Annual Methodological Archive Research Review
http://amresearchreview.com/index.php/Journal/about
Volume 4, Issue 3 (2026)

Online ISSN 3007-3197
Print ISSN 3007-3189

http://amresearchreview.com/index.php/Journal/a

Imperial Landscapes and Ecological Violence in Amitav Ghosh's Smoke and Ashes

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the intersection between ecology and imperialism in Ghosh's Smoke and Ashes (2023). In the novel, opium is a tool of imperialism and a source of ecological exploitation, violence, and addiction. The current study investigates the representations of ecological ruins in the form of soil erosion because of debilitating nutrients in soil reducing its fertility, utilization of local resources, and coercive economic control. This research is qualitative. This research will highlight oppressive structures, coercive economic control of the British, catastrophic environmental conditions, and moral turpitude. This study reveals environmental imperialism, coercive agricultural control, and environmental degradation. The study will highlight the duality of opium's role in ecology and British imperialism fueling the Empire's expansion while simultaneously destroying the ecological system. After drawing Alfred W Crosby's "Ecological Imperialism," imperial powers not only monopoly through military forces but also on ecology by introducing new crops, food, and disease. By applying postcolonial theory, it highlights Edward Said's Orientalism and Gayatri Chakravorty. Spivak's perspectives on subalterns focus on how the British dominated the East as inferior by imposing harmful practices and then exploiting natural resources, land, and individuals. Spivak's perspectives on subalterns show how the voices of colonized people were often silenced. Through this novel, Ghosh critiques the imperial system and its long-lasting impact on both the environment and society. Findings of study presents the opium empire as a scene of environmental crime, highlighting the close connection between ecology and imperialism and the fact that colonial ecological damage is the root cause of today's problems.

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Key Words: Exploitation, Imperialism, Catastrophe, Ecology, Violence, Monopoly, Addiction.

Introduction

Ghosh's writings are crucial to comprehending historical fiction, ecocriticism, and postcolonial literature His writings combine painstaking research with gripping narratives to span enormous geographic and historical expanses. He is known for his elaborately woven stories that delve into issues of colonialism, migration, history, and environmental degradation. His works, which include both fiction and non-fiction, are well researched and frequently combine several traditions, timeframes, and geographical locations. Ghosh's writing is distinguished by its deep attention to ecological challenges, catastrophe of environment, decolonial realities, and the interdependence of human communities.

Ghosh frequently combines historical research with narrative storytelling in his writings, making it difficult to distinguish between fiction and non-fiction. His latter writings, especially, address climate change, catastrophes of the environment, soil erosion, colonialism, and displacement, making him a vital voice in current world literature Along with the Ibis Trilogy, "The Hungry Tide" and "*Smoke and Ashes"* both emphasize opium trade and its legacy, globalization and imperialism, environmental destruction, exploitation, and underrepresented voices. *"Smoke and Ashes"* expands the focus to include global historical causes, whereas "The Hungry Tide" is primarily regional (Sundarbans). Collectively, they demonstrate Ghosh's profound interest in colonialism, environment, and history.

Ghosh's writings also explore identification, exile, and ancestral memory in great detail, delving deeply into "postcolonial and diasporic narratives". His writings compel readers to reassess humanity's position in a world that is changing quickly, whether viewed through the prism of past trade routes or current catastrophe of environment. Ghosh bridges the gap between academia and fiction by merging meticulous study with narrative, which makes him an important figure in both formal and activist communities. The gripping non-fiction book *"Smoke and Ashes"* (2023) by Amitav Ghosh explores the terrible or unfortunate legacy of the opium trade,

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tracing its origins in colonial domination and its profound effects on global or worldwide economies, civilizations, and cultures.

The current study examined how Ghosh reflects larger concerns of generational environmental exploitation and contested imperial geographies in *Smoke and Ashes* through the opium trade and its ecological legacy. The argument, which draws on postcolonial theory, focuses on how Ghosh examines the colonial opium economy as a profoundly ecological events that is intertwined with environmental degradation, economic expansion, and monoculture. Postcolonial ecocriticism's theoretical framework throws light on how opium-trade-shaped landscapes come to represent resistance, ecological change, and colonial exploitation (Huggan & Tiffin, 2010). The nature and contest space shifts that went with British colonialism in India were profoundly weaved with imperial and financial misuse, taking off a bequest of environment or natural debasement and social change.

