

Nature, Humanity, and Slow Violence: An Ecocritical Study of *Fireflies in the Mist*

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ABSTRACT

This research endeavour examines the ecocritical dimensions of Qurratulain Haider's novel Fireflies in the Mist (originally Akhir-i-Shab k Hamsafar in Urdu), a novel set against the backdrop of World War II, the partition of India, and the creation of Bangladesh. It employs a qualitative analysis approach and draws upon ecocritical theory and literary analysis techniques to explore the representation of ecological elements in the narrative. Through close examination of the text, the analysis reveals how characters' interactions with the environment reflect societal attitude towards nature and culture. By applying Rob Nixon's concepts of 'Slow Violence' and 'Environmentalism of the Poor,' this study investigates how the novel depicts the environmental degradation effected or largely contributed by colonialism, war, and the partition. It also reveals how these events and practices disproportionately affect marginalized communities instead of those who perpetuate them. The findings emphasize the significance of the synthesis of human and non-human experiences and the impact of environmental destruction on the underprivileged. The study highlights the need to consider ecological perspectives in literary analysis and it reiterates how literature can reveal the deep connections between environmental issues, social inequalities, and historical events. Its findings also inform environmental and social justice policies, and highlight the need to protect both people and the planet. In conclusion, this critical examination contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing insight into Haider's portrayal of environmental justice and the enduring consequences of socio-political violence on both people and the environment.

Keywords: Eco criticism, Slow Violence, Environmental Justice

INTRODUCTION

Scholars have long examined the complex relationships between humanity - and nature (Nahdhiyah et al., 2023). This paper examines the ecocritical elements in Qurratulain Haider's *Fireflies in the Mist*, a novel exploring ecological degradation, socio-political upheaval, and human survivability. The discussion includes the framework for analysis articulated in Rob Nixon's theory of slow violence and the environmentalism of the poor, which indexes the slow degradation of the environment that occurs often imperceptibly, leading to environmental injustice that informs marginalization (Skotnicki, 2019). This

literature is reframed by the acknowledgment of Haider's work and perspective, locates the value of literature to examine the environmental effects of past and present political and historical narratives while underscoring the capacity of literature to offer insight into ecological injustices (Hussein, 2022).

The discussion is grounded in this theoretical foundation and moves to the larger context of environmental realities that frame the 21st century. The metanarrative of the 21st century is alarming because humanity is witnessing an aggressive rise in crises related to deforestation, industrialization, climate change, and depletion of natural resources (Asthana, 2023). Regrettably, these environmental crises in South Asia take on compelling significance related to the population explosion, which contributes to a food crisis and more uncertainty due to the climate crisis (Khalid, 2021). In recent decades, the frequency and severity of environmental catastrophes have increased, with disproportionate impacts on vulnerable communities (Kerr & Aamer, 2025). Although today's environmental challenges are unprecedented in scale, their origins can be traced back to the colonial and industrial revolutions of the 20th century. The expansion of imperial economies, mass-scale extraction of resources, war-induced displacements, and uncontrolled urbanization severely destabilized ecosystems (Little, 2025; Wood, 2015). These developments prioritized political and economic dominance over environmental sustainability. As a result, environmental degradation has continued to influence human and non-human relationships, giving rise to conflicts over access to water, land, and survival (Ali, 2021).

Despite the severity of these issues, ecocriticism remains a relatively underexplored field in South Asia (Alam, 2022). While the region's literature often reflects deep-rooted connections with nature, explicit ecocritical frameworks have been slow to develop in the subcontinent. Literary theorizing has overwhelmingly focused on postcolonial and political themes, at times neglecting considerations of environmental issues; however, nature has played a notable role in classical South Asian literature (such as *The Rigveda*/ Kalidasa's *Meghaduta*) and in a more contemporary vein, South Asian literary authors (for example, Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*, Gun Island, and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*) have raised awareness of environmental themes and the ecological degradation of place and displacement. That being said, ecocritical studies of South Asian literature are rather sparse. There are many environmental dilemmas facing South Asia, including deforestation, pollution, and climate change (Hasnat et al., 2018), and so, this is an auspicious time to engage and engage literary studies with these dilemmas through an ecocritical lens. The current study will make a case and fill in these substantial gaps of comparative literature by utilizing the framework of ecocriticism to examine *Fireflies in the Mist*.

To appreciate the weight of this analysis, it will be first useful to understand the literary importance of Qurratulain Haider (1927–2007). As a formidable presence in Urdu literature and well-known for her individual narrative voice, she is ritually reminded in her writing of history, cultural belonging and human relations. In 1994, with *Fireflies in the Mist*, she depicts the Indian experience in a region of turmoil caused by a myriad of socio-political turmoil, which is intended to illustrate the precarious balance between humans and their natural surroundings. The story in this novel includes complex characters, and the combination of many events connect the character and their surrounding reality. The character not only represents their own and their culture's struggle, but also highlights struggles facing communities in an ever-changing ecological reality (Sathe, 2018).

