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ENVIRONMENTAL EXPLOITATION IN AMITAV GHOSH'S *THE GLASS PALACE*

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Abstract

*This study focuses on the environmental exploitation in the novel *The Glass Palace*. Amitav Ghosh is a celebrated Indian diasporic writer. He is known as a novelist, essayist and historian. Through his works, he combines imagination with history and reality. In his works, he covers a wide range of topics such as history, politics, migration, environment and culture. Further, he analyses the effects of colonialism on the lives of the people. In his writings he critiques modernity and environmental exploitation and its consequences that arise from human interference with nature. He presents how the plantation process exploits natural resources and how it disturbs the local ecosystem in Burma in the novel *The Glass Palace*. The narrative connects the history of Asian countries like India, Burma and Malaya. This story spans several generations and deals with how history and colonialism affect people over time. It highlights the impacts of the economic policies and environmental crisis on society.*

Keywords

Environment, Colonialism, Nature, Exploitation, History, etc.

Full Article

Introduction:

Nature is the foundation of human existence and it provides essential resources to humans. It regulates climate, promotes agriculture and maintains biodiversity. The ecosystem is the backbone of human life and it reflects the cultural identity and psychological well-being. This study examines the role of nature and how human recklessness has damaged ecological balance in the novel *The Glass Palace*. It was published in the year 2000. It is a historical novel that deals with the important political and economic events in South Asian countries. The novelist explores multi-dimensional themes in this novel. The narration has many stories and connects different characters and places. The novel focuses on the central character Raj Kumar and his journey from an orphan boy to an entrepreneur in the Burmese timber trade against the backdrop of World War II. It highlights the resource extraction and deforestation in Burma and their impacts on the natural environment. Further, it analyses the exploitation of the teak forest and the damage to the ecological system. The writer also presents the ecological impacts of war and its consequences in the destruction of nature. Ghosh symbolizes the resource depletion as an effect of human greed and reflects the connection between humans and the environment. This article examines how humans exploit natural resources for maintaining power and wealth.

Human-Nature Relationship:



The narration deals with the history of the last ruling monarch of Burma, King Thebaw and the decline of the royal family of Burma. Ghosh highlights the British annexation of Burma for its natural wealth especially the teak forest. He deals with human cunning and destructive nature for their profit through the character RajKumar. He starts his life in Burma as an orphan boy from India and working in Ma Cho's shop. He has high hopes and dreams about his life in the new environment. In Ma Cho's shop, he meets Saya John. They both developed a good friendship and understanding over the course of time. Saya John's presence and ideas influence Raj Kumar's life a lot. He learns about the British control over the teak forest and the business opportunity related to that through Saya John. As a young man with having thirst for success he was always ready to use every opportunity life gave him. He used British economic policies in Burma for his business interests. Every character in this novel engages with the natural world, sometimes thoughtfully and sometimes recklessly.

The novelist presents the beauty of Burma in different aspects. Through the description of Burma's natural wealth like forests, minerals and gems, he highlights the wealth aspects of early Burma. After the British occupation they exploited the natural wealth and land for their economic benefits. They introduced new machines and plantations and disturbed the natural cycle in many ways. It contributed to environmental pollution in various ways and required more workers to work on the plantation. It led to the slave trade and people from different countries settled in Burma. Raj Kumar made use of this opportunity and traveled to India, gathering labourers from different regions to work on Burma's rubber and teak plantations. He invested the money from this labour contract in the teak business with the guidance of Saya John. He is a man of curiosity and learns from experience. With the help of Saya John, he created a reputable name for himself in the teak trade business and became a respected businessman. He also became involved in deforestation for his business and economic development. AmitavGhosh presents how humans destroy nature for their own benefit through the characters of Raj Kumar and Saya John. Both share the belief that natural resources are the sources of wealth and prosperity. The text provides a deep insight of how human activities and personal ambitions damage the natural balance that once connected people to the land. It also shows how this bonding between the land and its people slowly fell apart over time.

The novel presents a detailed picture of Rajkumar and Saya John's experience and growth in their business. Their business heavily depends on the river because they transfer the goods through riverboats. Saya John earns much profit in his business by providing supplies and provisions to the teak camps. Ghosh clearly portrays the exploitation of the forest for teak. As stated, "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" (Ghosh, 69). The novelist mentions the cutting of the tree as killing and explains the process of how the woodcutter cuts the tree and the equipment he uses. He presents the details of the tree's fall on the ground. The writer compares the process of cutting trees for teak wood to assassination and explores how this process harms the natural world. Ghosh examine how human intervention and pollution devastate natural order and causing environmental degradation. He shared the details of the logs journey to timber yards and the use of elephants in the transportation. Saya John shared the value and economic importance of teak to Rajkumar and stated that "one was a weed that served to flavor soup while the other came from a tree that had felled dynasties, caused invasions, created fortunes, brought a new way of life into being" (Ghosh, 71).

