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Coloniality of Waste: Foreign Policy, Toxic Exports, and India's Ecological Futures

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Abstract: The current paper examines India's ecological precarity as it becomes a major destination for hazardous and discarded materials from wealthier nations. Rather than a neutral byproduct of globalization, the influx of e-waste, plastics, and decommissioned ships represents a continuation of colonial patterns where environmental risk is displaced onto the Global South. Through the critical examination of Assa Doron and Robin Jeffrey's *Waste of a Nation* (2018) and Jennifer Clapp's *Toxic Exports* (2001), the present paper examines how India's ecology and labour systems are entangled with foreign policy decisions and global trade regimes. The study employs textual analysis of these key works alongside policy examination of the Basel Convention (Basel Convention, 1989), the Basel Ban Amendment (1995), and India's 2019 prohibition on plastic waste imports by MoEFCC (Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, 2019). Case studies of Alang's shipbreaking yards and urban e-waste hubs illustrate how toxic inflows affect not only landscapes but also the lives of marginalized workers who bear the health and social consequences of hazardous recycling. By foregrounding India's position as both a site of ecological vulnerability and of resistance, this paper argues that foreign policies and global trade logics treat India as a dumping ground while local activism and regulatory shifts attempt to contest this ecological injustice. The central argument is that imagining sustainable futures requires reframing foreign policy as an ecological responsibility, where justice and accountability are prioritized over economic convenience.

Keywords: *India, Hazardous Waste, Foreign Policy, Environmental Justice, Coloniality, Ecological Precarity*

Introduction

"Rich people can persuade themselves they've gone green because they recycle, while forgetting they have a second home" (Monbiot). This observation captures the core issue of waste colonialism, the pattern by which wealthy nations offload hazardous waste onto less wealthy regions under the label of globalization. This phenomenon is very explicit in India. In the recent decades, India has emerged as a major destination for toxic exports of e-waste, plastics, and decommissioned ships from the Global North. Far from being a neutral side-effect of trade, these transboundary waste flows replicate historic relations of extraction and injustice, displacing environmental risks on the Global South. Waste colonialism, as conceptualized by contemporary scholars, describes pollution as "not a manifestation or side effect of colonialism but is rather an enactment of ongoing colonial relations to Land" (Liboiron 6; Fuller et al. 540).

The present paper applies critical textual analysis to the two primary works including Doron and Jeffrey's *Waste of a Nation* and Jennifer Clapp's *Toxic Exports*, in conjunction with a close reading of key policy instruments such as the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal (1989), the Basel Ban Amendment (Decision III/1, 1995), and India's Hazardous and Other Wastes (Management and Transboundary Movement) Rules, including the 2019 plastic waste import ban (MoEFCC, 2019). The study also incorporates a case study approach, examining Alang's shipbreaking industry and major urban e-waste clusters to highlight the tangible outcomes of policy choices. Grounded in environmental justice theory (Fuller et al. 2022), post-colonial perspectives, and material ethics (Hawkins ; Davis), the analysis explores how colonial logics continue to shape present-day waste flows and how various forms of resistance contest these entrenched structures.

Assa Doron and Robin Jeffrey's *Waste of a Nation: Garbage and Growth in India* (2018) offers an expansive socio historical account of India's escalating waste crisis amid accelerated urban expansion and economic development. The authors illustrate how India's shift toward mass consumption and disposable culture is complicated by entrenched caste-based hierarchies and structural inequality. Doron and Jeffrey underline that,

> If a Swachh Bharat (Clean India) is to be achieved, it
> will be a place where the waste of a nation does not include poor and
> marginalized people but is restricted to inanimate matter—minimized,
> collected, neutralized, and reused in ways that provide models for other
> places in an environmentally fragile world. (Getting to Know Garbage, para. 11)

This shows how historically backward and marginalized communities disproportionately shoulder the burden of managing society's discards. Their study traverses varied sites of waste labour, from informal waste pickers negotiating sprawling landfills to the hazardous shipbreaking yards of Alang, Gujarat, where migrant workers dismantle toxic vessels under perilous conditions. Through this analysis, the book establishes that waste management in India is far more than a technocratic problem, instead functioning as a deeply social and political terrain shaped by questions of dignity, labour precarity, and environmental justice. As Doron and Jeffrey further demonstrate, caste continues to structure waste work in India, with communities assigned to refuse handling facing persistent stigma and material risk (Doron & Jeffrey, Caste).

