

## TRACES OF POSTCOLONIAL ECOFEMINISM IN MOHAMMED HANIF'S OUR LADY OF ALICE BHATTI

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### ABSTRACT

This study explores the exploitation and commodification of women and nature in Mohammad Hanif's *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* (2011) through the lens of postcolonial ecofeminism. This conceptual framework analyzes postcolonial feminism and ecocriticism. Postcolonial ecofeminism is a concept that has existed for some time but is still in its nascent stage of development. It suggests that the exploitation of nature and the oppression of women are deeply interconnected. The novel's protagonist, Alice Bhatti, embodies the experiences of marginalized individuals subjected to the dual oppressions. The study analyzes Alice's narrative and her symbolic connections to the deterioration of Karachi's natural environment. It elucidates how patriarchal systems exploit both women and the environment. The study has used a descriptive qualitative method to analyze the text of the selected novel. Its significance lies in its unique approach by adopting postcolonial ecofeminism as it remains underexplored in current literature.

**Key Words:** Postcolonial Ecofeminism, Exploitation, Commodification, Nature, Women.

### INTRODUCTION

Postcolonial ecofeminism as a conceptual framework originates from the blend of postcolonial feminism and postcolonial ecocriticism. Postcolonial feminism contends that Western feminism is insufficient for women worldwide. Similarly, postcolonial ecocriticism asserts that traditional ecocriticism is inadequate for the women of the Global South. Postcolonial ecofeminism amalgamates the issues of postcolonial feminism and postcolonial ecocriticism, positing that the material circumstances of Third World women influence their environmental interactions. Postcolonial ecofeminism is a concept that has existed for some time but is still in its early stages of development. A postcolonial ecofeminist perspective involves the amalgamation of postcolonial ecocriticism and ecofeminism into a unified conceptual framework. It suggests that the exploitation of nature and the oppression of women are deeply interconnected

with issues of class, caste, race, colonialism, and neo-colonialism (Andrea, 2008).

Ecofeminism originated in the 1970s and 1980s from the convergence of ecocriticism and feminism. The term was coined by Françoise D'Eaubonne, a prominent French feminist author, in her 1974 publication, *Le Feminisme ou la Mort* (Feminism or Death), to embody a significant academic, philosophical, and literary endeavor to confront societal injustices, particularly inflicted upon women and the environment (Lahar, 1991). Ecofeminism asserts that all types of oppression are interrelated; therefore, the domination of nature and the subjection of women are fundamentally interconnected since both demonstrate socially constructed oppressions stemming from the power dynamics of the patriarchal system. Ecofeminists assert that the exploitation of nature and women arises from a patriarchal need for dominance, viewing both nature and women as commodities.

Since patriarchy is based on male dominance, neither nature nor women can attain emancipation without directly confronting the structures of male supremacy (Tizzoni, 2018, p. 8).

The novel *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* (2011) by Mohammed Hanif centers on the protagonist, Alice Bhatti. She is a working-class Christian woman and the only daughter of Joseph Bhatti. At the outset of the novel, she is introduced as a junior nurse at the Sacred Heart Hospital for All Ailments in Karachi. Hanif has portrayed Alice Bhatti as a static stereotype of Pakistani women victimized and ostracized by religious, cultural, and social assault. Throughout her life, she endures constant torment and disgrace. Since she belongs to a minority group, she is characterized as an untouchable; notably the author uses the term "choora" for the Christian community of Karachi streets. Her Christian identity makes her vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Joseph Bhatti complains, "These Muslas will make you clean their shit and then complain that you stink" (p. 5). In his novel, Hanif uses the term "Endangered Species" to refer to women in Pakistan (p. 87). Alice endures a wretched fate as she has been exploited throughout her life and encounters a dismal demise in the end. Wattenbarger (2012) says that Hanif has depicted the plight of women in Pakistan with remarkable honesty.

