

Ecocritical Responsiveness and Diasporic Imagination: An Eco-Colonial Representation in Diasporic Writings

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ABSTRACT

Within the literary realm, the relationship between environmental sensitivity and postcolonial woundedness is an interestingly intersecting perspective. Ecocriticism highlights Nature as a space of sociocultural values where the writer uses his imaginative bend to explore issues related to the environment, such as the maltreatment of the environment by humans and anthropocentric utilization of nature. Taking Aamer Hussein's collection of short stories, i.e., *The Swan's Wife*, as a sample, the current study, in this context, sheds light on how nature/environment and postcolonial understanding can serve as a metaphoric signifier for healing colonial wounds. Through a detailed qualitative content analysis, the paper explains how nature is an engaging mechanism in Aamer Hussein's selected work that assimilates diasporic imagination with eco-consciousness. The study, thus, initiates a much-needed debate between the role of ecocritical thought and postcolonial consciousness in the Pakistani context.

Keywords: Anthropocentrism, diaspora, environmental sensitivity, postcolonial consciousness

INTRODUCTION

The intersection between postcolonialism and ecocriticism is an interesting, rather esoteric concept that demands an investigation of ecocritical and postcolonial sensitivity. According to Buell et al. (2011), "ecocritics had emphasized ties to place, post-colonialists had foregrounded displacements" (p. 421). Eco-colonial studies embrace ethnicity and differences to thwart eurocentrism and ecological racism, which

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can be a source of catalyzing the existing environmental problems (Afzal, 2017). Land and people are affected by both empire and colonization, and postcolonialism is essentially anthropocentric.

Colonization means the coming over the whole environment and region under the hegemonic control of humans (Afzal, 2017). While postcolonial studies broaden the ecocritical perspective of inclusion of not only humans but also nature as a victim of postcolonial hegemony, interestingly, ecocriticism acknowledges the indulgence of diverse human groups instead of generalizing humans in one simple category who are the offenders of Nature. Both colonization and anthropocentrism consider landing an empty property to be taken over by the offenders. Concerns pertaining to cosmopolitanism, the Anthropocene, trauma, and migration are also articulated through ecocriticism (Mason et al., 2013).

Aamer Hussein's collection of short stories, *The Swan's Wife* (2014), is taken as the sample for the current study as it both explicitly and implicitly bonds with postcolonial sensitivity and an attachment to Nature. In this regard, the way nature/environment acts as a healing mechanism for postcolonial sensitivity is the concern of this research. It is found that Nature is serving as a metaphoric signifier for healing colonial wounds. Through a detailed qualitative content analysis, the paper explains how Nature is an engaging mechanism in Aamer Hussein's selected work that assimilates diasporic imagination with eco-consciousness. The study, thus, initiates a much-needed debate between the

role of ecocritical thought and postcolonial consciousness in the Pakistani context.

Writers are generally inspired by the places of their existence and develop a distinct compassion towards them. The notion of *Place* occupies a central stance in literature as it positions a writer's creative endeavor, his work, within a specific context and location. William Zinsser (1980) asserts that "every human event happens somewhere, and the reader wants to know what that 'somewhere' is like" (p. 88). Aamer Hussein's writings are representative of the various places and cultures he has been exposed to. He believes in the unavailability of being exposed to diverse philosophies, cultures, ideologies, and languages, depicted by the employment of various narrators and multiple stylistic maneuvers being the characteristic feature of his work. Amit Choudhary articulates that "Hussein's stories are about individuals and their countries of exile, where the world itself is seen as a place of transit" (Khair, 2004, p. 702). This consciousness is thoroughly connected to cultural rootedness, and we can call Hussein's work 'situated cosmopolitanism.' As he has been close to various cultures and considers himself a world writer, for him, culture and race are important:

I was 15 when I went to England to study, and there I met Iranians, Palestinians, and even had a Korean friend... There was a sense of displacement among them, a feeling that their home was elsewhere. Gradually, I also imbibed a similar feeling, and with political turmoil

taking place back home, it added to the feeling of rootlessness (Quoted in Siddiqui, 2015, para 7).

Those stories from the selected book exemplified the Human-nature interaction and postcolonial sensitivity. These stories raise a clear stance on environmental discourse and reveal the man/nature binary. Furthermore, the environmental tensions, through texts and narratives, are elaborated on at length by the characters.

