

CAPITALIST EXPLOITATION OF THE DOWNTRODDEN AND NATURE: AN ECO-MARXIST ANALYSIS OF GHOSE'S *THE MURDER OF AZIZ KHAN*

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Abstract

*"Eco-Marxism is a political belief system that combines the Marxist belief of anti-capitalism with ecology and pro-environment policies" (Kamel, 2020, p. 6). It maintains that capitalism exploits both marginalized communities and the natural environment, driven by materialistic pursuits. This research undertakes an Eco-Marxist analysis of capitalist exploitation in Zulfiqar Ghose's *The Murder of Aziz Khan*, focusing on the intertwined devaluation of the downtrodden and nature. The novel critiques the relentless drive of capitalist forces that commodify human labor and natural resources, reducing both to mere instruments for profit maximization. By examining the dispossession of Aziz Khan's land and livelihood, the research highlights the dual oppression endured by marginalized communities and the environment, as illustrated by the plight of Kalapur's farmers under capitalist hegemony. The research findings highlight Ghose's portrayal of capitalism as a driver of inequality, alienation, and environmental degradation, advocating for just and sustainable alternatives. This research aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the complex relationship between social and environmental justice within the context of capitalist exploitation.*

Key words: *The Murder of Aziz Khan*, Eco-Marxism, Capitalist exploitation, Devaluation of nature, Socio-economic inequality, Industrial development, Ecological balance.

Introduction

Literature has long served as a powerful medium for reflecting the complexities and realities of human life, acting as a lens through which pivotal events that have shaped human culture are immortalized. Across centuries, it has captured revolutions, the rise and fall of nations and governments, wars of varying scales, influential theories, and shifts in human thought. These events, which have profoundly impacted societies, are woven into the narrative landscape of literature. In the contemporary world, one of the most pressing issues is the capitalist exploitation of both marginalized communities and environment. The relationship between capitalism and environment is fundamentally unsustainable: "The environment cannot sustain capitalism, and capitalism certainly cannot sustain the environment" (Patterson, 2010, p. 74). Capitalism regards nature as 'cheap' in two ways: first, by reducing its elements to commodities with low market value, and second, by devaluing them ethically and politically to enable commodification. These dual processes have profoundly shaped capitalist transformations over the past five centuries (Moore, 2015). Marx argues that capitalism commodifies nature and labour by dispossessing workers of resources, enabling profit-driven exploitation while alienating true wealth from those who produce it.

For Marx, capitalism's conversion of nature's gifts into conditions of surplus-value production is enabled by the 'freeing' of labour power from the land and other necessary conditions of production. The capitalisation of nature's gifts is thus both condition and result of the system's alienation of real wealth vis-à-vis the direct producers, in Marx's view. (Burkett, 2006, p. 37)

Within Eco-Marxist theory, capitalism is often identified as the primary driver of both human alienation and environmental degradation. Eco-socialist critiques argue that environmental issues are systemic outcomes of capitalism's inherent flaws and contradictions. The deterioration of environment is not an isolated issue but rather an intrinsic and inevitable consequence of capitalism itself: "Environmental decline is part of the general crisis of capitalism" (DeBardeleben, 1985, p. 50). It is not merely a consequence of technological or industrial development but is deeply embedded in the social class structure. Capitalist systems, driven by globalization and industrialization, prioritize the exploitation of natural resources to accumulate wealth and generate rapid profits. Simultaneously, these systems perpetuate the subjugation of the working class. By disregarding bioenvironmental ethics, capitalists subordinate nature to their own interests, failing to recognize it for its intrinsic value and instead exploiting it to fulfill their needs. As Marx puts it, "Nature becomes purely an object for humankind, purely a matter of utility; it ceases to be recognized as a power for itself" (qtd. in Foster, 2000, p. 148).

This research examines *The Murder of Aziz Khan* through the lens of Eco-Marxism. The novel, written by Zulfiqar Ghose, a prominent Pakistani English writer, focuses on the detrimental effects of capitalism, particularly its exploitation of both the working class and the natural environment of Kalapur as symbolized by the farmers' land. Eco-Marxism emphasizes how capitalism commodifies human labor and natural resources, resulting in systemic inequities and ecological crises. Analyzing *The Murder of Aziz Khan* through an Eco-Marxist framework reveals how capitalist ideologies exploit the poor and treat nature as a mere commodity, leading to profound social and ecological imbalance. Ghose (1967), the novelist, portrays the struggles of Aziz Khan, a poor man resisting industrial expansion, to highlight the dehumanizing impacts of capitalism's economic dominance and its concurrent exploitation of nature, symbolized by the land of Kalapur's farmers. The protagonist, Aziz Khan, embodies a broader resistance to the commodification of both human life and the environment through his defiance against industrial encroachment, symbolized by the land of Kalapur's farmers. The loss of land by Kalapur's poor farmers to the greedy Shah brothers exemplifies that land is "intimately connected to the question of capitalism's intensive and extensive logic of expansion" (Menozzi, 2020, p. 2).