War and Ecological Destruction:

In the novel *The Glass Palace* war played a crucial role and its impacts on the ecology of Burma are highly significant. Both the British and Japanese armies fought to occupy the land mainly for



its natural resources. As they marched through the forest, they constructed roads and tracks, which significantly damaged and heavily polluted the ecosystem of the country. They both want to hold control of the raw materials such as oil, teak and rubber. The timber yards cut the trees aggressively for military needs, profit rather than sustainability. Businessmen like RajKumar took advantage of colonial needs such as the development of infrastructure, new buildings, newly developed railways and the necessity of raw materials like teak wood for new constructions. This incident states how humans drove towards money instead of living along with nature for their livelihood. Saya John shared his memory of his native place Malaca how once the place was covered with pepper vines which are now replaced by a rubber plantation. These plantations entirely changed the landscape and the lives of the people too. Dense forests are being destroyed and replaced by rubber plantations. Through this plantation Ghosh, presents the effects of the loss of biodiversity, human suffering and cultural disruption. This shows how living landscapes are transformed into spaces exploited for economic profit. Here, the novel addresses the consequences of human greed. Everything such as forests, water and human beings is viewed as a resource to be exploited to the utmost. Burma becomes the source of wealth for the British. This is in total contrast to the beliefs of the ancestors, who led a life without disturbing or damaging nature.

The novelist explores human supremacy over nature to project their power and dominance but the consequences are destructive. Both war and economic interest change a wealthy nation into a barren land. The novel highlights the significance of war and its impacts on the physical and personal space. It devastates the natural as well as the personal relationships of people. Ghosh presents that all these are the effects of humans' irresponsibility towards nature. The narration provides a detailed sketch of the natural world including forest, village, estates and the connected community. The ecosystem was totally exploited by the British in the name of modernization. They considered the country and its natural resources as a source for their factories and involved people with ambitions for fame and wealth, like RajKumar and depleted the natural resources for their own profit. Their actions changed the entire landscape, the connected ecosystem and the lives of the people who depended on the land. In the name of progress they damaged and disturbed the ecological system of the country. Both the English and the natives destroyed the forest for their own benefit.

Cultural and Livelihood Challenges:

The narration describes the teak camps in the jungle and provides a detailed account of the processes involved in teak wood production in a detailed way. It describes how they use elephants for logging the woods and the river for floating the logs, making it easier to transport them to the next area. Saya John shares the European way of thinking and their knowledge regarding the use of natural wealth for human profit. He says that, "To bend the work of nature to your will; to make the trees of the earth useful to human beings- what could be more admirable, more exciting than this?" (Ghosh, 75). The novelist presents the different regions of Burma and how they were engaged by the British traders. There are many water resources, mountain regions and lands of the inhabitants now used for the teak production. The areas that were once inhabited by indigenous people and rich in nature are now settled by many loggers and elephant trainers. The teak production and the related activities have brought a new way of life to the people.

The novel deals with different kinds of diseases like Dengue, Malaria and Anthrax. The British used Elephants to move logs and they arranged camps in the forest. The elephants are affected by anthrax and most of them have died. Deforestation and its impacts highly affect both humans and animals in that region. As stated, "The slope was very steep and after months of pounding from enormous logs, its surface was crumbling into powder" (Ghosh, 98). The assistant of the camp forced the young oo-si to use this steep with his elephant and free the obstinate log.



The consequence was bad. He was crushed and died. The aggressive elephant attacked the assistant officer in the teak camp and killed. This incident highlights the effects of natural disasters caused by humans, as well as the fact that they too suffer the consequences. Human intervention in the natural world disturbs living beings and their routines, forcing them to change their behavior and living pattern. Ghosh presents the effects of conflicts between humans and wildlife and their impacts in the novel *The Glass Palace*.

The story portrays the depletion of Burma's oil wealth by English merchants. The writer presents the oil wealth of the nation and shows how it was used by the indigenous people for their own needs. The English merchants noticed the resource and bought the land from the local people and introduced advanced machinery to extract oil from the land. Before that, these lands were less populated but after the creation of oil wells they were occupied by outsiders and became densely populated and polluted as well. Now, both the local communities and the English consider the land as a means to increase their income without feeling any guilt about damaging it. They created many oil wells and drained the resources for their profit and increased their wealth. Oil was extracted for British factories, wars and ships. They spoiled the land through careless use of heavy machinery and scarring and disrupting natural balance. This demonstrates how humans have exploited and degraded nature for their own benefit.

Conclusion:

The study analyses the significant environmental issues in the backdrop of war, power and economic policies in the novel *The Glass Palace*. Amitav Ghosh explores how natural resources particularly the teak trade and rubber plantation led to extensive environmental exploitation in Burma. Through his narration, Ghosh portrays the destructive impacts of imperial occupation on landscapes and the treatment of the natural world. In this novel, imperial powers treat the forest as a commodity to be exploited for economic and military interests. It illustrates that environmental degradation is closely connected to the power and control. It shows that the exploitation of natural resources is linked to economic and political domination. The novel expressed the idea that human greed and uncontrolled development can slowly destroy the balance of nature. Nature is not just a resource to be used; it is something that needs care and respect. *The Glass Palace* provides an early insight into Ghosh's environmental concerns, a perspective that is further developed in his later writings on ecology.

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