

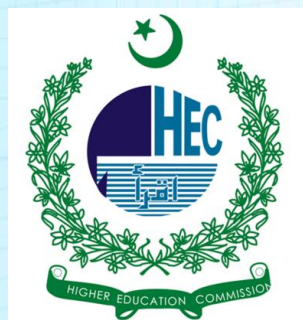
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A Postcolonial Ecocritical Reading of Hamid's Moth Smoke



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Abstract

This research conducts a Postcolonial Ecocritical analysis of Mohsin Hamid's renowned novel *Moth Smoke* (2000), focusing on the themes of environmental crisis and social inequalities portrayed throughout the narrative. The novel presents Lahore as an Urban postcolonial city, struggling not only with pollution and catastrophic climate change, but also with social injustice due to class disparities prevalent in the society. This study analyzes Hamid's distinguished novel by employing the theory of Postcolonial Ecocriticism, a concept introduced in the text *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* (2009) by Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin. The Qualitative research approach, particularly close reading method, has been used to conduct this research, focusing on the sections of the novel that illustrate the themes of environmental decline, postcolonial elements and social inequality. The aim of this research is to scrutinize the connection between colonial histories and contemporary ecological crises that are being faced by postcolonial countries. The study reveals that the environmental degradation of the Postcolonial world cannot be separated from colonial legacies, capitalism and class disparities prevalent in postcolonial countries. By conducting an interdisciplinary postcolonial Ecocritical analysis of *Moth Smoke* (2000) novel, this study contributes to the contemporary debates on capitalism, Ecological degradation, corruption and postcolonial studies.

Keywords: Postcolonial Ecocriticism, Ecology, Environmental degradation, Social Inequality, Literature, Capitalism

1. Introduction

In recent decades, the world has witnessed several environmental disasters and natural calamities which has made Ecocritical concerns a significant heated debate in contemporary modern times. Irresponsible and anthropocentric attitudes of humans have led the world towards ecological instability, forcing nature to retaliate in the worst ways possible. While considering the modern ecological crisis, it is important to emphasize on the historical legacies of colonialism and exploitation. The novel *Moth Smoke* (2000) written by Mohsin Hamid portrays sufferings of local people living in postcolonial Pakistan by focusing on the themes of environmental devastation, class

system, capitalism, corruption and identity crisis. Mohsin Hamid is considered as one of the most significant and influential voices of South Asia in Literature, who always illustrates the cruel reality of the postcolonial world. His writings are celebrated and recognized worldwide due to their unique writing style, experimental narrative techniques and reality based stories. Most distinguished works written by Mohsin Hamid include *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), *Exit West* (2017), *How to get filthy rich in rising Asia* (2013) and *Moth Smoke* (2000). He also talks about the critical and sensitive issue of Islamophobia in his writings and interviews as researched by scholar Ramzan in work “*Making up stories is an inherently political act*”: *Mohsin Hamid in conversation*. (Ramzan, 2022) In his novel *Moth Smoke* (2000), Hamid reveals that the postcolonial countries are still struggling to evade the psychological and social scars left by the colonial powers. The global economic superpowers and power structures are still controlling third world countries by using trade sanctions, loan schemes, international funds and neocolonial practices, making it evident that the modern crises of postcolonial countries are strongly connected with their colonial history. The novel *Moth Smoke* (2000) also illustrates the extreme level of corruption and growing level of terrorism that was prevalent in the 1990s period in Pakistan. (Narzary, 2021)

Set during the summer of 1998 in Lahore, *Moth Smoke* (2000) follows the story of young individual Darashikoh Shehzad who belongs to a middle class family and becomes a victim of drug addiction and false imprisonment. The novel strongly critiques the class system in Pakistan which favours the powerful and elite class and oppresses the poor, making them feel alienated and excluded from the society. The environmental conditions of Pakistan particularly Lahore have been shown as destructive and polluted. The air is dusty, smoky, toxic and the heat is unbearable for human and non-human inhabitants of Lahore. Razzak et.al (2022) in their research entitled *Impact of community education on heat-related health outcomes and heat literacy among low-income communities in Karachi, Pakistan: a randomised controlled trial* explores the harmful impact of Urban city pollution to its people's health, mainly focusing on poor communities. The energy crisis, load shedding and suffocating heat of urban city Lahore makes it difficult for middle and lower class

people to live a normal life, meanwhile the rich and elite class of society continues to live their life with comfort and luxury by using facilities of air conditioners and expensive cars. Daru loses his job in the bank and falls into the destructive circle of inferiority complex, self pity, identity crisis and self exploitation, ultimately destroying his life. The unbearable climate of Lahore contributes to the collapse of Daru's mental and psychological health. Daru states in the novel: "I light up while rubbing the hash and tobacco residue off my hand and onto my jeans. Rolling while rolling, solo, and baking while baking in the heat. It helps kill time on long afternoons, and I haven't traveled very far, but I know that no place has afternoons longer than this place, Lahore, especially in the summertime". (Hamid, 2000) The novel is written in the historical context when nuclear tests were being conducted by Pakistan, therefore presenting the political unease and tension of that time. (Jeanniard, 2022) Thus, the novel *Moth Smoke* (2000) portrays ecological imbalance as a living reality of the postcolonial world, where western led capitalist system destroys the moral compass of society.

