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## **Creating Ethical and Eco-friendly Communities in Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace***

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### **ABSTRACT**

In this paper, we shall see the materialistic intent behind the British invasion of Burma and their lucrative teak trade. We shall explore how Amitav Ghosh presents the problems of conserving biodiversity, distrusts materialistic forces that crush indigenous dissent, and takes part in the new emerging paradigm of making a Material Turn. He thus considers possible ways of analyzing language and reality, human and non-human life, mind and matter, without falling into dichotomous patterns of thinking. Ghosh has often probed into the reasons for the postcolonial writer's imaginative failure in the face of ecological devastation. He examines the inability of the present generation to speak of the loss of the habitat and posits that this indifference is reflected in the postcolonial literature of our time, in the recording of colonial history, and the political ambiance of our day. Ghosh posits that contemporary writers need to find new modes of thinking, create imaginative forms of fiction where ethical, and inspire the existence of ethical, eco-friendly communities.

**Keywords:** Ecocriticism; colonialism; materialism; postcolonialism.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

In his work of fiction, *The Glass Palace* (2000), Amitav Ghosh, an Indian diasporic writer, through his ecocritical writing focuses on the political and geopolitical tensions that exist between the colonizer and the colonized during the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. Ghosh's narrative traverses the epoch of the freedom struggle movement from British rule in South-East Asia (Desai & Hawley 2019). He reveals the fictional lay of the land before and after mineral-rich Burma was ravaged by its precious gems, teak, ivory and petroleum reserves resulting in its present-day deplorable status of being classified among the poor nations in the world (Tizzoni 2018; Poray-Wybranowska & Ball 2020). *Global Finance Magazine* (2020) ranks Burma as the fifty-eighth poorest country in the world with a Gross domestic

product (GDP) based on purchasing-power-parity (PPP) of 6707\$. He shows how the ecological balance established by elephants and humans in rubber and teak plantations in South Asia is distraught by the colonial enterprise. In *The Glass Palace* (2000), Ghosh traces three generations of history to reveal how the British colonial enterprise resulted in the free plundering of Burmese natural resources like teak, ivory, and petroleum.

On the one hand, this paper will delve into how Ghosh's account reveals the efforts of human endeavor to create material prosperity; while on the other side, it will discover how ethical, eco-friendly communities sprout in the fictional space to discover, identify, protect and conserve threatened inter-connected ecosystems and eco-societies in our 'Endangered Earth'. My use of the term the 'Endangered Earth' draws inspiration from Jan 2, 1989, *Time Magazine* (1989) issue cover page that bears the image of the planet Earth fettered in twine with a dark crepuscular sun in its background. Instead of choosing a 'Man of the Year' for its cover, *Time Magazine* (1989) chose the title 'Planet of the Year: Endangered Earth'. We shall see how Ghosh's fictional enterprise falls within the sphere of postcolonial ecocriticism that considers the problems of conserving biodiversity, distrusts the grandeur of empty materialistic quests, and stresses the need to make a material turn. The term 'material turn' is used by Serenella Iovino in her work *Material Ecocriticism* (2014) in which she describes the existence of material forces and substances - the agency of things and their role in materialistic societies, and how narratives and stories contribute to making meaning out of the material world. Ghosh's work is representative of the fundamental premise of ecocriticism that "human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it" (Glofelty 1996, xix). In his work *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (2016), Amitav Ghosh wonders if the present generation is deranged. He warns readers that "this era, which so congratulates itself on its self-awareness, will come to be known as the time of the Great Derangement" (Ghosh 2016, p. 11). This paper thus proposes to contemplate how Ghosh's ecocritical writing is the best of all cultural forms to voice ecocritical awareness and aims at "the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature" (Rueckert 1996, p. 107).