The Murder of Aziz Khan serves as a microcosm of broader systemic injustices, where industrial development comes at the expense of social and environmental well-being. Ghose (1967) critiques capitalist ideology, portraying its role in perpetuating inequality, alienation, and ecological imbalance. Set in the early years following Pakistan's independence, the emerging capitalist structures began to dismantle local traditions and disrupt the socio-cultural fabric of a nascent postcolonial society. The novel focuses on the pervasive influence of capitalism, revealing its destructive impact on both the working class and the natural environment, as represented by the land of the farmers of Kalapur. Through the story of the Shah brothers, who represent the capitalist elite, Ghose (1967) critiques the exploitation of both the poor and natural resources, symbolized by the land of Kalapur's farmers, inherent in capitalist systems. These brothers expand their economic dominion by establishing industries and mills across Pakistan, employing both legal and illicit methods to consolidate power. Their relentless pursuit of profit comes at the cost of marginalizing the working class and depleting natural resources, highlighting the intertwined exploitation of labor and nature. The novel critiques the devaluation of the downtrodden and nature under capitalism, emphasizing the systemic imbalance where concepts like democracy, justice, and ecological sustainability hold little significance for the ruling elite/capitalist class. It reveals the capitalist ethos of exploitation as a dual assault—on the disenfranchised working class and the fragile natural

world represented by the land of Kalapur's farmers. The Shah brothers emerge as symbols of this exploitative nexus, using their wealth and influence to perpetuate social inequalities and environmental imbalance. The novel critiques the dehumanizing and ecologically destructive ethos of capitalism, portraying it as a system that prioritizes profit over people and the planet. By examining the plight of Aziz Khan and the unchecked greed of the Shah brothers, this research concludes that *The Murder of Aziz Khan* serves as a poignant literary critique of capitalism's dual exploitation of marginalized communities and environment.

Literature Review

Rehman (1991) examines the theme of alienation in *The Murder of Aziz Khan*, highlighting the influence of capitalism on individuals and societal structures, while emphasizing the novel's exploration of self-integrity and the resilience of the ego under external pressures. The novel *The Murder of Aziz Khan* exposes "Pakistan's social realities in the nineteen sixties" (Rahman, 1991, p. 89). Hashmi (1994) identifies land as the central theme and metaphor in *The Murder of Aziz Khan*, noting that the protagonist, Aziz Khan, endures humiliation and the dispossession of his land by the emerging industrialist class in post-colonial Pakistani society (Benson & Conolly, 1994, p. 580). Ahmed (2009) analyzes the socio-political landscape of post-independence Pakistan as depicted in *The Murder of Aziz Khan*, asserting that the novel realistically portrays the exploitation of the working class and the socio-economic disparities characteristic of 1960s. Hussain et al., asserts that *The Murder of Aziz Khan* portrays the realities of Pakistani society in the late 1960s, a period marked by the rise of a burgeoning upper class willing to forsake ethical principles in pursuit of wealth. "The plights of exploited working class (the ruled) in the hands of upper class (the ruler) are projected effectively by Ghose in Pakistani context" (Hussain et al., 2023 p. 154).

Jajja (2012) analyzes the novel from a Marxist perspective, emphasizing its depiction of how the economic base influences societal superstructures and its portrayal of class divisions between the haves and have-nots within a capitalist framework and ideology. Ali (2016) examines the theme of class conflict in the novel, identifying the Shah brothers as representing the capitalist class and Aziz Khan as embodying the working class, asserting that this conflict disrupts societal structures and reflects the dominant class's efforts to control the laboring class. *The Murder of Aziz Khan* "examines the plight of post-independence India's marginalized Muslim community in which a lower-class family is exploited by the upper-class family by having approach to the power structure of society" (Khan, 2024, p. 317). "As a distinguished novelist, Ghose critiques the capitalist system, revealing its detrimental effects on societal norms and values. He illustrates how capitalism disrupts pre-capitalist social equilibrium, leading to class conflict and socio-economic exploitation" (Afzal et al., 2024, p. 875).

While existing literature offers valuable insights into the socioeconomic dimensions of Ghose's work, a gap remains in analyzing the novel through the lens of Eco-Marxist theory. This research seeks to address that gap by exploring how *The Murder of Aziz Khan* depicts the dual exploitation of marginalized communities and the natural environment, providing a comprehensive critique of capitalist hegemony and its consequences.

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

This research employs a qualitative methodology, primarily focusing on textual analysis and the application of Eco-Marxist theory, drawing on the frameworks of Marx and Foster. It examines the capitalist exploitation of both marginalized communities and the natural environment in Zulfiqar Ghose's *The Murder of Aziz Khan*. The research focuses on the systematic devaluation of oppressed groups and ecological degradation, addressing core concepts such as commodification, alienation, and the metabolic rift within the context of the

novel. It highlights how capitalist forces contribute to labor and environmental degradation, emphasizing the novel's portrayal of resistance to industrial encroachment. Secondary sources offer context within the socio-historical framework of capitalist development and environmental harm, providing a critique of capitalism while highlighting the need for sustainable alternatives and social justice.

