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Colonial Exploitation and Neocolonial Developmentalism: A Postcolonial Ecocritical Study of Intizar Hussain's *Basti*

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Abstract: *Through the prism of postcolonial ecocritical theory, this research paper seeks to examine colonialism's commodification of nature, the environmental degradation at the hands of "ecological imperialism's" agenda of "developmentalism," and the environmental fallout of neocolonial militarism and wars in Intizar Hussain's critically acclaimed novel, Basti (2018). This paper combines Huggan and Tiffin's (2010) and DeLoughrey and Handley's (2011) theoretical constructs on postcolonial ecocriticism to formulate an integrated theoretical lens for analyzing the novel. The research establishes that Basti (2007) highlights environmental degradation caused by colonial exploitation, the extinction of biodiversity, and the destruction of natural habitats. The novel articulates its ecological concerns by critically reflecting on the installation of electric poles in Rupnagar, the laying of railway lines, and the introduction of motorbikes during the colonial era. It aptly anticipates and maps out the environmental toll of developmentalism and modernization schemes, causing the destruction of natural landscapes and disruption of traditional organic lifeways. Furthermore, by foregrounding the ravages of war and the environmental toll of neocolonial militarism, the novel shows how colonial and neocolonial violence commodifies and destroys nature. It delineates landscape's transformation into a desolate wasteland as an adverse environmental impact of war. This research paves the way for groundbreaking future studies in Pakistani literature that can deepen our understanding of its ecological themes.*

Key Words: Postcolonial Ecocriticism, Exploitative Development, Ecological Destruction, Militarism Basti, Neocolonialism

Introduction

Postcolonial ecocriticism combines theoretical insights from Postcolonial studies and ecocriticism to examine the lingering impacts of colonialism on the environment, culture, and literature in the postcolonial contexts. It draws heavily on ecocriticism, a critical approach to analyzing the relationship between literature and the natural environment, which explores how literary texts represent environmental issues and human relations with the natural world. The term "ecocriticism" was first coined by William Rueckert (1978) in his essay "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecology," where he introduced the concept of applying ecological principles to the study of literature. Ruckert defines ecocriticism as the study of the "relationship between the human and physical environment" (p. 105), emphasizing the importance of understanding how literary works can shape human attitudes toward nature. Ecocriticism has emerged as a response to the growing environmental crisis. As the field evolved, ecocriticism also expanded its initial focus on nature to incorporate diverse perspectives on environmental degradation, including global capitalism, imperialism, and industrialization. Lawrence Buell's influential work *The Environmental Imagination* (1995) marked a shift towards examining the literature's response to the growing ecological crisis. Cheryll Glotfelty's foundational work, *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996) and Timothy Morton's *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (2007), further expand the field by exploring diverse approaches by which nature and environment are represented in literature.

The intersections of ecocriticism and postcolonialism are remarkably significant as both fields investigate structures of oppression and domination. Postcolonial ecocriticism addresses how colonial

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powers exploited natural resources and degraded ecosystems. Both disciplines, ecocriticism, and postcolonialism, exhibit a common purpose. Postcolonial scholars map out how colonial powers exploited natural resources. Likewise, ecocritics investigate dominant ideologies' impact on human interaction with the environment. Postcolonial perspective on ecocriticism, particularly Huggan and Tiffin's seminal work *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* (2010), DeLoughrey and Handley's *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literature of the Environment* (2011) and Rib Nixon's *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011) have contributed significantly towards the proliferation of the eclectic field of postcolonial ecocriticism. Postcolonial ecocriticism draws attention to colonialism's practices to exploit and degrade the environment.