This study seeks to analyze the intersections of women and environmental exploitation in Mohammad Hanif's *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* (2011) through the conceptual framework of postcolonial ecofeminism. The study seeks to examine the representation of the protagonist, Alice Bhatti, and her marginalization in a postcolonial Pakistani context. The research aims to analyze the symbolic connections between the exploitation of women's bodies and the degradation of the natural environment in Karachi, employing ecofeminist critiques that link the oppression of women to the exploitation of nature. The objective of the study is to provide a comprehensive postcolonial ecofeminist study of the selected work, highlighting its critique of the enduring effects of colonialism and patriarchal oppression in contemporary society.

## **PROBLEM STATEMENT**

The exploitation and marginalization of women and nature serve as an eminent notion in modern literary discourse. The selected novel explores exploitation of women through Alice Bhatti's experiences and symbolic representations of nature. The study depicts women and the environment as essential sources of care and nurturing, while also emphasizing their commodification and destruction by patriarchal means. The study emphasizes the profound relationship between women and nature in the context of the novel, where women are regarded as land and their bodies are exploited for personal and sexual contentment.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Postcolonial ecofeminism combines the principles of postcolonial theory and ecofeminism to examine the relationship between the exploitation of colonized territories and the subjugation of women and the environment. This concept examines the enduring legacies of colonialism that persistently harm environments in postcolonial cultures and the patriarchal structures that marginalize women, particularly those from indigenous and lower socioeconomic origins. Postcolonial ecofeminism emphasizes the organization and interrelation of postcolonial and ecological concerns. Colonial women have been seen as "repeatedly naturalized as objects of heritage to be owned, preserved, or patronized rather than as subjects of their own land and legacies" (Sheoran 2015). Consequently, to confront the prevailing imperialist undertones and colonial practices, it is crucial to integrate postcolonial and ecological concerns.

South Asian literature offers a rich context for examining the connections between environmental degradation and gender discrimination. Novels such as Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) and Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* (2009) examine the interconnection between environmental degradation and patriarchal violence within postcolonial settings. Roy's work connects the environmental deterioration in Kerala to the subjugation of lower-caste women, a topic that parallels Alice Bhatti's experiences as a Christian woman in a patriarchal society. However, writers like Mohammed Hanif, Kamila Shamsie, and Bapsi Sidhwa depict that objectification is deeply ingrained in patriarchal structures, resulting

in systemic brutality against women and individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. They exemplify the objectification, dehumanization, and exploitation of women and the working class, highlighting their role in perpetuating cycles of injustice and violence (Ahmed, 2013).

Ackerly (2000) promotes 'Third World feminism,' a distinct form of the women's movement. This variant of feminism disregards essential characteristics and behaviors associated with gender, group dynamics, language, and learning. This discrimination perpetuates the role of the female gender, situating them inside a patriarchal nation like Pakistan, where women's rights are continually restricted. Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies contend that patriarchy is instituted and sustained through the oppression of women, the colonization of marginalized groups and their lands, and the exploitation of the natural environment. Thus, this global system substantially facilitates the subjugation of women and the deterioration of the environment. (Mies & Shiva, 1993).

Any, J. S. (2016) states that Morrison's *Bluest Eye* is mostly examined through the frameworks of race, gender, and identity, with inadequate focus on ecofeminist motifs, notwithstanding her abundant environmental imagery. Unlike traditional American environmentalists, she illustrates the relationship between nature and women through an African American lens that highlights the impact of culture on the natural world. Morrison asserts a universal link between African women and nature. African American women have historically suffered oppression and subjection under white domination, with nature seeing their anguish and humiliation since they are often perceived as inferior parts of human society, leading to their objectification and marginalization. Morrison expresses her specific concern about the spiritual ecological conditions of African American women. Fatima, M. & et al. (2024) propound that sexual objectification and self-objectification can be differentiated. Women encounter challenges related to sexual abuse in patriarchal countries. They endure many forms of societal harassment, normalized by the culture, and act in accordance with the expectations imposed by patriarchal society. The study explains that sexual objectification views a person solely as a sexual

object. Objectification is treating someone like a commodity and ignoring their dignity. Women are often objectified as sexual objects, such as Alice Bhatti, who endures discrimination and objectification due to her gender, religion, and lower social status. The narrative examines the objectification of women within a profoundly patriarchal culture that often diminishes them to their physical appearance or defines them solely by their associations with men.

