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**A Critical Study of George Orwell's *Burmese Days* with special Reference to
Ecological Imperialism**

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Abstract

Through the well-known novel *Burmese Days*, Orwell places the ecological disaster worldwide. The causes of the degradation of the ecology are clarified in this book. Real evidence of ecological imperialism may be found in the book *Burmese Days* as a logging enterprise administered by a small European colony in Upper Burma. The blatant hypocrisy and double standards employed by the British Empire in Upper Burma are brought to light in this book. The underlying goal of these British colonial strategies was to honestly assess imperialism's effects on the environment. Examining how ecological imperialism impacts the novel's characters is the goal of the current study.

Key Words: Ecological Imperialism, Empire, Post-Colonial Literature, Environment

Introduction

In George Orwell's *Burmese Days*, the consequences of imperialism are illustrated via talks between the main character, John Flory, and other characters. These exchanges take place on *Burmese Days*. The story makes it abundantly evident that the British imposed their authority on the Burmese to maintain control over the population of Burma. Despite this, Orwell does not criticize imperialism, and to combat the British Empire, the main character is neither powerful nor moral; rather, he is split and imperfect.

Orwell began writing *Burmese Days* soon after he left Burma in 1928; it took him nearly six years to complete the book because he was uncertain of how he felt about the Burmese people. 1934 marked the beginning of the decline of the British Empire and was also the year when the first edition of *Burmese Days* was released to the public. Orwell's ideas on the wrongdoings of imperialism, his sorrow over his stay in Burma, and his perceptions of the Burmese people and their culture are all reflected in the book. Also reflected in the book are Orwell's observations of the Burmese people and their culture.



Overview of the Novel

The book explains how colonialism hurt Anglo-Indians of mixed British and Indian origin who are of "British descent or birth but living or having lived in British India for a long time." *Burmese Days* obscure the harm an ineffectual imperialist administration causes the Burmese populace. Despite his criticism of the British administration in Burma and India, he backed the campaign for Indian independence. The critic Malcolm Muggeridge claims, "There was much about the British Empire that Orwell adored" (Maes-Jelinek 343). Not only are the author's mental issues shown in his articles, but they are also brought to light in the book *Burmese Days*. This is because the author could not understand his sentiments toward the locals until his later years as a writer.

Burmese Days chronicle the relationships between Anglo-Burmese or Englishmen who were British subjects residing in Burma during the last years of the British Empire. The two main protagonists of the narrative are English and Anglo-Burmese, respectively, John Flory and Elizabeth Lackersteen. U Po Kyin and Dr. Veraswami are two minor characters that are not European. John Flory, an Englishman who resided in the Kyauktada hamlet, and Orwell share many similarities in terms of personality, as it was in Burma in real life. Some observers claim that Orwell strove to communicate his ambivalence for the Burmese throughout the novel. Orwell assumes that the Burmese will consent to British rule since the text fluctuates between truth and fiction, leaving readers to choose which part of the story is true or fiction. As a result, there are fewer Burmese characters in the tale.

At the start of the 20th century, the cost of travel to other parts of the world was so high that most people could not venture outside of their immediate vicinity. Thanks to books, readers may now immerse themselves in different cultures at home. Critics frequently disregard and even magnify factual mistakes in representations of the indigenous population because of how Europeans see Burmese people. Because of



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this, readers may view the Burmese as ignorant "savages," whilst British colonial natives would be considered superior to Europeans.

The main character, John Flory, engages in many By using hideous deformations and acting in a way that devalues non-Europeans, Orwell illustrates the negative effects of imperialism. This is done to highlight the detrimental effects of imperialism. The only character in the novel that does this is Flory, who has any sympathy for the plight of non-Europeans residing in Burma when the British governed it. He maintains strong contact with Dr. Veraswami, an Indian doctor, to have a Burmese mistress. Orwell's characterization of Flory does not adequately represent the Burmese as a weak person with both physical and mental faults who deserves to be heard, let alone comprehended. Another of his physical faults is a large birthmark with a purple region on Flory's left face. "Flory's flaw is so obvious." The unsightly birthmark on Flory's left cheek, which extends from the corner of his lips to the corner of his eye, is the first thing people notice about him. (*Burmese Days* 17).

