

EXPLOITATION OF HUMAN, ANIMAL, AND BIRD: AN ECOCRITICAL STUDY OF THE GLASS PALACE AND SEA OF POPPIES

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ABSTRACT: Environmental problem now a day is popular in every corner of the world. Ecocriticism is also an important issue in every field like philosophy, literature, science and other arts. Ecological imperialism is sponsored by British, which has anthropocentric thought that is defined as the systematic exploitation and re-shaping of the local ecosystems of the peripheries for the economic welfare of the center. In John Bellamy Foster and Brett Clark's (2004) words ecological imperialism is "robbing the periphery of its natural wealth and exploiting ecological resources"(p.189), which according to them went hand in hand with the "genocide inflicted on the indigenous populations" (p.188); and "undisguised looting, enslavement and murder" (p.189) were turned into a capital in the dominating center. The novel that has taken for this study accentuates the environmental degradation and reveals human interference, technological development and war responsible for the destruction of environment. The novel *The Glass Palace* reflects the themes such as human greed, migration, history, and imperial exploitation. British invaded Burma and exploited the natural resources like teakwood and rubber. It also focuses on the conflict between humans and the environment. Even British used animals for commercial use and killed the birds for the benefit of human beings. The native people have suffered a lot due to the poppy cultivation system that was forced by the British. British have exploited both the environment and the native people through the cultivation of the cash crop at large scale. In *Sea of Poppies* this novel, Ghosh highlights that ecological destruction has taken place due to excessive exploitation of nature by British who make money through illegal production of opium. During the imperial rule, economic, social, physical, political and environmental changes had been taken place among the native populations, which resulted changes in their conventional occupation and environment. Agriculture was altered from staple wheat, pulses and other food items to the cultivation of opium under the British rule. It covered large areas of India and changed the traditional crop cycles. This adversely affects the natural ways of land use and life.

KEYWORDS: Ecocriticism, literature, imperial, destruction, ecoimperialism

I. INTRODUCTION

Due to environmental damage and its adverse impact on animals, plants and human being, environmental studies started in 1960. Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), the most popular book, deals with the toxic effects of industrial and agricultural chemicals on human and animal. Environmentalism is the concepts, which deals with many methods and subjects. It is said that in this global era "Nature is turning into 'Denature'". Much of the

earth is a 'built environment', a 'planned habitat' . . ." (qtd. in Clark 6). Today many theories are emerged under the umbrella of ecocriticism like postcolonial ecocriticism, ecophilosophy, social ecocriticism and environmental justice, etc. Due to industrialization, man's relation with has been changed. Man is the part of the nature but today man has used nature for his personal use Lynn White says, "Formerly man had been a part of nature, now he was the exploiter of nature . . . Man and nature are two things, and man is the master" (8). Many scholars have investigated the relation between environment and globalisation in different ways. Greg Garrard also asserts, "The relationship between globalisation and ecocriticism . . . has barely been broached" (qtd. In Huggan and Tiffin 80).

II. ECOCRITICISM

Literature is an important tool to make people aware about environmental degradation. Human activities concern with the society that is related to the human life that exists on the earth. Ecocritical texts reflect social, economical and cultural implications in the literary works and presents complicated relationship between humans and their physical environment. Buell in his essay, *Literature and Environment* describes the six specific centers of interest of literature-environment studies:

The imagination of place and place-attachment, the enlistment and critique of models of scientific inquiry in the study of literature and the arts, the examination of the significance of gender difference and environmental representation, the cross-pollination of ecocritical and postcolonial scholarship as ecocriticism has extended its horizons beyond its original focus on Anglo-American imagination, ecocriticism's evolving interest in indigenous art and thought, and ecocriticism's no less keen and complex attentiveness to artistic representation and the ethics of relations between humans and animals. ("Literature and Environment" 417)

Ecocriticism is the link between the environment and social justice. Therefore, it is complex issue which is related to environment and globalization. Human's greed is responsible for the degradation of environment. It is very much necessary for man to rethink his connection with the non-human things. Ecocriticism also talks about the social changes towards nature through literature. Cheryll Glotfelty, in introduction of an anthology, *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, defines the term:

Ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earthcentered approach to literary studies. (19)

Environmental justice talks on class, race, gender and colonialism to evaluate texts and ideas from ecocritical perspectives. It believes that preservation of environment along with the the poor people is necessary. It is an important aspect of ecocritical theory. It consists the sacredness of the Earth and everybody is ready to protect the nature

EXPLOITATION OF HUMAN AND NATURE

Due to the western philosophy, the destruction of environment in the third world countries has been taken place as it is shown in the novel, *The Glass Palace*. They exploit the natural resources of the third world countries for the industrial raw material. Ramchandra Guha states in the *Environmentalism: A Global History* that, "Nature has become a source of cheap raw material as well as a sink for dumping the unwanted residues of economic growth" (4). Arundhati Roy, an environment conscious writer states in her essay *The Greater Common Good*, she reminds of the coming dangers in the future. Amitav Ghosh in his novel *The Glass Palace* deals with the alteration of landscape of Burma, and the impact of war. He reflects the environmental issues, and exploitation of nature by man. He is a truly ecocritic as Sajalkumar Bhattacharya asserts in an article, "Ghosh is by turn a sociologist, a historian, a teacher, an essayist alive to a range of crucial contemporary issues from terrorism to the conservation of nature". (143)

The Glass Palace concerns with British conquering Burma in 1885. It has seven parts and forty-eight chapters. It presents man's selfishness for land and money that leads to the destruction of ecology. He gives the vivid description of the Burmese forest and exploitation of environment by Britishers and links to the history. Burma had a rich landscape and natural resources before invasion of British as Rajkumar, a pivotal character reflects, "Ah, Burma- now Burma was a golden land", (494). It shows the readers' eyes that something has been lost with the invasion of British People. Subha Tiwari asserts about *The Glass Palace*,

This is basically a book about Europeans greed and cruelty of colonialisation . . . The British came to rich lands like India and Burma with an insatiable greed and drained them of all resources . . . The ruthless cutting of jungles through systematized mechanical ways feels so cruel. (6)

In *The Glass Palace*, Ghosh exposes involvement of man's exploitation with the natural resources. It presents the deforestation and exploitation of the Earth through many ways. They had killed birds, animals, and deforming the landscape and biodiversity. Burma is has rich teak forests and the English captures Burma for trade as Ghosh described, in the novel, "A war over wood? Who's ever heard of such a thing?" (15). Ghosh in *The Glass Palace*, describes the western technology destroy the natural landscape. On the name of modernisation and development, they have done everything to exploit the colonized Burma country. Once Rajkumar going with Uma has shown the result of the natural destruction due to development as stated, "The city seemed transform beyond recognition to Uma. There were stately hotels, enormous banks, fashionable restaurants, arcaded department stores and even nightclubs" (241).

At most importance is given to the deforestation in this novel. Teakwood trees are cut down in large amount for industrial purpose. Trees are depicted as one of the significant role in the novel. Ghosh presents it in Burma as given:

The trees once picked, had to killed and left to dry . . . The killing was achieved by the girdle of incisions, thin slits, carved deep into the wood at a height of four feet and six inches off the ground . . .The assassinated trees were left to die where they stood, sometimes for three years even more . . . Dead though they were, the trees would sound great toxins of protests as they fell, unloosing thunder explosions that could be heard miles away bringing down everything in their path, rafts of saplings, looped nets of rattan. (69)

Similarly, Ghosh presents that Britisher exploit not only natural resources but also poor people who depends on forest for survival. Laborers were brought from the other regions for the deforestation of the Burma country. They worked under the critical dangerous situation where there was no guarantee of lives. The cruelty towards laborers are shown through the voice of Uma. *The Glass Palace* depicts the exploitation of both nature and woman. Nature and woman both are exploited like objects in the novels. They are only things of satisfaction and consumed. It is presented by Ghosh through the voice of Dolly, wife of Rajkumar. The impact of colonization and war can also be observed in *The Glass Palace*. Ghosh's novel describes that there is no value of nature in the life of human being. Britisher colonized the countries for the use of industry and money at any cost which results in degeadation of environment. Due to war between Japanese and Britishers, there is disorder and destruction on everything including nature and human. People suffer from starvation and hunger, Ghosh tries to depict the harsh reality of war as, "Wood bought food more easily than money or valuable" (470).

