INTERNAL-COLONIAL ECOCRITICISM AND ENVIRONMENTAL OTHERING: A STUDY OF MIRZA WAHEED'S *THE COLLABORATOR AND THE BOOK OF GOLD LEAVES*

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Candidate of **Master of Philosophy** at the National University of Modern Languages do hereby declare that the thesis **Internal-colonial Ecocriticism and Environmental Othering: A study of Mirza Waheed's *The Collaborator* and *The Book of Gold Leaves*** submitted by me in partial fulfillment of MPhil degree, is my original work, and has not been submitted or published earlier. I also solemnly declare that it shall not, in future, be submitted by me for obtaining any other degree from this or any other university or institution.

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ABSTRACT

Title: Internal-colonial Ecocriticism and Environmental Othering: A study of Mirza Waheed's *The Collaborator and The Book of Gold Leaves*

Through the lenses of environmental othering and internal-colonial ecocriticism, this thesis comprehensively examines the complex and multifaceted interaction that exists between humans and the environment. It places a significant focus on the literary works *The Collaborator* and *The Book of Gold Leaves* authored by Mirza Waheed. The research delves into the intricate ways in which internal colonialism precipitates environmental degradation and systematically marginalizes particular groups. By scrutinizing the themes of ecological denial and environmental othering within the socio-political and cultural context of Kashmir, the study brings to light the insidious impacts of these dynamics. Furthermore, the research highlights how Waheed's narrative vividly depicts the devastating effects of prolonged conflict and war on both the environment and society. This portrayal calls for a critical reconsideration of our relationship with the natural world, urging a shift towards environmental justice and sustainable development practices. The thesis employs Eco critical framework to underscore the profound interconnectedness between human actions, environmental well-being, and social equity. By doing so, it amplifies the urgent need to address these interlinked issues, advocating for a more holistic approach to environmental conservation and social justice.

Keywords: *Environmental Othering, Internal-Colonial Ecocriticism, Ecological Denial, Environmental Justice, Sustainable Development*

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DEDICATION

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Over the last few decades, the burgeoning global environmental movement has witnessed a remarkable surge in its influence and impact. This movement fervently advocates for sustainable development and ardently endeavours to champion the cause of nature preservation. The current study highlights the profound understanding that the existence and well-being of all living organisms are inextricably linked to their environment. According to Bonnie Roos, the world is "locked in a dance of cultural, economic, and ecological interdependence. This interdependence calls for a multiplicity of voices to address the problems that our world faces today" (3). In literary and critical discourse, addressing the environmental crisis has faced challenges, with some scholars and critics resisting scientific and industrial progress. However, movements like Racial Justice have highlighted the disproportionate impact on marginalized communities, fueling environmental justice activism. This indicates an expanding acknowledgement of the interconnectedness between humans and their surroundings as environmental considerations become more intertwined with broader concerns regarding social equity and disparity. This paradigm shift has propelled the emergence of a crucial concept—ecological justice.

Glotfelty defines ecocriticism as the study of literature from an ecologically sensitive point of view. All forms of ecological criticism are predicated on the idea that human culture is interconnected with the physical world, both influencing and being influenced by it. The relationship between nature and culture—more significantly, the cultural objects of language and literature—is the focus of ecocriticism (Glotfelty 56). The current study delves into the intricate relationship between humanity and the environment, exploring how human actions impact nature and its inhabitants. The intersection of literary analysis with environmental concerns has given rise to the interdisciplinary field of ecocriticism, offering profound insights into our connection with the natural world. Simultaneously, discussions on internal colonialism have shed light on the intricate dynamics of power, exploitation, and marginalisation within shared territorial spaces.

This introduction navigates the landscapes of ecocriticism and internal colonialism, probing their intersections and setting the stage for a nuanced examination of Plumwood's concepts of Ecological Denial (97) and The One and The Other (106) in the context of regions affected by violence. Plumwood's Ecological Denial provides critical insights into how societies suppress ecological concerns to maintain dominant power structures, often enabling exploitation in regions marked by conflict. In such settings, ecological damage is systematically disregarded, with landscapes reduced to tools for resource extraction or geopolitical advantage. Furthermore, Plumwood's The One and The Other reveals how these landscapes, species, and marginalised communities are labelled as "the Other" to rationalise their subjugation and depletion. This framework unveils the cultural narratives that underpin environmental degradation and violence, exposing their entanglement with broader socio-political hierarchies.

Ecocriticism posits that human culture is deeply intertwined with the natural environment, influencing and being influenced by it in multifaceted ways. Cheryl Glotfelty defines ecocriticism as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment," emphasising an earth-centered approach to literary analysis (18-19). She notes that ecocriticism shifts attention away from human-centred concerns, focusing instead on how nature, ecology, and the environment are represented in texts. By linking literature with environmental studies and other disciplines, it explores how literary works engage with ecological issues like pollution, climate change, and deforestation. Ecocriticism raises critical questions about how nature is portrayed, the ethical responsibility humans bear toward the environment, and how literature can raise awareness of ecological crises.

Similarly, the theory of internal colonialism exposes the power imbalances and inequalities within nations or regions governed by dominant groups. Michael Hechter introduced the concept in his 1975 work, Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development, where he defines it as the political and economic disparities between core and peripheral regions (97). Internal colonialism mirrors the dynamics of external colonialism, but it occurs within a single state's borders as dominant regions exploit marginalised areas, leading to their economic underdevelopment and cultural suppression. Hechter argues that the core region reaps the benefits of resource extraction from the periphery, which remains politically, economically, and socially subordinate (Hechter, 1975).

The intersection of ecocriticism and internal colonialism unveils fertile ground for critical inquiry, offering a lens through which to analyze the intricate relationship between literature, environment, and power dynamics. Ecocriticism, with its lens on nature portrayal and human-environment dynamics in literature, intersects with internal colonialism by revealing how environmental abuse and decline are entangled with broader socio-political frameworks. Through this convergence, ecocriticism offers a holistic view of colonization's intricate effects on human societies and the natural realm. Mirza Waheed, a notable Kashmiri writer, emerges as a prominent figure in contemporary literature, expertly crafting narratives that transcend fiction's boundaries to delve into Kashmir's sociopolitical fabric. His works not only document the region's numerous trials but also serve as a poignant examination of conflict and colonisation’s impacts on both the environment and the people.

The exploitation of Kashmir's resources and landscapes for external interests mirrors overarching patterns of internal colonialism. This inquiry within ecocriticism furnishes a nuanced comprehension of how environmental misuse intertwines with broader sociopolitical constructs, presenting a comprehensive outlook on colonisation’s multifaceted repercussions. Plumwood's concepts of Ecological Denial (97) and The One and The Other (107) provide invaluable theoretical lenses for comprehending the ramifications of violence within ecocritical analyses. Ecological Denial unveils the mechanisms by which individuals and societies suppress or disregard ecological concerns, often in favour of advancing capitalist agendas or maintaining existing power dynamics. This notion elucidates the deliberate neglect or ignorance of environmental issues, particularly prevalent within contexts of conflict and exploitation.

On the other hand, the concept of The One and The Other emphasises the processes through which certain landscapes, species, or communities are marginalised or cast as the 'Other' in comparison to dominant societal narratives. In regions rife with violence, this framework exposes how environments are pushed to the sidelines, robbed of their inherent worth, and exploited for the pursuit of power or profit. Viewed through the prism of The One and The Other, Waheed's narratives uncover the subtle yet pervasive ways in which specific landscapes and communities are sidelined, underscoring the imperative for a critical examination of these depictions within the broader environmental discourse.

In this study, the application of Plumwood's concepts of Ecological Denial and The One and The Other serves as a theoretical framework for analysing the impacts of violence on both human communities and the environment in conflict-ridden areas. By examining literary texts *The Book of Gold Leaves* and *The Collaborator*, this research aims to uncover how environmental degradation, exploitation, and Othering are intertwined with narratives of conflict and colonialism. Through a critical ecocritical lens informed by the concepts of Ecological Denial and The One and The Other, this study seeks to deepen our understanding of the intricate connections between violence, environmental degradation, and social injustice within war-driven regions.

1.1 Problem Statement

Colonialism has long been understood to have significant impacts on the environment, often resulting in widespread ecological damage. Literature on Eco criticism has explored this issue, but there is a need for a more nuanced understanding of the environmental impacts of colonialism within the context of internal colonialism. The notion of othering has been used to investigate how dominant groups devalue and take advantage of marginalised communities and their ecosystems. The concept of eco genocide has been put forth as a way to comprehend the ways in which colonialism has damaged the environment. This study seeks to examine the themes of "Internal-Colonial Eco criticism and environmental Othering "in Wahid's novels *The Book of Gold Leaves* and *The Collaborator*, with the aim of deepening our understanding of the complex relationship between colonialism, the environment, and marginalised communities.

1.2 Research Objectives

In light of the aforementioned problem Statement, the objectives of this study are as follows:

- To investigate how environmental Othering is portrayed in selected novels
- To analyse how it contributes to the marginalisation of certain groups.
- To analyse the ways in which internal colonialism exploits the environment and the people living within it, as depicted in the novels.

1.3 Research Questions

Given the previously discussed background, this study addresses the following questions:

1. How do the internal colonialist ideologies, in the selected texts, lead to causing the environmental destruction?
2. How are the socially marginalized human groups exploited through internal colonialist practices in the selected texts?

1.4 Significance of the Research

This study will help the researcher to understand the literature, especially in the critical approach. This study aims to investigate the impact of war and weaponry on the environment in the valley of Indian-occupied Kashmir. The study will also help to raise the consciousness among people that warfare has horrific effects on human beings as well as on the environment. Furthermore, the research will contribute to the expansion of eco-critical studies in the field of literature. This research will help readers and writers understand the relationship between humans and nature, illustrating how humans impact nature and vice versa through various characters in the novel. Moreover, this study can be used by other researchers in the future, and it will motivate them to do research in the field of Ecocriticism.

1.5 Rationale of the Research

The rationale for this research study lies in the recognition of colonialism's profound impact on the environment, a theme extensively explored in eco-criticism literature. However, there remains a need for a more nuanced understanding of how internal colonialism specifically affects environmental degradation. This study aims to bridge this gap by concentrating on the concept of “Internal-Colonial Eco criticism" and "environmental Othering" within the context of selected novels by Wahid, namely *The Book of Gold Leaves* and *The Collaborator*.

