





Green Crimes: Cultural Ramifications and Eco-conscious Narratives

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Abstract. The wake of the new millennium has been rather tumultuous with the world splitting with wars, conflicts and prejudices but none have a greater and far-reaching consequence than the acts of violence against nature. Consumerism, materialism and the industrial boom have led to a global crisis that has adversely affected the natural environment. Green crimes cause environmental harm including actions not specified by the law but having environmental and cultural ramifications. To establish a safe and sustainable globe for future generations, eco-conscious narratives provide a window for creating awareness and acknowledging the perpetual perils. The paper tries to explore how eco-conscious narratives initiate social, political, moral, legal, and cultural perceptions to confront the offences against nature. The paper also seeks to find how contemporary cultural phenomena serve as a tool to combat green offences, provide alternate methods to conserve ecological collapse and create green empathy, and sustainability.

Keywords: Green Crimes, Environmental Sustainability, Green Empathy, Cultural Studies, Eco-Justice.

1 Introduction

The dawn of the new millennium has ushered massive opportunities and challenges for the planet. The rapid progress in science, technology, and industrialization, has grave and dark undertones that threaten to rupture the very foundations of our fundamental existence – the rising environmental problems, acts of violence against nature by humans, and environmental collapse. The accelerated environmental degradation on a global scale has been propelled by a drastic increase in green crimes causing horrific environmental hazards as well as triggering significant cultural ramifications. The consequences of these environmental or green crimes are not only confined to legal, political, moral or environmental discourses or debates; they rather affect the communities, the biological ecosystem, the economies, and future generations. A deep understanding of the perpetual perils and thus taking steps to

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prevent, protect and conserve to create a sustainable environment is paramount. Creating awareness and developing green empathy have to be developed to tackle the surge in environmental crimes that heighten the existing ecological plight. According to a study conducted by the *Institute of Health Metrics and Evaluation and Global Burden Diseases, Injuries and Risk Factors Study 2019* (Fuller et al 2022, e536), pollution remains one of the major perils for diseases and premature deaths across the world.

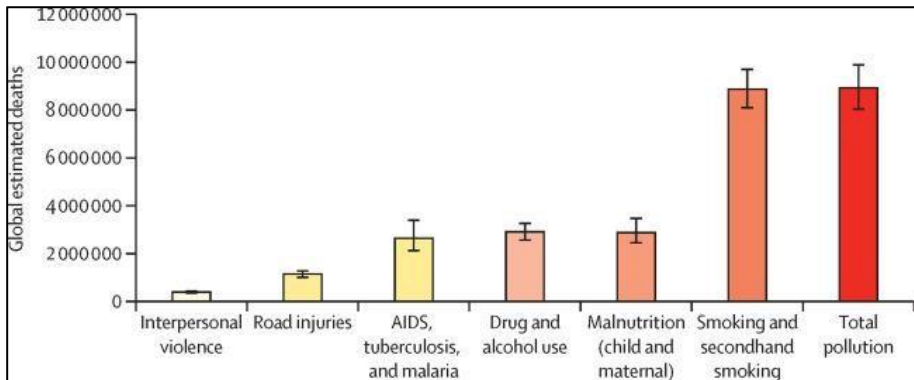


Figure 1: Global Estimated Deaths by Major Causes

The graph reveals that the effect of pollution on human health is far more significant than that of warfare, terrorist activities, major or critical diseases, drug abuse and alcoholism. “In 2019, pollution was responsible for approximately 9 million premature deaths” (Fuller et al 2022, e536). It points out the present-day concerns regarding pollution, environmental degradation, ecological collapse and the need to focus on sustainability and existence. As human activities continue to impact nature, the consequences of environmental degradation are not confined to physical changes but also concern biodiversity, cultures, and survival.

According to The National Crime Records Bureau’s (NCRB 2022, 11.1) latest report, we find that India’s overall offences against the environment have increased by 97.5 per cent in the country between 2021 and 2022. The rampant globalization has intensified the impact of human activities on the environment. The growing population and the never-ending desire for more have led to deliberate actions by humans to exploit and degrade the ecology for consumerism, materialism, or economic gains. The illegal activities falling under purposive crimes against nature range from illegal wildlife trafficking and poaching, hazardous waste disposal, uncontrolled and unlicensed deforestation, and rise in pollution; collectively constituting acts that fall under the legal framework of environmental crimes. Sometimes environmental crimes go beyond the purview of the legal aspects affecting the moral, ethical, cultural and emotional codes that govern maintaining the ecological balance. The network of collective responsibility and accountability of

nation-states, communities, and individuals is essential to tackle the threat transcending beyond the political, legal, economic, and cultural debates and divides through awareness, developing empathy and exercising the policies through proper planning and implementation. The fine balance between the requirements of the global world and the effect on nature needs to be strong, definite and realistic.

