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***The great derangement: unravelling the climate crisis
through cultural and environmental perspectives***

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Abstract:

Amitav Ghosh's seminal work, *The Great Derangement* (2016), embarks on a profound exploration of the intricate relationship binding humanity, culture, and the environment. This research paper endeavours to provide an extensive analysis of the pivotal themes and concepts illuminated by Ghosh, offering a comprehensive comprehension of the multifaceted challenges posed by climate change. Central to the discussion is the recognition of humanity's unprecedented role as geological agents, significantly altering Earth's fundamental processes, thereby setting the stage for unprecedented climatic shifts. Ghosh's inquiry into the intersection of culture and climate underscores the critical role culture plays in fuelling desires and perpetuating the carbon economy, thereby contributing to environmental degradation. Furthermore, this paper delves into the profound implications of seemingly innocuous choices made by the bourgeoisie, unravelling their profound impact on the alarming unpredictability of weather events. The exploration extends to the underlying power dynamics inherent in the carbon economy, shedding light on how corporate interests shape and perpetuate environmental issues. Moreover, the research delves into the unique challenges faced by writers in addressing the climatic catastrophe, highlighting the intricate interplay between literature, society, and environmental concerns. It also examines the influence of corporatized democracies on energy flows and environmental policies, emphasizing the need for a holistic understanding of these complex dynamics.

Keywords:

Derangement, climate, bourgeoisie, environment, geology, carbon economy

In *The Great Derangement*, author Amitav Ghosh delves deeply into the intricate relationship between humanity and the planet, unravelling the profound impact of culture, desires, and human actions on Earth's fundamental processes. Ghosh presents a thought-provoking exploration of human beings' role as geological agents in climatic change and the consequences of their actions on the environment. Ghosh's narrative begins by highlighting the profound transformation of humans into geological agents, emphasizing the extent to which human activities have disrupted the Earth's natural balance. Similarly, in his critical essay, Dipesh Chakravartty posits that human history diminishes the rich natural history of the planet when human beings, as biological agents, transform themselves into geological agents, altering the very fundamental processes of the Earth. He asserts, "Humans have become geological agents very recently in human history" (207). This sets the stage for a critical examination of how culture fuels human desires, particularly for vehicles, appliances, and specific types of habitats, ultimately contributing significantly to the carbon economy. Ghosh astutely observes that the artifacts and commodities born from these desires both reflect and obscure the cultural matrix that spawns them, making for a compelling commentary on consumer-driven society.

Throughout *The Great Derangement*, Ghosh challenges the concept of neutrality in bourgeois life, exposing the consequences of seemingly innocuous choices made by humans on a global scale. In terms of freedom and liberty, individuals rejoice in a lifestyle that leaves a substantial carbon imprint, resulting in irreversible changes in the world's geology, leading to the unpredictability of weather events such as unprecedented rainfall and drought. Ghosh connects these consequences with the notion of Hyperobjects, a concept introduced by Timothy Morton, which refers to entities or phenomena of massive scale and scope, extending beyond the limits of human perception and comprehension. Hyperobjects, including global warming, climate change, radioactive materials, and concepts like the biosphere, possess characteristics that distinguish them from more familiar objects and concepts.

Morton's concept of hyperobjects encourages humans to contemplate the profound interconnectedness of the human world and the necessity for new modes of thinking and action to address complex global challenges. It also raises questions about how one perceives and responds to phenomena that extend beyond human beings' immediate, localized experiences. The ever-increasing consumption by human's results in deforestation and the creation of urban slums, addressing the notion that cities like Mumbai consider seafront locations as status symbols. This not only elevates the value of real estate but also perpetuates a colonial worldview. Ghosh convincingly argues that this worldview has become ingrained in middle-class lifestyles worldwide, symbolizing power, security, and conquest. *The Great Derangement*

candidly addresses the risks inherent in nuclear power plants within the framework of unreliable power supplies, furnishing readers with a comprehensive comprehension of the challenges arising from the partitioning of nature and culture. Ghosh adeptly navigates the intricacies of corporatized democracies in post-war Western Europe, accentuating the pivotal role of energy flows in configuring the socio-political landscape.

A salient facet of the book lies in its exploration of contemporary fiction, a domain Ghosh contends has become overly individualistic, marginalizing collective voices and identities. Within this discourse, he underscores the indispensable role of literature in shaping societal perceptions and responses to the contemporary ecological crisis, commonly referred to as “the great derangement.” Ghosh initiates this exploration by highlighting the conspicuous absence of climate change as a thematic concern in present-day literature, particularly within mainstream fiction. Despite the urgency and magnitude of the climate crisis, Ghosh observes that prevailing literary works predominantly dwell on more immediate and individualistic themes, such as personal relationships and daily life. This omission, according to Ghosh, constitutes a form of derangement; an intentional oversight or neglect of a profoundly critical issue.

The author posits that the traditional realist novel, which has dominated literary expression for centuries, encounters difficulties in grappling with the intricacies of climate change. Realist fiction tends to centre on individual human experiences and emotions, whereas climate change is inherently a global and intergenerational phenomenon. Ghosh argues that the realist novel’s emphasis on the individual often renders it ill-suited for portraying the collective and enduring dimensions of the climate crisis.