1.6 Delimitation

The research centers on analyzing Mirza Waheed's novels *The Book of Gold Leaves* and *The Collaborator* within the context of Indian-occupied Kashmir, using Plumwood's theory as the primary theoretical framework, mainly focusing on the concepts of ecological denial, backgrounding, and the One and the Other. It examines how the novels portray contemporary environmental issues specific to the region, delving into themes of colonialism and environmental degradation. By focusing solely on these novels and Plumwood's theory, the study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the complex

relationship between colonialism, the environment, and marginalized communities in Kashmir. This specific focus allows for an in-depth examination of the chosen texts and theoretical perspectives. However, it may restrict the analysis from covering a wider range of literary works or theoretical approaches.

1.7 Definitions

a. Ecocriticism

Cheryl Glotfelty defines ecocriticism as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (18-19), emphasizing an earth-centered approach to literary analysis. She explains that ecocriticism shifts the focus from human-centred concerns to exploring how nature, ecology, and the environment are represented in texts. By connecting literature with environmental studies and other disciplines, it examines how literary works reflect or address ecological issues like pollution, climate change, and deforestation. Ecocriticism raises critical questions about how nature is portrayed, the ethical responsibility humans have toward the environment, and how literature can raise awareness about ecological crises.

b. Internal Colonialism

It is a concept that refers to the systemic exploitation and marginalization of minority or peripheral regions within a nation by dominant groups or regions. Michael Hechter, who introduced the term in his 1975 work *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development*, defines it as the political and economic inequalities between core and peripheral regions, where the dominant region exerts control over marginalized areas, often leading to their economic underdevelopment and cultural oppression (9). Hechter argues that internal colonialism mirrors the dynamics of external colonialism but occurs within a single state's borders, with the core region benefiting from the extraction of resources from the periphery, which is kept politically, economically, and socially subservient (Hechter, 1975).

c. Ecological Denial

Ecological Denial, as defined by Plumwood, refers to a societal and cultural phenomenon where the reality and gravity of the ecological crisis are systematically ignored or downplayed. This denial is deeply rooted in what Plumwood describes as an "illusion of dis-embeddedness," where modern society has become disconnected from the

natural world and fails to recognize its essential dependence on ecological systems. In this state of detachment, humanity no longer perceives itself as "ecologically constrained beings," leading to a widespread disavowal of the environmental crisis (97-98).

Instead of confronting urgent ecological issues such as climate change and greenhouse gas emissions, "the bulk of the social effort and energy" is diverted toward either denying the existence of these problems or assigning them "an extremely low priority." Plumwood argues that this form of denial is not simply a failure of political will or technological advancement but a deeper "crisis of rationality, morality, and imagination." This suggests that the inability to act decisively on environmental issues stems from intellectual and ethical failings within dominant cultural and political systems.

This form of denial, Plumwood contends, is a "highly dysfunctional response" to the ecological crisis, one that ultimately exacerbates environmental degradation. It is sustained by a culture that prioritizes abstract political and economic concerns over immediate, concrete ecological realities. When "democratic structures that can address inequality and change social frameworks" are ineffective or perceived as unchangeable, ecological denial becomes even more entrenched. Plumwood warns that this denial could lead to catastrophic outcomes for essential systems, such as food and energy production, as the ecological crisis continues to deepen.

d. Denial and Backgrounding

Plumwood defines denial and backgrounding as processes through which marginalized groups, marked as the "Other," are rendered invisible and inessential to maintain the dominance of the central, superior group. This denial operates by refusing to acknowledge the "center’s dependency on the Other," as doing so would threaten the dominant group's sense of superiority and autonomy. In an androcentric context, Plumwood explains, women's contributions are often treated as insignificant or "background" to the more valued aspects of life, classified as natural and requiring no special skill. This allows for the exploitation of marginalized groups, as their labor is expropriated without recognition. Plumwood also draws parallels with colonialism, where the colonized are denied historical and ecological agency, their presence erased as their land and labor are appropriated as part of "nature" (108).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The examined literature review deals with the intertwining narratives woven by scholars exploring the intersection of literature, ecology, and human behavior, offering a profound glimpse into the intricate relationships shaping our world. As we navigate these narratives, we confront the stark realities of environmental degradation, exploitation, and the urgent need for sustainable practices. These scholarly endeavors not only unravel the multifaceted impacts of human behavior on the natural world but also underscore the interconnectedness of diverse ecosystems, human societies, and the imperative of collective stewardship. In delving into these literary realms, we are beckoned to contemplate our roles as Earth custodians, recognizing our profound responsibility in shaping a harmonious coexistence with the environment.

2.2 Ecocriticism and Destruction of Landscape

In the realm of environmental literature, a noteworthy contribution comes from the research conducted by Pooja Kumari and Sadaf Shah, who explored the complexities of the relationship between humans and nature as depicted in Khaled Hosseini's "*And the Mountains Echoed."* Their insightful analysis underscores the pervasive exploitation of nature by humanity, a theme that resonates throughout history, demonstrating how humankind has often harnessed the resources of the natural world without due consideration for the ensuing, damage and destruction. Kumari and Shah eloquently highlight the reciprocal relationship between humanity and the environment, observing that relentless exploitation of nature can provoke violent responses from the ecosystems being exploited. This is encapsulated in their assertion that "When man goes on exploiting nature ruthlessly, nature sometimes too becomes violent" (4). The authors draw attention to the interconnectedness of human actions and natural consequences, emphasizing that the exploitation of nature is not a one-sided affair but rather a dynamic interaction with potential repercussions. The focus of their study extends to Afghanistan, a region with a tumultuous history marked by numerous wars. Kumari and Shah posit that the ecological impact of wars is nothing short of ecocidal, causing widespread damage and destruction to both human and non-human entities on a large scale (5). They aptly highlight that such

environmental exploitation through warfare stands in direct violation of the principles of environmental justice, as wars result in ecological imbalances that have far-reaching implications for the well-being of the planet and its inhabitants. The research also delves into the ruthless treatment of non-living entities during times of conflict, shedding light on how wars create massive destruction, leading to ecological misbalances. They draw on the narrative in "*And the Mountains Echoed,"* quoting Mr. Markos, a plastic surgeon in the novel, who vividly describes the profound effects of war in Afghanistan. His poignant words encapsulate the multifaceted nature of conflict, from the ever-shifting dynamics of heroes and villains to the myriad atrocities such as snipers, land mines, bombing raids, looting, raping, and killing.

In his compelling article, Shoaib investigates the fictional portrayal of the escalating ecological crisis in Kashmir's valley, attributing it to the violent oppression imposed by the military forces (82). He argues that the pervasive environment of fear generated by violence has cast a shadow over the once-beautiful valley, leading to a decline in tourism due to heightened concerns about safety. Beyond its impact on human inhabitants, Shoaib emphasizes the far-reaching consequences of oppression on the region's rivers, lakes, and wildlife, highlighting the alarming pollution of Dal Lake caused by warfare and the use of weaponry. The author draws attention to the poignant portrayal in the novel, where he states that the paradise on earth is undergoing a critical ecological phase, facing barrenness and the loss of its natural beauty. This evocative description underscores the dire ecological straits that Kashmir finds itself in, a direct result of the ongoing conflict and violence.

Shoaib goes on to assert that the ecological threats faced by Kashmir extend beyond the immediate consequences of conflict. Forces of industrialization and urbanization are identified as additional perilous elements that pose a continuous threat to the region's green fields and overall ecosystem. This transformation of land, driven by modernization, emerges as a significant catalyst for environmental change in Kashmir. The encroachments and illegal housing developments further exacerbate the deterioration of the valley's natural beauty, creating a cascade effect that compounds the ecological challenges faced by the region. Through the lens of characters like Roohi and Faiz, Shoaib illustrates how the war has not only disrupted the lives of Kashmiri people but has also wrought havoc on the delicate ecological balance of the land. The interconnectedness of human experiences and the environment emerges as a central theme in his analysis, reinforcing the idea that the consequences of violence extend far beyond immediate human suffering. In his poignant

conclusion, Shoaib broadens the scope of his argument, asserting that the ecological crisis in Kashmir is not an isolated narrative but a reflection of a broader global issue. He makes a passionate appeal to both the people and the Indian forces, urging them to recognize the gravity of the situation and work collectively to preserve the "Heaven on Earth", that is, Kashmir. His call for awareness and action underscores the urgency of addressing the intricate interplay between violence, militarism, and ecological degradation, not just in Kashmir but in every region where such issues persist.

2.3 Ecofeminism

In Cenk Tan's significant study conducted in October 2019, he conducts an ecocritical analysis of J.G. Ballard's climate fiction novels, utilizing the theoretical lenses of Ecocriticism and Ecofeminism to explore the complex connections between humans and the environment in Ballard's narratives. Tan explores three novels by J.G. Ballard, offering a thorough examination that highlights how human actions, environmental impacts, and the marginalization of women are intertwined. Through the lens of ecocriticism, Tan emphasizes the reciprocal relationship between humans and non-humans, asserting that environmental changes are not only influenced by human activities but also have a profound impact on human experiences. One of the main conclusions of his research is the direct correlation he establishes between the subjugation of women and the exploitation of nature, a perspective reinforced by the principles of Ecofeminism. This intersectional perspective suggests that societal constructs, including patriarchy, hierarchy, and class struggle, play a pivotal role in driving current ecological crises (118).

Tan's analysis of Ballard's first novel, "*The Wind from Nowhere*," focuses on the anthropocentric behaviors of characters and their impact on the narrative's unfolding events. The author contends that characters exhibiting anthropocentric thinking, such as Hardoon and Kroll, meet their demise in the face of disaster, while ecocentric individuals like Maitland survive. This narrative dynamic serves as a cautionary tale, illustrating how anthropocentric thinking can lead to humanity's destruction (115). Dr Dickinson's character further elucidates the connection between human negligence and the resultant hurricane, framing it as a natural reaction to humanity's actions, portraying humans as sinners deserving punishment in a natural process (55). Moving on to the analysis of Ballard's second novel, "*The Drowned World,"* Tan integrates Murray Brookchin's concept that the subjugation of nature is rooted in hierarchical relationships among humans. This concept

encompasses various forms of oppression, including that of women, young individuals, ethnic groups, and societal structures. Tan examines the character of Beatrice Dahl, subjected to control throughout her life by patriarchal dominance, echoing the dominance exerted by men over nature. By exploring the relationship between Ecocriticism and Ecofeminism through Beatrice's character, Tan concludes that both the Earth and women emerge as victims of patriarchal and capitalist systems. His concluding statement envisions a future where both women and the Earth, as givers of life, will eventually attain freedom (90). *Cenk Tan's* ecocritical study provides a nuanced understanding of the intricate relationships between human actions, environmental consequences, and the oppression of women in J.G. Ballard's climate fiction novels. His incorporation of Ecofeminism adds depth to the analysis, revealing the pervasive influence of societal constructs on ecological crises and the interconnected struggles faced by both women and the Earth in the face of patriarchal and capitalist systems. Tan's research not only enriches the discourse on ecocriticism but also underscores the broader implications of literary analysis in addressing pressing socio-environmental issues.