Research Questions

1. How do the selected stories present the interface between postcolonial and ecocritical philosophies?
2. Which ecocritical undertones of Nature contribute to the enhancement of postcolonial sensitivity?

Significance of the Study

The study is significant as it can illuminate the intersection of ecocritical and postcolonial sensitivity established in literary texts in the Pakistani context. Further, it would be helpful for emerging writers, teachers, and students who want to examine or incorporate these themes in their writing.

METHODOLOGY

The present research explores the postcolonial ecocritical consciousness in the atmospheric diasporic writings, *The Swan's Wife* (2014) by Aamer Hussein. The detailed content analysis of the selected short stories from the book, on the basis

of purposive sampling, is executed. The stories with an explicit focus on place, land, home, and habitat are selected to facilitate the main concern of the research, i.e., to examine the presentation of colonial-ecological philosophies and undertones in accordance with Aamer Hussein's peculiar writing style. It is, thus, an exploratory and descriptive study in nature. Content analysis is opted for, keeping in view that it facilitates providing multiple interpretations pertaining to words, images, dialogues, and characters. The theoretical framework the research has focused upon is Nixon's (2005) notion of *place being displacement* and the postcolonial ecocritical concept of *Othering* of silenced Nature and dis-oriented humans.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Issues and Perspectives

The colonialist discourse inherent in postcolonial theory took its roots in the 18th century when Joesph-Ernest Renan, in his *La Réforme intellectuelle et morale* (1871), sketched out the supremacy of the imperial nations to civilize the colored nations intellectually, socially, and culturally. Postcolonial discourse offers a counter-narrative to the Eurocentric beliefs of the Global North. It perpetuates environmental justice whereby each section of the natural world has the freedom to exist apart from capitalist hegemonic ideals. Postcolonialism, in this sense, can be termed as "anthropocentric" (Huggan & Tiffin, 2015, p. 208), as evident in Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961),

Said's *Orientalism* (1977) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993). Environmentalism, or Green Studies, is a relatively new field that seeks to determine the intersection between nature and humans in diverse ways. Postcolonial Ecocriticism states that humans' maltreatment must be addressed first before addressing non-humans' needs.

Eco-consciousness vis-à-vis postcolonialism implies a healing relationship as Wordsworthian nature can take up a sustainable role in alleviating colonial wounds. An environmental discourse informed by postcolonial sensitivity opens up how vulnerable entities are (mal) treated, objectified, subjugated, marginalized, and victimized by a dominant subject. According to Mukherjee (2010b) in *Postcolonial Environments*, "the relationships between human and non-human agents or actors that define the history of the Indian subcontinent is what I understand as 'environment'" (p. 5). Since both are downtrodden, the remedial interdependent symbiosis is fundamental to initiating the process of recovery from postcolonial anxiety.

Huggan's and Tiffin's *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* (2015) displays an exhaustive and cross-cultural relevance of green postcolonialism. It further offers cultural, historical, political, and ecological insights into postcolonial anxiety. The binaries such as wealthy/poor, master/slave, and developed/underdeveloped highlight some of the core problems existent in post-colonialism. Similarly, *Greening Postcolonialism: Ecocritical Perspectives* (2004) by Graham Huggan also entwines

the two fields and describes the utility of non-human actants for human beings in the social and cultural realm. In this context, the ecological discourse can pave a path for a fruitful alliance and "a productive overlap" between the two theoretical models (Huggan, 2004, p. 701).

In *Environmental Justice Reader* (2002), the issues pertaining to social inequality, colonization, and environmental degradation are portrayed, which may "shape the aspiration toward 'postcolonialism' or 'green postcolonialism'" (Heise, 2010, p. 252). Pablo Mukherjee's reading strategy for reading postcolonial environmental text offers affinities between how both critical theories are a gateway to a unified understanding of nature and postcolonialism. According to him, the content and thematic style of postcolonial texts may be ambiguous upon first reading; however, a deeper study can unveil topographies in which the narrative structure is resistant to colonial imports. He further scrutinizes how the "novel itself is a register of the environment of uneven historical development specific to postcolonial India" (Mukherjee, 2010b, p. 82). The uneven style of South Asian Novels, according to Mukherjee, reveals the deeply entrenched artistic responses to history and culture where environment, culture, and history are intertwined and interdependent.

