

## CLIMATE CHANGE AND CHALLENGES: AN ECOCRITICAL STUDY OF AMITAV GHOSH'S *THE GREAT DERANGEMENT*

Dr. Leela Dhar

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Govt. College Nihri, Distt. Mandi, Himachal Pradesh, INDIA



### ABSTRACT

*Nowadays, the fury of Mother Nature renders humankind defenseless. When we attempt to contemplate the environmental situation, it has become obsolete. The ordinary people continue to pollute the environment without hesitation, despite scientific efforts to reduce global warming to some extent failing to alter public attitudes. That being said, literature has the power to profoundly affect people's mental health. There are situations when it has a greater psychological impact on individuals than the data and statistics that economists provide. Fictional and non-fiction narratives are primarily derived from individuals who either experienced or observed natural disasters. One writer who dug deep into the environment's content to discover how consumerism is challenging nature and leading to climate change is Amitav Ghosh. The goal of this research paper, "Climate Change and Challenges: An Ecocritical Study of Amitav Ghosh's *The Great Derangement*" is to use both fiction and non-fiction as a tool to change people's minds. It will also highlight how incompetent humans are at handling the complexity of climate change.*

**Key Words:** Eco-criticism, Nature, Culture, Land and Human Consciousness, and Politics

### Introduction

Disciplines like applied sciences, sociology, philosophy, history and religion have been chief instrumental in observing environmental concerns over the years. Whereas literary studies remained silent looking behind the curtain during mid twentieth century. In the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the necessity of literary account of observing environmental issues began to be felt.

Over the years, disciplines like the applied sciences, sociology, philosophy, history, and religion have played a major role in observing environmental problems. In the middle of the 20th century, literary studies were silent when it came to investigating behind the scenes. The need for literary accounts observing environmental challenges became apparent at the close of the 20th century and the start of the 21st.

The present times, numerous writers came forward to take initiative in depicting nature and its significance through their works. "The recent acceleration of scholarly activity in the areas of environmental history, Ecofeminism, and Ecotheology, provide a clear indication that environmental consciousness is increasingly being reflected in both academic discourse and the institutional structures which underwrite that discourse. Environmental scholarship has finally infiltrated the disciplines of literary studies, where it variously appears under the rubric of nature writing, Environmental literature, nature/culture theory, place studies, Ecofeminism, and other number of other sub disciplines which may be constellated around the term Ecocriticism" (Branch 92).

The term Ecocriticism was coined by William Ruckert in "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism", in 1978. By Ecocriticism he assumed "the application of ecology and ecological concept to study of literature" (Glotfelty xviii). English ecocritic believed that their legacy goes back to John Ruskin's *Modern Painters* Volume III (1856) and Wordsworth's *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads* (Second Edition, 1800).

Literary theories are significant to examine the text, the writer and the society artistically. Ecocriticism is one of the theories through which a work of writer can be examined unbiasedly. It aims at exploring the entire ecosphere. In other words, the ways in which the environment is imagined, understood and represented is instrumental to the development of eco-critical awareness” (Sharma 163). The need of environmental began to be felt in the countries like America, United Kingdom, Australia, Newziland, Europe and a few Asian Countries. In the context of India, one can witness multiple variety of ecosystem i.e The Himalayas, Plautus of South, Sunderban in the East and Thar of the West. However, the ecosystem has been polluted owing to excessive use of carbon dioxide releasing out of factories and motor cars, and over use of natural sources.

One theory that can be used to evaluate a writer's work objectively is Ecocriticism. Its goal is to investigate the whole ecosphere. Countries including America, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Europe, and a few Asian nations started to feel the need for environmental protection. India is home to a variety of ecosystems, including the Himalayas, the Plautus in the south, the Sunderban in the east, and the Thar in the west. Nevertheless, overuse of natural resources and carbon dioxide emissions from companies and cars have contaminated the ecosystem.

It is universally acknowledged that human being has been part and parcel of nature just like plants, animals and birds. So their interdependence with one another is unavoidable in order to have a balance in nature. It has been observed whenever human being tried to make excessive exploitation of nature; he or she had to face nature's wrath producing flood, drought, famine and earthquake.

Everyone agrees that humans have always been a part of nature, just like plants, animals, and birds. Therefore, for there to be a balance in nature, their connection is inevitable. Every time human beings have attempted to overuse the natural world, it has been noticed that they will have to deal with the wrath of the natural world, which includes earthquakes, starvation, drought, and floods.

Various Indian writers showed affection for nature and tried to depict nature in their respective works. In this league, Raja Rao came forward, who, in his work *Kantapura* depicted the relationship between human being and nature. His depiction of South Indian village and superb setting reflects his love and affection for nature. Another writer was R.K Narayan who projected Malgudi, a native name of place for most of his novels and short stories. His association with landscape, natural sites, atmosphere of Malgudi reveals his ecocritical perspective on works. Besides, Bhabhani Bhattacharya in her work *So Many Hungers* presents the picture of Bengal Famine of 1943.

It explicates how a few Indians had to die owing to hunger and starvation. And Kamala Markandaya, too, in her work *Nectar in sieve* presents Bengal Famine. It exhibits how nature has full control over human being. She reveals how the psyche of Rukmani, the protagonist is affected by rural village life. After being landless, Rukmani expresses her empathy, apprehension and attachment to the land. This is how Rukmani recalls her early married days: “While the sun shines on you and the fields are green and beautiful to the eye, and your husband sees beauty in you which no one has seen before, and you have good store of grain laid away

for hard times, a roof over you and a sweet stirring in your body what more can a woman ask for?" (Markanda 8).