Woodland lands, prior to colonization, were symbolized by multifaceted social systems and societal norms which placed a large emphasis on communal ownership (Gadgil and Guha, 1992; Gedail et al., 1993). Whichever way, British operated the show, re-imagined these scenes in ways that favored the income over the maintainability. The clearing of timberlands was given an incentive under the burden of arrival charges, which allowed developing the agrarian land with settlement clearing, which is primarily to maximize the agricultural production and royal gain. The commodification of common assets such as teak, which backed the British sea extension, checked a principal crack in nearby environmental hones (Gadgil & Guha, 1992).

Beneath the pretense of 'development,' British specialists propelled endless framework ventures, counting the development of the railroad framework. These required gigantic amounts of timber, with an assessed one million wooden sleepers required every year within the 1870s alone (Government of India, 1964). Species such as Sal, teak, and deodar were overharvested, frequently without thought for environmental adjust. The Indian Timberland Division, set up in 1864, encouraged the large-scale apportionment of forest arrive, coming full circle within the Timberland Act of 1878 which centralized control and renamed timberlands into categories—

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village, secured, and reserved—according to commercial esteem (Mohapatra, 1997; Gadgil & Guha, 1992).

Protected woodlands, which held the most elevated financial esteem, were subjected to the foremost strong misuse. As wartime requests surged between 1937 and 1945, the recorded timber yield expanded by 65%, barring unrecorded extraction due to remiss oversight (Gadgil & Guha, 1992). Blended timberlands were felled and supplanted with market-driven monocultures, significantly diminishing biodiversity and exhausting common woodland cover by the time of India's freedom in 1947 (Sagreiya, 1967).

1.1 Statement of the Problem

In *Smoke and Ashes,* Ghosh explores the hidden histories of opium through a global network of trade. British monopoly over India's property, legacy, and assets caused natural destruction. In *Smoke and Ashes*, Ghosh depicts constrained and awkward development. This study explores ecology and Imperialism in this story in the form of forcible opium cultivation since it is not only a financial mechanism of oppression but also a natural debacle, leading to disastrous outcomes of environment, excessive soil erosion, water wasting, biodiversity loss, and harming the Indian economy. Ghosh reveals the concealed narratives of reliance on opium as a source of accumulating wealth of the British Empire to create environmental upheaval and gain geopolitical power through the monopolistic control of natural resources and agrarian environment of India through the East India Company. It turned the agriculture practiced in Indian region which had been supporting communities in the region over thousands of years, caused a reduction in biodiversity as it replaced indigenous plants and a reduction in soil fertility due to monocultural farming techniques. Therefore, the goal of this study is to examine or explore how ecology and imperialism are connected in *Smoke and Ashes,* especially as it relates to forced opium farming, exploitation of both nature and generations. It seeks to investigate how imperial economic policies functioned through ecological dominance in addition to human oppression or tyranny. Through their examination, the study highlights how the logic of exploitation posed by colonialism also incorporated environmental degradation, loss of labor, and

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biodiversity as a key component as opposed to incidental outcome.

1.3 Objectives

1. To explore the coercive cultivation of opium to reshape the ecological landscape. In the Indian Region *Smoke and Ashes* by Amitav Ghosh.
2. To investigate the ecological catastrophic consequences of imperial greed in Smoke and Ashes by Amitav Ghosh.

1.4 Questions

1. How coercive cultivation of opium reshape the ecological landscape. In Indian region in *Smoke and Ashes* by Amitav Ghosh?

2. What were the ecological catastrophic consequences of imperial greed in *Smoke and Ashes* by Amitav Ghosh?

1.5 Significance of the Study

The significance of the study is how the British Empire exploited the ecosystem, soil erosion, reshape ecological landscape only growing one crop "opium" in paddy fields, the catastrophe of other crops, discombobulated farmers, and the series of wars with China (1839 to 1842). The significance of the study is that the hidden histories of opium, trade, exploitation, addiction, violence, and imperialism reshape the ecological landscape and global trade networks. Crucially, this study sheds light on the history of opium trade its use as an imperial tool as well as a commodity of imperial greed—that is frequently disregarded or purposefully hidden. The study shows how opium cultivation encouraged systemic violence, how trade routes became addiction hotspots, and how these exploitation processes contributed to the establishment of a global power structure, such as a monopoly that favored the imperial core at the expense of colonized communities. This study advances our knowledge of how imperialism, ecological manipulation, and drug markets are linked across world's history by shedding light on these hidden histories. By examining the perspectives and experiences of colonized peoples, Ghosh's account not only reveals the little-known history of the British Empire's opium and global power dependence but also subverts prevailing Eurocentric narratives. By demonstrating how the opium economy influenced trade routes, labor networks, and societal structures, Ghosh adds to the