Eco-Marxism combines Marxist theories of class struggle, labor, and commodification with ecological concerns. Eco-Marxism is defined as “sociopolitical ideology that fuses the Marxist critique of capitalism with ecological issues and pro-environmental movements” (Pepper 1993, 23). At its core, Eco-Marxism highlights Marx's critique of capitalism, which views the exploitation of labor and resources as intrinsic to capitalist systems, resulting in alienation and commodification. Ecological degradation in capitalist societies is deeply tied to systemic class inequalities, necessitating not just technical solutions but a fundamental restructuring of social and economic systems. “In capitalist society, ecological degradation is rooted in the social class structure” (DeBardeleben, 1985, p. 50). The depletion of raw materials and the disconnection of farmers from their natural environment have emerged as significant consequences. Foster maintains: “the greater capitalism's expansion, the more intense its ecological demands, and the greater the level of ecological destruction it imposes” (Foster 2000, 66).

The capitalist class structure divides society into those who control the means of production (capitalists or bourgeoisie) and those who sell their labor (proletariat). The ruling capitalist class prioritizes profit, often exploiting natural resources without regard for ecological sustainability, disproportionately impacting working-class and marginalized communities. “Capitalist society also threatens potential abuse of humanly induced climatic changes” (DeBardeleben, 1985, p. 51). Capitalism prioritizes profit over ecological sustainability, exploiting natural resources and disproportionately harming working-class and marginalized communities. Wealthy elites shield themselves from environmental harm, while poorer classes suffer the consequences. The capitalist system deepens global inequalities by shifting environmental burdens to less-developed regions for the benefit of wealthier capitalist nations. Corporate interests driven by profit shape policies and evade environmental accountability, leaving disadvantaged groups to bear the brunt of inadequate protections. Workers in capitalist societies often work in ecologically harmful industries due to limited alternatives, and capitalism's structure limits opportunities for sustainable development and fair labor practices. Environmental degradation caused by human activity will eventually “choke off the continued rise of labor productivity” (DeBardeleben, 1985, p. 187). As natural conditions worsen—marked by “more difficult access to natural reserves, less rich deposits, lower quality ore, and rising pollution”—“more labor must be expended in each phase of the extractive and production process” (DeBardeleben, 1985, p. 187). This increased labor demand will reduce efficiency and productivity unless these “worsening factors can be compensated for by technical advances” (DeBardeleben, 1985, p. 187).

A major tenet of Eco-Marxism is social metabolism; that is, human society interacts with nature and forms a self-reproducing system. Marx refrained from “subordinating nature to society, or vice versa,” which enabled him to avoid the extremes of both absolute idealism and mechanistic science. His metabolic analysis emphasizes the continuous interaction between humans and nature, leading to “reciprocal influences, consequences, and dependencies” (Foster & Clark, 2020, p. 182). These dynamics unfold within a relational and thermodynamic framework, described as “the universal metabolism of nature” (Foster & Clark, 2020, p. 182). In a mutually dynamic relationship, human social systems and natural systems interact to sustain life. However, the transformative processes inherent in the

capitalist system significantly disrupt and alter this balance. Marx (2004) criticizes capitalism for exploiting both labor and nature, disrupting their essential metabolic interaction. In the capitalist system, the focus is on accumulating material wealth, often at the expense of natural and social wealth. Marx (2004) argues that “all progress in capitalist agriculture is a progress in the art, not only of robbing the worker, but of robbing the soil” (p. 637). He contends that capitalist production advances the techniques and the degree of combination in the social process of production, but it does so by “simultaneously undermining the original sources of all wealth—the soil and the worker” (Marx, 2004, p. 637).

Foster (2000) asserts that, in *Capital*, Marx’s materialist conception of nature became fully integrated with his materialist conception of history. Marx employed the concept of “metabolism” to define the labor process as “a process between man and nature, a process by which man, through his own actions, mediates, regulates and controls the metabolism between himself and nature” (Foster, 2000, p. 141). However, an “irreparable rift” has emerged in this metabolism due to capitalist relations of production and the antagonistic separation of town and country. Consequently, in a society of associated producers, it would be essential to “govern the human metabolism with nature in a rational way,” something that is “completely beyond the capabilities of bourgeois society. Marx’s theory of the metabolic rift is grounded in the understanding that capitalism induces an existential crisis in the relationship between humans and nature. The concept refers to the “irrevocable rift in the interdependent process of social metabolism, a metabolism prescribed by the natural laws of life itself” (Marx 2004, 949). The metabolic rift in nature, driven by the consequences of capitalist policies, has also disrupted human metabolism. Marx (2004) claims that the exploitation of nature is linked to the “expropriation of human bodily existence.” He highlights the various ways in which large numbers of peasants are forcibly displaced from rural areas, thereby depleting the vitality of the soil (Marx, 2004, p. 182).