The primary preoccupations of postcolonial ecocriticism, like the lingering impact of the colonial exploitation of the environment and its continuation by the neocolonial forces, are prominently reflected in South Asian literary traditions, where the themes of environmental degradation, colonial exploitation, and the struggle for identity often intersect. Intizar Hussain's Urdu novel *Basti,* published in 1979 and translated into English by Frances W. Pritchett in 1995, aptly captures these concerns of postcolonial ecocriticism. The novel meticulously intertwines the traumas of displacement and the environmental destruction brought about by colonial and neocolonial forces. *Basti* (2007) traces a legacy of colonial exploitation of natural resources and destruction of the environment. The novel adheres to the postcolonial ecocritical argument that preserving pristine pre-colonial environments serves as binding forces and bulwarks against the political and communal turmoil of colonial and postcolonial South Asia. The materialistic exploitation of sources, plunder of resources, and exploitation of colonized land in the name of developmentalism and civilization come at the cost of the disappearance of indigenous and organic ecological consciousness. By revisiting the past through Zakir's memories, *Basti* (2007) poignantly illustrates colonialism's ongoing ecological and cultural impacts. Therefore, this article seeks to analyze this novel within the framework of postcolonial ecocriticism. This research article employs a combination of Huggan and Tiffin's (2010) and DeLoughrey and Handley's (2011) theoretical constructs on postcolonial ecocriticism to formulate an integrated and comprehensive theoretical lens for analyzing *Basti* (2007). These theories offer a critical lens to probe the novel, focusing on how it portrays the commodification of nature by colonial/neocolonial powers under the pretext of developmentalism and modernization.

Literature Review

Intizar Hussain has produced an enormous corpus of literature in the form of drama, travelogue, criticism, journalism, calligraphy, sketch writing, and translation. He adopted journalism as a profession and story-telling as a passion. He was born in a small settlement named Dabai in the Buland Shahr district near Aligarh, where he spent first eleven years of his life. These early years of training serve as the foundation for his literary genius. The idyllic and pastoral setting of Dabai served as a setting for his contact with the purer forms of nature and formed his environmental consciousness. Since its publication in Urdu and subsequent translation into English *Basti* (2007) has garnered a rich corpus of critical engagements with the novel's investigation of historical trauma, nostalgia, identity, and spirituality themes. The novel maps out how the political division of India decimated life as inhabitants of Basti knew it, toppling their secure existence in the bustling settlement. Unlike more direct accounts of the Partition violence, Hussain's novel (2007) avoids a more graphic depiction of the physical brutality that accompanied the Partition. Many South Asian writers have probed the complex political, social, and ideological turmoil which has its roots the Partition of 1947. Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956) and Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man* (1988) portray the violent communal bigotry that consumed communities. However, Urdu authors, particularly Sadat Hassan Manto, Quratulain Hyder, and Intizar Hussain, assimilate the lingering psychological scars of the Partition within their fiction in a more tangential way. As Rakshanda Jalil (2015) notes in her "Introduction" to *The Sea Lies Ahead*, Hussain and his comrades "have been content to write of consequences rather than reasons, effects rather than causes" (p. 7). In this vein, *Basti* (2007) offers a meditative examination, through allegory and myth, of the subcontinent's Partition's continuous impact on the trauma-stricken South Asian psyche in its aftermath.

Khan and Digvijay (2015) also acknowledge Hussain as a gifted storyteller who conveys The Partition through subtlety rather than directness. They assert that the themes of longing and sentimentality he

gleaned from the catastrophic political events of South Asian history permeate his fictional works. His writings show a discernible sadness and an undercurrent of unfulfilled hopes. According to them, he is a pragmatist, symbolist, and sentimental dreamer who chronicles myths and memories. Widely published in Urdu literary magazines in India, his fictional works have been frequently translated into other regional languages, and he remains enormously popular. The Partition as memory is the central theme of *Basti* (2007). The novel is anchored in nostalgia and firmly rooted in memories. The trauma of the Partition in the novel is conveyed primarily through Zakir's memories. Radha S. Gautam (2015), in her article "Translating Trauma: Mediating Memory in Intizar Hussain's *Basti*," examines these aspects of the novel. She emphasizes that the protagonist's reflections link his past in Rupnagar with the political crisis of 1971. She stresses that "the lens of memory in the novel serves to focus our attention on how local communities experienced the trauma of the Partition" (p. 9). She also contends that Hussain captures the characters' trauma and reflects the memory of a nation struggling with the aftermath of the Partition.