To illustrate Flory's malformed persona, Orwell deforms him using his birthmark. On Flory's face, the birthmark is a mole. Flory's birthmark is a cautionary tale that individuals interbreed with non-Europeans are imperfect and that their defects are so glaring that they cannot be hidden. When Flory was born, her mother gave her the birthmark. Because of his actions, he may no longer be as noble as other Englishmen, as seen by the blueish-purple colour. He moves his head and body continually, making it hard for anybody to see the birthmark on his face. Flory is referred to as "other" several times throughout the book. He attempts to hide his relationships with Indian and Burmese people from the locals. Flory makes it obvious that he does not want to discuss his acquaintance with Dr. Veraswami with any other Englishmen. Dr. Veraswami made several inquiries in the hopes of being considered for membership in the prestigious European Club, but he was never given a response to any of his inquiries. Unless he is under the influence of alcohol, Flory tends to



retreat and hide.

Flory keeps Ma Hla May, a young Burmese woman, and his birthmark a secret. Flory keeps Ma Hla May company until an Englishwoman named Elizabeth Lackersteen shows up in Kyauktada. When Ma Hla May humiliates Flory in front of a church audience for having a sexual relationship with a Burmese lady, Elizabeth Lackersteen decides not to pursue a love relationship with him. As the story draws to a close, he takes his own life as a direct response to Elizabeth's criticism. By offering Flory the opportunity to end her life for the benefit of an English woman, Orwell implies that those who support the Burmese people and fight against imperialism are weak and doomed to fail. A British lady will be better off due to Flory's demise. The tragedy of *Burmese Days* is that the only European character who shows compassion for the Burmese people ends up taking his own life after receiving a rejection letter from an English woman. The author places much more emphasis on English ties than interactions with individuals from other countries.

Elizabeth Lackersteen, an Englishwoman, is the most prominent example of a female figure in *Burmese Days*. She says no to Flory's proposal of marriage, which ultimately results in Flory's being put to death. Despite the narrative's portrayal of her as shallow, she is a well-developed character with a varied speaking style. It is improbable that she would be considered a fascinating character in the novel if her part had taken place in England rather than Burma. Meanwhile, even the most uninteresting Burmese individuals are more critical than Orwell's unoriginal characters. The narrator writes, "She trembled in her bones at the thought that he [Flory] was in love with that crazy, grey-faced monster" (274). When Elizabeth learns that Flory has a mistress, she is terrified that the mistress is a Burmese lady.

The text often refers to the Burmese woman as a "creature" by the character Elizabeth, demeaning her. Elizabeth is a fantastic representative of her country since she is a native Englishwoman who did not grow up in one of the American colonies. She dislikes everything non-English, even going to Kyauktada bazaars,



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after observing Europeans, "which aroused a peculiar dislike in her," according to 126. "Burmese women are what most appeals to her, and as she describes them, she sneers," They surely are dreadful, don't they? So hideous, like some sort of beast. Do you think anyone else than you would find these women attractive? ... However, that skin tone. How anyone could endure looking at it is beyond me (119).

Due to their deplorable look and ethnicity, Elizabeth refers to Burmese women as "animals" in one of the passages. She dismisses Flory's response to her criticism of the local ladies and considers his arguments to be "amusing" even though she was the one who raised the issue (Orwell 119). When Orwell connects Flory to Elizabeth, who despises all things Burmese, Flory loses credibility as a sympathizer for the Burmese people. Her sexist comments damage the perception of Burmese women. The author reinforces the myth that Burmese women are less important than English women by failing to challenge Elizabeth's sexist claims.

Ellis is an ugly British figure with a depth of character. Ellis is a repulsive individual. Who uses racial slurs against native people and is consumed by anti-non-European animosity in the colonial club. Orwell expresses his hate for communities made up of individuals of different races and the goals of "pure-blooded" Europeans in the book *Burmese Days*. In the novel, children with one Burmese father and one English father are referred to as Eurasians or half-breeds but are not given a voice (they are referred to as "Eurasians"). When describing Sunday church services, Ellis makes fun of the two half-European, half-Burmese Christian missionaries, stating, "And then those two yellow-bellies, Francis and Samuel, call themselves Christians." The last time the padre was in this location, they dared to approach the front seats and sit near the white men (Orwell 27). As a result, monikers are used to separate native speakers from English speakers. To identify persons of mixed ethnic ancestry from Europeans, Orwell uses nicknames. For example, the word "belly" refers to an animal that moves over the ground by scuttling, yet the term "yellow-bellies" refers to the colour yellow and connotes either dread or pollution. The taxonomy encompasses many animal and plant species



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and people of mixed racial heritages. The English used false representations of the Burmese people in their works as a weapon to keep control of Burma during the colonial era.