Juliet Sylvia Pasi's insightful study delves into the literary works of Tsitsi. Dangarembga precisely "*Nervous Conditions"* (1988), "*The Book of Not*" (2006), and "*The Purple Violet of Oshaantu"* (2001), along with No Violet Bulawayo's "*We Need New Names"* (2013) by Neshani Andreas. Pasi's analytical approach centers on examining these texts through the lens of oppressive frameworks rooted in Western philosophy, providing a unique perspective on the interconnectedness of violence against women and the exploitation of various environments, including the land, development, forests, homes, and immigrant settings.

By employing an ecofeminism lens, Pasi uncovers strong parallels between the violence inflicted upon women and the exploitation of the natural world. The chapter emphasizes the connections between the mistreatment of women and the degradation of the environment, drawing attention to how both women and the Earth suffer under oppressive systems. Pasi's analysis sheds light on the interconnected struggles faced by women and the land, illustrating how these issues are often intertwoven within the narratives of the selected texts. A central focus of the study is the exploration of the link between the violation of the land and the unjust treatment of women. Pasi aptly highlights how both the Earth and women experience forms of exploitation and violence, drawing attention to the shared vulnerabilities and oppressions present in these realms. This intersectional analysis

contributes to a broader understanding of the socio-environmental issues depicted in the literature.

However, the chapter also underscores a key aspect of hope and resilience through the lens of ecofeminism. Pasi emphasizes that, in alignment with ecofeminist principles, social change becomes a crucial liberatory approach for ensuring survival, equity, and sustainability. This positive outlook suggests that meaningful transformations in societal structures and attitudes can pave the way for a more equitable and sustainable coexistence between humanity and the environment. Juliet Sylvia Pasi's study not only provides a thought-provoking analysis of Tsitsi Dangarembga and No Violet Bulawayo's works within the context of oppressive Western frameworks but also offers a nuanced exploration of the interconnectedness between violence against women and environmental exploitation. The incorporation of an ecofeminist lens adds depth to the examination, revealing the shared struggles and potential avenues for positive change. Pasi's work serves as a valuable contribution to the discourse on ecofeminism and literature, encouraging readers to reflect on the complex relationships between gender, the environment, and the prospects for a more sustainable and just future.

2.4 Eco criticism and Socio-Ecological Aspects

Continuing with the examination of J.G. Ballard's works, Tan delves into the third novel, "*The Drought*," within the same comprehensive study. This segment of the analysis centres on unravelling the socio-ecological dimensions embedded in the narrative. Through a meticulous exploration of the text, the author vividly elucidates the portrayal of nature's demise, illustrating how rivers are desiccating, and avian life is perishing within the narrative's unfolding events. The analysis posits that Ballard's novel serves as a harrowing portrayal of a catastrophic future for humanity, a future shaped by human activities and an overarching anthropocentric mindset. The author underscores the pivotal role of industrialism and capitalism as the driving forces behind the depicted drought. By linking the environmental catastrophe to these societal structures, the analysis unveils a stark commentary on the detrimental impact of human-centric behaviors on the natural world.

Furthermore, the author argues that the novel functions as a cautionary tale, illustrating how the pursuit of industrial and capitalist ventures inevitably results in the degradation and devastation of nature. The story mirrors the real-world outcomes of unrestricted human exploitation and the prioritization of profit over ecological health.

In essence, this study's exploration of "The Drought" provides a compelling narrative that draws attention to the interconnectedness of socio-economic structures, environmental degradation, and the potential dystopian future depicted in Ballard's work. The analysis serves as a valuable addition to the broader discussion on literature and the environment, urging readers to reflect on the implications of human activities on the delicate balance of nature and the urgent need for sustainable and ecologically conscious practices.

2.5 Ecocriticism and Psychological Impacts

Expanding on the analysis of the ecological crisis depicted in J.G. Ballard's "*The Drought,"* Tan delves into the profound impact of this environmental turmoil on the human characters populating the novel. The narrative unfolds against a backdrop of intense interpersonal conflicts among the characters, adding a layer of complexity to the overarching ecological theme. The central character, Dr. Charles Ransom, serves as the protagonist, an anthropologist whose home is a houseboat situated on a river that is gradually drying up. The depiction of Ransom's predicament goes beyond the physical consequences of the ecological crisis; it delves into the psychological ramifications of living in a world where the environment is undergoing catastrophic changes. The drying up of the river isolates Ransom, severing his connections with the once-vibrant natural surroundings. This isolation, coupled with the psychological emptiness stemming from the ecological upheaval, adds a poignant dimension to the narrative.

In the broader context, the author concludes the study by drawing a critical link between the portrayed drought and the socio-economic structure of capitalism. This connection is identified as a direct outcome of human social activities. The study posits that the destructive consequences unleashed upon nature are intricately tied to the dynamics of human social relations, highlighting the far-reaching impact of societal structures on the environment. Therefore, the analysis not only underscores the environmental devastation caused by capitalism but also underscores the intricate interplay between ecological crises and the fabric of human relationships. The concluding assertion reinforces the notion that the degradation of nature is not solely an environmental concern but an inherent reflection of the broader social and economic systems in place.

In essence, the study offers a holistic exploration of J.G. Ballard's "*The Drought*," shedding light not only on the ecological consequences but also on the profound implications for the human psyche and the interconnectedness between capitalism, social

activities, and the degradation of the natural world. This comprehensive analysis encourages readers to reflect on the intricate relationships between environmental crises and the societal structures that contribute to their occurrence.

2.6 Postcolonial Imperialism and Ecology

In Ghazala Gayas's illuminating article, she delves into the concept of Ecological Imperialism and its profound impacts on colonized communities (475), using Mahjur's poetry as a lens through which to analyze this environmental discrimination. Gayas draws insightful connections between historical practices and the contemporary environmental challenges faced by marginalized and colonized communities. Her analysis positions environmental discrimination as an enduring tradition perpetuated against these vulnerable groups. The focal point of Gayas's exploration is Mahjur's poetry, particularly evident in the conclusion drawn from her analysis. She underscores the idea that the environmental discrimination unveiled in Mahjur's verses is not a recent phenomenon but a longstanding tradition imposed on marginalized and colonized communities. Through the lens of Mahjur's poetic expressions, Gayas sheds light on the environmental injustices endured by these communities throughout history.

A crucial takeaway from Gayas's analysis is the call to action embedded in Mahjur's poetry. She emphasizes that the people of the valley, beyond safeguarding themselves from external oppressors, bear the responsibility of caring for their natural surroundings. This resonates strongly in Mahjur's poem *'The Other World,'* where he vividly portrays a chilling image of a mechanized, weaponized alternate world that starkly contrasts with the natural beauty of the Kashmir valley. The poem serves as a powerful critique of a society engrossed in the production of destructive tools, neglecting the well-being of the valley and its inhabitants. Gayas contends that Mahjur's poetry, despite its portrayal of environmental degradation and exploitation, is imbued with hope. The purpose of this hopeful tone, as she argues, is to instil consciousness among people about the imperative need to preserve the natural landscape. The interconnectedness of man and nature is a recurring theme in Mahjur's verses, and Gayas emphasizes that appreciating these elements separately would be incomplete. Through poetry, Mahjur advocates for a collective understanding of this interconnectedness and the necessity to act as stewards of the environment.

Ghazala Gayas's article, enriched by the analysis of Mahjur's poetry, serves as a compelling exploration of Ecological Imperialism and its lasting impact on colonized

communities. By intertwining historical perspectives with contemporary environmental challenges, Gayas provides readers with a nuanced understanding of the environmental discrimination faced by marginalized groups. Mahjur's poetry becomes a powerful vehicle for conveying the urgency of environmental preservation and the interconnected relationship between humanity and nature, urging individuals to be conscious stewards of their natural landscape.

2.7 Human Development and Ecological Destruction

Narayan Jena's article places a spotlight on the intricate interplay between nature and human life, emphasizing the significant role that nature plays in reshaping and restructuring human existence (1). This perspective prompts a reflection on how the trajectory of human development has, in turn, left an indelible mark on the landscape. Jena's exploration underscores the reciprocal relationship between humans and their environment, showcasing how the evolution of one has profound implications for the other. Shifting focus to Dr. Anita Sree's examination of Amitav Ghosh's work, particularly "*The Hungry Tide,"* the analysis delves into the multifaceted aspects of environmental conservation and human diversity. Sree argues that Ghosh's novel extends beyond the traditional boundaries of environmental discourse, venturing into the realm of understanding diverse human societies and values. The novel, according to Sree, prompts a reevaluation of the human condition, advocating for a broader representation that encompasses various species and the interconnected patterns of life across the entire planet.

Sree elucidates how "*The Hungry Tide*" vividly portrays nature's wild and untamable characteristics, resisting human attempts at dominance. The novel brings to life the dynamic interactions between humans and the formidable elements of nature, including tigers, crocodiles, snakes, vast mangrove forests, hurricanes, and catastrophic typhoons. Set in the Sunderbans, a rural region in northeast India characterized by numerous shifting islands, the narrative unfolds in an environment where life is precarious, surrounded by challenges posed by the sea, storms, and unpredictable wildlife. A key element in Ghosh's narrative is the depiction of the struggles faced by the people of the Sunderbans. The novel weaves together their history and battles with nature, creating a compelling narrative that transcends individual experiences to encompass broader ecological and environmental factors. The Sunderbans people grapple with the forces of nature, including the sea, storms, tigers, and the daunting surroundings. Ghosh's storytelling strives to bridge personal

experiences with the larger tapestry of the region's ecological dynamics, creating an immersive narrative that highlights the ongoing struggle between humans and their natural environment. These articles collectively illuminate the intricate relationships between nature and human life, drawing attention to the reciprocal influences that shape both. Jena's exploration emphasizes the impact of nature on human existence, while Sree's analysis of Ghosh's novel underscores the multifaceted dimensions of environmental conservation and human diversity. These perspectives collectively provide a nuanced understanding of the intricate connections between humanity and the environment, encouraging readers to reflect on the broader impacts of human development on the natural world.

The reviewed literature highlights key intersections between ecocriticism, ecofeminism, and environmental degradation but lacks regional diversity, focusing mainly on Afghanistan and Kashmir. Expanding analyses to other colonized regions, such as Africa and South America, would provide a more global perspective. Additionally, nonhuman agency in conflicts remains underexplored, warranting research on how ecosystems and animals resist exploitation during warfare.