The interplay of nostalgia and memory is also pivotal to *Basti* (2007). Zakir finds solace in recollecting his childhood in Rupnagar as a means to escape the traumatic reality of the Partition. This theme is explored in detail by Poonam Charan (2021) in her article "Hope amidst Chaotic State of Affairs in Intizar Husain's *Basti*." She argues that Zakir's retreat into memories is not just an act of remembrance but a survival mechanism amidst the chaos of the Partition. She elaborates that through Zakir, Hussain portrays individuals clinging to their past in times of upheaval. She further elaborates in her article that "Zakir searches for a balance between two different worlds; he is nothing but a mere observer in the outside world, and within the interior world, he is lonely" (p. 5). His isolation is symbolic of the more extensive disconnection felt by those who experienced the Partition as they navigate a fractured present while remaining emotionally bound to a peaceful, lost past. Charan concludes that Zakir's nostalgia is employed to contrast the serenity of the past with the disillusionment of the present and to locate the emotional void left by displacement. Tariq Usman et al. (2022) also examine the poignant illustration of Zakir's displacement in their article, "The Giddy Circles of Partition: Displacement and Dilemma in the Novel *Basti* by Intizar Hussain." Zakir's reflections, caught between his past in Rupnagar and his present life in Pakistan, foreshadow his internal struggle with identity. Usman et al. (2022) state, "Zakir lives in a dynamic, conflictual and opposing world" (p. 19), which intensifies his sense of alienation in a post-Partition landscape. Zakir's feelings of estrangement serve as a metaphor for the more significant existential crisis faced by those uprooted as a consequence of the Partition.

Nostalgia also plays a crucial role in expressing the emotional displacement of characters like Zakir in *Basti* (2007). Rahman et al. (2022), in "Nostalgic Elements in Intizar Hussain's *Basti*," examine the emotional dimension, noting how the novel captures the deep psychological scars of the Partition. They assert that Zakir's connection to his past, especially his memories of Rupnagar, represents a longing for a lost homeland. As Rehman et al. (2022) note: "The sound of the cuckoo made his mother emotional" (p. 1197), showing that even simple reminders of the past can trigger powerful emotions. They argue that nostalgia provides solace and emphasizes the inescapable nature of trauma, showing how characters remain emotionally tied to a world that no longer exists. *Basti* (2007) recaptures the Partition trauma, blending history with memory. In her article "The Roots of the Present are in the Past: Recapitulating Partition Through Intizar Hussain's Novel, *Basti*," Farooqi (2022) investigates how Hussain provides a multilayered understanding of the Partition, connecting the present with the past. She highlights that the use of myth and allegory brings depth to Hussain's Partition narrative, emphasizing that the novel avoids direct depictions of violence. Instead, it evokes a sense of historical continuity. This approach distinguishes *Basti* (2007) from typical Partition literature that often focuses on immediate violence and loss.

Basti's (2007) socio-political preoccupations have also been examined. In their article "Socio-Political Underpinnings in Intizar Hussain's *Basti*: A Critical Discourse Analysis," Hassan et al., (2024) assess Hussain's commentary on the political fragmentation and communal tensions that stem from partition. They assert that the novel's "political discourse and philosophies [...] raise concerns about the effects of political choices on everyday people" (p. 42). This disillusionment is felt by individuals like Zakir, whose personal trauma symbolizes the larger national psyche after the Partition. They contend that the novel employs discursive techniques to critique not only the Partition but also the postcolonial challenges of nation-building, national identity, and the political instability in Pakistan. Despite detailed attention to

the examination of topics like memory, trauma, the Partition, postcolonial identity, myth, spirituality, and sociopolitical realism in *Basti* (2007), this novel's multifaceted and rich engagement with ecological concerns has yet to be thoroughly examined, presenting a gap in the current scholarship. Hussain's rich ecological consciousness, steeped in indigenous knowledge about nature, environment, and ecology, merits a detailed examination that this research paper seeks to undertake.

Theoretical Framework

Postcolonial ecocriticism, as a broader theoretical framework, investigates how colonial and neo-colonial forces, driven by capitalist greed, exploit and degrade the environment for profit. Capitalism's foundation rests on the belief that humans are the pinnacle of creation and that nature exists solely to serve their needs, justifying the commodification and destruction of natural resources. The exploitation of nature by colonial powers was not just an economic venture but part of a larger ideological framework that justified the domination of land and people. This perspective of nature as a commodity to serve the colonizers' goals became a cornerstone of colonial practices, resulting in long-lasting ecological degradation. Kristiawan Inndriyanto (2019) explicates the notion of ecological imperialism, asserting that "the underlying capitalist and mechanistic ideologies in which nature is perceived only of their intrinsic values and usefulness toward (Western) humans illustrate total disregard to the original owner of the colonized land" (p. 123).