Exploitation of animals

In *The Glass Palace*, exploitation of animals are also shown that the usage of animals like elephant for carrying heavy logs is the best example. Elephants were used for deforestation in the beginning of the novel. Britisher uses this huge animal elephant and starts using them for commercial purpose as it is said, "The initial felling of the forest was done by elephants . . ." (75). British exploits the environment and animals at one time. It was his technique to use elephants for logging for human profit. It is helpful to clear the forests in fast speed. N. K. Raja Lakshmi in an article mentions:

The elephants that were used only in pagodas and palaces, for wars and ceremonies were made to work for human profit. The elephants that were the symbol of power, dignity and authority are transformed into commodity. Elephants turn out to be slaves and objects of profit. (123)

It is clear that the colonisers came to plunder the natural resources and exploited the others territory's environment for their own profit. They didn't grow it in their land but instead they cultivated in India spoiling India's environment and left the land polluted. Through the novel, Ghosh (2008) brings out the rise of industries during that period. As Burnham says: —why, one might even say that it is opium that has made this age of progress and industry possible (SOP, p 116). Thus it is evident that human greed paved for exploiting the natural resources and development of industries for the profit which put the environment under the threat. Thus in the novel *Sea of Poppies*, Ghosh (2008) dramatizes fact and fiction to bring forth the environmental disputes on animals and humans because of the factory effluents that comes out of the Sudder Opium Factory.

Due to opium effect, the animals behaved abnormally; they were not mischievous like normal monkeys because they were intoxicated by the industrial effluents which make them go into deep sluggish state. Moreover, Ghosh (2008) piques its impact on the humans:

—Rare was the passer-by who could brave this mist without exploding into a paroxysm of sneezes and snuffles— yet it was miracle, plain to behold, that the coolies pounding the trash were no more affected by the dust than were their young English overseers! (SOP, p 91).

This not only depicts the industrial wastes and it's the effects of opium on the human beings who pass by the industry but also shows the whole environment with its affected the flora and fauna. This not only depicts

the industrial wastes and its the effects of opium on the human beings who pass by the industry but also shows the whole environment with its affected the flora and fauna.

Ghosh (2008) then describes the devastation of the sea and also its creatures that are dependent on it. The river banks and ghats are filled up with the broken earthenware (gharas) in which the raw opium was bought and the fishermen were crowded for fishes: —the belief was widespread that the fish were more easily caught after they had nibbled at the shards! (SOP, p 92). This shows how the opium affected the whole environment from creatures with seven sense to five sense. Moreover Ghosh (2008) accentuates man's dictatorship over the land and its resources: —he who owns the land, owns the rice! (SOP, p 157). Ghosh envisages the problems that will be caused to the environment when mankind violates the land ethics.

More importantly, Leopold (1949) conservationist and ecologist highlights: —In short, land ethics changes the role of Homo-sapiens from the conqueror of land-community to plain member and citizen of it! (p 866). Moreover humans lack the land ethics which leads to supremacy over nature , instead humans have to think themselves as a part of it. Ghosh is writer who tries to highlight the environmental problems and thereby tries to create awareness among his readers. Ghosh also brings out the plight of holy banks of river Ganga as it was polluted where dead bodies were cremated for ages together. Ghosh (2008) describes the condition of the river as —It was surrounded by a profusion of offerings and objects, as if it were being readied for some larger purpose! (SOP, p 176).