“Marx used the concept of metabolism to describe the cyclical process through which nature and society interact, emphasizing the natural exchanges between humans and the environment that sustain both. However, capitalism disrupts this natural metabolic process, leading to “metabolic rift” (Foster, 2000, p. 141). This disruption occurs when the extraction of resources for profit disturbs the ecological balance, creating imbalances and degradation in environment. In this context, the concept of metabolism highlights the essential connection between economic systems and ecological sustainability, which is ruptured by capitalist exploitation. Foster (2000) asserts that this conceptual framework was crucial as it enabled Marx to integrate his critique of the three central concerns of bourgeois political economy: the analysis of surplus product extraction from the direct producer; the related theory of capitalist ground rent; and the Malthusian theory of population, which interconnected the two. Furthermore, Marx’s concept of the metabolic rift in the relationship between town and country, and between humans and the earth, allowed him to address the roots of what historians have referred to as the ‘second agricultural revolution’ occurring within the capitalism of his era, along with the agricultural crisis it entailed. This framework also facilitated the development of a critique of environmental degradation, which anticipated much of contemporary ecological thought. Marx’s critique of capitalist agriculture evolved in two stages: (i) the critique of Malthus and Ricardo, in which James Anderson’s analysis played a central role, and (ii) an exploration of the second agricultural revolution and the implications of Justus von Liebig’s soil chemistry, prompting Marx to analyze the conditions for a sustainable relationship with the earth (Foster, 2000).

By applying Eco-Marxist approach to *The Murder of Aziz Khan*, this research explores how Ghose (1967) critiques the capitalist mode of production, highlighting its harmful effects

on both marginalized communities and environment. Eco-Marxist approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of how capitalism's drive for profit results in the commodification and degradation of both labor and nature.

Textual Analysis and Discussion

Human natural relations have, in many ways, been degraded as a result of capitalism's substitution of commodified use-values for the 'non-critical' natural use values from which it has alienated workers and communities – a process that has taken on more-or-less immiserating forms depending on one's position in the global capitalist system. (Burkett, 2006, p. 136)

Ghose (1967) provides an Eco-Marxist critique of capitalist exploitation, highlighting the devaluation of both human labor and the natural environment in *The Murder of Aziz Khan*. The novel centers on Aziz Khan, a small landowner, whose life is irreversibly altered by the encroachment of industrial capitalism. Through the conflict between Aziz Khan, a small landowner, and the Shah brothers, Ghose (1967) showcases the inherent contradictions within capitalist society. Aziz Khan, who owns a 70-acre patch of land, embodies the working class's suffering under capitalism. His unwavering refusal to sell his land emerges as a symbolic act of defiance against capitalist encroachment.

And these seventy acres, this place of earth, this world of Aziz Khan, did not appear to him as land, as a property with a market value. It was a sufficiency of existence. So that nobody could take the land away from him without first taking away his existence. (Ghose, 1967, p. 16)

“For Aziz Khan, his land was a complete world where only those plants grew of which he had sowed the seeds of himself” (Ghose, 1967, p.16). To Aziz Khan, the land transcends material value; it represents a profound bond with nature and tradition. He is profoundly attached with his land which stands for natural environment. His land is his life. “Aziz Khan would slip into the plantation under moonlight and feel the cotton-buds by passing a hand gently over them or by putting his mouth to them as if they were balls of candyfloss” (Ghose, 1967, p. 15). Plants are the source of knowledge for Aziz Khan. Aziz Khan drew “knowledge from the plants: and inspection really of his own source” (Ghose, 1967, p. 15). His resistance highlights the clash between the capitalist agenda of commodification, represented by the Shah brothers, and the humanistic and ecological ethos embodied by Aziz Khan. For the Shah brothers, Aziz Khan's land holds strategic economic value. Owning it would reduce the costs of cotton transportation to their mills, enhancing profitability. Their determination to acquire the land reflects capitalism's tendency to prioritize economic gain over human and environmental well-being. Aziz Khan's struggle symbolizes the devaluation of the working class and nature under capitalist exploitation. The Shah brothers' exploitation of labor and natural resources shows how capitalism thrives by devaluing the poor and the environment.

The novel *The Murder of Aziz Khan* begins with a focus on Aziz Khan's life before industrialization, highlighting the harmony between humans and nature in a traditional society. However, as the industrial forces gain power, the narrative increasingly focuses on the conflict between Aziz Khan and the capitalist forces threatening his land. Aziz Khan's transformation from a landowner to a man caught in the gears of industrial capitalism is a central motif in the novel, symbolizing the broader theme of exploitation and alienation. Ghose (1967) critiques how individuals are coerced into selling their labor and land in the face of overwhelming economic pressures:

With the arrival of the Shah brothers—symbolic of the capitalist class—the rural, agrarian village of Kalapur undergoes a shift, evolving into an industrial hub. The conversion of Kalapur from a rustic farming community into an industrial zone illustrates the disruptive force of capitalist-driven urbanization. As industries begin to dominate, exploitation of the labor force becomes routine, and many of Kalapur’s residents are compelled to migrate to metropolitan areas in search of employment, often at the cost of selling their ancestral lands. This shift marks the gradual decline of the traditional peasant lifestyle, replaced by an industrialized, urban-centric culture. (Afzal et al., 2024, p. 778)

