.

The study is under the title of Colonial Carbon Footprints: Amitav Ghosh, Postcolonial Ecologies and the Modern Climate Debates has a focus that is at the border of literary analysis,

theory of postcolonialism, and environmental humanities. It explores the ways in which fiction by Amitav Ghosh especially *The Glass Palace* (2001) and *Sea of Poppies* (2008) has shown the profound continuities between past colonialism and the current ecological crisis. The paper goes further in the literary appreciation by placing the stories by Ghosh in the context of climate-related discussions in the world, positing that his use of environmental degradation, migration, and imperial extraction reflects the ongoing discourses of environmental justice and sustainability in the contemporary world.

This paper examines the ecological legacies of empire in the ways that colonial forms of extracting resources, plantation agriculture and racialized labour systems laid the grounds of modern unequal environmental liabilities. It brings out the idea of the colonial carbon footprints, which details the ways in which the patterns of climate vulnerability on the Global South still are defined by the industrial and agricultural practices that have been initiated during the colonial rule. The analysis of Ghosh's historical novels and the present climate discussions helps fill in the gap between the nineteenth century imperial economies and the inequity of environmental inequalities in the twentieth century.

It also includes the comparative reading of the two major works of Ghosh. The Glass Palace depicts how natural resources were affected in the process of commodification by the British during the expansion in Burma, and the case of opium monoculture in colonial India in Sea of Poppies reveals the ecological and human impacts on the world. Combined, they show that the ecological violence could not be separated in economic and racial domination. Through the study, Ghosh links the historical milieu to contemporary problems like carbon capitalism, environmental racism and climate-induced displacement showing that literature could provide ways to articulate ecological memory and moral accountability.

Moreover, this paper establishes Ghosh as a crucial figure within the earth environmental humanities who takes climate change and constructs it as a cultural, ethical, and historical phenomenon instead of being a scientific problem. Its coverage does not therefore rest with limited works of the literary criticism but rather the historical coverage of the environmental justice. Revealing the colonial causes of the climate crisis, this work becomes the part of an interdisciplinary discussion that asks to decolonize climate ethics and sustainable futures.

Overall, the critical analysis Amitav Ghosh as narratives that reflect a postcolonial ecological awareness that transcends both past and the Anthropocene will constitute the scope of this paper. It attempts to illustrate that to comprehend current environmental crisis, it is necessary to rediscuss the colonial history during which the initial carbon footprints of the empire were implied on both the land and the people of the country.

### **Conclusion**

The individual works of Amitav Ghosh, *The Glass Palace* and *Sea of Poppies*, combined refer to a potent ecological record of the postcolonial imagination. They reveal the way the history of empire, capitalism and exploitation of the environment has been linked and connected in a manner that influences the material and moral landscape of the current world. Ghosh makes us look at colonial history as a prelude of the climate crisis a narrative of extraction and inequality the echo of whose impacts we still feel deep in the Anthropocene through the prism of ecological imperialism, environmental racism, postcolonial ethics. Ghosh fiction goes beyond the limitations of historical realism and creates a new incarnation of postcolonial eco-historiography, in which the narration process can be seen as resistance and remembrance. Through bringing voice to the muted ecologies of the past, Ghosh encourages readers as well as scholars to contemplate the future, based on ecological justice and communal memory. By thus, he reinvents the purpose of literature in the age of climate change not as a means of escapism, but as a kind of moral participation in the most critical crisis the world has to face.

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