Pakistani Fiction and Ecological Discourse

Pakistani anglophone writing offers diverse co-mingling between nature and culture. Scott Slovic, an ecocritical theorist in

Ecocriticism of the Global South (2016), asserts that Pakistani literature is slowly coming to terms with the environment and offers globalized transnational interests through its distinct ecological turn. Uzma Aslam Khan, Nadeem Aslam, and Mohsin Hamid's fictional narratives deal with environmental violence, pollution, waste materials, contamination, and lack of environmental sustainability. Hamid (2013), in *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*, states how the "city's neglected pipes are cracking" (p. 98), the contamination of "underground water mains and sewers mingling, the taps" draws attention to threats to human health caused by pollution (pp. 99-100). Kamila Shamsie (2009) uses the concept of 'ecological risk' to define an array of ecological transformations in a global context. Her novel *Burnt Shadows* (2009) delineates the tropes of deteriorating environmentalism and its catastrophic aftermath. Owing to global representations by Pakistani authors, Masood Raja (2018), in his article "The Pakistani English Novel: The Burden of Representation and the Horizon of Expectation," claims that the "Pakistani novel in English has finally come of age and has garnered its space within and without Pakistan" (p. 2).

Discussing Pakistani fiction, Hashmi (1993) writes that formalist and syntactic dimensions of Pakistani novels underlie specific features, such as linguistic and stylistic, turning it into an "indigenized Pakistani language" (p. 100) but is also very near to what Mukherjee (2010a) dubs "uneven development" (p. 14).

However, this unevenness is due to colonial history that resides by and large inside Pakistani culture. Although Pakistani fiction is researched (e.g., Pirzadeh, 2016; Rahman, 2011; Yaqoob, 2015) from aspects such as toxicity, eco-consciousness, and environmental crisis, the healing impact of environment on postcolonial sensitivity remains an under-researched area which needs consideration. The interconnectedness between the environment and humans is mandatory for healing racial, social, and cultural wounds. By dint of Mother Earth's universal traits of love and care, the postcolonial pangs of slavery and exile can be minimized, if not obliterated.

Therefore, the current study aims to bridge the current gap between diasporic imagination and the utility of the environment to cure colonial wounds. *The Swan's Wife* (2014) demonstrates how ecological awareness and natural ties can help redeem individual deficiencies and offer them to act out their angst.

Theoretical Framework

Double Consciousness of Place: *Place is Displacement, and Displacement is Place.*

The place is the central binding concept for ecocriticism and postcolonialism. From a postcolonial perspective, there is a focus on the reimagining and rethinking of place and its history. On the other hand, ecocriticism centers on the conservation of place. Postcolonialism generally focuses on the discourses of former colonies, and ecocriticism relies prominently on the western (American or British) models

of theorizing. A notable argument is put forward by Frantz Fanon (1961, p. 44, as cited in DeLoughrey & Handley, 2011, p. 3) that “for colonized people the most essential value, because the most concrete, is first and foremost the land: the land which will bring them bread and, above all, dignity.” Therefore, he implied the foundation of the domain concerning postcolonial ecocriticism. “Land” is the term that is not only the most prominent identity marker of former colonies but also is a basis of maintenance or livelihood for both the colonizers and colonized inhabitants during colonialism. Thus, a synthesis of the ideologies of both postcolonial critics (like Bhabha, 1994; Fanon, 1961; Said, 1993; Spivak, 1998) and ecocritical critics (e.g., Buell, 2001; Love, 2003; Morton, 2007) could be constructed.

Nixon (2005) further accentuates its need to bridge ecocriticism and postcolonialism. He stressed the alliance of these two fields. Nixon believed that globalization is the binding phenomena of ecocriticism and postcolonialism as he stresses that “in an era of giga mergers and nanosecond transnationalism, we cannot persist with the kind of isolationist thinking that has, in different ways, impeded both postcolonial and ecocritical responses to globalization” (p. 248). Further, he reflects on the binary bioregionalism/ cosmopolitanism where bioregionalism is – “one’s local part of the earth whose boundaries are determined by a location’s natural characteristics rather than by arbitrary administrative boundaries” (Jay Parini, as cited in Nixon, 2005, p. 236).