2 Exploring Green Crimes and Green Criminology

Green crimes refer to the activities that harm the earth's environment and its ecosystems. These crimes can take various forms and can often trigger violations of environmental laws and regulations. "Environmental crime is conceptualized in several different ways within the broad framework of green criminology. For some scholars, environmental crime is defined narrowly within strict legal definitions – it is what the law says it is. For others, environmental harm is itself deemed to be a social and ecological crime, regardless of legal status – if harm is done to environments or animals, then from the point of view of the critical green criminologist, it is argued that such harms ought to be considered a 'crime'" (White and Heckenberg 2014, 8). Green crimes cause environmental harm including actions not specified by the law. Communities throughout the world engage to find ways to combat the side effects of environmental degradation, and the eco-conscious narratives, on the other hand, provide a suitable platform to delve into the themes of ecological crimes, concerns and complexities within and beyond the boundaries of the legal, ethical and moral discourses into affecting the socio-cultural domains. Therefore, the responsibility of green criminologists is to figure out the causes, patterns, and consequences of green crimes. Criminologists analyse and identify the trends of crimes against nature and assess the impact of environmental offences on both local and global scales; contributing to the development of policies and strategies for preventing and controlling green crimes.

The term 'green criminology' was first proposed by Lynch, "to describe a critical and sustained approach to the study of environmental crime" (Lynch 1990, 1). Green criminology refers to "the study by criminologists of environmental harms (that may incorporate wider definitions of crime than are provided by strictly legal definitions); environmental laws (including enforcement, prosecution and sentencing practices); and environmental regulation (systems of criminal, civil and administrative law designed to manage, protect and preserve specified environments and species, and to manage the negative consequences of particular industrial processes)" (White 2011, 8). In the chapter entitled Introduction: approaching green criminology, Beirne and South define green criminology as "the study of those harms against humanity, against the environment (including space) and non-human animals committed both by powerful institutions (e.g., governments, transnational corporations, military apparatuses) and also by ordinary people" (Beirne and South 2007, xiii).

3 Ecological Justice and the Need for Ecoconscious Narratives

With the rise in green crimes, the demand for ‘ecological justice’ has also intensified. “Ecological justice refers to the relationship of humans generally to the rest of the natural world and includes concerns relating to the health of the biosphere and, more specifically, plants and animals that also inhabit the biosphere. The main concern is with the quality of the planetary environment and the rights of other species (particularly animals) to live free from torture, abuse and destruction of habitat. The focus is on constantly evaluating how humans interact with their environment, about potential harms and risks to specific creatures and specific locales, as well as the biosphere generally” (White and Heckenberg 2014, 49).

It is high time that acts of violence and crimes against nature must be curbed to establish a safe and sustainable globe for future generations. To achieve sustainability, the eco-conscious narratives provide a window by creating awareness and acknowledging the perpetual perils. With unprecedented environmental challenges, the need for eco-conscious narratives has gone beyond mere storytelling; they serve as powerful tools to shape perceptions, create awareness, modify behaviours, bring cultural changes, and inspire to protect and conserve the environment. “Environmental degradation is nothing new, but it was only in the latter years of the twentieth century – as pollution accelerated – that global awareness of the problems grew. It is now apparent that any understanding of the natural environment and its problems must also be global in scope. Regardless of divisions into nation-states, the planet constitutes a single ecosystem, defined as the system composed of the interaction of all living organisms and their natural environment” (Carrabine et al 2009, 386).

Ecoconscious narratives create awareness relating to environmental issues and intend to develop an eco-conscious society with green understanding and green empathy. Through compelling writings, documentaries, cinematic mediums and literature, these narratives highlight the scope of green understanding helping to create sustainability and reducing environmental offenses. Ecoconscious narratives include works that go beyond the legal and political debates, discourses and boundaries; impacting the popular culture of the period and making their presence in literary textual genres like novels, plays or poetry, film and cinematic adaptations or cinematic influences, documentaries, and web sources. Emphasizing on the consequences of environmental degradation, these narratives provide a kaleidoscope for individuals to reflect on their acts, thus tackling green crimes.