Franco Moretti’s exploration of the concept of “fillers” in narratology sheds light on how storytelling evolved in the nineteenth century and its connection to the changing dynamics of everyday life. Fillers, in this context, refer to narrative elements that serve a specific purpose within a story. Moretti’s analysis suggests that these fillers played a crucial role in shaping the narrative landscape of the time. One of Moretti’s key observations is that the increasing use of fillers in storytelling coincided with a shift towards depicting everyday life. This shift created a narrative space that was both familiar and open to new developments, allowing stories to unfold within the context of routine and ordinary occurrences. In other words, fillers served as building blocks for narratives that could adapt and generate new stories with each passing day. Moretti makes a compelling link between the prevalence of fillers in literature and the emerging regularity of bourgeois life. He suggests that fillers provided a unique form of narrative

pleasure that was well-suited to the daily activity of reading a novel. In order to enhance pleasure by providing a sense of ease and satisfaction, fillers enhanced the pleasure of storytelling by catering to the expectations and experiences of readers immersed in the routines of bourgeois life. The use of fillers in storytelling is not arbitrary but is deeply connected to the socio-cultural context of the time. Furthermore, it underscores his interpretation of power dynamics within narratives and society. Moretti's ideas align with a conception of power reminiscent of Michel Foucault, characterized by regulation, rationalization, and normalization. In this context, bourgeois realism, marked by the prevalence of fillers, is both a contributor to and a product of bio political forces, reflecting the social and cultural norms of the era.

He further argues that literature, as a form of cultural imagination, should be at the forefront of addressing this crisis. However, the imaginative capacities of both writers and readers seem to have been deranged or constrained when it comes to comprehending the scale and implications of climate change. Ghosh contends that literature has a unique role in expanding our imaginations and helping us re-envision our relationship with the natural world. He argues that storytelling can offer alternative narratives and perspectives that challenge the dominant paradigms driving environmental degradation. By weaving climate-related themes into literature, authors can engage readers emotionally and intellectually with the urgent issues at hand. It is the need of the hour for new narrative forms addressing the climatic crisis through which one can capture and understand the complexity of the ecological challenges we face. In addition to that, Ghosh insists on the responsibility of writers in addressing climate change in their work.

In reality, Ghosh states that contemporary weather events in various parts of India reflect a very high degree of improbability. Ghosh's narrative takes readers to the Sunderbans, a unique and fragile ecosystem located in the Bengal delta, where he confronts the stark reality of climate change in the context of a population of 250 million people. Through vivid storytelling, Ghosh highlights the disparities between densely populated regions like the Bengal delta and low-population island nations like Tuvalu. This stark contrast serves as a powerful reminder of the disproportionate impact of climate change on different parts of the world.

One of the most alarming revelations put forward by Ghosh is the fate of the Indus River, upon which Pakistan critically depends. Ghosh underscores how human exploitation of this vital resource has led to its depletion, causing the river to no longer reach the sea. The intrusion of saltwater inland has resulted in the loss of over one million acres of agricultural land. This vivid

example illustrates the devastating consequences of human actions on the environment and livelihoods. Ghosh goes on to discuss the vulnerability of Asia's population to climate change, shedding light on the dire circumstances faced by millions in the region when world nations turn their attention to highly populated countries like India and China to mitigate climate change. He ironically draws attention to Anil Agarwal and Sunita Narain's seminal essay titled "Global Warming in an Unequal World: A Case of Environmental Colonialism" (1991), emphasizing that the accumulation of greenhouse gases is primarily a consequence of the excessive consumption of developed nations. This raises critical questions about the ethics of climate change and the responsibility of the global community.

He explores the intersection of climate change and national security, highlighting how the reliance on fossil fuels by various nations, including the United States, has significant implications in the name of national and global security. A vast amount of energy was consumed by countries like the USA in military operations. Timothy Mitchell in his seminal work *Carbon Democracy* quotes, "without the energy they derive from oil, the current forms of political and economic life would not exist" (136). This extensive reliance on fossil fuels for retaining power over world nations contributes to the degradation of the environment and exacerbates geopolitical tensions as nations vie for access to dwindling fossil fuel resources.

In Pre-Independent India, before the advent of Industrialization, Ghosh invokes the visionary criticism of Mahatma Gandhi on industrial capitalism in *Young India* (1928). He states that copying the prevailing economic systems of the West, which prioritize profit over the well-being of the planet, creates a huge ruckus in a country like India.

The concept of the 'deep state' is also explored in *The Great Derangement*. The term describes the idea that unelected or unaccountable forces, often with their own agendas, can influence or manipulate government policies and decision-making processes. Ghosh delves into the ways in which political and economic interests can obstruct meaningful action on climate change, offering readers a nuanced perspective on the challenges of addressing this global crisis. He argues that the vested interests of powerful actors, such as fossil fuel industries and influential political figures, can prevent effective policies and international cooperation to mitigate climate change. He hints at the influence of the deep state in shaping national and international policies, making it difficult for governments to prioritize long-term environmental concerns over short-term economic interests.

From grand old times to till now, human beings rely upon energy resources starting from wood, charcoal, coal, and for the past five decades human beings have heavily depended upon fossil

fuels. Dipesh Chakravarty rightly points out that “The mansions of modern freedom stand upon the ever-expanding base of fossil fuels. Most of our freedoms so far have been energy-intensive” (208). He predicts that even the transition from coal to fossil fuels to reduce organized labour and to the flow of oil can be metaphorically compared to the flow of power over pipelines. Ghosh’s analysis underscores the far-reaching consequences of these changes on society and the environment. *The Great Derangement* is a profound non-fiction work that challenges readers to confront the consequences of human actions on the environment and society. Ghosh’s meticulous research and eloquent writing serve as a powerful call to action, urging individuals to re-evaluate their choices and consider the long-term consequences of their actions in a world where the great derangement is an undeniable reality.

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