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ECONOMY AND ECOLOGY: A POSTCOLONIAL READING OF AMITAVGHOSH'S FICTION

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"... it is our duty as botanists to enlighten the world of commerce."

- Arthur William Hill

Abstract

Landscape and seascape have been active participants in the historical process of colonization. Postcolonial writers like Ghosh have utilized the constructs of ecology to highlight and question the narratives of 'so called' progress brought out by colonial powers. Peder Anker in his introduction to the book Imperial Ecology states that the formative period of ecological reasoning coincides with the last years of the British Empire and that ecology grew out of the imperial administrative and political culture. The article is an attempt to discuss nature's economy in an imperial world as portrayed in the fiction of Amitav Ghosh.

Keywords: ecological imperialism, economic ecology, ecological debt

Introduction

Amitav Ghosh has long been involved in ecological issues, and his fiction offer insightful thoughts on environmental governance and subject constitution from a postcolonial perspective. During the mid-nineteenth century there were frenetic ecological activities favoring industrialization and imperial mission of the British East India Company in several parts of Southern Asia. Edward Said who positions postcolonial writing as a process of recovery, and identification "enabled by the land" foregrounds the vital role of literary imagination in the process of decolonization. In the same line, Ghosh's narratives of literary imagination bring to lime light the tyrannical histories embedded in land and sea during colonial era. He focuses on the transformative impact of imperial empire on the colonized land and its people.

Economy and ecology are inextricably intertwined so much so that a wealth of a nation is determined by its ecological resources. Alfred Crosby's 1986 book titled *Ecological Imperialism: the biological*

expansion of Europe ,900- 1900 describes the destruction wrought on indigenous environments with the introduction of alien flora and fauna that causes adverse effects on native species and ecology. Ecological degradation is closely linked with capitalism. Transformation of whole ecosystems and pillage of resources were practices of any imperial project. Production and consumption patterns of capitalist nations account for the deteriorating ecological conditions of the colonized countries. Amitav Ghosh in his fiction highlights the expansive growth of European nations and the downfall of many Asian countries primarily because of 'economic ecology.'

Natural resources in its varied forms have led to formation of empires as well as downfall of many an empire. John Bellamy Foster and Brett Clark in their article "Ecological Imperialism: the Curse of Capitalism" state that 'great fortunes were built on robbing the periphery of its natural wealth and exploiting ecological resources.' (189) In order to prove the point, they proceed to quote Marx's observation on India, 'the