



Capitalism Subdues Natural Environment: an Eco-Marxist Study of South Indian Movie Pushpa

Shafqat Hussain¹

¹Researcher, Institute of English Language and Literature
University of Sindh Jamshoro, Pakistan

Parvez Ahmed²

²Faculty of English Studies, National University of Modern Languages Islamabad, Pakistan

Abstract

This research study develops its basis on Karl Marx's critique of the capitalist mechanism. The objective of this study is to examine the connection between the capitalist project and the environment in the cinematic portrayal of Pushpa: The Rise, a South Indian movie, through a critical lens. The current study is descriptive in design following the Textual Analysis Method of research, as the primary data are the movie and its dialogues. It follows the theoretical framework of Eco-Marxism to evaluate the relationship between capitalism and the environmental crisis in the selected movie. Framework is developed after reviewing related previous literature. It argues that capitalism's enterprise is fundamentally expansionary and so infringes on the ecological realm, bringing nature to the brutality of oppression and contamination. For eco-Marxists, ecological struggle clashes with the principles that control the capitalist system. The findings of this study display an optic to see capitalism and the environment as two contrasting forces. Capitalism is causing environmental dangers for human life in Indian society. For this reason, a well-designed projection of resistance should be implied and should be backed by authoritative regularities.

Keywords: Capitalism; Environment; Eco-Marxism; India; Pushpa

Introduction

Pushpa: The Rise is a South Indian cinematic thriller which entails the journey of a lower-class boy who becomes a gangster and smuggler through illegal environmental damage of trees for earning the desired profit. Pushpa Raj is a creative thinker who can solve problems on the spot. This trait has allowed him to rise to the top of the red sandalwood importers' network. The story begins with a Japanese animated narrative. Gradually, it draws into its realm and teaches about red sandalwood, which is exclusively found in Andhra Pradesh, India. The story spends its place alongside establishing the syndicate's personalities and structure (Janani, 2021). However, the movie does not provide any innovative things, yet it is entertaining. It is essentially a mafia drama featuring red sandalwood trade as a storyline, ignoring the corporate components and the appearance of slo-mo scenes. Pushpa, on the other hand, seems to have enough content to retain the audience's interest in the plot (Janani, 2021).

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Along with cinematic entertainment, the movie highlights an environmental satire and capitalist lust for damaging natural trees for gaining money. This study critically investigates the question of environmentalism along with capitalist rule over it. It evaluates how far capitalism is causing environmental damage in Indian culture. The researcher paves analysis with the aim of exploration of the relationship between capitalist lust and environmental destruction. The study manifests environmental destruction through the lens of an eco-Marxist view. The analysis of the movie presents it as an environmental critique of cinematic discourse over capitalism. To reach a comprehensive conclusion and applicable creative suggestions, the researcher has utilized the article "Marx's Ecology in the 21st Century" by Clark et al, (2010) and other related literature on Eco-Marxism as a theoretical framework to interpret the movie with the help of textual analysis method of research.

1.1. Research Question

- How far does capitalism cause environmental catastrophe in the selected Indian movie?

2. Environmental Issues in India

The rapid growth in population and economic development in India has led to several ecological issues, including the degradation of agricultural and forest land. These problems are among the most pressing environmental concerns in the country. Depletion of resources (water, minerals, forests, sand, rocks, etc). Degradation of the environment and public health are terms that refer to the state of biodiversity being lost. Poor people's livelihood security, density births, fatalities, emigration, and repatriation are primary demographic processes that drive variation in quantity, structure, and dispersion of the population, and these variations present several serious cause-and-effect concerns. In India, the growing population is leading to a slew of catastrophic environmental disasters such as loss of biodiversity, and erosion of land and forests (Yadav, 2013). However, even though, India boasts a plethora of environmental organizations and indigenous initiatives. The country's numerous renowned climate change scientists, ecological campaigners, and journalists do not seem to have created something of an impact yet (Ghosh, 2016). The relics of Popular Culture - movies, TV programs, literature, or even social networks - can be used to disseminate awareness activities among people all over the globe, when aimed at huge audiences and representing the emotion of the people "provide deep insights into the concerns, anxieties and desires of their times" (Jones et al., 2011, p. 3).