The unjust distribution of facilities and opportunities across the different classes of society devastates the marginalised and vulnerable population of the country. Iqbal et.al (2025) in a research article entitled *Power, Poverty and Property: How Socio-Economic Inequities Fuel land litigation in Pakistan* explore that poor people have unequal access to legal resources as compared to influential ones, which impact their land ownership matters. Mumtaz & Roelen (2025) in their study *Winners and losers: Class dynamics and social protection in Pakistan* explain that the entire process of decision making in the country is controlled by the elite class which perpetuates the marginalization of the lower class. This research will employ the theoretical Lens of Postcolonial Ecocriticism, a concept given by Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin in their notable work *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* (2009). The study will focus on the connection between colonial histories, global capitalism and environmental degradation. Hamid's novel and theory of Postcolonial Ecocriticism states that the ecological disasters and natural calamities faced by postcolonial countries is not merely because of global wave of environmental instability but they are deeply rooted in the social, cultural and political

unfair systems that prevail and perpetuate division in the society. Employing an interdisciplinary approach by interconnecting environmental justice with postcolonial studies, helps in the deep and critical evaluation of the social and moral decline of Pakistani society, presented in the novel *Moth Smoke* (2000).

1.1 Research Objectives

1. To conduct a Postcolonial Ecocritical analysis of Hamid's novel *Moth Smoke* (2000)
2. To scrutinize the connection between colonial history and current environmental degradation in Postcolonial countries

2. Literature Review

Khan & Riaz (2024) in research *A Comparative Postcolonial Ecocritical Study of Selected African and South Asian Fiction* introduce the discipline of Postcolonial Ecocriticism as an innovative and emerging interdisciplinary field which combines environmental issues and post colonial literature. According to the researchers, Postcolonial Ecocriticism talks about the connection between the current environmental crisis and its connection with the colonial legacies. By using the framework of Postcolonial Ecocriticism introduced by Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, this study analyzes the novel *How beautiful we were* written by Imbolo Mbue in 2022 and the novel *Trespassing* written by Uzma Aslam Khan in 2003. Both novels address ecological problems in Asia and South Africa. Mbue in the novel *How beautiful we were* explains the devastating effects of oil drilling in Africa and Uzma Aslam Khan in her writing discusses the environmental crisis in Pakistan which are enhancing mainly due to industrialisation. According to the research, western powers are still exploiting other developing countries by displacing and tormenting the marginalized communities and by propagating capitalism, therefore increasing the Postcolonial Ecocritical crisis in those countries. Researchers have explored those regions which are mostly under-represented including Asia and South Africa, emphasizing that social justice cannot be acquired without attaining ecological balance.

Bowers (2004) in an essay *Eco-Criticism in a (Post-) Colonial Context* included in book *Towards a Transcultural Future: Literature and Human Rights in a 'Post'-*

Colonial World explores how Postcolonial theory and the discipline of Ecocriticism are connected and influence each other in many ways. According to the researcher, Ecocriticism mostly revolves around the destruction of nature in Western studies and culture and ignores the crisis of people belonging to once colonised countries. Bowers uses postcolonial Ecocritical theory to scrutinize the novel *Almanac of the dead* written by Marmon Silko, highlighting that in postcolonial regions the societies go through exploitation, postcolonial crisis, problems of indigenous people, lack of human right protection and even loss of land. Therefore, one must reconsider the relationship between history, politics, traditions and ecology in order to truly comprehend environmental crisis and instability. The study comprehensively investigates the broader picture of postcolonial Ecocriticism where nature, ecological crisis and the struggles of marginalized people are related to each other.

Bartels et.al (2019) in research *Postcolonialism and Ecology* explain the devastating impacts of colonization on people and the environment. The researchers analyzed that when European countries made colonies in nations like Asia and Africa, they damaged their environment, took their rich resources including copper, gold, oil and even their livelihood which caused irreparable damage to the people of those regions and to the environment itself. When colonized regions got independence, they found themselves in a crippled and miserable situation because the effects of colonial practices never left them. Even after many years of independence, postcolonial countries are going through issues including pollution, Western-led capitalism, extraction of rich resources and exploitation. This study connects Ecocriticism with postcolonial literature and analyzes how history plays a great role in contemporary environmental crises. According to the researchers, colonialism and the environmental crisis cannot be dealt with as separate issues because they are interconnected. The critical problem is that colonialism has taken another form in current times which is neocolonialism and western capitalism is still exploiting the developing countries in the same way they used to do in colonial period.

Malik et.al (2025) in research entitled *An analytical study of hyperreality and environment in Mohsin Hamid's Moth Smoke* deeply explores Mohsin Hamid's novel *Moth Smoke* (2000), by using the lens of Postmodernism, focusing on the concepts of

simulacra and hyperreality given by Jean Baudrillard. The research analysis that Hamid has portrayed Pakistan as a hypermediated place in his novel where the reality and circumstances are shaped by digital media, human wealth and the culture of consumerism. These social issues lead to the deeper and more complex issues, turning the characters of the novel into people having identity crisis and emotional instability. The study focuses on the characters of Daru, Ozi and Mumtaz to highlight how modern societies, particularly mentioning the city of Lahore, have become hyperreal landscapes, where human worth is measured by material possessions, his car, air conditioner and the luxurious lifestyle. Researchers argue that the increasing culture of consumerism, materialism and influence of media have eroded the religious and traditional values, destroying the family system, social morals and individual intellect. The researchers explore the journey of the Daru by examining Baudrillard's four stages of simulation, emphasizing that hyperreality damages not only the life of an individual but it has an everlasting negative effect on society as a whole. This hyperreal world leads toward a social order where morals, ethics, individuality and human value do not matter.