The notions of global/national and stranger/native are knitted in a cause-and-effect relationship as rightly put by Richard Mabey (1994): “the challenge, in a world where the differences between native and stranger are fading, is to discover veins of local character which are distinctive without being insular or withdrawn” (p. 71). Nixon termed this vision environmental double consciousness where the underlying histories promote place (land, wilderness, and pastoral) as being discovered in relation to hybridity, displacement, and cross-cultural of one’s imagination of place. This concept is exemplified in V. S. Naipaul’s, *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987) and *Nature’s Government* (2000) by Richard Drayton. Naipaul owns an environmental double consciousness as “behind the wealth and tranquility of an English idyll, he remembers the painful, dystopian shadow garden of the transatlantic plantation that helped make that idyll possible” (Nixon, 2005, p. 240).

Evidently enough, we can adumbrate by saying that each place possesses a past comprising the feeling of displacement as Nixon (2005) asserts that “place is displacement” (p. 241) along with an assertion of displacement is place being location: “a matter of (social) ‘locale,’ (geographical) ‘location,’ and ‘sense of place.’ Elements of nature (elemental forces), social relations (class, gender, and others), and meaning (the mind, ideas, symbols)” are unified in this concept (Agnew, 1987, p. 28). We can synthesize this with Buell’s (2001) conception of place which is the “configuration of highly flexible subjective,

social, and material dimensions...” (p. 60). This notion of place as displacement and displacement as a place is one of the defining characteristics of eco-colonial criticism informed by double consciousness of ecocritical and postcolonial sensitivity. The present research relies on it as one of the analytical precepts for the analysis of selected texts. Secondly, another aligned principle with this double consciousness of place is the critical conceptualization of ‘othering.’

Subdued ‘Other’ (Colonized Nature and Humans). Elizabeth DeLoughrey (2014) holds a similar view as that of Nixon in terms of discarding American centralism in environmental discourses by pointing out that “some of the work of postcolonial-ecocriticism includes examining the implications of foundational narratives, problematizing assumptions of a universal subject and an essentialized nature, and examining how forms of dominance are naturalized” (p. 321). The object/subject clash has signified many philosophical discussions in postcolonialism, and further, this is heightened by ecocritical questions of nature/human nexus as rightly put by Aldo Leopold, humans must abandon the long-held view that land is a commodity and come to see themselves not as conquerors of nature but citizens within it. We must come to regard the land, by which he means “soils, waters, plants, and animals,” as part of a larger community. The non-human members of this community have a “right to continued existence, and at least

in spots, their continued existence in a natural state” (Leopold, 1970, as cited in Zammito et al., 2008, p. 106). The “Other” in postcolonial discourse, often represented as the dominated natives (colonized), is thus stretched to include the non-human world of forest, soil, animals, rocks, and valleys, among others, are the site of extraction. This position resonated in Gayatri Spivak’s critical essay entitled “Can the Subaltern Speak?” where Spivak (1998) argues:

A group of countries, generally first-world, are in the position of investing capital; another group, generally third world provides the field for the investment, both through the comprador indigenous capitalists and through their ill-protected and shifting labor force. In the interest of maintaining the circulation and growth of industrial capital (and of the concomitant task of administration within the nineteenth-century territorial imperialism), transportation law and standardized education systems were developed—even as local industries were destroyed, land distribution was rearranged, and raw material was transferred to the colonizing country. (p. 287)

Thus, Spivak recognizes the human/nature dichotomy, and implicit in her schemata is the notion that the neo-colonialists and indigenous people take one end of the binary and the oppressed class and nature form the second side.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In *The Swan's Wife* (2014), Umair Omar, the speaker and the character, is revealed at various stages of his life and can forthrightly be taken as one who represents an alter ego of writer Aamer Hussein. Umair and Hussein share the similitude of being exposed to different cultures. Both were academicians, possessing the sensitivity of a diaspora stemming from the hybrid sensitivity of cultural clashes. The stories Knotted Tongue-I, Third Postcard from Umair, Fourth Postcard from Umair, 9th Extract from Refika's Notebook, Knotted Tongue II, and Ahmar and Anbara are selected as they entail both postcolonial and eco-conscious motifs in them.