Jennifer Clapp's *Toxic Exports: The Transfer of Hazardous Wastes from Rich to Poor Countries* (2001) offers a sharp political economic critique of the global hazardous waste trade. Clapp shows that the mechanisms of hazard transfer are constantly shifting, with efforts to restrict one form of toxic export prompting new strategies to appear (ix). She traces the shift from the open dumping practices of the 1980s to the recycling loophole of the 1990s, when hazardous waste was reclassified as recyclable material to evade regulation. Her analysis demonstrates how economic globalization facilitates the relocation of environmental harm through intricate trade and investment networks, while international governance systems struggle to match the pace of waste traders' innovations. Through her examination of environmental advocacy groups and industry lobbying efforts, Clapp argues that the Basel Convention emerged as a regulatory compromise that controlled but did not eliminate hazardous waste flows.

While existing research extensively addresses domestic waste management in India and global hazardous waste trade regimes, there is a scarcity of studies that integrate these areas through the specific analytical framework of foreign policy as a mechanism of ecological responsibility. Contemporary research predominantly views waste imports as either failures in environmental governance or issues of trade regulation, seldom examining how foreign policy decisions create structural ecological vulnerabilities and perpetuate neo-colonial hierarchies. Additionally, the historical continuities between classical colonialism and modern waste colonialism are inadequately theorized in the Indian context. Sridhar and Kumar note that the term "waste colonialism" originated in the late 1980s to characterize the transfer of toxic waste from developed to developing nations; however, its profound implications for rethinking international relations and global power imbalances remain largely unexplored (104).

Relevance of Study

The selected works are necessary for making sense of India's current waste situation. Doron and Jeffrey provide detailed ethnographic insights into the manifestation of transnational waste flows within particular Indian geographies, ranging from the perilous shipbreaking coast of Alang to the

concentrated e-waste processing centres of Moradabad and Seelampur. Their documentation illuminates the communities whose labour sustains the nation's waste economy, anchoring macro-level discussions in lived experience. Clapp's analysis goes into more detail about the international political and economic systems that let dangerous materials into India. It talks about the regulatory gaps, unfair trade agreements, and global power dynamics that keep waste colonialism going. The two works together show how global policy frameworks and the everyday realities of toxic exposure in India are linked.

Gay Hawkins's conceptual insights strengthen this discussion by offering an ethical lens that shows "waste isn't a fixed category of things; it is an effect of classification and relations" (2), highlighting how waste practices shape ethical orientations and political identities. Similarly, Heather Davis's idea of "plastic matter" demonstrates how synthetic materials embody colonial notions of "synthetic universality," designed to appear as if they originate from nowhere (5). Together, these frameworks clarify how the materiality of waste enables its movement across borders, reinforcing the dynamics of waste colonialism. Integrating these perspectives allows the study to extend environmental justice and international relations scholarship by framing hazardous waste transfer not simply as a regulatory problem, but as a foreign policy issue requiring ethical accountability and structural rethinking.

Historical Continuities: From Colonial Extraction to Waste Imperialism

Long standing patterns of North South inequality form the structural backdrop against which contemporary hazardous waste flows must be understood. Under formal colonial rule, imperial administrations extracted vast resources from colonies such as India while offloading environmental degradation onto local populations. It is evident that the British colonial state privileged extraction over infrastructural investment, leaving sanitation and waste management systems profoundly underdeveloped. The ecological burdens of empire were thus borne by communities who lacked political representation and had minimal control over environmental governance. In the postcolonial period, this dynamic has reappeared in an inverted form: hazardous wastes and discarded commodities now move from industrialized nations to developing regions, reproducing colonial hierarchies in a contemporary technocratic idiom. Environmental scholars conceptualize this as "toxic colonialism" or "garbage imperialism," underscoring how the global geography of waste continues to reflect the asymmetries embedded in colonial history (Clapp 31-32). Thus, it becomes evident that the expansion of hazardous waste exports to the Global South must be interpreted through the lens of colonial continuities, as these transnational waste circuits materialize long standing economic and political dependencies. Contemporary waste flows follow what Davis calls "transmission," where racialized and poor communities inherit the burdens of plastics they did not produce (6). Wealthy nations preserve

their environmental quality by exporting pollution to poorer regions, reproducing the same extractive logics that shaped colonial domination.

