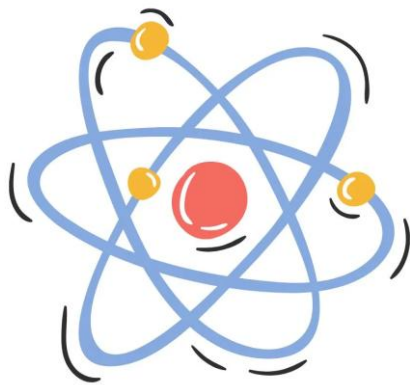




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OUR TIMES

¹Dr. U. Vijaya Sarathi, ²Mrs.
Suganthi R.,

¹Assistant Professor of English, Vel Tech Ranga
Sanku Arts College, Avadi, Chennai, India

²Assistant Professor, ²Soka Ikeda College of
Arts and Science for Women, Chennai, India

DEPRECIATION OF MYTHOLOGICAL STORIES RESULTED IN DESTRUCTION OF ENVIRONMENT: A STUDY OF AMITAV GHOSH'S THE LIVING MOUNTAIN - A FABLE FOR OUR TIMES

^{*1}Dr. U. Vijaya Sarathi, ²Mrs. Suganthi R

¹Assistant Professor of English, Vel Tech Ranga Sanku Arts College, Avadi, Chennai, India

²Assistant Professor, Soka Ikeda College of Arts and Science for Women, Chennai, India

¹vijayasarathi845@gmail.com, ²suganthirajkumar724@gmail.com

**Corresponding Author*

Abstract: Literature serves as a prism which reflects lives of the people such as their tradition, culture, and even a trend which influenced them and its effect on the society. Environmental degradation is one of the major issues the entire world is encountering at present. Albeit having taken various measures to prevent it from degrading further, none of them have worked out as effectively as expected. However, the natural resources were free from the exploitation by human beings in the history wherein traditional stories had played a pivotal role. Though the traditional stories have been the foundation of literature, they are not being paid much attention as it is paid to a written text at present because it is regarded that one who reads a written text is educated, but the person who believes and follows traditional stories is uncivilized. Therefore, traditional stories, otherwise known as mythological stories, are undermined and being considered as superstitious believes. It ultimately resulted in destruction of customs, traditions, especially the environment because the so-called mythological stories are intertwined with these all. So, the research article concentrates on how mythological stories guarded environment and the impact of their negligence on the environment with limitation to Amitav Ghosh's *The Living Mountain: A Fable for Our Times*.

Key Words: Traditional Stories, Environmental destruction, Superstitious believes, and Conservation of nature.

Introduction:

Literature serves as one of the most powerful vehicles to convey the perception of the people on trends, culture, environment, pandemic, and so on and their effect on the society. Literature in English varies depending upon the land where it has been produced from. For instance, there are various disciplines in English literature like African English Literature, American English Literature, Indian English Literature, and the like. Every literature delineates with the uniqueness of the respective terrain, the problems, and the impending issue. In this regard, Indian English Literature concentrates much upon its heritage and environmental significance of the land. Amitav Ghosh is an Indian-American writer who was born on 11 July, 1956 in Kolkata, India. Though he has obtained American citizenship and lives in the United State of America, most of his writings are categorized under Indian English Literature.

Ghosh's *The Living Mountain: A Fable for our Times* (2022) is chosen for the research. It explicates how indigenous people of a valley located in Himalaya lead harmonious lives with nature and how the harmony was impaired by the advent of outsiders. The environmental degradation is constantly escalating in order to meet the ever-growing greed of human beings in the technologically advanced world. Despite drafting various policies in the view of curbing its degradation, they are not as effective as it was expected to be. Hence, it drives to research question like what could be a more reliable as well as effective solution for the existing issues in the environment. The present research, in an attempt to find the answer, concentrates more into the value of mythological stories and how effectively they act in conserving the natural resources. The research is limited to Amitav Ghosh's *The Living Mountain: A Fable for our Times* and Eco-criticism has been used to analyze the primary source.

