

INDUSTRIALISATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEGENERATION: A CRITIQUE OF ENVIRONMENTAL POLITICS IN FRED STENSON'S WHO BY FIRE

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Abstract

This research study aims to examine the consequences of industrialization on the human and non-human life of the surrounding places. Likewise, it explores degrees of loss of environment caused by national and transnational industrial units. On one side, such syndicates accumulate more revenues from resource-rich regions while on the other inflict environmental and cultural degradation. Moreover, this study is intended to evaluate the resistance of the local community, specifically the women, against such industries. Such industrial corporations operate on the patterns of transnational corporations of the Global North and consider local communities as their 'other'. For such reasons, this study is premised, theoretically, on investigating existing relationship between industrial units and the local communities. In this context, theoretical underpinnings of postcolonial Eco-criticism seem plausible for this investigative study. The study interprets Fred Stenson's Who by Fire (2014) for a critical understanding of industrialization, its impacts on environment and strategies of environmental politics of impacted communities. The study finds that industries are established in resource-rich geographies to enhance their revenues. They exploit natural resources and inflict environmental degeneration upon these geographies. In addition, it explores women's strategies of environmental politics to protect their resources and environment from further degradation.

Keywords : *Industrialisation, Ecological Degradation Environmental Politics, Global South, Global North.*

Introduction

This research study aims to examine the roots of environmental degradation of the regions in which industries are established. Likewise, it attempts to explore magnitude of the loss of environment inflicted upon the communities in which industries operate. Moreover, a significant issue of this study is to foreground the resistance of affected communities to protect their environments. Before advancing forward, phraseologies of Global South and Global North need to be explained. Clarke (2018) notes that Global South represents a cluster of countries from Africa, Asia, Latin America, Oceania and Caribbean that are declared by the World Bank as low or middle income in a comparison with North American or European countries (Clarke). Conversely, the Global North consists of developed nations, specifically economically and technologically, of the world. A distinct feature of Global North is that it exercises economic, cultural and political dominance over the Global South (Clarke 2018).

Nevertheless, Mahlar (2018) presents another significant aspect of this taxonomy of nations based on processes of economic development in nation-states and widening monetary and power gaps within countries. He puts it as “There are Souths in the geographic North and Norths in the geographic South” (2018, 32). Countries of Global North prefer to establish their enterprises and industrial units in the regions of the Global South. At times, certain national corporations initiate their projects in less developed areas or communities within their countries. Establishment of mines, oil extraction plants and refineries, deforestation for diversified purposes and construction of mega dams might be regarded as paragons of national syndicates that operate within a nation. Ultimate end of such national corporations seems to exploit natural resources of that region. Moreover, they attempt to maneuver work force for depreciated rates. Nixon (2011) states this phenomenon as “Western multinational exploit an environmental, health and labour climate [of the Global South]” (Nixon 71).

An essential aspect of this research study is to investigate the ramifications of national and transnational enterprises upon ecologies of the geographies in which they function. As they exploit natural resources of less developed geographies “under cover of a free market ideology”, environmental degradation seems to be inevitable (Nixon 2011). Similarly, Gedicks (2001) contends that such forces impact the lives of their labour force and cultures of the respective regions (2001, 65). He contends that energy consumption of industries of the developed nations result in “massive deforestation and the destruction of more native cultures” (2001, 65). In addition, Gedicks maintains that such corporations cause the loss of natural surrounding of the region and, ultimately, result in food scarcity and spread of diseases (Gedicks 152). Likewise, Wiwa (1995) notes the cultural consequences of Shell’s drilling on the Ogoni people

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and their culture. Moreover, he considers the drilling process in the Nigerian Delta as one of the reasons of civil war in the region (Wiwa 65). While drawing analogies between European colonialism and the impacts of oil drilling in the Niger Delta region, he perceives the latter one as the continuation of the former one as names it "indigenous colonialism" (Wiwa 63). In this sense, they equate with European colonial elements that are characterized by exploitation of natural resources and impacting the cultures of colonized places.

