CHAPTER – IV

Visions of Nature Relationships in River of Smoke

Amitav Ghosh’s works have created a unique identity in the genre of Indian Writing in English. He mostly portrays contemporary themes and brings forth a sort of realization of the events that have happened in the past and continue to make their presence in the present. An intermingling of these time periods coupled with a tinge of the current ecological issues makes his novels a kind of fact cum fiction based readings. Ecocriticism offers an ecological vision about the relationship between nature and everything especially human beings. In a way, nature and human beings have a mutual relationship. Ursula Heise in PMLA very rightly maintains, “Ecocriticism analysis the ways in which literature represents the human relation to nature at particular moments of history” (1097). Ghosh in River of Smoke (2011), the eighth novel and second part of Ibis trilogy, describes the nineteenth century Asian subcontinent with creative enthusiasm and deep historical insight. He revisits history whereby he passes judgment over the misused power to exploit ecologies of imperial subjects in the past.

The novel is woven on the warps of history with woofs of individual lives. It has both historical and imaginary characters from nineteenth century past. It charts out the destinies of characters from Ghosh’s earlier novel, Sea of Poppies, the first part of the Ibis trilogy. These characters include Neel, Deeti, Paulette, Kalua, Ah Fatt, Jodu etc. The novel further elaborates the lives of drug trafficking merchant, Bahram Modi; Chinese Commissioner, Lin Zexu; an American trader, Mr Charles King; the British naturalist, Mr Penrose; the artist, Robin Chinnery; Chinese artist, Lamqua; his apprentice, Jaqua; Chinese nursery owner Punhyqua; a gardener, Ah Fey or Mr Chan; curator of Kew Gardens, Sir Joseph Banks and his apprentice Mr Kerr. Apart from Ibis, the novel focuses on two other ships- the Anahita owned by an Indian drug baron, Bahram Modi and Redruth owned by Mr Penrose, a British naturalist.

River of Smoke entirely deals with the breakout of the opium war (1839-42). After ruining the Indian landscape and looting its capital, the British promote
Industrial Revolution and the expansion of the empire. They convert Indian land into the producer of raw materials whose access is confined exclusively to English factories. Mishra quotes Fairbank, “In 1830, the auditor-general of the East India Company declared that every year at least £4,000,000 had to be carried back from India to England” (71). The cultivation of poppy flowers and the processing of seeds into opium in India and its sale in China by British, American and Indian traders is the most spotlighted aspect of the novel. Imperialists and colonizers are greatly responsible for death and destruction of native flora, fauna, cultures and human beings of the annexed bio-regions.

The novel tracks down the instances of ecological imperialism which has spread its roots as an exploitative system in our environment. All the enhancements of technology, science and commerce in the name of growth are mainly anthropocentric and certainly abandon the claims of the natural environment. Ecocritical engagement that is noticed in the novel is the writer’s critique of globalized capitalism which has accentuated the deterioration of the environment and the plundering of earth’s resources. In his famous essay “Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism”, Lenin rightly points out, “The enormous growth of industry and the remarkably rapid process of concentration of production in ever-larger enterprises are one of the most characteristic features of capitalism” (qtd. in Mishra 74).

Ghosh spotlights how the British aim to expand their market in China by focusing on its valuable commodities like silk, tea and porcelain etc. Chinese are presented as people, who believe that their own products, like their food, their plants and their own customs are superior to all others. The low demand of the European commodities in China has actually presented a great problem for the British, as it leads to unequal flow of trade resulting in immense outpouring of silver from Britain. So in order to compensate this imbalance, British start forceful export of Indian opium to China. Rajnish Mishra gives the explanation of The Cambridge History of China regarding this trade as:
this money was used to buy opium that was exported to China, to be sold in Canton and the sale yielded another £3,300,000. Thus West had finally found a way to address the huge deficit it was facing in its trade with China. By 1830’s it had finally found something that it could supply to China in return of many valuable things. (71)

Ecocriticism seeks to examine how metaphors of nature and land are used and abused. Murray Bookchin, the great social ecologist, is the very first thinker to explicitly link an ecological understanding of society and its relationships to non-human nature by criticizing capitalism and modern technology. The capitalist society for Bookchin epitomizes the historical process of the development of hierarchy and domination. Likewise, in the novel, the economic motif or capitalistic greed of Britain is depicted by Ghosh as the main cause of exploitation of Indian and Chinese lands. They exploit other nations under the unfair license of free trade. Free trade is the excuse that the English merchants take advantage of to conduct their unforgivable crime. In actual practice, there is nothing free about their trade practices. Ghosh states that it is not only the conservatives who favour this systematic exploitation, but even the liberals are on its side. The British Parliament and Queen are in league with the merchants who bring the much needed revenues and many other things from all over the world. Ghosh, in his earlier novel, Sea of Poppies, chooses Mr Burnham, an English opium merchant to confess the intensions of free trade. He ironically comments:

The war, when it comes, will not be for opium. It will be for the freedom of Chinese people. Free trade is a right conferred on Man by God, and its principles apply as much to opium as any other article of trade. More so perhaps, since in its absence many millions of natives would be denied the lasting advantage of British influence. (115)

Ghosh makes clear the tactics of the opium trade as a complete British monopoly. This trade makes them so rich that they cannot conceive of managing
without it. They make millions of Chinese people slaves to opium. The addiction of opium has almost engulfed everyone there; monks, generals, housewives, soldiers, mandarins and even students. Their role in China’s enfeeblement is very clearly brought forth in Commissioner Lin’s public dispatch to Queen Victoria. Commissioner Lin, is the new representative of Chinese government in Canton to ban smuggling of opium. He blames the foreign merchants and hold them responsible for seducing the people of China. For sake of their own profit, they flood the country of China with illegally brought opium. In the very beginning, it was primarily used by leisured upper classes but adoption of opium as a commercial enterprise by Britishers lead to death and exploitation of land and people. Neel, one of the characters in novel clarifies the British tactics:

The drug may come from India, but the trade is almost entirely in British hands. In the Bengal presidency, the cultivation of opium is their monopoly: few Achhas play any part in it, apart from the peasants who are made to grow it – and they suffer just as much as the Chinese who buy the drug. In Bombay, the British were not able to set up a monopoly because they were not in control of the entire region. That is why local merchants like Seth Bahramji were able to enter the trade. Their earnings are the only part of this immense commerce that trickles back to Hindusthan- all the rest goes to England and Europe and America. (484)

Ghosh shows his compassion and sympathy towards both Indian and Chinese lands. He laments over the fact that Britishers have made the provinces of Malwa, Bihar and Banaras, the chief localities of opium cultivation, by converting the vast tracts of Indian land into piles of poppies. He opposes the debilitating exploitations of weaker/ developing economies by more powerful capitalist nations. The capitalist system always shows the capacity to commodify everything, including human relations with each other, and, overwhelmingly, their relationship with nature. Capitalism results in a sort of clash between an economy based on unending greed and the desiccation of the natural environment. The exploitation of
human beings and nature, as generated by opium trade as well as selling of indigenous flora and fauna, brings out the monstrous impositions of Western colonialism exposing their capitalistic greed.