To bring this all together, in this study, we use ecocritical theory to unpack human-nature relationality, cultural differences and socio-political contexts as depicted through characters in *Fireflies in the Mist*. By looking at how the characters relate to seemingly nature, through critical inquiry we examine how society perceives nature and cultural difference: how industrialization, communal violence and war destroy life - human and environmental. We also focus on how Haider conceives of nature, as she considers the questions around environmental justice in conjunction with notions around slow violence.

This study is looking to read *Fireflies in the Mist* ecocritically, namely framed by Rob Nixon's concepts of slow violence and environmentalism of the poor. By investigating how Haider represents environmental devastation as a prolongation of socio-political unrest, it strives to draw attention to the role literature plays in helping to reveal the long-term environmental consequences of political and historical transition.

The main objective of this critical exploration is to explore the interplay between human and non-human cultures especially in the context of socio-political upheavals and broader ecocritical concerns. It further aims at investigating the novel's depiction of environmental degradation and how marginalized and unprivileged communities are struggling for survival and justice in this environment. To achieve these objectives, the study seeks to answer the following questions:

- (i) How does the novel represent the synthesis of human and non-human culture amidst socio-political turmoil?
- (ii) How does the text portray the slow and often unnoticed forms of environmental degradation, and how do these impact underprivileged communities more severely than others?

Applying an ecocritical approach to Haider's *Fireflies in the Mist* serves as an outlet to reveal the intricate relationships between nature, culture, and socio-political contexts in the subcontinent. Set across three decades, the novel captures the misty landscapes of Dacca, tranquil Buriganga River, monsoon season, gardens, and wildlife which not only serve as a rich backdrop but also reflect the environmental history and cultural fabric of the subcontinent. Haider depicts changing human and non-human relations in times of political strife. This ecocritical study allows us to understand how nature shapes and is shaped by human conflict. More specifically, Haider examines how environmental degradation is experienced by marginalized communities, particularly focusing on rural peasants and farmers as they endure drought, famine, and monsoon.

This research adds to the substantial field of ecocritical research in South Asian literature which is a largely unexplored study. Looking at, and examining, *Fireflies in the Mist* through an ecocritical lens deepens our understanding of how aspects of ecological degradation and social injustice intersect in South Asian literature. The research aims to address instances of unrelenting social injustice, demonstrating Rob Nixon's **Slow Violence** and **Environmentalism of the Poor**. In sum, this study contributes additional depth to ecocritical discourse in Pakistani academia, and establishes a model for other scholars to further explore Haider's literature while fostering a larger interest in exploring environmental themes in the region's literary tradition.

Theoretical and Analytical Framework

This study utilizes a qualitative strategy to perform an ecocritical reading of *Fireflies in the Mist* in order to discover connections between environmental degradation, social injustices, and marginalized voices. Ecocriticism is a critical framework that studies the relationship of literature, culture and the physical environment (Buell, 1995). It investigates how a text might represent nature, ecological crisis and the human-nature relationship. Ecocriticism looks closely at the human-non human relationship in the environment (Long, 2024). In addition to ecocriticism, this study uses Rob Nixon's slow violence and environmentalism of the poor to interrogate historical environmental exploitation and socio-led injustices.

As a theoretical framework, Ecocriticism emerged in the latter half of the 20th century (Buell, 2011). It emerged as a powerful tool for raising awareness about environmental issues in response to the global ecological crisis and was pioneered by scholars like Cheryl Glotfelty and Lawrence Buell. Ecocriticism critically examines the representation of nature in literature and seeks to redefine our relationship with nature by promoting environmental awareness through the analysis of literature. The term "ecocriticism" was first coined by William Rueckert in his critical writing "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in

Ecocriticism” in 1978. Rueckert (1978) defined it as the application of ecological principles to literary analysis. Later scholars expanded on this idea as like Buell (1995) describes ecocriticism as an approach that studies literature and environment with a commitment to environmentalist praxis.

Cheryl Glotfelty views ecocriticism as the study of relationship between literature and physical environment. In her views, literary theory in general, examines the relations between writers, texts and the world. In most literary theories 'the world' is synonymous with society- the social sphere. However, Ecocriticism expands to the notion of entire ecosphere. As feminist criticism views literature through a gender-conscious lens and Marxist criticism examines text in light of economic class and production modes, ecocriticism carries an earth-centred perspective into literary studies (Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996).

Ecocriticism also delves into the intricate dynamics of nature versus culture in literary works as it examines the human-nature relationship and its struggles in the face of social and political turmoil. This includes the impact of cultural values and beliefs on environmental degradation, and the contrast between cultural sensitivity and lack of cultural sensitivity towards environmental issues. Early eco-critics focused on nature writing like wilderness, the woods and the large mammals, and nature was seen like a binary opposition to human culture as the latter was considered a force that contaminated or destroyed former. Ecocriticism often focused on praising nature, mourning its degradation by human culture, and condemning the harm caused by pollution and environmental destruction (Parker, 2015). However, present-day eco-critics view culture as deeply intertwined with and shaped by the natural environment, rather than as something separate from it. They emphasize the interconnectedness of human culture and the physical world, acknowledging that culture both impacts and is impacted by nature (Long, 2024).