Jabeen, N. (2016) asserts that Desai's novels, especially her environmental works, highlight the natural world and reveal ambivalence regarding the women-nature relationship when scrutinized through a conventional ecofeminist perspective. The authentic depiction of individuals and settings, along with the conflicts and ambiguity among the characters, unveils aspects of postcolonial ecofeminism to the audience. Desai does not perceive women as a homogeneous entity, a significant characteristic of ecofeminism that incorporates postcolonial ecofeminism. All ecofeminists agree that, in a patriarchal society, women and nature are interrelated.

Siraj, S. & et al. (2021) highlight the grim aspects such as isolation, trauma, insecurity, and the misery of women. The work critically examines the apathy, deceit, conventions, greed, and indifference towards the challenges faced by the economically oppressed sector of society, particularly women. The study emphasizes the plight of women and the manner in which their legal rights are undermined. It is evident that females experience persistent suffering, despondency, and threats, occasionally from family members and at times from strangers. The enduring system of the world appears to be orchestrated for and by men. The foundations of patriarchy are robust, presenting a formidable challenge for women to dismantle as they adapt to it with apparent ease.

The literature review identifies a notable research gap in the exploration of postcolonial ecofeminism within contemporary South Asian literature, specifically in the selected novel, *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti*. The novel's depiction of Karachi as a polluted metropolis and its effects on the protagonist, Alice, who endures institutional objectification based on her gender, religion, and socio-economic status, have not been comprehensively examined through the framework

of postcolonial ecofeminism. This gap emphasizes the necessity for a more profound comprehension of Hanif's work to the wider discourse on objectification, and exploitation of women, hence enhancing the examination of ecofeminist critiques within postcolonial frameworks.

### **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The study's significance lies in its unique approach by adopting postcolonial ecofeminism, as it remains underexplored in current literature. Typically, the works of female authors are considered for ecofeminist studies, therefore, the current study distinguishes as compared to other. The novel depicts the interconnected subjugation of women and nature in postcolonial societies, as both are exploited and commodified under patriarchal structures. This study provides a distinctive analysis by correlating these themes with ecofeminist ideals, which challenge the simultaneous subjugation of women and the environment. However, the importance of this study transcends the novel itself. Establishing a postcolonial ecofeminist conceptual framework facilitates future researchers in examining related topics in other South Asian novels or in further exploring eco-critical dimensions within the same text.

### **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

The study's conceptual framework is based on postcolonial ecofeminism. It is founded by the integration of postcolonialism and ecofeminism that examines the interconnected subjugation of women and nature. Postcolonialism analyzes the enduring effects of colonialism on societies, cultures, and identities, emphasizing how power dynamics established by colonial subjugation marginalize and oppress women. On the other hand, ecofeminism focuses on the concurrent oppression of women and nature within a patriarchal setting. It propounds that environmental exploitation is fundamentally connected to the oppression of women. However, the amalgamation of these two theories constitutes postcolonial ecofeminism, which analyzes the environmental degradation and analyzes the marginalization of women and nature. This paradigm examines the parallels between the exploitation of natural resources and the exploitation of women.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The study has used a descriptive qualitative method to analyze the text of the selected novel. The researcher has used the textual analysis of the novel as a method to extract relevant passages and excerpts reflecting ecofeminist and postcolonial themes. However, both primary and secondary sources of data collection are used. The primary source of data is the pdf version of the novel, *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* (2011), downloaded from Anna's Archive. The secondary sources include relevant articles, scholarly papers, books based on ecofeminist discourse, and whatnot. Moreover, key passages from the novel are selected for close reading, focusing on moments where the exploitation of both women and nature is depicted. Quotations are extracted to analyze instances of objectification, commodification, and the portrayal of women as healers and nurturers. Furthermore, the purposive sampling method is employed to locate examples of pertinent themes in the specified texts. The researcher has executed the subsequent steps for data collection: Firstly, the researcher commenced by reading the selected novel to fully grasp the narrative. Secondly, conducting a comprehensive re-reading of the work facilitated the careful collection of important data in the form of quotations, phrases, and thoughts directly related to the study topic. Finally, the data was classified to distinguish the topics pertinent to the study.