The description of the faustian aspirations and attitudes of British traders in the novel, echoes Harold Fromm’s concept of ‘trade-offs’, which represent the greed towards economic development. Harold Fromm in “From Transcendence to Obsolescence” very aptly writes that trade-offs sacrifice, “the luxury of an uncontaminated environment in order to permit economic “progress”’ (36). Human being’s faustian posturing takes place against a background of arrogant, shocking, and suicidal disregard of their roots in the earth. Likewise, Ghosh clarifies that for the sake of their personal profit, Britishers seduce Chinese people to opium. The tactics of British trade is a solid proof of the barbarity of capitalistic or economic greed which is a parasitical system that exploits humanity and nature alike. Its sole motor is the chase towards profit and thus the need for constant growth. Such greed wastefully creates unnecessary products, squandering the ecosphere’s limited resources. It returns only toxins and pollutants.

Economic greed and capitalism has always been ecologically destructive and these assaults on the earth have accelerated and are still accelerating. Its prime motif is to measure how much more is sold every day, every week, and every year; involving the creation of vast quantities of products that are directly harmful to both humans and nature. It involves the production of commodities that cannot be produced without spreading diseases both in human and non-human life forms. It does not spare even forests that produce the oxygen that is breathed in by humans. It demolishes ecosystems and treats water, soil and air like sewers for the disposal of industrial wastes. It exists on every level, from the individual enterprise to the system as a whole. The insatiable hunger of corporations is facilitated by imperialist expansion in search of ever greater access to natural resources, cheap labour and new markets.

The present societies are structured around the brutal competition of grow or die in which enterprises are driven by the pressures of the market place to seek
profit for capital expansion at the expense of all other considerations. The imperative stands radically at odds with the capacity of the planet to sustain diversity of life forms, and in turn leads capitalist societies and nations to plunder the planet. William Howarth in “Some Principles of Ecocriticism” quotes Alfred Crosby, “capitalism becomes the source for all conflict, oppression, and environmental abuse” (79).

Ghosh depicts the strong urge of China’s action on British Government to put an end to the oppression done to them by means of opium smuggling. Chinese authorities realize the harm caused to their people and environment by opium, the mainstay of British trade equation and finally decide to remove it. The government of China stops opium import from other neighbouring countries and declares it, “deadly poison” (432), “The flowing poison, the vile dirt, the dire calamity brought upon us by foreigners” (538). They call it a poison responsible for loss of human life and other non-human life forms. The novel also elucidates ill effects of opium on its addicts. These ill effects are expressed through imagery of death. Ghosh maintains, how in the sequel, the poison takes dreadful effect leaving the sleeping smokers like corpses and like haggard demons. China in a struggle to throw off the coils of the drug sends a proclamation to the foreigners who have completely ensnared the Fanqui-town of the city of Canton, now called Guangzhou. Ghosh through this proclamation declares:

. . . you bring opium to our central land, chousing people out of their substance and involving their very lives in destruction? I find that with this thing you have seduced and deluded the people of China for tens of years past; and countless are the unjust hoards that you have thus accumulated. (431)

Highlighting the concerns of the economic greed of Britain, Ghosh emphasizes human being to follow certain ethics in their relationship to the land to avoid ecocide. Ghosh intends to highlight importance of environmental ethics in order to deal with the global crisis. A great historian, Donald Worster maintains:
We are facing global crisis today, not because of how ecosystems function but rather because of how our ethical systems function. Getting through the crisis requires understanding our impact on nature as precisely as possible, but even more, it requires understanding those ethical systems and using that understanding to reform them. (qtd. in Glotfelty xxi)

The growing demand on natural capital, such as land, forest, water, soil, air and bio-diversity outstrips the world’s capacity to renew these resources. This is precisely what Aldo Leopold warned more than seven decades ago in an essay on land ethics. He says that even though it may not be possible to prevent the alteration, management and use of natural resources, it is certainly possible to affirm their right to continued existence. Ghosh’s belief in adopting land ethics to save the land and prevent ecocide resonate with Aldo Leopold who begin his ruminations on land ethics by giving an ecological definition of ethic as a limitation on freedom of action in the struggle for existence. The philosophical definition of ethic entails differentiating between social and anti-social conducts. According to Leopold, the first set of ethics deals with relationship among individuals. The second set of ethics deals with the relationship between individual and society. Third step in the ethical sequence is to connect man and land because land is still looked upon as property. Leopold in Sand County Almanac maintains, “The land-relation is still strictly economic, entailing privileges but not obligations” (168). As such, in order to save the earth and its inhabitants, Ghosh wishes human beings to shift their role from conqueror of the land community to plain members and citizens of it. He emphasizes that humans should have respect for their fellow members and land community that includes soils, waters, plants and animals. He urges human beings to cast off the belief that economics determines all land use. Aldo Leopold also believes that land relations hinge on investments of time, forethought, skill and faith, rather than investments of cash. He very aptly maintains, “As a land user thinketh, so is he” (qtd. in Sumathy 22).
In *River of Smoke* Ghosh, discusses different approaches of different characters of the novel towards nature. He presents variously different characters; migrants, lascars, traders, government officials, British officials, business men, botanists, horticulturalists, boatmen and even painters. Being a writer of ecological consciousness, he presents these characters from two different angles:

1. Characters in the novel who exploit Nature
2. Characters in the novel who idealize and worship Nature

Through the characters of novel, Ghosh seeks to present his eco-critical view point by opening the vistas of the cliffs of Mauritius, Chinese landscapes, inner sanctum of walled Chinese garden, plant life on a vessel *Redruth* owned by Mr Penrose and the impact of opium on China’s people and its physical environment.

**Characters in the novel who exploit Nature**

Ghosh through this novel focuses an eco-critical lens on the nineteenth century human exploitation of humans and nature alike by the rulers, imperial powers and the dominant human races. Novel is an account of ecological imperialism which highlights the main ecological concerns like environmental justice and environmental racism issues. According to Robert Figueroa and Claudia Mills, “environmental justice refers to the conceptual connections and casual relationships between environmental issues and social justice” (qtd. in Sujatha 121). Ghosh delineates the socio-economic conditions of the imperial powers in which the farmers of the Gangetic plains are forced to opium cultivation leading to rapid destruction of agrarian economy of India, depriving the farmers of their sustenance. Ghosh opens the account of his novel with the description of a place, the cliffs of Mauritius where the environmentally displaced people from India are forced to settle down for clearing the plantation. Deeti is a central character who has suffered because of the curse of opium. Ghosh opens his novel describing Deeti’s shrine. Her shrine emanates right in the middle of rock shelf, crafted not by human hands but by the wind and the earth:
Deeti’s shrine was hidden in a cliff, in a far corner of Mauritius, where the island’s eastern and southern shorelines collide to form the wind-whipped dome of the Morne Brabant. The site was a geological anomaly—a cave within a spur of limestone, hollowed out by wind and water—and there was nothing like it anywhere else on the mountain. Later Deeti would insist that it wasn’t chance but destiny that led her to it—for the very existence of the place was unimaginable until you had actually stepped inside it. (3)

Deeti and eight of her shipmates from the northern India are indentured to a far corner of Mauritius, Baie du Morne, the British plantation colony as labourers. These labourers are environmentally displaced and face environmental racism at the hands of colonialists. The place they are forced to make their habitat is the remotest part of Mauritius that is inaccessible by road. Huggan and Helen Tiffin in Postcolonial Ecocriticism writes:

Environmental racism is perhaps best understood as a sociological phenomenon, exemplified in the environmentally discriminatory treatment of socially marginalized or economically disadvantaged people, and in the transference of ecological problems from their ‘home’ source to a ‘foreign’ outlet . . . Above all, though, environmental racism is an extreme form of what Plumwood calls ‘hegemonic centrism’. (4)

Ghosh highlights the poor working condition of the coolies working in the plantation. Environmental racism and environmental injustice is clearly brought forth in the description of landscape there. These displaced labourers are made to work in environmentally hazardous conditions. Sujatha in her essay “Opium and India in Sea of Poppies: A Socio-Environmental Study” very aptly points out to Ronald Sandler and Phaera Pezzullo who outline the principles of environmental justice as, “Environmental justice affirms the right of all workers to a safe and healthy work environment, without being forced to choose between an unsafe livelihood and unemployment. It also affirms the right of those who work at home
to be free from environmental hazards” (122). Ghosh highlights the worst possible plight of human beings. The imperial powers force them to serve their indenture without any motivation. These imperial powers are presented by Ghosh as ill both in mind and body. The coolies labouring there are not able to get basic necessities like food and proper shelter:

food ran so short that the coolies had to forage in the jungle in order to fill their bellies. Nowhere was the forest richer than on the Morne, but rarely, if ever, did any one venture to climb those slopes- for the mountain was a place of sinister reputation, where hundreds, perhaps thousands of people were known to have died. (10)

The above extract of the novel shows the dreadful atmosphere of the place. The place has witnessed the death of thousands of people. It is only few years before Deeti and her ship-siblings arrival on the cliffs of Morne that some escaped slaves known as fugitives or marrons took refuge there. They succeeded in settling there in considerable numbers, making a community. They did not know that after only a little time of their arrival, slavery was outlawed in Mauritius. Some soldier troops sensed their presence and marched towards them to set them free. Fugitives mistook them for a raiding party and flung themselves off the cliffs. They were plunged to their deaths on the rocks below in huge numbers. As a result, from that day, the entire landscape seems to be frozen in fear. The people living there are continuously under the fear and panic. Ghosh picturizes the dreadful atmosphere of that place and asserts that the memory of this heart breaking incidence still saturates the landscape. In the coolie lines of Morne, when the wind is heard to howl upon the mountains, the sounds seem to be the keening of the dead, and the fear invoked is so deep that that no one would willingly set foot upon those slopes.

In contrast to the hostile landscape of Mauritius cliffs, Ghosh picturizes the landscapes of China with all its beauty and attraction. The landscape of China is described in a fascinating way, which can help humans relieve themselves of their tensions and pressures. Landscape, includes the physical elements of landforms
such as mountains, hills, water bodies like rivers, lakes, ponds and sea, living elements of land cover including indigenous vegetation, human elements including different forms of land use, buildings and structures. Chinese provide wilderness experience by presenting landscapes that produce a scenic facsimile of wilderness, a mythologized image of what one would like the wilderness to be. Evidence of human activity is carefully erased, but humans themselves are not excluded. The aesthetic touch to landscape designates it a legitimate object of artistic consumption. Alison Byerly, in “The Uses of Landscape” very rightly maintains that the aesthetic view of wilderness inculcate in viewers a sense of responsibility towards nature. According to him, wilderness is meaningless in absence of humanity. He believes that the landscapes must help to provide an aesthetic experience:

The anesthetization of landscape permits the viewer to define and control the scene, yet fosters the illusion that the scene is part of self-regulating nature. The viewer seems to be an incidental spectator of the beauties of nature when in fact man has created the “view” himself by announcing and promoting it as “scenic.” The idea of wilderness refers to the absence of humanity, yet “wilderness” has no meaning outside the context of the civilization that defines it. This paradox requires that we experience the wilderness without changing its status as wilderness. This can only be done by constructing an aesthetic image of the wilderness that allows us to avoid confronting its reality. (54)

As such, landscape is more than just scenery. It is the interaction between people and place. Ghosh presents the city of Canton in a burst of bloom of flowers and fragrances. Penrose beautifully introduces Canton as a habitat of plants and flowers. The flowers are seen almost everywhere in full bloom. They are found on roofs of boats, on top of old walls, hanging down from balconies and even on carts that roam on streets. During spring, the trees and plants are bright with bloom and the air is perfumed with the scent of flowers. It is presented majestic even during
the wistful hues of autumn. The pavilions are guarded with unique floral bushes. The flowers hang down in thick clusters, emanating a sweet, heady odour. Robin Chinnery, a great artist and painter describes the landscape of Canton in mesmerization:

Nowhere on earth- I suspect, is the importance of portals as well understood as in China. In this country, gateways are not merely entrances and exits- they are tunnels between different dimensions of existence. Here, as at the threshold of Punhyqua’s garden, I was visited by the feeling that I was stepping into a realm that existed on some plane other than the ordinary. Ahead lay a garden, not unlike Punhyqua’s, an artfully made landscape of streams and bridges, lakes and hills, rocks and forests, with winding pathways and wave-like walls. (442-43)

The Honam Island that lies on the opposite side of the city of Canton is described as being like a vast park, green and wooded. There are several small creeks and streams cut through it and their shores are dotted with monasteries, nurseries, orchids, pagodas and picturesque little villages. It is a fact that Chinese garden is enclosed by walls and includes one or more ponds, trees, various flowers, and an assortment of halls and pavilions within the garden, connected by winding paths and galleries. Ghosh describes Honam Island as a freshly born kingdom offering a strange excitement. The island is guarded with a fine arrangement of feathery pine trees and fantastical boulders that is having look of anthills. These hills are pierced with many holes, hollows and fissures by the action of water of River Pearl. He describes it as a place of the most extravagant fantasy with winding streams which extend across by hump-backed bridges. Small islands with halls and pavilions emerge out fantastically from the womb of lakes. There are varied trees both lofty and sturdy that stand out full of life, gliding proud and erect. The tiny and stunted trees add to the delight with their branches that illustrate the flow of the wind. He states, “At every turn there was a new perspective to baffle
and delight the eye: it was as if the very ground had been shaped and contorted to create illusory vistas” (280).

Sir Joseph Banks, curator of the King’s Garden at Kew, portrays China as rich in its botanical varieties. It is blessed with different and varied plants and flowers. He portrays China as, “a country singularly blessed in its botanical riches, being endowed not only with some of the most beautiful and medicinally useful plants in existence, but also with many that were of commercial value” (101). The reason for China’s varied variety of flora is the Celestial’s keen appreciation of the value of their natural endowments. Their gardeners and horticulturists are presented as being the most knowledgeable and skilful in the world. Besides being skilful, they guard their treasures with extraordinary vigilance. Ghosh reports that even lavish bribes do not persuade them to yield their riches. Yet the imperialists somehow manage to plunder in and succeed in exploiting varied flora of China.