The present analysis draws upon ecocritical theory to examine the representation of ecological elements. These ecological elements include synthesis of human and non-human culture amidst socio-political turmoil and disproportionate impact of environmental degradation on under-privileged communities within *Fireflies in the Mist*. The concepts of “Slow Violence” and “Environmentalism of the Poor”, introduced by Rob Nixon, further broaden the scope of ecocriticism. It addresses the gradual environmental harms that often go unnoticed and accumulate over time, affecting disproportionately the vulnerable population (Nixon, 2011).

Rob Nixon’s concept of Slow Violence aligns with postcolonial critiques of environmental exploitation through temporal, spatial and affective perspective. By integrating these frameworks, this study underscores the layered impact of environmental degradation on communities marginalized by colonial histories, patriarchal structures, and capitalist exploitation. Nixon's concept of “Environmentalism of the Poor” highlights the gradual and often invisible harm inflicted upon the natural world and marginalized communities. It analyses how the novel portrays the impact of colonialism, capitalism, and environmental exploitation on the natural world and human communities (Nixon 2011).

Slow violence is a form of harm that unfolds gradually and often goes unnoticed by mainstream society and causes delayed destruction with impacts extended over years or even generations. This type of violence includes the long-term effects of climate change, toxic pollution, deforestation, soil erosion, and resource depletion. Its slow pace makes it harder to see, but its consequences are profound and lasting. However, literature, especially postcolonial narratives, can play a vital role in exposing this hidden harm (Fisher, 2022). Slow violence is gradual and often invisible and delayed damage caused by environmental degradation, climate change and other forms of ecological harm. Unlike immediate forceful destruction, slow violence becomes visible after a considerable passage of time and, at the same time, disproportionately affects marginalized communities. The communities affected by slow violence are mostly poor, marginalized and potentially disenfranchised (Nixon, 2011).

Communities impacted by slow violence are often poor, marginalized, and powerless and their struggles arise out of necessity. Rob Nixon describes this fight as the “Environmentalism of the Poor” by ascribing

it to the struggles of marginalized communities fighting for survival in the face of environmental degradation and slow violence. Unlike traditional environmentalism, which focuses on conservation and preservation, this movement prioritizes basic human needs, such as health, livelihoods, and life itself. For these communities, environmental activism is not a choice, but a necessity driven by the immediate threat of environmental destruction to their very existence. This movement highlights the disproportionate impact of environmental harm on vulnerable populations and underscores the need for environmental justice and human rights (Nixon, 2011).

The analytical framework employed for the purpose of ecocritical investigation of *Fireflies in the Mist* is thematic qualitative text analysis as outlined by Udo Kuckartz (2014) in his book titled *Qualitative text analysis*. The method starts with careful reading of the text for identifying key aspects relevant to research question. The next step is determining major topics and subtopics within text. Then data related to these topics and subtopics is assembled. This process ensures systematic and structured analysis of qualitative text data along with interpretative depth and flexibility (Kuckartz, 2014). The study's thematic qualitative textual analysis provides a suitable framework for examining the intersections between nature, humanity, and slow violence in the text. The researcher acknowledges the limitations and potential biases of the study, striving to represent the experiences of marginalized communities and women accurately and respectfully. The findings of this study contribute to a deeper understanding of the ecological and social implications of literary representations of nature and humanity.

Ecocritical Analysis of the Novel

The ecocritical analysis of the novel *Fireflies in the Mist* provides a complex and varied exploration of environment, colonialism, class struggle, and gendered oppression. The analysis of Human-Nature Interaction highlights how different classes and cultures engage with nature. It emphasizes colonial land exploitation, agricultural struggles, and ecological imbalance. The lens of slow violence investigates how environmental and social oppression unfolds gradually over generations. Using Rob Nixon's framework, the novel is analysed through postcolonial, feminist, spatial, temporal and affective perspectives to demonstrate the long-term effects of imperial and patriarchal control. Finally Environmentalism of the Poor examines how farmers, fishermen, and marginalized women struggle against colonial and postcolonial resource exploitation. By analysing these themes, this analysis reveals how Haider connects environmental concerns with social justice, history, and identity.

Human Nature Interaction in the Novel

In *Fireflies in the Mist*, human-nature interaction reflects class divisions, colonial exploitation, and ecological consequences. The novel explores how different social groups engage with nature, the impact of human actions on the environment, and the long-term effects of historical events. It highlights the deep connection between environmental and socio-political struggles.

Depending on their socioeconomic standing, historical roles, and ideological preferences, different social classes and civilizations react to nature in different ways in *Fireflies in the Mist*. The more intimate but perilous relationships between working-class and Aboriginal communities and nature are contrasted in the book with the colonial elites' sheltered, artificial interactions with nature. While nature is something that the British and upper-class Indians control, beautify, or exploit, nature is a field of survival, struggle, and resistance for revolutionaries and the rural poor.