## **NARRATIVES OF RIVER DISPLACEMENT**

In *The Glass Palace* (2000), Amitav Ghosh mines his own experience by recalling childhood family accounts of his father and his uncle, the late Jagat Chandra Datta of Rangoon. The narrative uses the Irrawaddy River to link together moments and scenes that are in some way distinctive or different from the historical account of events in Myanmar or erstwhile Burma. Ghosh muses in: *Climate Change and the Unthinkable* "Even a child will begin a story about his grandmother with the words: 'In those days the river wasn't here, and the village was not where it is...'" (2016 p. 6). Ghosh traces his family's experience as ecological refugees when they were displaced from their roots on the banks of the Padma River in the mid-1850s. The mighty river decided to change course on a whim thus displacing its inhabitants.

Similarly, in *The Hungry Tide* (2004), Ghosh writes of the fickle nature of the waterscape in the Sundarbans that evolve depending on the vagaries of the ebb and flow tides. Likewise, in *The Ibis Trilogy* (2019), Ghosh describes the opium river trade and describes how the drug is ferried from the wharves of the silty Hoogly River in West Bengal in India to the port city of Canton on the Pearl River in Southern China. The Burmese riverscape stands as a witness to history as its waters ripple down the

Irrawaddy River each time the British cannonballs were fired into the marketplace of Mandalay. The vagrant inhabitants on riverboats called *sampans* traverse forests and dry land moving westward to seek refuge in other civilization-housing-peaceful water spaces. Through the eyes of the protagonist Rajkumar, a Hindu from Chittagong in India, the reader-voyager discovers how his family had drifted slowly down the Bay of Bengal coast with his father using his knowledge of figures and languages to earn a livelihood. But the river in the fictional space, a stable presence in the lives of the river folk transforms into a foe that could not be relied on, as the colonizer takes control over it to conduct colonial trade. In this indeterminate fluid river space on the Irrawaddy River, Ghosh reveals the varied quests, travels, expeditions, and voyages of the protagonists in the eco-narrative. *The Glass Palace* (2000) is an account of the materialistic intent behind the British East India Company's exploitation of timber and rubber in colonial Burma. Ghosh's eco-narrative highlights the empire-sized fortunes earned by the materialistically oriented British traders and pictures the suffering faced by the Burmese, Indian and Malayan populations who constitute the indigenous manpower and cheap labor force.

### VOICING THE CRIES OF VOICELESS NATURE

In *The Glass Palace* (2000), Ghosh paints a vivid picture of how the British wipe out teak forests, convert them into timber yards for commercial purposes, and wipe out unique flora and fauna. Dolly, while roaming around the rubber plantation, observes the changes in the landscape and realizes that the "ground underfoot had a soft, cushioned feel, because of the carpet of dead leaves shed by the tress. The slope ahead was scored with the shadows of thousands of trunks, all exactly parallel, like scratches scored by a machine" (Ghosh 2000, p. 199). The tactile feeling of dead leaves on her feet combined with the visual portrayal of the landscape speaks of the agony undergone by the imperial teak tree. Through the drastic change in the landscape from rich and fertile forests of teak to that of a bare landscape without any vegetation, Ghosh highlights the effects of greedy colonial enterprise on nature. The rivers witness a flux of activity as a flotilla of British ships ferry teak and spices to the Empire. The peaceful Irrawaddy River is transformed into a commercial waterway. The *chaungs* or rushing mountain streams of Burma are transformed into teak trade winds. The teak tree assumes the status of a tree that had "felled dynasties, caused invasions, created fortunes, brought a new way of life into being" (Ghosh 2000, p. 71). The West's fascination for the East as evident in the Orientalist quest for spices resulted in the ensuing discovery of rubber and teak: "The rise of global capitalism all occurred together [...]. Gold and silver from the West crossed the Atlantic or the Pacific, it ultimately found its way to Asia (east of Suez) to purchase the "riches of the East" and to allow the otherwise deprived inhabitants of the northwest Eurasian peninsula to share in the fabled Oriental splendours" (Trocki 1999, pp. 7-8). This idea stems from Edward Said's contention in *Orientalism* (1998) where he describes 'Orientalism' as the Western attitude that views Eastern societies as exotic, primitive, and inferior. This "ineradicable distinction between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority" (p. 881) is evident in Ghosh's postcolonial textual response in *The Glass Palace* (2000) where the margins write back and lay bare materialistic colonial intent of the past by reconfiguring and reliving the teak trade in the fictional space.