### **EXPLOITATION OF WOMEN AND NATURE**

Alice is a Christian woman from an underprivileged background who faces several sorts of oppressions due to her gender, religion, and financial condition. Alice's Christian beliefs position her as marginalized in a Muslim-majority nation. Her faith is interwoven with her identity as an outsider. She faces stigmatization because of her status as an untouchable and depicted as a wholly subjugated individual. Hanif uses the term "Choor" to denote the Christian community in the streets of Karachi. Hanif portrays Alice as a miserable individual who endured humiliation at every stage of her life. She is an ostracized individual inside Pakistani society. She is depicted as wholly dependent on destiny and recognizes her position as a member of the untouchables. Hanif



has portrayed her character as a pariah. As he quotes:

“Life has taught Alice Bhatti that every little step forward in life is preceded by a ritual humiliation...Too many humiliations and a journey that goes in circles means that her fate is permanently in the red” (Hanif, 2011, p. 52).

The author holds Alice culpable for her reluctance to accept change and her hesitance to capitalize on opportunities for advancement. Hanif asserts that this signifies a formal surrender by women in the novel to hegemonic authority exerted by the dominating community. Since the novel also presents other female characters, such as Hina Alvi, the senior nurse, and Zenab, the sick mother of the errand boy, Noor. Whether it is Alice, Hina Alvi, or Zenab, they are all doomed to have the same fate. Nonetheless, it may be claimed that it embodies the experiences of all oppressed women in our society. However, Sister Hina Alvi is a disheartened and divorced woman. She is also a Christian, similar to Alice Bhatti. She is presented as a low-ranking lady at Sacred Heart Hospital in Karachi, referred to as a nurse inside the medical profession. Consequently, senior male physicians are predisposed to regard these nurses with disdain, as an instance from the novel narrates, “the famous surgeon was known for treating nurses in the operating theatre like garbage bins in uniform” (Hanif, 2011, p. 153). According to Sherry Ortner (1972), men exert their control over women whom they consider inferior. This builds a link between nature and women. Ortner asserts, “We find women subordinated to men in every known society” (Ortner, 1972). Ariel Salleh acknowledges that women in almost all countries occupy the lowest tiers of hierarchical systems of oppression, akin to nature, which is likewise devalued (Salleh, 1995).

Alice is further exploited by utter societal marginalization as people avoid any kind of physical interaction with her and other members of the Christian community. Even the receptacle she has used is deemed as vile and untouchable as novel narrates, “people do not want to drink from the same glass that she has drunk from” (Hanif, 2011, p. 86). However, the same people seek to engage with her sexually at any cost. At this point,

the novel debunks the cultural hypocrisy and dual standards of these people. Although she abhors this attitude directed towards her, yet she wants to accept her status as an untouchable, but on the terms that “people won’t touch her without her explicit permission” (p. 87). Ortner asserts that the universal devaluation of women and their perceived subordination to men arises from the association of women with a symbol that every culture denigrates, which is defined as a lower order of existence (Ortner, 1972, p. 9).

She also faces sexual exploitation and abuse at the hands of men as she interacts and dwells in a male-dominant environment. She confronts various deviant sexual advances towards her. Once, when she checks on a patient suffering from a heart condition, suddenly he exposes his genitalia, and she is forced to kick an elderly man. The old man threatens her by saying, “I’ll cut you up and throw the pieces in that well” (Hanif, 2011, p. 88). The scene reveals the pervasive harassment encountered by working-class women, particularly in professions such as nursing. Greta Gaard thinks that all forms of oppression are interrelated, stemming from patriarchal rule, and constitute ecofeminist concerns (Gaard, 1993).