To add more, this study investigates the strategies of environmental resistance of the affected communities. Specifically, it focuses on the contribution of women in environmentalism and in protecting their environment. Women actively participate in environmentalism as, according to Shiva, they are more sufferers (Shiva 1987). The local communities raise voice against the environmental vandalism caused by industrial units. Likewise, they challenge exploitation of their resources and demand conservation of their environment. In this connection, Carter (2001) examines the role of grassroots environmental groups that are "less formally organized" and believe in "protest politics" as their policy (2001, 131). Such groups consist of members from local community and educated middle-class individuals. According to Carter, such groups campaign against unwanted exploitation of natural resources and environmental hazards of the corporations (Carter 142). Like Carter, Gedicks (2001) seems to emphasise a well-organised resistance against environmental degradation of the Niger Delta caused by oil drilling corporations (Gedicks, 02). In a similar way, Wiwa (1995) looks at environmental politics as a solution to Ogoni problems. Moreover, he emphasizes the role of the youth in organizing resistance against oil industries operating in the Niger Delta.

Environmental politics draws its inspiration from environmental justice movements of the United States. Scholarship of environmental justice contends that the roots of environmental justice lie in the United States during 1980s (Bretta 137). In American history, these decades are characterized by a number of civil rights movements. According to Bullard and Wright, these movements campaign against environmental concerns of neglected and low-income communities living in various parts of the United States (Bullard and Wright 153). Pollution and dumping of industrial waste in their areas constitute major concerns of such marginalized social groups. Broadening the scope of environmental politics, environmental activists of the Third World adapt certain traits of Environmental Justice movement to disseminate their environmental concerns to International organizations. Moreover, former movement is confined to geographical boundaries of the United States whereas the latter one communicates concerns of impacted communities of the Global South.

Accordingly, this research project is premised on the study of industrialization and its impacts on environment of the geography in which it operates. Additionally, it examines multifarious strategies of environmental resistance specifically focusing on gendered environmental activism in Fred Stenson's *Who by Fire* (2014). In addition, it will examine cultural and environmental hazards originated from industrial processes in the selected text.

Research Objectives

To examine the hazards of industrialization on the environment as represented in the selected text

To investigate the nature and strategies of environmental resistance of the affected communities as delineated in the selected text

Research Questions

How does industrialization impact the environment and culture of the region in which it operates?

What are life experiences of the women of affected communities in connection with environmental politics?

Theoretical Framework

This study is premised on environmental degeneration, strategies to protect environment and the nature of relationship between industrial forces and the impacted geographies. Industrial elements function as neoliberal forces of the Global North and affected territories equate Global South spaces. In this context, critical formulations of Postcolonial Ecocriticism seem plausible for this study. Essentially, eco-critical theory seems to be grounded on the notion that human culture is closely connected with the physical world. The scholarship of this critical discipline concurs that both, human culture and the environment, affect each other. Glotfelty (1996) affirms the same as "human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it" (10). Likewise, it examines the nature of relations between humans and natural world the way it is represented in literature. Glotfelty (1996) explores this trait of ecocriticism as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (09). In a similar vein, Mishra (2016) maintains the same functionality of Ecocriticism as "criticism of the house, the environment as represented in literature" (168). In addition, It emphasises to analyze attitudes of humans towards environment and certain transformations in such relations that occurred at various moments of history. Moreover, it emphasizes global ecological crisis caused by developmental projects of the humans throughout history and investigates the constituent elements of this crisis. In this connection, Marland (2013) notes, "[eco-criticism] explores from the perspective of anxieties around humanity's destructive impact on the biosphere" (847).

To add more, Ecocriticism establishes itself on two primary formulations that are debated as anthropocentrism and biocentrism. The former believes human beings

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to be the masters of natural resources with the privilege to utilize them for their benefits. Anthropocentrists maintain that the purpose of environment is to serve the humans. Known as shallow ecology, it places humans on superior edge of the binary of humans versus nature. Mishra (2016) encapsulates it as "man [humans] thinks himself to be superior to others [non-humans]" (168). On the contrary, the latter formulation seems deconstructive in nature since it challenges the construction of superiority of the humans. In this respect, Mishra (2016) notes that "Ecocriticism decentres humanity's importance to every object of environment" (169). Deep ecology discourages interference of humans in nature for the sake of preserving it in pristine form. Moreover, it advocates inherent value of all organisms on earth while it opposes superiority of none over the other (Mishra 2016). Moreover, it guarantees a balance in the eco-system and solution of ecological crisis by suggesting limited intercession of humans in the natural environment. Mishra (2016) puts the same as "nature has its own right to survive" (Mishra, 2016). To safeguard the existence of non-human spheres of life and establish an affinity between the anthropocentric and the bio-centric spheres are considered the significant objectives of Eco-criticism.