Review of Literature:

Dr. T. Mangayarkarasi and Maalya S. Jayan in their article entitled *An Eco-centric Reading of Amitav Ghosh's The Living Mountain: A Fable for Our Times* state that all the nations expect humans development much but they have to be sustainable as well as. According to Ghosh, people across the world began opposing the initiatives which cause environmental damage. For instance, indigenous people in Neyamgari, Odisha stand against a mining project which may possibly destroy their sacred mountain. The industrialists and corporate companies treat everything including nature in terms of money sans considering its intrinsic value, and such things are occurring everywhere in India. *The Living Mountain: A Fable for our Times* depicts that considering human beings as superior to all other species is not good for the nature.

Amit Kumar and Vikas Sharma in their article entitled *Locating Empire and Capitalism in Amitav Ghosh's The Living Mountain: A Fable for our Times* assert that the story of the chosen work is about the people of two different groups called Anthropoi and Varvaroi. The former represents colonial invaders and the latter is identified as indigenous and aboriginal. They state that Ghosh has excellently presented the exploitation of natural resources by the colonists and their regime in about thirty-five pages. The arrival of the outsiders called anthropoi denotes the advent of British colonist who destroyed the environment to the hilt.

Ram Sebak Thakur, et al in their article called *Amitav Ghosh's The Living Mountain: A Tale of Green Imperialism* analyze the work by employing the term coined by Alfred Crosby 'green imperialism.' It refers the exploitation of natural resources by colonizing a country or a region. Crosby sarcastically states that Europeans could be found in a place where exploitation requires. A group of indigenous people lived in a valley on the foothill of Mahaparbhat. They followed the words of their ancestors so they kept themselves away from the mountain in order

to be close with nature. The indigenous people decided that others should also never be allowed to set their feet on the mountain which protects them. There was no issue unless a stranger turned out to their place and he asked them to tell him about the place where they dwell. The authors state that it was an imperative concept of colonialism to be aware of the place which is supposed to be colonized.

Discussion and Findings:

Stories have been an inevitable part of human beings' lives for centuries together. Every traditional story attempts to constrain people from doing something against justice as well as streamlines living style of people by influencing them. The traditional stories, otherwise called mythological stories, are not just as other fables which are meant purely for entertainment; they would be with strong moral messages. Robert Bringhurst in his writing called *The Tree of Meaning* asserts “. . . Myths are not just stories: they are narrative hypotheses, personified theorems that address the very nature of the world” The stories of this kind are made by humans and if they deal with the altercation in environment, it could be understood that there might have been a change in the nature when it was made and the creature that enabled them to identify the change was praised and used as the central figure of the story. For instance, there is a story of wolf and coyote in the tradition of the people who speak Numic—Shoshone, Paiute, and Ute. It is being widely believed by them; on the other hand, it is said to be myth and inseparable.

The wolf is treated as a benevolent creator, powerful, and wise in the story. The planet earth had been void sans human beings, living creature of any kind, river, mountain, and the like. Only silence prevailed everywhere; a wolf emerged from the silent. It said to itself that there should be life in the planet and started shaping the lands, raised mountains, and channelized valleys. Later, it called for water to flow, plant to grow, and it created living

creatures like fish, bird, animals, and humans as well. The wolf inculcated humans the means to live by hunting, worshiping nature, and even how to speak. There had been an order and peace in the planet until the advent of coyote that is known for disorder, and mischievousness. It thought that the world was extremely perfect without any change and unexpected events. Despite being warned by wolf, coyote got a thing like parcel to wolf wherein death was. Wolf was angry with coyote but latter said that there creates a space for people when they leave—die. Though the wolf did not want the death, it was too late to act as death had already entered the world, so wolf taught, instead of giving up, the people to love each other, accept the death, and to find the wisdom; on the other hand coyote was creating problem and made people to learn from it.