Ghosh describes how the chopped trees were left to rot and die as timber yards began to sprout around them. In the fictional space, Saya John and Rajkumar native

teak merchants work for hand in glove with the British, exploit the valuable resource for lucrative gain, and reap rich profits, ferrying supplies and provisions to teak camps. The deceptive way in which the indigenous folk makes money is what Rueckert calls “the self-destructive or suicidal motive that is inherent in our prevailing and paradoxical attitude towards nature” (1996, p. 107). Ghosh describes how by driving a girdle that cut thin incisions into the imperial teak trees at a height of four feet and six inches of the ground, the assassinated trees voiced agony by emanating “great tocsins of protest as they fell, unloosing thunderclap explosions that could be heard miles away, bringing down everything in their path, rafts of saplings” (Ghosh 2000, p. 69). The wanton felling results in other species of flora being destroyed as the land turns barren. The teams of elephant handlers called *oo-sis* and *pe-sis* goaded elephants to work. *Pa-kyeiks*, a handful of men specialized in fastening steel harnesses darted in and out between the elephants’ legs to create the right fiction necessary to haul the logs to the waterfront. The logs would then await the arrival of the monsoon rains when the frothing waters of *chaungs* would push the waters from feeder streams to the tributaries of the River Irrawaddy. Another group of natives called ‘*aungingor* herdsman’ would use their native skills to clear the *chaungs* from logjams and congestions. The tame temple elephants in Burmese pagodas and the ceremonial elephants in palaces fall prey to colonial exploitation as the British decide to transform them into logging elephants for their commercial profits.

Yet until the Europeans came none of them had ever thought of using elephants for logging [...]. It was the Europeans who saw that tame elephants could be made to work for human profit [...] the entire way of life is their creation [...] this method of girdling trees, these ways of moving logs with elephants, this system of floating them downriver (Ghosh 2000, p. 74-5).

In his article, “Nature and Science,” Christopher Manes contends that in the present status quo, nature is silent with speech being essentially a human prerogative in our culture. But human exploitation and degradation of natural resources have resulted in mankind being more sensitive to ecological concerns and interpreting other forms of ecological understanding, sensitivity, and consciousness. Like Manes, Ghosh’s fictional sleight of hand advocates the idea of environmental ethics that restore man to the “humbler status of homo sapiens: one species among millions of other beautiful, terrible, fascinating, and signifying forms” (Manes 1996, 26). By giving voice to the teak trees, Ghosh contributes to what Manes calls ecological knowledge and thoughtfulness where one is involved in “metaphorically relearning the language of birds – the passions, pains, and cryptic intents of other biological communities that surround us and silently interpenetrate our existence” (Manes 1996, p. 25). In the fictional space, the River Irrawaddy with its timber-laid cargo transforms into a furious-seething force that turns gloomy and inflamed as it is made to participate in the process of ecological destruction.

When the timber-heavy streams of the monsoons debouched into the Irrawaddy, the impact was that of colliding trains. The difference was that this was an accident continuously in the making, a crash that carried on uninterrupted night and day, for weeks on end. The river was now a swollen angry torrent, racked by clashing currents and pock-marked with whirlpools. When the feeder streams slammed head-on into the river, two-ton logs were thrown cartwheeling into the air; fifty-foot tree trunks were sent shooting

across the water like flat bottomed pebbles. The noise was that of an artillery barrage, with the sound of the detonations carrying for miles into the hinterland (Ghosh 2000, p. 120).