Another gap lies in the insufficient examination of the psychological and emotional impacts of environmental crises, especially in conflict zones. While some studies touch on this, there is room for deeper exploration of how ecological destruction affects mental health and emotional well-being. Future research could also benefit from interdisciplinary approaches, integrating insights from environmental science, sociology, and political ecology to provide a more holistic understanding of how literature critiques real-world ecological and social issues. Furthermore, expanding ecofeminist perspectives to include feminist ecocriticism and a broader view of gender could enrich the discourse on environmental degradation and postcolonialism.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Introduction

The exploration of internal colonial Eco critical analysis in Waheed's novels, "*The Book of Gold Leaves*" and "*The Collaborator*," is rooted in the theoretical frameworks of internal-colonial and Eco critical theories. These frameworks, enriched by insights from Cheryl Glotfelty's Eco-criticism Reader and Val Plumwood's concepts, delve into the intricate relationships between humans, nature, and power dynamics in postcolonial landscapes. The theoretical framework serves as a lens through which the research inquiries are examined, establishing a theoretical basis for analyzing and understanding the results.

3.2. Research Methodology

The current study uses the ‘critical theory’ paradigm to study how, during the war, the environment is neglected and what consequences this environmental destruction brings. Critical theory is concerned with power dynamics and how they affect social structures, institutions, and personal experiences. It is beneficial in analyzing themes of oppression and injustice, such as those found in the context of internal colonial ecocriticism and environmental othering in Waheed's works, *"The Book of Gold Leaves"* and *"The Collaborator"*. Researchers can examine the ways in which colonialism and environmental exploitation have formed power relations within society by using critical theory to study internal colonial ecocriticism and environmental Othering. This includes looking at how dominant groups have used environmental othering to defend their ownership of resources and how this exploitation has affected marginalized communities whose life depends on the environment. Researchers can also look at how power relations are maintained through narratives and discourses that support dominant ideologies by applying the critical theory lens. For instance, the Indian army is portrayed as a force that exploits the environment in *The Book of Gold Leaves* and *The Collaborator*, and this exploitation is justified by the need to keep control over the area. Critical theory can also be used to identify practical solutions and methods for dealing with internal colonial ecocriticism and environmental othering problems. Researchers may start creating treatments that challenge dominant ideas and advance more equitable and sustainable connections with the environment by

understanding how power is dispersed within society and how it is maintained. In general, using Mirza Waheed's books as a case study, critical theory is a useful research paradigm for examining internal colonial ecocriticism and environmental othering. Researchers can better understand how colonialism and environmental exploitation affect people and communities by looking at power relations and the discourses and narratives that support them. Researchers can also help in the creation of more fair and sustainable societies by identifying viable solutions. The main theoretical paradigm to study the text will be 'ecological denial' and The One and The Other in the internal-colonial world. And moreover, the study aims to examine the impacts of the ecological crisis on both biological and non-biological entities present in the valley of occupied Kashmir.

The current study uses the 'thematic analysis framework' to study how the violence in the war region impacts not only the human beings but also the non-human entities. For this, a thorough reading and re-reading of the collected data is undertaken to gain a comprehensive understanding of its content. Moving forward, the process involves generating initial codes from the data. Researchers identify and label meaningful segments or phrases that relate to internal colonialism, environmental othering, and violence. These codes serve as the foundational units of analysis, capturing the essence of each segment in a descriptive manner. Following this, the data is subjected to a process of searching for themes. Initial codes are grouped together based on similarities or patterns related to the themes of interest. This stage involves exploring how these codes intersect and interact with one another to form preliminary themes that encapsulate the main ideas and concepts present in the data. The present research underscores how in regions plagued by violence, Environmental Othering reveals the marginalization of environments, their intrinsic value diminished and exploited for the sake of power or profit.

Once preliminary themes have been identified, they undergo a rigorous review process. The researchers scrutinize the themes to ensure they accurately represent the data and capture the complexity of the relationship between internal colonialism, environmental othering, and violence. This may involve refining, combining, or splitting themes to better reflect the nuances and subtleties present in the data. With the themes finalized, the next step is to define and name them. Each theme is defined in clear and concise terms, outlining its key characteristics, components, and implications. Meaningful names are provided for each theme to effectively communicate its focus and relevance to the research topic. Finally, the results of the thematic analysis are written up in detail. The researcher provides

a comprehensive analysis of each theme, drawing on evidence from the data to support the interpretations and conclusions. It explores how internal colonialism, environmental othering, and violence intersect and manifest in the chosen region, highlighting the impact on both people and the environment. Additionally, the researcher considers the broader implications of the findings and discusses potential avenues for future research or intervention to address the issues identified. Thematic analysis offers a systematic and rigorous approach to exploring the complex themes of internal-colonial ecocriticism and environmental othering, contributing to a deeper understanding of the relationship between human societies and their environments amidst colonialism and violence.

3.3 Theoretical Framework

The current study deals with the internal colonial-Ecocritical analysis of two selected works, *The Book of Gold Leaves* and *The Collaborator*, written by Mirza Waheed, by using internal-colonial and Ecocritical theory in concentrating on the ecological issues present in the postcolonial world. **Ecocriticism**, as defined by Cheryl Glotfelty, is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment, focusing on how nature, ecology, and environmental issues are represented in literary texts (Glotfelty 18-19). This approach shifts from human-centered concerns to an earth-centered analysis, examining themes like pollution, climate change, and deforestation. Ecocriticism raises questions about humanity's ethical responsibility toward the environment and how literature can bring attention to ecological crises.

Internal Colonialism, introduced by Michael Hechter in his 1975 work *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development*, refers to the systemic exploitation and marginalization of minority or peripheral regions within a nation by dominant groups or regions (Hechter 9). It mirrors external colonialism but occurs within a state's borders, where the dominant core extracts resources and maintains economic, political, and social control over the subjugated periphery, leading to its underdevelopment and cultural oppression (Hechter, 1975).

Eco-criticism explores the relationship between literature and the natural environment (Glotfelty 18), while internal colonialism sheds light on exploitation dynamics within a nation (Hatcher 9). Plumwood's notion of "ecological denial" (97) and her critique of anthropocentrism contribute significantly to understanding how environmental crises and human-centered perspectives intersect, particularly in contexts of internal colonialism

and ecological exploitation. This chapter aims to unveil the complexities of environmental degradation, power structures, and ethical responsibilities in colonized landscapes like the valley of occupied Kashmir. Plumwood's theories present a robust framework for confronting environmental and socio-political dilemmas in literature and society by challenging binary viewpoints, championing ecological diversity, and urging a reconsideration of how humanity interacts with the natural world. In this study, the chosen texts are analyzed through the lenses of 'ecological denial' (97), 'denial and backgrounding' (104) and the idea of 'the One' and 'the other' (107), a concept introduced by Val Plumwood in her seminal work, *"Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason*." She argues that the cultural phenomenon of ecological denial, which refuses to acknowledge the truth and severity of the environmental crisis, reflects a diminished sense of our interconnectedness with nature.

Plumwood states the idea of "ecological denial," a cultural phenomenon in which individuals downplay the seriousness of the ecological problems. She states that "It is a reaction to a crisis in which the majority of social effort and energy is directed away from dealing with crises like greenhouse gases and toward denying that a problem exists or assigning it a low priority" (97). This denial results from a diminished understanding of our relationship with nature, which separates us from the ecological reality. Denying the existence of problems or giving them low priority is frequently more important in society than solving challenges. This denial is indicative of a problem involving reason, morality, and creativity in addition to technology. Ecological denial intensifies when democratic institutions fall short in addressing inequalities and when social structures endure.

She further talks about how human self-enclosure and centeredness are encouraged by rationalist culture. This mindset stems from the idea that humanity is defined by our capacity for reason. As a result, this worldview that emphasizes reason over ecology causes people to prioritize human needs above ecological realities. It is said that the idea of anthropocentrism, which puts human needs ahead of those of the natural world, encourages people to feel disconnected from their surroundings. This disconnection hinders our understanding of our connections with nature and encourages the exploitation of it. She argues that various failures in rationality occurring across cultures stem from a dominant perspective that lacks certain forms of self-awareness. Although what is being done seems logical from that master perspective, there are many things that the master perspective is unable to notice because they are either unavailable or hidden within the dominating

framework. Plumwood further explores the effect of hegemonic-centric structures on shaping ideas and perceptions within society. These structures not only justify oppression by presenting it as natural but also obscure it by promoting a false sense of universality. This universality portrays the experiences of the dominant group as the standard while marginalizing or disregarding the experiences of subordinate groups as secondary or irrational. Once these structures are established, alternatives become challenging to identify within existing frameworks of thought. Examples such as androcentric, which prioritizes male experiences, and ethnocentrism or eurocentrism, which upholds the perspectives of dominant racial or ethnic groups, illustrate how identity and experiences are often depicted through the perspective of privilege, suppressing or sidelining other viewpoints.

Plumwood discusses the concept of the “Illusion of Disembeddedness,” where the commotion of nature is denied or overlooked, leading to a disconnect from its essential role in sustaining life. This disconnect reinforces illusions of human identity as separate from and superior to nature, perpetuating the belief in humans as distinct entities with dominion over the natural world (120-121). This perspective deepens the divide between human welfare—often viewed as active participants in markets—and other beings perceived merely as property without agency or inherent value. Such a framework justifies capitalism and the commodification of nature by neglecting the intrinsic worth and agency of nonhuman entities. In addition, she explains the concept of hegemonic centrism, which designates one term as primary or central and others as subsidiary or derivative with respect to it. Racism, sexism, and colonialism are all rooted in different forms of centrism that exhibit this pattern of mutual reinforcement. Dominant Western culture exhibits androcentrism, eurocentrism, ethnocentrism, and anthropocentrism, alongside being reason-centered. Reason, as per the rationalist tradition, is considered characteristic of the privileged side, while its absence defines the marginalized "Other." This structure allows for political and cultural variations, with specific forms of centrism acting as determinants within the overarching pattern (120-121).