Postcolonial Eco-criticism seems to have developed from already well established critical fields of eco-criticism and postcolonial studies. It emerged, as a critical field, in 1990s to investigate ecological impacts originated from neocolonial enterprises in postcolonial conditions. As a critical study, it emphasizes to examine the effects of neocolonial corporations on the environments of formerly colonized places. According to Mason et al (2014), analysis of continuation of the impacts of environmental deformation and vandalism imposed on the indigenous ecologies during the colonial periods constitutes a specific characteristic of this field (2014, 02). Like postcolonial studies, it tries to locate the links between the ecological destruction of former colonies and developmental strategies of colonial periods (Mukattash, 181).

Likewise, Vital (2008) identifies the same characteristic of postcolonial Ecocriticism as "a new kind of concern for the environment emerging in the post-colonial era, one attuned to histories of unequal development and verities of discrimination" (2008). In addition, it considers colonization not as history of the humans rather its impacts are observed on the physical environment of colonized territories that include the movement of natural resources, animals and plants. Similarly, it seems to offer relatedness between current issue of climatic change and the material practices during the colonial periods. Huggan and Tiffin (2010) consider the environmental issues "central to the European domination and inherent in the ideologies of imperialism". Besides, Postcolonial eco-criticism characterizes the protest of former colonies against the environmental strategies envisaged during the colonial

histories. Ramachandra Guha (1990) accounts the protest of lower class Indians of Himalayas. He encompasses the plantation and management of forests in Indian Himalayas from the colonial period to the independence.

Process of industrialization creates environmental hazards in the territories in which it takes place. Such hazards include water and air pollution, degradation of land, exploitation of natural resources and impacts on the fauna and flora of the region in which industries operate. In this respect, Elliott (2004) contends that multinational corporations perform a significant role in "industrial pollution" and other environmental hazards (Elliott, 116). Moreover, she acknowledges that such industries exert environmental effect of international scale as they exploit resources of various geographies through their environmental strategies and investment strategies (Elliott). Like Elliott, Carter (2001) traces the causes of prevailing environmental problems in the role of industrialization. In tis regard, he maintains that industrial units of developed nations, mostly European and North American, inflict environmental degradation (Carter 23). In this context, he seems to advise such developed countries to initiate environmental solutions as well. Besides critical voices from the West, Shiva (1987) examines the impacts of development on the environment and culture of the former colonized places. She contends that strategies of development, envisaged by advanced nations, resemble with the ones devised during the colonial periods (Shiva, 40).In addition, she regards development as continuation of the colonialism in its impacts on the environment and culture of the colonized people.

Environmental politics comprises the strategies of the impacted communities to protect their environment from further degradation. Carter (2001) divides environmental politics into old and new ways of politics to raise voice against the hazards of industrialization. In this respect, he emphasizes the role of grassroots environmental groups that could perform their role in protecting environment from degradation. Likewise, Gedicks (2001) examines the resistance policies of the natives against mining corporations in different parts of the globe. In addition, he urges the indigenous African communities to devise strategies of resistance against oil industries operating in Niger Delta region. Like Gedicks, Wiwa is another African voice who makes an effort to unite Ogoni people and speaks for environmental protection on behalf of Ogoni people. Wiwa (1995) motivates Ogoni youth to initiate peaceful environmental politics against oil corporations that cause environmental vandalism in the region. From Indian context, Guha explores the phenomenon of environmental politics in *Verities of Environmentalism: Essays North and South* (1997). He investigates the challenges and struggles of the impoverished communities, ethnicities and groups of people from diverse Global South perspectives against distributional inequalities of their resources. In a similar vein, Narian (2008)

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uses the term "Environmentalism of the Poor" in Indian context to refer to environmental conflicts arising from mining, deforestation, construction of dams and nuclear stations (Narian).