The continuity between colonial resource extraction and contemporary waste dumping was made explicit in a notorious 1991 World Bank memo by Lawrence Summers, then the Bank's chief economist. Summers argued, supposedly in provocative jest that "the economic logic behind dumping a load of toxic waste in the lowest wage country is impeccable" (Clapp 1). He observed that Africa was "vastly under-polluted" and suggested that low-income countries should absorb more toxic waste since the cost of health impacts would be monetarily less there (1). Though widely condemned for its callousness when leaked to the press in 1992, the memo revealed the prevailing mindset in some economic circles: environmental risk could be treated as just another commodity to allocate through global markets, with the lives of the poor valued less in the calculus. As Fuller et al. observe in their analysis of waste colonialism, "African countries expressed their concern that low gross domestic product (GDP) countries were being used as disposal sites for 'developed' high GDP countries' waste" (539).

By the 1980s, mounting environmental regulations and NIMBY ("Not In My Backyard") protests in the North drove up toxic waste disposal costs from a few dollars per ton to hundreds (Clapp 23). Facing local resistance, companies sought cheaper dumps abroad, often in countries with weak regulations or desperate for foreign exchange. Clapp documents numerous incidents, including Philadelphia's toxic incinerator ash that roamed the oceans in 1986, eventually being dumped on a beach in Haiti under false pretences (33-34). Such incidents underscored a new form of environmental subjugation where postcolonial nations became the trash bins for wealthier societies' hazardous detritus. Recent scholarship on waste colonialism emphasizes how "current waste allocation practices remain tied to colonial systems that continue to harm Indigenous peoples" and marginalized communities globally (Lam & Kohm 344). These practices constitute "pollution as colonialism," wherein waste transfer enacts ongoing colonial relations to land without consent of affected communities (Liboiron 36; Fuller et al. 542).

Upon tracing India's history, it can be brought to light that during British rule, sanitation and waste systems were neglected as colonial authorities focused on extracting resources rather than improving public welfare (Doron & Jeffrey, Preface). As Davis notes, "the first landfill in India was created by the British during their occupation of the subcontinent" (5), setting up disposal practices that still shape the present. However, after independence, India's economic liberalization in the 1990s opened the country to global markets, allowing waste to enter under labels like recycling or raw material trade. By the late 1980s, developing countries began resisting this trend, leading to the Basel Convention of 1989.

> The solidarity of developing countries and the strong relationship between environmental NGOs and developing countries that was apparent in the late I 98os and early I 99os may be weakened by further delay in the ratification of the ban amendment. Several developing countries, including India, Senegal, Brazil, and the Philippines, have been courted by industry groups in an attempt to win them over to their point of view. This strategy may be working. India, for example, broke ranks with the majority of developing countries and called for a review of the Basel Convention's rules on exports at COP-5. (Clapp 158)

Yet, as later sections show, international agreements did not fully stop toxic waste flows, revealing how deeply rooted these colonial patterns remain.

Policy and Trade Regimes: Achievements and Limitations

The global governance of hazardous waste has been largely reactive and struggling to keep pace with the shifting tactics of waste exporters. The Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal, adopted on March 22, 1989, was a landmark accord aimed at preventing egregious dumping of toxic wastes in developing countries. It states that prior informed consent is required for hazardous waste shipments and obliges exporting nations to ensure environmentally sound management (Clapp 39). The convention established important principles but was a compromise measure as it regulated waste trade but did not prohibit it outright. Clapp argues that a key weakness of such regulations is that they address one loophole only for waste traders to exploit another (3). When direct dumping for disposal was restricted, companies began labelling hazardous waste shipments as “recycling” or “reuse” to evade scrutiny. The Basel Convention’s rules inadvertently encouraged this shift since the treaty allows trade for recycling purposes with consent (58). By the 1990s, “recycling” had become a convenient fig leaf for sending rich countries’ waste abroad. This is identified as the dynamic nature of hazard transfer where, the efforts to stop one form of toxic export simply prompt new forms to emerge (3).

