

Capitalist versus Indigenous: Environmental Uncanny in Amitav Ghosh's Ghost-Eye

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ABSTRACT

Amitav Ghosh is an Indian author of exceeding interest in ecological standpoints and narratives in most of his fictions and nonfiction. Ghost-Eye of Amitav is a novel that talks about reincarnation, climatic change and the conflict between the capitalist and indigenous. He presents Islands of Sundarban as the setting of the novel which he used in his previously published fiction that acts as a significant character of the novel. Amitav Ghosh talks about environmental Uncanny in The Great Derangement as nature becoming the central character in the human world that occurs in improbable events. The recognition is the awareness of the non human presence during climatic change, he insists writers to deal in literary framework, particularly the fiction. In accordance with his awareness, he presents the novel Ghost- Eye with Uncannies that transits the narrative of nature as a background to the central character, breaking the traditional discourse of using the nonhuman as their backdrop. The environmental Uncannies are analyzed through the literary narrative in the novel..

Keywords: Ecocriticism, Environmental Uncanny, Amitav Ghosh, climatic change, capitalism.....

Amitav Ghosh is an Indian writer whose works mainly deal with environmental issues through his personal journey of research concerning the environmental crisis. His increasing focus on climatic change makes him a significant ecocritic, positioning him as a leading voice in ecological discourse where he connects colonialism, capitalism and environmental degradation. Ghost-Eye of Amitav Ghosh is one such recently published novel where he touches again the subject of the conflict between the indigenous and capitalists and climatic change that he used the same theme in his previously published novel. Also he uses the setting as Sundarban, the ecologically important and wealthy part of the continent where he used the same setting in his most critically acclaimed novel, The Hungry Tide. The narrative of Ghost-Eye reveals the condition of the village Lusibari which is the prominent setting of The Hungry tide where almost all the main characters reside. Ghosh uses this novel to show the destructing state of the Sundarban by climatic change to create awareness over the non-human world.

In The Great Derangement, Ghosh observes that the climatic change that the world face now is once the world considered as "extreme improbability" (32) that in some countries like Brazil they even fail to take measures, "they refused to believe the hurricanes were possible in Brazil" (35). When it occurs for real, they find a mystery or strangeness in the climatic change and the irreducible mystery, Ghosh calls it as uncanny. Uncanny is a term introduced by Freud in his essay, Uncanny and he defines that it is "the species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and long had been familiar" (124). Morton in Ecological Thought, claims that Sigmund Freud's essay The Uncanny is essential for grasping the ecological (4). Ghosh uses the word uncanny to "express the strangeness of what is unfolding around us" (40). He explains that the environmental uncanny is different from supernatural uncanny as it "pertains to nonhuman forces and beings" (42). Ghosh observes the Freudian uncanny pertaining to climatic change is the moment of recognition of something we are already aware of. The uncanny produces the feel that we are always being heard and our actions being observed by nonhuman entities. The uncanny appears when unfamiliar becomes familiar in the moment when nonhuman forces act to appear active and animate during climatic change.

In Ghost- Eye, the setting of the novel Sundarbans itself uncanny as it acts as a main character as all the characters is either being affected or affecting it. The capitalist and politically supported, Chhoto Sardar planned to do cultivation of tiger prawn, the growing business in Sundarban that demanded certain amount of capitals that only benefited those who have money. He demanded the land of Benoy mondal, father of Isha who later incarnated to Varsha after her death. When Benoy Mondal refused to sell the land, he was falsely accused by the Forest Department and got arrested and later murdered. Varsha and her mother too adamantly denied to sell their land that led the capitalist to kill the mother and rape Isha. In that event, a cobra which is believed as a goddess of the natives, Manasa Devi frightened the attackers and bit Isha to save her from being sold

to the traffickers. Though Chhoto ignored it as coincidence, the succeeding incidents haunted him. When he began to think that he had succeeded in getting the land and house of Benoy, unprecedented things appeared. Four months after the murder, the cyclone arose in the embankment that swept the house and flooded the pond. Also, when they again repaired the embankment to start the cultivation, each time it was met with a storm that swept the prawns away. Later Chhoto Sardar in drunken state he fell and drowned himself in one of his ponds. Here the revenge of the murder of the poor helpless native family is handled by the nature itself. All of a sudden, nature acts as a hero, standing against the villainous capitalist and siding with the indigenous. K.C. Abraham posits that the social justice issue is the ecological justice issues as indigenous depends on nature completely. (Frederick 97) The entry of the King Cobra and the series of climatic change are uncanny. The climatic change Ghosh in *The Great Derangement* calls it as “their uncanny lies precisely in the fact that in these encounters we recognize.