In this context, Hanif (2011) says, “when your average man hears the word ‘Sister’, he gets an erection” (p. 55). The word sister refers to nurses in Pakistan which in itself is ironic, considering the treatment they receive. However, the male patient perceives Alice neither as a professional nor as a human being rather he objectifies her sexually. He does so that even in moments of apparent weakness which indicates men within patriarchal systems retain authority no matter what. She is faced with similar sexual exploitation, once when she was attending on an elderly landlady, Begum Qazalbash in the VIP room at the hospital, her son forced Alice for oral pleasure as she feel a “flaccid piece of cold meat grazes her cheek” (Hanif, 2011, p. 55). He coerces Alice for sexual enjoyment by brandishing a pistol; “the barrel of the pistol hits her face and a bit of vomit spurts out of her mouth” (p. 55). According to Greta Gaard, there are ideological connections between the subjugation of women and the exploitation of the natural environment. She elucidates how patriarchal authority see both women and the environment as passive entities, striving for their subjugation (Gaard, 1993). Similarly, the use of the pistol is

symbolic of patriarchal and colonial violence, emphasizing the imposition of control through intimidation and physical coercion that is directed against both women and the environment.

The exploitation towards women exacerbates in an instance in the novel wherein Alice is assaulted by her husband, who douses her with acid. He has no justification for assaulting his wife other than his baseless distrust of her. Inspector Malangi, with his malevolent demeanor, incited Teddy Butt's animosity towards women. Inspector Malangi incited Teddy Butt to take revenge on Alice Bhatti by splashing acid on her body and also supplied him with a bottle of acid and provided guidance. Teddy Butt eventually murders Alice. A death that even Death mourns. He inflicted burns on her face and torso by hurling a bottle of acid at her. According to Zia (2013), such kind of violence constitutes gender-based violence. This form of attack is prohibited both locally and globally. (Zia, 2013). Unfortunately, the patriarchal roots are so deeply entrenched that it consistently dominates every aspect of life. Alice does not alter the conventional notion pertaining to women. Her death does not significantly alter established conventions.

Karachi serves as the backdrop of the novel, portrayed as a tumultuous and contaminated metropolis, depicting the societal deterioration and pollution of the environment. The environmental degradation and urban deterioration in the novel symbolize the societal neglect experienced by ostracized women, such as Alice. The novel mentions the description of the city as: "The open drain is clogged, its surface shimmering with all the plastic bags dumped in it" (Hanif, 2011, p. 83). Karachi is portrayed as a city inundated with inhabitants and trash, its thoroughfares congested with pollution, waste, and deterioration. The environment is inhospitable for the benefit of natural ecosystem. The city's condition is characterized by neglect and deterioration as the superior overlook both the environment and the most vulnerable societal members. The declining state of the hospital as Alice narrates, "I can't stand it here. This place smells of death" (p. 31), highlighting the ecofeminist critique of the environmental and social neglect fostered by the same oppressive systems. Alice desires in the novel, "How about real miracles, like the drains

shall remain unclogged...Or our beloved French Colony shall stop smelling like a sewer?" (p. 103). Ecofeminism frequently associates women's bodies with nature, both of which are subjected to exploitation by a patriarchal system. The lack of difference in attitudes toward nature between women and men in marginalized societies does not diminish the subordinate status of women in these circumstances. Vandana Shiva's ecofeminist theory asserts that environmental deterioration is connected to patriarchal exploitation of women (Shiva, 1988). Alice's body embodies violence and exploitation throughout the novel, reflecting the ecological deterioration of Karachi. Her physique symbolizes the manner in which patriarchal institutions exert control over both women and the environment. Val Plumwood contends that we choose reason over passion, intellect over physicality, and society over nature. Thus, reason, intellect, and culture are essential and interrelated with humanity. Emotion, the body, and nature are perceived as inferior and hence linked to femininity. In a patriarchal society, all that is considered superior is male, and all that is perceived as inferior is female (Plumwood, 2002).