Ghosh very clearly shows how imperialists and colonizers bring death and destruction of native flora, fauna, cultures and human beings. Britain and other foreign countries are presented in a race to accelerate their efforts to obtain China’s most valuable trees and plants. Ghosh writes, “The value of China’s plants had not been lost on Britain’s rivals and enemies across the channel: the major physick gardens and herbariums of both Holand and France had also been endeavouring to assemble collections of China’s flora” (101). In a way they bring about massacre of land and its varied species for their own profit and greed. The mindless pursue and human greed of Britishers towards different species of flora of China disappears some plant species completely. It is a disgusting fact that humans are mindlessly destroying the plants and trees for their own use. A similar fact is mentioned in the novel showing how a rich botanical variety of China- *Camellia sinesis* disappears completely from the earth. This species of *camellia* from which tea is extracted is taken in possession by the foreigners and then mindlessly used as it accounts for an enormous proportion of the world’s trade. It is believed that this rich golden coloured plant yields an infusion that can turn white hair into black,
restore the suppleness of aged joints and serve as a cure for ailments of lungs. It is beautifully described as:

The petals on their green tinged stem shine like the purest gold.
A purple eye looks up from the centre, setting the bloom aglow,
It remedies the pain of ageing bones and quickens the memory
and mind,
It puts to flight the death that festers in the lungs. (124)

A comparable adventurous spirit in the novel is harboured by a British naturalist, Fitcher Penrose travelling in his ship *Redruth* that carries a huge stock of flora. Apart from a trove of living plants, the *Redruth* also carries painted gardens—a collection of botanical paintings and illustrations. Frederick Fitcher Penrose is a man of unusual accomplishment and considerable wealth and a noted nurseryman. Ghosh, in the novel introduces him as a plant-hunter. He makes a great deal of money through the marketing of seeds, saplings, cuttings and horticultural implements. His principal enterprise, a nursery called Penrose & Sons in Cornwall is reputed for its illegal Chinese importations. Among these imported plants, various varieties of *plumbago*, *flowering quince* and *wintersweet* has gained enormous popularity in the British Isles. His motif is to tap the exotic natural resources of China and make them saleable and popular in the occidental world. In the exchange, the plants he chooses for Chinese connoisseurs are handpicked from the American Northwest, “*Gaultheria shallon*” a plant both ornamental and medicinal, and a magnificent new conifer” (77) and from Mexico are *Mexican orange*, “*antirrhinums, lobelias and georginas*” (77). He makes a great deal of money through the marketing of different species of flora. His plans are simply to exchange plants in order to make profit in this business. As such Ghosh presents him as an ecological imperialist. Penrose earns prestige, laurels and money by virtue of his repeated visit in Canton in the quest of rare and precious plants and his success in garnering and transporting those plants to Britain. Ghosh infers:

His patented moss-scrappers, bark-scalers and garden-scarifiers had a large and devoted following in England. His principal enterprise, a
nursery called Penrose & Sons, was based in Falmouth, in Cornwall: it was reputed especially for its Chinese importations, some of which—like certain varieties of plumbago, flowering quince and wintersweet—had gained enormous popularity in the British Isles. (35)

This establishes Penrose as one of the most renowned botanists and horticulturists of Britain. Attributing his success to his visit to Canton, Penrose acknowledges, “Canton’s placed many a foot on the ladder of fortune,’ said Fitcher, ‘and I was fortunate that mine was among them” (103). The imperial explorers and exploiters of nature have devised ingenious ways of exploiting Chinese flora as Celestials are aware of the value of the nature and resist the western barbarians to invade and lay hand on their landscape. The determination of exploiters remains undeterred and they keep devising all possible and new ideas to exploit their natural resources. Like in eighteenth century, no foreigner was allowed to take live specimen of plants from China, so they took dried specimens like seeds and even discovered painted gardens. Painted pictures as a kind of catalogue were taken to plan future exploitative excursions.

Fitcher revolutionizes the business of transporting plants across the sea by inventing miniature greenhouses on his ship. He is ever ready with procedures and protocols for all the contingencies of the plant life inside his ship. He takes care of all the subjects related to his plants like soil type, manure, fertilizers, compost etc. He becomes acquainted with every odd and even regarding the plant life on his board. Fitcher designs an ingenious arrangement of movable awnings to provide shade, sunlight and protection from rough weather, “When there was rain, the awnings turned into water-traps: with so many plants on board, the Redruth needed more fresh water than other ships, and Fitcher was loath to let a single drop go waste” (76). He designs Redruth in a unique manner as it has its own, unique procedures for dealing with waste. The refuse from its galleys is not indiscriminately emptied over board. Everything that might serve as plant nutrition is carefully separated for use of plants, “Tea leaves, coffee grounds, rice, bits of
old biscuits and hard tack- all this was dumped in an enormous barrel that was suspended over the stern” (76). He admits that only thing voluntarily debarred by him for use is excrements of the crew. It is debarred because of crew’s prejudices.

Like other imperialists, Fitcher sees nature as something to be exploited for profit. His practical approach towards nature comes forth clearly through his response to the wilderness that the botanical gardens at Pamplemousses of Port Louis has turned into, “he received a shock that almost toppled him from his mount: where once there had been orderly, well spaced trees and broad, picturesque vistas, there was now a wild and tangled muddle of greenery” (37). Fitcher had earlier also on his first voyage to China visited Pamplemousses garden. At that time, the island was a French colony and the garden had an artificial look with orderly well spaced trees and broad, picturesque vistas. But now, the island is free and as such the wilderness of the area is trying to rehabilitate itself. Ghosh shows, how nature with its plenty of flora is enjoying the freedom without human intrusion. Nature follows its own laws and tries to guard its vicinity, “the greenery was as impenetrable as a wall, and the unclipped aerial roots of the banyans that flanked the main gateway had thickened into a forbidding barrier- a portcullis that seemed to be designed to keep intruders at bay” (37). Penrose is not ready to accept the nature’s plenty in all its varieties from various continents. He murmurs in disbelief, “In Nature there existed no forest where African creepers were at war with Chinese trees, nor one where Indian shrubs and Brazilian vines were locked in a mortal embrace. This was a work of Man, a botanical Babel” (37). His greed is highlighted in the novel as even while mourning for the fallen state of Pamplemousses botanical garden, he unmindfully grabs at everything there. He never hesitates planning miles-long expeditions on plant collection. He refuses to acknowledge the physical toll of his advancing years. His dogged persistence in his trade is depicted by Ghosh, when he discovers plant species of Pale rose bamboo orchids, *Arundina chinensis*, and small primrose-yellow epiphyte on the adventurous island of Hong Kong. In spite of the steep gradients and rocky slopes of the island, Fitcher continues his hunt as having once set off; he would soldier on to the very end. The slopes of the island are presented as very challenging but
Fitcher continues without any hindrance. The challenging geography of this stretch of land is depicted as:

The soil was granitic and glinted underfoot with quartz, mica and feldspar; on steep slopes it had a way of slipping and sliding so that a slightly misplaced shoe could send an avalanche roaring down a treeless gully. In some stretches the decomposed granite was covered with mould and ferns, which gave it a deceptive look of solidity; a moment’s carelessness could lead to a nasty slip or a fall.

