

Ecological Imperialism in the Hills of India : The Case of Munnar

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The establishment of British Empire in India is akin to the appropriation of the aboriginal resources and tribals of India. The natural resource base of India acted as a laboratory to the Western science and technology. While political imperialism followed ecological imperialism in all other colonies of Britain, the vice versa was their strategy in India. But the hill stations of India witnessed the same plan of action as that in the other colonies, i.e., ecological imperialism was succeeded by political imperialism. The archived and textualised past of Munnar, fragmented and well organised in forms of original records and secondary reflections is a veritable source of understanding for analysing the history of Munnar. The imperial gaze of the English, individual and collective subjected the pristine landscape for an extensive and rigorous scrutiny of the Empire resulting in the reconfiguration of the native landscape in the way of making it a garden, tea garden suitable for the exploitative networks of plantation industry and its commercial agents. The paper specifically examines the ways in which the British imperialism crept into the hills of Munnar and appropriated the nature and life of Munnar.

Ecological Imperialism :

Alfred W Crosby in his book, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900*, argues that European conquest over United States, Argentina, Uruguay, Australia, Canada and New Zealand was constituted by not only military, technology and

economy, but also through a process called, ecological imperialism. Crosby calls these lands as *Lands of Demographic Takeover*.¹ There has been four categories of organisms that helped Europeans to expand: (1) human beings (2) animals closely associated with human beings- desirable animals like horses, cattle and undesirable animals like rats (3) disease causing pathogens (4) weeds. 107 The vast areas of forests and pastoral lands in the Lands of Demographic Takeover were inundated by animals and plants from the Old World, i.e. Europe. The Europeans were accompanied or preceded by their domesticated animals, and these animals adapted to the new environment faster than their masters and their number grew rapidly. 109 Wherever the Europeans settled, the pathogens they carried created epidemics of smallpox, measles, influenza and tuberculosis. They also brought with them weeds that hindered the growth of native plants and even outgrew them. The demographic takeover of the colonies was facilitated not only by humans and gunpowder alone, but also by various aggressive and opportunistic animals, pathogens and weeds also.

Taking the case of India alone, Europeans arrived in India, not for a demographic takeover, but for trade only. Later, under favourable circumstances, they took over the administration, polity and economy of India. The arrival of European animals, plants and pathogens only succeeded humans. So India, as a whole, is not a place where the concept of Ecological