Online ISSN 3007-3197
Print ISSN 3007-3189
http://amresearchreview.com/index.php/Journal/a

postcolonial and ecological narrative in this work. Because it makes connections between past exploitation and current global issues like poverty, addiction, climate change, and socioeconomic injustice, the study is particularly appreciating today.

1.6 Literature Review

Recent scholarship, notably (Chakrabarty, 2021), links colonial extractivism to present-day climate change, suggesting that the Anthropocene cannot be understood separate from imperial histories of environmental degradation. With the rise of environmental justice movements, there is a growing call among scholars for decolonial engagement with sustainability, with emphasis on the importance of climate justice being a topic of sustainability discussion (Nixon 2011). Financially, colonial-run shows set up attractive institutions that encouraged the exchange of riches from the fringe to the metropole (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012).

Cushman's (2013) work interfaces biological government to the worldwide commodification of common assets. Bennett (2015) looks at the worldwide history of timberland administration, centering on the part of colonial powers in building up ranches and ensured regions. He contends that colonial ranger service hones were driven by the financial and royal interface, frequently driving to environmental corruption. Bennett's (2015) work highlights the worldwide measurements of biological colonialism. Chakrabarty (2009) investigates the verifiable roots of the climate emergency, connecting it to the bequest of colonialism and industrialization.

Postcolonial biological feedback looks at how the legacies of colonialism impact natural hones and how colonized social orders react to environmental emergencies. Researchers have contended that colonial abuse of normal assets and inborn information frameworks altogether contributed to natural debasement (Povinelli, 2016; Tsing, 2015). Besides, the results of such abuse proceed to influence the postcolonial world in both unmistakable and intangible ways, as seen within the separation of local species, the presentation of monoculture, and the reconfiguration of scenes.

Hartnett (2021) introduces the notion of climate imperialism, exploring the disproportionate impact of change in climatic conditions on the former colonized places. He argues that global natural strategies often perpetuate the flow of royal

Online ISSN 3007-3197
Print ISSN 3007-3189
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power as the global South is the most affected by the consequence of environmental disasters brought about by the industrialized nations. Nioh (2022) considers the case of French environmental colonialism, which manifests itself in the way in which the colonial natural approaches operate in the postcolonial countries.

Goodman (2020): "Three Worlds of Climate Imperialism"? "Prospects of Climate justice"" Goodman (2020) talks about distinctive points of view on climate government, emphasizing the imbalances and control elements that shape worldwide reactions to climate alter. He traces three conceptual systems of climate government and analyzes prospects for accomplishing climate equity inside these systems.

Nuri, M. A. (2020). The first wave of scecriticism is described in (Three Waves of Ecocriticism) as growing its postcolonial branch as a perspective deeply rooted in Western scholarly norms but gradually gaining momentum to stabilize the views of colonized places. In the context of the postcolonial ecocriticism, the former focused on the natural consequences of colonial abuse that needed to be addressed. This phase criticized the attitude of colonialists to view nature as a resource that can be conquered and removed by financial means. Bartels, A., Eckstein, L., Waller, N., and Wiemann, D. (2019).

Analyzing (Amin 2022) integrates existing evidence on the impacts of climate change and potential adaptation or mitigation in several impacted sectors. Challinor (2014) a change in climate variability and extreme weather events and their potential impacts on agricultural systems. Increased food insecurity from climate variability, the authors show, underlines the need for adaptation to help reduce negative impacts.

Sheller (2018) links climate vulnerability with restrictions to mobility, arguing that postcolonial populations disproportionately experience climate-induced displacement, whereas wealthy nations are subject to restrictive immigration policies, creating climate refugees. Whyte (2017) critiques the dominant Western narratives about climate change. He claims that Indigenous people are not only victims but agents of rebuke. Simpson (2014) emphasizes how inborn connections to arrive and nonhuman substances give strong models for climate adjustment. She studies capitalist approaches to climate relief, contending that arrangements must be established in innate sway.