The story seems to be illogical but it extensively deals with the factor which engulfs the world at alarming rate i.e. over population. Over-population is one of the major causes of environmental degradation. Nature is being destructed not by any other living species on this earth such as bird, animals, and reptiles but human beings. Whatever the thing it might be like infrastructural development, scientific advancement, laying out road, deforestation, coal and uranium mining, and so on, they are being undertaken by human beings for human beings. These activities drive to ecological disaster. If population increases, the needs of the people would also be spiralled, and it would ultimately be resulted in exploitation of natural resources. The story explains how wolf as a creator that expects the world to be like people should be happy ever, giving birth to children to be pleasant, and there should not be winter, but contrary to wolf's expectations, coyote wants death to be existed and a space for offspring. Though the wolf in the story is projected as a figure of sympathy and merciful, coyote reflects the reality of the world. If the world does not function as Coyote wants it to be, there won't be space to live on this planet on account of over populations. Raymond Pierotti states "Even though they acknowledge the sadness that resulted from death, which they attribute to Coyote's thinking,

the *Newe* themselves recognize that ‘If it weren’t for Coyote there would be too many people now’ ”

Myth is not for making fun of or brushing aside but it is to explore in order to enhance humans’ understanding of themselves and the world. Traditional stories which nexus human beings with nature are often found with animals as a protector, helper, and messenger of human beings. There are many of such stories—in one of the biblical stories of Jonah, he was assisted by a huge fish in the sea as he fell from the boat; as per the story in Hebrew Bible, a person named Balaam was saved by his donkey from an angel sent by god to kill him for having cursed the people of Israel as he should not have done so; it is mentioned in Mathew’s gospel that spirit of almighty descends like dove from heaven on Jesus when he raises above the water after baptizing; according to discourse *The Lily of the Field and Bird of Air*, human beings had been taught how to be humans and its requirements for being humans by lily and birds. By listening to mythological stories, one could relate himself/herself with other living species of the planet which drives humans not to destruct nature but to have a harmonious relationship with the environment.

However, the inception of science and its advancement approached such stories with reason and asserted them to be baseless to pay attention or reverence as it had been paid to. Science indeed rationalized people and branded these stories which were widely believed and followed as myths. Besides, the modern education is also framed in accordance with the concept of addressing traditional stories as irrational and illogical. Raymond Pierotti states in his article entitled *The Role of Myth in Understanding Nature* that education, in an attempt to rationalize people, inculcates myths are false or untrue. “In books and educational settings, it seemed that the idea of myth was employed to discuss ideas that are ultimately false or at least untrue. . . . (1)” It was ultimately resulted in doing whatever had been feared of doing so far such as despoliation of riverbed, destroying mountain, and deforestation, for most of the stories

projected nature as a powerful god; on being disturbed by human beings, the raging god would penalize with natural calamities like flood, hurricane, storm, draught, and the like.

Environmental stability is at stake due to an ever-growing demand for natural resources in order to satiate the hunger of the giant called science that grows rapidly. As people have been used to sophisticated way of living life with the assistance of scientific advancement as well as lack of knowledge about the impending disaster due to environmental degradation, a pragmatic solution is mandatory to be adopted apart from inventing alternatives. In this regard, reviving mythological stories back to practice will be an effective mean to conserve forest, mountain, river, etc. “Regardless of how valuable a myth is for usage today; mythology has always been important for the preservation of local biodiversity. The use of myth is one of the many strategies for managing and conserving natural resources (Dr. Ezechinnah Chukwuma Alexander, 2024).”

It is widely known that Indigenous people pay attention to traditional stories and practices them with utmost reverence. On the other hand, they are perceived as the conservator of nature. The life style of the indigenous people (tribal) will be nature centric instead of being human centric because they are intertwined with traditional stories that modern humans call myths or superstitious believes. For example, there had been followed various tactics to preserve eco-system by the indigenous people in the Rivers State in Nigeria like Ijaw, Ikwerre, Ogoni, and so on. One of the techniques was that designating a forest as sacred one which connects to god (Dr. Ezechinnah Chukwuma Alexander, 2024). According to the communities in River State, both indigenous and others are no longer permitted to enter the forest if it is designated as sacred forest. They had believed strong that the forest was made by almighty and there is where the indigenous community communicate with their ancestors and God. Therefore, it is strictly prohibited to cut a tree or kill an animal in the forest; if it is violated on any ground, the violator is subjected to encounter spiritual consequences. The activities against

the harmony of the nature like hunting, cutting woods, and such activities had vehemently been curbed by doing so and it drives to protect the environment as well.

