Impact of Colonialism on Environment: A Socio Ecological
Study of *Twilight in Delhi*

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Abstract

Massive devastation of indigenous social ecology was envisaged during the colonial expansion in almost all parts of the world since the 16th century. This colonial craze resulted in the exploitation of the natural resources of the colonial territories, which leads to environmental degradation. The alarming consequences of economic expansion including depletion of the ozone layer, air pollution, loss of forests and biodiversity, extinction of animal and plant species, loss of marine life, water and soil pollution have occurred at an alarming rate. Substantial destruction has greatly affected the global environment in the shape of global warming, urbanization, and massive industrialization among other grave issues. Modern intelligentsia and academia give rise to environmental consciousness through multiple campaigns including the celebration of "Earth Day", the emergence of environmental activist organizations like "Friends of the Earth", "Earth First", "Sea Shepherd" and the formation of "Association for the Study of Literature and Environment ASLE" in America, the vis-à-vis start of Environmental studies and Ecocriticism at universities all over the world. Soon it prospered into further interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary fields of studies, in addition to the environmental campaigns activated across the world.

Keywords: Environment, Ecocriticism, Social Ecology, Postcolonial, Pakistani Novels.

Background and Purpose

The indigenous social ecology was disrupted by East India Company in Indo-Pak sub-continent during the 19th century, which abruptly altered the social, cultural, political and environmental order of the whole subcontinent. The same was highlighted by Ahmed Ali in his famous masterpiece "Twilight in Delhi". This research aims to find out the impact of colonialism on the indigenous social ecology with special reference to the selected novel by utilizing "Textual analysis technique" under qualitative research methods. Moreover, the research is carried out from the

theoretical perspectives of Murray Bookchin, helping the student of literature to build a better understanding of the selected novel from new perspectives of social ecology and to expose the root causes of environmental degradation under colonial expansion in relation to colonial and postcolonial societies.

There are many social, as well as, ecological theories which cover the vast and expanded field of each study. Modern ecological concepts have been derived from Lawrence Buell, whereas, the social ecological model of Murray Bookchin is the most recent in the field and fits the present research. It not only places human beings at the center of the model, but also marks human beings as key figures in it. Human beings are the only active contributors in the social ecological model of Bookchin, who can affect the natural ecology, whereas the rest of the entities – the flora and fauna – are merely passive participants of nature. The devastation of indigenous social ecology in the hands of colonial powers can be evaluated by utilizing the ecological model of Murray Bookchin. The social ecological theory is mainly related to sociology and ecocriticism; however, the same can be utilized in literature like many other modern theories. The socio-ecological model of Murray Bookchin is operationalized for utilization in literature. This type of socio-ecological model can better help the researcher to analyze the situations and factors in the selected novel as it describes a phase of Muslim Delhi, before and after the advent of colonial powers in India.

Exploring the socio-ecological perspectives requires analysis of intricate and complex situations as depicted in the novel. Moreover, the sensitivity of the dialogues of various characters in the novel superimposed with different moods, tones, feelings and emotions also demands qualitative analysis of the text. The researcher utilized close reading as a tool for this research by employing "Qualitative textual analysis technique". The relevant text of the novel is selected by employing close reading of the text and then analyzed according to the socio-ecological concepts of Murray Bookchin, paragraph wise, to achieve the research objectives.

Loretta Johnson (2010) endorses the expanded scope of ecocriticism as, "literature of all periods and places—not only ecocentric or environmental literature or nature writing, but all literature—is viewed in terms of place, setting, and / or environment, all of which have taken on richer meaning" (p.7). Environment is the physical setting and background of our actions and human beings cannot escape from its influence in everyday life. Environment exists in and abounds since time immemorial, even far before the existence of human beings, on the face of earth, whereas, ecocriticism deals with the study of literature and the environment. Hence, the whole literature can be explored through the lens of ecocriticism (Glotfelty, 1996: p.33).