One of the most important Burmese characters in the novel is named May, and she works as a prostitute. The fact that the ladies are prostituting themselves leads readers to the conclusion that they are from Burma. She shouts "like a crazy" when she enters a church while wearing torn clothing, demanding payment from Flory for the sex services she performed. This furthers her stereotype. In front of the congregation, May yelled at Flory, "Look at me, white guys, and look at me, too, ladies! Do you recognize how you injured me?" (273). Flory has destroyed her, just as conquerors destroy and abuse their established colonies. On the other hand, Ma Hla May's antics utterly eclipse Orwell's critique of imperialism since May is acting impulsively while her antics leave the dignified English speechless and dumbfounded. In this specific story, Orwell depicts a native Burmese woman who is out of control and must be subdued by an Englishman.

Orwell misrepresents every non-European in *Burmese Days*, not only men and women from that country. Readers can infer that it may be inferred from U Po Kyin's contempt for the Indian Dr. Veraswami that Burmese people have a poor impression of all Indians. Dr. Veraswami is the archetypal example of a British subject whose main aim is to become a member of the European colonial club. In the novel, Veraswami is continually shown by Orwell to be in favour of colonialism, even going above and beyond. The following is Veraswami's reaction to Flory's critique of imperialism:

My friend, my friend, you forget the Oriental character. How is it possible to have developed with our apathy and superstition? At least you have brought us to law and order. The swerving British Justice and Pax Britannica" (41).



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In this passage, Orwell denigrates non-Europeans while applauding Britain's support for the colonies. The author gives the doctor animalistic traits and mocks Veraswami's snake-like speaking style and use of "is" rather than "is." Because Orwell does not criticize Dr. Veraswami's actions, the paragraph can readily be misinterpreted. The author goes too far in demonstrating how non-Europeans grovel for treatment on par with Europeans. Orwell consistently emphasizes how superior Englishmen are to local people throughout the novel.

Additionally, throughout his book, Orwell makes fun of Burmese society. Burmese villagers are inciting a riot to get revenge on a European for the murder of a Burmese kid, and hundreds of Burmese people have gathered around the European Club to shield themselves from the violence. The government of Burma should make every effort to bring those guilty for the child's death to justice. The narrator makes the following proclamation as the crowd gathers around the club and begins hurling bottles and stones at it: "There were a series of crashes as the windows were broken, and then a ceaseless thudding of stones from all sides, shaking the thin wooden walls and seemingly splitting them." (249)

Orwell originally presents the Burmans as dangerous foes, but he quickly downplays their strength and asserts their inferiority. The Burmans appeared to have no plan other than to throw stones against the walls while yelling and banging on them (248). The author portrays the Burmans as immature brutes who only use stones as weapons in their conflicts with one another. After ultimately making their way away from the crowd and trekking alongside a river, the English come upon another throng of irate Burmese holding knives. Flory spots an Indian Military Policeman moving through the crowd when she is in the middle of the chaos. He was surrounded by what can only be described as a "sea of bodies" that "fell on him from side to side, bumping his robes and choking him with their animal heat" (251). Once more, Orwell brings to the Burmans' "animal heat," a despicable character flaw. A squadron of sepoy, which are Indian soldiers



operating under British command, unexpectedly arrives in town just as things are starting to seem bleak for the English. The sepoys fire their rifles over the Burmese crowd to put an end to the bloodshed.

According to the narrator, Burman's horde is attempting to "recoil," but the sepoys are stopping them from succeeding. The word "recoil" is used one more time by the author to describe the locals as snakes that retreat when confronted. "Finally, the entire crowd bulged outward and started to roll slowly up the maidan," the narrator writes. The British military troops can disperse the crowd (252). An "open space in or near a town" is what the British call such a location in South Asia ("Maidan"). Orwell claims that the Burmese cannot defend themselves because the disturbance ends nearly as fast as it began. Even when portraying abhorrent locals, Orwell is not truly on their side and merely highlights how helpless and unable the native population is to protect itself. By recounting the riot and demonstrating how it developed, the author gives examples of how Burmese people employ their primitive weaponry and animalistic urges as self-defence. Orwell makes the case that people are animals or unevolved beings because they are incapable of self-control and must be subjugated.