Postcolonial Humans and Their Displacement

Knotted Tongue-I is the story in the book which dwells on the themes of exile and displacement while pronouncing the story of an immigrant writer Zohra by offering a riveting window to her struggles and the tribulations of captivity and 'otherness' that she encounters in a foreign land. Zohra and her writing creativity are introduced with an engaging orientation of Nature, "The writer enclosed some poems whose words were like a drop of rain and arrowheads of fire. The letter came from my old country" (Hussein, 2014, p. 41).

Her writing was not just wording but rather identified as *drops of rain* and *arrowheads of fire*. *Rain* and *fire*, the elements of Nature, seem to allude to her individuality, symbolizing the anguish,

turmoil, and dissatisfaction she was trying to grapple with. The notion of hybrid place, intercultural experience, and the desire for ultimate grounding and rootedness is the conundrum that Zohra was trying to solve. However, despite her efforts, she stays unanswered. While contemplating the freedom associated with her motherland in comparison to the suppression she faced in the foreign land, she maintains that,

I want to go home to do something.
Here one's tongue is useless. The bastards seal our lips and leave our arms paralyzed. I can't speak anymore, neither verse nor protest. Here I'm a vagabond, I carry my home on my back. (Hussein, 2014, p. 42)

The place, the essential interconnecting concept, is stressed in the text by Hussein as the bailiwick of congruity, which serves as an ever-defining mechanism of the sensitivity, identity, intentions, and motifs of Zohra, the immigrant. Nevertheless, this complex place sensitivity is further problematized when her own country, even, could only be ascertained to be a mirage of freedom because eventually it is revealed that "another year went by and Zohra came back to this city" from her native country. "She said: there each sound gets stuck in my throat. One can't even sing. Let alone shout. Better for me to stay away for a while from our homeland" (Hussein, 2014, p. 42). These descriptions enunciate the conflict between the consciousness of national spirit along with the sense of being a stranger in a

foreign land and the resulting complicated sense of displacement. Nixon (2011) maintains that displacement is not merely the physical movement of communities or the group of people from one place to another, but rather it offers a wide array of possible connotations, including “the loss of land and resources beneath them, a loss that leaves communities stranded in a place stripped of the very characteristics that made it habitable” (p. 19). In the case of Zohra, this convoluted feeling of subjugation is transmitted as a result of the mental thralldom she faced as an immigrant coupled with the loss of freedom and identity. It further is juxtaposed and impinged with the imaginative freedom and impulse Nature seems to offer to the writer, Zohra, as “In a glass hall on the banks of a river, one afternoon. White swans skimmed the surface of the water. She’d gathered her thoughts into poems and read aloud two of them” (Hussein, 2014, p. 42).

Correspondingly, *rain* and *fire*, manifesting Zohra’s writing, in fact, in the story, function as the objective correlative of the diverging affiliation of Zohra with reference to the two countries she resides in. The desired creative freedom she was yearning for was not provided in either country. The local/foreign binary seems to diminish as for Zohra, both countries are offering the same creative space. The world, for Zohra, is not demarcated in foreign or locally but rather is a global field for her. As Brennan (2006) states,

The intended point [of globalization] is rather that the world is being

reconstituted as a single social space. One might interpret this to mean that the world is becoming more homogenized, that we are seeing the creation of a single, albeit hybridized, world culture whose pace of life, tastes, and customs[...] have increasingly fewer local variations. (p. 129)

Here, the foreign and local cultures offer Zohra the same artistic homogenized space, where she feels displaced and knotted tongue. *I am a vagabond, I carry my home on my back*, is the repeated colonial and ecological register of the story as the loss of home, freedom, peace, and creativity she mourns about was the proximity with nature, which later she availed by retaining her creativity in harmony with Nature. Zohra being a colonial subject is contrasted with Zohra being a creative, independent, and free writer. Furthermore, this freedom and independence are shaped and manifested in her intrinsic bonding with Nature, contributing to assigning the story its ecocritical hue. Clark (2019), while reflecting on the worth of contemporary ecocriticism and the human-nature nexus, maintains that “Ecocriticism’s goal can provisionally be described as that of some state of human freedom and flourishing in which non-human life is fully recognized” (p. 138). The non-human existence of swans was potent enough to subside the prevailing injustice which Zohra was breathing in. Her entrapment turned out to have no boundaries, either local or foreign; the world, for her, had the same