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Ortiz (2019) proposes a contrapuntal perusing beyond the human building upon a system by Du Boisjan to emphasis minor lifeworld that carry on and generate resistance within royal restriction. These include drawings like how seeds are strong under sugarcane monocultures and tales of people that adapt to nonhuman substances in the fight against betrayal.

Ghosh (2016) both in his nonfiction work and through his fiction (including the Ibis Trilogy and Gun Island), studies the Eurocentric system of climate stories, situating colonialism as a driver of modern natural emergencies. Ghosh underscores how scholarly conventions molded by Western realism have fizzled to react enough to biological catastrophe, particularly from the point of view of once-in-the-past colonized social orders.

Ferdinand (2019) studies the determination of colonial pecking orders in natural talk and policy-making. He calls for a DE colonial environmentalism that not, as it were, recognizes the verifiable savagery of colonialism but reimagines planetary prospects from the edges. Chakrabarty (2021) makes an essential intercession by theorizing the Anthropocene as a worldview that strengthens history specialists and scholars to move past conventional human-centric histories. He investigates the pressure between planetary and worldwide viewpoints, emphasizing that while climate alteration may be a planetary marvel, its causes, and results are profoundly established in royal histories. Chakrabarty does not deny the role of European colonial development in the construction of the carbon economy but tendencies a redefining of human structure and temporality.

Shrivastwa (2020) adopts a comparative Eco critical reading on Nepali, Indian and English literary texts in which postcolonial literature becomes entangled with themes of biological misfortune, otherworldly cosmologies and local opposition. The consideration emphasizes that South Asian writing habitually depicts environmental mindfulness as fundamentally to social memory and resistance to Western innovation.

Sharma (2017) conducts an Eco critical perusing of Anita Desai's and Intizar Hussain's works, centering on South Asian natural concerns. Sharma recognizes the meeting of climate powerlessness, social disengagement, and natural rot, especially in

Online ISSN 3007-3197
Print ISSN 3007-3189

urban and post-partition scenes. Alam (2022) extends this discourse through his investigation of "eco-material cracks" in South Asian Anglophone fiction, centering on how materials such as water, soil, and harmful waste act as both story and environmental specialists. His work challenges pursuers to see the colonial abuse of assets not fair as a foundation but as a dynamic drive in the scholarly frame and legislative issues.

1.7 Theoretical Framework

In *Smoke and Ashes,* Ghosh elaborately explores the theme of ecology and imperialism regarding biology and domination. Post-colonial studies regarding *Smoke and Ashes* tell us that British imperialism reshaped the ecological system of areas in which opium poppies were cultivated on colonized land coercively with consequences of generational exploitation. Text will be closely examined to identify and analyze key themes and discourses surrounding ecology and imperialism, the catastrophe of the environment, utilization of resources, monopoly of the British Empire, nature contested colonial spaces, especially those related to the hidden histories of opium trade and its socio-environmental effects. Crosby's concept of "ecological imperialism" shows how European countries changed the nature of the places they conquered by growing only one type of crop. According to Crosby's thoughts how biological double dealing served majestic desires, changed environmental elements, and transformed agricultural lands into opium fields. The impact of addiction in China portrays critiques of post-colonial theory. Post-colonial scholars, such as Said's ideas, throw light on the power dynamic between the colonizers and colonized, and emphasizing how the British exploited natural resources and extended their power.

1.8 Analysis and Discussion

The methodical process of arranging, scrutinizing, and analyzing data to derive significant insights, identify trends, and respond to research inquiries is known as data analysis. Finding recurrent themes like generational exploitation, ecological transformation, and consequences of imperial greed requires a qualitative method in literary research, particularly in a postcolonial study like Ghosh's *Smoke and Ashes.* The analysis represents how imperial greed affected natural environmental systems