2.1. Cinema and Environment

In latest times, Hollywood movies and documentaries like "Before the Flood" (2016), "Warcraft" (2016), "An Inconvenient Sequel: Truth to Power" (2017), and

others have received praise for their stunning graphics and portrayal of ecological problems that needed immediate attention from people. These popular portrayals of environmental issues in cinema have cleared the ground for such a new eco-cinema worldview to emerge (Sharma & Chaubey, 2020). The coinage of the term eco-cinema is associated with Roger C. Anderson's 'Ecocinema: A Plan for Preserving Nature' (Chu, 2016, p. 11), which includes films made to bring ecological concerns to the light, to address human disconnection from the environment and its pressing concerns. Eco-film is defined by Ingram (2013) as: A film with a philosophical component that more or fewer works to promote concepts or, more broadly, an environmentalist sensitivity. The goal of this conceptual content is to raise viewers' knowledge of notions like environmental ethics and environmental interconnectivity (Ingram, 2013, p.44). Eco-cinema can be defined as a method used to highlight issues related to nature and its resources. These films explore the relationship between humans and nature while also serving as a visual reminder of the impending consequences of global warming, climate change, and other environmental hazards such as water and air pollution. They provide a warning about the harmful effects of rising pollution levels across the globe. When one looks back at the history of Eco cinema, it is clear that it arose from Eco criticism in the last decade. The examination of the environment and nature and literature is described as the examination of the effects between the environment and the literary sphere (Sharma & Chaubey, 2020). Moreover, Eco cinema explicitly aims to elicit political and personal action from audiences, engaging cognition to effect tangible shifts in the decisions made on a near-term and long basis, as individual citizens and as a society, regionally and overseas (Paula Willoquet-Maricondi, 2010).

2.2. Indian Eco-Films

Nilu Madhabh Panda, an Indian film director, has contributed to raising awareness about environmental and ecological issues through his successful films and documentaries. His eco-narratives, Kaun Kitney Pani Mein (2015) and Kadvi Hawa (2017) have been recognized as significant additions to the category of Ecocinema by the Hindi Film Industry. Kaun Kitney Paani Mein provides a humorous take on the sensitive issue of water scarcity in modern India, while Kadavi Hawa explores the moral dilemma faced by individuals, encouraging viewers to reflect on their role in shaping the present epoch. In addition, Abhishek Kapoor's Kedarnath depicts the devastating consequences of greed and mishandling that resulted in the 2013 disaster in the sacred town. The film weaves this catastrophic event into the love story of two individuals from different faiths, Mandakini (Sara Ali Khan), a Hindu Priest's daughter, and Mansoor (Sushant Singh Rajput), a Muslim Human Porter. Kedarnath is considered a part

of the Eco cinema genre as it highlights the disastrous consequences of human actions (Sharma & Chaubey, 2020).

2.3. Capitalism and Environment

Socialism has an even worse ecological record than capitalism. It is argued that capitalism cannot be made accountable for ecological crimes and inequalities (Singleton, 1985). As a result, some argue that it is the form of capitalism, instead of capitalism itself that is troublesome for climate protection. This viewpoint is based on the premise that there can be no one-size-fits-all capitalist system, and that 'varieties of capitalism' exist (Hall and Soskice, 2001). Many academics, analysts, and social change campaigners regard commercial ecology as a dangerous enterprise, emphasizing the conflicts within capitalism and ecological sustainability of social justice (Faber and O'Connor 1993, Schnaiberg and Gould 2000, Berry 2003, Williams 2005, Pellow 2007, Magdoff and Foster 2011, Parr 2012, Klein 2014). They think capitalism stifles rather than encourages innovation since private enterprises will only develop profitable technology. Moreover, they highlight capitalism's intrinsic necessity for corporations to always generate much more to retain revenues and stay competitive versus competitors. According to some experts, in a capitalist system, the survival of the system is the primary driver of supply and demand, rather than meeting basic needs or improving the environment. The system's need for continuous expansion often leads to the destruction of natural resources and the generation of unmanageable amounts of waste. The profit motive encourages cost-cutting measures, forcing companies to choose the cheapest available techniques. In the pursuit of quick profits, companies may make decisions that harm environmental sustainability. This can result in poor working conditions, temporary employment, excessive resource extraction, irresponsible waste management, and localized environmental problems that disproportionately affect the poor. All of these factors may lead to the subjugation of people in all parts of the environment (Picketty, 2014).