To the British elite in India, nature was something to be controlled for convenience. They did not use it as a provider of food but as a setting for their privileged existence. The use of native labour in maintaining an artificial world is shown in the presentation of British homes: "All windows and doors were screened with tattie screens of scented khus grass; they were watered from time to time by a chhokra boy" (Haider, 1996, p. 70). This fact betrays the exploitative nature of the relationship between the British and native

labourers. While the colonial masters led a well-nurtured, climate-conditioned life, native labourers worked in the scorching sun to keep up this façade of comfort.

The Indian elite landlords and the colonial officials too engaged with nature in exploitative manners, albeit through hunting. The Kheda trip tradition of capturing elephants for sport is how nature was reduced to a spectacle for both the British and the Indian aristocracy: As mentioned in the text, "MacDonnel had taken them to Sylhet on a Kheda trip; Margaret wanted to see how the tuskers were trapped" (Haider, 1996, p.12). The evolution of elephant trapping from being a survival-based or sacred practice to an aristocratic recreation marks the colonial commodification of nature. Another blunt illustration of British economic exploitation of nature is witnessed in MacDonnell Sahib's business deals: "MacDonnell Sahib, speculating in elephants, tea, jute, and nearly indigo, mirrored a pattern of extraction" (Haider, 1996, p. 4). The British introduced the large-scale monoculture plantations, especially the jute industry, which revolutionized Bengal's agricultural landscape, stripping the soil bare and exposing the region to famine.

For the common people and the indigenous, nature is not a luxury but a way of life. Maulvi Sahib is an example of this deep relationship with nature. "What do you do for a living, Baba?" Deepali asked. "Catch fish," he replied, simply. Unlike the British and the elite classes who see nature as something to be conquered or gazed upon from afar, the fisherman's livelihood is entirely dependent on the river. His answer has quiet dignity and he is untouchable. The novel frames these marginalized communities not as passive victims but as active participants in shaping history.

British economic policies forced farmers to grow jute and indigo for export rather than food crops for local consumption, leading to widespread food shortages. This shift not only drained the land of nutrients but also made Bengal more vulnerable to famine. The novel suggests that the very landscapes that had once sustained communities were reshaped to serve colonial economic interests, leaving the people dependent on imported food and external markets.

Similarly, the environmental degradation caused by British elephant hunting and tea plantation expansion reflects how colonial exploitation extended beyond agriculture to Bengal's natural ecosystems. MacDonnell Sahib's business ventures in elephants, tea, and jute symbolize an extractive economy that prioritized profit over ecological sustainability. The large-scale destruction of forests for tea plantations disrupted Bengal's delicate ecological balance, replacing diverse native flora with single-crop plantations. This not only reduced biodiversity but also led to deforestation and soil erosion, making rural areas more vulnerable to natural disasters such as floods and famines.

The industrialisation of colonial Dacca transformed the riverine landscape into an overcrowded and polluted waterway, replacing natural beauty with commercial activity. As the narrator mentions that the bustling waterway was overcrowded with cargo ships, tugs, barges, steamers. The river, once a vital and unpolluted natural resource, became congested with trade vessels, altering its ecological function. This imagery reflects how industrial expansion prioritizes economic gain over environmental health, contributing to pollution and habitat destruction.

The novel also draws attention to the widening gap between resource abundance and human suffering. Despite the natural wealth of Bengal, its people remain hungry due to exploitative land use policies: As discussed, "Golden Bengal grows rice thrice a year and remains hungry" (Haider, 1996, p. 157). This statement expresses the paradox of resource mismanagement. Though the land is fertile, its benefits do not reach those who cultivate it. The hoarding of resources by landlords and colonial authorities leads to food scarcity and malnutrition.

In *Fireflies in the Mist*, historical events—colonial rule, partition, famines, wars—change the natural world. The book shows how political and economic upheavals alter landscapes, ecosystems and displace communities. Bengal's rivers, forests and agricultural land bears the marks of these transformations, where history and nature are intertwined. Wars turn rivers into battlefields, colonial policies drain resources and displacement leads to environmental neglect. Through these themes the book critiques how human conflicts leave their imprint on the natural world and leave behind destruction and change.

Another striking example of colonial impact is the decline of Bengal's coastal districts, which once thrived due to maritime trade. As described, "Now they are full of robbers, and destitute fishermen. In the Mughals' and the Nawab-Nazims' time these coastal districts used to be prosperous because of their maritime trade" (Haider, 1996, p. 118). This is how British policies broke the old economy and the environment. Loss of trade routes and decline of industries forced people into poverty and they didn't have the means to look after the land.

Partition of Bengal in 1947 led to massive displacement and people had to leave their homes, lands and livelihoods. This displacement not only disrupted human lives but had ecological consequences too. The sudden movement of millions led to deforestation, overuse of natural resources and neglect of cultivated land. The destruction of Chandrakun's gardens and overgrown creepers symbolizes this loss. Once manicured landscapes went to ruin as their owners fled or lost their wealth, that's how political turmoil leads to environmental neglect. Decline of these estates is a metaphor for the broader environmental degradation caused by displacement. This moment captures the erosion of cultural practices attached to nature as modernity and political instability disrupts sacred traditions. The fear and uncertainty of the festival is the larger breakdown of social and environmental harmony caused by partition.