Huggan and Tiffin (2010) argue that the colonial and neocolonial discourse of "development is at best a form of strategic altruism, in which technical and financial assistance from the self-designated First World is geared to its own economic and political concerns" (p. 28). They further argue that developmentalism overlooks environmental damage and emphasizes economic growth. The colonial logic ingrained in this developmental agenda perpetuates resource extraction and marginalization of native communities even after decolonization. Vandana Shiva (2015), an Indian activist, explores the connection between colonialism and environmental destruction in *Earth Democracy*. She asserts: "The colonial project was always about the control of land, water, and resources. Global capitalism continues this legacy, transforming nature into commodities and indigenous people into disposable entities" (p. 18). Shiva's argument supports Huggan and Tiffin's (2010) criticism of colonialism, highlighting that extracting natural resources is a significant agenda of global capitalism and colonialism.

Colonial exploitation and environmental degradation are intricately tied and cannot be disentangled. Environmental sustainability and health of the colonized territories are significantly impacted by the actions of colonial powers, endangering ecological balance. DeLoughrey & Handley (2011) assert that "to speak of postcolonial ecology is to foreground the historical process of nature's mobility, transplantation, and consumption. The new material resources of the colonies literally changed human bodies and national cultures" (p. 13). The colonial powers established a global infrastructure system rooted in the Western cultural belief that nature lacks agency, legitimizing the degradation of the natural environment and leading to ecological breakdown. DeLoughrey & Handley (2011) emphasize that the development programs during colonial and post-colonial eras, which the Western organizations carry out in the developing world, result in significant ecological damage. They further emphasize that the persistence of colonial legacies in the postcolonial times contributes to an environmental disparity between the global North and South: "Critiques of capitalism, technology, neoliberalism, modernization, biopiracy, and empire demonstrate that environmental concerns are not the exclusive prerogative of the privileged north … Modernization schemes … [have]radically altered postcolonial environments" (p. 16).

Postcolonial Ecocriticism also emphasizes the compounding effects of war, often resulting from colonial/postcolonial militarism as an immediate cause of damage to the environment. It posits that the destruction of the natural environment and different forms of pollution signifies the unintended harm inflicted upon the environment during wars. As Shiva (1999) states, "capital now has to look for new colonies to invade and exploit for its further accumulation" (p. 5). This process is intensified explicitly during wars and conflicts when natural resources are frequently used as a strategic weapon of war and financial leverage. Therefore, the environmental damage during wars is not an incidental consequence but rather a deliberate outcome of the commodification of nature that prioritizes financial interests over environmental sustainability. Nixon (2011), in *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, proclaims

that environmental destruction in postcolonial territories is often a slow and invisible process linked to global capitalism. He states that "the radioactive aftermaths of wars, acidifying oceans, and a host of other slowly unfolding environmental catastrophes present formidable representational obstacles that can hinder our efforts to mobilize and act decisively" (p. 2). Nixon's (2011) idea of 'slow violence' correlates with DeLoughrey & Handley's (2011) argument that the colonialist regime alienated people and land and created long-lasting damage that extends to the neocolonial period. Guha (2000) also offers a critical perspective on the Western notion of environmentalism that neglects the impacts of war and the project of modernism on postcolonial environments. He argues that the growth of capitalists "has been made possible only through the economic and ecological exploitation of the third world" (p. 95). This framework illustrates the interconnection between colonial legacies, environmental destruction, and global capitalist systems commodifying nature. Whether by industrialization or wars, these regimes exacerbate ecological degradation in colonial/postcolonial territories by treating natural resources as tools for human advancement. These theoretical concepts derived from the scholarship of leading proponents of postcolonial ecocriticism address the link between colonial practices and environmental damage, the lingering ecological impact of ecological imperialism, and the fallout of neocolonial wars and militarism in postcolonial contexts, provide a rich critical lens to examine the ecological concerns of *Basti* (2007).