An anthropocentric perspective views nature as fundamentally separate from humans, emphasizing the differences rather than the shared traits between humans and the natural world. It regards nature as a lower order devoid of continuity with humanity, focusing on aspects that differentiate humans from nature and animals as defining elements of human identity. Anthropocentric culture views humans as being outside of and apart from a mechanical and lifeless nature that lacks characteristics unique to humans, including

consciousness and agency. This viewpoint reinforces the idea that traits connected to nature and animality are inferior by placing a rigid ethical border at the boundary between humans and other species. Consequently, anthropocentric cultures tend to devalue aspects of human selves and cultures linked to nature and animal traits, as well as marginalized social groups associated with these characteristics. Denial and backgrounding serve as mechanisms that reinforce the perception of the "Other" as fundamentally different and inferior. Once the Other is categorized as part of a separate and lesser group, there arises a strong incentive to downplay or ignore their significance. This is because acknowledging the dependency of the central group on the Other would undermine the central group's perceived superiority and distinctiveness. The colonized people are ignored as the unnoticed background of 'civilization,' perceived as the Other, whose past land ownership and the acts of violence and dispossession that followed are never admitted or acknowledged. Their labour and land are appropriated as just "nature," and their presence and influence on the land are disregarded and portrayed as worthless. Dominant groups align themselves with mastering nature and controlling colonized groups. However, those categorized as part of nature or the Other face barriers to identification and sympathy due to these structures of Othering.

The backdrop of technological progress in anthropocentric culture frequently portrays nature as inconsequential and unnoticed. Due to this perspective, nonhuman nature is routinely disregarded in decision-making processes since it is seen as unimportant in the scope of things. Nature's order, resilience, and critical services are often disregarded in favor of denying dependency on them. These services are rarely acknowledged until after catastrophes happen, usually to rectify the situation rather than avert such problems. That either inspires terror or is seen as a technological problem that must be conquered when we take into account how intrinsically dependent humans are on nature. This perspective, which upholds exaggerated notions of human autonomy and independence from the natural world, exacerbates the blind spots of centrism and human self-enclosure. As a result, in the eyes of the human colonizer, nature and animals are seen as "lack" and devalued since they lack attributes like logic that are considered necessary for humans. Non-human animals are viewed as inferior by us because we believe they lack the cognitive abilities of humans, yet we ignore the beneficial qualities that many animals possess that we do not. In development, assimilation, and colonization, people perceive differences as grounds for inferiority rather than as encouraging and fascinating symbols of diversity. They view human order as superior to the complex and ordered structure of nature and seek to

substitute it wherever feasible. They do not acknowledge any limitations to the use of nature unless they recognize the need to preserve its existing order.

The logic of centrism supports illusions such as the Illusion of Disembeddedness, which portrays humans as radically separate from and superior to nature. This mindset distances us from nature, making it challenging to see our ecological relationships beyond abstract terms. The human-centered perspective fosters a mechanistic view of the world, ignoring the needs and striving of other beings. It leads to arrogant and instrumental forms of knowledge that overlook what is unknown or unknowable. By dissociating from nature to manipulate it, we lose the ability to empathize with or engage with it dialogically.

This human-centered rationality is particularly perilous regarding nature because it fosters a massive denial of dependency, portraying nature as inessential and disregarding its irreplaceability and limits. This concept overestimate human ability to control ecosystem processes in an ecologically limited context while failing to recognize the complexity and importance of the biosphere services they supply. In the past, focusing mainly on humans helped Western civilization grow without worrying much about nature. But now, in a time where we're running into limits with the environment, this approach is causing significant problems. It makes us insensitive to the needs of other species, which puts our survival and theirs at risk. The old way of seeing our relationship with nature as "us versus them" stops us from finding new ways to work together with nature to survive.

Plumwood asserts that the concept of "the one," meaning the primary or centre, which defines the marginal "other," is used as a theoretical framework for analyzing the texts and discovering how nature is treated as "other" (99). The intersection of Ecocritical theory and internal colonial theory offers a nuanced perspective on the intricate relationship between humanity and nature within societies marked by domination and suppression. This study delves into the impacts of land colonization on both the natural environment and its inhabitants, drawing upon insights from internal-colonial and eco-critical theories. Through the lens of postcolonial ecologies and Glotfelty’s Eco-criticism Reader, the study aims to explore the dynamic interplay between the physical world and human societies as depicted in selected literary texts. By synthesizing these theoretical frameworks, the research seeks to shed light on the complexities of environmental exploitation and socio-political power dynamics inherent in colonized landscapes. Within Contemporary Human Ecology, this dualistic, human-centric viewpoint is extreme and inherently anti-ecological. Five crucial steps are outlined by the idea. First of all, it validates an ethics that stops short of crossing

the "human-species boundary," viewing all of nature as uniform and consciousness-free and so immune to the moral principles that govern interactions between humans. Second, there is a denial or marginalization of human dependence on nature, which reduces ecology to a "technological problem to be solved" and promotes a fictitious feeling of human autonomy. Thirdly, nature is viewed as a negative realm devoid of civilization, development, or advancements since it is only defined by its non-human qualities. Fourth, in environmental discourse, the intrinsic agency of nature is often ignored, and its relevance is acknowledged only inasmuch as it helps human objectives. In an era of ecological limits, these "blind spots of centrism and human self-enclosure" need to be addressed if mankind and the natural world are to survive. Additionally, nature is frequently treated as merely instrumental, stripped of intrinsic agency by mechanistic worldviews. Similar to how patriarchal societies have historically oppressed women through radical exclusion, stereotyping, backgrounding, incorporation, and instrumentalism, human beings have exerted dominance over nature in the same manner.

The concept of "denial back and backgrounding" (108) suggests that once the "other" is deemed inferior or unimportant, it is then considered inessential. The dominant center neglects and devalues it, treating it as unimportant and irrelevant to its concerns. As militant forces in Kashmir, for their material gains, are continuously neglecting the destructions taking place in the valley for their interest, and hence nature has become inessential to them. They are denying the fact that the use of weapons during war has fearful impacts on biological and non-biological entities like rivers, lakes, and mountains etc. The "Othering model of human-centeredness" is important because it supports the ecological knowledge that a human-centered framework presents serious issues for both humans and non-humans. The author goes on to show how an anthropocentric logic of human isolation has crept into many cultural domains and masqueraded as reason. For example, an instrumentalist approach to productivity research that emphasizes control and profit works closely with a disembodied economic system. This reductionist scientific method fosters societal illusions of dominion over and alienation from nature by weakening, exacerbating, and desensitizing the natural environment. These conceptual blind spots lead to unprecedented degrees of detachment and disconnection between production and consumption, costs and benefits, and false impressions of invulnerability. The vast processes of biosphere degradation that our political and economic structures profit from and normalize, while discouraging remedial action by stifling, devaluing, or appropriating

critical, reflexive, and communicative feedback. The underlying causes of the ecological disaster include misguided human-centered ethical, philosophical, and spiritual worldviews (illusion), unfair political systems (interest), and insufficient knowledge (ignorance). These causes are interrelated and reinforce one another.

Eco-criticism, deeply influenced by Plumwood's insights, centers its critique on dualisms, particularly the pervasive nature/culture dualism entrenched in Western thought. This dichotomy often results in the marginalization and domination of nature by culture, leading to the exploitation of the environment. Within eco-criticism, the interrogation of dualism encourages scholars to challenge binary oppositions such as human/nature, subject/object, and man/woman in literature and culture. The theorist underscores the ethical dimensions inherent in eco-criticism, advocating for a reevaluation of our ethical responsibilities towards the natural world. She champions an ethic of care and respect for non-human entities. This ethical perspective prompts scholars in literary analysis to explore how texts depict human interactions with the environment and non-human beings and to contemplate the ethical ramifications of these representations.

The theory also addresses issues of agency and anthropocentrism in literature and culture. The anthropocentric view places humans at the center of the universe and denies agency to non-human entities. In eco-critical analyses, scholars explore how texts depict the agency of non- human beings and ecosystems, challenging anthropocentric narratives and highlighting the interconnectedness of all living beings. It advocates for ecological diversity and pluralism in eco-criticism. She emphasizes the importance of recognizing and celebrating the diversity of ecosystems, cultures, and perspectives in literary and cultural representations. Eco-critics draw attention to the rich tapestry of ecological narratives, voices, and experiences found in literature, challenging monolithic and homogenizing views of nature and culture. The theory advocates for an interdisciplinary approach that draws from philosophy, ecology, feminism, and other fields, enriching analyses of literature, ecology, and culture with diverse theoretical perspectives. This framework provides a nuanced and interdisciplinary lens for examining literary and cultural representations of the environment. By emphasizing ethical considerations, challenging anthropocentric perspectives, and advocating for ecological diversity, the theory broadens our comprehension of how literature and culture depict humanity's relationship with nature.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Waheed's literary works, The Book of Gold Leaves and The Collaborator serve as poignant critiques of the Indian government's exploitation of environmental Othering in Kashmir, showcasing the devastating impacts of internal colonialism on both the natural environment and the marginalized Kashmiri population. The government's narrative, presenting itself as a modernizing force while denigrating the Kashmiri people as "backward" and "uncivilized," is exposed as a means of justifying its occupation and resource exploitation in the region. In The Book of Gold Leaves, Waheed interweaves a tragic love story with the harsh realities of conflict in Kashmir, using the natural beauty of the region to underscore the detrimental effects of violence and colonization on the ecosystem. The characters, Faiz and Roohi, navigate the challenges posed by the war, emphasizing the intricate political and social climate that threatens their relationship. Waheed's vivid and evocative descriptions of Kashmir's mountains, forests, and lakes serve not only as a backdrop to the narrative but also as a powerful commentary on the significance of these natural resources for the locals.

The environmental degradation portrayed in Waheed's works is not merely a backdrop but a central theme that resonates with the Kashmiri people's way of life. The continuous burning of garbage and wood, the construction of dams for hydroelectric projects, and the clearing of forests for timber production contribute to the contamination of the air and pose a direct threat to the cultural identity of the Kashmiri people. Their dependence on the forests, rivers, and mountains for sustenance and cultural identity becomes a vulnerability exploited by those in power. In The Collaborator, Waheed delves into the life of Shalimar, a young man coerced into aiding the Indian army, offering a powerful indictment of the violence and ruin that accompany war and occupation. The interconnectedness between the inhabitants of a small town in Kashmir and their natural surroundings is vividly depicted, emphasizing their reliance on rivers and forests for livelihood. However, the destructive consequences of conflict, such as river contamination, deforestation, and smoke pollution, force them to abandon their homes and face violence and intimidation from the occupying forces.

Waheed's novels collectively present a strong criticism of internal colonialism and environmental Othering in Kashmir, shedding light on the complex relationships between

literature, the environment, and social justice. By portraying the interconnectedness between the natural world and human existence, he highlights the urgent need to address the socio-environmental injustices perpetuated by internal colonial systems. In doing so, Waheed's contributions to Eco criticism offer a profound exploration of the intricate dynamics between human societies, their environments, and the pursuit of justice.