However, this international treaty also suffered from definitional ambiguities. Key terms like “environmentally sound management” and “hazardous waste” were defined vaguely, making enforcement difficult (Clapp 56). Each country maintained different definitions of hazardous waste, creating inconsistencies. Additionally, the prior notification procedure lacked robust monitoring mechanisms, as the Basel Convention secretariat was not given powers to inspect agreements or apply sanctions (57). The Article 4, 9 (a) in Basel Convention text states,

> Parties shall take the appropriate measures to ensure that the transboundary movement of hazardous wastes and other wastes only be allowed if…The State of export does not have the technical capacity and the necessary facilities, capacity or suitable disposal sites in order to dispose of the wastes in question in an environmentally sound and efficient manner. (Secretariat of the Basel Convention 17)

However, enforcement of these provisions remained weak. Recognizing the limitations of the Basel Convention, many developing nations and environmental activists pushed for a total ban on waste exports from OECD to non-OECD countries. This led to the Basel Ban Amendment, adopted in 1995 through Decision III/1, to prohibit hazardous waste exports for any reason including recycling from the wealthiest countries to the rest of the world. The Basel Ban Amendment embodied the principle that no country should have to bear the toxic burden of others' consumption (3, 15). The Basel Action Network documents that this victory for international environmental justice was achieved despite powerful opposition from such countries as the United States, Australia, Germany, Canada, Japan and the United Kingdom. India strongly supported this effort and aligned its national regulations with Basel principles. The Conference of the Parties adopted Decision III/1 at its third meeting to amend the Convention by adding, inter alia, a new Article 4A. The new amendment prohibits each Party included in the proposed new Annex VII of all transboundary movements to States not included in Annex VII of hazardous wastes covered by the Convention that are intended for final disposal, and of all transboundary movements destined for reuse, recycling or recovery operations, thus covering both disposal and recovery (Secretariat of the Basel Convention 14). However, the Amendment faced long delays in entering into force because it required acceptance by at least three-quarters of the Parties; this threshold was finally reached in 2019, and the Ban Amendment entered into force on 5 December 2019, almost twenty-four years after its adoption. During this interim period, hazardous waste exports to countries such as India continued, both legally under existing rules and illegally through mislabelling or other violations. The United States, one of the largest generators of hazardous waste, has still not ratified the Basel Convention, which means that, under Article 4(5), Parties are generally prohibited from trading hazardous wastes with it; trade can occur only through separate bilateral or regional agreements under Article 11 (Secretariat of the Basel Convention 27; International Agreements).

India's Domestic Waste Regulations Evolution

India's domestic policy responses evolved in this context of incomplete international control. India's first Hazardous Waste Rules came in 1989, concurrent with global awareness. Over time, India updated these rules in 2000, 2003, 2008 and fixed them with the Hazardous and Other Wastes (Management & Transboundary Movement) Rules in 2016. This tightened import restrictions and brought India into closer alignment with Basel obligations. India for years was a significant importer of used plastic scrap and PET bottles, feeding a domestic recycling sector. However, when China, which was previously the

world's largest plastics importer, had shut its doors in 2018, a glut of plastic waste sought new destinations. In fiscal year 2017–18, India's imports of PET bottle scrap and flakes increased from about 12,000 tonnes in 2016–17 to about 48,000 tonnes, a nearly four-fold rise, as exporters redirected plastic waste away from China toward alternative markets such as India (Amrit B.L.S.). Fearing India would become the "world's dumping ground" for plastics after China's exit, the Indian government took a dramatic step. In March 2019, India amended the Hazardous and Other Wastes (Management & Transboundary Movement) Rules, 2016 to completely prohibit the import of solid plastic waste and scrap, closing earlier exemptions for Special Economic Zones and Export Oriented Units (Hazardous and Other Wastes Amendment Rules 2019, 4). This policy shift was celebrated by environmentalists as India asserting its right not to absorb others' garbage. The government framed the ban as promoting management of India's own plastic waste and curbing pollution in line with Swachh Bharat (Clean India) goals.

