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ECOLOGICAL IMPERIALISM IN GEORGE ORWELL'S *BURMESE DAYS* AND *COMING UP FOR AIR*

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ABSTRACT

Ecological imperialism delineated as the intentional destruction, through exploitation, taking out and transmit of natural resources of the colonized lands in the fascination of scientific and economic progress. The main objective of this article is to show that the loss of the natural environment and agrarian culture and the evils of the rapid urbanization and industrial activity, Green Imperialism through the two famous fictions of George Orwell. It also focuses on the ecological dimension of ecological imperialism and its manifestations of George Orwell's select works. Imperialistic aspects have destructive consequences for ethnic people and nature around the world. Its intervening effect on the western thought was so acute. As a consequence environmental policies have altered the underlying ecological cycles of the planet. The novel *Burmese Days* reveals the acute hypocrisy or double standard practices of the British Empire in Upper Burma. These British colonial practices also marked by the fundamental indeterminateness about an open assessment of imperialism and its ecological dimension. Orwell's *Coming Up for Air* chiefly deals with the exhibition of the alienation or estrangement of man from nature and culture.

**Key Words:** Green Imperialism, Ecological Imperialism, Reminiscence, Ecology, and Imperialism.

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Literature is the scintillating boon which is given by the writers to the readers. It creates inquisitive and acquisitive ways to produce connotative ideas. It mainly contributes to overt the mind and heart. There are many revenues to open the avenues. British Literature is a form of English art. It is capable of bringing about different emotions and a general sense of 'spiritual' well-being. English literature devotes us a new way of deeming about the world. Particularly, this article proposes to allocate with the ecological imperialism in George Orwell's *Burmese Days* and *Coming Up for Air*.

The term Ecology is outlined by Haeckel as the scientific study of the relationship between the organisms and the environment. Ecology adopts a philosophical and metaphysical approach in the study of these relations. In other words it is delineated as the study of *oikos*, the Greek term which means 'household'. Imperialism is outlined as an unequal human and territorial relationship, usually in the form of an empire

based on ideas of superiority and practices of dominance and involving the extension of authority and control of one state or people over another. Man feels that he is superior in this biosphere and has control over nature. But he fails to understand that nature is for everyone and for everything and not a subordinate and subservient to anything or anyone.

Ecological Imperialism was a theory devised by Alfred Crosby in *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe (1986)*. This theory suggests that colonization was not only a form of cultural and political oppression or tyranny, it was also a form of environmental intimidation and violence. This theory advocates that wherever colonists settled they brought with them diseases that devastated the local populations (of both people and plants and animals) as well as invasive pests and weeds that encroached on the existing flora and fauna and eventually starved them out of existence.

Ecological imperialism delineated as the intentional destruction, through exploitation, taking out and transmit of natural resources of the colonized lands in the fascination of scientific and economic progress. Ecological consciousness is a major concern of eco-criticism that investigates the relation between literature and environment. It believes that the natural world is a living, sacred thing in which each individual feels closely attached to a particular place. The main objective of this article is to show that the loss of the natural environment and agrarian culture and the evils of the rapid urbanization and industrial activity, Green Imperialism through the two famous fictions of George Orwell. It also focuses on the ecological dimension of ecological imperialism and its manifestations of George Orwell's select works.

To understand Ecological Imperialism we have to recognize its roots in the anthropocentric worldview. For the most part Ecological Imperialism is a British Enterprise because they have anthropocentric attitude though as a specific manifestations. The Europeans practiced a mercantilist strategy of subjugation and annexation by their expansion into the world's distant geographies mostly by means of their military aggression. The cruel outrages are exercised on the indigenous people at the time.

They were the acts of ecological mastery over nature in the colonized lands. As a consequence, those attitude continue to affect the entire planet today. In the words of two famous critics, John Bellamy Foster and Brett Clark, Ecological Imperialism is like robbing the periphery of its natural wealth and exploiting ecological resources that resulted in an undisguised looting, enslavement and murder of ecology.