The impact of war on nature is also reflected in Charles Barlow's family history. His father, James Barlow, attempted to document Bengal's natural environment, but his work was ultimately futile:

His father had read botany and zoology at Balliol College and had spent his time in Bengal writing about its natural history. However, his fatal encounter with a tiger suggests the ultimate failure of this colonial attempt at mastery over the environment (Haider, 1996 p. 176).

Throughout the novel, the degradation of nature parallels broader societal and political decline. The image of the Ganga as a carrier of history and memory emphasizes how natural elements bear witness to human transformations: "The voyage of ashes and bones floating down the Ganga" (Haider, 1996, p. 346). The river carries both the literal remains of the dead and the metaphorical weight of history. Finally, the rising sun over Japan serves as a reminder of nature's endurance despite historical turbulence: "The Sun God was slowly appearing over the misty islands of Japan" (Haider, 1996, p. 347). This passage suggests that while human history is marked by war, displacement, and environmental destruction, the natural world continues its cycles, indifferent to human struggles.

Exploration of Slow Violence in the Text

Rob Nixon's idea of slow violence describes the slow demolition caused by social, political, and economic power over the long haul. The novel depicts this type of violence richly in its presentation of the environmental and socio-political wrongs inflicted upon marginalized groups under colonialism and its residual postcolonial legacies. The destruction of the natural environment is deeply connected with resource degradation, racial orders, and systemic exploitation; it can be seen as a form of continued environmental injustice.

Colonialism in Bengal reshaped the landscape and economy, prioritizing British interests while devastating local ecosystems and communities. The segregation of Indian and British populations in Civil Lines was a physical manifestation of colonial control: "Many upper-class Indians and members of

provincial civil services came out of their Indo-Saracenic havelis and took up residence in the Civil Lines, but the Whites had no social contact with their Indian neighbours" (Haider, 1996, p. 70). This radicalized urban planning created environmental disparities. Similarly, British officials engaged in hunting and resource extraction, exploiting India's wildlife for sport and economic gain. As mentioned, "Plumer Sahib shot this croc in the Ram Ganga, in the Himalayan foothills of U.P. Plumer Sahib is a famous big-game hunter; he has bagged many a tiger in the Sunderbans, too" (Haider, 1996, p. 82). The glorification of British hunters proves how colonial rulers treated nature as a commodity rather than a shared resource. The destruction of Bengal's biodiversity through deforestation for tea and jute plantations and the excessive hunting of animals represent environmental violence. This harm was done to both the land and the indigenous communities.

The colonial restructuring of Bengal's economy is also an example of environmental injustice. British policies forced monoculture farming. They gave priority to cash crops like jute and indigo over food production. This shift led to widespread hunger and land degradation. The soil was stripped of nutrients and this all made it less fertile for future generations. The Bengal Famine of 1943 which was one of the most devastating consequences of British economic policies is mentioned in the novel: "But my sister writes to say that there are rumblings of a most dreadful visitation, a terrible famine, which may soon stalk the unhappy land of Bengal" (Haider, 1996, p. 207). This famine was not purely a natural disaster. It was caused by British wartime policies which diverted food supplies away from India to fuel the war effort.

The arrival of European trading companies marks the beginning of this slow decline. Their influence steadily expands and alters the natural and economic landscape. "Slowly and subtly they had taken over as the river country's blustering new masters. They had come to stay" (Haider, 1996, p. 4). This passage highlights how colonial control does not begin with conquest but with gradual economic infiltration, which ultimately reshapes the environment. The introduction of large-scale jute cultivation displaces local riverine economies. This transforms the once self-sustaining agricultural system into an extractive colonial enterprise.

Rehan's anger at British colonial rule directly reflects Nixon's concept of Slow Violence. His frustration reflects the long-term damage put on Bengal's economy and environment. As stated, "England?" he repeated crossly. "Who the hell is talking about England? Look at what England did to us" (Haider, 1996, p. 115). He later explains the economic motivations behind colonial violence. "Do you know that during the last two hundred years the emerging nations of Europe waged wars against one another, mostly in order to capture Indian trade?" (Haider, 1996, p. 118). Unlike sudden, visible acts of violence, this economic and ecological destruction unfolded over centuries. The exploitation of agriculture, forests, and water bodies was not just a side effect of colonialism but a proper strategy to maintain British dominance.

Slow violence is not necessarily immediate; it plays out over decades, centuries, and generations. It shapes landscapes and lives through incremental deterioration, the erosion of ideals, and historical displacement. In *Fireflies in the Mist*, the temporal frame of slow violence is seen in the incremental disempowerment of aristocratic dynasties, the gradual erosion of cultural identities, the waning of revolutionary fervour, and the residual psychological effects of historical occurrences.