The landscape, as shown in the quotation, is filled with the remnants of the poppy harvest. Deeti cannot help but feeling upset over the fact that the environment has lost its green color. For Deeti, being able to see the greenery in her environment brings such sense of relief. Unfortunately, seasonal crops are no longer planted in order to gain as much poppy harvest as possible. In this case, winter crops like vegetables and grains are nowhere to be found. The cultivation of poppies in a massive amount has created an obvious problem which is the loss of nature's biodiversity.

Since the poppies monoculture is forced, it has resulted in various problems on the environment. Due to poppy crop, the nature has lost its biodiversity and the soil fertility. To maintain the nutrients and soil fertile, biodiversity is needed. Since the farmers in the novel do not plant the seasonal crops anymore, there is no crop rotation effort to restore the nutrients that are found in the soil. The most obvious effect can be seen in how Deeti along with some other farmers are experiencing late harvest, which is possibly caused by the lack of available soil nutrients. The late harvest has caused uneasiness for Deeti and her neighbors who also work as poppy farmers.

The animal has also suffered due to this monoculture. It is found that the poppies monoculture also affect the animal population in various ways. The enormous amount of poppies in the field is shown to have pacified the animals. Deeti observes that the insects like bees, grasshoppers, wasps and butterflies had also adverse impact on their behaviour of the insects. The smell of the sap does not only pacify these insects, but it also potentially kills them.

Sea of Poppies also presents the negative effect of British colonization on India's nature through the

depiction of the opium factory. The opium factory in Ghazipur as shown in the novel is the actual portrayal of Ghazipur Opium Factory that was established by East India Company, and it is the biggest and the oldest opium factory in the country. On her way to pick her sick husband up from work, Deeti witnesses how the opium factory has caused negative effects to its surroundings.

Although the Sudder Opium Factory was indisputably large and well-guarded, there was nothing about its exterior to suggest to an onlooker that it was among the most precious jewels in Queen Victoria's crown. On the contrary, a miasma of lethargy seemed always to hang over the factory's surroundings. (*SOP*, 89)

British have gained the huge profit from the opium production even though they did not provide necessary things at the factory. The factory has caused a miasma of lethargy. It has caused dullness and produced an awful smell to its surroundings. On her way to the factory in Kalua's oxen cart, Deeti and Kabutri suffer because of the opium-filled air. The waste of the factory in the form of fog takes over the fresh air of the city. The polluted air gives a terrible effect not only to humans, but also to the animals. Deeti, Kabutri, Kalua, including Kalua's oxen and everyone nearby the factory cannot help but sneeze because of the air pollution.

The opium factory shows natural exploitation and human exploitation. Ghazipur Opium Factory was established and managed by the British. The superintendent of the factory is a senior official of the East India Company, and the other important positions such as overseers, accountants, storekeepers, and chemists in the factory are also occupied by the British. These people order several hundred of Indian workers for the Company's benefit. On her visit to the opium factory to pick her sick husband up, Deeti does not only discover the horrible condition of the opium factory's surrounding, but she also witnesses how the employees of the factory are working under such an inhumane condition. The working condition for the workers in factory is so horrible; the factory is polluted by the opium, and in some rooms the temperature is cool, almost wintry, while in some other places, the temperature is too hot. There are not enough lights in the factory, and there is not enough space either since there are a lot of workers placed in the same room at the same time. (*SOP* 97)

As the result of an awful working condition, a lot of workers in the factory are in an awful health condition as well. Seeing the workers and their working condition in the factory seems to trigger Deeti's pity to them. These workers happen to be badly affected by the drugs they work on, and some of them become ill since they are made to do such work like sinking themselves in the opium filled tanks. To add the way the workers are oppressed, they do not only work in such an inhumane condition, but they also are tormented by the British overseers who watch their every move. White overseers patrol every place; they are armed with tools like metal scoops, glass ladles, and long-handled rakes, and are ready to punish the workers (*SOP*, 93). For these workers, there is no room even for minor mistakes. Deeti witnesses how the workers in the opium factory carefully treat the ball of opium as if their lives are depended on it. The horror breaks when one of the workers drops the opium ball, and he receives caning from the overseer as a consequence of his mistake.