George Orwell is the pen name of Eric Arthur Blair. He was the most influential and eminent writer from the western literature. He strongly advocates the ideology of ecological imperialism and the anthropocentric worldview through his two stunning works, *Burmese Days(1934)* and *Coming up for Air(1939)*. Imperialistic aspects have destructive consequences for ethnic people and nature around the world. Its intervening effect on the western thought was so acute. As a consequence environmental policies have altered the underlying ecological cycles of the planet.

Orwell contextualizes the great ecological disaster faced by the world through his famous work, *Burmese Days (1934)*. This novel unveils the underpinned progression of environmental abuse. The notion Ecological Imperialism is exhibited here in this novel *Burmese Days*, in the form of timber business handled by a small European settlement in Upper Burma. This novel also reveals the acute hypocrisy or double standard practices of the British Empire in Upper Burma. These British colonial practices also marked by the fundamental indeterminateness about on open assessment of imperialism and its ecological dimension.

The leading character of the novel *Burmese Days*, John Flory governs a lumber camp in Burma's previously unscathed jungle and he is unconscious of environmental impact, his company's systematic tree clearance causes on the local ecosystem. Flory is unusually quiet and receptive to Burmese culture although he talks offputtingly of the subjugation of colonial rules. By all chance he is also unusually participates in blind to the reduction of the resources. For instance in a conversation with his Indian friend Dr. Veeraswami, he overtly discloses the real intention of the existence of the British Empire in Burma. The British Empire and their colonial policies are only to exploit the natural resources in Burma. But their policies does not denote any ecological concern over the ethnic people of Burma.

“How can you make out that we are in this country for any purpose except to steal? It’s so simple. The official holds the Burman down while the businessman goes through his pockets. Do you suppose my firm, for instance, could get its timber contracts if the country weren’t in the hands of the British? Or the other timber firms, or the oil companies, or the miners and planters and traders?” (BD 60)

For the British to manipulate the nature was a matter of economic priority. They commonly disregarded the environmental consequences of their actions unless obviously their economic interests were at risk. Orwell also draws some orthodox imageries of flora and fauna to indicate how the text bestows nature as the exoticother, against which the European self-express itself in a forcefully relished manner of personality indulgence. This self is entirely anthropocentric and it is marked by the excessive crave to seize and exploit the nature. Flory’s portrayal delineates this process in an enlightening light:

“The lower jungle paths turned into morasses, and the paddy fields were great wastes of stagnant water with a stale, mousy smell... It was the beginning of the short winter, when Upper Burma seemed haunted by the ghost of England. Wild flowers sprang into bloom everywhere, not quite the same as the English ones, but very like them - honeysuckle in thick bushes, field roses smelling of pear drops, even violets in dark places of the forest ...One went shooting after duck and snipe” (BD 66)

Orwell furthermore discusses the Socio-Political imperialist structures inflicted by the British Empire on the Burmese land presented through the scenes of shooting animals. These scenes reveals the anthropocentric colonialist mindsets of the British. Ecological Imperialism is recurrently presents in such scenes where the act of shooting animals for fun is narrated as a natural pastime activity of the British on the Burmese. The only value of nature has for the colonizers is entirely instrumental. Ecological Imperialism is outlined as the systematic exploitation and re-shaping of the local ecosystems of the peripheries for the economic welfare of the center.

In the novel *Coming Up for Air* (1939), Orwell depicts the destruction of nature and culture is the serious social problem of the modern industrialized society and he has expounded this through the difference between the traditional England and modern capitalistic industrialized society. Orwell depicts the devastating effects of industrialization on nature and the traditional ways of living. In the modern industrialized society demolition of nature and culture is the serious social issues. These social and ecological problems are discussed in this novel by differentiating the traditional England and modern England.

Orwell’s *Coming Up for Air* chiefly deals with the exhibition of the alienation or estrangement of man from nature and culture. The industrialization and totalitarianism served as the root cause for this segregation of man. Orwell attempts to examine nostalgia and reminiscence in this novel and the influence of modern life on having angst for the loss of past. Through the novel *Coming Up for Air* the writer brings forth the ecological and anti-capitalistic world view which was the major determinant of this novel. The gloomy air of subjugating Britain before the War and the traumatic illustration of Britain after the World War I pervades throughout the novel.