Daniel H. Henning (2006) acknowledges the importance of ecocriticism at the United Nations declaration of World Conference 1992 and recommends the inclusion of all

stake holders including the state to curtail down the environmental degradation in the world. Lawrence Buell (2005) categorized ecocriticism into

"First" and "Second" waves, likewise, Kovacik named the early 18th and 19th century environmental literature as "Zero Wave of Ecocriticism". In the same context, ecocriticism prospered into various strains like environmental racism, ecofeminism, environmental justice, deep ecology, social ecology etc. However, the "Third wave of ecocriticism" deals with the collective survival of this planet and human beings despite of regional diversities.

Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin observed in R. Goha that the joint study of both "postcolonial and ecocriticism" is challenging and are "continuous imperialist's modes of social and environmental dominance" (2010: p.2). Richard Grove and Alfred Crosby (2009) also placed colonialism at the center of "postcolonial" and traced the influence of imperial powers in certain ecological areas and by assuming postcolonial closed to "Environmental racism". Plumwood looks into sexism, racism and colonialism in a single array and endorses male dominance over sex, race and the Earth.

The devastation of indigenous environment, according to Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin (2010) is multifarious, and the colonial mindset can be traced back into the ancient Judeo-Christian believes, scientific and industrial revolutions, and European craze to dominate the whole world. Loretta Johnson concludes the postcolonial ecocriticism as:

> "Second-wave ecocriticism treats such environments as disease landscapes and medical geography of global disease wrought on environments by colonialism… This ecological colonization includes not only smallpox epidemics in the Americas but also long-term psychological and medical effects of colonization in tropical climates worldwide" (2010: p.22).

The effects of colonialism and colonial expansion were deep rooted into the common ideology to conquer the poor indigenous landscapes on the basis of superiority and dominance. They first consider the indigenous population as outdated, inferior and uncivilized, thus constructing a sick argument to rule them as reflected through the famous novel "Heart of Darkness".

Murray Bookchin (2007) was the first environmentalist who linked the current day environmental problems to the social problems in the world. His approach towards modern ecological problems is based on the ecological displacements of contemporary world as a consequence of ethnic, cultural, economic and gender conflicts. Thus, in order to eliminate the environmental issues, the ecological displacements must be addressed. It is a comparatively newer perspective to see the environmental problems.

Natural ecology cannot exist in isolation; rather, it requires the support of social ecology as natural ecology is always dependent on human beings or vice versa, which ultimately gives rise to social ecology. According to Bookchin, the primitive societies were genuine and were based on equality and interdependence; however, their bond goes weaker and weaker till modern times. The mutual relationship of equality is replaced with modern concepts of command and obedience. Every simple life leads towards social ecology, whereas the industrial life leads towards ecotechnology. Moreover, the domination of the young by the old, of women by men, of the poor by the rich etc, snatched freedom, as well as, control of modern societies. Akram (2017) rightly concluded the arguments of Bookchin as, "Human beings are the sole representatives of environment and nature in literature, which in response, affects their social life. So the changing behavior of human beings also affects response towards nature and environment" (p.35).

Bookchin (2007) has developed his concepts towards "Ecological Utopia" where he envisaged the collective survival of the universe only through establishment of ecological societies. He further says:

> "We must create an ecological society-not merely because such society is desirable but because it is directly necessary. We must begin to live in order to survive. Such a society involves a fundamental reversal of all the trends that mark the historic trend of capitalistic technology and bourgeois society" (p.83).

The ecological utopia of Bookchin requires complete overhaul of the existing hierarchies of the world, by adopting environment friendly technologies and by exercising the principle of "as little waste as possible". It also requires participation from all tiers and from every individual in order to ensure the collective survival of the universe.