#### **Women and Nature: Healers and Caretakers**

Alice's role as a nurse at Sacred Heart Hospital highlights her position as a caregiver in a system that relies on her labor while devaluing her contributions. Despite depending on women like Alice, yet men subjugate and exploit them. Ecofeminism frequently emphasizes women's conventional duties as caregivers and healers, which are associated with the nurturing and preservation of life, akin to the Earth. Alice's role as a healer symbolizes women's relationship with nature and life-sustaining processes, despite their concurrent oppression by the systems they uphold. According to Ortner (1972), despite the variations within ecofeminism, it is acknowledged that women, having been socially positioned as household managers and caretakers, had a distinct mindset and interaction with the environment compared to men (Ortner, 1972, p. 19).

Alice epitomizes the role of women as caregivers and healers through her profession as a nurse. Alice delivers vital treatment to her patients while being disadvantaged as a woman from a lower caste and a minority Christian community in a patriarchal and Muslim-majority society. She diligently

attends to her patients' needs, treating their injuries and providing solace, frequently at the cost of her own health. Her profession as a nurse places her inside a conventionally feminine role, characterized by maternal qualities and a lack of appreciation. Despite Alice's essential role as a caregiver, she frequently encounters contempt from both male colleagues and patients, depicting the broader patriarchal structure devaluing women's labor.

Nature too functions as a healing element throughout the novel. The peepul tree, commonly known as the "Old Doctor," symbolizes nature's restorative capabilities. It offers shade, protection, and spiritual comfort to those who seek its sanctuary. The novel quotes, "Others might come here to be healed or find spiritual sustenance or firewood. Alice comes here to take a nap under its cool shade" (Hanif, 2011, p. 147). Prior to the establishment of the hospital, "peepul tree that was believed to provide medical care," showing the perception of nature as a source of healing and energy (p. 23). The tree symbolizes tenacity and natural healing in a society dominated by men that commodify women and the environment alike. According to Shazia Rahman (2019), "Pakistani women's attachment to their environment and their environmental concerns and issues are often ignored because patriarchal discourses are dominant." (Rahman, 2019. p. 4).

However, the natural scenery of Karachi, especially the beachfront, provides opportunities for contemplation and respite for individuals confined within the stifling urban milieu. Alice says to Teddy, "I have been to the beach...All those waves rocking you up and down. Must be fun" (Hanif, 2011, p. 80). These natural areas provide a transient respite, highlighting the restorative potential of nature, even in the face of human abuse. Similarly, the tree, much like Alice, is a silent force of healing that goes unnoticed until it is destroyed. Alice's caregiving attitude extends beyond the hospital; she is portrayed as caring for her father as she says, "But who can say no to a father?" (p. 7). It shows the unselfish, nurturing role frequently attributed to women in patriarchal societies.

Both Alice and the peepul tree ultimately endure violence and devastation that depict the overarching postcolonial ecofeminist critique that women and environment frequently represent the

initial casualties of structural oppression. Alice's terrible demise due to her violent husband epitomizes the violence perpetrated against women in patriarchal countries, and the peepul tree's obliteration by lightning signifies the environmental degradation resulting from colonial and postcolonial exploitation of natural resources.

### **Objectification of Women and Commodification of Nature**

Alice endures brutality and domination from various men, especially her husband, Teddy Butt. This shows the objectification of women as possessions or entities subjected to male dominance. Alice's corporeal form serves as a locus of violence, perpetuating patriarchal supremacy as men exert authority through the domination of women's bodies. Alice is often objectified by male characters in the novel. Her societal status renders her susceptible to exploitation and sexual harassment. In the novel, women are frequently diminished to their physical attributes or sexual accessibility, with scant consideration for their individuality or liberty. This sexual objectification reflects the broader cultural perception of women as objects of male desire instead of as autonomous beings. Mukherjee characterizes postcolonialism as the "intensified and sustained exploitation of the human and the non-human," elucidating the methods utilized by colonizers (Mukherjee, 2010). They subjugate both humans and non-humans, perceiving them as commodities to be exploited.