As industrial forces invade his rural world Kalapur, the land’s value becomes solely economic, reducing it to a commodity to be exploited for profit. Ghose (1967) vividly depicts the stark contrast between the rural, agrarian lifestyle that is sustainable and rooted in nature, and the urban-industrial world that seeks to extract resources at any cost. The ecological degradation that accompanies capitalist expansion is also a crucial element in the novel. As Aziz Khan resists the selling of his land, the narrative shifts to depict how industrialization ravages the surrounding environment. The land that once nurtured agriculture is slowly being degraded by pollution and environmental harm brought on by industrialization. In this way, Ghose (1967) highlights the profound, irreversible damage that capitalist exploitation inflicts—not just on human lives, but on the natural world as well. The contrast between the rural, agrarian life and the industrial world highlights the stark difference between the harmonious relationship humans once had with the land and the destructive, profit-driven exploitation of nature that capitalism promotes.

As the story unfolds, the farmers’ sense of helplessness becomes increasingly clear, highlighting the systemic nature of their exploitation. The farmers of Kalapur, who are compelled to sell their land to the Shah brothers, embody the devaluation of the poor under capitalism. The loss of their land to the Shah brothers serves as a powerful symbol of the commodification of both human labor and the natural world, where everything—including the land that sustains them—is reduced to mere property for profit. The Shah brothers exemplify capitalist exploitation by preying on the poverty and helplessness of Kalapur’s farmers. Using their financial desperation and alliances with the ruling elite, they acquire the farmers’ ancestral lands at undervalued prices, perpetuating systemic oppression. For the farmers, burdened by debt and economic insecurity, selling their land becomes an inevitable choice, even as they harbor aspirations of urban business opportunities—a false promise of upward mobility within the capitalist framework.

The [farmers] were aware that in the hands of the Shah brothers, who had the money and the government connections with which to bring in foreign machinery, the land’s output and consequently its value would multiply several times; but they also knew that they were in no position of bargain. (Ghose, 1967, p. 13)

Ghose (1967) critiques the capitalist system, illustrating the dual exploitation of both marginalized communities and nature. The process of land commodification in Kalapur, driven by capitalist expansion, disrupts the ecological balance and contributes to environmental degradation. By focusing on the systemic issues faced by the farmers and the destruction of nature, Ghose’s (1967) novel serves as a powerful commentary on the ecological and social injustices inherent in capitalist exploitation.

The rural farmers of Kalapur, dispossessed of their ancestral lands by the Shah brothers—newly arrived symbols of capitalism—experience an acute disconnection

from their land, profession, and cultural identity. As these farmers migrate to urban areas for employment, they leave behind not only their traditional agrarian lifestyle but also the familial and communal bonds that once defined their existence. (Afzal et al., 2024, p. 778)

A central theme in *The Murder of Aziz Khan* is the commodification of both human labor and nature. Aziz Khan's land, which has been passed down through generations, symbolizes not just his livelihood, but also his connection to the earth. Loss of land of Aziz Khan symbolizes loss of natural environment of the working class. Aziz Khan's love for his land is so profound that he cannot think to sell it, as is reflected in dialogue between Javed and his father, Aziz Khan: "I [Javed] think we should sell the land" ... "Aziz looked up at his son; his eyes did not question the presumptions of such a suggestion on. 'It is yours, son,' is all that he said" (Ghose, 1967, p. 139). Here, the land is more than a mere economic asset; it represents a sacred connection between humans and nature, rooted in generational stewardship. Aziz Khan's reluctance to part with his land symbolizes a resistance to the capitalist commodification of natural resources, which erodes traditional values and ecological harmony. From an eco-Marxist perspective, the novel highlights the dual devaluation of the poor and environment under capitalism. The land, which once served as a source of sustenance and identity for Aziz Khan, is transformed into a commodity by the bourgeois elite, reflecting the broader capitalist tendency to exploit both human labor and natural resources for profit. Aziz Khan's struggle becomes symbolic of the proletariat's resistance to the alienating forces of capital, which overlook the intrinsic value of nature and its deep connection to human life. Through the symbolic role of land and its central place in the narrative, Ghose (1967) critiques capitalist exploitation, highlighting the intertwined marginalization of the poor and the degradation of the natural world.

The land in *The Murder of Aziz Khan* becomes a powerful symbol of both the ecological and cultural identity of the residents of Kalapur. It represents a traditional way of life that is increasingly threatened by the advance of industrial capitalism. The selling or exploitation of the land is shown not just as the loss of physical space, but as the destruction of a way of life that is deeply intertwined with nature. Aziz Khan's connection to the land goes beyond ownership—it is a reflection of his identity, his heritage, and his resistance to the forces that seek to sever these ties. In this way, the land symbolizes the broader metaphor of nature's commodification under capitalism, where its value is no longer intrinsic but measured by its potential for profit. "Through Aziz Khan, Ghose (1967) portrays a character deeply rooted in tradition and agricultural values. Aziz Khan's ultimate loss of land symbolizes the larger cultural erosion inflicted by capitalist encroachment" (Afzal et al., 2024, p. 778). The pre-capitalist era in Kalapur is depicted as a time of ecological harmony, where the relationship between humans and nature was sustainable and mutually nurturing. This harmony is poignantly captured in Aziz Khan's reflection on his lifelong connection to the land: "[In] all [Aziz Khan's] life, the land has been rich and unailing" (p. 149).