something we had turned away from: that is to say, the presence and proximity of the nonhuman interlocuters.” (40). Ghosh reveals the hypocrisy of the capitalist who pretend to work for progress, masking their actual intention to grow richer by building projects in remote islands. Tipu, the native of the Sundarban, unlike other natives, gains knowledge of the world and the working of the capitalist through the internet. He calls the ignorance of the billionaires to climatic change and catastrophe like pandemic as “Malthusian correction” (Ghosh 231). Regarding controlling the population, they want the other people to be swept away. “They have always thought of us Dalits and tribals as disposable meat” (231) and he also says it is a “war of extermination” (232) that “they want to eliminate by weaponizing the environment.” (232) The solution Ghosh offers for this issue through the narrative of Tipu. He talks about Ghost- Eye that some of the natives possess. Native Americans talk about Ghost Eyes that they can see two worlds: one is ordinary and the other only Ghost Eyes can see. Tipu is a Ghost eye who began to feel strange when he was bitten by a snake in Manasa Devi temple which is a narrative of Gun Island. From that time, he had been seeing visions that warned of the destruction of nonhumans. Also some of the Ghost Eyes possessed people would have special gifts that they make an “irruption” (233). He calls the change in activities of nonhuman forces during the capture of the refugee boat as irruption which was performed by a Lebanon Woman who was a Ghost Eye. During the incident, the Italian coastguard who turned their back initially, decided to save the refugees being consumed by the circling of birds, dolphins and the sudden silence. The discovery of the one who possesses Ghost Eye is uncanny. As the uncanny explained as “the ecological uncanny is most commonly experienced as the sense of ourselves as foreign bodies. The secreted, concealed thing in nature is us, and although we secreted ourselves there, the discovery makes us strange to ourselves.” (Giggs 201). The Ghost eye possessed woman lived for many lives and the knowledge that people like her have, Tipu believes as a solution to the war of extermination he discussed.

The practicality of the Ghost Eye is demonstrated in the later part of the novel. The energy corporation planned to build a coal burning company in the island of Sundarbans, which they obviously knew as a threat to the environment as a similar project in Bangladesh had a disastrous impact. To prevent this, Tipu along with Varsha who has special ability as a ghost eye, plans to gather the ghost eyes to form a guild to perform the irruption in Makara Sarasanti which is the native’s celebration of guardian spirit of the forest, BonBibi. Tipu believed that a portal will open up between our everyday world and another unseen one when bunch of ghost eye gather as he believed that ghost eyes are selected by nature itself. They challenged the corporates and the radicals. The energy corporation planned to build the factory in the ruins of the Manasa temple. When the protesters and supporters of Manasa Devi gathered, they evicted out forcefully. Here, the nature began to step in to protest in the form of irruption in Sundarban. An unusual change in the pattern and behaviour of the nonhumans is observed in the site fenced by corporates. Royal Bengal Tigers twice in two days appeared in full view which is almost unheard of in Sundarbans. The murder of the crows scared the security forces, the appearance of eighteen foot king Cobra and the huge fish die off in the river that “hundreds of thousands of dead fish floated up to the surface” (306) attracted the attention of the masses. Thus the sudden change in nature is the uncanny which the capitalist tried to ignore by scientifically justifying the change. On the day of Makara Sankranti, thirty thousand people and media gathered and witnessed the apparition of Manasa Devi as a sphere of light glowing around the outline of the female figure” (309) who was Varsha. The radicals kept falsifying the occurrence by calling the fish die off as due to oxygen depletion and the light during the apparition as a gas flare, but they got ignored in the end. The Calcutta High Court issued an emergency stay order on the power plant and ghost eye guild has been given the go-ahead to go global.

It is clearly a conflict between the indigenous and the capitalist. The indigenous when they try to protect the environment from the capitalist, nature in uncanniest ways steps to protect the indigenous. The boundary between the real and the supernatural began to fade, when the government began to take measures by believing in the apparition. The radicals, however hard they tried, failed to persuade the people through scientific reasons. The reincarnation which is the central theme of the novel, Ghosh says in an interview, that from a radical point of view it is hard to ignore the reincarnation, as there exist lots of testimonies regarding it. During the two major incidents, nature becomes the central character that shows its vitality that is hard to ignore. This transition of the nature from ignorant to the main character is the moment of recognition that we already aware and repressed, Ghosh calls it as:

the uncanny and improbable events that are beating our doorsteps that are beating at our doors seem to have stirred out a sense of recognition, an awareness that humans were never alone, that we have always been surrounded by beings of all sorts who shares elements of that which we had thought to be most distinctively of our own. (40-41)

Through the climatic change after the murder, the irruption and the apparition, nature appears to converse effectively. It violates, and reacts in the form of climatic change. It appears active rather than passive, animate rather than inanimate expressing its vitality in the human world. The author neither wrote the novel as magical realism and surrealism nor as a science fiction but as a novel that needs attention of awareness over the climatic change. Siobhan Carroll says that “if traditional Nature Discourse works to detail the difference between man and nature, the ‘ecological uncanny’ undoes this cultural work, exposing the human in the natural and vice versa.” (1). The conflict between the radicalism and the indigenous belief appears throughout the novel and in the end the author shows the success of indigenous belief over scepticism when nature decides to appear as a main character acting in accordance with the belief of indigenous. Thus the ecological uncanny Ghosh explained in his nonfiction *The Great Derangement* is observed to be handled in *Ghost- Eye...*

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