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and human life through attentive reading and thematic or ideological interpretation. Data analysis helps in the development of a sophisticated understanding of the text's more profound socio-political and ecological outcomes by understanding symbols, metaphors, and historical allusions. This is based on the textual materiality and symbolism of the book. *"The problem was that left to themselves the farmers would have preferred to plant other, more remunerative crops, like sugar cane, cotton and tobacco. This meant that the regulations always had to leave some loopholes for various kinds of compulsion: 'Normalizing these coercive practices,' notes Wormer, 'was the task of bureaucratic reform". (Smoke and Ashes, 2023, p. 52)* This eloquently illustrates how the repressive or oppressive policies of the British colonial state aggressively engaged in and altered India's agrarian ecosystem in addition to controlling human labor. Had farmers been given a choice, they would have planted commercially and ecologically diverse crops such as tobacco, cotton and sugarcane-food crops that are more suited to the soil, climate, and market of their locality. But through state regulation via loopholes of all sorts of coercion, a monocultural system of poppy cultivation was forced uprooting biodiversity and ecological balance in the agricultural landscapes. Besides enforcing the law, the bureaucratic system was also reforming the ecological transformation. The British colonial rule has changed the ecological productivity of the land by forcing the farmers to cultivate opium as a result of a systematic force. It resulted in single crop system, the economy that is chemically intensive and the replacement of the various agro-ecological systems. This change was pivotal or essential in understanding how colonialism transformed the environment to be exploited in imperial markets mostly at the cost of local sustainability in addition to its application of power, rule and violence. The British colonial

Policies left the agricultural independence to be arranged in the way of cultivating by farmers, making them plant opium instead of cotton or sugarcane, which had higher prices in the market. This is a demonstration of how the ecological systems have been transformed to suit the requirements of the imperialism, following the Crosby concept of Ecological Imperialism. Edward Said has revealed this as an act of systemic dominance hidden behind bureaucratic change in his postcolonial critique. In order to

Online ISSN 3007-3197
Print ISSN 3007-3189

pass off exploitation as governance, coercion became commonplace.

In *Smoke and Ashes*, Indian farmers were compelled by British colonial authorities to switch from diversified, sustainable agriculture to opium monoculture. This intentional environmental reengineering resulted in long-term ecological imbalance, loss of water resource and nutrients diminished biodiversity, disturbed traditional farming, and lowered soil fertility. Environmental exploitation and catastrophe of environment for profit was institutionalized by imperialism through bureaucratic management and coercive laws. *"The reason was succinctly explained in a petition signed by hundreds of farmers: 'We cultivate the poppy under pressure from Government, otherwise we would not do it, and our prayer is that we may be released from this trouble." (Smoke and Ashes, 2023 p .54).* "We cultivate the poppy under pressure from the Government, otherwise we would not do it, and our prayer is that we may be released from this trouble" is taken from a petition signed by hundreds of Indian farmers. This declaration creates a brilliant, solid and tough window to the coercive approach to colonial agricultural policy as practiced by the British rule. It is not only a scream of suffering, pain and agony, but a commentary on a system that had mostly changed the natural equilibrium of Indian expansive agricultural spaces and also on the existence of the farmers. The main concept behind this statement. Is the systematically forced poppy growing on Indian farmer? This imperial mandate was prompted by the unquenchable urge of the British Empire on opium particularly to facilitate its lucrative business with China. Opium poppy monoculture was becoming increasingly common among farmers, who historically cultivated a wide variety of food crops appropriate for the local soil, seasonal cycles, and subsistence requirements. This change was brought about by colonial pressure rather than agrarian desire or ecological fit.

This petition reveals the coercive control of colonial power and pressure that deprived farmers of their agency and forced them to serve imperial economic goals from a postcolonial perspective. It illustrates how colonial forces redesigned labor and reshape land cultivation to sustain exploitative monocultures like poppies, harming indigenous ecologies, according to Crosby's ecological imperialism concept. The farmers' appeal exposes the sociopolitical oppression brought about by imperial

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domination as well as ecological devastation. Environmental vulnerability grew as diversified farmlands were converted into delicate, single cash-crop systems. Farmers' protests against this system of coercion revealed the exploitative nature of colonial land use and were acts of ecological and political resistance. Ghosh emphasizes how British control essentially reshape or redesigned agriculture for greed, power, financial gain rather than merely overseeing it. This transformation of labor and land into imperial resources had a long-lasting negative ecological impact, reshaping India's agricultural landscape and establishing an exploitative system that persisted after colonial authority.