The air is polluted by the waste of the opium factory. It contaminates the Ganga River and the animals in the environment. Deeti observes how the factory's waste is badly affecting the population of monkeys near the factory. After consuming the contaminated water from the Ganga River, the monkeys seem to mimic an opium addict; those monkeys lose their excitement and are stupefied by the factory's waste.

...The monkeys that lived around it, for instance: Deeti pointed a few of these out to Kabutri as the ox-cart trundled towards the walls. Unlike others of their kind they never came down from the trees it was to lap at the open sewers that drained the factory's effluents; after having sated their cravings, they would climb back into the branches to resume their stupefied scrutiny of the Ganga and its currents. (*SOP*, 89)

Ghosh exhorts and also shows his concern for holy river Ganga. He points to the fact that it has also become a victim to pollution because waste and effluents of opium factory is let mercilessly into it. Having an ecological vision, Ghosh not only focuses his vision on terrestrial life forms- humans as well as non-humans but also on the aquatic life forms. It is a fact that water bodies have always been used as dumps for wastes. These wastes in the form of chemical effluents get into water and then to aquatic environment. It is believed that even the fish are under the tranquil effect of opium. The fishermen have easy access to fish in this stretch of water.

The pollution of Ganga water is increased due to the broken earthenware pots. The pots used to contain raw opium contaminate the population of the fish in the river. It is fact that due to imperialism, the human, land and animals have been suffered and it has great impact on the biodiversity of that region. These chemical effluents through the aquatic life pass on to terrestrial life forms and as such the chain continues. The impact of the raw opium can also observed on the aquatic animal, which can be seen in:

...This stretch of riverbank was unlike any other, for the ghats around the Carcanna were shored up with thousands of broken earthenware gharas—the round-bottomed vessels in which raw opium was brought to the factory. The belief was widespread that fish were more easily caught after they had nibbled at the shards, and as a result the bank was always crowded with fishermen. (*SOP*, 90)

Benjamin Burnham clearly states his opinion on the exploitation of India's nature and indigenous population. He thinks that British have successfully made use of opium, India's only source of wealth. According to him, British rule has properly helped to utilize opium for human's benefit, and without it India is just an impoverished land. It is fact that the exclusive monopoly of the opium only benefits British. Opium as British's source of wealth has caused a widespread poverty and hunger to the indigenous people. The cultivation of poppy makes it difficult to get basic needs of the farmers. Many farmers are forced to leave their villages in search for a better job, but it somehow useless and they are still living in poverty and hunger

CONCLUSION

Ghosh lays stress on the fact that from the feeling of unity between individual and the community emerges a feeling of unity between the community and its environment. Again through his writing, he generates a sense of symbiosis. The symbiosis generated here is of communal interdependence and co-operation that tends to transcend raw feeling of terror and awe. Highlighting the curse of monoculture imposed by British imperialists, Ghosh shows that in nature, balance and harmony are achieved by ever-expanding diversity. Ecological stability is not a function of simplicity and homogeneity but of complexity and variety. The capacity of an ecosystem to retain its integrity does not depend on the uniformity of the environment but on its diversity. It is this ecological diversity which is being disrupted and disturbed by British imperialists, the impact of which is still being felt on the land of India. Apart from the loss of biodiversity caused due to monoculture, Ghosh shows the contamination of water and air caused deliberately by extractive and productive processes are the most

significant consequence of ecological imperialism. This sort of imperialism also results in loss of biodiversity and the extinction of plant and animal species which in turn disrupts the precarious balance of ecosystem.

The novels that has taken for this study accentuates the environmental degradation and reveals human interference, technological development and war responsible for the destruction of environment. British invaded Burma and exploited the natural resources like teakwood and rubber. It also focuses on the conflict between humans and the environment. Even British used animals for commercial use and killed the birds for the benefit of human beings. Ghosh leaves a message to protect the environment and stop destroying environment for the profit. Everybody has to live in peace and harmony with nature. They are the part of the universe. Therefore, human make on efforts to preserve the Earth.

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