It is believed in Greco-Roman mythology that natural places like mountain are sentient presences. It is otherwise called sacred nature which is capable of blessing as well as punishing the person who trespasses into. There are many deities that believed to be at natural places wherein Artemis is imperative, that is known as goddess of wilderness, child birth, and chastity. The goddess is said to be at groves which are at Brauron and Ephesus. It is believed that she takes care of young girls and animals but a violator would be retributed. In this regard, while the goddess was bathing, a hunter named Actaeon stumbled upon her; the enraged Artemis metamorphed him into stag and he was hunted by his own hounds (Marianna Olivadese, 2025). Albeit these stories appear to be like fairy tales, they served effectively in conserving the environment by celebrating flora and fauna equal to divine power. Amitav Ghosh, an Indian-American novelist, in his novelette called *The Living Mountain: A Fable for Our Times* has explicitly expressed that traditional stories would hold the people behind from exploiting natural resources in this Anthropocene.

Ghosh states that the earth is on its new epoch wherein human beings commit a lot against it, and also, he asserts that following mythological stories could be a pragmatic as well as an effective solution. The narrator in the novelette finds a friend named Maansi in an online book club created by her. Despite having known each other for years, they had not met or spoken in person. They paid more attention to discuss the books instead of knowing one another as the cardinal rule of the club was “It’s Not about you or me; it’s about the book (LM 2)”. Every year they chose new topic to discuss for next twelve month; each person would propose a topic every alternative year. It was the turn of Maansi by the time and she uttered the word ‘Anthropocene’.

The phrase ‘anthropocene’ is supposed to be a new geological epoch, but it has not been approved by the International Commission of Stratigraphy, which reserves the right to take the plunge. The term is still under serious discussion because an end of a geological epoch would be decided based on a significant change found in layers of rocks. Anthropocene is a Greek word; it denotes that it is era wherein human beings are exercising multiple activities which destroy ecosystem and change the climate. Anterior to the proclamation of anthropocene, the earth has been in an epoch called ‘Holocene’ for 11,500 years. It begun at the disappearance of glacier covered the earth; the epoch was called ‘Ice age’. However, the International Commission of Stratigraphy challenges the term stating that humans can never make such impact to have changes on rocks. Ghosh acknowledges the uncorroborated term anthropocene by utilizing it in his writings as it had been done by Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer in their research articulated entitled *The Anthropocene*. The term was popularized only after the publication of the research articulated in 2000 despite used by them since 1980 informally.

The narrator had no idea about the term proposed by Maansi, but she said that she would work on the materials and would share them with him the next day. He received the messages from her a few days later which read as she had collected materials and some random books thinking that they would be scientifically related to the term Anthropocene, but they dealt with sufferings of the people who live in an island. She hit the bed late at the night as she had been engaged with the materials and she had a dream. She could not believe if it was a dream or the story that she heard from her grandmother. When she went to a physician to consult in this regard, she was asked to write down what she had dreamt. Mannsi sent what she had written to the perusal of the narrator. Ghosh explicates vividly through the dream of Maansi that humans cause damages to the environment due to the influence of science and technology, and also asserts that it could be curbed only by adhering strictly to traditional stories.

Maansi identified herself, in the dream, as a little girl who lives in one of the villages located in a valley up in the Himalaya. Though there had been disparities among the people, they revered the mountain which was called ‘Mahaprabat’ passionately by them. They believed strongly the words of their ancestors that the mountain was the most alive one compared to other mountains and it would protect them as long as they happen to be away. The people of the village believed their words and had never set their foot upon the mountain, and everyone in the villages adhered to it. “. . . it would protect us and look after us – but only on condition . . . but from a distance (LM 7).”

The nature had been harmonious with all the living creatures on the planet with proper climate pattern, pollution free air, water sans contamination, and so on. Ever since the natural resources began to be exploited by human beings just for leading a sophisticated life, the earth commenced to stride on the path of destruction. The earth is about 4.5 billion years old, but the humans for last 2000 years have accomplished a lot in destroying the nature on account of modernism, and it has been intensified for last 60 years. The behavioural evolution of human beings can be categorized into four isms such as Classicism, Neo-classicism, modernism, and post-modernism. The people lived prior to modernism were largely influenced by the traditional stories, which are otherwise known as mythological stories; it prevented them from harming nature as the stories advocate that nature is the place where god lives.