Perhaps the most poignant example of slow violence in the novel is the systematic dismantling of revolutionary ideology. The juxtaposition between young revolutionaries and their disillusioned, older counterparts shows how time wears away the convictions of youth. Deepali, who used to be an ardent activist, is now viewed as cynical and distant. Rehan Ahmed, who used to be a radical Leftist, is now a political opportunist, reflecting how revolutionary passion ends up being co-opted by the establishment: "I grew tired. Then I had the opportunity to rest and be comfortable, first there and then here. It's as

simple as that" (Haider, 1996, p. 331). His resigned cynicism is a marked contrast to the zealous, anti-colonial polemics of his earlier years. The gradual degeneration of radicalism into complacency and opportunism is one of the novel's most powerful temporal examinations of Slow Violence.

Colonial and postcolonial economic exploitation further intensifies environmental injustice. The jute industry, once Bengal's economic backbone, provides wealth to external markets while leaving local farmers poor: "Cargo ships will carry the 'golden fibre' to Chandpur, Madaripur, and Narayan Gunj. The money will go to Calcutta and Scotland" (Haider, 1996, p. 156). This passage highlights resource extraction as a form of slow violence. The land and labor of Bengal sustain industries controlled by urban elites and foreign powers, while the farmers themselves remain in debt and poverty. Despite their role in cultivating Bengal's most valuable crop, they receive no share of its profits.

Women, too, experience environmental injustice intertwined with patriarchal oppression. Yasmin's fraudulent marriage exposes the vulnerability of women within patriarchal legal structures. Gerald's letter dismisses their relationship, stating that he was "never really interested in women" and only "married" her out of pity. This revelation leaves Yasmin to navigate single motherhood, economic hardship, and social stigma. Her situation reflects how gendered slow violence operates on multiple levels, not only is she abandoned by her husband, but she also lacks legal or financial support. Women like Yasmin are systematically disempowered. The novel thus reveals how climate disasters, resource extraction, and patriarchal oppression intersect, perpetuating generational cycles of poverty and environmental degradation.

Slow violence is not just physical or environmental but it is deeply psychological and emotional. It shapes the internal worlds of individuals across generations. In *Fireflies in the Mist*, characters endure emotional fragmentation, ideological disillusionment, and the inherited burdens of history. Colonialism, partition, and political struggles leave scars that persist long after the events themselves.

For Deepali, political activism brings psychological turmoil. She shifts between fear, excitement, resentment, and humour. Her realization of personal and political betrayal triggers an identity crisis, as narrator describes her, "Deepali crossed over to the dressing table and looked at herself; dishevelled hair. Ashen face, red eyes. Perhaps she had really become a bhairabi" (Haider, 1996 p. 149). The bhairabi, a Tantric ascetic, symbolizes suffering and transformation, reflecting Deepali's ideological disillusionment.

The commodification of women is reinforced through wedding songs that reduce brides to objects of exchange. As stated, "O my millionaire Father, we are cows of your garden, birds of your fields" (Haider, 1996, p. 153). These lyrics normalize women's dehumanization, exposing the slow psychological violence of patriarchal traditions. Yasmin and Deepali's emotional scars reflect the hidden cost of historical upheavals. Yasmin, once successful, observes how past idealists like Deepali and Jehan Ara are left with nothing but bitterness and disappointments. Even personal relationships become casualties of national conflicts. Rosie, caught between nationalist loyalty and personal love, experiences irreconcilable emotional contradictions: As depicted, "She prays for India's victory but also prays for Akmal, her enemy" (Haider, 1996, p. 290). Similarly, nationalist divisions prevent her from mourning loved ones. This reinforces the mental and emotional toll of lost dreams as it shows how historical conflicts shape not only nations but the psyches of those who lived through them.

Environmentalism of the Poor

The trials of underprivileged people, the landless of farmers, and the use of natural resources show the environmentalism of the poor in *Fireflies in the Mist*. The book shows how colonial and postcolonial power structures value riches above environmental equilibrium, therefore leaving the needy to suffer. People like Ali Hussain, rural labourers, and displaced villagers symbolize the quiet victims of environmental inequality. Their ability to resist social, financial, and ecological oppression demonstrates their strong but often underestimated environmental awareness.

From *Fireflies in the Mist*, the rural poor—including fishermen, farmers, and boatmen—suffer the most severe effects of environmental and financial exploitation. While these societies most depend on natural resources for sustenance, they are still quite susceptible to environmental catastrophes. The old fisherman in the Sunderbans embodies their silent strength and obscurity. “He had probably spent his entire life here, toiling and praying, and would die here, unknown and unsung” (Haider, 1996, p. 107). This highlights how rural workers contribute to society yet remain unnoticed, their struggles rarely acknowledged by those in power.

The boatmen’s plea to nature encapsulates their perpetual struggle against environmental destruction and economic hardship. As narration says, “O Boatman, how many humans, how many cattle were taken away by the river?” (Haider, 1996, p. 158). Here, natural disasters are not just acts of fate but on-going struggles, highlighting the relentless cycle of suffering that defines the lives of Bengal’s poor.