Analysis: A Postcolonial Ecocritical Study of *Basti*

Basti (2007) is one of the most critically acclaimed Urdu novels. Translated into several languages, including English, the novel reflects on South Asia's social and historical realities. It has garnered international recognition because of its treatment of the experience of physical displacement, loss of identity, and the tension between modernity and tradition. The novel's protagonist, Zakir, is a troubled man reflecting on his turbulent past and present. With a varied history to draw from, *Basti* (2007) demonstrates an immersive engagement with many eras and places. The novel prominently features the intermingling of memory and the present. It refers to momentous events such as the 1857 uprising, the 1947 Partition, the 1965 war between India and Pakistan, and the 1971 war and the secession of East Pakistan. It deals with many recollections and situations, with the trauma of being displaced as its uniting theme. While set in Lahore in 1971, the narrative reveals through flashbacks the protagonist's memories of his childhood in Rupnagar.

Basti's (2007) engagement with environmental issues is nuanced and multifaceted. The novel's narrator, Zakir, preserves nature's beauty. Reeling from the experience of his physical displacement, he fondly remembers the pastoral peace of the idyllic setting of his childhood in Rupnagar. He feels a mystic belief in nature's ability as a unifying force of balance amid the political turmoil of South Asia of his time. *Basti* (2007). posits the degradation of nature as a metaphor for the degradation of society. Zakir and Anisah stand as polar opposites, highlighting the antagonism between Western/colonial models of development and living harmoniously within the natural world. Zakir remains devoted to nature's gifts. His mind wanders back to vibrant memories of towering trees abundant with a rainbow of singing songbirds from his youth. Zakir finds peace amongst green leaves and flowing streams, while Anisah prefers the tumult and commotion of the Western progress model. Their differences reveal a potential clash between wildlife preservation and so-called improvement through expanding the colonial and postcolonial development agenda. Zakir recounts the idyllic, pristine, and unravaged environment while talking to Afzal. At the same time, he declares his abiding devotion to nature: "Fellow! Don't you know how much of my time is spent in the company of birds and trees? I don't have time for love. You make love, I'll pray for you" (Hussain, 2007, p. 77). Zakir's recollection of vibrant memories and deep connection to nature expresses a belief that the natural world is a necessity, not a choice. Zakir's environmentalism and his grief over the decimation of nature resonate with ecocritics like Davidson (2019), who, in "Never Say Never: Reconciling Generational Sovereignty with Environmental Preservation," warns that "some environmental destruction (e.g., species extinction, climate change) is irreversible on any humanly meaningful timescale" (p.1).

Basti (2007) foregrounds that the disappearance of vast forests due to the commodification of the environment has led to the disappearance of many birds and animals' endemic to that landscape. It echoes the concerns of postcolonial ecocriticism by portraying the degradation of the natural environment through colonial/neocolonial developmental projects. This depiction in the novel aligns with DeLoughrey

and Handley's (2011) argument that colonial and neocolonial development prioritize economic growth over environmental sustainability driven by Western ideologies, perpetuating ecological destruction. Zakir feels a deep connection with the natural world, viewing birds with admiration as gifts from God that he strives to preserve and shelter. He fondly recalls a pair of "bulbuls" that were regular "guests" (Hussain, 2007, p. 115) to his home each summer, enjoying the ripened guavas. However, those colorful songbirds have not returned in recent years due to developments like wars and urbanization. Their absence is a stark reminder of all lost amid the turmoil. Once abundant with life, the land now sees fewer visitors among its remaining trees, a silent suffering that echoes the people's struggles. Zakir is reminded of these birds; "But where are those bulbuls now? On the first morning of the war [...], their beaks were exploring the ripening guavas—when a plane passed overhead with a tremendous roar. Both birds, [...], left the guavas and flew off" (Hussain, 2007, p. 115). This connection between Zakir and birds signifies a fostering of sustainable human-animal relationships. The departure of birds signifies a disruption of human-nature harmony and the loss of shared existence because of the ravages of colonialism and the neo-colonial emphasis on an environmentally blind focus on development. Zakir's relationship with animals and birds symbolizes more than mere nostalgia. His nostalgia represents a fast-disappearing recognition of the mutual co-existence between humans and nature.

The Western colonialism impacted the physical landscape of the colonized territories in multiple ways. The colonized people found their ecosystems forcibly altered by the colonizers' introduction of foreign flora and fauna within the colonial borders. This ecological imperialism disrupted indigenous sustainability in a most destabilizing manner, as "settlers arrived with crops, flocks, and herds, and cleared land, exterminating local ecosystems" (Huggan & Tiffin, 2010, p. 7). It resulted in loss of biodiversity and destruction of soil because of the monocultural framing. This transformation diminished colonized cultures' symbiotic relationship with their unique environments. The exploitation of natural resources was done through deforestation and mining operations. Infrastructure programs like the development of rail links, the construction of ports, and the urbanization of resource-rich cities impacted the ecosystem. According to colonial logic, lands flourishing with indigenous crops were deemed barren wastelands merely because they failed to maximize productivity and generate revenues. *Basti* (2007) examines environmental degradation because of the ravages of colonial exploitation, the extinction of biodiversity, and the destruction of natural habitats.