This Study: A Socio Ecological Look at *Twilight in Delhi*

Ahmed Ali a glittering star, short story writer, poet, critic, translator, teacher, diplomat, businessman and recipient of Sitara-e-Imtiaz (Star of Distinction) has depicted a phase of historical life of Indo-Pak subcontinent in his famous novel "Twilight in Delhi". The decay of Muslim rule in India is the decay of a dominant culture and a specific mode of social life. The fall of Delhi from "the Jewel of the world's eye" to merely ruins has been depicted in the novel through a Muslim aristocratic family of Mir Nihal at the Freedom Fight of 1857. Same was endorsed and visible from the verses of the last Muslim king Bahadur Shah Zafar as,

> *"Delhi was once a paradise,*
>
> *Such peace had abided her;*

> *But they have ravished its name and pride,*
>
> *Remains now are ruins and care"*
>
> *(Bahadur Shah)*

Ahmed Ali looked back into the colonial expansion of Sixteenth through Eighteenth century from Spaniards, Portuguese to British, who shattered down the cultural, religious, social and political ecologies of indigenous people all over the world:

> The damage done by the colonial powers to the heritage of conquered peoples is irreversible; yet racial memory is a collective storehouse that time and history cannot eradicate. In Mexico and Peru the Spaniards conquered the vast Aztec and Inca empires in early parts of the sixteenth century, and became the rulers of millions of human beings sanctified by Papal bulls to convert heathen people to Christianity and impose their language upon them, which the Portuguese also did in Brazil. In Africa, the British, Dutch and the Portuguese captured, enchained, baptized and shipped twenty million able-bodied men, women and children as slaves to the Americas, of only twelve million reached alive (p.vi).

The devastation of the environment started with the capitalistic ideology of the Western powers, during the past four centuries right from Africa to America and from Australia to India. The social ecologies of the indigenous people were destroyed in order to achieve materialistic goals in the new world. The poor population along with their natural ecologies were severely mutilated by the hands of White colonizers.

The city of Delhi was first built by Raja Yudhishtra in 1453 BC after the commencement of the great war of Mahabharat. Afterwards, Delhi was remained under attack by various invaders and conquers as Ali describes, "But the city of Delhi, built hundreds of years ago, fought for, died for, coveted and desired, built, destroyed, and rebuilt, for five and six and seven times, mourned and sung, raped and conquered, yet whole and alive, lies indifferent in the arms of sleep. It was the city of kings and monarchs, of poets and story tellers, courtiers and nobles" (p.4). It reflects the tragic history and the position of Delhi in the subcontinent. It remained a symbol of pride for the people of subcontinent and a center of politics for all times, which was completely altered by the colonizers. The contrasted figure of Delhi is narrated by Ali:

> But, no king lives there today, and the poets are feeling the lack of patronage; and the old inhabitants, though still alive, have lost their pride and grandeur under a foreign rule. Yet the city stands still intact, as do many more forts, and tombs and monuments, remnants and

reminders of old Delhi, holding on to life with a tenacity and purpose
which is beyond comprehension and belief (p.4).

The demise of Delhi by the hands of British has completely altered the social ecology
of the city. The colonizers have deprived the Delhiites their king, which subsequently
halted the majestic look of the city. The Mughal courts, darbars, sessions, arrival and
departure of foreign and local delegations and local celebrations, all came to an end.
The color of soil has changed to red with the blood of the Muslims, and twilight
engulfed the whole city with dominant monuments, tombs, and remnants of the
Mughals.