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Ghosh presents Penrose as an ecological imperialist, intensely immersed in his mission of making profit from plants as a result he devises whatever makes his work easy. He is so much determined in his passion that he neglects other life forms for his own profit. He captures the birds, slaughters them, strip off their fat and put it into special barrel to decompose. His greed and selfishness is shown in his act when he offers rewards for capturing birds. Whenever an exhausted auk or gull comes down to the brig to rest, there would be a furious scramble among the sailors and they at once would plunge at the birds to capture them because Fitcher offers lucrative rewards for capturing them. The bird’s carcasses are not even neglected. Every part of bird’s body is put to use as it is added to compost barrels that hangs from the Redruth’s stern. Fitcher makes use of meat bones and fish bones in making compost. He because of his self aggrandizement and self indulgence forgets the value of the lives of small fish. Two or three fishing lines are always trailing behind the brig to catch fishes in huge numbers. He uses the head, tail and bones of the captured fishes as compost for his plants. Moreover, small fishes are caught in huge numbers to be slipped as a whole into potting soil.

Ghosh presents Fitcher’s character in a unique manner. His passion has made him experienced in dealing with plants. In his chase of passion and self glorification, he neglects other life forms. Redruth’s assemblage of plants and equipment is ample proof of his seriousness, competence and indeed his passion. To all these efforts and difficulties, Ghosh through the character of Robin Chinnery
offers a wise and flourishing solution. He opposes this culture of growing plants on board. He wishes freedom for these poor imprisoned plants. He brings forth the fact that plants have right to be free in their natural habitat. He says:

\[ \ldots \text{your poor plants should be given a holiday from their life aboard the Redruth. After all, plants were not meant to grow on ships, were they, Puggly dear? and it does seem cruel to deprive them of their natural element when it lies so close at hand. Indeed I can think of no reason why Mr Penrose should not contemplate setting up a little nursery on the island.} \ (438) \]

It is the dazzling variety of floral species of China that ultimately attracts the foreigners towards it and becomes the root cause of opium war. Initially, in the novel, there are number of ships seriously engaged in opium transportation to China. Bahram Modi, an Indian opium merchant, owning a ship *Anahita* is upended by a terrible storm. The storm destroys almost ten percent of the total opium. Ghosh presents the scene of destruction of opium as, “Bahram could see crates crashing against the bulkheads like rafts against a reef; all around the hold, hard-shelled balls of opium were exploding upon the timbers, and gobs of the raw gum were hurtling about like shrapnel” (29). The splintering of the crates, the stuffing of dry leaves and other poppy trash results in the melting of opium into sludge and forming a slippery floor. Bahram falls down and is entrapped into his own trap, “There was opium in his eyes, his ears, his nose, his windpipe—it was as if he were drowning and in that instant many faces flashed past his eyes” (31). He could see nothing but opium in its worst form; his clothes are drenched in the muddy sludge of opium, from the tip of his turban to the hem of his ankle. He tries hard to get rid off from all this trash, but fails. His head is filled with giddying smell of opium and in an effort to get rid his face of the gum, a wooden chest hits his elbow in such a way that more drug slips through his lips. The storm and opium create a horror into the psyche of Bahram making him to hear a breaking, tearing, splintering sound as if the ship is being torn apart. He indulges into this trade having sole motif in profit. He is not naïve or innocent but is fully aware of his
actions. He boldly confesses his greed by saying that the profits come from selling things that are of not any real use. He says:

Opium is just like that. It is completely useless unless you’re sick, but still people want it. And it is such a thing that once people start using it they can’t stop’ the market just gets larger and larger. That is why the British are trying to take over the trade and keep it to themselves. (51)

The depiction of this incidence is Ghosh’s prophesy of the ill effects and fall of the bedazzling edifice of opium trade. He foresees the slippery nature of affluence generated by this trade. Later, Bahram meets a tragic end in the novel. He commits suicide in the same river of smoke which he tries to pollute with opium. Nature takes revenge on its conspirators. It becomes clear that in the blind march of progress, humans kill and neglect their environment, and as such pose threats to their own existence.

The novel introduces us to a group of people who are blind and mindless destroyers of nature leading to overall ecocide. Their anthropocentric dominance ruthlessly marginalizes nature including animals, plants, inert entities such as land and water, women, minorities, children, prisoners and the insane. Members of the chamber of commerce including Mr Lancelot Dent, Hugh Hamilton Lindsay, Mr John Slade, Mr Inns, Mr Jardine, Burnham, Captain Elliot and other foreign opium merchants resist to China’s genuine plea of stopping the inflow of opium just because of their growing appetite for economy. One of the members of chamber of commerce admits:

Needless to add that British trade with China is of vastly greater commercial importance to Britain than the Canadas. It reaps an annual revenue of five million pounds and involves the most vital interests of the mercantile, manufacturing, shipping and maritime interests of the United Kingdom. It affects, in an eminent degree, the territorial revenue of our Indian empire. It must not be lost by any wavering imbecility in meeting the present difficulties. (517)
In the novel High Commissioner, Mr Lin boldly expresses this issue and asserts that the foreigners have, in their commercial intercourse with China, long enjoyed the gratifying advantages of illegal opium trade. The English merchants use all means, from rhetoric to brute force, to mould the opposition in order to get their selfish interests fulfilled without any resistance from them. They perpetuate their ideology in various garbs. Religion, politics, economics, ethics and all other efforts are used by British to flourish their illegal greed.

Mr Charles King, an American trader is a supporter of mandarins, the Chinese merchants in Canton. He is also made one of the members of Canton’s General Chamber of Commerce to represent the views of foreign traders to them. He works in obedience and hand in glove with mandarins. He boldly opposes opium trafficking by foreign traders in China. He views, “The smuggling of opium has lost us the affections of the good, has made us panders to the appetites of the bad, and we may well fear lest we one day suffer by the out breakings of passions to whose excitement we our selves have ministered” (371). In an encounter reply to Mr Charles King, Mr Burnham an English opium merchant raises a question on the masculinity of Asian itself and he further claims that opium is required by them to bolster their potency and they are indispensably susceptible to opium. This man is of the view that Western traders of opium are doing an obligatory and congratulatory work rather than earning disproportionate assets by trading opium and thereby spoiling the life of millions of innocent.

Opium pollutes not only the physical senses but over all physical environment. In the Fanqui-town, the creek factory is the boisterous, freewheeling place inhabited by foreign traders like Mr Jarden and Mr Innes. The factory’s conditions holds no appeal for these determined, headstrong free traders and exploiters as they only care for the fact that this creek gives them direct access to the river. Ghosh presents them negligent even about their dwelling conditions and surroundings as the stream near it is one of the principal conduits for the city’s refuse. At this place, the tides would often deposit the carcasses of dogs and piglets in the refuse clogged mud. The flies are always found buzzing and the sight
induces an unbearable vomit stench. Besides polluting the land and people by opium, the establishment of these factories pollutes the Pearl river. The decomposed and diluted waste and material has direct access to river. Ghosh being an eco-critical writer is sensitive about the tremendous ill effects of this pollution on the health of local people and sanitation. William Rueckert asserts:

The basic postulate of ecology and tragedy is that humans precipitate tragic consequences by acting either in ignorance of or without properly understanding the true consequences of their actions, we are violating the laws of nature, and the retribution from the biosphere will be more terrible than any inflicted on humans by god. (113)

