



FAMILY CAPITALISM AND THE EXPLOITATION OF NATURAL RESOURCES: A CATALYST TO CLIMATE CHANGE

Devseshan R B

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36713/epra19497>

DOI No: 10.36713/epra19497

ABSTRACT

Capitalism is one of the significant reasons behind the exploitation of the natural resources. Family is the primary unit of Social Structure. The evolution of family structure undergoes various cultural challenges throughout history, from Gynocracy to Patriarchy. Accordingly, the family structure is now divided into the Bourgeoisie and Proletariat families. The bourgeoisie family satisfies the demands of the proletariat family. However, both Family divisions exploit natural resources not for need but for greed. It is explicit that every family is modified into a capitalist family mindset. Most of the time, capitalism exploits natural resources, and that exploitation is the cause of the depletion of natural resources and environmental degradation, thus resulting in climate change. Resource exploitation, particularly natural resource exploitation, significantly contributes to climate change. The development of infrastructure for human needs, technological advancement, and others has never satisfied human expectations, which are unnecessary but an unwanted exploitation of natural resources. Thus, this research paper discusses how the materialistic and capitalist mindset of the family exploits nature and acts as a catalyst for climate change.

KEYWORDS: Family system, Materialistic attitudes, climate change, Resource exploitation, and Human greed

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The origins of the modern family, private property, and class society have been central concerns in sociological and historical research. Friedrich Engels' work, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, provides a historical materialist analysis of these phenomena, arguing that the development of private property and the patriarchal family were key stages in the evolution of class society. Engels traces the historical development of the family from early communal societies to the emergence of monogamous marriage and the nuclear family under capitalism. His work has been influential in shaping Marxist perspectives on the family and gender relations. Karl Marx's theories of capitalism and class struggle further complement Engels' analysis. Marx's focus on the economic base of society and the exploitation of labour by capital provides a framework for understanding how class relations are fundamental to the organization of society. Marx's analysis of capitalism as a system based on the accumulation of capital and the extraction of surplus value from labour helps to contextualize Engels' arguments about the role of private property in shaping social relations. Thorstein Veblen's theory of the leisure class adds another dimension to the analysis of class and consumption. Veblen argues that the leisure class, made up of wealthy elites, engages in conspicuous consumption as a way of projecting their social status and maintaining their position of power. Veblen's theory helps to illuminate the cultural and social dimensions of class distinctions, showing how consumption patterns reflect and reinforce class inequalities. John Bellamy Foster's concept of the metabolic rift offers a critical perspective on the ecological dimensions of capitalism. Foster argues that capitalism's relentless drive for profit leads to the exploitation and degradation of nature, resulting in a rift in the metabolic relationship between human societies and the natural environment. This concept highlights the ecological consequences of capitalist production and consumption patterns, adding a crucial ecological dimension to the analysis of class society. Together, these theoretical perspectives provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the origins and dynamics of class society, highlighting the interconnectedness of economic, social, and ecological processes. By integrating these theories, this research aims to deepen our understanding of the complex interplay between capitalism, family, consumerism, class relations, and the environment. Also research aims to say, thus every family evolved into a capitalistic family and every human is bourgeoisie, majorly concerning the natural resources and alienated themselves from the nature.



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The qualitative method is incorporated in this research. The primary data is based on the concept of Marx and Engels. The secondary data is collected from already published research articles, newspaper, magazines and thesis.

INTRODUCTION

Climate change is a long-term shift in temperature and weather patterns. Climate change may be a natural Phenomenon, But humans have induced it through green house gases. Greenhouse gases (CO₂, CH₄, N₂O, O₃, etc.) protect the earth, keep it warm, prevent it from freezing, and make life suitable for all species, including humans. However, human activities increased the amount of greenhouse gases, making heat trapped inside the earth's surface and making the world warmer and warmer; this is called the greenhouse effect. This greenhouse effect leads to global warming and climate change. The greenhouse effect is caused by human activities (industrialisation, privatisation, liberalisation, transportation, deforestation, consumption patterns, demands and others), resulting in greenhouse gases, and this leads to Climate change and global warming. Humans play a crucial role in environmental degradation, natural resource exploitation, biodiversity loss, pollution, global warming, and climate change.