Amitav Ghosh with his work the *Hungry Tide* (2005) tried to highlight ecological issues in India. He reveals how the conflict between nature and man becomes the root cause of destruction in Sunderbans. "It proves to be the most pertinent text, exploring the duel force of nature as the giver and destroyer of life" (Jha 5) He tries to warn human beings against the obvious exploitation of nature. He advocates that such countries where tides, landslides, floods and harsh landscapes are in abundance, death comes in many forms. "At no moment can human beings have any doubt of the terrains hostility to their presence, of its cunning and resourcefulness, of its determination to destroy or expel them. Every year, dozens of people perish in the embrace of that dense foliage, killed by tigers, snakes and crocodiles" (Ghosh 7).

The present work taken for the study is also a non-fiction and a thorough study on the environment and its queries which everyone has to ask. It is observed by the writer that many realistic novels were failures to raise the questions dealing with climate change. Now it has become imperative to focus on what is the need of the time and what the coming generation expect from the writers. Before going through the thorough study, one has to have a glimpse of the work.

*The Great Derangement* is one of greatest works of Amitav Ghosh which focuses on climate change. It exposes the human failure in the face of global warming. The Writer tries to examine our inability-at the level of literature, history and politics-to grasp the scale and violence of climate change. In this work, the writer tries to warn the present writers who have abdicated their social responsibility of protecting nature with heart and soul. It also emphasizes on if these people still fail to perform their duties in restricting global warming, we are sure to be punished by nature in near future.

It is believed that rivers like Ganga and Narmada are scared and those hauman being dip in these rivers, their sins are washes off. Secondly, they are like mothers who selflessly nourish people. Similarly, Satluj, Padama, Narbada and Godavari are significant in cultivating fields and barren land as well. The balance of these rivers is imperative to the growth of human being and environment. The Ganga is believed to be descended from heaven for the welfare of common people. Unfortunately, the water of these rivers is being misused and exploited by the consumerist society. It is essential to comprehend the significance of every drop of water either it is in ponds or in the rivers.

The consumerist society exploits the soils and water heavily resulting in flood in the rivers. The writer shared his childhood experience with us, stating that "the great river suddenly changed course, drowning the village; only a few of the inhabitants managed to escape to higher ground....when I look into my past the river seems to meet my eyes, staring back, as if to ask, do you recognize me, wherever you are?"(The Great Derangement 4-5). These lines are the reflective of the fact that the present condition of climate and environment is same as it was in his childhood when he witnessed flood in the river and forced him to go to the safer places. River has been personified to ask him what necessary steps are being taken by him to protect and preserve environment.

At this juncture the writer fails to respond, for he did nothing but watch just like other people. The writer tries to say through these lines that the global warming has begun to threaten the

very existence of those people who reside on the banks of rivers. This warning of the writer proved to be true in the recent flesh-floods taking place in Himachal and Utterakhand. In this natural calamity those houses were washed away which were constructed on the banks of rivulets. Besides, many activists like Medha Patkar are already involved in environmental movement which was against the construction of the dam across the Narbada River. In the words of Porselvi “Narbada Bachao Andolan was a people’s movement which unites nature rights with human rights (Porselvi 132)

Environment has also been prone to suffer at the hands of politics in our country. Framing Policies for environmental conservation is just to present before us a picture of the initiative taken by our political leaders. However, the reality exists behind the curtain where the policies lie in the closed files and nothing else. A number of activists tried to consider climate change as a matter of morality while politics of power overshadows morality. It is the need of hour to throng together and work collectively irrespective of all disciplines. Here the writer says that “when future generations look back upon the great derangement they will certainly blame the leaders and politicians of the time for their failure to address the climate crisis. But they may well hold artists and writers equally culpable-for the imagining of possibilities is not, after all, the job of politicians and bureaucrats” (*The Great Derangement* 181)

Health of our environment depends on the release of carbon emission. In the consumerist society, the success of an economy is decided by energy sources that produce low levels of green house gas emission. If it exceeds the level of green house emission, it adversely affects our climate. Besides, it has been observed how localized cultural practices shape water, landscape and air to some extent. Therefore the finality of words in the language is due to the existence of the entity. If the plants are lost and animals get extinct out of this world, the words appropriate to these objects are, too, lost shortly afterwards. Nature provides us a conducive setting to get ourselves acclimatized with her, but culture pays no attention towards her. Here the writer says that sometimes, culture fails to have healthy relationship with nature. Similarly the writer says that “The climate crisis is also a crisis of culture, Culture generates desires-for vehicles and appliances, for certain kind of gardens and dwellings-that are among the principal drivers of the carbon economy” (*The Great Derangement* 12)

## Conclusion

In the present paper, the writer believes that human beings have to take advantage of nature as per the requirement of their livelihood. It has been observed that culture turned out be villain in polluting nature to a large extent. So the writer wishes for the amiable relationship be maintained between nature and culture. The present work seems to advocate least interference of human politics in making policies regarding the non human entity. It has also been noticed that the present time requires an ideological change as well in spreading environmental consciousness among the masses. The writer focuses on environmental justice by advocating how to be free from ecological annihilation. He directs how to make proper use of natural resources for the wellbeing of human and non humans. He rejects exploitation of land, water, culture and people, considering the root cause of environmental degradation. He warns if the present writers fail to improve the present condition of environment, the coming generation will never forgive politicians, leaders, bureaucrats and even the literary writers for their reluctance towards nature and the destruction caused by global warming.

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Pratibha  
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