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Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Environmental Justice and Colonial Exploitation in Modern English Literature

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Abstract

The paper of research explores the connection between the exploitative colonialism and environmental injustice based on the critical theory of postcolonial ecocriticism in contemporary English literature. Postcolonial ecocriticism integrates the findings of ecological criticism with those of postcolonial theory to examine the ways in which the colonial power structures changed the landscape, the ecosystem, and the native connections to nature. The research focuses on the colonial expansion that resulted in the massive environmental degradation by the plantation farming, mining, deforestation, resource extraction, and how the historical events contribute to the modern ecological crises. Through the discussion of environmental change in literary works, the paper will point out how contemporary writers of the English language portray the disproportionate cause of environmental degradation among the less privileged groups especially in the former colonies. The paper also looks at the notion of environmental justice and the notion of slow violence which means the ecological destruction to the vulnerable populations, which is gradual and sometimes invisible. The paper will show the value of indigenous ecological knowledge and alternative relations with nature through a postcolonial ecocritical approach that reveals the cultural, political and historical aspects of environmental exploitation as well as the significance of indigenous environmental knowledge. In conclusion, the paper contends that contemporary English literature has a role to play in the creation of awareness on environmental justice and in the unravelling of the consequences of colonialism on the environment in the modern world.

Keywords: Postcolonial Ecocriticism, Environmental Justice, Colonial Exploitation, Ecological Degradation

Introduction

Postcolonial ecocriticism is a trans-disciplinary area of study where the knowledge base of both postcolonial studies and ecocriticism are integrated so as to explore the nature of the interaction between colonial power structures and environmental problems as reflected in literature and culture. It is concerned with the way in which colonial expansion and imperial domination changed the landscapes, ecosystems, and native relations with the natural world and how these changes are alluded to and criticized through literary writings. Combining the interests of environmental sustainability and social justice, the ecocriticism of the postcolonial era investigates the close relation between environmental destruction and historical events of colonial exploitation and world inequality.

The rise of ecocriticism as a literary critique field of study in the late twentieth century prompted researchers to study literature in its capacity to depict nature, landscapes, and human relations to the natural world. Yet, the initial ecocritical practices tended to concentrate mostly on the Western side and failed to fully consider the influence of colonialism on the historical practice and depiction of the environment. Postcolonial theorists thus extended the reach of ecocriticism, by pointing out the transformation of natural environments as well as cultural views of nature by colonial systems of power. Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Homi K. Bhabha are some of the thinkers who have been very instrumental in examining how colonial discourse has contributed to the narratives and hierarchies that remain prevalent and significant in global relations

today.

The expansion of colonies was both a project of politics and the economy and it was an environmental project. European colonialists exploited the natural resources of the colonized countries through mass production of natural resources like plantation agriculture, mining, deforestation and development of infrastructures. In most cases, these activities led to the destruction of the ecology and the displacement of the indigenous people whose sustainable practice and traditional ecological knowledge were alienated or suppressed. Through this, the environmental impact of colonialism has been felt to date in many parts of the world. The aim of postcolonial ecocriticism is thus to explore the ways literary and cultural texts capture these histories of the environment and expose the inequity in the distribution of environmental harm.

Over the past decades, researchers have also related the postcolonial ecocriticism to such a concept as environmental justice when drawing attention to the fact that environmental issues tend to impact disadvantaged populations disproportionately, especially in the Global South. Postcolonial literary works tend to bring out the experiences of the communities that the society experiences in terms of environmental degradation, toxic pollution, and the extraction of their resources. Literature offers a strong instrument of questioning the intersection of ecological catastrophes and race, class, and colonialism through narrative, metaphor, and cultural representation.

Moreover, the issues related to the modern ecological crisis, like the global warming, the loss of biodiversity, and the exhaustion of natural resources, have evoked the growth of scholarly interest in the correlation between colonial past and environmental crisis. Other academics, like Rob Nixon, have come up with powerful ideas like the concept of slow violence, which is a systematic environmental destruction that happens over a long period and is usually invisible in the general discourse. The idea is especially applicable in the postcolonial setting where the harm inflicted by colonial use of the environment is still felt in the vulnerable groups.