Alice's profession as a nurse at Sacred Heart Hospital subjects her to undervaluation and exploitation of her caregiving efforts. "When men entered the hospital, they would think Alice was something they could grab, grope, and use" (Hanif, 2011, p. 56). This line shows how men perceive Alice as an object and consider her more of a sexualized entity rather than an individual possessing agency and dignity. However, several instances of abuse, assault, and objectifying language aimed at Alice and other female characters in the novel reveal objectification. She is consistently objectified; one notable example is Hanif's assertion that Alice is "the pretty one with a shapely waist and attractive legs" (p. 21). It reveals Alice's objectification through her external appearance and her reduction to mere physical attributes. Moreover, Teddy Butt exhibits a clear

propensity to objectify women. Alice is described as "a fresh young morsel," while women are characterized as "meat" (Hanif, 2011, p. 63). According to Adams (1990), meat has long been used in various cultures as a metaphor for women's oppression. Therefore, objectification ingrained in the minds of certain characters further dehumanizes women.

She experiences gender-based objectification and harassment due to her gender and her position in a predominantly masculine environment. Her beauty and appeal often attract the attention of men and patients, leading to her objectification. She is initially hesitant about Teddy Butt's marriage proposal, and he tries to persuade her by threat with the help of the Mauser gun he possesses. He brandishes his Mauser in front of her chest and tries to coax her with his flattery by saying, "The world might think it's the love of your flesh...do I think about these milk jugs?" (Hanif, 2011, p. 63). Even as Teddy attempts to flatter Alice and express his love, his words and actions are laced with irony. It depicts the deep-rooted patriarchal mindset that reduces women to their bodies and enforces control through coercion and intimidation. The primary aim of a patriarchal society is to constrain the unbridled sexual expression of the female body and, more specifically, to govern female sexuality (Labovitz, 2012, p. 84). Teddy claims to love her more than her flesh, but his language betrays him. He objectifies Alice by referring to her breasts as "milk jugs," reducing her to an object. According to Adams (1990), "Objectification permits an oppressor to view another being as an object. The oppressor then violates this being by object-like treatment" (Adams, 1990, p. 27).

Alice has grown increasingly cognizant of societal perceptions and treatment of her body. After facing incessant objectification from men, she asserts, "For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed" (Hanif, 2011, p. 155). This quote evokes powerful religious imagery, reflecting the Christian ritual of the Eucharist salvation. Although, in this context, it does not carry salvation but instead reflects her submission to the harsh realities of her bodily exploitation and suffering. By calling her body "a piece of meat," she is not objectifying herself but instead voicing the reality of how her body is perceived and treated by those around her. In *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, Carol J. Adams argues that meat serves as a symbol of

patriarchal authority and subjugation, wherein animals are objectified and consumed similarly to the treatment of women in patriarchal societies. Adams emphasizes the intersection between the discourse around meat eating and the language used to depict women's bodies, so diminishing them to just consumable, dehumanized entities (Adams, 1990).

Nature is often commodified in the novel. It is regarded as a resource to be utilized and exploited without consideration for its inherent value. Particularly the urban surroundings of Karachi depict a commodified view of nature, wherein the natural world is neglected and abused for economic or political gain. The peepul tree serves as a central symbol of nature's commodification. The novel narrates, "a two-hundred-year-old peepul tree that was believed to provide medical care before they built a hospital and now just provides shade and firewood" (Hanif, 2011, p. 23). The peepul tree, historically esteemed for its medicinal attributes, now merely offers shade and firewood, diminishing its value to tangible, consumable commodities. From an ecofeminist perspective, this devaluation reflects the tendency to reduce women, especially in patriarchal society, to their functional duties. The tree's function as a source of firewood depicts its utilization for economic benefit. Ecofeminist theory establishes connections between the exploitation of nature and the subjugation of women within the patriarchal system. Similar to how a tree is denuded of its previous function and diminished to mere firewood, women's bodies and labor are commodified and exploited within patriarchal society.