Economic policies also fail to uplift rural communities, ensuring that wealth from their labour benefits urban elites and foreign powers. As it is mentioned, “The money will go to Calcutta and Scotland” (Haider, 1996, p. 156). This highlights the continuity of colonial economic extraction, where local labour sustains industries that generate wealth for others while leaving the workers themselves impoverished. This illustrates how historical injustices persist, keeping rural workers in cycles of poverty and dependence despite cultural recognition.

Perhaps the strongest theme throughout the novel is how the colonial and postcolonial regimes drain resources from Bengal with no return for its people. Land and labour exploitation was at the core of British economic policies, whereby resources were drained for European convenience and locals deprived of access to the same. The ayahs, khidmatgars, and cooks who worked as servants in British homes created a class of invisible workers, supporting British ways without ever enjoying them.

These hierarchical systems continued even after independence, so that only a privileged few had access to power and resources. Affluent Indians such as Nawab Qamrul Zaman Chowdhry and Barrister Prithvi Roy were able to deal with the British on equal terms. While Rosie’s father was a native Christian cleric, he was dealt with in a condescending manner. This hierarchy within Indian society reveals how colonial domination entrenched class divisions, disallowing genuine economic justice even after independence.

The jute industry is an example of how natural resources were exploited without local farmers gaining any benefit. As described, “Rehan Ahmed, who was once a revolutionary, now runs a jute factory—a labour- and land-intensive industry founded on the exploitation of labour and land” (Haider, 1996, p. 328). His evolution from radical idealist to capitalist factory owner is the perpetuation of colonial exploitation under new management. Rather than British industrialists, local elites now dominate production, but the workers are still poor.

The ecocritical reading of *Fireflies in the Mist* demonstrates how nature, human conflict, and historical repression are intricately woven into the narrative of the novel. The ecocritical approach shows how landscapes, rivers, and ecological degradation influence the lives of characters. Environmentalism of the poor highlights the endurance of subaltern farmers, fishermen, and women, who are the victims of economic and ecological exploitation. The title of the novel, *Fireflies in the Mist*, captures elusive hope and resistance, representing the unseen yet unrelenting struggles of the oppressed. Through this multi-layered analysis, the novel is revealed to be a strong critique of history, identity, and environmental justice, highlighting the on-going struggle against systemic injustice.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The world is aflame, but no one can see it as the flames are invisible. The forests are disappearing, but there are no warnings sounded. Rivers are getting dry, but there is no concern. This is the terrible situation of Slow Violence. It is the one that does not detonate but its effects spread over centuries, unheralded,

unpunished. Rob Nixon argues that such environmental degradation goes unseen largely because it is bereft of spectacle. It comes as a whisper, yet its reverberations haunt civilizations. The novel *Fireflies in the Mist* does not just tell history; it portrays the silences in it. It strips away the layers of colonial oppression, postcolonial abandonment, and the marginalization of the poor.

The novel places environmental degradation in the context of colonial history. The Bengali landscape was exploited by British domination for economic purposes. They converted huge tracts of land into indigo and tea plantations. These transformations drained the land. The local ecosystem was destroyed, and uprooted. The communities have been coexisting with nature and this ecosystem for generations. The colonial land management model was focused on profit at the expense of sustainability. The result is a legacy of environmental and social devastation.

Post-independence policies followed this trend. In the guise of national development, Industrialization hastened the degradation of the environment. Factories started contaminating rivers. Forests were cut down more, and city growth engulfed agricultural land. Haider exposes that colonial exploitation was further worsen by new leaders. This economic greed resulted in environmental injustice. The novel highlights that such changes favoured the privileged few but left the masses poorer. The livelihoods of poor masses are based on living off the land.

In the novel *Fireflies in the Mist*, the human relationship with nature is highlighted through multiple aspects like exploitation, dependence, and conflict. Here, Haider shows that nature is not only closely linked with individuals' lives but it also influences their identity, economies, and struggles. Bengal's land, rivers, and forests are not mere resources but rather they are portrayed as treasures that constitute cultural habits, survival, and the past. The novel is extremely critical of how colonial and postcolonial powers have severely damaged this relationship because of their preference for economic interests over ecological balance.

Through this way, the novel explores how human relationships with nature are conditioned by power relations. Those who dominate land policy and industrialization perceive nature as a commodity. On the other hand, the marginalized consider it as a source of sustenance. This contrast is central to the ways the novel explores the issue of environmental justice. It exposes ecological degradation that has a very negative impact on those who have little ability to withstand it.

Violence is conventionally imagined as sudden, explosive, and indelible—bullets discharged, bombs exploding, and bloodshed. But not all violence declares itself with such drama. Some types of devastation play out over time, quietly spreading across generations. Rob Nixon calls this slow violence—a slow, a kind of harm that is mostly invisible in dominant narratives. Whereas war makes headlines for its grandeur, slow violence insidiously seeps into the ground, contaminates the water, and chokes the air. It does not kill instantaneously; it kills over several years, normally harming the least culpable among its victims.