In September 2022, the government revised the import policy for polyethylene terephthalate (PET) flakes so that, although PET bottle waste and scrap remained prohibited, PET flakes themselves could be imported under a restricted regime requiring an authorisation from the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) and a no-objection certificate from the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (Directorate General of Foreign Trade). The rationale cited was a domestic shortage of PET waste for recycling, with several Indian firms claiming they needed to import tens of thousands of tonnes of used plastic bottles from abroad to meet demand. This development sparked outrage among environmental NGOs, who argued there is no real shortage of PET domestically. Instead, importing waste undermines efforts to improve local collection and recycling systems. The back-and-forth around the plastic waste ban underscores how foreign trade interests can conflict with environmental policy. It also highlights India's dual role: while being victimized by waste dumping, India is also a rising economic power with its own industries that sometimes benefit from cheap imported waste. The Supreme Court of India has affirmed that allowing the country to become a dumping ground for foreign hazardous waste violates the fundamental right to life under Article 21, and hence State requires to prevent hazardous waste imports that endanger health and the environment (Moyna). Thus, on paper, India has both international commitments and judicial mandates to refuse being a dumping ground. The challenge lies in translating these into proactive foreign policy.

Alang Shipbreaking Yards: Scale and Operations

In India, the coloniality of waste is clearly visible in sites such as the shipbreaking yards at inscribed in landscapes like Alang in Gujarat. Alang is a stretch of coast along the Gulf of Khambhat. Since the early 1980s, it has been transformed into one of the world's largest shipbreaking yards (Doron & Jeffrey, Ships, Par 2). "Gangs of workers cut up the ship by hand to recycle the steel and extract everything from lifeboats to kitchen crockery and bathroom fixtures for resale" (par 3). This industry

migrated from the developed world, where labour and environmental regulations made shipbreaking costly, to countries like India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan. From the perspective of shipping companies, sending old ships to Alang is economical recycling. They receive payment for the steel scrap. From the perspective of global waste flows, however, each ship carries a toxic payload. Decommissioned ships are laden with asbestos, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), residual fuel sludges, and heavy metals in paints (Clapp 101). A retired ship is essentially hazardous waste, but it is not officially treated as such until it is sent for scrapping. This loophole allowed large quantities of toxic substances to enter India for decades in the name of importing ships for reuse and dismantling. Recent studies confirm that "shipbreaking activities release hazardous wastes (namely, oil, asbestos, other landfillable wastes, and incinerable wastes) that harm both workers' health and surrounding environments" (Rizvi et al. 9). At its peak, Alang encompassed 140 spaces on the shoreline where ships could be beached and torn apart, with more than 140 companies involved in the business (Doron & Jeffrey, Ships, Par 3). The advantage of the location lies in the great tidal variations in the Gulf of Khambhat which has a difference of ten meters between high and low tides on some occasions. A ship can be driven far up the shore at high tide until it is firmly beached, and at low tide, workers begin the dangerous process of dismantling. Poddar observes that India's shipbreaking uses the beaching method, which is labour-intensive and generates employment, but also poses hazards to labourers and the environment (264).

The labour conditions in Alang highlight the human cost of waste coloniality. Working with little more than blowtorches and hammers, teams of migrant labourers manually dismantle these leviathans, often lacking proper protective gear or training. Accidents are frequent where workers have been crushed by falling steel plates, caught in explosions, or sickened by exposure to toxic fumes. According to the Shipbreaking Platform, since 2009, at least 470 workers have died while working in shipbreaking yards, with common causes being heavy steel beams and plates that fall and kill workers, as well as explosions and fires (Guenin). In India, waste collectors range from large ship-breaking firms in Alang that purchase obsolete oceangoing vessels on the global market to individual bicycle-riding *kabaadiwalas* going door to door. Between these extremes are small traders like Sanjay in Varanasi, whom Doron met, buy from scavengers and scan auction listings for surplus government materials. Such auctions typically offer items like transformers, air conditioners, vehicles, office furniture, and various metals (Doron and Jeffrey, Rebirth, Par 13). The International Labour Organization (ILO) warned in 2015 that "shipbreaking has grown into a major occupational and environmental health problem in the world. It is amongst the most dangerous of occupations, with unacceptably high levels of fatalities, injuries, and work-related diseases" (Gupta and Schröder). Studies have documented prevalent chronic illnesses among shipbreakers, asbestosis and cancers from asbestos inhalation, neurological damage from heavy metal exposure, and skin diseases (Trading Lives for Profit). For a pittance, roughly a few dollars a day, these men, mostly from poor regions like Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh, literally trade their health for scrap. "Workers often lack basic protective

gear, such as gloves and masks, and adequate training, making them vulnerable to injuries and health issues" (Guenin). Environmentally, Alang's once blue waters and golden sands have been turned into a toxic graveyard. Oily ballast water and paint chips have contaminated the tidal zone and the analysis shows elevated heavy metals and carcinogens in the soil and water around the yards (Doron & Jeffrey, Ships).