4.1 The Book of Gold Leaves

The narratives of "The Book of Gold Leaves" (TBGL) delicately illustrate the atmosphere of Srinagar, involving it within its natural surroundings. However, the region's political instability severely impacts the peaceful landscapes. The consequences of the continuous political conflict immediately manifest in the environment, imposing a substantial cost. Violence, a bleak result of political upheaval, affects not just the physical landscapes but also the social and political structure of Kashmir.

4.1.1 Shattered Communities: Social Disruption in the Shadow of Military Bases

As the novel opens, we can see that curfews and lockouts have become prevalent, transforming previously crowded avenues into eerily silent thoroughfares. This persistent aura of terror instils a strong sense of anxiety in the inhabitants, discouraging them from leaving their houses. The fear of safely returning home weighs large, putting a cloud of worry over individuals' everyday lives. People are more concerned following the event with Zaal. This military vehicle arrests many Kashmiri young men on the road and moves them away to an unknown location. The aftermath of this occurrence becomes a heartbreaking metaphor for the random nature of violence, putting communities in a continuous state of fear. As the narrator states the condition of the city, "The city's nights are not what they used to be. People now leave the streets and the shrine to the dogs at night…." (106). The condition of the city is not as normal as it was before the curfew, and people in the valley are getting disturbed by the presence of the military. This military intervention and curfew have a significant psychological impact on people, contributing to ecological denial by obscuring the seriousness of environmental issues amidst the immediate concern for safety. Plumwood (2002) asserts that the presence of the marginalized group is not even acknowledged. Their presence on the land is ignored, and they are portrayed as nonessential since their labor-filled land has been appropriated by nature (104). This reflects the way colonial systems erase the intertwined existence of people and the land, dismissing their history and presence as irrelevant to modern agendas. Plumwood's idea resonates with

Waheed's narrative that the people of the valley are suffering, their mental health is being neglected by 'The One', and their presence is ignored even by the forces. The psychological toll is evident as dread and uncertainty become embedded in the national consciousness. The everyday life of Srinagar is marked by a continual sense of anxiety, with people dealing not just with the physical interruptions created by fighting but also with the emotional and mental wounds it left. The disregard for the well-being of the valley's people mirrors the environmental and psychological "othering" that Plumwood critiques, where both human and ecological stability are treated as expendable in pursuit of hegemonic goals. The community's mental health suffers significantly as a result of the continual danger of violence and the unpredictable nature of daily living. The formerly dynamic and culturally diverse city becomes a zone where the mental well-being of its citizens continually comes under threat, perpetuating environmental othering by marginalizing the importance of ecological concerns in the face of immediate safety needs. As we can see, the condition of the city was once it was the city of poets and artists, but now "The area's garrulous poets and satirists, who have for centuries held their evening conclaves on the bank of the Jhelum and defied the city's ghosts, stay indoors now, not just when it is dark but during the day as well, coming out only when it is essential, to buy bread and milk" (106). This loss of cultural vibrancy reflects internal colonialism, where the colonizers impose a culture of fear and repression that erases local traditions and deep ties to the land. Major Sumit Kumar's military plans for Srinagar City demonstrate the widespread militarization of Kashmir: "At the mouth of each street and lane, there is or will be a bunker. At the other end of each street and lane, there is or will be a bunker. Three sandbags and a line-drawn machine gun mark the bunkers on Kumar's chart" (Waheed 59). Plumwood's critique of colonial structures resonates here, as the militarization of the landscape reflects how the region is viewed purely in strategic terms, disregarding its people and environment as integral to its identity.

Plumwood presents a similar idea that the inhabitants of the valley who are being victimized by the Other, whose past ownership of the land is never acknowledged or spoken about, are rejected as the overlooked backdrop to "civilization" (104). This invisibility of the valley's people, who are reduced to mere obstacles to the colonizer's aims, underscores the internal colonial mindset that systematically prioritizes domination over both human and ecological concerns. The colonizers of the valley are present there, and nobody can raise the question of their presence and ask about the missing persons. This denial of

accountability not only erases human lives but also perpetuates the exploitation of land, disregarding the deep interconnections between the two.

At the beginning of the story, Faiz is shown as the Paper Mache artist, but later on, after seeing the condition of the city, he decides to join the militant group to avenge his godmother. Struggling to come to terms with the loss of his godmother, he resolves to take up arms, driven by a desire for vengeance and a longing to expel outsiders from Kashmir. Venturing across the Pakistani border, he returns as a guerrilla fighter, adept in bombmaking. As the novel progresses and delves into the experiences of characters like Faiz, Roohi, and Shanta Koul, readers come to realize that the fate of individuals mirrors the fate of the entire nation, illustrating the profoundly political nature of personal experiences. Faiz himself confides in a fellow militant, admitting, "I could not take it anymore. It was too hard. They are too cruel. They should not be in our homes" (Waheed 125-26). As Plumwood asserts, for capitalist purposes, nature is denied, "it is appropriate that the colonizer impose his value, agency and meaning, and that the colonized be made to serve the colonizer as a means to his ends" (106). This denial extends beyond the environment to encompass the people who inhabit it, reducing them to tools for exploitation. Such a framework perpetuates both ecological and social domination, prioritizing material gain over human and environmental integrity. Here, according to Waheed's perspective, the only thing that matters to the oppressor is their material gain, for which even the killing of a human being has become a routine and daily life activity. This reflects the internal colonial mindset that devalues both the people and their land, treating them as disposable in the pursuit of hegemonic objectives. Plumwood asserts that every action done by the 'The One' is justified and cannot be questioned, "Because the master perspective lacks certain kinds of self-knowledge, such a study can reveal various kinds of culture-wide rationality failures. From that master perspective, what is being done is rational" (99). So, here in the novel, we can see that Miltary intervened in the city without any notification or informing the people of the valley because everything at their end is justified and logical. The militarization of Kashmir reflects not only the disregard for human agency but also the systemic erasure of ecological and cultural significance, consistent with Plumwood's critique of the exploitative master model.

Professor Koul, in the novel, embodies the perspective of eco-friendly awareness, endangered by two significant threats: violence and ecologically harmful development. When he observes that the pollutants in the town are flowing into the water bodies, he

becomes deeply concerned and upset. He expresses his sorrow by stating, "The hospital, the medical school, the sub-divisional police headquarters, and other institutions of excellence have all built man-size underground sewage pipes that pour their toxic effusions into the canal all day" (186-187). This vivid depiction of environmental degradation underscores the ethical ramifications of human-environment relationships depicted in literature. As Plumwood pinpoints, "The juxtaposition of these two features, the dominant rational framework which locates humanity outside nature and denies or backgrounds dependency on biospheric services, alongside the reality of our ever-increasing encroachment on the natural systems on which we depend, is alarming". Plumwood's theory, which highlights the dangerous disconnect between humanity's perceived independence from nature and the reality of our increasing encroachment on natural systems, finds a clear resonance in Waheed's narrative. Plumwood argues that the dominant rational framework locates humanity outside nature, leading to a denial or backgrounding of our dependency on biospheric services. This mindset fosters environmental negligence and exploitation, ultimately jeopardizing the very systems that sustain human life (121). In Waheed's portrayal of Kashmir, the relentless militarization of the valley mirrors this colonial approach, where the land and its people are treated as expendable. The denial of dependency on nature parallels the marginalization of the Kashmiri community, aligning ecological destruction with the systemic erasure of cultural and human identities. Such dual exploitation underscores the deep entanglement of ecological devastation and internal colonialism.

4.1.2 Spiritual Resilience and Ecological Symbolism Amidst Conflict in Kashmir

The tragic passing of Roohi's father inside the shrine represents the breaking of the spiritual ties that bind the Kashmiri people in the face of unrelenting bloodshed, underscoring a deep rift between the community and its spiritual history. This event, set against the backdrop of war, encapsulates the alienation and estrangement felt by both people and nature, casting them as the 'Other' in their land. During the war, the people and nature in the narrative appear as 'Other,' experiencing a sense of alienation and estrangement. As Plumwood proclaims, those who are in power are rational, and the subordinates are considered irrational, "dominant `centre' is represented as universal, and the experiences of those subordinated in the structure are rendered as secondary or `irrational'" (99). The work emphasizes the intrinsic worth of the Kashmiri community's traditional spiritual customs as a cure for the current environmental catastrophe plaguing

the area. Kashmiris need to rediscover their innate connection to nature in order to find comfort and spiritual fulfilment despite the ongoing fighting. The novel vividly portrays the traditional allure of Kashmir, shedding light on the avian life amidst the turmoil of conflict. Specific locations in this conflict-ridden area provide sanctuary for birds, allowing them to fly around and rest without interference. These places include mosques, rivers, lakes, and shrines. after nightfall falls, crows, the protectors of the Great Sufi's throne, surround the shrine and take it back after people leave. They perch on rooftops, balconies, and old wooden verandas that have housed unscrupulous caregivers as well as saints. The gathered mystical group is observed in reverent quiet by the other devotees in the courtyard, echoing the focus of eco-critics on interconnectivity and the appreciation of diversity in ecological narratives. This scene resonates with eco-critical perspectives on interconnectedness and diversity, echoing Plumwood's argument that dominant powers marginalize subordinate experiences as irrational (99). By reclaiming their inherent connection with nature, Kashmiris can find solace and spiritual fulfilment, challenging the dominant narrative that seeks to suppress their ecological and spiritual identity. Plumwood's insights into the erasure of subordinate identities mirror the ecological marginalization seen in Kashmir, where natural sanctuaries and spiritual traditions are suppressed under the rationalized control of dominant forces. This marginalization aligns with internal colonialism, as the local populace and their deep ecological knowledge are rendered invisible by the hegemonic powers. Reclaiming this connection with nature thus becomes both an act of spiritual resistance and ecological restoration.