Aziz Khan's loss of his ancestral land critiques the irreversible consequences of capitalist intrusion, which dismantles both ecological balance and the cultural connections that bind individuals to their environment. The loss of his land symbolically implies the loss of environmental sustainability for the marginalized class. Through the tragic fate of Aziz Khan and his land, *The Murder of Aziz Khan* serves as a searing indictment of capitalism's disregard for the interconnectedness of humanity and nature. After losing both his sons, Afaq and Javed, finds him defeated at the hands of the capitalists. When Aziz Khan returns from Lahore after his son. Afaq's hanging, he confronts the grim reality of his land's obliteration. As the novelist elaborates:

It was not his land. The withered plantations were not there. Three bulldozers were going up and down the sloping land, tearing up from the roots whatever grew there. He walked on along the fence... Two men stood by an opening in the fence, guarding the drive to the house. They had been watching him and stood erect now to reassure themselves of their strength. Aziz Khan stood a few yards from them and looked at them... The bulldozers were going up and down, up and down. He looked away and began to walk again along the fence... Even at the farthest end of his land, he could hear the bulldozers going up and down, up and down. He walked on and on, never taking his eyes off the land. (Ghose, 1967, p. 315)

From the above citation, it is evident that the relentless movements of the bulldozers — “up and down, up and down”— symbolize the unceasing forces of capitalist greed, uprooting both ecological life and cultural heritage. The vivid imagery of the landscape’s desecration reflects the violent imposition of economic agendas that strip the land of its identity and intrinsic worth. Aziz Khan’s helpless walk along the fenced boundary highlights his alienation from the land that once defined his existence. This description powerfully encapsulates the eco-Marxist critique of capitalism’s dual exploitation of environment and the marginalized. The bulldozers’ mechanical destruction of the land parallels the dehumanization of workers like Aziz Khan, Riaz, Salim, and Javed, who are stripped of agency and identity within the capitalist framework. Just as the land is fenced and commodified, laborers are constrained within exploitative systems that prioritize profit over ecological harmony and human dignity.

Under capitalist system, the poor are systematically stripped of economic and social rights, while the wealthy consolidate power and broaden their influence through financial dominance. The Shah brothers personify this economic disparity, using their wealth to establish industries throughout Pakistan, further entrenching their control and exacerbating the divide between the rich and the poor. Their capitalist ambitions enable them to acquire land in Kalapur under dubious circumstances, leading to the construction of “two textile mills” (Ghose, 1967, p. 13). This process not only displaces the local farming community but also reinforces the systemic exploitation of both labor and land. The Shah brothers “have constructed two textile mills in Kalapur after acquiring land from the local farming community through questionable means” (Afzal et al., 2024, p. 880). The Shah brothers’ expansionist goals extend beyond Kalapur, reflecting the insatiable nature of capitalist enterprises. The Shah brothers’ “wealth allows them to forge connections with the ruling elite and infiltrate the institutions of power in Pakistan. The Shah brothers lead opulent lifestyles, establishing mills and factories both domestically and internationally” (Afzal et al., p. 779). In a conversation between Ayub and Afaq, their future plans to enter other industries, including the soap industry in East Pakistan, highlight their relentless pursuit of profit: “We’re planning to enter the soap industry in East Pakistan” (Ghose, 1967, p. 36). This line exemplifies the unchecked growth of capitalist endeavors, often at the expense of vulnerable communities and natural resources.

For the impoverished working class, such as Riaz, Salim, and Javed, the Shah brothers’ mills represent sites of relentless economic exploitation. These laborers work tirelessly in substandard conditions, yet their efforts yield minimal economic advancement. The capitalist framework, as embodied by the Shah brothers, systematically ensures that the fruits of labor are funneled toward the elites while the workers remain trapped in a cycle of poverty. The Shah brothers’ practices, emblematic of capitalist hegemony, perpetuate ecological degradation and social injustice, revealing the interconnectedness of environmental and

economic exploitation. “Workers in the Shah mills are reduced to mere instruments, stripped of autonomy and basic rights. Riaz, Javed, and Salim, among the mill ‘s earliest laborers, are dismissed simply for voicing resistance to these oppressive capitalist practices” (Afzal et al., 2024, p. 777). The exploitation of labor and land highlights a dual devaluation under capitalism, where nature and the working class are commodified and stripped of their intrinsic value. The Shah brothers prefer commodity value to human value. They are always obsessed by the idea of hoarding heaps of wealth. They always think about constructing mills and recruiting workers. As Ayub remarks, “We’ll have to setup the overtime. Recruit more labourers is the answer. We’ll have to start the night shift as soon as we can. The mills can’t lie idle at night” (Ghose, 1967, p. 32).