Urban E-Waste Hubs: Moradabad and Seelampur

If Alang is a graveyard for ships, India's cities have become graveyards for the world's electronic junk. Places like Seelampur in Delhi and Moradabad in Uttar Pradesh have become notorious as e-waste processing centres. The majority of e-waste generated globally are recycled informally in developing countries. Informal recycling involves the use of crude methods (such as open burning, dismantling, and repair) to recover valuable materials without adequate precaution to health and the environment. Moradabad, once known as a city of brass craftsmen, saw its traditional industry decline after the 2008 global financial crisis. Into that void came a new livelihood that is of extracting metals from imported electronic scrap. Doron and Jeffrey's investigative account reveals how Moradabad's economy pivoted the skilled metalworkers who turned their furnaces from brass to e-waste, as "streams of electronic goods began arriving from across the country and beyond" (Electronics, Par 11). In Moradabad, workers still face serious health risks from handling electronic waste.

The processing methods used in Moradabad and similar hubs are extremely primitive and harmful. In the predominantly Muslim slum quarter along the Ramganga River, entire families engage in e-waste recycling. Men bash open old computer monitors and TVs, women and children sort through piles of circuit boards and components by hand (Doron & Jeffrey, Electronics, Par 13). Statistics indicate that 50% of all printed circuit boards from devices used within India end up in Moradabad for recycling (Electronics, Par 11). In 2010 India generated about 300,000 tonnes of e-waste, but an additional 500,000 tonnes were imported (mostly illegally) that year, making India "the e-waste dumping ground of Asia" (Association for Progressive Communications). The valuable fractions are then extracted by crude techniques like burning wires and circuit boards over open fires to melt off plastic and isolate metals, acid bathing of printed circuit boards to dissolve and recover gold and other trace precious metals, and grinding and washing charred electronic residues to scavenge copper and lead. These processes release a series of toxins including lead, mercury, cadmium, brominated flame retardants, into the air, soil, water, and the lungs of workers (Electronics). Recent systematic reviews confirm that exposure to e-waste emissions can cause headaches, mood swings, memory loss in adult workers, and other chronic diseases (Fischer et al. 8). Parvez et al. document in their comprehensive review that "exposure to e-waste-induced toxic chemicals disrupted thyroid function and had endocrine-disrupting effects on sex hormones", with vulnerable populations including children facing the greatest risks (909). As Liu et al. document, "people living in the e-waste informal

recycling areas have higher levels of toxic chemicals in their bodies. Many studies also reported that children and newborns were more vulnerable to the e-waste pollution, which can negatively impact their neural system, endocrine system, and organ functions" (2).

Toxic Exposure and Ecological Resistance in Marginalized Communities

About 90% of India's e-waste is processed in the informal sector by poor labourers, often children, working outside any formal regulation or protection (Doron & Jeffrey, Companies, Par 7). The social profile of those bearing the brunt reveals another layer of injustice. Much like waste work in general in India, those handling imported e-waste and scrap tend to be from marginalized communities including religious minorities, lower castes, migrant poor. Comparative studies confirm that informal e-waste disposal practices significantly impact air pollution with neurological risks being the most substantial contributor, and that these practices are associated with higher public health risks (respiratory issues, neurological disorders, and cancer) than formal e-waste disposal practices (Biswas et al. 1481). In Moradabad's case, a Muslim-dominated enclave took up e-waste processing when formal jobs waned. In Delhi's Seelampur and Old Seemapuri areas, many waste recyclers are migrants or minorities living in slum conditions. This mirrors Doron and Jeffrey's finding that within India, "the burden of waste systems has been carried by waste workers, most often Dalits," rendering the privileged classes blind to the waste they generate (Handlers, Par 13). The intersection of global and local hierarchies means the people dismantling a European computer or American smartphone in India are likely from communities that also face discrimination at home. Thus, the coloniality of waste operates on multiple scales: globally, rich nations exploit poorer ones; locally, the urban rich outsource dirty work to the poor along caste lines.

