

Cultural Exploration: Amitav Ghosh's *The Living Mountain: A Fable For Our Times* – Local Wisdom Of Conservation As Preserving Nature Through Culture

Rekha Kumari¹

PhD Research Scholar, University Department of English,
Binod Bihari Mahto Koyalanchal University, Dhanbad, Jharkhand

Dr Mohan Lal Mahto²,

Supervisor, Assistant Professor, Department of English
P.K. Roy Memorial College Dhanbad, Jharkhand

Abstract: Cultural exploration is a way of learning and discovering the hidden meanings, experiences, self-awareness, and understanding of everyday life. Conserving nature is a crucial issue in today's times, where culture plays a vital role. Climate change is the biggest challenge worldwide, and the biggest cause of this problem is the imbalance in nature. Amitav Ghosh is a well-known national and international author. Most of his works deal with the cultural aspects of life. He presents culture as a masterpiece to awaken people about their environment and nature. Ghosh takes readers to their own land and connects them with their roots. His book *The Living Mountain: A Fable For Our Times* is set in a Himalayan valley, the story follows the perspective of cultural experiences and interference from outsiders. Amitav Ghosh shows the wisdom of local ways of living. This study aims to show the cultural experiences and local wisdom of saving nature. This study emphasizes the role of culture in saving nature and controlling environmental crisis. This study high the need to save cultural experiences and provide a scientific and logical perspective of looking at culture.

Keywords: Local Wisdom, Culture, Environment, Cultural Awareness, Nature, Preservation

INTRODUCTION

Literature is the collection of stories, ideas, knowledge, logic, awareness, experiences, power, and more. Amitav Ghosh is an author of Indian writing in English. His works primarily deal with environmental issues and their impact. He has won numerous national and international awards for his works. He is a recipient of the Sahitya Akademi Award (1989), Prix Medicis Étranger(1990), Padma Shri(2007), the Jnanpith Award(2018), and the Erasmus Prize(2024).He is a leading author of both fiction and non-fiction works. He has written *The Calcutta Chromosome*, *Countdown*, *Ibis Trilogy*, *The Great Derangement*, *Gun Island*, and *The Living Mountain: A Fable for Our Times*. This study focuses on *The Living Mountain: A Fable For Our Times* and explores the local knowledge surrounding it. Amitav Ghosh's *The Living Mountain: A Fable for Our Times*, as the title suggests, is a fable for our times, addressing the current state of humanity. Through the story, Ghosh reflects on the need for deeper understanding and the challenges of the present. Through his book he reflects among people the consequences of their actions towards nature and the environment.

India has been a country of diverse communities and is also renowned for its unity in diversity. This diversity is reflected in lifestyle, language, food, clothing, art, beliefs, festivals, religion, and more. Amitav Ghosh sheds light on the beliefs of Indians and connects them with the well-being of nature. His main concern is the native people and their simplicity. Deforestation is at its peak. This is an open invitation to natural disasters. The reasons behind deforestation are land for agriculture, buildings, furniture, industry, and urbanisation. This invites climate change, loss of biodiversity, soil erosion, and degradation. These things are happening badly, and not only humans but all living beings are paying. Deforestation in the name of development is not taken seriously. Development means a comfortable life for only one species on earth. This is the book *Countdown* written by Amitav Ghosh which shows development based on destruction. In the book *Countdown*, Ghosh has shown the life of the people around Pokhran. Pokhran is the area which was chosen by the government for nuclear testing. The book *Countdown* is about Khetoloi which is 6 km away from Pokhran. "We had never heard of cancer before in this area. But people began to get cancer after the test. There were. strange skin diseases"(Ghosh 08). Nuclear power is a crucial weapon for any country to

defend itself against international threats. This book *Countdown* depicts the aftermath of the 1974 nuclear tests. The Khetoloi area is covered in radioactivity. The effects are felt on new-born babies, who suffer from limb defects, and on calves who are blind and have tongues and eyes misplaced on their faces. Ghosh sheds light on the future consequences. “Some day we will sink and this is not anything to do with China or with Pakistan. It is because this country is cursed to put up with a leadership that has chosen to sell it for their own personal aggrandizement” (Ghosh 49).

Local Wisdom of Conservation

The Living Mountain: A Fable for Our Times is a story set in a Himalayan valley where the people of the valley believed that a mountain known as Mahaprabat or the Great Mountain was different from all the mountains in the world. “our ancestors had told us that of all the world’s mountains ours was the most alive; that it would protect us and look after us- but only on condition that we told stories about it, and danced for it – but always from a distance” (Ghosh 07). This reflects the simplicity of the valley's people. The locals believe this wholeheartedly. These lines clearly state that they must maintain a distance from the mountain, preventing people from thinking about its harm. The people of the valley view every aspect of the mountain with a view to preserving it. They treat things as if they are unique and found only in our valley, making it our responsibility to protect them. “This tree, which grew only in our Valley and nowhere else, produced, things that were so miraculous that we called it the Magic Tree. It’s leaves kept insects away; its wood was impermeable to water; its roots nourished rare mushrooms; its flowers produced exquisitely scented honey; and its fruits was delicious to eat” (Ghosh 08). The cultural experiences of the people of the valley beautifully illustrate the contribution and protection of all types of trees. It is a norm in the valley to listen to the stories of their ancestors with attention and love, and everyone follows this. Celebrations in the valley are meant to express gratitude to the Great Mountain. The people of the valley live around nature and are well aware of its importance. The celebrations of the people of the valley reflect a deep message towards nature: “We exist because of you.”