ethics and conduct everywhere except in the purview of non-human existence and environmental synchronization. The *home* she was searching for turned out to be the cuddle of nature. She constantly yearns for the ultimate creativity in an ideal place while pronouncing that “once home, my deprivation will become my language of freedom” (Hussein, 2014, p. 42). The role of Nature is that of an ideal place or a creative home for the subjugated and silenced postcolonial individual, Zohra. Here, the human-nature intersection seems to come into play to counter the colonial human-place nexus. There is the constant abutment of Zohra’s old or native country in opposition to her place of migration, augmented and confounded by her sense of being an outsider in a global world as the desire that *Now I shall turn this foreign tongue into a whip and lash them with their words* is useless because even in her native place she mourns that *at home each sound gets stuck in my throat*. Also, the healing power of Nature, living near the *banks of the river*, turns out to be a potent remedy for Zohra’s anxiety of displacement, which is not dissolved even in her return to the native country but rather by building an affinity with Nature. Huggan and Tiffin (2007) delineate while considering the vein of postcolonial ecocriticism in any literary text that “postcolonial ecocriticism preserves the aesthetic function of the literary text while drawing attention to its social and political usefulness, its capacity to set out symbolic guidelines for the material transformation of the world.” (p. 14). *Knotted Tongue-I*,

thus, offers useful symbolic insight that human liberation could be achieved by reconnecting to the non-human world.

In the twenty-first century’s technological advancement, people persist inseparably associated with Nature and its various phenomena despite being isolated and deracinated. This connection is built and evident through Hussein’s *The Swan’s Wife* (2014), where eco-cosmopolitanism is implied by denoting the way Nature is bridging the rift between the individual global citizen of the world and his seclusion due to this. The isolation and the resulting turmoil could be minimized with the rebonding and reconsideration of our natural surroundings, which are pure and comforting. Batra (2019), while reflecting on the ecological consciousness in a literary work, proclaims that “As we undertake this exercise to focus on place, land, niche, home, habitat, among others, our main concern is to discover the writer’s point of view with regard to nature” (p. 241). The probe of ecological awareness for him turns out to be, “Are the values expressed in the work consistent with what is termed as ‘eco-ethics’ or sound ecological principles” (p. 241). Hussein’s texts in *The Swan’s Wife* (2014) exemplify linguistic and conceptual ingenuity, giving voice to environmental sensitivity, hinting towards the lost home, the neglected environment, and, quite categorically, the anthropocentric orientation of the characters. In 3rd Postcard from Umair, the description of Umair’s sister is a specimen of the environmental consciousness constructed through the

postcard scenes and tropes which we may call “evoking the everyday Anthropocene” picture of human-nature juncture. The subject-object nexus of the human and non-human world is palpable as Umair decrees in the postcard that:

Sitting by the window of her London flat. Behind me there’s a red brick wall. Here she paints in her eyrie, in a tower. Her studio overlooks tall palms, jasmine bushes, bright flowers. Later with green figs, white peaches, local cheese, we drink summer wine. My sister calls it Poor Man’s Sangria. (Hussein, 2014, p. 50)

Though the description etched by Hussein may have an anthropocentric bearing, the readers are deftly drawn, indirectly, towards the ethical or eco-centric tremors with the expressions like overlooking *tall palms, jasmine bushes, bright flowers*, and nature itself reduced to *poor man’s sangria*. It may serve to evoke the positioning of the characters with the environment while alluding to their eco-sensitivity, which may be equated with what Panov (2013) asserts as ‘*axiological positioning*’ when he defines *ecological consciousness* as:

Ecological consciousness is understood as a reflection of the psyche of a variety of man’s relationship with nature, which mediate its behavior in the “natural world” and express the

axiological position of the subject of consciousness in relation to the natural world. (p. 380)

However anthropocentric, these rambling descriptions call for the possible range of meanings regarding the way the eco-sensitive or homocentric imagination of Hussein and the characters he creates operates in his stories. In this regard, Menely and Taylor (2017), as reaffirmed by Ryan (2019), underscore the possibilities of such homocentric presentations of literary works by stating that “the Anthropocene, for all its uncertainties and dislocations, continues to affirm the relevance of the critical and discursive analysis for formulating alternative ecocultural imaginaries and relational possibilities” (p. 165). In *The Swan’s Wife* (2014), the knitting concept of ecological and colonial consciousness is Nixon’s notion of *place as displacement and displacement as a place* because the themes of rootlessness, identity crisis, and diasporic isolation are constructed through references to places the characters belong to and an array of possible meanings that can be associated with attachment of the places, and the natural features of those places including the environment, flora, and fauna.