Literature Review

This segment of the article examines the literature produced on the repercussions of industrialization on the environment and environmental politics. In the first place, Davies (2018) explores the ramifications of petro-chemical industry on the populations and environment of Louisiana. This study is based on the interviews of the residents of a town in Louisiana, a polluted industrial area. The study unfolds that the slow violence, caused by the petro-industry, has changed the locality into "death-world" as the number of casualties caused by the slow violence is huge. Davies, here, familiarizes the reader with another idea of "Slow Observation" that seeks the victims of the slow violence to live within "sustained environmental brutality" (Davies 2018) and encourages them for political resistance. Another scholarly attempt by Davies (2019), examines the long-lasting impact of Louisiana disaster on the lives of the people. Additionally, Davies accounts various forms of slow violence and particularly differentiates between it and the structural violence. Davies sees structural violence as the social disparities that ultimately leads to the damage of an individual and that these structural inequalities pave the ground for the slow violence in the society.

Similar to environmental degradation, a wide array of scholarship seems to have explored diversified perspectives of environmental politics. In this regard Amatyia (2019) analyzes resistance and struggles of indigenous communities narrated by Arundhati Roy in her essay *Walking With the Comrades* (2011). Amatyia (2019) conflates his critical insights, regarding Roy's essay, in this work He attempts to contextualize Roy's essay in Pratt's notion of "Traveler" that she disseminates in *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992). Amatyia places Roy's essay (2010) in postcolonial travel literature as it accounts the resistance and struggles of indigenous people against exploitation of their mineral resources. Similarly, he maintains that even after decolonization has taken place formerly, grabs of natural resources of the poor nations still perpetuates. For him, "structural adjustment programs" of past three decades enable "metropolitan power centres" to grab mineral resources of Third World states. (53). To add more, Amatyia initiates another subgenre of postcolonial literature that narrates conflicts originating from extraction and exploitation of natural resources of a place. He introduces such writings as "Resource conflict literature" (54). He puts as, "growing body of texts about indigenous struggles against the grab of natural resources by large corporations or state-run development agencies" (54). Moreover, this article puts in place certain

forms of resource conflict that have developed in diversified socio-economic conditions. He notes as "Conflict over natural resources may manifest in multiple forms including civil litigation, protest marches, public demonstrations or armed rebellions" (56). Likewise, Gedicks (2001) proposes an identical notion of "Resource Rebels" in his publication. By this phrase, Al Gedicks refers to the groups of people that envisage certain schemes to protect their resources from exploitation by transnational powers. As Amartya's study (2019) is premised on Roy's essay (2010), the researcher draws a comparison between the struggle of Naxalite rebels and legendary Gundadhur. The former ones celebrate latter's struggle against exploiting forces of colonial periods. They are seen in "traditional garb" and pose as Gundadhur that symbolizes their determination to confront exploitative transnational enterprises that carry on the legacy of colonialism (63). Thus, Amartya seems to delineate environmental politics, though with a different nomenclature, with all its perspectives that render it plausible to be applied on texts to investigate resistance and struggles against resource exploitation in the Global South backdrops. Keeping in view aforesaid research projects, the present study will examine cultural and ecological hazards caused by corporations of the Global North. As well, it will foreground the strategies adopted by affected communities to prevent the exploitation of their resources and preserve their ecologies. Its premium focus will remain on contributions made by women in this connection. Moreover, this study will foreground slow violence of poor sections of affected places and environmentalism of affected women from variant socio-political, economic and historical backgrounds. The texts selected for this study reveal different Global South settings that render this study an altogether a different one. It is different in the manner that selected texts demonstrate different time settings in the history that enlighten the scholarship about the neocolonial strategies at various points of time in history.