Through his novel, Hussain (2007) contrasts the beautiful and vibrant natural world Zakir remembers from childhood and the barren and decimated environment modern developmentalism has brought into being. Zakir's childhood world is alive with animals, forests, and his deep connection with the land. The novel portrays how Zakir was amazed by the natural world in his early days: "Bluejays, woodpeckers, peacocks, doves, squirrels, parakeets---it seemed they were as young as he" (Hussain, 2007, p. 2). Zakir views nature as a timeless, almost mythical force tied to his eternal spirit and culture. However, over time, nature becomes something anyone can control and exploit. For instance, in the novel, the advent of electric poles in Rupnagar was initially celebrated as evidence of development. However, these poles "grew as the heaps of stone chips" and became a part of "dust-choaked landscapes"(Hussain, 2007, p. 6), echoing the broader environmental degradation caused by developmentalism. This description mirrors the global tension between modern development and the preservation of nature, as highlighted by Berlik et al. (2002), who point out that "citizens of affluent countries may imagine that preservationist domestic policies are conserving resources and protecting nature" (p. 557). It exposes how rapidly the promise of modernity, brought through developmentalism, fades into abandonment, and local landscapes are scarred and left to decay. These electric poles, much like the other developmental projects, symbolize progress in the start but gradually become relics of unmet promises.

Basti (2007) delineates the lingering effects of colonial mismanagement as local villagers struggle with a changing climate and degraded environment left in the wake of extractive colonial occupation. Resource appropriation and cultural disruption sowed seeds that continue to impact formerly colonized peoples because foreign interlopers imposed their purportedly superior technologies like electricity, combustion engines, and asphalt passages upon territories under their dominion. *Basti* (2007) portrays the electrification of Rupnagar during colonial India as detrimental to the presence of wild animals within human communities: "Rupnagar, offering up its three monkeys as a sacrifice, had entered the age of

electricity, and the monkeys vanished so completely that for weeks not one was to be seen on any wall, roof, or tree" (p. 29). This environmental degradation elucidates the broader social displacement rooted in colonial exploitation. As noted by Rawat and Gurav (2023), colonization often justified the "depletion of natural resources under the guise of their utilization" (p. 405) and the disturbance of ecology in the name of modernization and innovation. This degradation leaves colonized lands with ecological imbalance and cultural decay, much like Rupnagar after electrification. Indeed, entering an era of electrification entails a heavy price for the region's wildlife populations. Once commonly seen scampering across walls and perched within branches overlooking the landscape, the monkeys vanish suddenly because their abodes vanish. In replacing reliance on outdated power sources with the innovations of electricity, progress demands sacrifice; the costs are evident in the stark absence of life forms that previously lent life and liveliness to the surroundings. This symbolic yielding of the monkeys came to represent the disruptions modernity forced upon the environment and its vulnerable inhabitants in their drive toward progress. The novel's depiction of environmental degradation, such as the disappearance of birds and animals and the destruction of habitats, embody Huggan & Tiffin's (2010) insistence on the fallout of ecological imperialism.