Ghose (1967) also focuses on the theme of alienation of the working class under capitalist system. Aziz Khan’s resistance to the industrial forces is not just a fight for his land but also a confrontation with the capitalist system that seeks to reduce him to a mere cog in the machinery of economic growth. Throughout the novel, Aziz Khan experiences alienation—both from the land he once nurtured and from his fellow villagers, who are tempted by the promises of industrialization. The alienation of Aziz Khan from his community reflects the broader Marxist concept of how capitalism leads to the breakdown of social cohesion, as individuals are divided by their economic interests. Aziz Khan’s refusal to sell his land can be read as a rejection of the capitalist system that seeks to commodify every aspect of human and ecological life.

Ghose (1967) illustrates the mechanisms of capitalist exploitation through the unequal enforcement of laws, where the impoverished face harsh restrictions while the wealthy Shah brothers remain immune to accountability. Drawing on Marx’s assertion that power stems from economic relations, the Shah brothers exploit their position as production owners to manipulate the legal system. This manipulation results in the wrongful execution of Aziz Khan’s son, Rafiq, compounding Aziz Khan’s suffering. The Shah brothers falsely accuse Rafiq of murdering a thirteen-year-old girl—a crime actually committed by Afaq, who evades justice through bribery and later relocates to England. Ghose (1967) critiques this judicial failure, exposing how capitalist dominance distorts institutions designed to uphold justice: “Rafiq [is] hanged. Jamila Bano [is] dead” (Ghose, 1967, p. 145). Afaq is free.

Marx and Engels’ (1848) critique of capitalism’s exploitative nature, where the accumulation of wealth by one class directly correlates with the deprivation of another, resonates throughout the novel. Ghose (1967) highlights the systemic oppression of the proletariat under the Shah brothers’ capitalist regime, depicting economic and political exploitation. Characters like Aziz, Riaz, Salim, and Javed symbolize the struggles of the marginalized, who endure coercion, oppression, and deprivation. Akram coerces farmers into selling their land, while Ayub suppresses workers’ rights and dismantles unions to maintain control over labor. The dismissal of workers such as Riaz, Salim, and Javed highlights the inhumane treatment of laborers who resist exploitation. Their efforts to foster worker solidarity against capitalist oppression are met with hostility, reflecting the broader devaluation of labor and agency under a capitalist framework. This is encapsulated in the line: “The worker has no identity” (Ghose, 1967, p. 209), which highlights the erasure of individuality and humanity within systems of economic exploitation. Economic exploitation of the workers goes on unabated. Riaz, a worker in the Shah brothers’ mill, points out economic exploitation of the workers as follows:

Our wages aren’t guaranteed. There’s no set scale for each type of work. There’s no demarcation of jobs. There’s no insurance scheme to pay us a minimum sickness benefit. There’s no pension scheme” ... “We work six days a week on normal wages

and for overtime we get only twenty-five percent extra. We get no paid holidays except religious festivals. What sort of a social contract is that?" (Ghose, 1967, pp. 187-188)

From an eco-Marxist perspective, this devaluation of human labor parallels the exploitation of nature. The land, once "rich and unfailing" (p. 149), is commodified and stripped of its ecological and cultural significance, mirroring the plight of the workers. Just as the capitalist agenda disrupts ecological harmony in Kalapur, it dismantles the agency and solidarity of the laboring class. Through its portrayal of systemic exploitation, *The Murder of Aziz Khan* critiques capitalism's insatiable pursuit of profit at the expense of both human dignity and ecological balance. Aziz Khan's resistance and the struggles of the marginalized serve as a powerful call to recognize and challenge the dehumanizing and destructive forces of economic and ecological exploitation.

Ghose (1967) critiques the dehumanization of the impoverished under capitalist systems, highlighting the indifference of the wealthy elite to the struggles of the marginalized. This systemic exploitation is exemplified in the Shah brothers' dealings with Aziz Khan and Javed during negotiations for Aziz's land. Despite their own wealth and influence, Akram and Ayub reduce their offer for the land from 2000 to a mere 200 rupees per acre, highlighting the humiliation and commodification faced by the working class. Treating Javed as a mere pawn, their disdain is evident in the remark: "He'll come crawling back, I tell you, he'll come on his hands and knees. And it'll be nothing" (Ghose, 1967, p. 142). This statement encapsulates the inhumanity of capitalist exploitation, demonstrating how laborers and small landowners are stripped of value and compassion. The Shah brothers' relentless ambition echoes the greed of historical moneylenders, whom Ghose (1967) describes as "middle men, narrow-eyed, tight-lipped who produce nothing and achieve nothing and yet acquire fortune for themselves" (Ghose, 1967, p. 20). This characterization highlights the capitalists' unyielding pursuit of wealth at the expense of both human dignity and ecological well-being.