2.4. Research Methodology

The present research is conducted with a descriptive design. The researcher has implied the Textual Analysis Method for the analysis of the movie. No specific model of textual analysis is taken into account. The researcher has applied the simple base of textual analysis, where the dialogues of the movie are considered as a text for the analysis as Frey, Botan, and Kreps (1999) describe textual analysis as a way of analyzing or describing communications or verbal or visual texts. The study is limited to a south Indian movie, *Pushpa: The Rise* (2021). The movie follows the setting of the environment and highlights the theme of lust for money and power. Therefore, the researchers have analyzed the movie concerning Eco-Marxism to

manifest the environmental teaching, its importance and the poison of capitalism affecting the natural green world of humans. The study is supported by a theoretical reference to eco-Marxism. It also adds primary data from the movie, and secondary data from relevant research and books. The upcoming section discusses the theoretical framework of Eco-Marxism.

2.5. Eco-Marxism

Eco-Marxism, a theory of environmental destruction inspired by Karl Marx's theories on capitalism, is particularly effective at criticizing the manner capitalism affects relationships between humans and the natural world. Its explanatory value comes from combining Marxist hermeneutics with ecological research (Muhia, 2020). Remarkable developments in the eco-socialist concept illustrate the ongoing significance of Marx's historical materialism and metabolic method to investigate the dialectical junction between nature and humans and the formation of environmental rifts inside ecosystems (Clark and Bellamy, 2010). As a result, eco-Marxists, according to Clark and Bellamy (2010), criticize the According to some scholars; capitalism and its focus on the valorization of capital at the expense of environmental sustainability have led to ecological contradictions. The modernizing characteristics of capitalism have endangered the long-term viability of organic ecosystems (Clark and Bellamy, 2010). There is indeed a strong connection between both the oppression of human labor and the exploitation of nature for gain in Marx's works. Marcuse (1964) investigates this connection when he criticizes the monopoly of capitalism, which he regards as harmful to nature and people. The modern emphasis on the marketplace and a revenue economy fueled this style of capitalism. This link is more appropriately developed by thinkers of Eco-Marxism like Medovoi (2013) asserts: Any genuine environmental politics battle must eventually interfere at the level of the system of production itself, participating in a variety of fights to DE instrumentalize life as an accumulation of capital technique. When the biopolitics of community and environment are regarded together, it is much clearer why numerous legacies of environmental damage – land deterioration, the extermination of "surplus" plants or animal life, urban squalor, and water contamination – are deeply co-expressed with class conflict, racially biased procedures, sexual orientation and gender normalization, and, in overall, the converting of morality into physiological pop culture (Medovoi, 2013, p. 86). Medovoi (2013) argues that it is problematic to think about environmental degradation without considering the process of production. He contends that the emergence of capitalism and the industrial revolution led to a political modernity that prioritized administering and controlling human beings in pursuit of profit. This management of human existence was extended to ecology and the non-human

environment, making them integral to the capitalist manufacturing engine. The "population/environment/capital triad" is a point of intersection where Marxism and Eco-criticism converge. Therefore, capitalism and environmental degradation are strongly linked. Ecological resistance, according to Douglas Kellner's understanding of Marcuse, clashes with the principles which rule over the mechanism of capitalism in the context of law which is greater wealth creation, the generation of adequate surplus value, gain, and the requirement of maintaining detached labor and oppression (Kellner, 2005). According to Reitz's (2019) view of Marcuse, capitalism can be by definition based on endless productivity since the more it creates, the more it generates. Marcuse espoused a basic hostility to worldwide capitalism's rapacious and exploitative economic structure as according to Reitz; eco-Marxism is not only concerned with respecting the interconnectedness of the land and the need for social action but also with preserving the environment while maintaining human life. Capitalists, on the other hand, subjugate nature and compromise its ability to sustain life. Eco-Marxism is particularly concerned with how the domination of nature affects people's health and how capitalist triumphs transform life in the face of expanding international consumer culture. Eco-Marxists advocate for uprisings or "ecological activism," as Marcuse called it, to unite people against capitalism's environmental destruction.

3. Result and Discussion

Pushpa: The Rise cinematically displays the themes of class discrimination, violence, crime, natural disaster and political corruption. The story develops a young man hailing from the lower class as a syndicate chairman who becomes the authority to sell red sandalwood. Sandalwood is a type of precious wood of the world which is only found in South India "It came from Madras travelling thousands of miles" (Vissa, 2021). Similarly, the movie displays the image of mafias who cut this tree down illegally and transfer it to China and other countries for the sake of earning money "It is so costly as is made of a special wood" (Vissa, 2021) which sheds their capitalist lust over the natural concern of climate crisis and global warming. This highlights capitalist economic mindset for personal gain is exploitative of not only labour but nature as well. According to Marxist eco-critics, capitalism appears as a disease that is deeply embedded in the way to monitor their earnings by causing disaster to nature, as capitalism and its modernizing attributes generate ecological inconsistencies that endanger the long-term viability of organic ecosystems (Clark and Bellamy, 2010). However, at the start of the cinematic scenes, the director displays the animated version of a scene which shows truckloads of wood shifting from India to China. This beginning scene of the movie clarifies the image of wood-cutting and transferring it