Voicing of Subdued Humans and Nature

Environment or Nature plays a pivotal role in any literary work, and in the words of Kochar and Khan (2021), it is:

both material and biological. It is available in the form of resources.

Therefore, it becomes a commodity, which is used, spent, and consumed. Further, it is also biological and living. In fact, it is as alive as the humans. Human experience cannot be devoid of nature. (p. 8)

The stories that surround humans and are alive by their presence deal inevitably with an account or narrative of the environment in which they operate; as Iheka (2018) rightly puts it, “The narrative is less about a personal journey and more of an exposé of ecologies, a treatise of the way that humans are co-inhabitants of the world” (p. 29). Humans’ connection with the environment and specifically the land they live in is critical because it not only grounds them but also specifies them belonging to a certain culture either as colonial subjects or sometimes as offenders of Nature as well as of other minority groups. This identification leads toward the categorization and “assumptions of a universal subject” and questions pertaining to “how forms of dominance are naturalized” (DeLoughrey, 2014, p. 321). In this regard, the identity and subjectivity of an individual are shaped by the environment he is a part of and the treatment he induces in that environment. This notion of identity and subjectivity being a cog of the environment is also avowed by Kochar and Khan (2021) in *Environmental Postcolonialism: A Literary Response* by the assertion that “The identity of an individual is closely linked with land, which is a natural resource. The symbiosis between subjectivity and land has been achieved in imperialism. Undeniably, the

land has been the chief imperial motive” (p. 8). Aamer Hussein’s writings are also based on his exilic and nostalgic experience of the land; he could no longer identify with him, and the resulting consciousness was bred in response to his displacement. Asghar (2020) reflects on Aamer Hussein’s diasporic characteristic of writing by upholding that.

His fiction is replete with the themes like an identity crisis, nostalgia, exile, hybrid identity, and the attempt of assimilating in the diasporic space. He is trying to deal with the realities of the unfixed through the continuous struggle of the characters in new lands, struggling for their survival and with the hope to return back one day or the other. (p. 66)

In the 4th Post Card from Umair, it is ascertained that the *garden* that was once *the home* is lost, and at the same time, the only solace in the foreign land is the *blue pool* where anxieties might disperse and even vanish:

Satiated by the blue pool now, hot as heaven. Anxieties disperse, join red petals scattered around on stone and grass. Birds dip their beaks in the pool’s water. In the sun’s blaze, the leaves on their branches shine white. Now I think of the garden I once called home. (Hussein, 2014, p. 52)

The loss of a home is the loss of motherland coupled with the loss of serenity

and peace, which are demonstrated as the attributes only Nature could offer. So, the dilemma of exile prevails in the life of diaspora, and the loss of identity and tranquility from such lives is shown in consonance with Nature and environment:

He takes me by the hand. We walk past the barking dogs, the white mare in the tall grass, down the avenue of cypresses, out of the gates, down the winding backstreets of the old town, to the edge of the land where the sea begins. And I take off my clothes, and I take off my name, and I swim off the page. (Hussein, 2014, p. 64)

The above extracts speak of humans' anxieties, complexities, and struggles in the lands of their exile and the nature/nurture or nature/culture conflicts in life. Only through their contact with nature can they figure out who they are, where they belong, and what cultural conditioning or social constructs they want to get rid of. Nature, yet again, is the refuge and possible refuge for such fretful individuals grappling with the issues of identity, ethnicity, and nationality.