The Murder of Aziz Khan offers a strong indictment of capitalist culture, which commodifies labor and land, perpetuating a cycle of exploitation and alienation that undermines social and ecological harmony. The Shah brothers, emblematic of capitalist power, leverage their economic influence to forge alliances with the ruling elite, highlighting the collusion between capitalists and those in governance. Through financial manipulation and state support, the Shah brothers acquire land from the farmers of Kalapur, exemplifying the systematic exploitation of marginalized communities and their ancestral land. Ghose (1967) critiques this dynamic by portraying Akram's unshakable faith in money's ability to solve problems, captured in the assertion: "For him, any problem which could have been embodied by a human being could be solved either by the offer of cash or, failing that, some insidious form of destruction" (Ghose, 1967, p. 34). Akram's migration to Pakistan opens new opportunities for wealth accumulation, enabling him to secure fifty thousand rupees and further expand his capitalist ventures. His approach to District Commissioner Muhammad Karim demonstrates how economic power is used to corrupt political systems. Akram bribes the Commissioner to facilitate the establishment of a textile mill, obtaining possession of government-owned, infertile land. This transaction highlights the capitalist ethos of exploiting both human and natural resources for profit, with little regard for social or ecological consequences. Ghose (1967) critiques the ruling elite, represented by figures like District Commissioner Karim, as indifferent to governance and the suffering of the populace. Instead of addressing societal issues, these figures prioritize personal financial gain, contributing to the nation's descent into anarchy. Political leaders are depicted as mercenaries, driven by self-interest and greed, engaging in disputes over power and resources. Ghose (1967) describes

them as individuals with “neither ideas nor ideals neither a sense of justice nor a sense of humanity but were aflame with the burning ambition at once to make their fortune, men whose mentality was no different from that of thugs” (Ghose, 1967, p. 26).

Ghose (1967) critiques the overarching influence of material considerations on the socio-political and environmental fabric of society. The Shah brothers, emblematic of capitalist elites, exercise significant control over various institutions, channeling their efforts toward the unrestrained accumulation of wealth. This relentless pursuit, whether through ethical or exploitative practices, comes at the expense of the impoverished and environment. Ghose (1967) critiques this profit-centric worldview, highlighting how the Shah brothers prioritize material prosperity over ethical considerations, mirroring broader capitalist tendencies to exploit both human and natural resources. The Shah brothers’ fixation on industrial development disregards environmental degradation and social inequalities it perpetuates. For the Shah brothers, financial gain becomes the sole objective, with no regard for the societal or ecological consequences of their actions. The novelist critiques:

[The Shah brothers’] beginnings had been obscure but in 1947, when Pakistan was created, Akram, who had made a few thousand rupees as a money-seller in Mumbai had come to Pakistan and for three years he had looked around Karachi and Lahore, buying somethings here and selling it there. One could not have said at that time that he would soon become a major industrialist, for his main business was buying goods which someone else had manufactured and selling them to an interested retailer for someone else’s subsequent use. (Ghose, 1967, p. 20)

Akram, a former moneylender in pre-Partition India, transitions into a businessman in Pakistan, employing exploitative capitalist strategies to consolidate his wealth. “Pakistan [has] given [Akram] a new opportunity” (Ghose, 1967, p. 21) to become an industrialist obsessed with the idea of material prosperity. Akram “had the gift to make money, a gift which [The Shah brothers] all desired themselves” (Ghose, 1967, p. 23). His obsession with material prosperity drives him to envision industrial expansion across the country. The conversation between Afaq and Ayub highlights their unbridled ambitions: “We’re planning to enter the soap industry in East Pakistan. We’re planning to take over the cosmetics industry in Karachi” (Ghose, 1967, p. 36). These lines exemplify the capitalist obsession with relentless business growth, exposing their disregard for the well-being of marginalized communities and natural ecosystems. From an Eco-Marxist perspective, the Shah brothers’ expansion into industries such as soap and cosmetics symbolizes the commodification of natural resources, reducing environment to a mere source of raw materials for profit. This extractive model of capitalism reflects a disregard for ecological sustainability, mirroring their indifference to the laborers they exploit. By contrasting the Shah brothers’ insatiable greed with the struggles of the disenfranchised, Ghose (1967) critiques the systemic devaluation of both the poor and nature within a capitalist framework, shedding light on the socio-environmental costs of unchecked materialism.

Conclusion

The Murder of Aziz Khan serves as a poignant critique of capitalist exploitation, illustrating how the forces of industrialization marginalize both the poor and environment, as represented by the land of Kalapur’s farmers. Through an Eco-Marxist lens, the novel reveals the interconnectedness of social and ecological oppression under capitalism. By examining the commodification of land and labor, Ghose (1967) highlights the systemic devaluation of both nature and the working class. Aziz Khan’s resistance to the encroachment of industrial forces symbolizes the broader struggle against capitalist hegemony, which seeks to transform

everything—human and natural—into marketable commodities. The land, a symbol of tradition, identity, and ecological balance, becomes a site of conflict, revealing how capitalism erodes both cultural heritage and environmental sustainability. *The Murder of Aziz Khan* offers a compelling narrative about the dual exploitation of marginalized communities and nature, drawing attention to the need for a more sustainable and just economic system. It invites readers to reflect on the complex dynamics of capitalist exploitation and challenges them to consider alternative paths that prioritize social equity and ecological harmony.

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