Louza (2024) in the article *The Question of Land Ethics and the Environmental Crisis in Mohsin Hamid's Moth Smoke* scrutinizes the novel *Moth Smoke* (2000) written by Mohsin Hamid by using the theoretical framework of Ecocritical lens. The researcher focuses on the anthropocentric approach of the world and explains how this anthropocentric thinking leads toward ecological imbalance and environmental issues. The people who believe that humans are dominating creatures act neglectfully towards the environment, resulting in countless environmental crises. Thus, humans need to have an ethical and responsible relationship with nature as the safety of humans depends on fossil fuels, natural resources and natural habitats provided by nature. The researcher deeply delves into the characters of Daru, Aurangzeb, Murad Badshah and Mumtaz, highlighting that only the characters of Mumtaz and Murad oppose the rotten rules and patterns of society. The study employs the concept of land ethics given by Aldo Leopold, showing that the novel of Mohsin Hamid urges its readers to develop a responsible connection with animals, non-human entities, air, soil, trees and nature because it is an

undenying fact that humans and nature have an inseparable relation. Environmental protection is deeply connected with human responsible attitude towards environmental justice.

Junaid & Junaid (2024) in their research *Economic Crises and Marx's Theory of Alienation from Self and Society in Mohsin Hamid's Moth Smoke* use the theoretical framework of Marxism to study and analyse the novel *Moth smoke* (2000), illustrating how the issues of inequality, capitalism, class conflict and corruption in Pakistani society have been portrayed in Hamid's novel. Mohsin Hamid portrays colonial capitalism, analysing the society in which few rich elites rule the entire country and control the most resources. The novel has masterfully highlighted corruption, materialism and elitism through the use of humour, irony and satire. This research calls for an urgent need to stand against the corrupt power systems, imperialism, capitalism and injustices because this is the only way to reclaim one's identity. The novel boldly exposes and uncovers the hidden social rotten ideals where poor people continue to live as a marginalized community of society. This research emphasizes that Pakistan today has post post-colonial generation who is experiencing an oppressive and unjust system which needs to be corrected. Literature is a very impactful medium which can perform as a powerful voice of resistance against the cruel and unequal societal norms. This novel asks its readers to think systematically and analyse the society critically and to question, oppose and recreate the unfair societal order.

Zubair & Maaz (2023) in research *Analyzing Ambivalence and Hybridized Individualistic Western Cultural Values in Mohsin Hamid's Moth Smoke* examine Mohsin Hamid's novel *Moth Smoke* (2000) by using the lens of postcolonialism. This study mainly focuses on the concepts given by Homi K Bhabha, including the concept of cultural hybridity, mimicry, ambivalence and identity crisis. In this novel, Pakistani society and its people live a confused life in which they are struggling between their traditional culture, morals, values and the influence of Western practices. This situation leads to the erosion of relationships, family norms, traditional ethics and values. The character of Murad is an embodiment of ambivalence, where he is often seen using English language to communicate merely to show himself as rich and

educated. This example explains how Pakistani people consider the language of English as a sign of dominance, knowledge and power, portraying the postcolonial psychological tension and identity crisis. The characters of Ozi and his wife Mumtaz also show that people are influenced by western culture. This research reveals that this situation leads the society towards collapse and moral decline. The journey and ultimate downfall of protagonist Daru exposes the devastating effects of class disparity and capitalism in Pakistan, a post-colonial country.

Kazim et.al (2025) in work *A Pragma-stylistic study of Mohsin Hamid's Moth Smoke* investigates the Pragma-stylistic features in the *Moth Smoke* novel (2000) written by Mohsin Hamid. Researchers explain that by breaking traditional rules and using certain figures of speech, the writer has shown power politics, corruption and hybridity in his work. This study has used a qualitative research approach, employing the Pragma-stylistic model given by Black in 2006. The study asserts that language holds hidden meanings and makes the story more thoughtful, deep and influential. The findings of the research reveal that Hamid has used linguistic support masterfully to explain social and cultural issues including societal inequality, class disparity, identity crisis and the never ending struggles of the middle and lower class of Pakistan. Hamid has used stylistic and figurative language in his novel to demonstrate societal issues and character's emotional instability.

2.1 Research Gap

Although the novel *Moth Smoke* (2000) has been explored through the theoretical lens of Eco criticism, stylistics and marxism, this thought-provoking story is yet to be examined through the interdisciplinary approach. This research aims to fill this gap by analysing Hamid's *Moth Smoke* (2000) through the lens of postcolonial Ecocriticism, combining environmental justice with colonial legacies.

3. Methodology

This study uses a Qualitative research method to explore the intersection of colonialism and environmental crisis as displayed in the novel *Moth smoke* (2000), written by Mohsin Hamid. The study focuses on the themes, characters and dialogues which align with the postcolonial ecocritical approach. A closed reading method has been used to carefully evaluate the elements of ecological imbalance and colonialism

presented in the novel. The Postcolonial Ecocritical framework given by Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin in their work *Postcolonial Ecocriticism; Literature, Animals, Environment* (2009) has been employed in this research to have a comprehensive and detailed overview of ecological and postcolonial themes portrayed in the novel.