We traveled for seven hours and reached the town on the edge of the river at five. The sun was still high, and the roofs of the tall fort-like buildings glowed in its rays. At once, we set off to wander the lanes of the unknown town. The river had broken its banks, and several streets were underwater. (Hussein, 2014, p. 65)

In the story *Knotted Tongue-II*, while narrating the account of the female character Shams, Nature is not just the background or physical landscape. Rather a whole scheme of metaphoric signification is introduced to make the reader realize the undeniable, forceful, fierce, and unshakable existence of nature. This existence is equated with the enormity of the feelings of displacement and exile. The anguish of the immigrants having the existence of *others* in the global world is presented, and their suffering and contemplation on their survivals in the foreign lands are depicted in association with Nature, quite prominently:

Perhaps silent anger can be washed away by rainwater. I remember Shams saying, what a worry it is this having to make a living wage, it kills you. I'm far away from my country, far away from my faith, I don't want to die alone in this desolate city. (Hussein, 2014, p. 65)

The impact of the diasporic universe and space is undeniably the defining feature of Hussein's writings, as he terms himself as "one having the notions of "unfixed" (Afzal, 2017, p. 65). In *Knotted Tongue-II*, the female character, Shams, is constantly shown calling on her exile background while imagery of Nature is evoked as a stylistic device:

One day in winter, a weeping friend told me Shams is ill. A flood of worries has swallowed her up. It had shown that day. ... But just before spring arrived, she died...

But a friend said she had given verbal instructions that she wanted fire, not earth, as her final element. (Hussein, 2014, p. 67)

Bauer (2019) claims that literary work can significantly give voice to the pervasive contemporary disintegration, loss, and displacement resonating with the spirit of the age, which is quite evident as is termed by Grusin (2018) as “the Anthropocene” (p. 328). The stories of loss and disintegration that Hussein has generated in *The Swan’s Wife* are the representations of myriad ways in which the subject of Nature can adduce the imaginative sensitivity of the writer and his characters. It may turn out to be anthropocentric but at the same time ecosensitive and eco-conscious too, as the metaphoric use of natural imagery sketches out the striking signification along with igniting the eco-imagination.

The story, *Ahmar and Anbara*, is a symbolic fable of an anthropocentric world and the allegory of materialistic human-nature orientation, which has exiled and migrated individuals, but the epistemological positioning of the subject (humans) and object (Nature) is now to a large extent inversed. Nature, like birds, is given voice and consciousness; it emerges as the savior of troubled humans. The story begins with an account of prince Ahmar who, the emblematic illustration of an immigrant, is deprived of all his intrinsic possessions.

I am prince Ahmar, the youth replied. My father is the king of a far-off country, but I have sworn to

stay away from my land for seven years because my brother accused me of a crime I didn’t commit, and I’m not at liberty to say where I come from. (Hussein, 2014, p. 121)

The exiled and migrated individual is shown struggling amongst the tremors of a foreign land, deprived of the comforts of home. Later in the story, that prince is murdered, and the rescuers are the pair of birds that, at the expense of their lives, are ready to create a rebirth for the dead prince. The birds spell out the solution to the prince’s rebirth as:

But if his bride were to capture us and hold us close to each other, heart to heart, and with one stroke of her husband’s dagger, separate our heads from our necks so that one of us shouldn’t die before the other, and hold our heads above the ground where the prince lies, our blood will spill on the earth, and its drops will turn into rubies brighter than the one the wicked woman stole from his forehead. Then Ahmar’s heart will beat again, and he’ll come back to the world of living. (Hussein, 2014, p. 122)

The prince can be reborn, and for this rebirth, nature in the form of birds is offering life, wholeness, and meaning in the story. Once again, Nature is not only the frame of the story rather an ease and the only blessing left in the lives of casted out and uprooted individuals.

CONCLUSION

We can sum up this study by claiming that in the selected texts, the interface between postcolonial and ecocritical sensitivity is presented through explicit evidence of turmoil, identity crisis, and exile's agony. Nevertheless, these alone are not the issues. The rootlessness and displacement from the native world of expatriates further augment them. However, these individuals somehow can redevelop and rethink their closeness, relationship, and affinity with Nature. The texts exemplify the rapport between postcolonial and eco-oriented sensitivity and psyche. The Swan's Wife metaphorically, stylistically, and thematically is suggestive of the eco-colonial status of individuals. Nature's role as solace, savior, place, remedy, metaphor, and symbol is solidified as a resilient engaging mechanism in *The Swan's Wife*, which not only offers imaginative space, freedom, and creativity to Hussein's writing style but also renders his characters as being displaced *others* who both consciously and unconsciously embrace the elements of Nature as their counterparts. These multifaceted features of Nature contribute to the enhancement of postcolonial sensitivity in the selected texts.

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