Human settlement in the place meant for animals and plants, recuperation of coastal areas for the construction of buildings, destruction of mangroves which are habitat for seabirds, amphibians and the aquatic animals are traced out as the root cause for the ecological and environmental problems are the source for hungry tide and earth quakes. The role played by Western industrialization and their modernising programmes in alluring the developing countries into the destruction of their environment is of great significance in this context.

Orwell observed the drastic changes of the social structure after the World War I which served as the focal concern in the novel *Coming Up for Air*. There was a great change from a traditional agricultural England towards on urbanized and industrialized society after the effect of World War I. The novel examines the gradual destruction of the natural environment threatened by the material values of an ugly machine culture through George Bowling who is the central character of the novel. Bowling had mystical bond with nature in which he sees as his true home. Bowling tries to survive in the modern society because he is collocated with

the anthropocentric view. The modern society separates him from the natural life and he was disgusted by the modern life.

Bowling seeks to recollect his lost connection with nature where his origin belong. For this cause he thinks deceived in an urban environment which he describes as a prison with cells all in row. Bowling hopes nature as the real natural spring of his life, without nature he cannot survive. Whilevisiting Lower Binfield he observes primroses, feels happy and reacts:

“I got to a spot where the grass beside the road was smothered in primroses. Apatch of clayey soil, perhaps. Twenty yards farther on, I slowed down and stopped. The weather was too good to miss. I felt I'd got to get out and have a smell at the spring air, and perhaps even pick a few primroses if there was nobody coming. I even had some vague notion of picking a bunch of them to take home to Hilda” (CUFA 165)

Through the happiness of Bowling, Orwell tries to explain the interrelatedness of the man and nature. He is very happy when he sees the primroses and he observes the beauty of nature in Lower Binfield. In the next visit to Lower Binfield his happy dream gets demolished because of the industrialization and capitalism has deteriorate the traditional agrarian culture and the beautiful environment surroundings. Owing to the violation of the capitalism and anthropocentric attitude there was a vast gap between nature and man.

Orwell further explains the outcomes of the technology which is liable for the destruction of natural world and it is also responsible for the gradual obliteration of the human world, through the character Bowling.

“Another quarter of a minute or so, and I raised my head again. Some of the people still rushing about, others were standing as if they'd been glued to the ground. From somewhere behind the houses a huge haze of dust had risen up, and through it a black jet 240 of smoke was streaming upwards. And then I saw an extraordinary sight. At the other end of the market-place the High Street rises a little. And down this little hill a herd of pigs was galloping, a sort of huge flood of pig-faces. The next moment, of course, I saw what it was. It wasn't pigs at all; it was only the schoolchildren in their gas-masks.” (CUFA 224)

Devastation of the forest is another ecological issue which is conversed in this novel. Apart from Bowling's findings of the secret fishing pool in the woods which has been exhausted and changed into a bosh junkyard. Bowling is overwhelmed on his visit to Lower Binfield that all the trees have been cut down and replaced by factories. His private angst about the disappearance of nature from human life twists out to be a kind of public issue which requires immediate change of policies. He points out that:

“Where those houses stood there used to be a little oak plantation and the trees grew too close together, so that they were tall and thin, and in the spring the ground underneath them used to be smothered in anemones. Certainly there were never any houses as far out of the town as it is... Where was the town I used to know? It might have been anywhere. All I knew was that it was buried somewhere in the middle of that sea of bricks. Of the five and six factory chimneys that I could see, I couldn't even make a guess at which belong to the brewery” (CUFA 179)

The ecological and the environmental problems encountered globally due to ecological imperialism, and the damaging effects of scientific and technological advancement and industrialization need to be addressed properly. Intellectuals all over the world and ecologists in particular are currently engaged in charting out solutions to this worsening threat that upset the very existence of living beings on earth. The role played by Western industrialization and their modernising programmes in alluring the developing countries into the destruction and annihilation of their environment is of great significance in the Western context. Hence Ecological Imperialism is contextualized in Orwell's both novels.

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