The mountain has also provided the people with what they needed to live as said by the ancestors of the people of the valley. For instance, there was a tree in the valley which could no longer be found anywhere else which they called Magic tree as its every part had a distinctive quality such as its leaves shooed away insects; its trunk would never get wet; its flowers had such a fragrant honey; its fruit was incomparable with the taste and the most of all was its nut, which had medicinal quality. People who did not belong to the valley had ventured to their place in order to get the nut, but they had to wait at the mountain pass as they were no

longer permitted to go past it. The people of the valley would go to the mountain pass to exchange their rare mushrooms, herbs, honey, and the like with what they could get from other people for a week. It made them lead a harmonious life with nature in the valley though it had been hard. “Life in our Valley was not easy – we had to work hard for our food But we knew no other life and were content with what we had We loved to listen to stories about our Great Mountain and our amazing trees; we loved to sing our songs; and we loved, most of all, to dance (LM 9)”.

People of the villages, influenced by traditional stories, got what the nature offered them to live. They had jealous upon a few of their people who were called Adepts; they were believed to communicate with the mountain that they revered. “Our dances were always led by women, and the most skilled of them were known as Adepts; sometimes, 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 (LM 9-10).” It might seem to be far from reality in this technology driven epoch, but it prevented people from doing nothing which harms ecology. However, the people who, influenced by science, were far away from the villages sought to get what destructs the nature to live a sophisticated life. The mountain Mahaparat had been free from humans’ intervention as the people of the village strictly adhered to their cardinal principle of not stepping on the mountain and of restricting others also from doing so. The harmonious nexus between the people and the mountain was ended due to the advent of outsiders.

Unlike every year’s trade week, a person who had come too far from the land where people called ‘anthropoi’ reside. Their scholars had come to know about the nuts from the valley and had sent him to learn better about the valley. When the people of the village showed him what they used to get from the valley, he demanded to see everything by himself but they turned it down. Since he had been denied, he asked them to narrate more about their place and

its uniqueness. While telling about their place where they dwell, they shared about the great mountain as well. “‘The most important thing in our Valley,’ the Elderpeople told him, ‘is something that cannot be traded – our living mountain, Mahaparbat’ (LM 12).” He had taken note of everything carefully and left the mountains pass after the trade week along with others.

The scholars of the anthropoi examined the points and discovered that the mountain was rich with minerals and other rare earth elements, which the people of the village were unaware of on account of believing their ancestors’ stories. “Their savants had studied all that was told to their envoy, and they were convinced that unbeknownst to us, great riches – minerals, metals and the like – were hidden within the mountain. We were unaware of this because we were a credulous and benighted people, who believed that our mountain was alive (LM 14).” A couple of years later, a battalion of anthropoi arrived at the place where their advent was prohibited and enslaved the people of the valley. The enslaved people began assisting the anthropoi by providing what they needed to trek the mountain sans hassle and to exploit the natural resources of the mountain. The anthropoi often told the villagers that they were valiant as their ideas were rational and superstitious free unlike that of theirs. “The Anthropoi had always told us that one of the reasons why they were so much stronger than us was that their ideas were universal – unlike the false, local beliefs that circulated amongst us Valley-folk. They laughed at our inherited ideas of the mountain’s sacredness: that was all ignorant, pagan superstition, they had said (LM 26).”

Amitav Ghosh explicates vividly that people of the village do not even attempt to climb the mountain on account of believing the words asserted by their ancestors that the mountain was alive and it would protect them. The stories of such kind had been serving as the protector of the environment for centuries together. However, the age of science undermined such stories and branded them superstitious believes. It ultimately resulted in exploitation of natural resources at an alarming rate. Besides, as the highly educated people live well by violating a

belief system and by proving traditional stories to be baseless, they stand as negative example for others who exercise them with reverence. They too start thinking that they have been living like a man without head so far and it makes them do whatever they can to live a sophisticated life. Ghosh states that the people of the villages are also influenced by the anthropoi later and begin ascending the mountain which they worshiped once. “Now began a tumultuous, headlong race towards the Mountain . . . (LM 20).”