Through metaphors of war, where the torrents clash and swirl creating fatal death currents that catapult and fire the logs into the river streams like a cannon, Ghosh gives voice to voiceless nature. The gentle Irrawaddy becomes an artillery barrage as its waters echo with the sound of log blasts that are transmitted on sound waves into the deserted landscape. By giving voice to logs, river water, torrents and portraying them as being eloquent and intelligible entities, Ghosh like Christopher Manes in “Nature and Silence,” suggests the need to “contemplate not only learning a new form of ethics but a new language free from the directionalities of humanism, a language that incorporates a decentered, postmodern, post-humanist perspective” (1996, p. 17). Manes’s premise in “Nature and Silence” is that humanity as a whole need to be tuned to the strains of deep ecology and create a “link between listening to the nonhuman world (i.e., treating it as a silenced subject) and reversing the environmentally destructive practices modern society pursues” (p. 17). By attempting to reanimate nature, Ghosh advocates the need to recognize the synergy that exists in the rhetoric of both human and non-human forces as a means of making a material turn, which is an enterprise of writing that is replete with “a material mesh of meanings, properties, and processes, in which human and non-human players are interlocked in networks that produce undeniable signifying forces” (Iovino 2014, p. 1-2).

### **MATERIALISTIC EXPLOITATION OF MAN AND NATURAL RESOURCES**

In *The Glass Palace* (2000), Ghosh highlights the environmental injustice inflicted on Nature and on the indigenous people of Burma. While maneuvering the logs on the strong, currented *chaungs*, the native Burmese village folk leaped, darted, swam, and ducked between the giant logs. The native forest assistants in the infection-infested teak camps risked their lives for meagre salaries of three annas. They would fall eventually prey to malaria or dengue fever and with no medical treatment. As for the *oo-sis* or elephant handlers, they often ended up being trampled by their elephants. The helpless animal protagonists like the elephants, fell prey to anthrax. Ghosh’s fictional scape of Burmathus reveals the environmental injustice of human and animal protagonists whose lives are at peril due to colonial pursuit for natural resources.

Ghosh describes the plundering of natural resources like oil reserves in Yenangaung that belonged to the *twin-zas*, an old tribe that has claimed ownership of these wells for centuries. The Yenangaung wells oozed petroleum naturally to the surface of the earth, thus drew the attention of colonists who cast their greedy eyes on this natural resource that was scarce in the West. Petroleum was initially an indigenous industry owned by the *twin-za* tribe until the British decided to exploit it. Ghosh’s fictional space reveals how the colonists deplete the land of this rare natural resource, making it sink down several hundred feet. Before the British launched on mass extraction, the rocks used to exudate oil profusely, resulting in large puddles joining to form creeks, streams, and rivulets. Ghosh describes how “these wells were so heavily worked that they looked like small volcanoes, with steep, conical slopes. At these depths the oil could no longer be collected simply by dipping a weighted bucket: *twin-zas* were lowered in, on ropes, holding their breath like pearl divers” (Ghosh 2000, p. 123). By painting a vivid picture of what existed earlier and what was left after the colonialist

materialistic depletion, Ghosh's fictional enterprise of reliving the colonial period is typical of what Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin claim to be "the rereading and the rewriting of the European historical and fictional record, [...] a vital and inescapable task at the heart of the postcolonial enterprise" (Ashcroft et al. 2005, p. 196). Through the eyes of the protagonist Rajkumar, the reader encounters scenes of human exploitation. With a mere rope tied to their bellies, the *twin-zas* with their near kith and kin worked as lowly-paid manpower for the British. A *twin-za* used to be lowered by his family into the oil-sodden pit as they watched him enter into the sludge to extract a bucket of oil. His frail, human body served as a pulley to fetch innumerable buckets of crude oil. Ghosh muses on the plight of the *twin-zas*: "What would it be like to drown in that ooze? To feel that green sludge, the colour of insects' wings, closing over your head, trickling into your ears and nostrils" (Ghosh 2000, p. 123). Ghosh's narrative set in the 1850s is historical with the destinies of the protagonists coinciding and interweaving within the context of the colonial massive oil extraction process. Through a narrative configuring the trade of natural resources, Ghosh weaves a common story thread to link together shared experiences, of victimized natives, during the materialistic colonial trade. Ghosh shows the transformation of the landscape as the colonizer lays his stamp on the fertile, rich earth of Yenangyaung. He describes the ecocide committed in the name of trade where "wooden obelisks began to rise on the hillocks, cage-like pyramids inside which huge mechanical beaks hammered ceaselessly on the earth" (Ghosh 2000, p. 123).