Fireflies in the Mist is a book saturated in Slow Violence. The degradation of the environment presented on its pages is not scenery merely; it is a power that governs the lives of people. Haider demonstrates how environmental devastation in Bengal has been an on-going, layered tragedy. It was once started by colonial rulers, sustained by postcolonial governments, and currently being expedited by industrialists. The pain of peasants, fishermen, and the urban poor is not due to any one incident but the cumulative effect of policies, greed for economic gains, and political abandonment over time.

Bengal should have been a land of plenty due to its fertile plains, abundant rivers, and rich biodiversity. But it has been facing systematic environmental destruction. Colonialism, war, famine, floods, migration, partition, and industrialization have all affected its landscape severely. It has benefited those who were

not dependent on it for their living and survival. Haider's novel painstakingly reveals this slow violence. She emphasizes that ecological degradation is not a natural disaster but a carefully engineered process. As the policies, formed by those who are in power, does not directly affect them. They have disastrous effect on the poor and marginalized. The British altered Bengal's agricultural scene to meet imperial requirements. Traditional forms of farming were abandoned in place of cash crops such as indigo and tea, which stripped the land of its fertility. Deforestation gathered pace, rivers were diverted for transportation, and land was fenced off for commercial use. It was not a sudden disaster but a gradual, slow loss of ecological and economic balance. When independence came, the damage was already done.

But Haider does not excuse postcolonial states. She is critical of the way the newly independent countries inherited colonial forms of environmental plunder instead of overturning them. The same things kept happening—the rural lands were grabbed for industry, the rivers were dammed in the cause of progress, and the city sprawl devoured agricultural lands. The colonial slow violence was rebranded as modernity, but the victims did not change: the landless, the workers, and the forgotten.

The novel shows that environmental degradation is not shared equally. The rich can pollute but not drink from the contaminated rivers. They can cut down the forests but not plough the denuded lands. For the poor, environmental degradation is not a theoretical issue—it is a struggle for existence on a day-to-day basis. Rob Nixon's environmentalism of the poor illuminates the way that those most harmed by ecological devastation are usually also the least able to stop it. Their conflict isn't an ideological one, but a pragmatic one since their very survival rests in the hands of the land, water, and air that political avarice and industrialization constantly poison.

In *Fireflies in the Mist*, Haider creates a world where the impoverished struggle to hold on to their world against forces that are too powerful to be turned over quickly. Opposition is not a revolutionary outburst; it is a relentless, draining struggle fought through persistence. The novel demonstrates that environmental injustice cannot be separated from social and political repression, and those who fight it, peasants, fishermen, and women, do so because the choice is extinction.

The novel *Fireflies in the Mist* does not end with the triumph of the oppressed. The rivers continue to be dirty, the forests continue to dwindle, and the poor continue to be trapped in cycles of displacement. Yet, resistance does not die out. The fisherman continues to throw his net into dirty waters. The peasant continues to sow in lands that have been drained of their fertility. The woman continues to carry water, despite knowing that tomorrow she will have to walk even farther. Haider does not offer resistance as an event, but rather as a process. It may not always be successful in modifying policies or legislation, but it makes sure that the voices of the weak are not silenced.

The analysis of *Fireflies in the Mist* finally concludes that environmental justice is impossible without political responsibility and cultural self-reflection. Haider's novel reveals the convergence of ecological devastation, social subjugation, and cultural erasure. It compels a reconsideration of what development means. The novel contends that real development must not be at the expense of the environment and the communities that rely on it. Only by recognizing the political origins of ecological degradation and reasserting cultural stories that privilege ecological balance can a more equitable and sustainable future be envisioned.

CONCLUSION

This research exploration, through an ecocritical lens, has explored the deep interconnection between nature and humanity in Haider's novel. It reveals how the novel critiques environmental exploitation, social injustice, and the marginalization of both people and landscapes. It offers a comprehensive understanding of *Fireflies in the Mist* which presents environmental injustice both as a historical and contemporary crisis.

Haider's novel does not separate human history from environmental history. The relationship between human and nonhuman culture is practical, spiritual, emotional, and historical. However, socio-political upheavals as in the form of colonialism disrupt this bond. By restructuring the land usage, colonial rule replaces self-sustaining agriculture with cash crops grown for economic purposes. Haider depicts the deep loss that comes with this disconnection with nature. It has deep psychological impacts as well. It shows that exploitation of nature is an environmental cultural and existential crisis.

Haider's novel makes it clear that effects of environmental destruction are different on various sections of the society. It punishes the poor first and its effects on poor are worst. The rich, who get profit from deforestation and industrial pollution, can afford to escape its consequences. But the peasants, fishermen, and landless labourers must live with poisoned water, barren fields, and shrinking forests. Their suffering is not an unfortunate side effect of progress; it is the very foundation upon which progress is built.

This study underscores the necessity of integrating ecocritical perspectives into postcolonial literature, particularly in the South Asian context, where environmental issues are deeply tied to historical and social inequalities. *Fireflies in the Mist* is more than a literary work—it is a call to acknowledge the wounds inflicted upon both nature and humanity, to recognize that the destruction of one inevitably leads to the destruction of the other. Haider's work insists that we listen, that we remember, and that we resist.

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