



The Anthropocene Epoch: A Study Of The Great Derangement: The Climate Change Unthinkable By Amitav Ghosh

Kinathy Vijaya Priya

Research scholar

Department of English, School of Languages, Vels Institute of Science, Technology & Advanced Studies (VISTAS), Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India.

Abstract: The process of man trying to overpower the natural world for the progress of humankind has become more pertinent than ever before in the history of the human race. The anthropogenic nature of man has come to the surface in recent years as the changes in our environment are altered at an accelerated speed. Human activities are responsible for the dramatic changes in the relationship between man and the natural environment. Anthropogenic climate crises are a result of modifications in human lifestyles. Though the scientific community creates awareness among a few on the planet, stories through literature are a vital platform that can communicate and bring mass awareness. Amitav Ghosh is one such Indian writer. In his book *The Great Derangement: The Climate Change Unthinkable*, he reflects that the novel, which is a powerful mode of storytelling, has failed to narrate the profound transformation induced by humans in the environment. He explores the role of culture and literature in reversing the unprecedented challenges of the climate crisis in today's world, and he stresses the need for storytellers to play a responsible role in saving the deranged world.

Index Terms Anthropogenic, Accelerated, Environment, Modification, Awareness, Climate Crisis, and Challenges.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Anthropocene is a period of human dominance over the Earth. The scientists regard the epoch as one in which human activity has altered the balance between man and nature. Man's approach to nature has changed our planet very rapidly. "In the last century we have had such a huge impact that we're taking the planet away from that natural [climate] oscillation and changing the trend for global temperatures from what should have been a cooling trend to a warming trend," explained Dr Waters to The Independent. ("What is the Anthropocene? And why does it matter?")

Human lifestyle is the predominant factor in altering our climate. Our snail-speed approach to finding another source of power to light our homes and to travel without burning fossil fuels is a major cause of the rise in greenhouse gas emissions. Addiction to the internet is also contributing to the changes around us. "Every email sent, movie streamed, or question Googled adds carbon dioxide to the ecosystem. This is a tiny amount for each activity online, but, added up, it equals 3.7% of global greenhouse gas emissions, or 1.3 billion metric tonnes per year" ("The human activities that cause climate change, and the human necessities climate change affects"). It is said that the global forest has shrunk to create concrete jungles in cities, and fewer trees absorb carbon, resulting in a temperature rise. The nitrogen in fertilizers and the hydrofluorocarbon in refrigerators and air conditioners contribute to the change we are slowly witnessing in nature. The erratic spike in temperature, severe flooding, heat waves, and extreme heat wildfires are happening more frequently than in any other era. There is unequivocal evidence that climate change is here. The most affected by the change are the vulnerable in developing countries. It is evident from the biological and physical changes on Earth that human activities cause them.

The first ones to assess the changes are the scientists. Scientific literature provides data and evidence about climate change and offers solutions to mitigate the changes. As the scientific language is not ordinary and the scientific literature is inaccessible to the general public, the severity of the scenario does not reach the masses. Therefore, changes in human attitude and behavior will take longer, and the information will only reach a limited audience. It has been observed over the years that cultural narratives play a pivotal role in shaping human behavior. Poems, novels, and films contribute to raising awareness about abstract scientific ideas more understandable. These stories can shape a healthy relationship between man and nature. Literature can also inspire and engage more minds to think of new ways of having a harmonious relationship with nature.

Amitav Ghosh's *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*, is an absorbing narrative, and is a significant contribution to the climate crisis dialogue. Through three sections in the nonfiction of the *Great Derangement*, he carves out a picture of global and local events that are impossible to ignore. The first part is about the inability of modern literary imagination to grasp the vast scale of change that has been happening around us. He does not tell stories; instead, he analyzes modern literature, history, and politics and their vital role in letting the world know that climate change is real and can be catastrophic to the destiny of humankind if ignored.

"The climate crisis is also a crisis of culture and thus of the imagination." (The *Great Derangement* 12) Amitav Ghosh claims that one of the main forces behind the carbon economy is culture, which breeds a need for cars and appliances for particular homes. Because of this, when we see a picture of a perfectly manicured lawn or see an advertisement for a beautiful island, it instantly transports us to the world of Daniel Defoe and Jane Austen. These manifestations are the culture's secrets. Poetry, prose fiction, theater, and architecture have all responded to war and crises throughout history. Ghosh questions why the authors should avoid and hide the subject of the climate catastrophe. Keeping people from realizing how dire their situation is. His observation is that this generation takes great pride in its self-awareness.

In the era of global warming, novelists refuse to believe that hurricanes are possible in Brazil. Novels that focus on bourgeois life are unable to handle unexpected events. Milton composed *Paradise Lost* during a winter of extreme cold and tried to capture both heat and cold. The novel, which has moved beyond its infancy and gained greater prominence today, is focused on observation. There are also times when it touches upon an unheard-of, improbable, and surreal world. But what is happening to our Earth is an improbable occurrence that is overwhelmingly and astoundingly real.