"In the production of opium, as with many other botanical goods, the colonial preference was always for standardized monocultures, so the poppies grown on the Opium Department's territories were uniformly of the same colour: white." (Smoke and Ashes, 2023 p. 87). An important ecological feature of imperialism is the deterioration of nature to measurable, extractable value, which is reflected in the focus on this one, high-yielding plant species. Diverse crops, native plant species, and ecologically balanced rotations were considered less desirable or inappropriate to the objectives of profit maximization. Because of this, the land was redesigned to accommodate imperial objectives, depleting the soil of nutrients via repetitive poppy cultivation and reducing the space available for ecological recovery or regeneration. For political and symbolic control, British colonial rulers enforced a monoculture of white poppies, substituting a standardized, drug-focused environment for a variety of adaptable food crops. This forced change damaged biodiversity, water resources, livelihood, ecological balance and degraded soil, and made areas more susceptible to starvation. Despite being lucrative for the empire, these fields degraded pollinators, local food chains, and farming autonomy, turning into natural dead zones. As they traveled towards Benares, Ghosh's great-grandfather frequently saw long fields bloomed with white opium flowers dancing in the wind. These flowers had pale blooms that were the most valuable, known for extracting the best and most profitable resin. To the British and their workers, the white color showed something better, but for the people who grew the plants, it symbolized for being forced and hard core work. This type of uniformity in flower blooming represented monopoly on the indigenous

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people.

Local biodiversity, ecology and farming autonomy were eradicated by the colonial imposition of uniform white poppies, which reflected agricultural and aesthetic dominance. According to Crosby, imperial capitalist exploitation benefited from the conversion of ecosystems into monocultures. In conclusion, colonial India's biological landscape was drastically altered by the imperial obsession with white-flowered opium poppies as a monoculture cash crop. It is a powerful illustration of ecological imperialism, in which foreign dominance penetrated the very fabric of the natural world, going beyond politics and the economy. A striking metaphor for the environmental cost of both nature's plenty and a people's autonomy is the visual homogeneity of white blossoms spreading across the plains. Empire monoculture is imposed at the expense of people's sovereignty and the richness of nature. *"Travelling to and from Benares, my great-great grandparents would have found. Themselves passing through a landscape that was blanketed with snowdrifts of white flowers". (Smoke and Ashes, 2023, p .87).*

On closer examination, Ghosh's evocative imagery of the Indian environment as perceived by his ancestors— "blanketed with snowdrifts of white flowers"—reflects the ecological change imposed by the colonial states forced opium cultivation. These "white flowers" are opium poppies, which were routinely planted throughout large areas of eastern and northern India while the country was ruled by the British. The allegory of a wintry scene covertly hides the violence incorporated into this change: a landscape that formerly provided. Agro ecological systems that are varied, Sugarcane, legumes, millet, rice, wheat and additional food crops, was lowered to a consistent monoculture under imperial rule instructions. Bureaucratically directed exploitation, rather than spontaneous agricultural growth, was the cause of this forced cultivation of the land into fields of similar white blooms. Land use was strictly supervised by the British Opium Department, which forbade alternative planting and required poppy growing on designated plots. Farmers were forced to cooperate because they were trapped in debt, intimidated, and under legal pressure. Consequently, the ecological resilience of the area was undermined. Opium monoculture weakened local biodiversity, reduced soil fertility, and increased the landscape's susceptibility to pests

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and environmental deterioration.

The "snowdrifts of white flowers" represent how the British transformed Indian ecologies into opium-producing monocultures for imperial gain, according to Crosby's ecological imperialism. The violence of colonial authority, where indigenous farming was suppressed to serve the empire, is hidden by this aestheticized environment, according to postcolonial theory. The aesthetic appeal conceals colonial capitalism's effects on the environment and cultural oppression. The British altered India's environment to support the opium trade, and what seems to be a picturesque landscape is actually a representation of imperial dominance. Ghosh highlights how colonialism imposed monoculture by recalling his great-great-grandfather strolling through "snowdrifts of white flowers" on his route to Benares. These poppy fields exposed the ecological and cultural costs of imperial greed by displacing diversified crops, degrading soil health, and upsetting biodiversity.