4.1.3 Environmental Warfare: The Ecological Consequences of Military Presence

Major Sumit Kumar, the person in command, meticulously examines a large map depicting his strategy to take over Srinagar. He envisions "bunkers at the entrance to each street and lane, establishing a strong military presence across the city" (Waheed 59). This map depicts the military taking over the city and imposing rule. Military machine guns are stationed everywhere, keeping a careful eye on everyone. Major Sumit Kumar's plan of bunkers demonstrates how the military is keeping a tight check on every aspect of the city. It makes the city feel like an intricate web, with the military always observing, almost like a terrifying ghost (jinn), throwing shadows over people's lives (Waheed 59). Colonial forces from the past continue to have a significant influence on the ecology of the region. The history of how they exploited the land and the current lack of concern from strong individuals exacerbates environmental issues. The backdrop is magnificent, with streams,

lakes, and snowy mountains, but Srinagar needs a better infrastructure to provide clean water. This problem jeopardizes people's health and causes a variety of ailments. It also demonstrates how the legacy of colonialism continues to impact the ecosystem. The same forces that formerly extracted resources from this region are presently contributing to its environmental degradation, perpetuating a cycle of neglect and exploitation. This idea resonates with Plumwood's concept of ecological denial, in which the 'Other' refuses to admit the truth and seriousness of the environmental crisis. "A weakened sense of the reality of our embeddedness in nature is seen in the cultural phenomenon of ecological denial, which refuses to admit the reality and seriousness of the ecological crisis". This denial usually stems from a cultural perspective that views people as superior to and apart from nature, as opposed to essential components of an intricate ecological system. By refusing to recognize our dependence on and interconnectedness with the natural world, society can continue harmful practices without feeling immediate guilt or responsibility. The colonial forces in Srinagar are not concerned about nature and the people, as they are unnecessary for them. This denial is dangerous because it prevents the necessary collective action needed to address and mitigate environmental crises. Instead of confronting and solving ecological problems, denial allows for their perpetuation, worsening the crisis over time. The militarization of Srinagar symbolizes a dual exploitation of the land and its people, as colonial powers impose their authority while ignoring ecological and human suffering. By prioritizing control and resource extraction, these forces perpetuate systemic marginalization, relegating both the environment and the inhabitants to expendable entities. This reinforces Plumwood's critique of the interconnected domination of nature and subjugation of marginalized communities, deepening cycles of destruction and inequity.

4.1.4 Nature's Decline: The Erosion of Landscapes

The Jhelum River is portrayed as Kashmir's lifeline, and Faiz and Roohi have a close Wordsworthian relationship with it. In his childhood, Faiz would dart "through the swift brown waters of the Jhelum to be among the first to emerge at the opposite bank" (5). The river serves as a sanctuary from the harshness of life, surrounded by "tall trees on either side, with the outside world only visible through the blue sky adorned with a multitude of stars" (7). They are often drawn by the "murmurs of the river in the dark" (61). Roohi witnessed Faiz swimming for the first time in the river. Roohi actively imagines a future with Faiz, reassuring him that the river and the countryside are their constant companions: "I will take you to all our lakes and rivers. I will float on the Jhelum with you by my side,

and we will see what lies beyond the shrine. We will go as far as the river courses, through the heart of our country. I am sure, no, I know, that the river, and the fields and the forests, will give us shelter, create havens for our children and us in the years to come…." (139). After their marriage, they seek solace in the company of nature. Apart from its tangible existence, the river represents the tranquil and steady flow of life, linking the cultural and religious spectrum of the city as a unifying factor. However, the violence that has entered the valley threatens this harmony. The way the river's once-smooth flow has been disrupted is similar to how other symbolic smooth flows in the novel have been disturbed. When an Indian army camp is set up in a high school run by Sumit Kumar, the usual pattern of learning is interrupted. Similarly, the deaths and kidnappings carried out by Indian troops in the valley interrupt the love of Faiz and Roohi.

Furthermore, Roohi's father is murdered at the Khanqah, obstructing the spiritual flow that the place represents. The river represents the bigger problem of how both human and natural components are marginalized and pushed aside during times of war. The river was once a source of life and cultural richness, but now it serves as a repository for the debris of armed conflict. This tells a moving story of relocation and alienation as the city and its residents struggle with the damaging effects of violence on their immediate surroundings and communities.

As Roohi swims in the Jhelum at night, her eyes reveal a sombre mood as she examines the marshy expanse. Her gaze is drawn to the formerly pristine area, where "deer thrived undisturbed on the chain of islands that could take them all the way to the high meadows of Nargismarg" (203). However, the peacefulness of this natural refuge has been harmed by the severe effects of war, unrestricted hunting, and widespread urbanization. These once-thriving species, once a vital part of the landscape, are now on the verge of extinction, victims of the constant stresses exerted by human activity on their once-pristine habitat. Faiz, a militant, cannot reside in the city due to fear of arrest by Indian troops. The big city takes on the role of a villain despite the river's natural beauty and significance to people's lives. The river is kind, but its waters are frequently tainted by hospital and mosque trash, as well as severed body parts from prison cells, rendering it unsafe for swimming. As Plumwood says, when the marginalized are considered low and unimportant, they are marked as inferior; they become inessential to the One, "The concept of "denial back grounding' is that once the "other" is marked as inferior or low, and then it is represented as inessential. The Center neglects its importance and devalues it as it is inessential for it

(104). Against the backdrop of conflict, the vital Jhelum River has become polluted, and the region's climate has faced severe disturbances. Kumar observes that the Jhelum River weaves like a thread throughout this book. The narrative consistently references the Jhelum River and Dal Lake to emphasize the extensive environmental degradation resulting from the occupation. "The river made the city, and the city has tried to unmake it over the centuries. While it brings the heavenly waters of the emerald Verinag spring from the hem of the Pir Panjal Mountains, the city thwarts its dreams, pouring refuse, bad wishes, and dark stories into it. Of late, it has also started carrying the dead, many tales of cruelty drowning in its onward rush, and with them, the dark deeds of the oppressor, too" (Waheed 23). This neglect and devaluation align with Plumwood's argument that once the "other" is marked as inferior, it becomes inessential (104), allowing dominant powers to perpetuate ecological harm without accountability. The plight of the Jehlum River thus embodies the consequences of such ecological denial and marginalization, revealing how the systematic devaluation of marginalized entities leads to severe environmental degradation. This degradation reflects a broader cultural failure to recognize and respect the intrinsic value and interconnectedness of all ecological and cultural elements, ultimately exacerbating the ecological crisis.

Wildlife officials in Hokrsar attribute the massive bird migration to favourable climatic conditions and abundant food sources in the region. However, the extensive military presence equipped with advanced weapons has seriously disturbed the ecology, resulting in easy bird hunting, deforestation, and ecological imbalance. This disruption mirrors the concept of ecological denial, where the seriousness of environmental issues is downplayed or overlooked, highlighting the need to address such concerns in literary discourse.

Unfortunately, the military incursion that the government conducted has overshadowed the beauty of the Valley of Kashmir. The armed Forces have disrupted the delicate balance of the valley's ecosystem with their presence, their weapons, and their big smoke-belching vehicles. The region's rich plant and animal life is currently in danger of going extinct as a result of the actions of the Military Forces. The military has been stationed across the valley, making it difficult for the locals to take care of the valley's welfare because they are too busy trying to survive. The psychological effects of the incursion have negatively impacted the people's quality of life, and the valley is still scarred from Kashmiris getting shot at. There is a war going on in the forests between the military

and freedom fighters. The forests are frequently blasted without apparent cause, and there is a persistent smell of gunpowder in the air. The various bird species that inhabit the valley are going to suffer significantly as a result, eventually leaving forest habitats. This portrayal of environmental degradation aligns with the perspective of eco-critics, who emphasize the interconnectedness of all living beings and ecosystems, advocating for recognizing and celebrating diversity in ecological narratives. The devastation wrought by the military incursion underscores the urgent need to protect and preserve the valley's unique ecological heritage, highlighting the profound consequences when human actions disrupt the delicate balance of nature. It calls for a renewed commitment to ecological stewardship, recognizing that the well-being of the environment is inextricably linked to the health and resilience of the community.

The impact of violence and unsustainable development contributes to environmental degradation. The novel underscores the devastation wrought upon Kashmir's physical environment by armed conflict. The novel paints a vivid picture of a paradise betrayed, underscored not only by its artistic poignancy but also by a factual depiction of the atrocities committed by various parties: the Indian army, politicians from both sides and militant groups. The narrative skillfully captures the indifference of politicians and authorities to attacks on symbols of peace and sanctity, such as shrines, as well as the desecration of the land through landmines, explosions, and pollution. This destruction and decay unfold in a land globally renowned for its proverbial beauty and serenity. The narrator poignantly describes the scene: "By the way, did I mention there is a profusion of tiny yellow flowers growing among the grasses here? You can see bright yellow outlines of human forms enclosing darkness inside. It makes me cry... In some cases, the outline has started to become fuzzy now, with the tiny plants encroaching into the space of the ever-shrinking human remains. I don't know the name of the flowers. Some kind of wild daisies, perhaps" (Waheed 14). This description highlights the ecological devastation wrought by conflict, further emphasizing the need for ethical considerations in human-environment relationships depicted in literature. Waheed's vivid depictions of exotic birds and animals thriving amidst lush greenery and abundant water sources captivate our senses, illustrating the rich biodiversity of this picturesque location. However, rather than romanticizing these features of nature, he treats them as an artist who is fully aware of how the valley is changing day by day due to the certain factors taking place in the valley for decades. The occupation of land by the colonial forces not only impacts human beings but also affects

the flora and fauna of the region. Every single entity present in the occupied land is treated as 'Other' during the war period. It has been clearly shown in the novel how violence disrupts the natural and smooth flow of life. War disrupts both rural and urban areas. As the conflicts between military forces and freedom fighters worsen, Roohi's tranquil surroundings are disrupted. This violence has an immediate impact on Kashmir's peaceful scenery, both in the valley and along the border that divides India and Pakistan in the region. This portrayal of ecological disruption echoes the perspective of eco-critics, who advocate for recognizing and celebrating diversity in ecological narratives, challenging monolithic views of nature and culture. The integration of eco-critical perspectives within this narrative illuminates the interconnectedness of human actions, environmental degradation, and literary representation, enriching the discourse on the ethical dimensions of human-environment relationships depicted in literature.

The importance of freshwater bodies in maintaining environmental balance is another point the novel highlights. Situated in the greater Himalayan region, the valley of Kashmir is blessed with... "a vast array of freshwater bodies such as lakes, ponds, wetlands, springs, streams and rivers. These varied freshwater ecosystems are of great aesthetic, cultural, socioeconomic and ecological value besides playing an important role in the conservation of genetic resources of both plants and animals". The peaceful lakes, which were once immaculate, are now affected by issues from the past and present. The region's delicate environmental balance has been impacted by the historical brutality committed by colonial forces, leaving enduring scars on both people and nature. Due to the violence and military invasion, the lakes, which were once brimming with alive flora and fauna, are now struggling to sustain their existence. As asserted by Plumwood, ecological imbalance is therefore worsened by the decrease in the migration of birds and aquatic life habitats, as well as changes to the natural ecosystem.

