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**Cultural Identity and Environmental crisis under Multinational Capitalism
in Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace***

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ABSTRACT

This abstract presents an analysis of the intersection of cultural identities and environmental crises within the framework of multinational capitalism as depicted in literary works by various authors. The analysis includes a detailed examination of Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace*, which skillfully portrays the intricate connection between cultural identity and environmental degradation and serves as a thought-provoking critique of multinational capitalism in Southeast Asia. Additionally, the abstract discusses the perspectives of other authors such as Jonathan Friedman, Mo Yan, Naomi Klein, and David Harvey, who also emphasize the repercussions of multinational capitalism on cultural identities and environmental sustainability, further emphasizing the necessity for change and preservation. Through a comparative analysis of these literary works, the abstract aims to offer insights into the profound impact of multinational capitalism on cultural identities and environmental crises and highlights the urgent need for systematic changes to address these interconnected challenges.

Keywords: Cultural Identities, Environmental Crises, Multinational Capitalism, Interconnectedness.

INTRODUCTION

In Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace*, cultural identity and environmental crisis are intricately woven into the fabric of a narrative shaped by forces of multinational capitalism in Southeast Asia. This novel, set against the historical landscapes of India, Burma, and Malaya, presents a critical examination of how British imperialism and the burgeoning forces of global capitalism precipitated cultural dislocation and environmental degradation. The narrative also foregrounds the extensive exploitation of natural resources, particularly teak forests and rubber plantations, as emblematic of the environmental consequences of capitalist expansion. Simultaneously, Ghosh interrogates the cultural ramifications of these economic transformations, depicting the erosion and reconfiguration of

indigenous identities under the relentless pressures of foreign economic domination. Through a detailed portrayal of the characters' experiences, the novelist skillfully demonstrates the intricate connection between cultural identity and environmental degradation, offering a penetrating critique of multinational capitalism and confronting readers to actively engage for their indigenous cultures and environmental conservation.

In *You Meng Ying (Quiet Dream Shadows)*, the 17th-century Chinese writer Zhan Chao commented "Reading books is easy, but studying them is difficult. Studying books is easy, but applying them is difficult. Applying it is easy, but remembering is difficult." This resonates with the importance of acknowledging that the true value of knowledge lies in its practical and enduring application. It is imperative not only to comprehend the knowledge we acquire but also to consistently apply it. This proactive approach is essential for the preservation of our cultural heritage and the protection of our planet, Earth. Through the penetrating discussion of the historical backdrops of *The Glass Palace*, Ghosh provides an intricate understanding of the environmental and cultural impacts of multinational capitalism and the novel serves as an urgent call for readers to act for both their cultural heritage and ecological preservation and remember the adverse effects of forgetting their ecological duties.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

1. To understand Amitav Ghosh's examination of the intersection of cultural identities and environmental crisis within the framework of multinational capitalism.
2. To understand Ghosh's perspective on the role of literature in exploring climate change and cultural ramifications.

DISCUSSIONS

The loss of cultural identity can lead to social fragmentation, diminished diversity, and loss of heritage. Jonathan Friedman's famous book *Cultural Identity and Global Process* is a thorough examination of the complex relationship between global processes like capitalism, modernization, and cultural identity. The writer suggests that cultural identity is dynamic and it is often constructed and reconstructed through various interactions. His special attention is given to the tension between local cultural identities and global influences. Sometimes an indigenous community adapts to global pressure by integrating new elements and sometimes it loses its vitality. He also discusses the possible ways to resist global influences. He highlights a few examples of cultural resilience.

In the wake of multinational capitalism, China's ability to preserve its cultural identities and ensure environmental safety involves a combination of community initiatives, government policies, and innovative practices that integrate economic development with cultural and environmental protection. The Nobel prize-winning Chinese literature Mo Yan writes powerful storytelling that highlights the themes of cultural and environmental concerns. His novel *Red Sorghum* is set in rural China and it spans several decades showing the life and struggles of local people. The writer underscores the importance of cultural heritage conservation amidst the pressures of multinational capitalism. Literary figures play an important role not only in China but also all over the globe in environmental protection and cultural identity preservation by raising awareness and inspiring actions.

Social unity, respect for diversity, and rich heritage are vital elements for a rich and dynamic society. By respecting cultural diversity, societies not only recognize the value of different traditions, languages, and customs but also promote efforts to revitalize cultural practices and identities. Many indigenous cultural practices consider human beings as an integral part of the natural world, rather than separate from it. Such a holistic traditional perspective fosters a deep reverence for the natural environment and promotes cultural practices that not only protect nature but also sustain it. However, the rise of multinational capitalism has reduced the territorial rights of local people which alienates them from maintaining control over their ancestral lands. The local communities are often better

stewards of the environment because their cultural identity is intertwined with their survival and the health of their land.