The Earth has enough natural resources for all living things to begin. Every creature (other than the six senses) utilizes it wisely and gives back to it. But humans are the only creatures who don't use it but instead exploit it. Viciously, and they give back enormous amount of waste, polluting the environment and causing environmental degradation. 6th sense, humans often makes them forget that natural resources and other living creatures are essential for planet earth rather than their innovation, technological advancement, infrastructural development and others. All his actions develop humans' potential to exploit natural resources instead of protecting them. No creature has a family structure like humans and owns no property or resources to pass to its heirs. They do not exploit nature or environmental degradation if they have family and own property. In the sixth sense, humans constructed family structures, owning property and resources to their heirs and expanding them for generations. The 6th Sense of Humans authoritatively constructed the world as its private property, like every family constructed or constructing their property according to their capital. And they, themselves alienated from nature and the environment.

Human social groups will always have conflict. Many sociologists like K. Marx, Max Weber, G. Simmel, and M. Sheriff explained the conflict theory; the conflict between these groups can arise for various reasons such as religious beliefs, values, cultural and traditional norms, Socioeconomic-political or access to resources. We can understand the conflict theory by social conflict theory, which arises due to inequalities in the social structure. Conflict due to natural resources, power, authority, class, caste, and others. Realistic conflict theory: Intergroup conflict arises because of scarce resources. However, conflict is a normal part of a social structure. More or less, It brings excellent or positive outcomes and a change in social structure. The two theories state the alienation of social groups through conflicts within themselves or with other groups (between human social groups). And we have to notice the conflict between the human and nature. The conflict between humans and natural resources in nothing but an anthropogenic act. Humans alienated themselves from the wild environment. Environmental alienation is also one of the major causes of global warming and climate change.

The conflict between humans or a social group is inevitable. Like this, conflicts between humans and natural resources or the environment are unavoidable. The conflict between humans and their groups creates a favourable outcome queue, stations the inequalities, and provides solutions. However, the conflict between humans and natural resources will increase the disparity or inequalities and moreover, not given a positive outcome. Also, the conflict between the human social groups or classes may increase towards access to resources.

ENVIRONMENTAL ALIENATION

Environmental alienation may be a natural phenomenon. Since ancient times, there has been a conflict between humans and nature, but the level of exploitation and ecological degradation is lower. The capitalistic mindset and materialistic attitude catalysed the action; both focus on profit, economic growth, infrastructure development, technological advancement, etc., rather than on the natural resources and environment. Due to environmental alienation, families forget the role of the environment, so humans contribute to deforestation, industrialisation, transportation, high demand and consumption of fossil fuels, electricity and others, leading to increases in the amount of greenhouse gases and particulate matter (PM_{2.5} & PM₁₀)



FOSTER'S METABOLIC RIFT

The concept of metabolic rift captures “the material estrangement of human beings within capitalist society from the natural conditions which formed the basis for their existence. Thus, every family encourages the activities of capitalism through direct or indirect means as it favours them to buy more goods and services. In a social structure, the family plays a significant role in every aspect, as it now encourages natural resource exploitation, environmental degradation, climate change, and global warming. Sociologists state that the family is the primary institution in a social structure through functionalism, structural functionalism, and symbolic interaction. The primary institutions primarily focus on acquiring their own property, goods and services. This creates a conflict between the social groups and also the environment. According to conflict theory, the social order is maintained by domination and power; the people with wealth and power occupy resources. Every family acquires economic power and wealth to exploit resources directly or indirectly, with or without consciousness or awareness, alienating themselves from nature and the environment. The exploitation of nature is not a new thing for humans; it has been practised since ancient times, now due to technological development and the capitalistic nature of society. It took a new height.

UN ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME GLOBAL OUTLOOK RESOURCE 2024

The consumption of natural resources is set to increase by 60 per cent by 2060; natural resource extraction has soared almost 400 per cent since 1970 due to industrialisation, urbanisation, and population growth.