Research Methodology

The research methodology employed in this study is non-empirical research approach that interprets a literary text to draw the findings. Morrow and Brown (1994) view non-empirical research being premised on a literary text that is interpreted and findings are presented accordingly. In a similar way, Mouton (2001) notes that non-empirical research is grounded on a specific theory, its application on a selected text and results are drawn according to the assumptions of the theory. The present study comprises application of post-colonial eco-critical understandings on Fred Stenton's *Who by Fire* (2014). It employs critical frameworks of Elliott, Carter and Shiva to examine the impact of industrialisation on the environment of the territories in which they are established. Likewise, it relies on critical assumptions of Guha and Alier (1997) to investigate environmental politics of affected geographies of the Global South. In addition, this study adopts the technique of textual analysis as a

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tool for data analysis. As a tool for analysis, it enables the reader to analyse a literary text critically in accordance with a particular critical understanding. Cuddon (1999) foregrounds similar characteristic of textual analysis as views it as a technique to extract critical meaning from a literary text. Such traits of textual analysis, as a tool, render it suitable to be applied on this research study.

Textual Analysis

Stenson's *Who by Fire* (2014) contains number of elements specified with Global South fiction. In the first place, Ryder Farm symbolizes as "South with in geographic North" (Mahler, 2018). Secondly, the way Alladin Oil and Gas plant originates troubles for surrounding community and inflicts layers of environmental despotism upon its residents is a peculiar characteristic of Global North corporations that operate in Global South perspective. Similar to Global North enterprises, Alladin Oil and Gas plant becomes a principal reason for cultural and environmental hazards for Ryder Farm dwellers. The Bauers family predicts the devastation because of this plant and becomes willing to sell its farm to Aladdin's. Within days, their lush green crops are destroyed and primary structure of the plant replaces them. Stenson puts it as, "A stream of caterpillar tractors entered the field across from Ryder's driveway, followed by dirt haulers" (Stenson, 14). Elliott (2004) notes this aspect of industries and contends that corporations inflict environmental pollution and other hazards in the territories they function (2004, 116). Environmental degradation is not confined to the crops and greenery, the plant impacts other forms of life as well. Operations of the plant produce stink that proves poisonous for the cattles of Ryder farmers, particularly of Tom's. It kills a dozen of Tom's piglets and calves and this loss of cattles becomes unbearable for Tom's family. Stenson notes it as, "Having seen the plant kill the better part of two litters of pigs, Tom had been worrying about calves" (112). Additionally, gas flares and stink of Aladdin Oil and Gas exert poisonous impacts on crops, fruits, eggs and meat quality of Ryder Farm. Above all, it seems to have affected the taste and hygienity of all such productions. Tom unfolds such poisonous impacts as, "Now suddenly, our body can't make good blood" (Stenson, 78). Wiwa (1995) mentions identical effects of oil corporations on the environment of Ogoni land and their results in the form of "food scarcity" (Wiwa 68).

Moreover, plant is responsible for another form of environmental degradation that poses great threat to people's lives. It releases its waste water in the water reservoirs of Ryder farm. As a result, it pollutes drinking water available to Ryder community that creates troubles for it. Elliott (2004) explores reasons of water pollution and accounts "industrial pollutants and untreated sewage" as the major contributors of water pollution (Elliott, 53). According to Elliott, releases of industrial

waste and untreated industrial water are prime sources of environmental degradation of diversified forms in the surrounding (2004). Likewise, Aladdin Oil and Gas plant causes ailments of serious nature which were never experienced by Ryder residents previously. Certain complaints, of lesser seriousness, are caused soon after the plant starts functioning. This situation is delineated in these words, "Everybody for miles had the same complaints: headaches, nausea, nosebleeds, sore throats, sore eyes" (32). Particularly, it affects Billy's health. Starting from headache, His ailment perpetually worsens and it causes restlessness in the family. Their concerns over Billy's health drive them to certain medical specialists. Stenson projects this situation as, "The tests show that he has anemia" (69). Origination of illnesses is not restricted to the human life of Ryder community; it expands its impacts to nonhuman life in the surrounding of Ryder farm. Elliott (2004) explores the impacts of industrial waste and industrial untreated water and their effects on human health. She maintains that such industrial waste and polluted water cause number of diseases in the surrounding (Elliott, 53). In a similar vein, Gedicks (2001) notes that mining and oil corporations cause "infectious diseases" and create problems in "food supply and malnutrition" (Gedicks 71).