The current research paper will thus seek to discuss how the postcolonial ecocriticism can contribute to critical perspective of the interplay between environmental justice and colonial exploitation in contemporary English literature. Through an analysis of the ecological degradation and environmental inequity through literary means, the paper aims at showing how literature mirrors the historical and current effects of colonialism on the natural environment and marginalized communities. In the course of this analysis, the paper reveals the relevance of the ecological consciousness to the postcolonial criticism of the modern ecological issues to comprehend the cultural and political aspect of the environmental challenges on a better level.

The Main Concerns of Postcolonial Ecocriticism

The theme of postcolonial ecocriticism is the correlation of the colonial past with the ecological successions and cultural representation. It discusses the ways in which the growth of colonial power and its imperial control transformed landscapes, ecosystem, and how nature is depicted in literature and other cultural products. This approach can be seen as a combination of the views of postcolonial studies and ecocriticism because environmental

degradation and social injustice are closely related to each other. Specifically, it highlights the disparity in the spread of environmental destruction which frequently concerns marginalized population groups in the post-colonial territories.

Place is one of the major issues of the postcolonial ecocriticism. Place in literary and cultural studies is considered to be not a geographic site, but the cultural associations and histories of a site. The colonial expansion has altered most landscapes in ways that included removal of resources, plantation farming and industrialization. These changes interfered with the natives' connections to land as well as changed the ecological routine. Consequently, it is possible to find that a number of literary works produced in postcolonial situations are characterized by conflict between conventional cultural interpretation of nature and environmental alterations brought about by the colonial rule. The other issue of postcolonial ecocriticism that is of significance is the analysis of the impact of colonial discourse on perceptions of nature. European colonialists tended to perceive colonized regions as raw material and economic gain. This view promoted the massive exploitation of the natural resources including forests, minerals and agricultural land. In most instances, the colonial rulers came with new land management and agricultural production systems that were focused on economic benefits but not ecological sustainability. The practices often resulted in deforestation, soil erosion and destruction of the local ecosystem.

The postcolonial ecocriticism also addresses the issues of environmental effects of colonialism as portrayed in the literary text. Most of the postcolonial British literary works portray a landscape that has been changed due to the colonial economic activities. These writings tend to bring the focus on the local communities that experience displacement, environmental degradation, and loss of livelihood due to exploitation of resources. Literature can demonstrate complicated relations between environment, culture and power through narrative and imagery.

Another important issue of postcolonial ecocriticism is the environmental justice that concentrates on the unfair distribution of the environmental issues among various social layers. Colonial and postcolonial development projects have a tendency of being harmful to the environment and the marginalized populations, who lack political or economic authority. The case of toxic pollution, industrial refuse, and the displacement of the indigenous populations show that the environmental harm is often interconnected with even a larger system of inequality. Such types of environmental damage have been described as slow violence by scholars like Rob Nixon in which ecological destruction is facilitated over a long period of time through slow and often invisible means.

Moreover, postcolonial ecocriticism addresses issues of how cultural discourses define nature to us. Nature has been frequently represented in Western literary traditions using the ideas of pastoral landscapes or wilderness according to European environmental experience and cultural presuppositions. Nonetheless, these ideas might not be very reflective of the environmental realities of colonized territories. Postcolonial ecocritical analysis thus aims at questioning Eurocentric interpretations of nature, pointing

out other approaches that are based on indigenous knowledge and local ecological practices.

In general, the central issues of postcolonial ecocriticism are the overlaps between the colonial history, environmental change, and cultural representation. Through analyzing the role of ecological exploitation and environmental injustice in literature, such an approach is able to determine how the colonial power structures have affected both the natural environment and human society. This approach, in turn, means that postcolonial ecocriticism can help gain a better understanding of the modern environmental problem and promote more inclusive and historically conscious approaches to environmental studies.