In the novel, Baburao a competent boatman on the Pearl river fully sympathizes with the condition of river. He is presented in a splendid resonance with views of Reuckert. He is aware of the fact that human beings by way of their arrogant actions on nature are posing threats to their own existence. He holds opium and opium merchants responsible for death and pollution of the river. His father who has lost his three sons in the smoke of opium paradoxically says, “the mud had turned this river into a stream of poison” (476). The pollution of opium has engulfed the whole river to such an extent that Baburao asserts that it is impossible for any life form to live on this river without being chocked by the smoke. Ghosh paradoxically narrates that the soldiers who are there to defend them, are all lost in smoke along with their officers. He calls it a plague from which no one can escape. He presents the fact that even defenders of the river are lost in the river of smoke. The smoke has in a way engulfed and corrupted every living and non-living entity of the vicinity and as such leads to over all ecocide. Ghosh further points to the ecocidal tendency of the British traders by alluding to their role in accelerating wars, conflicts, blood bath and unprecedented eco-cultural damages. William Howarth in “Some Principles of Ecocriticism” very aptly maintains:
The dogma that culture will always master nature has long directed Western progress, inspiring the wars, invasions, and other forms of conquest that have crowded the earth and strained its carrying capacity. Humanists still bristle with tribal aggression, warring for dominion even though they spurn all forms of hegemony. (77)

The novel shows the destruction caused due to war and as such represents ecocide. The Chinese stands up in the defense of their land and people and banns the import of opium. Britain takes its revenge by declaring war on China under the rhetoric of freedom. They plan to promote their interests by way of gunboats and expeditionary force. The determination of Chinese authorities and resistance offered by Britishers ultimately leads to the destruction of land and people. Nature has been a strategic element of war since the first rock was thrown by the first cave dweller. In the same way, in the novel, Ghosh presents that the war destroys every thing in sight. Pointing towards the Fanqui-town, Neel confers the change as, “the transformation was startling to behold- it was as if a carnival-site had been transformed overnight into a parade-ground” (507). The war has destroyed the glory of the town. The place is changed beyond recognition. The site of the city is a scene of utter desolation. Neel demonstrates the ruined Fanqui town and its devastated condition. He is horrified to see the extent of ruin. He further lashes his tongue against the destruction as the city is burned to the ground. Canton is bombarded by British and French gunships. The townspeople notice that the foreign factories are the only part of the city that is unharmed and they are enraged. In revenge, a mob sets fire to the factories as a result they are erased completely.

Paulett’s friend, Robin Chinnery is haunted by the images of the destruction of Fanqui-town. He is greatly affected by the trauma of war. The scene leaves him into depths of an abyss. He picturizes the Fanqui- town in flames and ecocide as:

From the top I looked down and saw a line of flames leaping above the river; the factories were on fire and they burned through the night. In the morning when the sun rose, I saw that Fanqui- town
had been reduced to ashes; it was gone; everything had disappeared—Markwick’s Hotel and Lamqua’s shop and the shamshoo-dens in Hog Lane and the flagpoles in the Maidan. They had all been wiped away and in their place there were only ashes. (551)

**Characters in the novel who idealize and worship Nature**

In contrast to the characters that exploit nature and human beings, there is a circle of people in the novel centered on nature. It involves Paulette Lambert, her father Pierre Lambert, Robin Chinery, Mr Chan or Ah Fay, Commissioner Lin and Charles King. In the novel, Paulette Lambert, daughter of a French botanist is presented very close to nature. She is very rightly described as child of nature. Her father, Pierre Lambert echoes with pride that he has educated her in the innocent tranquility of the botanical gardens. He has been her mentor, guide and teacher and has always made her worship nature. He proudly maintains that the trees have always been her scripture and the Earth her revelation. She has been raised to revel in the love, equality, freedom and state of liberty for nature. Paulette is presented by Ghosh as an embodiment of Nature. She is taught the importance of botany by her father. A naturalist is always in tune with nature and accepts it as his/her god. The same ideology is applied in Paulett’s understanding of nature and god:

... the love of Nature had been a kind of religion, a form of spiritual striving: he had believed that in trying to comprehend the inner vitality of each species, human beings could transcend the mundane world and its artificial divisions. If botany was the scripture of this religion, then horticulture was its form of worship: tending a garden was, for Pierre Lambert, no mere matter of planting seeds and pruning branches—it was a spiritual discipline, a means of communicating with forms of life that were necessarily mute and could be understood only through a careful study of their own modes of expression—the language of efflorescence, growth and decay: only thus, he had taught Paulette, could human beings
apprehend the vital energies that constitute the spirit of the Earth.

(78-79)

Paulette is represented as an enthusiastic naturalist in the novel. She travels to Mauritius and walks to Botanical garden of Pamplemousses, where her father had once worked. There, she joins Mr Penrose and decides to assist him in gardening his plants. It is not the greed, but greenery that attracts Paulette towards this job. Her tenacious spirit to explore the penetrating secrets of nature draws her to Redruth. Paulette being a botanist and naturalist gains affinity and a close relationship with various species of plants on Redruth. She observes pain of separation when these plants are transported to other ship for sail to Canton. The plants to be transported to Canton include a Douglas fir sapling; a redcurrant bush and two specimens from the north-western coast of America—a yard-high bush of the Oregon grape, covered with yellow flowers, and a pot of Gaultheria shallon with glossy leaves and clusters of delicate, bell-like sepals. The collection also includes two recently introduced plants from Mexico—the Mexican Orange, with pretty white blooms, and a beautiful fuchsia that is one of Fitcher’s treasures known as Fuchsia fulgens. Paulette develops a sort of relationship with these plants:

Paulette had grown attached to each of these plants, especially to the Oregon grape which had proved exceptionally vigorous. It pained her to see them being removed to the Redruth’s gig, to be transferred to Baburao’s junk; like a parent at a time of parting, she doubted that her children would be properly looked after. (471)

Being close to nature, Paulette finds desolate scrub-covered slopes of island of Kowloon very much attractive. It is seen that such brooding peaks and cloud-wreathed crags are always like a magnet to Paulette. It is because the love of nature has always been a kind of religion and a form of spiritual striving for her. She is awestruck on seeing the mindless destruction of that part of nature as she only finds few destroyed trunks and coiled branches of trees there. Ghosh presents her as a deep ecologist, who mourns over the destruction of different species of
plants. She is presented by Ghosh as if in a spiritual communication with plants who understand their modes of expression—the language of efflorescence, their growth and decay. The destroyed plantation disturbs her. Ghosh picturizes the ruthless human intrusion as:

The vegetation was sparse and lacking in interest: such trees as there may once have been had been hacked down by the people who lived in the impoverished little villages that were scattered around the island’s rim. They had done a thorough job of it too, for almost nothing remained now but a few stunted trunks and wind twisted branches. Apart from that, the slopes seemed to offer nothing but scree and scrub—and the two were sometimes almost indistinguishable in colour, now that the greenery had turned a dull autumnal brown. (203-04)

On the other hand, by contrast, she finds peace and satisfaction in sparsely populated Hong Kong—an island on eastern end of Pearl River. The sight is empty of human habitation. It is shown that there is no intrusion by the mainlanders, as a result of which nature there is in full swing offering good clean water through its abundance of many clear streams tumbling down from the island’s peaks and crags. She enjoys wandering in the forests and mountains.