In "Greening Postcolonialism: Eco-Critical Perspectives", Graham Huggan explains postcolonial literature's intense engagement with growing concerns for environmental and ecological problems faced by postcolonial societies. He lays emphasis on "the inseparability of current crises of ecological mismanagement from historical legacies of imperialistic and authoritarian abuse" (Huggan 2004, p. 702). From this perspective, Ghosh's fiction can be considered as a fertile literary ground where environmental and ecological issues are effectively problematized in relation to the depletion of natural resources like teak and oil in Burma where the indigenous population is defenseless. It is interesting to consider Huggan's views on the pertinent link between ecocritical and postcolonial literary studies. He contends the 'green' turn in postcolonialism as a prerogative of the postcolonial writer to analyze imperialism, colonialism, and environmental devastation. It is thus evident that in Ghosh's fictional enterprise while campaigning for the need of a postcolonial green, he lays stress on the need to protect downtrodden communities. His portrayal of the depletion of resources is a critique of the selfish colonial decision to survive at the expense of environmental deterioration and the consequent result of "exploiting nature while minimizing non-human claims to a shared earth" (Huggan 2010, p. 5).

### THE SPROUTING OF ETHICAL ECO-FRIENDLY SOCIETIES

Ghosh's anthropological streak of mind makes him delve into the botanical affiliation and similarities between the teak tree (*tectona grandis*) and its distaff branch the mint leaf (*genus mentha*). Readers discover that unlike the thumb-sized-herbal mint leaf that was soothing, bitter and sweet; the elephant-leg-sized teak leaf, a close cousin, had announced a new way of life into colonial Burma: "Yet even Rajkumar, who was in no way inclined to indulge the far-fetched or the fanciful, had to admit that between the faint hairiness of the one and the bristling, coarse-textured fur of the other, there was an unmistakable kinship, a palpable familial bond" (Ghosh 2000, p. 71). Ghosh's ecocritical

fiction lays stress on the interconnected nature of different life forms and Rajkumar's attempt to look at the interconnected nature of species can be considered as a creative endeavor to consider how these ecologically connected groups can be creatively transformed. Unlike the Western dictate of establishing a link between native species through their botanical names, Rajkumar's indigenous approach of a description of a leaf's physical attributes is typical of eco-communities that sprout in times of need. Rajkumar resists the dominant Western narrative by creating a new form of representation that is comprehensible to the native folk. Ghosh's postcolonial narrative aims at showing how victims of colonial exploitation through their subaltern ways of resistance voice protest against the power imbalance between the colonist and the colonial subject, thus portraying a form of resistance described by Bill Ashcroft in *Postcolonial Transformation* where subaltern resistance could find an outlet as "any form of defense in which an invader is 'kept out'" (as) "these subtle and more widespread forms of saying 'no' that are most interesting because they are most difficult for imperial powers to combat" (Ashcroft 2001, p. 20). Ghosh's pedagogical approach aims at discovering the alignment of a green paradigm through an eco-narrative and environmental critical advocacy. This attempt to unite fictional aesthetics and advocacy is typical of postcolonial ecocriticism that seeks to advocate social and environmental justice in today's postcolonial world. After the depletion of the teak plantations, Ghosh leads his protagonists to better pastures in Malaya. Having exploited the teak to its utmost, the next generation disembarks at the war-hit zone of the Malayan peninsula. In Ghosh's fictional space, environmental concerns blend with the historical events showing that the colonized can seek new means of reconfiguring a new world. Saya John's son, Mathew, launches on a transformation of the landscape into a rubber estate called Morningside on Penang Island in HuayZedi in Northern Malaya. He creates a monument to teak wood, choosing the best quality of teak and rubber at his disposal. The new cash crop 'rubber' sustains the economy replacing the spice gardens and pepper vines of the Malaya hill slopes. The soot-blackened forest area is replaced by symmetrical rows of rubber trees. Ghosh highlights how mankind can thrive despite obstacles and can humanize desolate nature, conquer new territory in other lands, domesticate wild landscapes, and exploit new natural resources. Man strives "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 2000, p. 75). As in the case of other natural resources in the fictional space, rubber runs out as a natural resource with its plantations finding no prospective buyers as new research brings forth new substitutes of rubber. Plantation workers in Southeast Asia face acute unemployment and plantations are divided into parcels and sold to businessmen. Once again, the protagonists resist the economic crisis. Through a mass collection of funds from well-wishers Ilango, the surviving protagonist buys the rubber plantations of Morningside that eventually becomes the property of the Malaysian Plantation Workers' Co-operative. The rubber plantations are replaced by another crop, 'oil palms' with stub-like trunks. In a typical ecocritical endeavor, Ghosh elaborates how mankind, flora, and fauna live in harmony on Morningside. Ghosh's narrative reveals how the protagonists seek to establish a green paradigm through an eco-narrative. In the eco-narrative, the eco-conservationists in the fictional space have to deal with the discontent of former plantation owners, traders, and real estate agents who considered the oil palms as threats to their existence in stark economic times. The reader encounters a multiplicity