Mir Nihal, the protagonist in the novel, has also witnessed the contrasting features of
both Mughal and British rules in India. He was physically seated at the stairs of Jama
Masjid during coronation ceremony in 1911, whereas, mentally he was engulfed with
bitter memories of the past amidst the Red fort, Khooni Darwaza (The bloody gate),
Feroz Shah Tughlaq fort, Hamayun's Tomb, and Qutab Minar. The incident of 13
September, 1857 refreshes in his mind, when thousands of Muslims were martyred
by Metcalf army, when they opened fire on the Muslims at Jama Masjid; who
gathered there as a protest against the conversion of Masjid into a church. The
magnificent places and the city of Delhi itself constitute the social ecology of Muslim
India in contrast to the construction of New Delhi under the British rule. All has been
changed from 1857 to 1911 and the condition of Mir Nihal is explained by Ali:

> He was filled with shame and grief, until the tears of helplessness came
> into his eyes and he wiped them from his cheeks…miserable are those
> who see and suffer and can do nothing. A fire burns within their breasts;
> but the flames do no shoot up. Only the soul is consumed by the internal
> heat and they feel dead, alas!…. (p.147).

Psychological state of Mir Nihal presented by Ali reflects the hidden regret and
repentance of each Muslim at Delhi. His feelings and emotions clearly indicates his
hatred towards Farangis-the colonizer. This hatred later on converted into formation
of Muslim League and hence the basis for an independent country in the shape of
Pakistan. This clearly highlights the two contrasting colors of social ecology before
and after the colonial rule in India.

The fierce battle between the indigenous forces and the Metcalf army took four
months and four days when the invaders succeeded in breaking the great wall of the
city. The courage of indigenous soldiers and common masses is described by Ali:

> They would all die one day, but it was better to die like men, fighting
> for their country and Islam. The time of your trial has come. The enemy
> is standing right in front of you. Those who wish to prove your mettle
> should come with me to the northern gate of the mosque. Those who
> hold life dear should go to the southern gate,…the Mussalmans had

cried in union 'Allah o Akbar'; and there was not one soul who went to
the southern gate of the mosque… (p.146).

The scenes of Muslim resistance expressed by Ali highlights the unity of Muslims
against the invaders. They can foresee their destiny in case of any defeat, many of
them accept death in the battle field rather to be alive under the foreign rule. The
defense of indigenous social ecology thus provide an opposition to the imposed
foreign social ecology in Delhi. The bloodshed of Delhi massacre was depicted by
Ali:

> Hundreds fell down head on the steps of the mosque and inside,
> coloring the stones a deeper red with their blood. But with a resolution
> to embrace death in the cause of the motherland, the Mussalmans made
> a sudden rally and before Metcalf's men could fire a second volley of
> shots they were at their throats. They began to kill the soldiers, who
> turned their backs and ran for their lives (pp.146-47).

The horrible picture of battle at Delhi reflects the bloodshed of both forces at the
footstep of Jama Masjid. The red color of footsteps intensified by the color of sacred
blood of Muslims. Ali narrated only one encounter of colonizers at Delhi as a
symbolic representation of the fierce fight between the two forces, which can be
generalized to the hundreds of such encounters all over the Indian Sub-continent.

Ali categorizes indigenous people into four major categories; first, who fought
against the invaders and martyred, second, who welcomed the foreign forces, third
one were who kept them aloft from the war and fourth one were those who could do
nothing and remained at a state of shame and regret like the protagonist, Mir Nihal.
Ali rightly describes the various people:

> There were those men of 1857, and here were the men of 1911, chicken
> hearted and happy in their disgrace. This thought filled him with pain
> and he sat there, as it were, on the rack, weeping dry tears of blood,
> seeing the death of his world and of his birth-place. The past which was
> his had gone, and the future was not for him. He was filled with shame
> and grief, until the tears of helplessness came into his eyes and he wiped
> them from his cheeks…miserable are those who see and suffer and can
> do nothing. A fire burns within their breasts; but the flames do no shoot
> up. Only the soul is consumed by the internal heat and they feel dead,
> alas…. (p.147).

The change in the social ecological domains of the contrasting rules is in front of Mir
Nihal, like thousands of other indigenous men, he is full of shame and regret being
alive but, feeling worse than the dead ones.