Foundations of Postcolonial Ecocriticism

Postcolonial ecocriticism has its roots in the overlap of two significant disciplines, postcolonial studies and ecocriticism. Whereas the postcolonial studies are interested in the cultural, political and economic effects of colonialism, ecocriticism studies the interaction of literature and the natural environment. The combination of the two has resulted in a critical framework where scholars are able to examine the influences of colonial histories on the environmental perceptions, practices and representations in literature.

The emergence of postcolonial ecocriticism can be traced to the realization by scholars that the problem of the environment cannot exist independently of the spheres of history and politics. Squeezing of natural resources, such as forests, minerals, arable lands, and water systems, was closely related to colonial expansion. The ideologies of progress and modernization used to justify these activities often focused on economic benefits than the sustainability of the environment. Consequently, various areas which underwent the colonial rule also underwent a high rate of environmental degradation. Literary works that occurred in these areas often use ecological implications of colonial exploitation and the culture changes that it brought about.

Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment can be regarded as an important theoretical contribution to postcolonial ecocriticism development. This remains one of the influential studies that outline the interaction between literature, environmental issues, and the characterization of nonhuman life. The authors underline that postcolonial ecocriticism has to concentrate on the ecological and ethical aspects of the relationships between people and nature. Their work is also concerned with the influence the cultural attitude to nature had on the colonial ideas and led to exploitation of both human and nonhuman community.

A second important addition to the discipline is the collection *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment*. The paper will discuss the way in which postcolonial literature interacts with the issues of the environment, land, agriculture, forests, and animal life. The essays provided herein show how literary text can uncover the multifaceted interrelationships between environmental change and colonial systems of power. The collection illustrates how colonial environmental practices affected the entire world by analyzing the accounts of various part of the world.

One of the issues that are central in the foundations of

postcolonial ecocriticism is human and nonhuman relations. Early ecocritical literature tended to put much emphasis on landscapes and natural landscapes, and more recent scholarship widened the field of analysis to include animals and other nonhuman life. Researchers started studying the representations of animals, ecology, and interrelation of non-human and human life in literature. It is contrasted with the traditional anthropocentric opinions that describe humans as the center of environmental stories, and focuses on the intricate mutualism of all living organisms.

The concept of Eurocentric notions of ecocriticism is also criticized in postcolonial ecocriticism that has been historically applied in environmental discourse. The use of such concepts like pastoral and wilderness was the part of the European cultural and environmental context but these ideas became widely used in the colonized territories without accounting their unique ecological and cultural nature. According to postcolonial scholars, people might lose their local knowledge systems and indigenous environmental practices in the process of such universalized concepts. Postcolonial ecocriticism aims to foster a more thorough perception of nature to acknowledge the presence of different cultural associations with the environment by questioning these privileges.

The identification of indigenous ecology knowledge is another source of postcolonial ecocriticism. The traditions of environmental care and sustainable management of resources are long in many native communities. Colonialism often interfered with these practices by introducing new land tenure, production, and production systems and extraction of resources. In its turn, modern postcolonial ecocriticism focuses on the necessity of reclaiming and recognizing native views on the environment, which may prove useful in terms of solving contemporary ecological issues.

In general, the principles of postcolonial ecocriticism point to the necessity to study the environmental problems with the use of historical, cultural, and political frameworks. This area of study by synthesizing knowledge of postcolonial theory and ecological criticism offers a methodology of exploring how the colonial systems of power influenced environmental practices and nature in literary work. In such an interdisciplinary approach, postcolonial ecocriticism would help to gain a clearer insight into the multifaceted association that exists between environment, culture and colonial history.

Colonial Exploitation and Environmental Degradation

The process of colonial expansion was both political and economic and also environmental. The European colonialists used the natural resources of the colonized territories to boost the economic development of the imperial countries. The colonial powers altered the land and vegetation by the use of activities that included plantation agriculture, mining, deforestation and large-scale infrastructure projects which in many cases led to the destruction of the environment in the long term. These methods were motivated by the urge to maximise economic gain and the need to incorporate colonised states into the global markets of trading and production.