In these toxic landscapes, whether Alang's shipbreaking plots or Moradabad's e-waste alleys, one can see the physical imprint of foreign policy and trade decisions. Environmental health scientists warn that such "hotspots" of pollution could have generational effects: high lead levels stunting children's cognitive development, dioxins from burning e-waste accumulating in the food chain. However, despite the grim scenarios described, it would be a mistake to portray India simply as a passive victim. Alongside the inflows of waste, there has been a robust current of resistance, activism, and policy innovation. In a landmark judgment authored by Justice Altamas Kabir, the Supreme Court of India held in Research Foundation for Science Technology and Natural Resource Policy v. Union of India (Writ Petition (C) No. 657 of 1995) that India must align its hazardous waste regime with the Basel Convention, strictly regulate transboundary movements of hazardous wastes, and ban imports of hazardous/toxic waste identified under the Convention while reaffirming that these rules operate in support of constitutional guarantees under Articles 21, 47, and 48A (Kabir). This case would wind through the courts for years, keeping a spotlight on illicit waste dumping and shipbreaking practices.

In a landmark 2012 judgment in *Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Natural Resource Policy v. Union of India*, the Supreme Court definitively upheld Basel Convention compliance as an obligation of the Indian state. The court strongly directed the government to ban the import of any hazardous waste that Basel listed as hazardous, unless it was for a "safe" recycling process. The judgment also called for monitoring and penalties for illegal traffickers of waste. Groups like Toxics Link, ToxicsWatch Alliance, Greenpeace India, and the Basel Action Network have conducted investigations, published reports, and campaigned vigorously against toxic imports. Clapp documents how Greenpeace International was extremely influential in the Basel Convention negotiations, providing technical information to developing country governments and helping formulate strategy (2). Greenpeace helped uncover and protest the planned dumping of the Clemenceau and other ships, effectively globalizing local struggles. "Not in My Backyard" became "Not in Anyone's Backyard," as activists from North and South joined forces to reject the pushing around of poisons (Clapp 23). Workers and villagers around Alang have been involved in court cases, submitting affidavits on health impacts that bolstered the Supreme Court's resolve to impose guidelines on the shipbreaking industry. In cities like Delhi, informal e-waste recyclers have typically had little voice, but NGOs are now advocating to integrate informal workers into formal recycling systems rather than simply crack down on them. After India's E-Waste (Management) Rules were introduced in 2011 (and updated in 2016 and 2022), groups lobbied for mechanisms that allow informal collection networks to feed into authorized recycling centres, so workers get protection and training instead of being marginalized (Doron and Jeffrey, Rivers).

Rethinking Foreign Policy through Ecological Responsibility and Clean Technology

The case of waste colonialism compels a fundamental re-examination of what foreign policy stands for in the twenty-first century. Traditionally, nations' foreign policies have been driven by economic growth, strategic power, and sometimes human rights, however, seldom by ecological well-being. The transboundary waste trade exposes the shortcomings of this approach. When short-term economic logic (e.g., disposing waste cheaply or earning foreign exchange via scrap imports) prevails, the environment and vulnerable populations suffer, and global inequities deepen. As Clapp argues, hazard transfer is both dynamic and multifaceted, with efforts to stop one form prompting new forms to emerge (ix). This suggests that imagining sustainable futures requires reframing foreign policy as ecological responsibility. For India, this means moving beyond an ambivalent stance of both cooperating in waste trade and intermittently resisting it, to a clear ethical position that environmental integrity is non-negotiable. Hawkins's framework of relational ethics offers insight here. It states that rather than treating waste as simply matter to be managed, we must recognize how "waste becomes a relation in which we sense the force of conversion and transience, of other possibilities emerging" (86).

This relational understanding extends to international relations, requiring recognition of mutual vulnerabilities and shared ecological futures.