The stripping of natural resources is already responsible for 60 per cent of global health impacts. It includes land use change, 40% of air pollution, and 90% of global water stress and land-related biodiversity loss.

GLOBAL MEAN TEMPERATURE

The global mean temperature for the past 12 months (Feb 2023- Feb 2024) was the highest on record. It was 1.52 degrees Celsius above the 1850-1900 pre-industrial average. (European Climate Agency). Here, conflict theory primarily focuses on the unequal distribution of resources between a family group and its individual and its reflection on patterns of unequal society.

FAMILY

Family is the primary unit of social structure. Family Structure has many roots in cultural aspects as it has now turned into patriarchy from gynocracy. And the emergence of the Monogamous nuclear family paved the way for the idea of private property. The Matrilineal form of descent has ended, because the men didn't have clear heirs. Therefore, “the matriarchal law of inheritance has been overthrown, the male line of descent and the paternal law of inheritance were substituted from them.” The transition of family structure from matriarchy to patriarchy is a historical defeat for feminism. For Engels, the result was “the world historical defeat of the female sex.

- The man took command in home also;
- Women was degraded and reduced to servitude;
- She became the slave of his lust and
- A mere instrument of production of children.” (Engles, The origin of family, Private property, and the state 1884(Tamil), Page no; 85,86,87)

By this, we came to know that the patriarchal society exploits women, but the matriarchy society doesn't use men. In a matriarchal family structure, the property is not passed to heirs, but through a communal approach, the property and resources are shared. In a patriarchal family, the property and natural resources are passed to their heirs (male heirs). The idea of private property had a close relationship with the patriarchal family system and the system of the monogamous nuclear family. The transition of the family from matriarchy to patriarchy converted the family structure into a capitalistic structure. The attitude of a family towards private property and materialism caused the exploitation of natural resources and environmental degradation. Engles argued that, The exclusive relation between one man and one woman emerged as a way to ensure the passing down of private property within the ruling class. He also argued that this family structure was not the natural or inherent form of the family but rather a product of historical and economic development. "In Engels' view, the monogamous nuclear family emerged with capitalism. Before capitalism, traditional and tribal societies were classless and did not have private property. Instead, property was collectively owned, and this was reflected in family structures. Rather than the modern nuclear family, family tribal groups existed in groups where there were no restrictions on sexual relationships. This means that Engels believed that anyone could have sexual relations with anyone else in the tribal group, and multiple partners (Stern, 1948).However, the emergence of capitalism, a system of private ownership, changed society and the family. The bourgeoisie, or capitalist class, used their personal wealth to



invest in businesses in order to make a profit which they did not invest for the benefit of everyone else. Eventually, the bourgeois started to look for ways of creating intergenerational wealth, rather than having it distributed among the masses of society." <https://www.simplypsychology.org/functions-of-the-family-marxism.html>

CAPITALISTIC FAMILY AND ITS DEMAND

Capitalism is a system where private individuals or organisations own the means of production and operate them for profit. "Marx states capitalism is an exploitation of labour where they sell their labour power for wages. The capitalism creates a inequality in the social structure between the capitalist (bourgeoisie) and the working class (proletariat)". <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/m/marxism.asp> We can take the classes as a family group; the bourgeoisie and proletariat will have families; however, the bourgeoisie works for their families and passes their property and resources to their heirs. The proletariat also works for his family, gains property and resources, and passes them on to their heirs. The social structure is divided into,

- Bourgeoisie family
- Proletariat family

Both the bourgeoisie family and proletariat family exploit the natural resources according to their capital. The bourgeoisie works for their family and owns property and resources, according to their capital, whereas the proletariat family also does the same according to their capital. The materialistic attitude and consumption of goods and services are similar to the family, but according to their capital. For instance, the bourgeoisie owns industries, mines, and other production units and produces surplus products to sell in the market or satisfy the demand of the proletariat families. However, many proletariat families consume enormous amounts of goods and services. Also, the proletariat family owns small properties like houses and other things—both the family has a capitalistic and materialistic attitude towards natural resources. The bourgeoisie family is the production unit, and the proletariat family is the consumption unit.