3.1 Theoretical framework

The study is based on the interdisciplinary theory of postcolonial ecocriticism which was introduced by scholars Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin in their work *Postcolonial Ecocriticism; Literature, Animals, Environment* (2009). The theory combines Ecocriticism and postcolonial studies, explaining that there exists an undenying connection between history, colonialism and environmental crisis. The scholars believe that the ecological problems and the legacies of brutal colonialism cannot be understood separately, as the colonial inequalities are still persisting in the form of neocolonialism, imperialism and globalisation. The book states: “Postcolonial ecocriticism might best be described today as a branch of environmental humanities that is heavily influenced by, but non-identical with, political ecology.” (Huggan & Tiffin, 2009) Postcolonial researchers claim that land and nature are not just neutral and passive backgrounds, but they are politicized places and territories which are greatly influenced by histories of colonialism, exploitation and capitalism. In their significant work, Huggan and Tiffin have turned the focus of Ecocriticism from western point of view to the postcolonial world, giving voice to the marginalized communities. The scholars claim that: “Accordingly, 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.” (Huggan & Tiffin, 2007) In postcolonial countries, environmental issues are deeply intertwined with personal struggles of survival and justice.

“Indeed, it seems necessary to point out that the convergence of postcolonial and eco/environmental studies over the last decade or so is neither intellectually unbidden nor historically unanticipated; rather, it has given greater visibility, in the first case, to the ecological dimensions of earlier

postcolonial analyses and, in the second, to the increasingly global outreach of a US-based ecocriticism that had always been aware of its own ‘eco-parochialist’ tendencies, and that had often shared postcolonialism’s distrust for national self-congratulation and unmarked racial politics.....What the postcolonial/ecocritical alliance brings out, above all, is the need for a broadly materialist understanding of the changing relationship between people, animals and environment – one that requires attention, in turn, to the cultural politics of representation”. (Huggan & Tiffin, 2009)

Huggan and Tiffin gave the concept of Environment and Empire in their work, explaining that colonialism and the practices of spatial expansion was indeed a strategy to attain environmental and ecological transformation. During the period of colonisations, the colonisers didn't only harm people, they also destroyed natural habitats, indigenous ecosystems and nature in order to get hold of colonized land's rich resources through exploitation. As the book states: “And, as in Australia and South Africa, the growing numbers of colonists regarded the lands they occupied as theirs by right.....The same attitudes were applied to animals. The transported stock ‘naturally’ belonged to the settlers, while native animals, the very basis of Indian existence, were ‘naturally’ considered fair game. Not surprisingly, then, livestock and game increasingly became the subjects of human conflict.” (Huggan & Tiffin, 2009)

This research will employ the above discussed concept to analyse Mohsin Hamid's novel *Moth Smoke* which extensively describes Lahore as an urban city, a postcolonial landscape which is going through excessive pollution, heat, smog and devastated nature. This environmental degradation is shown as a legacy of colonial capitalist practices which gave path to postcolonial Western style capitalism in Pakistan. The characters in the novel, being members of the post colonial world, go through political, economic and environmental crisis which demonstrates the everlasting psychological and systematic effects of colonial legacies.

“Not only were other people often regarded as part of nature – and thus treated instrumentally as animals – but also they were forced or co-opted over time into western views of the environment, thereby rendering cultural and environmental restitution difficult if not impossible to achieve. Once invasion

and settlement had been accomplished, or at least once administrative structures had been set up, the environmental impacts of western attitudes to human being-in-the-world were facilitated or reinforced by the deliberate (or accidental) transport of animals, plants and peoples throughout the European empires, instigating widespread ecosystem change under conspicuously unequal power regimes.” (Huggan & Tiffin, 2009)

Another major concept Environmentalism of the poor has been given by Huggan and Tiffin in their book *Postcolonial Ecocriticism; Literature, Animals, Environment* (2009), emphasizing that people of developing postcolonial poor countries struggle to get basic needs of life including clean water, health facilities, food, education and land. This concept has been adopted by scholars including Ramachandra Guha and Joan Martínez-Alier which explains the difference between western environmentalism and ecological justice in developing postcolonial countries. While the Western models focus on aesthetics and wilderness of nature, the poor people of marginalized communities face the problems of poverty, displacement and loss of habitat as a result of environmental decline. In the novel *Moth smoke* (2000), the poor people suffer load shedding, heat strokes, deaths, smoke and smog which destroys their mental and physical health. On the other hand, the rich elites of the society like the character of Ozi and his father enjoy the facilities of air conditioning, luxurious cars and every possible security. The ecological harm is very unequal among poor and rich countries, and on the same note between poor and rich people of the same society. This regional and class disparity always affects the poor more as compared to elites. Therefore, the discipline of postcolonial Ecocriticism urges the readers and scholars to consider environmental decline and collapse an after effect of colonialism. The colonial powers used industries, railways, modern urban buildings and infrastructures to have a domination in the ecological domain. The book *Postcolonial Ecocriticism; Literature, Animals, Environment* (2009) narrates:

“European justification for invasion and colonisation proceeded from this basis, understanding non-European lands and the people and animals that inhabited them as ‘spaces’, ‘unused, under used or empty. The very ideology of colonisation is thus one where anthropocentrism and Eurocentrism are

inseparable, with the anthropocentrism underlying Eurocentrism being used to justify those forms of European colonialism that see ‘indigenous cultures as “primitive”, less rational, and closer to children, animals and nature. Within many cultures – and not just western ones – anthropocentrism has long been naturalised. The absolute prioritisation of one’s own species’ interests over those of the silenced majority is still regarded as being ‘only natural’. Ironically, it is precisely through such appeals to nature that other animals and the environment are often excluded from the privileged ranks of the human, rendering them available for exploitation.” (Huggan & Tiffin, 2009)