The peepul tree, having endured for 200 years and offering refuge and comfort to people, is ultimately destroyed. Its branches are severed for firewood. When struck by lightning, it is cleaved in two and abandoned to perish, highlighting the exploitation of nature till its exhaustion. As the novel quotes:

"lightning struck the Old Doctor – a two-hundred-year-old peepul tree that had survived three hurricanes and generations of Sacred patients who chopped bits off it for firewood...the tree split into two, smoke emanated from it for days and never a leaf grew on



it ever again” (Hanif, 2011, p. 196).

The tree's fate is linked to the feminization of nature within a patriarchal culture, where both women and environment are exploited and perceived as resources to be employed rather than revered. The nurturing role of the peepul tree is in correspondence to that of women, particularly marginalized figures like Alice Bhatti in the novel, who are simultaneously exploited and scorned within the structures of colonialism and patriarchy. The lightning strike that ultimately destroys the tree symbolizes the irreparable damage caused by patriarchal and colonial systems, despite the resilience of nature and women. The tree's splitting following the lightning hit and its failure to regenerate foliage shows the environmental deterioration resulting from colonization and contemporary exploitation. Similar to Alice, the tree ultimately faces destruction, showing the eradication of natural healing powers due to patriarchal and colonial exploitation. Alice's role as a nurse parallels the way nature, such as the peepul tree, is reduced to its material uses. Both are life-giving forces, yet both are exploited and discarded once their usefulness is deemed exhausted.

### CONCLUSION

The novel ends with the tragic death of Alice, paralleling the earlier destruction of the peepul tree. Both Alice and the tree, symbolic of women and nature respectively, are destroyed by forces of patriarchal dominance and environmental disregard. In the novel, women are shown as passive and obedient entities primarily dependent on men for sustenance and protection. It is additionally asserted that women are incapable of self-protection and are reliant on men. It shows how Alice is consistently humiliated, mistreated, and tormented. It exemplifies the harsh characteristics of her environment. In Alice's demise, her body is regarded as expendable by patriarchal society, like the peepul tree being deprived of its vigor and purpose. Both fatalities depict how patriarchal structures perpetrate violence to exert dominance over women and the natural world.

Moreover, Alice's demise can be perceived as an element of the extensive postcolonial trauma that persists in impacting vulnerable communities

within society. Alice's existence, like that of a tree, is influenced by her identity as a member of a colonized and subjugated group, and her sorrowful demise reflects the enduring repercussions of colonial legacies. The natural world, symbolized by the tree, and the marginalized individual, Alice, are victims of the persistent consequences of colonial exploitation. The peepul tree's transformation from a source of healing to a commodity for firewood reflects how Alice, despite her role as a healer, is reduced to an object of desire and control. Both nature and women are seen as resources to be exploited by patriarchal structures, rather than beings with intrinsic value.

### SUGGESTIONS

Postcolonial ecofeminism is a concept and ideology that represents an emerging discourse in literature. Indeed, both postcolonial ecocriticism and ecofeminism, as fields of study, inadequately engage with the discourses of postcolonial ecofeminism. Researchers may examine the commodification of nature in the novel as a reflection of patriarchal dominance over women's bodies, thereby broadening the parameters of postcolonial ecofeminist critique. The selected novel may be examined alongside other South Asian postcolonial literature, such as Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* or Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows*, to evaluate the expression of postcolonial ecofeminist themes across various narratives. These comparisons would elucidate the parallels in the manner postcolonial authors address the interrelation between environmental degradation and the objectification of women within patriarchal and colonial contexts. Moreover, future research could extend beyond ecofeminism by incorporating postcolonial ecofeminism alongside other ecological theories, including dark ecology and deep ecology. This multidisciplinary method enables researchers to examine the wider ramifications of environmental degradation and gender oppression within the postcolonial framework.

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