In addition to environmental degradation, the phenomenon of industrialization causes cultural hazards for the surrounding communities as well. In Stenson's text, displacement has been represented as one of the cultural impacts of the process of industrialization. Bauers and other families are compelled to sell their farms to Aladdin Oil and Gas plant. Impacts of plant, in certain forms, compel the farm owners to auction their lands to the plant management. In this connection, the Bauers family becomes the first prey of the ploys employed by the plant administration. On the contrary, the Ryders resist any notion of selling their farms as Ella has developed emotional attachment with the farm. Nevertheless, ultimately, Ella is willing to move away and reveals her wish to sell the farm. Stenson unfolds the accomplishment of plant owner's purpose of attaining Ryder farm as, "Aladdin would be glad to see them go" (139). Roy (2010) describes a similar kind of displacement with reference to the Adivasi people of India. Roy examines forced displacement of the tribes of central Indian states ordered by Indian government for the purpose of extraction of natural resources located in these states.

Like environmental degradation, a significant aspect of this research study is to examine the strategies of environmental politics crafted by affected communities. It, specifically, focuses on contribution of women of working groups regarding conservation of their environment and independent utilization of their natural resources. In this connection, female characters of this novel appear to be well aware of the environmental and cultural degradation Aladdin Oil and Gas plant is doomed to render on the community. They actively envisage schemes to postpone the despotism

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of the plant. In this regard, Ella's efforts to shun impacts of the plant are considerable. On Billy's being affected, she phones plant's office angrily and demands certain officer to visit her home. She intends to inform the concerned authorities about dangers of the plant. Afterwards, Lance visits her home to settle the issues of stink and smoke of the plant. Very courageously, she demands the closure of the plant as it is affecting health of her children. She expresses her anger as, "I don't care how long it takes your plant to start up again or what it costs you in time and money" (Stenson, 60). Despite her various strategies to protect her farm and children from hazards of the plant, she fails altogether. Plant management creates schemes to counter her resistance and health risks of her family enforce her to surrender to the plant and ultimately, she decides to auction her farm. Ella's confidence resembles with the active members of Chipko movement initiated by Indian women to protect the forests of their territory. Shiva (1987) mentions the contribution and participation of three hundred Indian women who saved Khejri trees by clinging to them under the leadership of Amrita Devi (Shiva, 105)

Likewise, Bertha Kenhardt is another woman of the community who indulges herself in resisting the hazards originated by the plant. She calls upon a meeting of community men to discuss various strategies to handle plant situation. She maintains a date-wise diary that details the hazards caused by plant stink and smoke to her. This meeting ends with her suggestion to send a letter to health minister. Moreover, Kenhardt is determined to send the same letter to MLA of their respective constituency to project the issue to the high-ups. She emphasizes to get the letter signed by every affected person of the community and by every married woman. Kenhardt's efforts seem in line with the environmental strategies proposed by Wiwa (1995). He plans a charter of demands to be presented in the meetings of Ogoni representatives and signed by them. In addition, strategies of Wiwa and Kenhardt are similar as both emphasise non-violent strategies of resistance against the industries. In addition, Kenhardt's way of protest could be recognized as a form of public demonstration as she seeks suggestions of affected community members. Amatya (2019) notes "public demonstration" as one of the strategies adopted by impacted geographies characterized by environmental degradation.

Conclusion

This research study concludes that Global North nations initiate industrial units in the geographies of the Global South with the intention to exploit their natural resources and inflict environmental degradation. It finds that such projects originate environmental hazards and cultural degradation for the communities in which they operate. Moreover, the study unfolds that, occasionally, certain powers of the Global

North are involved in maneuvering resources of the geographies that lie within Global North. Additionally, it unpacks that developmental projects originate diversified forms of environmental degeneration that extends from human to nonhuman spheres of life. The study seems to conclude that women of impacted communities play a consequential role in resisting against ecological hazards of their places. They equate the men in devising strategies to conserve their resources and protect their environment.



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