This research will employ these two concepts given by Huggan and Tiffin in their book *Postcolonial Ecocriticism; Literature, Animals, Environment* (2009) to scrutinize the interconnection between history of colonialism, Western-led capitalism and the environmental crisis. This approach will help to critically evaluate the social crisis and ecological instability as portrayed in the novel *Moth Smoke* (2000) written by Mohsin Hamid. The study stresses the powerful role of literature in highlighting the realistic societal and psychological problems of oppressed people and the postcolonial world. As the book states; “Literature continues to play the dominant part in postcolonial ecocriticism, and it will continue to do so.....one of the distinct benefits of reading literature is that it adds singularity to specificity, while another is that literature has an enduring capacity to combine multiple, often conflicting perspectives and to operate across numerous temporal and spatial scales.....the mediating function of social and environmental advocacy, which might turn imaginative literature into a catalyst for social action and exploratory literary analysis into a full-fledged form of engaged cultural critique.” (Huggan & Tiffin, 2009)

4. Analysis and Discussion

4.1 The legacy of Colonialism impacting Pakistani people’s lives in *Moth Smoke* (2000)

Moth smoke (2000) presents a clear and critical overview of postcolonial Lahore, situated in Pakistan, portraying the impact of colonial history on today's generation. The story is set during the 1990s time period when corruption, capitalism and injustice was prevalent in the whole country. The main character of the novel

Darashikoh Shehzad belongs to a poor family which makes him feel worthless and incompetent. As Murad Badshah explains the class disparities of Pakistani society in the novel, stating that: “You see, it is my passionately held belief that the right to possess property is at best a contingent one. When disparities become too great, a superior right, that to life, outweighs the right to property. Ergo, the very poor have the right to steal from the very rich. Indeed, I would go so far as to say that the poor have a duty to do so, for history has shown that the inaction of the working classes perpetuates their subjugation.” (Hamid, 2000) Although Daru is an educated and talented young individual, he feels inferior in the company of his rich friend Ozi mainly because of his luxurious lifestyle. He goes through identity crisis which is one of the main aspects of postcolonial identity. The wife of Ozi, Mumtaz also feels disconnection from her surroundings and suffers through a distorted sense of self. An element that is very evident in the narrative is the influence of Western culture and language on the life of people. In postcolonial Pakistan, people tend to speak English with pride, taking it as a matter of great privilege and honor. The character of Murad Badshah is a lucid example of such thinking. He tries to speak English so that he can mask his poor background. It makes it clear that people think speaking English can make them look rich, educated and influential.

“‘Greetings!’ he exclaims, hauling himself out of the rickshaw with some difficulty. ‘Hello, gangster,’ I say to him. Murad Badshah’s my dealer: occasionally amusing, desperately insecure, and annoyingly fond of claiming that he’s a dangerous outlaw. He speaks what he thinks is well-bred English in an effort to deny the lower-class origins that color the accent of his Urdu and Punjabi. But like an overambitious toupee, his artificial diction draws attention to what it’s meant to hide.” (Hamid, 2000)

Daru goes through great difficulty in finding a proper job merely because he doesn't have any foreign degree. Every office and company he goes to gives priority to individuals who contain a degree from some western country which illustrates that the Pakistani system is in a strong grip of Western superiority complex. According to them, foreign degree makes a person more appropriate and suitable for the job, making it difficult for the poor marginalized group of society to have proper jobs. The

novel narrates: “Eight banks, eight c.v. 's, seven flat-out rejections. This is my first actual interview. ‘Thank you, Butt saab.’ ‘Where else are you looking?’ I tell him. ‘And what have they told you?’ ‘They say I don’t have a foreign degree or an MBA.’ ‘And?’ ‘They haven’t given me an interview.’” (Hamid, 2000) Another postcolonial element portrayed in the novel is economic instability and dependence on foreign countries for mere survival. The novel shows the critical time period when Pakistan tested its nuclear program in 1998 and went through sanctions which threw the country into economic vulnerability. Although the country, despite all the challenges, managed to become a successful nuclear power, it went through a time full of adversity and challenges due to the western dominance in the global financial order. The elite class just like Ozi and his father continued to enjoy their life as usual but the situation of poor people like Daru became worse with time. Unemployment in the country went to an unbearable level and poor people had to live their life in misery even if they were educated.

“You have to have money these days. The roads are falling apart, so you need a Pajero or a Land Cruiser. The phone lines are erratic, so you need a mobile. The colleges are overrun with fundos who have no interest in getting an education, so you have to go abroad. And that’s ten lakhs a year, mind you. Thanks to electricity theft there will always be shortages, so you have to have a generator. The police are corrupt and ineffective, so you need private security guards. It goes on and on. People are pulling their pieces out of the pie, and the pie is getting smaller, so if you love your family, you’d better take your piece now, while there’s still some left.” (Hamid, 2000)

Another postcolonial element depicted in the novel of Mohsin Hamid is the contrast between the class of poor and rich, just like the colonial history in which the colonizers enjoyed all the luxuries of the country and the colonised lived in misery. In postcolonial Pakistan, the elite and powerful make their separate colonies where they enjoy every possible comfort of life while the poor take all the challenges of the society. If the environmental crisis comes, those who suffer the most are the ones who are the most poor. The heat doesn't affect the rich as they have the facility of air conditioners even in their cars but the poor get affected by it physically, mentally and

psychologically. Even if floods come, the rich stay safe in their strong buildings and infrastructures, while the poor get washed away with water. Even the financial and economic instability in the country causes unemployment on a large scale but the consequences are only faced by the poor educated young people of the society. On the contrary, the rich manage to get their desirable positions by using connections and power. Thus, the class disparity and uncontrollable capitalism in postcolonial Pakistan is influenced largely by the colonial legacy that west Left in Asia.