Marx and Engles argued that the economy is the central driving force in history. The evolution of human society is driven by economic factors or materialism, especially using production. It played a significant role in shaping the socio-political and cultural attributes. (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/historical-materialism>)

Capitalistic attitudes not only indulged in the mind of the bourgeoisie but also corrupted the mind of proletariats. Thus, every family has evolved into a capitalist concerning the exploitation of natural resources—the competition of production within the bourgeoisie and competition between proletariats for the consumption of goods. Thus, capitalism comes in, and Natural resources go out.

DEMAND

Consumers' demand and consumption is more or less based on their social institutions like religion, culture, and others or by the income levels of an individual or a social group; we can say that The consumer's demand is based on socioeconomic factors and the consumption patterns of a family or a social group. However it varies during a specific period. A social group or a community demands or consumes a product according to its social values or norms. But the production is not merely based on this. A Capitalist has the ability to penetrate their product in a society. But, as families now shift towards capitalistic action through a worldly form of consumption. A family and its demands are not based on what we need to survive. The consumption family explicitly states that consumption is not for need but for greed. As Marx, argued the evolution of human society is driven by economic factor or materialism especially using production. The materialistic factor urges them to occupy excess of goods. Like the capitalist makes surplus production to make a profit, the proletariat family makes excessive consumption or demand. However, greed is not only the soul factor but also the Pull factor of the market and Push factor of the society.

For instance, the Pull factor: capitalism induces surplus or overproduction. The surplus production mismatches the supply and demand. Excess supply pushes the capitalist to sell its product by lowering the prices, by advertisement or government intervention, a cultural invasion, or a change in fashion and technology. Example: A capitalist offers his goods or product for free and makes consumers consume. This drags more consumers and makes them consume. The capitalist continues his offers until they become regular basic needs, and thus, it changes the pattern of the family unit. This strategy continues until the product becomes an actual demand. Push factor: Factors like conspicuous consumption, defensive consumption, credit system, net disposable income, which urges a person to spend on non-essential goods, like luxury items or others. This pushes a family towards a capitalistic means of consumption. Marx viewed capitalism as part of a historical progression of economic systems. He believed capitalism was rooted in commodities or purchasing and selling things. In capitalism, every



family and individual is developed into a capitalist due to economic factors and structural or technological advancement. The sense of capitalism is a sense of profit and competition. Here, the social values and norms and healthy being will fade away. And the material gain will be prioritized for their socioeconomic status. Conspicuous consumerism: wealthy individuals use relative differentials in the cost and quality of commodities to distinguish their status from those with less wealth. In aiming to maintain or improve status via “conspicuous consumption,” Veblen analysed luxury consumption as primarily competitive and for their necessity. Defensive consumerism: here, an individual consumes goods or materials to maintain his social status or value but not for his needs. They finish a product despite fear of exclusion in a social group. By this, an individual or a family consumes goods and services to project their economic wealth as it provides social value. One family or an individual will compare with others through the consumption of materials or goods, competing with each other.

Every family prioritises the materials or goods, as they are labelled as the social value of an individual or a family. Consider your house with no A/C, refrigerator or washing machine; what sense of question will arise around you? The question around you doesn't favour your action. Here, we tend to move on accordingly to defensive consumption. Consider your house with A/C, refrigerator and washing machine which are old technology and model? Again, The question around you doesn't favour you. We move on accordingly to conspicuous consumption. All these technological innovations and advancements favoured humans and reduced their work. So, these innovations or technological advancements must ultimately reduce human work efficiency. Not to showcase their social value. But this has been upgraded to human value. Machines are invented to work for us so that we can make some time for rest or with our family or others. Instead, we have been working for it all over the years. The machines need to work for us instead; we are working hours and hours to attain all these. And spend their life on the attainment of materials.