In practical terms, India could take the lead in institutionalizing the Ban Amendment norm. As of December 2019, the Ban is international law; India should fully implement it, sending a signal that it will not accept hazardous waste from any country (Basel Ban Amendment, 2019). This would strengthen India's hand in bilateral relations—for instance, making it clear to e-waste exporting countries (like the U.S., UK, Japan) that shipments will be turned away and that they should invest in recycling capacity at home. The Ban Amendment "prohibits the export of hazardous wastes from member states of the European Union, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and Liechtenstein to all other countries", providing a clear framework for enforcement. In the long run, a policy of "No toxic imports" would spur domestic innovation as well. Indian industries would need to find clean substitutes and develop local recycling technologies for materials they can no longer import cheaply. Doron and Jeffrey suggest that India has vast waste resources of its own that could be better collected and recycled, providing jobs internally without the added burden of foreign trash (Facilitators). Foreign policy could include advocating for a global fund for toxic waste cleanup in poorer countries, financed by the biggest waste exporters, akin to a "polluter pays" principle on an international scale.

India's foreign policy could push for international technology transfer to help manage waste domestically. For example, collaborating on advanced e-waste metal recovery or safe ship recycling technology would be more beneficial than importing the waste itself. Waste should be contained locally while clean technologies are shared freely where they are needed. Clapp emphasizes that the ultimate solution to hazard transfer is the reduction and eventual elimination of hazardous waste generation on a global scale through clean production (155-157). The Basel Convention has from its inception had waste minimization as one of its principal goals, though efforts during the first decade focused almost exclusively on controlling trans frontier movements. A refocused foreign policy must incorporate clean production as a central objective, with wealthy nations assisting poorer ones in adopting cleaner manufacturing processes rather than offloading their toxic byproducts. Davis argues that addressing "plastic matter" requires confronting the "synthetic universality" embedded in petrochemical production with the assumption that matter can be infinitely manipulated without consequence (43). A just foreign policy would challenge this logic, insisting on production systems that respect material limits and ecological boundaries.

A refocused foreign policy must incorporate the voices of those most affected by ecological decisions, mainly the communities and workers on the frontlines. This is a democratization of foreign policy, traditionally an elite domain. In practice, it could mean including civil society experts in delegations to environmental treaty talks, or holding domestic consultations with waste worker

associations and environmental justice groups when formulating positions. It could also mean twinning city networks, for example, having Moradabad's local representatives communicate with cities in developed countries that send e-waste, to share realities and craft solutions. Such inclusivity ensures that foreign policy is informed by ground truth and guided by the imperative to protect human rights and health. It makes environmental justice not just a slogan but a guiding framework for international engagement. As Doron and Jeffrey note, a truly "clean India" would be one where "the waste of a nation does not include poor and marginalized people" as part of the refuse (Getting to Know Garbage, Par 11).

Conclusion

The export of toxic waste to India exposes a foundational continuity in globalization. It is evident that the resource extraction done during the colonial period has metamorphosed into contemporary environmental exploitation wherein wealthy nations, corporations, and consumers enjoy convenience and cleanliness leaving vulnerable communities exposed to pollution and health crisis. India's plight as a dumping ground, from contaminated coastlines in Alang to polluted rivers in Moradabad and the mourning e-waste crisis together demonstrates that the "coloniality of waste" still persists as a byproduct of asymmetrical power. However, amidst all this crisis, India has emerged as a site of resistance. This is evident through the actions of courtrooms, village councils, ports, and Parliament where the biased system is continuously resisted in the form of informed activism, legal action, and moral assertion. The issue of waste management is fundamentally political. It is all about who hold the power to relocate the risk and who holds the power to refuse.

Confronting the coloniality of waste demands a paradigm shift in how nations relate to each other and to the earth, one grounded in principles of ecological citizenship on a global scale. This means making the Basel Convention enforceable, prosecuting illegal dumpers, and applying extended producer responsibility so that waste is reduced at the source. India's dual task of cleaning its own polluted landscapes while advocating for fair international rules shows how the Global South can move from being a passive recipient to an active shaper of environmental solutions. Reframing foreign policy as ecological responsibility is not just a technical adjustment to waste management but an ethical requirement as no community should have to live off another's toxic waste. Forms of environmental racism should become a thing of the past rather than an ongoing reality. The growing resistance across India suggests that ecological futures depend on policy choices rather than fate, and that a more just and liveable world remains possible.

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