The colonial regimes were premised upon the exploitation of native people and lands. The developmental projects and modernization schemes led to the destruction of natural landscapes. Such impositions disrupted traditional lifeways and cultivated dependence. The developmental and modernization schemes introduced by colonials in the colonized territories destroyed the natural ecosystem. This environmental decay in *Basti* (2007) mirrors the broader postcolonial critique of capitalism's role in commodifying nature. It corresponds with Nixon's (2011) concept of 'slow violence,' where this gradual ecological harm results from the relentless exploitation of colonized ecosystems under the nexus of colonialism/neocolonialism and global capitalism. Introducing vehicles and constructing coal-tar roads in colonial regions led to environmental degradation. The novel views the arrival of motorbikes with a concern expressed for electrification: "Rubber-tired horsecarts ran along the smooth roads, with an occasional buggy, an occasional motor-car, among them. And beyond those roads, beyond the bazaars and neighborhoods, that dark, smooth, oiled-looking coal-tar road, on which the lorries ran all day" (Hussain, 2007, p. 27). The proliferation of motorbikes in colonial territories revolutionized transportation, providing autonomy and mobility to individuals and communities with little access to such rapid mobility. Motorbikes allowed for swift and independent travel across stretches of land. However, this widespread use of motorized two-wheel transportation had unintended environmental consequences. The constant combustion of gasoline and oils within small but numerous bike engines emitted harmful pollutants into the air in large quantities. These pollutants are released in the atmosphere to degrade air quality and contribute to the greenhouse effect and global climate change. This proliferation of motorized vehicles represents a shift towards environmental degradation as roads expand across pristine landscapes. As Solarin (2020) says, "An increase in fossil fuel leads to an increase in ecological footprint" (p.1). In addition, reliance on petroleum-powered motorbikes for locomotion only perpetuated the fossil fuel-based economic structure imposed by colonial regimes. The fossil fuel extraction and distribution necessary to meet the demands of motorbike use reinforce the patterns of colonial resource exploitation and environmental degradation that dominate the natural world. Hussain's text aptly anticipates and maps out the environmental toll of these developments.

At another instance in the novel, *Basti* (2007) reflects on the arrival of the train in a pensive scene, using its introduction as a symbolic representation of the colonial mission's disruption of local ecosystems: "The train came along, blowing its whistle from afar and belching out smoke. […] Then suddenly, from the shelter of the trees, the coal-black rushing engine came into view" (p. 28). The iron horse relentlessly charged across the land, spewing its blackened lungs into heaven. While a marvel of the evolving age, this machine destroyed all in its path, smothering nature under a shroud of dirty smoke. As a tool of empire, the locomotive dismantled peoples and places, clawing resources from the earth's weakening body to feed its insatiable hunger. It seemed progress but demanded destruction and displacement. This developmentalism for extracting the natural wealth and resources soils the pristine ecosystems as fossil fuel-reliant transportation systems, such as trains, cause environmental exploitation in colonial territories. Colonized territories are overrun, and ecosystems are overwhelmed as the industrial machinery ventures into new frontiers of the empire, taking everything under its mighty iron wings to thrust the

colonized territories into modernity's grasping embrace. The introduction of these modernized machinery, like motor vehicles and trains, reflects the concerns of Huggan & Tiffin (2010), Shiva (1999), and DeLoughrey & Handley (2011), who argue that colonialism's capitalism-oriented modernization and mechanization lead to environmental degradation. The imposition of fossil fuel-dependent transportation exemplifies colonial/neocolonial commodification of nature.

Basti (2007) also probes the militarism and wars of colonial and neocolonial periods and their devastating effects on the natural environment. The novel's depiction of social and environmental destruction presents an alternative view of militarism. It shows these overtures sometimes provide a cover for exploitation, leaving communities and nature degraded. The novel's portrayal of environmental destruction during war reflects a broader trend in South Asia where "militarism has structured policy, spaces, and psyche" (Pirzadeh, 2016, p. 4), bringing "a wide-ranging consent to militarized forms of life" (Roy, 2002, p. 340). It shows colonial and neocolonial violence turn the natural surroundings into not just a victim but also a weapon for war. The commodification of nature in the novel is also linked with the depiction of war and its consequences. The destruction resulting from Indo-Pak wars unfolds in the novel as both human communities and the environment are affected by the conflicts. The novel's frequent employment of fire and burning imagery shows the environment's transformation into bleak ruins. Zakir's reflection, "so much had already burned, so much burning now.... " (Hussain, 2007, p. 170), illustrates the extent of damage and also indicates that conflict and political unrest have ravaged the natural environment as well as the human world. He describes another incident of war when the bombing is carried out: "An explosion! The roof beams were burning the way a forest burns (Hussain, 2007, p. 166). The way nature is exploited, wasted, and discarded during times of war is metaphorically referred to as 'burning'. The land becomes something to be consumed and destroyed in the name of conflict, and the inherent worth of nature is lost as homes, forests, and lands are turned into battlegrounds. The novel presents fire as a potent emblem of harm done to the natural environment. Forests burn, homes are turned to ashes, and flames devour landscapes, leaving only devastation. Wars, driven by political and economic motives, consume everything in its path, including the natural environment. As Zakir moves among the ruins of an erstwhile vibrant and bustling community, he sees roofs of mansions crumbling and "wells of cold sweet water have been filled with dust ... [and} choked with the corpses of virtuous women". The whole city appears like "a desolate wasteland" that "lies in ruins" like "a house which is burning on all four sides" (Hussain, 2007, p. 174). This striking picture of desolation emphasizes how militarism adversely impacts the natural world, turning it into a wasteland. Zakir, thus, remains traumatized by the violence of wars and the Partition.

