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Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee, *Postcolonial Environments: Nature, Culture, and the Contemporary Indian Novel in English* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 203 pp.

It is no small goal that Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee sets for himself with *Postcolonial Environments*. With his integration of the ecocritical and postcolonial schools, Mukherjee develops a robust method of reading that is applicable to a range of texts, even as he specifically homes in on contemporary Indian novels written in English as his theory's proving ground. *Postcolonial Environments* aims to develop "the methodological ability to hold the particular and the general, the local, regional and global levels, within the same analytical move" (18). To accomplish this, Mukherjee proposes a reading practice organized around what he terms "eco-materialism," which itself relies on a fusion of environment and history that attends to the ways in which social and political relations are made possible and conditioned by particular environmental realities. In this view, environment itself becomes a product of history, and the stories of history become embedded in geographies that themselves are shaped and disciplined by human labor and the flow of global capital. Foregrounding how the workings of capital tend toward fundamentally uneven development, Mukherjee's method accounts for a range of social and ecological contexts, including pockets of extreme wealth in the generally impoverished "global south" and pockets of extreme poverty in the comparatively wealthier "global north." At its base, Mukherjee's understanding of the postcolonial condition is premised on the environmental vulnerabilities of disempowered and marginalized people, the health and lives of whom are increasingly put at risk by the practices of a select group of entrenched interests and multinational corporations—whose control of global resources through the mechanisms of capital Mukherjee identifies as neo-colonial.

Postcolonial Environments' attention to the relationship between capital, uneven development, and the postcolonial condition makes clear its author's commitment to historical materialism, but it is his ultimate goal to develop a practice of reading that accounts for the unevenness he suggests is a fundamental part of postcolonial reality. Ecocriticism and postcolonial theory inform this reading practice, but Mukherjee's combination of these theoretical perspectives is more than a simple gesture toward the promise of their collaboration. Examining ecocriticism's roots in the "deep ecology" movement, Mukherjee reveals the historical basis for its tendency to conceive of environment as "nature, and in this way of thinking is often a particular vision of nature—the ever-shrinking wilderness" (26). His attention to some of postcolonialism's *ur*-texts (Said, Bhabha, Spivak) similarly draws out the historical basis for the lack of thorough attention to environment in much postcolonial theoretical work. While Mukherjee's analyses of these movements can at times seem somewhat disingenuous in

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relation to how the theories are currently employed by many of their practitioners, his surveys of their respective histories reveal some of the theoretical limitations embedded in both fields. And, it should be noted, Mukherjee does take cues from thinkers in these fields who move beyond the limitations of their first-wave iterations (Graham Huggan, Sarah Whatmore, and Cary Wolfe—to name a few). The promise of Mukherjee's work arises from his use of postcolonial and ecocritical theories as correctives to one another. By drawing on methods from cultural geography alongside those of historical materialism, Mukherjee advances a version of social ecology to ground the eco-materialist approach that he argues will invigorate ecocritical and postcolonial interpretive practices.

A significant portion of *Postcolonial Environments* is devoted to its careful development of the reading methodology it proposes, but it is once Mukherjee turns to his textual analyses that the potential of his interpretive framework really becomes clear. Reading the novels of Arundhati Roy, Amitav Ghosh, Indra Sinha, and Ruchir Joshi, each of his final four chapters is organized around a contemporary Indian novel written in English. This choice of language is an important characteristic for Mukherjee, as it signals these novelists' participation in their own exoticism but also makes available a position from which they critique the very process that commodifies their work as such: "Despite their obvious participation in the entrenchment of a global neo-colonial or postcolonial regime," he writes, "contemporary Indian writing in English offers a searching critique of that regime (and by extension of itself) through its *literary* specificity and singularity" (9, emphasis in original). To this standard framing of postcolonial literature, Mukherjee adds his emphasis on the postcolonial environment, and his choices of subject texts become particularly productive for him because of how he reads them against the backdrop of the historical material realities of India as a postcolony.

Mukherjee's readings highlight the praxis of his method. His discussion of Roy's 1997 novel *The God of Small Things*, for example, bridges her political activism to her narrative technique—a critical move that, as Mukherjee points out, has often eluded appraisers of her work. While Mukherjee's reading of Roy's novel advances his argument that her "style, form and subject [. . .] are deeply considered artistic responses to the historically specific condition of uneven development in India, a condition that cannot be understood as long as we understand environment as a separate category to those of history and culture," it is his focus on stylistic and formal techniques, in this chapter particularly, that signal the value not only of his cultural insights but also of his methods as a literary critic. By reading Roy's "uneven style" in relation to uneven development in Ayamenem (widely considered to be the basis of Roy's fictionalized portrayal of a town of the same name in her novel), Mukherjee demonstrates how the novel's shifting narrative voice challenges conventional European realism. Mimetic technique alone is not up to the task of registering the experience of uneven, postcolonial India. Several stock tropes of postcolonial theory, most provocatively the paradigmatic concept of "border-crossing" in his chapter on Roy's novel, become infused with a new energy through the rubric of Mukherjee's eco-materialism.

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The dexterity of Mukherjee's eco-materialism is further on display in his reading of Sinha's 2007 novel *Animal's People* where the living conditions of nonhuman beings are brought into focus. In this chapter, Mukherjee demonstrates how the disruption of a singular notion of human being became a historical necessity for those living with the aftermath of the 1984 Union Carbide pesticide factory disaster in Bhopal. Questionable corporate practices, such as those that led to the factory's gas leak, risk the health and lives of a multitude of human and nonhuman beings who all, as Mukherjee acknowledges, "have little to say in the matter" (134). Mukherjee reads the novel's protagonist, known simply as "Animal" to the people around him, in the context of this environmental disaster to show that his ability to traffic between human and nonhuman communities underscores Sinha's "different-yet-equal" ethic for imagining the collectives of human and nonhuman beings whose very existences and interactions produce both history and environment. Mukherjee's attention to formal technique is present in his chapter on Sinha, as well, when he accounts for the influence of north Indian classical music on the form of *Animal's People.*

In its broadest sense, the promise of *Postcolonial Environments* lies in its authors assertion that the "story of India is echoed in the general condition of the entire postcolonial world" (7). Yet, despite only a few brief asides concerning the histories and environments of Asia, Latin America, Africa, and pockets of at-risk populations in the "global north," the text does little to demonstrate directly how eco-materialism might provide a framework for understanding the artistic forms of the postcolonial condition writ large. Still, this is hardly a searching critique of Mukherjee's theory, for what it may at times lack in the breadth of its subject texts, it makes up for with a thoroughly developed methodology that is readily applicable to almost any form of cultural expression. Because of the care Mukherjee takes in explaining his theoretical underpinnings (including the introduction, the first four chapters of the book are all devoted to this task), his method of reading is available to readers versed in any number of postcolonial literatures—including those of the "global north" that may not be immediately recognizable as such. *Postcolonial Environments* offers a powerful interpretive framework that should be welcomed by ecocritical and postcolonial scholars certainly, but also by literary scholars more generally for the ways it ties stylistic, technical, and formal analyses into the broader networks of globalization.