Set up of plantation economies was one of the greatest types of colonial environmental exploitation. Colonial

governments in most of Asia, Africa and the Caribbean established large scale plantations of crops like tea, sugar, rubber, and cotton. These plantations burnt down large areas of forests and transformed a variety of ecosystems into monoculture agricultural spaces. Consequently, this caused a drastic decrease in local biodiversity and soil fertility became regularly exhausted with time. The exploitation of the local labor was also the foundation of the plantation system, and social inequalities were tightly connected to the environmental change.

Another significant feature of colonial exploitation was mining and extraction of resources. Colonial powers often perceived the colonized countries as sources of precious minerals and raw materials to be used in industrializing the European world. Mining activities caused the devastation of natural sceneries, pollution of water bodies, and the resettlement of the indigenous populations. These activities were usually done without ensuring the environment was sustainable and without putting into consideration the needs of the indigenous people whose livelihoods were reliant on the land.

Deforestation was also a significant contributor towards the colonial-environmental transformation. The colonial governments introduced forest management policies aimed at regulating and misusing the timber resources to get it into commercial uses, such as shipbuilding, railway construction and industrial growth. These policies tended to curtail the native rights of local people to utilize forest resources thus destroy the age-old ecological process and cultural attachment to the land. Deforestation in a large-scale caused soil erosion, destruction of habitats, and alteration of the climate patterns in the region.

Besides extracting resources, colonial governments also brought new infrastructure like railway, dams and roads to ensure that goods and resources could easily move. Although these changes were commonly discussed as the manifestation of modernization and development, they more often than not led to the ecological disturbance and displacement of indigenous people. Meanwhile, development projects based on large-scale projects changed natural water flows, destroyed wildlife habitats, and changed rural sceneries.

According to postcolonial ecocritical artists, environmental legacies of colonial exploitation still affect modern ecological disasters. The economic systems that were put in place under colonial regime, tended to carry on after the independence and led to continued mining of resources and industrialization in most of the postcolonial countries. Consequently, environmental degradation is still firmly linked to economic disparities around the globe which have its historical origins in colonialism.

The postcolonial literary works often mirror such changes in the environment and challenge the devastating nature of the colonial exploitation. The sceneries in many contemporary works of English literature reveal the traces of colonial extracting of resources and damaging the environment. Such texts about the transformation of the physical environment and the social life of the local people can be understood through narrative and symbolism.

The postcolonial ecocriticism demonstrates that it is significant to address environmental issues in the context of the political and historical processes by means of analyzing

the historical interconnection between the colonial domination and environmental degradation. This school of thought underlines the fact that modern ecological issues cannot be completely sought without reference to the previous environmental legacies of colonialism.

Environmental Justice in Modern English Literature

The issue of environmental justice has gained significance in contemporary English writing, especially those that are based on postcolonial realities. Environmental justice focuses on the lack of equity in the distribution of environmental benefits and costs among various social groups. Marginalized communities are in most instances affected by environmental degradation especially in the colonized areas in terms of pollution, displacement as well as the loss of natural resources. The literature on postcolonialism usually highlights these disparities by depicting the environmental conflicts of people victimized by colonial exploitation and contemporary development initiatives.

The interconnection between social injustice and environmental destruction is a common theme in modern English literature created in postcolonial societies. Authors describe the landscape that has been industrialized, mined, and developed on a massive scale. These are not only social but also ecological changes since they not only disrupt the traditional ways of life but even cause the extinction of communities who are tightly related to natural environments. Literary representation can be used to bring out environmental problems that run parallel with matters of power, class, and historical inequality.

A notable one is the writings of Amitav Ghosh whose novel *The Hungry Tide* touches upon the delicate eco-system of the Sundarbans. The novel describes the issues of the relationship between human peoples and wildlife and natural ecosystems in an area that is highly subject to environmental change. It also touches on the conflicts between the conservation and survival of the local communities. The novel tells a story that shows the close connection between the environmental conflicts and the displacement problem, poverty, and the political power.