In *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate*, Naomi Klein reflects how the growth and profit mentality of capitalists have sidelined the development of indigenous people and deregulated markets have led to environmental degradation. Therefore, she proposes a more structured economic system that will prioritize social justice, the protection of both cultural identities and environmental sustainability. Sidelining the environmental duties can result in degraded ecosystems and increased health risks. The protections of both cultural identity and environment in the age of multinational capitalism are interconnected goals that not only support sustainable development but also social cohesion and the overall health of our communities and planet Earth. The effort has been made by many literary figures to ensure resilient and a thriving world for ourselves and future generations.

The global climate change is to be considered as a social crisis due to its profound impacts on human societies. The issue of climate change is not only exacerbating health inequalities but also disrupts cultural practices and community structures. The rural communities are closely linked to the land and natural environment. The loss of territory and resources can lead to loss of identity and cultural disintegration. The promoters of multinational capitalism often engage in extensive resource extraction practices like oil drilling, mining, and logging that lead to habitat destruction, deforestation, and biodiversity loss. Moreover, the global spread of capitalism frequently brings homogenized and Westernized cultures and traditions which leads to a loss of unique cultural identities. "Revitalization of Traditional Culture" is a major initiative of the Chinese government which considers global climate change as a social crisis and aims to protect and promote intangible cultural heritage.

The South African-born Nobel Laureate J.M. Coetzee commented on Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace* as "An absorbing story of a world in transition, brought to life through characters who love and suffer with equal intensity." Coetzee's words are apt because he reflects Ghosh's poignant portrayal of the human experience in the face of capitalist expansion. Characters in the novel experience different experiences amidst the transition period. In the context of multinational capitalism, the narrative of the novel unfolds how economic forces reshape cultural identities, lives, and environments. Important characters of the story like Dolly and Rajkumar navigate through the transitional capitalist landscape, highlighting personal sacrifices and aspirations amid broader historical changes driven by industrialization and capitalism.

Through the juxtaposition of cultural identity with environmental crisis; Amitav Ghosh underscores the interconnectedness between humans and their natural environment. The promoters of multinational capitalists often spread dominant cultural values primarily through marketing strategies and products that lead towards the potential homogenization of global culture, diluting local cultural identities. On the flip side, multinational capitalism can also facilitate cultural hybridization through the blending of local and global cultures. In response to the pressures of multinational capitalism, some local people actively work to preserve their cultural identities and the environment.

The author also reflects on the profound impact of multinational capitalism and colonialism on both. Capitalists often prioritize profit over environmental sustainability which results in depletion of water resources along with deforestation and destruction of ecosystems. By showing how the British colonial endeavors disrupted indigenous traditional customs and altered both cultural identities and natural landscapes; Ghosh underscores that local communities frequently confront the dual threat of environmental degradation and cultural insecurity from capitalist activities. The loss of lands for local people is the loss of their cultural heritage tied to those confiscated lands by the colonialists who are governed by capitalist enterprise. Amitav Ghosh's advocacy for the urgent need to address the impacts of multinational capitalism on cultural identities and the natural environment suggests the necessity of

more sustainable and ethical business activities that value both cultural diversity and environmental integrity.

The rapid imposition of new colonial economic systems and cultural norms often resulted in over exploitation of natural resources, which in turn took a heavy toll on the social and cultural fabrics of the indigenous population. Cultural practices of Indigenous populations and their identities are often intricately connected with the natural world and such close ties are realized through agriculture, forestry of other delicate interactions with the environment. And whenever such natural settings are disturbed, it creates cascading effects on social structure and cultural identities. The novel is a holistic representation of cultural and ecological sustainability and a critique of modernity that segregates human progress from environmental wellness. Ghosh confronts the idea that modern capitalism is inherently beneficial to both people and the planet and he brings up the cost of environmental degradation and emphasizes that the consequences of environmental destruction are often overlooked. The juxtaposition of cultural identity and environmental crisis is often helpful for the readers to comprehend that the ecological crisis is not just about the destruction of nature but also about people whose lives are intricately tied to the environment.

Amitav Ghosh critiques the neoliberal practices in free markets as solutions to environmental degradation. Naomi Klein's views on capitalism and its impact on the global environmental crisis are identical to Amitav Ghosh's critique of capitalism. Klein gives a clarion call to rethink the capitalist economy. Her *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate* is a discussion of the dangerous imperatives of multinational capitalism. The profit maximization attempts along with consumerism and endless growth are all at odds with the urgent need to minimize industrial and greenhouse gas emissions. Klein discusses how capitalist economies are built on extractivism, contributing to environmental destruction. Therefore, she argues that the issue of the global environmental crisis needs systematic changes that will go beyond technological fixes and individual attempts.