The British government altered the city scape of Delhi by disfiguring Chandni Chawk and by cutting old peeple trees. The environmental degradation started soon after the conquest of Delhi, in the name of widening the roads and progress. The colonizers also planned a new city opposite to the old fort and Turkoman gate, in contrast to the old city. The construction of new city according to Ali means, "new people, new ways, and a new world altogether. That maybe alright for the newcomers: for the old residents it was a little too much… they brought with them new customs and new ways" (p.197). This is how the colonizers planned to completely alter the indigenous social ecology. The colonizers enforced new language, culture and encourage its propagation into the young generation of Indians, thus challenged the indigenous social ecology of the Indians.

The colonizers banned existing courtly language-Persian, similarly Arabic and Urdu were also discouraged in the society, which consequently shifted the attention of nobles from Persian and Urdu to English. Delhi along with the whole country was made speechless and a new language was imposed on them, which is devoid of pure feelings, expressions and meanings. There was a large network of Madrassas in the country, who impart required education to the indigenous people. The change of language was followed by the replacement of old Madrassas (School system) with English school system. The new school system under Lord Macaulay facilitated the British in acquiring brown Englishmen and consequently old education system was decayed.

The decay of feudal system is also linked with the changing social ecology of Delhi. The city of Delhi was famous for princes, monarchs and feudal lords. People often provide services to these rich people and the social ecology of Delhi thus works. The leisure activities like kite and pigeon flying and visits to mistresses was very common at that times. Feudal lords like Mir Nihal enjoyed the rich traditions of Mughal period, which is a dream now. His relation with Babban Jan reminds the leisure hours as Ali says that she entertained him "with her conversation, and songs, and her lithe figure and young body" (p.108). This immensely affected the new generation like Asghar, who attracted towards the new culture.

The novel is embedded with many references of poets and poetry. Poetry being the sublimated genre, has a central position in indigenous literature. Delhi has witnessed a long list of poets like Ghalib, Dagh, Dard, Insha, Hafiz and Mir Anees. People often learn their peoms and lyrics (Ghazals) by heart and usually use them in their routine conversations. Moreover, some beggars like Gul Bano also used to sing poems of the last Muslim king Bahadur Shah Zafar to earn money. The princes, lords and ministers used to organize poetic sessions in Delhi under the Mughal rule. However, after the colonizers, this great poetic and literary tradition melted away under new rule of White colonizers.

One of the major pillars of social ecology which was affected by the British colonizers was religion. Muslims remained the rulers of India for centuries. They cared for the indigenous people regardless of their religions. However, the British after the Freedom Fight of 1857 targeted Muslims as Ali pointed out. Many Muslim scholars were hanged or condemned to penal servitude in the Andaman Islands, where most died of hardships greater than anything suffered by American prisoners at Alcatraz in San Francisco Bay… (xi). The British had a plan to convert Jama Masjid in Delhi to a church, which reflects the mentality of the White colonizers. Moreover, the indigenous poor community was converted into Christianity through missionaries in the subcontinent. This is how the colonizers affected and altered the indigenous religious, cultural and social ecologies in the Indo-Pak subcontinent.

The economic degradation was also among the prominent figures affected by the colonizers in the subcontinent. The Delhiites witnessed the boom period of Mughal Empire, when Delhi was known as "the Jewel of the World", in contrast to the aftermath under British rule. People of Delhi were exiled for a period of five years by the White invaders, after the failure of Freedom Fight in 1857. During the said period, the British dug up their houses for ornaments, jewelry and wealth. They searched and snatched precious ornaments from the indigenous population and left them to move from "village to village and jungle to jungle" without money. It was a mega plan to transform the people of Delhi into beggars. The depiction of various types of beggars on the basis of age, gender, cap, and color in the novel highlighted the height of poverty during the British rule. In addition, the new form of education and new requirements for government jobs deprived the majority of Muslims from entering into public sector jobs. Likewise, the old education system resulted in excessive unemployment among the Muslims in Delhi, as well as the whole country at large. In this regard, Ali rightly says:

> Why do you ask my native place,
>
> O dwellers of the East,
>
> Making mock of me for the poor plight I am in?
>
> Delhi which once the jewel of the world,
>
> Where dwelt only the loved ones of fate,
>
> Which has now ruined by the hand of Time,
>
> I'm a resident of that storm-tossed place… (p.5).