Cultural Confluence with Nature

“When dancing, they would go into a trance and afterwards they would tell us that they had felt the Mountain speaking to them through the soles of their feet”(Ghosh 10). In *Living Mountain*, Amitav Ghosh reveals the cultural belief of the people of the valley that the great mountain is alive and distinct. Because of this belief, people treat the great mountain like a member of their family, sometimes even more than a family member. The cultural practices of the people of the valley towards the great mountain include ceremonies to express gratitude, folk dances and songs for well-being, avoiding climbing too many people, and treating it like living beings. Every action of the people of the valley towards the great mountain reflects their dedication of love and care for their surroundings. Ghosh reveals the indigenous people's age-old behavior towards nature and the understanding behind these cultural practices. This awakens the indigenous people's cultural beliefs and reconnects people with nature.

Amitav Ghosh talks about the interference of outsiders and how local knowledge is ruined through his book *The Living Mountain: A Fable For Our Times*. “They had laughed at our inherited ideas of the mountain’s sacredness”(Ghosh 26). The outsiders ignored the ideals of the natives. The new generation began to imitate the outsiders and began climbing the mountain in large numbers. That resulted a massive landslide. “We saw that the combined weight of all the climbers had unsettled the snow on the lower slopes of the Mountain. As a result, a series of devastating landslides and avalanches had swept through our Valley, killing vast numbers of our fellow villagers”(Ghosh 24). Ghosh highlights the loss of culture and the loss of environmental balance. He emphasizes the message behind these cultural practices. He portrays the cultural practices of the indigenous people of the Himalayan valley as safeguards for both humans and nature. He explores the idea that if nature is harmed, humans will be unable to protect themselves. Through *The Living Mountain*, Ghosh also hints to indigenous people that if a natural disaster occurs, the lives of the poor and innocent people will be the first to suffer. This provides a way for indigenous people to protect their surroundings from outsiders. Traditional beliefs help maintain a connection with nature. Hindu cultural beliefs in India are based on natural aspects. This religion defies all essential natural objects as gods and goddesses. “In Hindu religion, it is a traditional belief that nature shows a reverence for five basic elements i.e., Earth (Prithvi), Fire (Agni), Water (Jal), Air(Wayo) and Space (Akash). All the five elements are treated as a body of God and are worshipped. These five elements are protected for religious, cultural and spiritual reasons” (Kandari 02). These five elements are essential for survival, and tradition teaches people that the human body is also a part of nature. Tradition conveys the message that if nature is destroyed, life on Earth will end. According to

Russian news reports, “The biggest snow fall in 60 years on Russia's Far Eastern Kamchatka Peninsula created vast drifts several metres tall that blocked building entrances and buried cars, according to Reuters visuals and weather monitoring stations”(Faulconbridge). This isn't the first environmental crisis. Every year, people face different kinds of environmental crises. Several states in India have recorded the highest rainfall ever recorded. “Punjab is suffering from one of the worst floods in the last 37 years”(Sagar). “Uttarakhand has been severely affected. Cloudbursts, flash floods, and landslides have razed houses, bridges, and fields. Rudraprayag and Chamoli districts were severely affected.” (Sagar). Every year, environmental challenges arise, impacting both humans and other living creatures. Industrial culture is at its peak, and people are deeply engrossed in this culture, showing no concern for their surroundings. Ghosh highlights this serious issue of environmental imbalance through his fiction and non-fiction works. He is concerned about cultural and natural degradation, showcases the beauty of cultural practices, and strengthens the traditional beliefs of local people to protect nature. He presents traditional beliefs as a way to protect nature from human greed. The story of *The Living Mountain: A Fable For Our Times* is about a landslide in a valley where people have strayed far from their culture. Here, Ghosh incorporates culture as a protective shield to protect nature. The local understanding behind cultural rules and regulations teaches the art of protecting both nature and humans.

CONCLUSION

In the book *The Living Mountain: A Fable For Our Times*, the people of the valley are symbolic representations of the developing nation and its challenges. The local wisdom of the valley's people is reflected in their stories, folk songs and dances, celebrations, rituals, and cultural practices. These beliefs are dedicated to nature. Local wisdom forbids outsiders from approaching their Great Mountains. Amitav Ghosh portrays life in the valley as a peaceful, less comfortable, but without environmental disasters. He shows the changing mindset of the people and its impact on life and nature. Ultimately, the people of the valley realize the wisdom behind their cultural practices when outsiders assume that these practices are the secret to the mountains and the people of the valley's longevity. “there was some wisdom in your beliefs after all. Can you please tell us your old stories, sing us your old songs, show us your dances – so that we can determine whether your mountain really is alive or not?” (Ghosh 34).

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