In *The Glass Palace*, Amitav Ghosh provides a thorough analysis of the inner workings of capitalism and its recurring crises. David Harvey's book *The Enigma of Capital and the Crises of Capitalism* is an important book that can be taken for help to understand how capital flows and inherent contradictions within the capitalist system lead to cultural and economic instability along with social inequality and degradation of the natural environment. Harvey highlights that capital is not just about resources or money but a volatile process that drives the economy and shapes cultural and social relations. The most important part of the book is a discussion of the crises of capitalism that the writer brought from Marxist theory. He argues that problems and crises are not anomalies but are inherent in the system of capitalism and such crises, according to Harvey, often lead to cultural, social, and environmental forms,

Harvey exposes capitalism for its 'spatial fix' which he refers to as a way for capitalism to mitigate its crises by expanding its geographical boundaries and such expansion often leads to uneven development with some places receiving attention and prospering while other regions suffer cultural exploitation and environmental degradation. David Harvey and Amitav Ghosh approach capitalism through different approaches but both present a thorough critique of the impact of capitalism on the environment and society. In *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* Ghosh argues that the relentless pursuit of growth and profit under capitalism has led to ecological and cultural crises of indigenous people. Their profound critique of neoliberalism describes how neoliberal policies have increased economic and cultural inequality and environmental disasters in society.

In the colonial period, colonizers extracted natural resources and labor from the colonized countries for their benefit. The extractive policy is seen continued in modern capitalism with multinational companies exploiting and extracting maximum resources and labor in developing countries to achieve maximum benefits. The identical nature of colonialism and capitalism is well

expressed by Amitav Ghosh in his Ibis Trilogy. Colonialism imposed the colonizer's language, culture, and values in the colonized countries to erode indigenous cultural identities. Similarly, capitalism also marginalizes local customs and traditional practices to promote a homogenized consumer culture. Ghosh includes the opium trade and colonialism and its far-reaching impacts on indigenous culture and the natural environment. He demonstrates how the colonial expansionism and exploitation of both natural resources and indigenous culture have set the stage for contemporary global capitalism which come up with environmental and social issues.

Ghosh is a liberal thinker and he suggests that sticking to indigenous cultural identities can help address the environmental crisis in the wake of multinational capitalism. Many local cultures have garnered sustainable practices over generations, tailored to the needs of their environments. These sustainable practices can provide important insights into modern environmental management. Moreover, many local cultures show respect and pray for the blessings from nature and they consider human beings not as aloft from nature but as an integral part of the larger natural system. Indigenous cultural practices often include the preservation of local biodiversity which is crucial for the management of ecosystem resilience and health. By integrating local cultural identities into environmental protection; Amitav Ghosh suggests that the preservation of local cultural identity helps to maintain a rich repository of knowledge, values, and practices that are inherently tied to the natural environment.

In her *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teaching of Plants*, Robin Wall Kimmerer presents local cultural stories and teachings about nature and plants to elaborate broader environmental principles. She uses the Potawatomi culture and teachings about sweet grass that is deeply connected to their land and natural environment. The insightful connection is profoundly influential in their responses to environmental crises. The cultural identity of the Potawatomi is often involved with rituals and ceremonies that honor and protect the natural environment. Their cultures include a wealth of knowledge about sustainable local ecosystems that have been novel's central characters practiced over generations.

The cultural identity in *The Glass Palace* is intricately linked with the narrative through the depiction of characters who grapple with the issues of displacement due to colonial rule. The novel portrays the lives of people who are uprooted from their homes because of colonial expansion, exploitation of natural resources, and war. Rajkumar is one of the central characters of the novel who undergoes a profound cultural identity crisis in his journey to become a teak merchant. His journey takes him across borders into India, where he faces different challenges to reconcile his Burmese heritage with his new life in exile. His wife Dolly lived in British-occupied Burma and after her displacement from Burma to India; she faced challenges in adapting to new cultural norms while retaining aspects of her Burmese cultural identity. Rajkumar's mentor U Sa maintains a strong cultural identity amidst the pressure he received from the global capitalists and his life and works highlight the tension between modernity and traditional value practices.

The intergenerational impact of capitalism and colonialism on surfaces is visible through the struggles of Rajkumar's mother. Her experience of loss and displacement reveals the impact of colonialism on cultural identity. These characters highlight how the historical change from traditional value practices to capitalism disrupts cultural identities, leading important characters to navigate confrontations of belongingness, heritage, and adaptation across different communities and landscapes.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace* is a vivid illustration of the profound impact of multinational capitalism on cultural identities and environmental crises. The important characters like Rajkumar and Dolly reflect how the capitalist exploitation of nature and local people and customs leads

to environmental degradation and cultural displacement. However, the environmentally conscious writer Amitav Ghosh underscores the profound need for systematic changes to address these interconnected challenges. By involving a critical insight into capitalism's role in shaping cultural and environmental crises, we can better gauge the intricacies of global capitalism and advocate for developing policies that can promote and protect ecological resilience along with cultural identity. Moving forward, further thought-provoking works and research along with collective attempts are important to create a more sustainable and inclusive future where both cultural heritage and nature can thrive.

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