to foreign countries; it signifies the trade of nature and the profit of money through natural disasters. Trees are the most important natural components of nature which control the temperature of the environment (Woodland Trust, n.d). However, this dangerous act of dismantling trees from their natural position to the arterial objects in the capitalist industries implies the idea that capitalism is far broodingly abusing nature which in return causes problems for biodiversity, environmental concerns, climate crisis expansion, the peak of temperature and the subdued value to nature. The shifting of this trade is not only illegal, "it is illegal to cut down trees here as per law. But crime exists where there is law" (Vissa, 2021) but also a disaster of nature for humans. In contrast, the capitalist body of India, the movie illustrates, is causing humans, nature and the natural environment at risk living in the century of climate crisis (Science News, 2022) It presents the eco-Marxist criticism of the capitalist system of Indian mafias who retain no pity on nature and environment and want their benefit from it. Moreover, the movie, Pushpa: The Rise reflects the significance of trees like red Sandalwood displaying it as a rare type of wood which significantly is found only in India "The place in the world where we can find red Sandalwood is just Seshachalam forests" (Vissa, 2021). These forests are only found in Madras India. However, this unique quality of red Sandalwood motivates the capitalist mafia to gain as much money from it. Economically, less quantity causes more quality profit (The Investopedia Team, 2020). This appears similar to red Sandalwood which is illegally cut by the laborer the of mafia with extra money to cut the trees and sell in different markets to earn money. These popular portrayals of environmental issues in cinema have cleared the ground for such a new eco-cinema worldview to emerge (Sharma &Chaubey, 2020). This presents nature as at stake in the hands of capitalism; as the critic Medovoi (2013) points out, deeming environmental degradation without taking into account the manufacturing process problematic. According to Medovoi (2013), it is problematic to think about environmental degradation without considering the process of production. He argues that the emergence of capitalism and the industrial revolution brought about a political modernity that prioritized profit over everything else, including the management and control of human beings and the environment. This resulted in the intertwining of human existence, ecology, and the non-human environment, all of which were used as tools for capitalist production. The intersection of the "population/environment/capital/triad" is where Marxism and Eco-criticism converge (p. 80). This connection between capitalism and environmental degradation is undeniable. Furthermore, Eco-Marxism befittingly provides valid criticism of such capitalist policies that earning profit has turned humans into beasts who have no pity even for nature. Historically, they manipulated laborers (humans), and now they have

been subjugating nature, which oppresses humans and biodiversity at a broader level. Ultimately, for the benefit of the capitalist economy, human life comes at stake, either through nature or directly by humans, as the eco-Marxist framework argues there is indeed a strong connection between both the oppression of human labor and the exploitation of nature for gain in Marx's works. Marcuse (1964) investigates this connection when he criticizes the monopoly of capitalism, which he regards as harmful to nature and people. The modern emphasis on the marketplace and a revenue economy fueled this style of capitalism. Relatively, in the movie, the Konda Reddy gang appears as the capitalist mafia who has this organization of cutting trees and sending them to the directed destination. Pushpa Raj becomes the leader of this mafia gang because of his sharp mind and tricks to let red Sandalwood reach the designed market safely. He risks "Hey bro, where are you going? That is illegal work. There is no guarantee to return home in that" (Vissa, 2021) joins this gang for earning money to rule the world "I came here to rule" (Vissa, 2021).