The whole ecologies of the Delhiites were affected by the hands of White colonizers. The poverty level in the city tremendously increased and, as a result, many people were left to spend their nights along the roads and in by-lanes. Ali narrates the situation in the city:

> In Delhi to this day there were innumerable princes and princesses alive
> daughters and grand-daughters of Bahadur Shah. Many cut grass for a
> living, other drove bullock carts to keep body and soul together. The
> princesses had married cooks and kahars, their own servants or serves
> as cooks or maids. Many of them had become beggars and went about
> begging in the streets. Some were given five or ten rupees as pension
> by those who had usurped their kingdom. But there were many others
> who were not given even this much of help (p.138).

This reflects the economic condition of Muslims in Delhi. The social ecology of Delhi comes in contrast to that of Mughal rule in India. The impact of colonizers is visible through the treatment of the last king, princes and princesses. Many royal family members were murdered and killed and the rest were left to suffer the hardships of life under the colonial rule.

The above discussion of the novel "Twilight in Delhi" reflects two different ways of life at Delhi, before and after the colonial rule. The social ecology evaluated before the advent of the British is the dominant one under the Mughal rule. Delhi was famous as "the jewel of the world" with rich traditions and no rival city in the whole subcontinent. The education system met the requirements of the country with a vast network of Madrassas with compulsory basic education. Religious freedom was exercised by all the regional religions of the country with harmony and peace. Even the Non-Muslims including Hindus enjoyed various ranks in government departments. The social ecology of the subcontinent prospered under the Mughal rule. The rich people also took care of the needy and supported the men of literature, especially the poets. Poetic sessions started to be arranged by feudal lords and the rich people and one could seldom find any beggar in the whole city during the period of Mughals.

On the other hand, after the fall of Delhi, people were deprived of their own king and the whole social ecology was first halted by the colonizers and then altered tremendously. Twilight overwhelmed the whole city of Delhi specifically and, in general, in the whole country. The people of Delhi were searched out for valuables and then banished for five years. This is how the indigenous rulers were forced to become beggars. The economic condition of the Muslim community was badly affected by exile and massive unemployment. A large scale of inflation was noted in the aftermath of Freedom Fight of 1857, and consequently, a large number of people became beggars including the princes and princesses. The city scape of Delhi was altered, trees were cut down and a new city was constructed to establish a new culture in contrast to the indigenous culture. People were deprived of their courtly language – Persian – and discouraged from the use of Arabic, Urdu or Sanskrit. Muslim scholars and leaders were mock trialed, sentenced, murdered or at best left to suffer bare hardships in Andaman Islands. The indigenous poor community was converted into newly introduced foreign religion through missionaries, thus shattering the

religious social ecology of the country. In short, the colonizers tremendously affected the social ecology of the indigenous people as depicted in "Twilight in Delhi".

Conclusion

Above discussion of the novel "*Twilight in Delhi*" reflects two different ways of life at Delhi, before and after the colonial rule. The social ecology evaluated before the advent of the British, is the supreme one under the Mughal rule. Delhi was famous as "the jewel of the world" with rich traditions and having no rival city in the whole subcontinent. Education system meets the requirements of the country with a vast network of Madrassas with compulsory basic education. Religious freedom was exercised by all the regional religions of the country with harmony and peace. Even the Non-Muslims including Hindus were enjoyed various ranks in the government departments. The social ecology of subcontinent was prospered under the Mughal rule. The rich people also take care of the needy and support the men of literature, especially the poets. Poetic sessions were arranged by feudal lords and the rich people, hence one can seldom find any beggar in the whole city during the period of Mughals.

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