Likewise, the works of Arundhati Roy also touch on the subject of environmental justice through the lens of social effects of development and industrialization. *The God of Small Things* is a novel by the author portraying a land that is characterized by social orders, ignorance of the environment and the remnant of the colonial system. The larger range of essays and political works by Roy also attacks big development projects, including dams and industrial complexes, as those that endanger ecosystems and uproot the vulnerable populations.

The idea of environmental injustice in literary form frequently demonstrates the way the colonial economic system preconditioned the current environmental disasters. The colonial practices that focused on exploiting natural resources and commercial agriculture developed a trend of exploiting the environment which has been sustaining in modern economies. Consequently, numerous societies in postcolonial societies have environmental issues that are historical in nature. Literature offers an effective way to reveal those relations and make the readers think about the moral and political aspects of environmental change.

The other significant factor about environmental justice in literature is the aspect of indigenous ecological knowledge and other forms of relationship with nature. Most works of literature underscore the ancient culture of respect towards natural resources and ecological harmony with the ecosystem. Such representations oppose mainstream conceptions of development that view nature as a source of economic development. Through the pre-empting of indigenous views, postcolonial literature adds to the wider debate of sustainable environmental practices, and cultural diversity.

Besides, literary stories tend to represent the slow and at times unnoticed quality of environmental damage. This process is what has been defined by scholars like Rob Nixon as slow violence or environmental destruction which is long term and disproportionately impacts vulnerable populations. Literature can put these forms of violence out into the limelight through the stories, and the readers can learn of the long-term effects of exploiting the environment.

On the whole, contemporary English literature contributes to creating awareness on the issue of environmental justice. Literary works allow one to understand the social and cultural aspects of environmental crises by presenting the lived experiences of communities that have been impacted by ecological degradation. An ecocritical approach to the texts of postcolonialism assists in bringing out the way in which trends of colonial exploitation experienced in the past remain evident in creating environmental disparities in the modern world.

Expanding Postcolonial Ecocriticism

Postcolonial ecocriticism has grown in body and breadth over the last several years as researchers started investigating novel issues of environmental concern and conceptualization. Although the initial research in the area concentrated more on the connection between the history of colonialism and environmental representation in literature, the current research studies on a wider area that includes climate change, toxic pollution, extractive industries, and global environmental inequalities. These changes are indicative of the increasing understanding that environmental crises are inseparable and intertwined with historically established structures of colonialism, capitalism, and power relations in the world.

The research of ecological crisis in the context of the Anthropocene is one of the most significant directions of the development of ecocriticism, which started in the postcolonial era. Anthropocene is the latest period of the Earth during which human activity became the dominating force which formed the ecosystems and climatic systems on Earth. Most researchers, however, point out that the use of the term Anthropocene may hide the imbalance in the destruction of the environment. Dipesh Chakrabarty and others have discussed how climate change has raised questions about traditional historical approaches, and others have offered different terminologies that emphasize the importance of capitalism and colonial exploitation in ecological destruction.

In particular, the idea of the Capitasilocene was put forward by environmental historian Jason W. Moore, who argued that capitalist regimes of the economy have been instrumental in driving up the pace of environmental

destruction. This view claims that the environmental crisis is not merely the outcome of human activity in general but is inextricably linked to the historical progression of capitalist economies where capital gains precedence and resource plundering is a priority. These international economic arrangements were very instrumental with colonial expansion being the connection between environmental exploitation and imperial power.

The acceptance of more and more concern with the problem of pollution, waste, and even toxicity is another significant trend in the context of postcolonial ecocriticism. Industrial processes and extractive industries have a tendency of causing environmental risks which are disproportionately impacting the marginalized populations. These issues incorporate polluted water supplies, hazardous garbage dumping and long-term environmental destruction accredited to mining and energy generation. According to the scholars, such environmental costs are often imposed on the people of the Global South and it shows the pattern of inequality which was created in the colonial's era.

Multispecies relationships are also a newer phenomenon that has recently started being examined, studying the relationship between human beings and other types of life including animals, plants, fungi, and microorganisms. This school of thought opposes the conventional humanistic environmental studies based on the interrelations of all living organisms. In noting that human beings are components of complex ecological systems, the scholars attempt to come up with more comprehensive approaches to comprehending the environmental responsibility and sustainability.