Natural resources are being exploited on large scale not only to meet the needs of human beings but also to satiate their desire. Activities against nature were once thought as equal as doing something against god because mythological stories were widely believed and exercised, but it is not the case at present. Many initiatives are being taken and schemes are amended to curb the environmental deterioration; however, a comprehensive approach is needed. Unless people are emotionally attached to a thing, they will never be fond of it. The traditional stories are blended with the humans’ emotions as blood and skin. Hence, revival of traditional stories back will be far effective in conserving the natural resources.

Conclusion:

The earth is encountering environmental issues like never before in the twenty-first century due to exploitation of natural resources on large scale. People wish to have a healthy as well as sophisticated life hand in hand, but both are two opposite poles which stand against each other. Advancement in science ultimately drives to compromise with the serenity of nature. People of this century actively engage in faltering eco-system on various means like deforestation, mining, plastic usage, and so on. On account of it, scientists like Eugene Stoermer and Paul Crutzen term the era as anthropocene – a geological epoch wherein humans’ intervention causes the change in climate. The world at present is constructed and functions with science and technology, so abandoning it is as equal as to imagining the world without

sun; a sustainable development is needed instead. Albeit having drafted and implemented various policies to curb the exploitation of natural resources and spoiling the environment, they have not worked out as effectively as expected.

The earth has not witnessed any of such harsh intervention of human beings in the ancient period as the people who lived then were largely influenced by traditional stories. They are being otherwise called mythological stories and superstitious believes in the technologically advanced era. Every traditional story has a unique moral value which constructed the society and mended humans' behaviours. Most of the traditional stories propagate nature as divine and natural places like forest, river, and mountain as the places where god exists. Such believes contributed vehemently on conserving natural resources. For instance, it has been strongly believed that lord Shiva is on mount Kailash. It is secondary to examine if he is there or not, but no projects which destruct the mountain would be executed as long as the belief holds the people firm. Despite having decided by few to unearth the rich minerals from the mountain, it would be prevented by many as the belief has been intertwined with their emotion. Likewise, there are many traditional stories still being believed and followed.

The advancement in science interrogates the traditional stories and asserts them to be far from the reality. It results in losing faith on such stories which drives the humans to destroy nature in order to live sophisticated lives. Amitav Ghosh, an Indian-American writer, acknowledges an unapproved term anthropocene by International Commission on Stratigraphy. He states vividly that no living creatures contribute on environmental degradation as much as human beings do, and also he asserts that practicing traditional stories is also one of the effective means to prevent the nature from further degradation. Ghosh explicates in a novelette entitled *The Living Mountain: A Fable for Our Times* that there were villages in a valley on Himalaya. Though there had been disparities among them, they all revered the mountain called Mahaprabat as they grew up hearing lots of stories and songs from their elders about the

mountain. The people of the valley never set their foot on the mountain to climb because they were told by their ancestors that it was the most living mountain than others and it protects them as well. As it had been said, the mountain provided the people of the valley with everything that they need to live. The most of everything is a tree on account of its parts had significant qualities; especially the nuts from the fruits of the tree had a high demand among the people who did not belong to the village.

The people of the valley used to exchange the rare things that they get in the valley with the outsiders for the things that they want but outsiders were not allowed to go past the mountain pass. Everything had been going good until the arrival of a person who lives in a place where the people called anthropoi dwell. He insisted the indigenous people to permit him to go past the mountain pass to see everything in the valley but it was turned down by them. As his obligation was denied, he inquired a lot about the place and took note of the details that people of the valley shared with him; while telling about their place, they told him about the mountain also. Later, the scholars of the anthropoi studied the notes and made research; at last, they found that there could be rich minerals on the mountain.

The anthropoi turned out large in number to the place where their presence was restricted after some years and captured the indigenous people of the valley. They exploited the resources of the mountain. On an occasion, the anthropoi said to the indigenous people that they had not made use of what they had unearthed on account of believing the superstitious stories told by their ancestors. It is imperative to understand that as long as they believed in the traditional stories the mountain was unimpaired, but the advent of the people who were influenced by science lead to its loss. Ghosh, through which, asserts that mythological stories are the effective means to curb the exploitation of natural resources.

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