4 Cases of Recent Green Crimes and Their Cultural Ramifications

Almost all environmental crimes caused by humans have serious and long-term implications on biodiversity and ecological balance; they do have cultural

ramifications too. Further, we will try to analyse certain incidents and offences that have been triggered by humans which have had greater cultural ramifications, even going beyond the legal, political and moral discourses. Some of the major incidents of environmental crimes in recent years include the Amazon Rainforest Fires in 2019, the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010, The Chernobyl Nuclear Plant Disaster in 1986, The Bhopal Gas Tragedy in 1984, Wildlife Trafficking in Africa and Asia, Commercial Deforestation in India during the 1970s, and so on.

World-wide Database of United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC 2020, 10-11), published for the year 2020, illustrates how certain wildlife trafficking flows toward the black market in the following Figures 2 and 3.

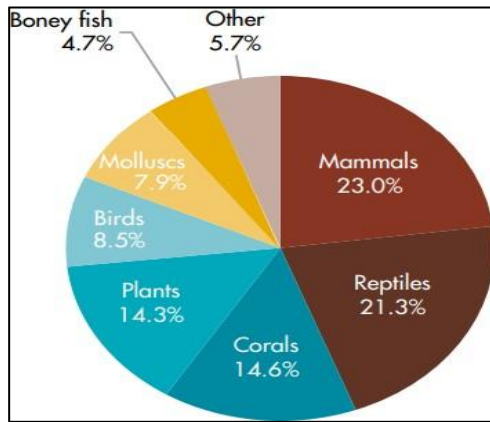


Figure 2: Percentage of Trafficking Seizures in World WISE by Taxonomical Category, 1999-2018

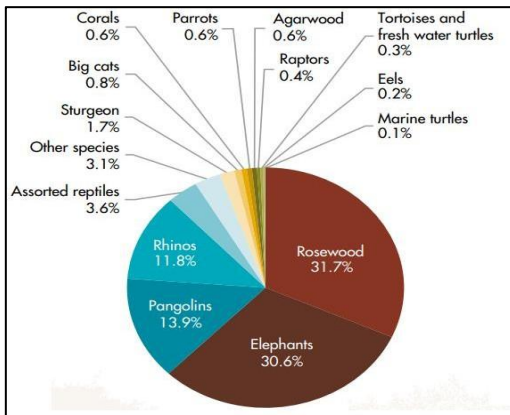


Figure 3: Share of Wildlife Trafficking Seizure World WISE, 2014-2018

The increase in illicit supply requires immediate action to stop this illicit market. Traffickers that supply illegal wildlife markets, typically, target markets for bulk orders. Concerning trafficking, there have also been discoveries that imply certain groups are engaged in the smuggling of various species; large amounts of ivory, pangolin scales and rhino horns smuggling have increased during the last decade. The data provided by UNODC shows how crimes against animals and nature have been a serious threat in the present time that needs immediate attention and counteraction.

Some other forms of environmental offences directly affect nature. For example, the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill occurred on April 20, 2010, when an offshore drilling rig exploded and sank in the Gulf of Mexico. As a result, for several months, millions of barrels of crude oil were exposed to the ocean surface. "The Deepwater Horizon (DWH) oil spill was the largest environmental disaster and response effort in U.S. history, with nearly 800 million litres of crude oil spilt. Vast areas of the Gulf of Mexico were contaminated with oil, including deep-ocean communities and over 1,600 kilometres of shoreline" (Barron 2012, 315). The offshore drilling was operated by British Petroleum, which took the lives of eleven people and released an uncapped well that was spewing oil into the Gulf. The oil flowed into the Gulf for 87 days until the well was successfully shut on July 15, 2010. Despite several attempts to limit the spill and cover the well, the spill continued to have catastrophic effects on local businesses, coastal habitats, and marine life. The environmental impact included extensive damage to marine and bird habitats, as well as having long-term effects on the Gulf's ecosystem. The spill also had profound economic repercussions, affecting fishermen, local tourism, and other industries that were dependent on the Gulf of Mexico. The Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill is noted as one of the largest environmental disasters in history, once again highlighting the challenges associated with offshore drilling and the need for safety measures in the oil and gas industries. The incident also sparked wide criticism for the lack of environmental and ethical responsibilities of large corporations.

The Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill also had a significant cultural and social impact. Peter Berg's movie, *Deepwater Horizon* (2016) dramatizes the events leading up to and during the oil rig explosion, and the heroism shown by the rig's crew in the face of adversity. Josh and Rebecca Tickell's green crime documentary, *The Big Fix* (2012) examines the post-environmental impacts of the oil spill and tries to investigate the facts presented by the government and the oil industry. John Konrad and Tom Shroder's book *Fire on the Horizon: The Untold Story of the Gulf Oil Disaster* (2011), presents a detailed account of the Deepwater Horizon disaster, exploring the technical failures and the consequences of the tragedy.

In India, on the night of December 2-3, 1984, the Bhopal Gas Tragedy occurred at the Union Carbide India Limited (UCIL) plant in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh; caused by a toxic gas leak of methyl isocyanate (MIC) resulting in the exposure of thousands of people to the deadly poisonous gas. The immediate effects of the gas leak led to the death of a multitude of humans as well as animals thereby causing long-term health

issues. In the aftermath of the Bhopal Gas Tragedy, there was a heightened awareness of the need for comprehensive legislation to address environmental issues and protect the environment and public health. As a response to this disaster, the Indian government enacted the Environment (Protection) Act, of 1986. The primary objective of this legislation was to provide a framework for the protection and improvement of the environment. The Act also established the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) and State Pollution Control Boards (SPCBs) at the national and the state level respectively. The established regulatory bodies were given the authority to enforce environmental laws and standards. The Act empowers the regulatory authorities to take measures for the prevention, control, and lessening of environmental pollution. It provides for the setting of standards for emissions and discharges of pollutants into the environment. The legislation specifies penalties for contravention of its provisions. Offenders may be subject to fines and imprisonment, depending on the severity of the violation. The Act introduced the concept of Environmental Impact Assessment, which requires certain developmental projects to undergo a thorough assessment of their potential environmental impacts before being approved. The Act encourages public participation in environmental protection by allowing citizens to voice their concerns and opinions on projects that may have environmental implications.

The Bhopal Gas Tragedy has left a lasting impact not only on the lives of the affected people or the need for environmental regulatory laws but also on the popular culture of our times. Through mass media, including films, books, and documentaries; eco-conscious narratives depict the incident, its aftermath, and the social, legal, moral, emotional and environmental implications. Ravi Kumar's directed historical drama *Bhopal: A Prayer for Rain* (2014) depicts the events leading up to the tragedy which is inspired by Sanjoy Hazarika's book, *Bhopal: Lessons of a Tragedy* (1987). Similarly, Max Carlson's award-winning documentary drama, *Bhopali* (2011) focuses on the struggle of the survivors of the tragedy and their fight for justice and compensation. The film, *Bhopal Express* (1999), directed by Mahesh Mathai, presents a fictional account of the Bhopal Gas Tragedy and its aftermath following the story of a journalist who investigates the disaster. *Bhopal, The Inside Story* (1994) written by T.R. Chouhan is an autobiographical account of a survivor offering a personal account of the disaster and its consequences.

5 Conclusion

The relationship between environmental problems, green crimes, and cultural ramifications, through eco-conscious narratives underscores the demand for urgent collective action to mitigate the challenges and create a sense of green empathy among individuals and communities. Environmental offenses ranging from pollution, deforestation, illegal trafficking of biodiversity, illegal exploitation of natural resources, the hazardous waste disposal need to stop and individuals, cultures,

communities, and societies must work collectively towards it by creating genuine empathy and aiming to bring ecological balance and ecological justice.

Cultural identities are intimately linked to the environment, as communities' future and sustainability depend on nature. The degradation of ecosystems and loss of biodiversity erodes the foundation of cultures and also threatens the practices that have evolved over generations. Environmental crimes compound these challenges communities, cultures and nature encounter. However, amidst these crimes, the role of eco-conscious narratives is vital cultivating a heightened awareness of their ecological footprint and encouraging people to embrace sustainable practices. The eco-conscious narratives explicitly help in understanding the environmental impact on the planet and advocate a systemic change that promotes conservation, awareness, responsible resource management, and the enforcement of environmental laws. Ecoconscious narratives and awareness foster eco-consciousness, empowering individuals and communities to be informed, aware and serious about environmental sustainability. Governments, businesses, and non-governmental organizations also bear the responsibility of implementing policies and practices that prioritise ecological well-being as the scope of green crimes and the need for sustainability goes beyond the legal domain into social, moral, ethical and emotional domains. Finally, addressing environmental problems and combating green crimes requires a comprehensive and collaborative approach. The preservation of cultural heritage, the mitigation of environmental impact, and the promotion of green empathy and eco-justice are that seek immediate attention.

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