Postcolonial ecocriticism has been extended to encompass other cultural works besides the literary works that include films, documentaries, policy papers, and other visual art forms. Such cultural outputs tend to discuss environmental concerns in a manner that extends to more people and influence society on the subject of environmental sustainability. The discussion of these sources will help researchers to explore the way in which environmental discourses are spread in the world culture and the way they affect societal awareness about the environmental disasters.

In addition, modern ecocriticism in postcolonialism focuses on the need to analyze environmental problems at various geographic levels including the local communities and global structures. Climate change, deforestation, and loss of biodiversity are not as much distinct phenomena that do not demand cooperation and awareness at a global scale. Meanwhile, the effects of these issues have a different manifestation in different parts of the world. Through the analysis of these variations, postcolonial ecocriticism emphasizes the necessity to develop environmental policies in respect to historical injustices and in favour of the rights of the marginalized. In sum, the development of postcolonial ecocriticism can be discussed due to the increased urgency of environmental issues in the world. Including the new theoretical approaches and showing the new environmental concerns, the field goes on developing and contributing to the comprehension of the intricate connection between the history of colonization, the cultural representation, and environmental alteration. This expanded method reinforces the contribution made by postcolonial ecocriticism to environmental crises in the present day.

Conclusion

The subject under consideration Postcolonial ecocriticism is going to offer a significant model of comprehending the linkage between colonial past, ecological degradation and the cultural representation. The sum of the previous knowledge in postcolonial studies and ecocriticism, this method presents the way colonial expansion and economic systems of the imperialism changed the landscapes, ecosystems, and human interactions with the nature. The environmental effects of the colonial exploitation still affect the modern ecological crises, especially in the regions where the intensive resource extraction and environmental transformation had been conducted during the colonial period. These historical and environmental processes are reflected and criticized in the literary texts as it is shown in the analysis of modern English literature. Most postcolonial authors describe a topography of ecological disturbance, social injustice, and dispossession of the indigenous population. Literature reveals the intricate relations between the destruction of the environment and the colonial powers through narrative, symbolism, and cultural representation. Through this, literary works offer useful information of how environmental injustice is endured by marginalized people whose means of livelihood is highly dependent on their physical environment. The other important input of postcolonial ecocriticism is that it focuses on environmental justice. Not every community is equally impacted on the problem of the environment like pollution, deforestation, and climate change. Rather, vulnerable Global South populations tend to be affected the most. Such types of environmental degradation have been referred to by scholars like Rob Nixon, who call them slow violence, as environmental degradation which builds up over time and is not easily noticeable in mainstream accounts. Literature has a particular role in presenting these obscured processes and making readers see the social and moral aspects of environmental crises.

Alternative views of nature, especially those based on indigenous ecological knowledge and traditional environmental practices are also important in postcolonial ecocriticism. These views criticize mainstream approaches to development that attribute more importance to economic growth than on environmental sustainability. Postcolonial ecocriticism promotes a more inclusive and responsible environmental management and policy by recognizing the different forms of relationship with the environment. Moreover, the recent move to incorporate the topic of climate change, extractive industries, and multispecies relations shows the enduring applicability of postcolonial ecocritical analysis. The modern-day environmental issues cannot be completely explained without historical analysis of their origin in colonialism and international economic disparities. Dipesh Chakrabarty and Jason W. Moore have among others underscored the need to analyze environmental crises in the context of wider historical and political dynamics. To sum up, postcolonial ecocriticism is a promising interdisciplinary method of studying the environmental aspects of colonial past and the contemporary world development. Investigating the reflection of ecological exploitation and environmental injustice in literature, this discipline is valuable to the further comprehension of cultural, political, and historical forces

contributing to the development of the modern environmental issues. With more and more environmental crises in the twenty-first century, postcolonial ecocriticism has become a key instrument to examine the relationships among environmental sustainability, social justice, and cultural representation.

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