According to Ghosh, writers evoke an uncanny feeling when describing hurricanes or tornadoes. Nature is too powerful, too grotesque, too dangerous, and too accustomed to be written about with a romantic streak in literature. Modern literature often banished the impossible and embraced the ordinary. These were the fillers that the audience looked forward to.

Ghosh relates the climate crisis to colonization and shows how coastal cities are affected by cyclonic storms. Despite precautions, the experiences of New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina, New York before Sandy, Tacloban before Haiyan, and Mumbai during the 2005 deluge show how cities can be flattened. A research paper by an American team concluded that cyclonic storms in the Arabian Sea are likely to intensify due to cloud dust and pollution.

Ghosh observes that the general perception that science fiction is better at addressing climate change than mainstream works is just an assumption. Novelists, though a few like Liz Jensen and Barbara Kingsolver communicate with great magnitude the vivid experience of the world now. Television, film, and visual art have found it much easier to bring out the issue of climate change than the novel.

According to Ghosh, the history of the climate crisis has capitalism as the theme of its narrative. Asia is the center of global warming due to its numbers. The ongoing challenges faced by Asian countries are due to drought, flooding, and weather events. As the melting of Himalayan glaciers begins and they begin to shrink Asia will face catastrophic water shortage within a decade or so.

Another instance cited from history by Ghosh is of the medieval economic revolution in China, which led to so much deforestation that the Jiangsu province was overjoyed to learn about the discovery of coal. The Chinese pioneered the use of other fossil fuels too. The eighteenth-century Chinese manual *The Classic of the Waterways of Sichuan* makes a mention of the extraction of oil and natural gas. Ghosh also refers to this in *The Glass Palace*, which touches upon a place in Burma where oil had, for many centuries, bubbled up to the surface and formed rivulets. It did not take much time for the locals and the British to get to the coal mines. In India, the Tagores bought the Raniganj coalfield in Bihar and became the principal supplier of coal in Bengal. The Wadia family is from Mumbai. The British were the leading colonial power to adopt the carbon economy. It stalled the growth of Asian countries. Fossil fuel helped the Western economy, and inequality increased between the West and the East.

Ghosh mentions the moral and political authority of Mahatma Gandhi, who resisted industrial capitalism, in his famous lines written in 1928. "God forbid India should ever take to industrialization after the manner of the West. If an entire nation of 300 million took to similar economic exploitation, it would strip the world bare like locusts" (15)

Politics in today's world, like art forms, have been oblivious to the climate crisis. Both have excluded the non-human and see everything from a "subjective" perspective. According to Ghosh, what is needed is a mass movement rather than individual changes. Today, the human world is trapped in an "individualistic imaginary." The world is more divided than ever before as the West adopts an "armed lifeboat" position. The man-made divisions will make every nation turn a blind eye to the suffering of other nations. As a community, there should be a collective effort by politicians and artists to spearhead efforts to reverse climate change.

The Paris Agreement at the climate change conference in 2015 aiming to cut greenhouse gas emissions is an urgent effort to strengthen the response to climate change. Though scientific research and writers have contributed to the pursuit of climate change, the participation of religious groups is a "promising development." Pope Francis, in clear, precise language, identified "the burning of fossil fuels as the primary driver of climate change, details the effect on the planet and people, dismisses those who deny the crisis, and accuses wealthy individuals, corporations, and countries of selfishly turning a blind eye." (Gelles)

To conclude, Ghosh insists on how we need novels to narrate stories that guide the human world through the bleak future. He even takes us through capitalism and colonialism to reach the root of climate change. Ultimately, Ghosh in *The Great Derangement* considers the act of coming together as nation-states on a global scale to forestall the climatic catastrophic changes. In doing so, God communicates the urgency of preventing climatic calamities for the future of mankind.

Works Cited

- [1]Gelles, David. "Pope Francis Warns on Climate Change." *The New York Times*, 5 October 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/10/05/climate/the-popes-warning-to-a-warming-world.html>. Accessed 30 May 2024.
- [2]Ghosh, Amitav. *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*. Penguin Random House India Private Limited, 2018.
- [3]"The human activities that cause climate change, and the human necessities climate change affects." *Concern Worldwide*, 7 March 2022, <https://www.concern.net/news/human-activities-that-cause-climate-change>. Accessed 24 May 2024.

[4]Kumar, Meera. "The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable - Gateway House." *Gateway House Indian Council on Global Relations*, <https://www.gatewayhouse.in/how-did-this-come-about/>. Accessed 31 May 2024.

[5]Potnis, Sanika. "The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable, by Amitav Ghosh." *Pune International Centre*, 1 October 2023, <https://puneinternationalcentre.org/2023/10/01/the-great-derangement-climate-change-and-the-unthinkable-by-amitav-ghosh/>. Accessed 31 May 2024.

[6]"What is the Anthropocene? And why does it matter?" *The World Economic Forum*, 31 August 2016, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/08/what-is-the-anthropocene-and-why-does-it-matter/>. Accessed 24 May 2024.