"This, in turn, sparked off a race between western and eastern India, with the Opium Department ramping up production in its own territories in the Gangetic plain." (Smoke and Ashes, 2023, p. 97). This section exposes the British imperial regime's aggressive expansionist intentions, which were motivated by an unquenchable need for opium profits. The expression "sparked off a race" refers to the growing regional rivalry that resulted in an unsustainable increase in poppy production, particularly in the Gangetic plain. This "race" had serious ecological consequences in addition to economic ones. Through "ramping up production," the colonial Opium Department drastically altered the local environment. Large areas of cropland with abundant biodiversity were forcibly transformed into monoculture poppy crops. This in turn disrupted existing patterns of agriculture, decreased the soil fertility and increased water consumption in environmental sensitive regions. The Gangetic plain, which used to be admired in terms of its agricultural richness and fertility is currently the site of extractive exploitation. Also, the term implies ecological management by the state, where imperialistic ambitions were based on monetary profits rather than ecological balance. As a result, this culminated into permanent ecological degradation and destruction, which was clearly due to colonial interest and entailed soil erosion and exhaustions, loss of domestic vegetation like food crops and exposure to exile,

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drought and famine. This short passage is therefore a main aspect of ecological imperialism, which is how imperial policies and economic rivalry cruelly transformed natural ecosystems to the imperial advantage and power. Also, the term implies ecological management by the state, where imperialistic ambitions were based on monetary profits rather than ecological balance. Ultimately, this caused the long-term environmental degradation, which was rather obviously brought about by the colonial ambition and also involved soil depletion,

Disappearance of local vegetation and susceptibility to drought and famine. According to Crosby ecological imperialism perspective, this shows how colonialists utilized local ecologies to enhance monoculture in order to gain money. Postcolonial theory exposes the latent economic competition and pressure that are imposed by the empire that exacerbates exploitations in various regions.

Together, they reveal how, beyond the façade of administrative rivalry, imperial greed reshaped livelihoods and landscapes. The statement emphasizes how opium cultivation aggressively expanded over the Gangetic plain, particularly under the Opium Department, driven by British imperial aspirations. This was a colonial tactic to control the opium trade, putting financial gain ahead of ecological harmony, rather than a healthy economic rivalry. Traditional farming methods were disrupted when large tracts of arable land were forcefully transformed into monoculture poppy crops. Reduced biodiversity, decreased soil fertility, and increasing strain on water supplies were the results of this change. Colonial practices directly contributed to the environmental devastation that followed. In the end, this illustrates how imperial avarice harmed colonial India's ecology over time.

"Production soared from four thousand chests per year in 1820 to over ninety thousand chests in the 1870s, making it "probably the largest commerce of the time in any single commodity" (Smoke and Ashes, 2023, p. 97-98). The astonishing increase in opium production from only 4,000 chests per year in 1820 to over 90,000 by the 1870s is a horrifying illustration of the ecological destruction brought on by imperial avarice. Described by Ghosh as "probably the largest commerce of the time in any single commodity," this astounding rise was not just an economic phenomenon but also the precursor to an ecological disaster. Large areas of rich agricultural land in the

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Gangetic plains were forcibly converted from the production of vital food crops to opium poppy fields to maintain such an exponential increase in output. The biodiversity, soil composition, and agrarian balance of the area were all permanently changed by this monocultural shift. The Indian countryside was redesigned as a production site for imperial profit under colonial pressure, sacrificing environmental sustainability in the name of economic growth. Crosby theory of ecological imperialism suggests that the dramatic rise in the opium production is one of the best cases whereby the colonialists restructured the ecosystem to maximize the extraction process by favoring the monoculture at the expense of biodiversity. This large scale trade demonstrates how nature had been commoditized in order to serve imperial interests. The postcolonial theory holds that such an expansion symbolizes bloody economic domination with the colonial powers imposing what the locals refer to as extractive systems, which disrupted livelihoods and local economies. Put collectively, they expose the socioeconomic oppression and environmental harm that has been internalized in imperial drug economies. The insatiable demand of opium by the British Empire led to extractive agriculture that focused on the cultivation of poppy to replace the native farming system, which led to massive deforestation and environmental disregard.