The movies present the eco-Marxist criticism of capitalism that Pushpa being a poor man, drags himself into earning money illegally by exploiting nature, without considering law, nature and environmental threats and concerns. He only needs money for himself as per the capitalist view of the economy (Marx and Engels, 1912). He risks his life in the jungles with animals and law, but capitalism's economic exploitation of nature drives him to earn money, without deeming nature as a significant part of the lively environment. He indulges himself in it and gradually becomes the chairman of the syndicate who controls the whole organization by purchasing red Sandalwood from different dealers to sell to a grand mafia of Murugan in Chennai, Hyderabad and Mumbai, India. Besides, this illustrates such a network of capitalist mafias is incorporated in India to ruin nature, subdue nature, oppress nature, to destroy nature only for the sake of money, wealth and lust for both as it is argued, under capitalist conduct, mother nature is subjugated, and its environmental capacity to maintain life is gravely compromised. Eco-Marxism is decidedly concerned with how the conquering of nature jeopardizes people's health and how much triumphs transform life, especially in the clamour to stay up with international consumer culture's expanding trends. Eco-Marxists urge for uprisings, or what Marcuse called "ecological activism" (Reitz, p.2), to assist people to unite against capitalism's environmental destruction. Capitalism appears as a disease which according to Marxist eco-critics is deeply enrooted in the system to evaluate their earning by providing the disaster to nature as it says capitalism and its modernizing characteristics produce ecological contradictions that endanger organic ecosystems' long-term viability (Clark & Bellamy, 2010). Additionally, Pushpa, the leading character of the movie, involves in crime

concerning natural disasters by coming across a huge lawful resistance from Indian forces "If anyone has to cut the trees or smuggle goods out of the forest, it can be only he takes a nap" (Vissa, 2021). It manifests that the police are very much sincere in their duties. The syndicate of Chandigarh has no support from the police but from politicians. "After he came, Police are unable to catch even a stem" (Vissa, 2021). Pushpa being a sharp mind always becomes successful in hiding red Sandalwood. "You need an idea for transporting the load. Not guts... We need brains" (Vissa, 2021). It explores the curiosity of Pushpa to cut wood and transfer goods which are ultimately destroying nature for earning money. Through this evolution, he becomes the partner of the Konda Reddy gang, and later becomes the chairman of the syndicate after exposing Mangal Srinu as a traitor. Mangal Srinu purchases their good cheaply, "we are all working hard and he is sitting and enjoying all the fruits" (Vissa, 2021) and sells them to Murugan in Chennai costly. This urges how deeply the syndicate in general is involved in only earning money. Not a single man cares for nature, the environment and the climate crisis, but every member and authority is concerned with their earning from the deals of red Sandalwood. "There are many who cut red Sandalwood. But there can only be one man who can single-handedly, navigate the big stuff" (Vissa, 2021). And that is the syndicate chairman. It manifests the overall general image of the gang. The examination of the environment and nature and literature is described as the examination of the effects between the environment and literary sphere (Sharma & Chaubey, 2020). More additionally, the gang is involved in the disaster of nature only for the lust of gaining money and wealth from such a precious unique red Sandalwood. It clarifies the worth of red Sandalwood when Pushpa displays the sample to Murugan in Chennai. He shockingly expresses, "What is this man? I have never seen before. This is Gold. This is found only in dense forests" (Vissa, 2021). It presents the critical image of capitalist ideology, money and wealth where nature is considered gold for them. Gold is the symbol of one of the highest wealth. Similarly, Murugan considers red Sandalwood gold, not nature. He forgets that it is a natural disaster. Wood is gained from trees, trees are part of the natural environment. Nature is destroyed to earn money. It demonstrates how capitalism and ecology interact for the goal of personal benefit, gaining money, and choosing wealth over nature and its disaster. Nature is subjugated in the hands of capitalists, and its environmental capacity to sustain life is critically jeopardized (Kellner, 2005). Pushpa sells that red Sandalwood to Murugan in China with "one and a half crore per ton" (Vissa, 2021). It shows the superiority of money over the natural cause. They together cut trees, destroy nature and cause danger to biodiversity and climate crisis. In the last, Pushpa becomes the syndicate chairman and marries a girl, and indulges in the depth of this business of

destroying nature and earning money. He rules this business and India and sells the wood to national and international dealers.

4. Conclusion

The study was conducted with the lens of eco-Marxism to interpret the South Indian movie *Pushpa: The Rise*. The researchers explored the connection between nature and capitalism represented in the selected movie. The study exposed that nature and capitalism have a deep connection with each other. Capitalism as exploiting human labor subjugates nature and the environment. The movie displays that a group of capitalist dealers cut red Sandalwood and sell it to different dealers who export the wood internationally. A specific group, without considering the natural environment's significance in the century of the climate crisis, destroys nature to earn money for their lust for wealth earning more and more. The movie appears as an eco-Marxist based on contempt of or global climate crisis and capitalism destroying nature. Capitalism is causing environmental dangers for human life in Indian society. For this reason, a well-designed projection of resistance should be implied and should be backed by authoritative regularities. Further, the researchers welcome the readers and critics to provide a valid criticism against this research study. Also, the upcoming researchers are welcome to study this subject more aptly to enhance its analysis more deeply.

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