

Third World Critiques (of western environmentalism)

“A Third World Critique” (1989)



A well-known Indian historian, Ramachandra Guha has taught at Yale University, the Indian Institute of Science, and UC Berkeley. He is also an authority on Indian cricket.

Ramachandra Guha
(1958-)

Guha argues for two claims:

- (1) Deep ecology is peculiar to the West.
- (2) The spread of deep ecology to other cultures will bring severe social consequences.

Four Tenets of Deep Ecology

- (1) Emphasis on **biocentrism** and the primacy of the anthropocentric/biocentric divide.
- (2) Emphasis on **wilderness preservation**.
Three causes of this:
 - (a) Historical: continuing the **Pinchot/Muir struggle**
 - (b) Moral: consequence of **biocentrism** (saving species for their own sake)
 - (c) Biological: importance of **species diversity**.
- (3) References to **Eastern spiritualism** (self: from ego to all)
- (4) Views itself as the **vanguard** of environmentalism.

Criticism of those Tenets

(1) Too much emphasis on the anthropo-centric/biocentric distinction.

Deflects attention from the primary causes of our ecological problems: **militarism** and **over-consumption**.

“Neither of these problems has any tangible connection to [this] distinction.”

Criticism of those Tenets

(2) Too much focus on wilderness preservation.

Preservation is ...

- a **direct transfer from the poor to the rich.**
- **not key to protecting the environment.**
- a kind of **imperialism** by Western biologists.

Criticism of those Tenets

(3) Misuses Eastern spiritualism.

- The appeal to Hinduism is purely opportunistic.
- Pre-scientific knowledge is accumulated wisdom of what works with nature; it has nothing to do with spirituality.
- Eastern Spirituality “serves as a vehicle for Western projections.”

Criticism of those Tenets

(4) Deep ecology is **not radical**.

- At best, it is the radical wing of the preservationist movement.
- Enjoyment of nature is an integral part of the consumer society.
- Deep ecology views **environmental protection** as a “full stomach” phenomenon and equates this with **wilderness preservation**.

Real Radical Environmentalism

(1) German Greens

Four pillars of the Greens: ecology, justice, democracy, peace.

(2) Chipko (literally: “embrace”)

These are the original tree-huggers, a movement of women in India who fought deforestation in the Himalayan foothills. Began in the early 1970s.

A truly radical environmental movement will focus on:

- Appropriate technology
- Alternative lifestyles
- Peace/anti-militarism

“Deceiving the 3rd World” (1993)



Maria Mies (born 1931), a German professor of sociology (Univ. Cologne), has worked for many years in India.

The “Catching-Up” Model

- (1) Traditional “**Development**” means: working towards higher consumption.
- (2) Underdeveloped countries need to “**catch-up**” (Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth*, 1960) — but this has never panned out. **It is a myth.**
- (3) The “catching-up” strategy assumes that **industrialization, technological development, and capital accumulation** is all that is needed.
- (4) In fact, the “development” of the West required **colonialism.**

Why are they poor?

“The poverty of the underdeveloped nations is not as a result of the ‘natural’ lagging behind but the direct consequence of the overdevelopment of the rich industrial countries who exploit the so-called periphery in Africa, South America, and Asia. In the course of this colonial history, which continues today, these areas were progressively underdeveloped and made dependent on the so-called metropolis.”

— Maria Mies

Capitalism and Colonialism

Capitalism requires colonies in order to grow.

The northern hemisphere colonized the southern.

Other colonizations:

- Humans colonize Nature
- Men colonize Women
- Urban areas colonize Rural areas

These colonial relationships are possible only through force and violence; in the end the colonized adopt the values — their vision of the Good Life — of the colonizers.

This Model is Impossible

- The economic basis of colonialism is to **externalize costs**. To “catch-up” means to “colonize someone else.” (Women are often an “internal colony” of a society.)
- The whole thing is a **pyramid scheme**; it is **impossible** for everyone to “catch-up”.
- “It is impossible for the South to “catch-up,” not only because of the limits and inequitable consumption of the resource base, but above all, because ... **the gap between the two poles is increasing.**”

This Model is Undesirable

- Has **affluence** made the West more happy?
No.
- That “**High consumption = The Good Life**” is a lie — it is the ideological support for the “constant growth model” of modern industrial society.
- It assumes: There are **no limits** to **growth**, to **resources**, to **technological progress**.