Basti's (2007) portrays the destructive capacity of war as something that disrupts the harmony between nature and society, leaving irreversible scars on both. The motif of desolation continues in *Basti* (2007) as Zakir reflects on the ravages of the Indo-Pak War of 1971: "The road was empty for a long distance, and also so full. From one side to the other side, all was silent except for the distant echo of bombings" (p. 174). This bleak depiction of silence and emptiness emphasizes the scale of environmental destruction, as even the roads and landscapes that once bustled with life now lay in ruins. It reinforces the idea that the destruction of war affects the natural surroundings, turning thriving ecosystems into silent, barren spaces. This imagery of barren landscape parallels Pirzadeh's (2018) idea that "depictions of landscapes are not uncommon in war narratives; the land usually is seen either as a passive backdrop or marginal component in most narratives" (pp. 2-3).

The devastation caused by wars not only affects human beings but also extends deeply into the environment, transforming vibrant landscapes into desolate wastelands. Hussain repeatedly uses the images of fire to convey the catastrophic repercussions of war on both human communities and the environment. Zakir's lament on the burning scars of the city underscores the devastating consequences of war. Fire is not only a literal force consuming homes and cities but also a metaphor for the commodification and depletion of nature during war. *Basti's* (2007) depiction of these conflicts echoes Shiva's (1999) theorization of how capitalists and militaristic ideologies treat the natural environment as expandable, a resource to be consumed and destroyed. By foregrounding these images of wars and their psychic and environmental toll, Hussain's text alludes to "the loss of [nature's] intrinsic value affecting the indigenous lifestyles" and its employment "as an instrument of modern imperialism" (Dhandapani, 2015, p. 1). In this

way, the novel not only critiques the exploitation of the environment but also foregrounds the entanglement of ecological degradation with wars.

Conclusion

Basti (2007) is rich with ecological consciousness and pronouncedly emphasizes the importance of the environment and the perseveration of nature. The novel unveils how nature's degradation mirrors societal decay. Zakir's inner musings portray the environment as a critical force of balance amid South Asia's political and historical upheavals. Zakir's nostalgia for idyllic nature echoes the broader postcolonial critiques that colonial and neocolonial forces have eroded not only personal identities but also the natural environment. The novel's ecocritical narrative extends beyond personal memory, exploring the impact of colonialism and modern developmentalism on colonized landscapes. The introduction of colonial innovations, such as motorbikes, trains, and electricity, has been assessed with an eye on the ecological damage of the industrialization and mechanization of the far-flung area of the colonized India. The depiction of coal tar roads as agents of pollution and environmental degradation highlights the slow violence of modern development. These developments, offering mobility and autonomy, contribute to ecological harm by accelerating the consumption of fossil fuels and intensifying pollution. Zakir's fond memories of vibrant birdlife and flourishing trees in his youth contrast starkly with barren landscapes brought about by these technological advancements. These details reflect a significant theme of the novel: the irreversible damage caused by the commodification of nature by colonial and neocolonial powers. Introducing these developments comes at the cost of displacing wildlife, depleting natural resources, and altering the ecological balance that once sustained the land and its inhabitants. *Basti* (2007) serves as a profound ecocritical reflection on the environmental toll of colonialism, modern development, and militarism. Its depiction of wars and conflicts decries the capitalists, and militaristic ideologies treat the natural environment as expandable, a resource to be consumed and destroyed. Hussain's narrative weaves personal and historical memories to emphasize the need for environmental preservation and recognition of nature's intrinsic value. By highlighting the deep interconnection between human well-being and ecological health *Basti* (2007) calls for a reexamination of progress that prioritizes sustainability and harmony with the natural world over unchecked colonial and neocolonial pursuits.

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