This change destroyed sustainable practices like crop rotation, harmed water cycles, and deteriorated soil health. Environmental exploitation and poverty cycles ensnared millions of peasants. As agriculture was transformed into a colonial economy, traditional communities that relied on grains and subsistence became more susceptible to famines, floods, and decreased fertility. According to Amitav Ghosh, the pain caused by this ecological devastation which was motivated by imperial greed—was an environmental attack as well as an economic one. These damages left long-lasting ecological scars that went beyond the colonial era. In today's postcolonial society, environmental vulnerabilities are still shaped by the opium trade's legacy. *"The very fact that a substance of great value was being produced at a loss by increasingly impoverished farmers was a guarantee of lawlessness." (Smoke and Ashes, 2023, p .77).* "The very fact that a substance of great value was being produced at a loss by increasingly impoverished farmers was a guarantee of lawlessness," as the statement

Online ISSN 3007-3197
Print ISSN 3007-3189
http://amresearchreview.com/index.php/Journal/a

puts it, highlighting the paradox at the core of imperial economies: the profitability of empires was maintained not through sustainable or moral production but rather through the forced extraction of labor and resources, frequently under deteriorating ecological and social conditions. Despite its enormous value in international trade, opium production was forced onto rural Indian villages in ways that progressively deprived them of their independence, financial stability, and sense of imperial balance. As farmers faced food scarcity, rising debt, and deteriorating soil fertility as they were forced often under forceful contracts to cultivate poppies instead of food crops. In addition to making farmers poor, this imbalance caused whole rural ecosystems to become unstable. An agrarian economy that was more susceptible to instability and collapse resulted from the ensuing deterioration. Here, "lawlessness" refers to more than just criminal activity; rather, it is a sign of a more serious illness: a colonial system that put the manufacture of commodities for imperial markets ahead of local well-being and environmental sustainability.

1.9 Conclusion

The colonial opium industry's systemic coercion, which exploited both rural livelihoods and India's biological landscape, is exposed by Ghosh in "*Smoke and Ashes.*" Opium cultivation was by no means a choice economic endeavor. It is on this ritual coercion that the foundations of a greater imperial plan were laid; on this form of ceremonial enslavement what appeared to be an agricultural economy of contract was in reality a highly disciplined and forceful ecological, social and economic order. The basic contradiction was that the same farmers preferred more profitable and marketable types of crops such as cotton, sugarcane, or tobacco, and this demonstrates that the development of poppy was a forced practice of colonialist determination and not an extension of agrarian logic.

The excerpts showed Ghosh's *Smoke and Ashes* provide a startling and disturbing depiction of the environmental devastation caused by imperial cupidity, especially through the opium cultivation then trade. The irresistible pursuit of capital accumulation by the British Empire, supported by poverty, drugs addiction, slavery, war, and mono farming was a major factor in the development of industry. Ghosh

Annual Methodological Archive Research Review
http://amresearchreview.com/index.php/Journal/about
Volume 4, Issue 3 (2026)
Online ISSN 3007-3197
Print ISSN 3007-3189
http://amresearchreview.com/index.php/Journal/a

highlights how these pillars of modernity, despite their significance, were purposefully left out of the popular narrative of advancement, revealing the logical fallacies that legitimize imperial brutality. The significant increase in opium production reveals a particularly concerning and alarming ecological impact. Large areas of arable land were converted into monoculture zones dedicated exclusively to poppy cultivation as a result of the Opium Department's policy, which increased production in the Gangetic plains. By 1820, the production rose to 4,000 chests and to more than 90,000 chests by the 1870s, which might have made it the largest single-commodity trade of the era. Such an unexpected increase had more profound effect on agricultural and ecological material of the region and was not just an economic gimmick. Poppies were planted in areas where essential food crops used to cultivate food threatening food security and causing environmental degradation. The destruction of biodiversity and massive erosions of the soil were because of the irreversible damage to the soil due to exploitation and loss of nutrients caused by the insatiable practice of monoculture. Additionally, this economic strategy promoted social misery like debts. Ghosh argues that the colonial methods of control and monopoly created psychological trauma and sociological wounds that persist in the postcolonial present, linking these historical and ecological changes to a persistent decline in social trust. The opium industry's very infrastructure was affected by the poor ecological conditions such as improper drainage, extreme weather and air pollution.

Annual Methodological Archive Research Review
http://amresearchreview.com/index.php/Journal/about
Volume 4, Issue 3 (2026)

Online ISSN 3007-3197
Print ISSN 3007-3189

http://amresearchreview.com/index.php/Journal/a

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