of voices that express the problems that the world faces today and discovers a plethora of issues that speak of the need to assert a green paradigm free of the stamp of lucrative colonial trade. Ghosh's fiction serves as the means of making "some connections between literature and the sun, between teaching literature and the health of the biosphere" (Rueckert 1996, p. 109).

### **MANEUVERING THE TRYST BETWEEN MATERIALISM AND ECOCRITICISM**

In the face of a global environmental crisis, Ghosh redraws the boundaries and remaps the rapidly changing contours of postcolonial writing. He insists on the need to write about the environmental crisis. In his interrogations in *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*, where he wonders if the present generation is deranged. Ghosh's fictional art considers "nature not just as the stage upon which the human story is acted out, but as an actor in the drama" (Glofelty 1996, p. xxi). The Irrawaddy River in the fictional space has shaped his imagination as it serves as a witness to the materialistic exploitation of colonial times. This study draws inspiration from Benita Parry's *Postcolonial Studies: A Materialistic Critique* (2005) and highlights the violence and imbalance of colonial encounters in *The Glass Palace* (2000). While Parry urges critics to orient their analysis towards a more materialistic critique that connects imperialism's epistemic violence and material aggression, my paper highlights an aspect that is missing in Parry's argument. Her contention of resistance theory is shaped from a meagre ideological perspective that leaves little room for smaller narratives of resistance. Throughout the work, Parry praises British Marxists' involvement in the liberation movements and passionately claims that Britain was the place where most of the anticolonial programs took off and where most of the native anti-colonialists had been trained. She thus tends to overlook the contribution of other parts of Europe and America, and she skims over the transnational dimension of anticolonial resistance. My study shows that by depicting the politics of resistance in colonial Burma in *The Glass Palace* (2000) through the lens of little narratives or stories of subalterns, Ghosh leads a materialist, historically circumstanced kind of enquiry. Through a portrayal of the British teak and oil trade in Burma, Ghosh highlights the material impulses of colonials, the misappropriation of land and natural resources, and the transformation of the landscape from one yielding necessary crops to that of bonded labor producing teak and crude oil to the needs of the Western world. The eco-narrative strives to remember the materialist past and the suffering of the subalterns, but at the same time, aims at criticizing the contemporary political and economic situation in postcolonial countries like Burma, thus showing the "need to recall the long histories of injustice, to remember the obstacles in the way of building a just society and always to hold in view the prospect of a future. His ecocritical vision as shown in *The Glass Palace* (2000) highlights the fact that "our best hope for universal emancipation lies in remaining unreconciled to the past and unconsolated by the present" (Parry 2005, p. 193). Through a material ecocritical approach, Ghosh examines "matter both in texts and as a text, trying to shed light on the way bodily natures and discursive forces express their interaction" (Iovino 2014, p. 2). However, at the same time, he creates a fictional space whose history traces the oil and teak trade, a story that is partly known and partly guessed.