4.2 Exploring the Ecocritical concerns depicted in Moth Smoke (2000)

Mohsin Hamid presents the city of Lahore as an urban industrialised city which is going through severe environmental decay, ultimately damaging the physical and psychological well being of its people. The climate that has been dominant throughout the narrative is suffocating heat. In addition to this heat, the poor people of society also suffer from load shedding which makes it difficult for them to keep their mind and their mood in a good state. Daru who belongs to a middle class background also struggles with this suffocating and unbearable warm climate which makes him a bitter person. The portrayal of Daru's family in the story also shows the difficulties that lower and middle class of Pakistani society face when the environmental degradation happens. While the upper class enjoys air conditioning in their homes, in their offices and in their luxurious cars including Ozi's Pajero, the poor class and people like Daru and his family live their life in misery and crisis. The professor Superb in the story also states the difference between middle and upper class of the society in terms of facing the outcomes of ecological imbalance. He states:

“‘There are two social classes in Pakistan,’ Professor Superb said to his unsuspecting audience, gripping the podium with both hands as he spoke. ‘The first group, large and sweaty, contains those referred to as the masses. The second group is much smaller, but its members exercise vastly greater control over their immediate environment and are collectively termed the elite. The distinction between members of these two groups is made on the basis of control of an important resource: air-conditioning. You see, the elite have managed to recreate for themselves the living standards of, say, Sweden, without leaving the dusty plains of the subcontinent.....They wake up in air-

conditioned houses, drive air conditioned cars to air-conditioned offices, grab lunch in air conditioned restaurants (rights of admission reserved), and at the end of the day go home to their air-conditioned lounges to relax in front of their wide-screen TVs.” (Hamid, 2000)

Another important ecological concern that has been discussed in the novel is the atomic program which is also greatly damaging for the environment. The novel states: “Murad Badshah shakes his head. ‘This nuclear race is no joke. Poor people are in trouble.’”(Hamid, 2000) The conversation between Ozi and Daru regarding the nuclear test demonstrates its political dimension. The novel states: “‘Nothing like nuclear escalation to make people forget their problems.’He winks.” (Hamid, 2000) Although it ensures a state’s safety, the negative consequences of atomic bombs cannot be neglected. As Murad Badshah states in the novel: “It was a summer of great rumblings in the belly of the earth, of atomic flatulence and geopolitical indigestion, consequences of the consumption of sectarian chickpeas by our famished and increasingly incontinent subcontinent. Clenched beneath the tightened sphincters of test sites and silos, the pressure of superheated gases was registering in spasms on the Richter scale. Lahore was uneasy, and Imodium in short supply.” (Hamid, 2000) While the country celebrates its nuclear power, the poor people go through catastrophic climate conditions, energy crisis and load shedding. One night, Daru’s Mother went to the house roof due to the absence of electricity so that she could sleep soundly but got killed on that night which left an unforgettable scar in Daru’s mind and heart. He remembers the horrifying incident in these words;

“On a midsummer night that followed a day when the temperatures spiked into the hundred and teens, much of Lahore was plunged into darkness. The pull of innumerable air conditioners stressed connections and wires and the systems that regulated the eddying currents of electricity past their capacities, and one after another, they failed. The wind chose that night to rest, and neighborhoods baked in the still heat. Perhaps it was not surprising that Darashikoh’s mother decided to sleep on the roof on that tragic night. After all, she had often done so as a child growing up in Khanewal with no air-conditioning. Darashikoh would remember having a cup of hot tea with her before lying down on his

charpoy, his arms crossed under his head, staring up at the stars. He fell into a deep sleep, so deep that he never heard the firing of the bullet that would claim his mother's life. His mother may have been asleep as well, for when her son found her dead the next morning, she was lying on her charpoy with her eyes shut. Or she may have been awake. She may have heard the repeated coughing of a Kalashnikov being fired into the sky. But even if she did, she probably thought nothing of it." (Hamid, 2000)

This shows that although environmental degradation is disastrous to everyone living in the society, the elite and upper class can manage to drop the effect to the bare minimum by using air conditioners, solar systems and other facilities including UPS, generators and expensive cars but the poor people suffer the most because they cannot afford these facilities. Daru believes that attaining those facilities will make him worthy as the novel narrates; "But Darashikoh believed in consequences. He knew that his mother would not have died if the AC had been cooling her room that night, and when he lost his job and had his power disconnected, he felt more than just the discomfort of the heat in his house. He felt an insecurity, a disease that gnawed at him day and night. Perhaps he merely feared the loss of social status that the end of his air-conditioning represented." (Hamid, 2000) The city of Lahore is shown in the story as an urban landscape, going through major environmental decline and the city is covered by smoke, smoke, dust and blurry weather. Daru often describes the environment of Lahore as some enclosed, dark and dusty space, where even the simple process of breathing becomes difficult due to extreme kinds of pollution. Environmental degradation does not only stop at climate change but it also affects the lives of animals and other non-human beings. The novel narrates:

"Stepping out into the hot day, I shiver at the sudden change in temperature. The sun beats down on the roads, searing the last blades of green from otherwise completely brown dividers of parched grass. The shopkeeper looks edgy, and the boy who brings me my drink doesn't smile. Probably tense about this nuclear thing. Or maybe it's just the heat. I sip slowly through a waxed-paper straw while I watch two dogs in the shade not far from my car." (Hamid, 2000)