A proletariat exploits itself and also by the bourgeoisie. The proletariat moreover aims for goods like bikes, cars, A/C, washing machines, luxury items, and others that will depreciate over the years, but they will pay EMI yearly for their depreciating goods; all their life goes through the attainment of materials which not even benefit economically. Though they know it creates a work pressure and financial constraints but they like to involve in these action, because it gives a social value, fulfilment. In capitalism, a family and its individual attain fulfilment satisfaction or happiness through the consumption of materials. The system of materialistic fulfilment is induced or encouraged by the capitalist. Thus, the individual alienates himself from their true nature and acts like a capitalist using the consumption of goods. Happiness or satisfaction or social value in a capitalistic society is acquiring abundant goods or materials the action desired by the capitalist.

Here, the term capitalistic family states that, the family is an important social institution to shape a society. The family and individual are integrated. In a society, a role may vary according to his ability, but he also has a role in the family. An individual belongs to a family. The family shapes the individual and also the society. An individual in social structure learns their cultural norms, religion, and traditional values from his/her family. Thus, the family transfers it to further generations. Currently, the family focuses on materialism rather than culture and tradition or any values; even the conventional and religious values are expressed in the way of economy or wealth. Also the activity education, leisure time, hobbies, apparel and others must be luxurious, and the social structure emphasizes this, that we live in that way. As everyone tends to ask about your pay or income, assets and property, that pay or income or property or assets projects our purchasing power and it shows our value in society.

Thus, the actions of a family and an individual emphasize the materialistic and capitalistic attitude. Where the family is not taken care of in any way other than the economy or wealth, the emotional support between the family members is being reduced, and all kinds of education are projected to improve the family social status or their economy. The primary objective of the family is to create a suitable economy or wealth for their survival and also for their heirs. Capitalism's attitude is transferred to further generations; as society is modified, economic wealth is the only means of survival. Thus every family struck in this structure by them or by capitalism. Thus, every family is changed into a capitalistic family. Capitalism encourages Individualism, Competition, Private ownership, Exploitation of labour and natural resources, and Capitalistic Consumerism. The capitalistic family encourages Individualism, Competition, Private property, Exploitation occurs within family and natural resources, and Capitalistic consumerism.

A Family and its individual's fulfilment, satisfaction, happiness, identity or social value is measured or analysed according to their purchasing power, consumption of goods (conspicuous and defensive), materialistic consumption, economic success, wealth. By this, a social structure lacks self-fulfilment, creativity, leisure time and other social values, which will be fulfilled through our purchasing power. The conflict or disparity in the



environment makes a plant animal or other creatures adopt the environment or die. Similarly, the conflict between the social group has diluted, and conflict between the family group has increased, as every family is isolated. Therefore, conflict arises between the families. The conflict is not based on socio-political or cultural norms. But through economic and materialistic values or through materialistic competition.

HUMANS THE GRADED EXPLOITERS

Dr B. R. Ambedkar stated that caste is graded inequality, which means people exploit or discriminate each another by the name of caste, where the caste hierarchy is vicious cycle of discrimination. Every human is a capitalist, and exploits nature and the environment according to their capital and the level of technological advancement they have. Here, humans are the graded exploiters of natural resources and the environment. For instance, comparing two bikes, BIKE A mileage of 60km/litre and BIKE B bike of 25km/litre, BIKE B is superior in all aspects concerning looks, speed or others other than mileage. Both bikes emit harmful gases, and both depend on fuel, but comparatively, BIKE A emits a low net amount of toxic gases and consumes a low amount of fuel. But due to conspicuous consumption, we tend to buy BIKE B. Instead, we can choose BIKE A. By this, we contribute to the earth. Like this, we must reduce our consumption of every good and service which adheres to environmental degradation and climate change. With a social consciousness, we must pick every good and service that is eco-friendly. But, however every goods or product needs raw material, the raw material need to be extract from the natural resource, it need a production unit or plant that releases solid and liquid wastes, emits harmful gases, by this we involves in embodied GHG emission, Embodied carbon—also known as embodied greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions—refers to the amount of GHG emissions associated with upstream—extraction, production, transport, and manufacturing—stages of a product’s life. And also the consider the usage of water(virtual water) and further the usage of products like AC, refrigerator, conventional vehicles and others emits harmful GHG and we have to dispose the product at the end of its lifecycle. Embodied carbon emissions also consider emissions associated with the use of a product and its disposal. Though it recycled it emit the harmful gases. However we are, we cannot exclude us from the exploitation of natural resources and environmental degradation, but we can able to cut off the unwanted consumption of goods and services and the energy resources.