Ghosh's fictional space is rich in both lived experiences, travel discourse, non-fictional sources, and his imagination (Choudhury 2016). The perceptive reader is aware that the mechanism of exploitation characteristic of colonial times exists even today in the form of economic, political, and social imperialism. He seeks to illuminate how displaced communities have to contend with hostile forces of the natural environment and insensitive governments that ignore human attempts of survival in the name of protecting broader ecological concerns of the planet. Even though the ocean is usually the lieu of maritime trade, all trade in Burma is limited to its rivers and does not enter into the ocean space as the trade is colonial with the terms being dictated by the British empire. This archive of unfair trade still exists in today's world as seen in the IOR-ARC treaty signed by countries that share the Indian Ocean, but present-day Myanmar is not one of the signatories. Though created to be a platform for the peoples of the Indian Ocean Region to reconnect with each other, to discover their common heritage and deep-rooted affinities, to celebrate their shared cultural history, and chart their own destinies, the free trade association that has been criticized for not having included Myanmar, despite its presence near Indian Ocean shipping lanes. *The Glass Palace* (2000) also reveals the loss of natural habitat and the destruction of the ecosystem during British colonial rule in the 19th century. The rivers in the fictional space bear witness to the destruction of native plants and the destruction of teak forests for lucrative gain. Ghosh's work is typical of postcolonial ecology where the literary form becomes a critical engagement with the aesthetics of the earth. Ghosh's literary enterprise with its hidden agenda of social and environmental advocacy is imaginative and serves as a catalyst for social action and exploratory literary analysis into a full-fledged form of engaged cultural critique. In today's postcolonial Myanmar, its economy is still dependent on natural resources, and agriculture, but the country has the inadequate infrastructure and limited, industrial know-how. Myanmar's twenty-six-year military dictatorship under the Burmese Socialist Programme Party was marked by a period of civil unrest, gridlock in political decision-making, and multiple insurgencies resulting in a declining economy. The National League for Democracy (NLD) led by Aung San Suu Kyi strives to uphold democracy but has been criticized for its brutal crackdown on displaced Rohingya Muslims. Ghosh's account of displacement also seeks to show how governmental proposals to create a democratic state at the expense of displaced communities are typical of contemporary selfish political decisions to framing programs at the expense of the livelihood of poor farmers and exploiting nature while minimizing human claims to shared earth. He criticizes the policies and government strategies of postcolonial governments where government policies take advantage of poor peasants in the name of the common good by appropriating eco-friendly policy labelling.

Ghosh's intent of highlighting the material forces and power relations at play in today's postcolonial context in Burma is a means of framing an eco-narrative or 'greening postcolonialism' with its sub-stories of victims of colonial unfair trade. In today's materialist world, he considers the need to recall the forgotten stories of injustice, to remember the colonial injustices that hampered the existence of a just society and find new ways of supporting present-day Myanmar. To reveal the material needs of the human and non-human protagonists in *The Glass Palace* (2000), he highlights these concerns through an eco-narrative versus eco-materialism. His

environmental advocacy brings ecocriticism closer to the material turn by highlighting how narratives and stories contribute to making meaning of the material forces and substance that rule the world. The fictional enterprise of underlining the need for social and political change speaks of Ghosh's envisioning of a 'postcolonial green' that campaigns for the transference from 'red' to 'green' politics and the need to dwell as responsible inhabitants who believe in global justice and sustainability on our planet. Ghosh's pedagogical approach considers the theoretical framework of the material turn which conceives matter as an agentic force with an effective and transformative power over human and nonhuman environments. Ghosh's ecocritical writing thus resists stasis and campaigns for the growing need to highlight ecological devastation through fiction.

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