Ecological Imperialism in *Burmese Days*

The main character in the novel *Burmese Days*, John Flory, runs a lumber camp in an area of Burma's jungle that has not been explored up to that point. He is still oblivious to the harm caused to the surrounding ecosystem due to the exact tree-clearing procedures that his company utilizes. The book's narrative is about John's quest to learn the truth about what caused the forest to be destroyed. Through the well-known novel *Burmese Days*, Orwell places the ecological disaster worldwide. This book sheds light on the factors that contributed to the deterioration of the ecosystem. Genuine evidence of ecological imperialism may be found in the book *Burmese Days* as a logging enterprise administered by a small European colony in Upper Burma. The blatant hypocrisy and double standards employed by the British Empire in Upper Burma are



brought to light in this book. The underlying goal of these British colonial strategies was to honestly assess imperialism's effects on the environment. John Flory, the main character in the novel *Burmese Days*, manages a wood camp in the forest of Burma that has not been visited up to this point. His company's meticulous tree-clearing tactics harm the area's ecosystem, but he is still oblivious. The book's narrative is about John's quest to learn the truth about what caused the forest to be destroyed.

Flory is exceptionally silent and receptive to Burmese culture, even though he paints a caustic picture of the tyranny caused by colonial legislation. He nevertheless contributes to the depletion of resources with an unusual level of blindness through pure coincidence. For instance, he candidly discloses the true purpose behind the founding of the British Empire in Burma when speaking with his close friend Dr. Veeraswami from India. The British Empire's colonial policies in Burma were exclusively implemented for the advantage of the nation's natural riches. They don't appear to care much about the environment or the Burmese ethnic groups, though, as seen by their behaviour.

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

The British had a financial incentive to manipulate nature. Unless it was endangering their financial interests, they largely ignored the environmental repercussions of their activity. To show how nature is depicted in the book as an exotic other, Orwell also employs some common images of plants and animals. This serves as a juxtaposition to how Europe expresses itself, which is through a highly appreciated kind of individualized indulgence. This ego, which is entirely anthropocentric, has a compulsive drive to take over



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nature and use it for its ends. Flory's description of this procedure explains it insightfully:

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

Additionally, via the representations of animal killing, Orwell criticizes the colonial socio-political structures that the British Empire imposed on Burmese land. These systems were in effect on Burmese territory. These pictures show how the British colonialists had an anthropocentric worldview, which led to their oppression of indigenous people. Typically, incidents involving slaughter serve as illustrations of ecological imperialism. The British had a reputation for entertaining themselves by riding animals on Burmese people. This is a prime example of how Burmese people were victimized by British ecological imperialism. Only a value with a purely practical character can nature provide to invaders. The term "ecological imperialism" refers to systematically exploiting and altering the ecosystems of the regions surrounding an economic centre to bolster that centre's financial standing.

It is vital to solving global ecological and environmental problems acceptably. These problems are caused by ecological imperialism, the unfavourable impacts of scientific and technical development, and industrialization. Taking proper action to address these issues is necessary. Ecologists and other intellectuals worldwide are addressing a rising problem that threatens the very survival of life on Earth. In the eyes of the West, it is vital to understand how Western industry and its modernization initiatives have influenced developing countries to destroy and devastate their surroundings. This contextualization of ecological



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imperialism comes from George Orwell's *The Burmese Days*.

Conclusion

Therefore, the British Empire's colonization of Burma to obtain raw materials for British industrial markets, the pro-British intellectuals' defence of British rule as being for the welfare of the native people, the despotic Empire's exploitation of the Burmese based on racism, and Burmese culture and tradition are the primary influences on how Orwell's first book, *Burmese Days*, turns out. *Burmese Days* were published in 1922. Orwell participated in these socioeconomic settings while working as a police officer in colonial Burma from 1922 to 1927; the book documents all he saw, felt, and experienced.



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