In the novel, stray cats and dogs have been shown as dead or exhausted due to the severe heat. Daru states in the novel: “A dog is lying in the middle of the driveway, just outside the gate, and he doesn’t stir when I yell at him or even when I send a stone thudding into his back. I look around for a stick but can’t find one, so I walk forward empty-handed to see if he’s dead. He is. He can’t have been dead for long because gorged ticks still cover his ears like bunches of grapes. There are a lot of dead dogs these days: the heat’s killing them. I push him with my foot toward the refuse pile by the gate and notice he’s already stiff, tendons like tight ropes wrapped around his bones.” (Hamid, 2000) The environmental condition is so bad that humans and animals are finding it difficult to live peacefully, which shows that nuclear bombs, industrialisation, urbanization and anthropocentric behaviours can lead towards an unhealthy world where people will find it hard to breathe clean air. This severe heat even kills people, as the novel narrates: “May arrives with a burst of heat that leaves nine dead in Jacobabad”. (Hamid, 2000) Just like the political and capitalist system of society is rotten as shown in the novel *Moth smoke*, the ecological condition is also deteriorating day by day. No one is showing attention to these serious concerns, mainly because those in power are not much affected by the ecological imbalance, as they have incalculable wealth. The novel states;

“All my life the arrival of the monsoon has been a happy occasion, ending the heat of high summer and making Lahore green again. But this year I see it as a time of festering, not rebirth. Without air conditioning, temperatures are still high enough for me to sweat.....The entire city is uneasy. Sometimes, when monsoon lightning slips a bright explosion under the clouds, there is a pause in conversations. Teacups halt, steaming, in front of extended lips. Lightning’s echo comes as thunder. And the city waits for thunder’s echo, for a wall of heat that burns Lahore with the energy of a thousand summers, a million partitions, a billion atomic souls split in half.” (Hamid, 2000)

The energy crisis in the country reflects the failure of the authorities and institutions who should be held accountable for the societal and environmental decline. This disastrous situation of Lahore exposes their disinterest in common people’s welfare as well as the betterment of the environment. The failure of governance is evident in the

environmental collapse that Lahore witnessed in the 1990s. The novel narrates: “Ozi’s sweating. His face shines and he wipes it with the tips of four curved fingers held together. ‘It’s damn hot. How long has the power been gone?’ ‘Just a couple of hours, I lie. ‘Load-shedding or a breakdown?’ I shrug. ‘You need a generator,’ he tells me. Ah, Ozi. You just can’t resist, can you? You know I can’t afford a generator. ‘Do I?’ ‘Of course. How can you survive without one?’ ‘Most people do manage to, you know.’” (Hamid, 2000) Mohsin Hamid has masterfully displayed the connection between environmental degradation, capitalist system and the postcolonial world. The novel demonstrates that the ecological decline cannot be studied and understood in isolation because it is strongly associated with the class system, corrupted powers and history. As the novel narrates; “When the uncertain future becomes the past, the past in turn becomes uncertain.” (Hamid, 2000)

4.3 Contemplating the relation between Eco-criticism and Postcolonial Studies

In his debut novel *Moth Smoke* (2000), Mohsin Hamid has presented the city of Lahore as a postcolonial City going through political instability, ecological crisis, severe climate change and moral decline, making this novel a masterful narrative that explains the interconnection between postcolonial world and environmental concerns. The novel is written during the time period of 1998 when nuclear tests were being conducted in Pakistan and the country was suffering from unbearable heat and pollution which made the lives of common people hard and challenging. This novel’s plot is greatly relatable to the work *Postcolonialism Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* (2009), an introductory book about Postcolonial Ecocriticism written by Huggan and Tiffin in 2009. This book creates a link between colonial history and the modern world environmental crisis. It emphasizes that the legacy of colonialism and exploitation of postcolonial countries including South Asia cannot be neglected when it comes to the discussion of ecological imbalance and environmental instability in the postcolonial world. The novel narrates:

‘Exactly. Our political system’s at fault. Men like us have no control over our own destinies. We’re at the mercy of the powerful.’ Normally a speech like this from a virtual stranger would seem odd. But something in the way he says it makes me comfortable, drawing me in. I lean forward to hear him better.

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‘We need a system,’ he goes on, and it sounds like he’s quoting something, ‘where a man can rely on the law for justice, where he’s given basic dignity as a human being and the opportunity to prosper regardless of his status at birth.’ (Hamid, 2000)

The novel *Moth Smoke* (2000) clearly depicts the uneven distribution of facilities among the different social classes of Pakistan. This inequality is deeply rooted in the colonial legacy that the West left in this country. This discriminatory circulation of wealth and power is inherited from the colonial history of South Asia. Daru suffers from the corrupted system of society and remains unemployed even though he is an educated and talented young individual. He states in the novel: “There are a hundred guys for every opening, and the one who gets hired is the one with connections. I’ve given my c.v. to twenty companies. I’ve had twenty rejections.” (Hamid, 2000) The ecological collapse affects largely the ignored and subjugated people of society who cannot protect themselves from its harm. On the other hand, the privileged ones can easily shield themselves from suffocation, pollution and harmful weather conditions by using facilities including air conditioners, luxurious cars and comfortable homes. This narrative of the novel closely expresses the reality of postcolonial societies where the ecological crisis uncovers the brutal distinction between the poor and rich class of country. This discrimination cannot be understood completely without relating it to the history of colonial exploitation and capitalism. The protagonist of the novel Daru belongs to a lower class family, therefore he cannot protect himself and his family from extreme heat, energy crisis and ecological devastation, making him a prisoner of environmental crisis. His friend Ozi who belongs to the prestigious elite class of society enjoys his life as usual despite the country going through a difficult time. The novel states:

“‘Sorry, sir, I can’t open the gate,’ says a security guard. ‘You’ll have to. I’m parking inside,’ says Ozi. The Pajero must give Ozi’s words added authority, because instead of laughing in his face, the guard says, ‘But how will we keep these people outside?’ ‘That’s your problem. If anyone tries to get in, hit them one.’ The guard disappears.....The police don’t stop us on our drive home. We are in a Pajero, after all.” (Hamid, 2000)

Ozi's class is considered supreme, therefore being excluded from national and collective societal sufferings. The moral decline of the society that has been represented in the novel also depends largely on the unjust and capitalist behaviours prevalent in the system, where even justice is served to those who belong to the privileged section of society. While finding the banking job, Daru faces continuous rejection because of lacking powerful connections. The story describes; "Butt saab continues. 'Unless you know some really big fish, and I mean someone whose name matters to a country head, no one is going to hire you. Not with the banking sector in the shape it's in.'if I were country head right now, I still wouldn't be able to hire you. Things are tight these days and favors are expensive.'" (Hamid, 2000) Daru becomes a victim of unfair allegations, ultimately destroying his life while the one who committed murder continues to live his life with luxury. This failed judiciary system which favours the powerful and oppresses the poor eventually makes people believe that they deserve to live a low level life if they belong to the poor and excluded class of society just like Daru accepted the cruel destiny given to him with silence and self exploitative attitude, because he knew that the society he belongs to does this oppression to everyone like him. Ozi kills a boy and Daru becomes a murderer in the eyes of the entire society because justice does not exist in societies where class disparities exist. The novel describes:

"For he has blood on his hands, Milord. Young blood. The blood of a child. He killed not out of anger, not out of scheme or plan or design. He killed as a serpent kills that which it does not intend to eat: he killed out of indifference. He killed because his nature is to kill, because the death of a child has no meaning for him..... .Tender humanity screams in fear, confronted by such a monster, and conscience weeps with rage. The law licks its lips at the prospect of punishing such a one, and justice can shut its eyes today, so easy is its task." (Hamid, 2000)

Air pollution is the most dominating and extreme kind of pollution in Lahore that has been shown in the novel *Moth Smoke* (2000). In different scenes of the novel, Hamid has described the air of Lahore as smog filled, dusty, toxic and smoky which makes it difficult for people to even breathe comfortably. This kind of atmosphere shows the

level of environmental collapse that industries, capitalism, materialism and the obsession of wealth has done to society. This consumerism which makes people feel obliged to have luxurious cars, air conditioning systems and expensive lifestyles, ultimately causes destruction to the environment, particularly the quality of air due to the chemicals, toxins and poisonous materials that emit from vehicles and air conditioners. Thus, the environmental crisis of a society is deeply interlinked with the social inequalities and injustices that are prevalent in them, largely due to the neo-colonial practices and colonial histories. In the novel *Moth smoke* (2000), not only humans but also animals have been shown as victims of climate change, heat and pollution.

“An emaciated bitch lies on her side, so thin it seems the skin covering her ribs will soon dissolve in the heat, exposing the white bones of her skeleton. She looks dead except for the slow rise and fall of her flank as she breathes, too tired to be bothered by the flies or the big, healthy pup who nuzzles at her dry tits, his tail moving rapidly from side to side as he sucks the last drops of life out of her.” (Hamid, 2000)

By using this narrative, Mohsin Hamid urges his readers to rethink about the environmental crisis and to consider the sufferings of not only humans but also of animals and other non-human beings, making this novel a critique of anthropocentric attitudes. Human and non-human inhabitants of urban polluted cities including Lahore go through several physical and psychological challenges and Mohsin Hamid has beautifully called for a multispecies equity in the world where human and non-human entities can live their life comfortably without becoming victims of environmental degradation. Scholars Huggan and Tiffin explain in their work *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* (2009) that literature plays an important role in spreading awareness and educating the public about root causes of global problems. It also proposes the possible solutions of social crises by connecting the crisis of today with the legacy of yesterday, because without understanding history it is impossible to comprehend and tackle the modern world's ecological and moral crisis. Mohsin Hamid does this chore flawlessly and skillfully by rendering the environmental and social injustice prevailing in Pakistan and connecting it with the

postcolonial studies.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, this study exhibits that the novel *Moth Smoke* (2000) written by Mohsin Hamid interconnects colonial history with political upheaval, social injustice, ecological instability and environmental destruction. In postcolonial Lahore, the availability of basic resources like clean air, air conditioning systems, appropriate jobs and justice is not uniform, rather it depends on the class system and social background of individuals. The findings reveal that the ecological imbalance and climate change devastates the lower class of society while the elite and privileged class continue to live their comfortable and luxurious life.

Further researchers can conduct the study on Hamid's novel *Moth Smoke* (2000) by focusing on the physical health damages that air pollution and extreme climate change can do to the inhabitants of Lahore and other urban cities. They can also investigate the psychological effects of ecological instability on people. Studies can also be conducted on the disastrous impact of modern technologies including cars, air conditioners and solar systems on the natural atmosphere of Earth.

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