Like the great nature writer, Audobon, Paulette is inspired by the divine beauty of nature. Like, Audobon, she enjoys wilderness and laments the swiftness with which wilderness is being lost. Her emotions take us to a poignant passage of Audobon, in which, he reflects upon his early rambles along the Ohio River. He notices with great sadness the changes in the area, where twenty years before, he had begun his quest to paint the avian life. He recalls the grandeur and beauty that once characterized the river. He further recalls the dense and lofty summits of forests that blanketed everywhere, along the hills, and along the margins of the streams. He laments over the fact that now the recollection witnessed lacks the sweetness of nostalgia. All the destruction is attributed to the mechanic intrusion of human beings. He notices that now even the remnants of the forests are
diminishing at an alarming rate. He mourns over the absence of Aborgines, vast herds of elke, deer and buffaloes which once pastured on the hills and valleys. He maintains:

> When I reflect that the grand portion of our Union, instead of being in a state of nature, is now more or less covered with villages, farms, and towns, where the din of hammers and machinery is constantly heard; that the woods are fast disappearing under the axe by day, and the fire by night . . . when I remember that these extraordinary changes have taken place in the short period of twenty years, I paused, wonder, and, although I know all to be fact, can scarcely believe its reality. (qtd. in Branch, “Indexing” 296)

In the novel, Paulette exactly like Audobon mourns over the lost wilderness and calls this loss a horrible tragedy.

The novel focusses an eco-critical glance at the nineteenth century human exploitation of nature. It depicts how in addition to those who rule and the dominant human races, nature is exploited even by the most powerless humans. In the novel, there is a character, Mr Ah Fey as such called as Mr Chan who is exceptionally clever and skilled but victimized and used by Britishers for their own profit. It is only when he is fifteen years old; he is seduced to opium and thus becomes an opium addict. He is used by Mr Kerr, the apprentice of Sir Joseph Banks to transport Chinese rich varieties of plants to Kew Gardens in England. As a result, he succeeds in this illegal mission, which otherwise is impossible for him. The credit of the whole success is attributed to Mr Kerr and Ah Fay just remains a facilitator of Exploiters to expand their ecological mastery. He realizes that he is misused by them to exploit his own natural resources. He calls himself a pander and a procurer. He develops hatred for them. He manages to free himself from their shackles and dedicates rest of his life to serve, beautify and defend the natural flora of his country. He is now a Chinese gardener and is portrayed as being very close to nature. He is the boss-man of China’s Pearl River nursery. He is presented having marvelously ingenious ways of organizing a nursery. His ways of managing
and placing the plants is unique. The containers are arranged skillfully to create an impression of a landscape, complete with winding paths, grassy meadows, wooded hills and dense forests. The nursery is described with natural features as:

Every plant in the place—and there must be thousands—grows in a pot: never will you see so many pots of so many different designs, gathered in one place—shallow saucers, rounded bowls with fluted lips, enormous vat-like urns planted with plum trees; porcelain tubs as brilliantly coloured as the flowers that bloom within them. (308)

Ghosh presents these natural features as endlessly mutable. It gives the impression that the courtyard can be reconfigured with the passing of the seasons, or even to suit the daily moods of its custodians. He proudly admits that his plant cases are as precious to him as life itself. He waters them by day and sleeps beside them at night; and when the weather grows hot, he builds little huts over them, with his own sparse clothing; when they are beset by tempests and storms, he shields them with his own body.

Ghosh asserts that the Canton gifts the western world with the choicest of flora to enrich their landscape. He is amazed to name some of the beautiful varieties of flowers this country sends out into the world, “chrysanthemums, peonies, tiger lilies, wisteria, rhododendrons, azaleas, asters, gardenias, begonias, camellias, hydrangeas, primroses, heavenly bamboo, a juniper, a cypress, climbing tea-roses and roses that flower many times over” (536). He clarifies the fact that from the above mentioned varieties, all the begonias, azaleas, moutans, lilies, chrysanthemums and roses that had already transformed the world’s gardens have come from the set of nurseries of the island of Honam that lies opposite to Canton, run by professional gardeners. Describing these nurseries, Fitcher says, “They’re a maze,” he said at last, ‘like the mizzy-maze at Hampton Court. Every time ee think ee’ve seen everything, ee’ll find that ee’ve scarcely begun. Ee’re just wandering around, gaking at what ee’re allowed to see, mazed, like a sheep in a storm” (206). It is a place, where botanists from all over the world get startled on noticing such a vast variety of flora. foreigners call these nurseries—the Fa-Tee Gardens. Ghosh
through Robin Chinnery conveys his feelings that the flowers of Canton are immortal and will bloom forever. Ghosh mourns the fact that in return, this country gets curse of slavery to opium. It is a bitter fact that this country has absorbed so much of the world’s evil, but in return has given so much beauty.

In the novel, Commissioner Lin, the new governor of Canton, is portrayed as totally devoid of taint of evil. He is appointed imperial maritime commissioner in 1838 to stop the opium trade. He is an incorruptible public servant and is also a scholar and an intellectual ordered by Chinese Emperor to stop the harmful trade of opium. He is incorruptible in a world where corruption and greed abounds. He is determined with an explicit mandate to put an end to the opium trade. He sympathizes with the plight of the common people who get entrapped in such kind of trades. He finds it beyond comprehension that these foreign countries would be so barbaric as to allow its merchants the freedom to harm and despoil the people of a foreign realm. He calls it piracy. He intends to use every possible means to force the surrender of opium. He issues a series of warnings against trading of opium through a series of letters to the members of General Chamber of commerce in Canton run by foreign traders. His simplicity and love for nature is highlighted the way he is introduced to the readers by Ghosh. He asserts, “At inns and rest houses his orders were that he was only to be served common fare- expensive luxuries, like bird’s nests and shark’s fins, were banned from his table” (425).

At the very onset of the novel, when Ibis from the earlier novel is caught up by the tempest and storm, Serang Ali, Neel, Kalua, Ah Fat and Jodu manage to escape. They find themselves on a single enormous mountain seeming to have risen out of sea— island of Great Nicobar. This island is brought into life because of a special kind of birds. Serang Ali points towards the swift flying birds called hintlene and calls them source of wealth. The nests of these birds called as yan wo in Canton are revered by people as they are the source of their livelihood and income. In China, it is considered as royal food as these nests are boiled and eaten by royal people. These nests are of immense value and would fetch the Chinese people silver and pounds of gold depending on their weight. Due to their high
economic value, people would sell these nests whenever they found one, in exchange of silver or gold. As a result of this mindless hunt, these species are becoming endangered. Ghosh clearly brings about the destruction of these endangered birds and their habitats. Commissioner Lin’s refusal of such luxuries, spotlights the fact that he opposes this kind of ecological massacre. He is a human being centered on nature. He whole heartedly opposes opium trafficking. He is a supporter of environmental justice. Environmental justice refers to the conceptual connections and casual relationships between environmental issues and social justice. He sympathizes with the empire as a whole and with the common people. In a letter to Queen Victoria, he boldly laments over the ill effects of opium, the poisonous article on human beings:

The Way of Heaven is fairness to all; it does not suffer us to harm others in order to benefit ourselves. Men are alike in this all the world over: that they cherish life and hate what endangers life. Your country lies twenty thousand leagues away; but the Way of Heaven holds good for you as for us, and your instincts are not different from ours; for nowhere are there men so blind as not to distinguish between what brings life and what brings death, between what brings profit and what does harm. (542)