CONCLUSION: HUMAN THE BOURGEOISIE

Consumerism, conspicuous and defensive consumption, demand, capitalistic production, technology advancement and infrastructural development rupture the natural resources and depletes it. Thus, these action catalysed the tension between humans and natural resources and other living creatures, and this tension or conflict develops into a disparity and creates an imbalance between human societies and also with the natural environment. An individual or human is a byproduct of the family; as stated, every family has evolved into a capitalistic family. A family transforms his ideas and values to his further generation. Thus, in an environmental society, Humans are developed into a bourgeoisie; other living creatures and natural resources are the proletariat. Human. The proletariat’s natural resources work for their survival and their action benefit the earth and protect the environment. But humans (bourgeoisie) extracts all these surplus value from the nature(proletariat). They rupture natural resources and in every aspects. Just to satisfy their needs and greed’s, they exploit the resources. For instance, Forest often refereed as Lungs of earth, it absorbs carbon dioxide(first largest contributor to global warming), produces oxygen, rich in biodiversity. But through deforestation the humans rupture the forest resource for their goods, for their infrastructural development activities and others activities like encroachment ,building resorts etc. We can relate this event with every natural resources that exist and extinct. The human alienates the natural resources, Like the capitalist alienates the worker, thus we can clearly explicit that human bourgeoisie exploits and alienates the proletariat’s natural resources(includes environmental) for their profit, economic position, social value, consumption pattern, lifestyles etc. Not all the humans are Bourgeoisie, but every Bourgeoisie is a human.

REFERENCES

1. Engles(1884), *The origin of family, Private property, and the state.*
2. United Nations Environment Programme. (2024, January 31). Raw materials extraction to double by 2060, UN report finds. *The Guardian*.
<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/jan/31/raw-materials-extraction-2060-un-report>
3. *The Down to Earth*. (2024, February 26). Extraction of raw materials could rise 60% by 2060 and making mining greener won't stop the damage. Retrieved from
<https://www.downtoearth.org.in/blog/energy/extraction-of-raw-materials-could-rise-60-by-2060-and-making-mining-greener-won-t-stop-the-damage-94516>
4. Foster, John Bellamy (March 2000). *Marx's Ecology: Materialism and Nature* New York: Monthly Review Press
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metabolic_rift#:~:text=The%20concept%20of%20metabolic%20rift%20captures%20the%20material%20estrangement%20of,the%20importance%20of%20historical%20change.



5. *The Hindu*. (2024, February 8). January 2024 warmest on record: European climate agency. *The Hindu*. Retrieved from <https://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/science/january-2024-warmest-on-record-european-climate-agency/article67824016.ece>
6. Marx & Engels (1867) *The communist manifesto and Marx (1867) Das Kapital* Investopedia. (n.d.). Conflict Theory. Retrieved from <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/c/conflict-theory.asp>
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. "What is Embodied Carbon?" EPA. Accessed March 4, 2024. Retrieved from <https://www.epa.gov/greenerproducts/what-embodied-carbon>
7. Veblen(1899) *Leisure class theory*, wiley online library ,positional economy and defensive consumption. Retrieved from [https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/cars.12137#:~:text=THEORIZING%20THE%20POSITIONAL%20ECONOMY%20AND%20DEFENSIVE%20CONSUMPTION,The%20positional%20nature&text=I%20Veblen's%20\(1899\),from%20those%20with%20less%20wealth](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/cars.12137#:~:text=THEORIZING%20THE%20POSITIONAL%20ECONOMY%20AND%20DEFENSIVE%20CONSUMPTION,The%20positional%20nature&text=I%20Veblen's%20(1899),from%20those%20with%20less%20wealth)