Commissioner Lin’s eco-critical concerns are clearly brought forth by Ghosh as when the day comes for him to set in motion the process of destruction of the captured opium. Lin, while destroying opium is very much vigilant about the local atmosphere, the land, waters and even all the terrestrial and aquatic life forms. He makes sure of every arrangement to lower down the poisonous effects of opium even while discarding it into water trenches. The chests are opened, balls of opium are broken up and mixed with salt and lime and then thrown into the water-filled trenches. Besides being supporter of environmental justice, he is a deep ecologist. He hesitates to let this poison into water as he is aware of the fact that it is going to pose threat to water life, even though, he makes every effort to lower down its poisonous effects. He sits down to write a poem, “it is a prayer addressed
to the God of the sea asking that all the animals of the water be protected from the poison that will be soon pouring in‖ (534). This shows Commissioner’s sensitivity towards the interconnectedness of all organic and inorganic life forms. Apart from this, there is in Lin a strain of radical non-anthropocentrism. His attitude resonates the great natural writer, Batram who in one of his manuscripts writes:

I cannot be so impious; nay my soul revolts, is destroyed by such conjectures as to desire or imagine that man who is guilty of more mischief and wickedness than all other animals together in this world, should be exclusively endowed with the knowledge of the Creator. . . .There is something so aristocratic if a philosopher use the expression or the epithet of the Dignity of Human Nature. Because a man as viewed in the chain of animal beings according to the common notion of philosophers, acts the part of an absolute tyrant. His actions and movements must, I think, impress such an idea on the minds of all animals, or intelligent beings. (qtd. in Branch, “Indexing” 288)

Commissioner, by lowering poisonous effect of opium and by using scientific and logical methods, clearly brings forth his ecological sensibility. Depicting such characters in the novel, Ghosh, as such is uniting natural history with literature and science with spirit.

Charles King who is an American trader and member of Canton’s General Chamber of Commerce realizes the evils of this drug and its adverse effect on common lives. Instead of supporting the issues of foreign traders, he works in disobedience with them. He has been dead against the trading and smuggling of opium by the foreign entrepreneurs. He calls it a consignment responsible for the ruin and death of multitudes of human life. While, the members of commerce are resolute and immovable in their decision to not yield to authoritarian call of Commissioner Lin to surrender all opium in possession of them, Charles King, makes all attempts to let decision go in favour of innocent masses of China. He predicts that if the Chinese do not stop the inflow of opium, their country would be
eaten away from within. Despite tug of war on dispute of opium, he does not give up his hope to convince the perpetrators of opium to accede to the proposal postulated by Commissioner. He asserts:

The traffic has become associated in the politics of the country, with embarrassments and evil omens; in its penal code, with the axe and the dungeon; in the breasts of men in private life, with the wreck of property, virtue, honour and happiness. All ranks, from the Emperor on the throne, to the people of the humblest hamlets, have felt its sting. To the fact of its descent to the lowest classes of society we are frequent witnesses; and the court gazettes are evidence that it has marked out victims for disgrace and ruin even among the Imperial kindred. (537)

Charles King proves out to be a human being, who stands by the common lives. Encouraging the drug barons to surrender their drugs, he very inspiringly makes an appeal to the present and future generations to sympathize with the human lives. He urges them to keep in mind that whatever is lost can be rebuilt and regained but human lives once lost cannot be raised back to life. He parallels this situation with the current scenario saying that they have been hurting their fellow creature without thinking that they cannot come back to life again. The day, when the drug is being transformed, Charles is happy and contented for the fact that its destruction is going to save a lot many lives. Ghosh, through the character of Charles, makes a humble plea, “The lands which have been engrossed by this deleterious culture, should be returned to uses not incompatible with human life, virtue, and happiness” (539). This plea is for environmental justice. Environmental justice refers to conceptual connections and casual relationships between environmental issues and social justice. While, Charles is enjoying the feast of destruction of opium cargoes, on the other hand, his joy is tinged with a terrible sadness as he knows that British and American battleships are on their way to China. Sandler and Pezzullo outlines, “Environmental justice opposes military occupation, repression and exploitation of lands, peoples and culture, and other life
forms. . .” (qtd. in Sujatha 122). He worries that a great cataclysm is approaching because he knows that war brings overall destruction and general ecocide. He calls it an unjust quarrel and war against not only the Chinese government but innocent human beings and nature. He wishes, “The energies and truth of God go with us in every effort to hasten the reign of universal amity and freedom; but that era must be coeval with the time when ‘nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more’ (539-40). He is portrayed by Ghosh as a social ecologist who opposes the domination of humans by humans. He boldly conveys the message of universal amity and freedom. He conjectures that the idea of dominating nature has its origin in the very real domination of humans by humans.

Ghosh wishes this planet to be a place of peace and harmony for the coming generations. He wishes people to alter their attitude towards each other, alter the humanity’s vision of itself, and ultimately its attitude towards the natural world. His views resonate with Derrick Jensen who in Deep Green Resistance maintains:

We must put our bodies and our lives between the industrial system and life on this planet. We must start to fight back. Those who come after, who inherit whatever’s left of the world once this culture has been stopped—whether through peak oil, economic collapse, ecological collapse, or the efforts of brave women and men resisting in alliance with the natural world—are going to judge us by the health of land base, by what we leave behind. They are not going to care how you are or I lived our lives . . . They’re not going to care whether we grieved the murder of the planet. They’re not going to care if we were enlightened or not . . . They’re not going to care if we became the change we wish to see . . . They’re not going to care if we wrote really big books about it . . . They’re going to care if they can breathe the air and drink the water. (12)

The novel is an attempt to arise the people’s awareness of protecting the earth and its inhabitants by particularly casting off the narrow anthropocentrism
and by adopting land ethics to achieve a harmonious society. Further it is clarified that problems linked with environmental crisis are directly linked to authoritarianism and hierarchy. Dominance of nature is therefore closely linked with racist ideologies. Exploitation and the destruction of the planet is intricately related and linked to the exploitation and oppression of human beings. The novel shows how the military violence is used against land and their inhabitants to secure the anthropocentric greed, illegal occupation and trading rights resulting in ecocide and series of environmental injustices. It is a bitter fact that the acts of ecological mastery over nature in the colonized lands continues to affect the entire planet today. The ruthless plundering of the natural resources has led to the loss of biodiversity.

Ghosh through the novel makes a call for the paradigm shift from the anthropocentric to the ecocentric set of values. Through the fictionalized characters like Paulette, Commissioner Lin, King Charles, Ah Fay and Robin Chinnery he presents mythriads of deep ecological, social ecological and ethic illumination and thoughts in pursuit of the ecological balance between nature and society, and even within human beings themselves. The social ecological wisdom as adopted by Ghosh, urges readers to respect, protect and care for other humans as well as nature. It is the need of the time to reconsider the relationships within human beings, between nature and human beings, between nature and society and between nature and human spirit. Ghosh stresses on the fact that humanity is a part of nature and the development of self awareness and human freedom is an important step in ending the environmental crisis. He wishes that all beings whether human or non-human should be free from all the unnecessary kind of control and exploitations. Moreover, there is a message that it is not enough to understand nature, but to save it, as ultimate concern of ecocritics is the preservation of nature, its harmony, stability, integrity, beauty and equilibrium of natural relationships in a particular environment.