Additionally, the effects of colonial legacies continue to combine with contemporary problems; these water bodies are contaminated and desecrated as a result of continuous mistreatment, inadequate maintenance, and widespread pollution. Daal Lake is one of the most famous lakes in the valley of Kashmir. Dal Lake serves as a crucial indicator of Kashmir's environmental degradation. The lake has suffered dramatically from the reduced flow of icy water from the mountains, poor upkeep, rising pollution, and the extra element of violence and possession of weapons in the locality. Dal Lake, which was formerly a massive shelter for houseboats floating on the water and a plethora of aquatic

species, is rapidly decreasing. Startling and significant changes can be seen when comparing its current state to that of fifteen years ago. An unsettling indicator of the increasing pollution is the emergence of an enigmatic red weed around the lake's perimeter, highlighting Dal Lake's significant ecological challenges.

In Plumwood's perspective on environmental justice, the marginalization of certain groups plays a critical role. The communities residing in conflict zones like Kashmir often face severe marginalization, exacerbating their vulnerability to environmental degradation. The imposition of military presence and the prioritization of security measures over environmental conservation further marginalize these communities, depriving them of their rights to a clean and healthy environment. Moreover, the uneven distribution of resources and opportunities aggravates the environmental injustices faced by marginalized groups, perpetuating cycles of poverty and ecological degradation. The nexus between conflict, marginalization, and environmental degradation underscores the need for a holistic approach to address these interconnected challenges and promote environmental justice in conflict-affected regions like Kashmir. The aforementioned lines indicate that India and Pakistan are both intentionally constructing a violent and power-driven narrative that shapes the region in order to pursue their own goals of political and economic domination. In addition to upsetting the peace in the surroundings, the use of weapons and ammunition is a metaphor for the continuous geopolitical conflicts. During his training on the Pakistani side of Kashmir, Faiz came across a variety of weaponry and explosives, which brought to light how this militarization not only endangers human lives but also seriously damages the valley's natural ecosystem. Waheed highlights the essential role that freshwater bodies in Kashmir play, as well as their continuous toxic exposure. The depletion, contamination, and overexploitation of Kashmir's water resources have been severe in recent years. There are several bodies of water surrounding the Kashmir Valley, especially the high-altitude lakes, and each one has its unique geography and importance. To protect the priceless freshwater ecosystems in the area, sustainable management and preservation measures must be implemented.

The water that was a source of drinking water has been poisoned by government mismanagement and egregious public negligence, as Waheed states that, "freshwater pond, a reservoir created by the abundance of the lake, which fed the Nallah Mar canal that traipsed through the city. In fact, this is what remains of the canal, a strangulated cripple of that waterway, a sickly reminder of what will, over a generation or two, become a legend,

a story the young may or may not believe" (83). Faiz and Roohi serve as the authors' mouthpieces as they frequently express sympathy for Dal Lake's pitiful deterioration in water quality. Roohi is appalled by the trash and destruction that both locals and visitors have left behind at the lake. She thinks it is "a gift preyed upon by all, violated over the years by ruler and ruled alike. Still, it is tranquil, like an ageing seer, trying every spring to purify itself of the poison that men have hidden in its green folds" (140). The inadequate sewage and drainage infrastructure have exacerbated the degradation of Kashmir's water-based ecological system. Most canals are heavily polluted, rendering them incapable of supporting marine life. Unfortunately, authorities seem unconcerned about the severity of this issue. Consequently, sewage is unabashedly discharged into rivers and freshwater canals, with raw sewage visible in the city centres of the valley. "Koul feels wounded every time he sees the large footed drain in place of the Golden Canal …. The hospital, the medical school, the sub-divisional police headquarters, and other institutions of excellence have all built man-size underground sewage pipes that pour their toxic effusions into the canal all day. If you take a boat trip on it, your boat might wobble over a carcass, or you may find yourself rowing through sheets of shit…." (Waheed 186-87). By portraying this state of environmental deterioration, the novel sheds light on the ongoing marginalization of environmental issues from the public discourse, which is primarily driven by the objectives of the military and corporate sectors. The military's involvement is apparent when one considers how their activities, whether directly or indirectly, support the disregard and poor management that contaminate essential water sources and feed the downward spiral of environmental degradation. Plumwood pinpoints the low importance and marginalization of non-human factors in nature as "non-animal beings who are `outside nature', we are subject to illusions of autonomy, service and control, taking the functioning of the `lower' sphere, the ecological systems which support us, entirely for granted" (100). The novel vividly illustrates the dire state of Kashmir's ecological system, emphasizing the pervasive neglect and degradation of essential water sources. This depiction aligns with Plumwood's critique of how non-human factors are marginalized and devalued in the face of human-centred agendas. The military and corporate interests prioritize their objectives, exacerbating environmental harm through poor management and contamination of natural resources. Roohi's and Koul's profound distress over the polluted waterways mirrors Plumwood's argument that society takes the functioning of ecological systems for granted, treating them as inessential. This negligence perpetuates a false sense of autonomy and

control, ignoring the critical interconnectedness of all living beings and ecosystems. In the novel, this detachment from nature's essential systems highlights the harmful consequences of environmental exploitation, where both the land and its people are treated as expendable. The militarized control of the valley further deepens this internal colonialism, disregarding the ecological and human costs in favour of maintaining power and dominance.

Farhat explores a track that initially followed the channel of a canal branching from Dal Lake. This canal was an important supply of water for agriculture. It was also a reliable source of firewood and fish, resulting in an environment that attracted a variety of birds and animals. However, causes such as dwindling river water, increasing pollution, and unrestrained urbanization steadily reduced and eventually eliminated the canal. The encroachment of colonizers, as well as the ripple effects of violence, led to the canal's disintegration, changing the scenery that Faiz nostalgically recalled from his family's previous trips to the lake. "In those days abundant with water, boats and watermelons, fish and lotuses on the boat, the lake and the city were one. They would anchor at the Dembh waterway, soon start nibbling at their picnic, then drift on through the willow-covered blue-green liquid pathways to the lake and onto the Mughal gardens in the palm of the Zubarwan hills. It all ended the moment a loony minister, Sheikh Samandar, decided a road was development and water was not" (Waheed 65).

4.1.5 Environmental Crisis: Impact on Biodiversity and Marine Life

The novel highlights the issues threatening the wildlife of the valley's biodiversity, emphasizing the importance of marine life in the ecosystem. His work depicts how marine life has become a casualty in the never-ending cycle of violence and pollution. In the previous period, Kashmir's beautiful lakes, with their crystal-clear waters, were teeming with numerous fish species, notably trout, which were critical in meeting the nutritional demands of the local community. However, increasing demand resulted in an expected decline in fish supply. TBGL explores this environmental change as Zahid Shah examines fish in the Namchabal canal, which has become polluted and inhospitable due to contamination from the city, leading to the decline of river life (83). The prevalent militancy and bloodshed in Kashmir have had a profound impact on the region's fish population and health. Marine life, once a natural resource, became a key source of food for both troops and insurgents throughout times of war. Before the outbreak of violence, authorities were assigned to protect waterways and prohibit the commercialization and improper use of trout.

However, deforestation has had a significant influence on trout habitats, resulting in decreased water flow and increasing human interference in the waterscape, ultimately reducing the trout population. The clarity of water, which is critical for trout survival, is further harmed by sedimentation in Kashmir's rivers and lakes, posing a significant danger to the species. In addition, the introduction of herbicides, pesticides, and fertilizers thrown into water bodies endangers fish life. These contaminants damage the delicate balance of the aquatic ecosystem, putting the once-thriving marine life at risk. The intertwined powers of military and trade caused severe damage to the military indument, causing severe deforestation in Kashmir. The preservation of forests in Kashmir is complicated by the link between military conflict and the local population's economic interests. This simultaneous pressure has resulted in a troubling history of deforestation in the region, with serious consequences for both animal habitats and the general environmental balance.

Farhat has a deep affinity with trees, seeing melody in their rustling leaves. During her younger years, she admired the towering poplars and saw them as a possible escape route. The impulse to climb the tallest tree and leap onto a passing helicopter represents a yearning for freedom and escape during the city's continuous curfews. "The poplars seemed so tall she had thought that if she could climb up the highest one, she would be able to jump onto a helicopter passing by, during one of the city's long curfews, and fly away" (240). Similarly, Faiz is fascinated by the sceneries and trees of the Neelam Valley in Pakistan-administered Kashmir. The attractiveness of these natural treasures emphasizes the devastating effects of deforestation on the region's aesthetic and ecological diversity. "It is truly emerald, a shining green carpet rolling down the terraced hills, with the Neelum River sliding away in the deep middle. He sees the corridor clearly now, a neighborhood of trees and swarms of leaves hanging from age-old creepers and their newer, younger siblings. It almost seems as if a gardener, a keeper of forests, with an eye for detail and artistic composition, has put it all together" (228). Faiz feels a deep connection with trees; it serves as a poignant metaphor for how cutting down trees in large numbers (deforestation) is creating significant changes in nature. The characters' love of nature demonstrates that trees are highly essential, and we must figure out more effective ways to use land and resources to maintain the environment. It serves as a warning that the impact of cutting down trees, mainly due to warfare and business, is harming Kashmir's natural equilibrium and that we must urgently find solutions to protect our ecosystem. However, these once tranquil forests today carry the scars of bloodshed, reflecting rising tensions between India and Pakistan.

The "dense forests are the checkposts of the two countries, manned by figures armed with sniper rifles and telescopes" (Waheed 229).

The pristine natural environment of Kashmir faces a looming threat from the pressures of modernization and urbanization, which pose a significant risk to the region's green landscapes and overall ecological balance. Land transformation stands out as a primary factor driving environmental shifts in Kashmir, exacerbated by encroachments and illicit housing projects that further degrade its natural beauty. Farhat strolls along a road that was formerly a serene canal extending from Dal Lake. This canal once provided a refreshing breeze, blooming flowers, fish, firewood, and water for irrigation. Faiz reminisces about his family's joyful outings and picnics by the lake, highlighting the loss of such cherished experiences amidst the changing landscape. "In those days abundant with water, boats and watermelons, fish and lotuses on the boat, the lake and the city were one.… They would anchor at the Dembh waterway, soon start nibbling at their picnic, then drift on through the willow-covered blue-green liquid pathways to the lake and on to the Mughal gardens in the palm of the Zubarwan hills" (65). Plumwood argues that the human-centred framework, which prioritizes human interests over those of nature, was once helpful for Western civilisation's growth and dominance (109). This framework has, however, contributed to the disregard for ecological balance, leading to the exploitation of natural resources, which has now reached a point of environmental crisis. The ongoing transformation of Kashmir's landscapes symbolizes the consequences of this mindset, as the region's once-thriving ecosystems are now endangered by unchecked human development. This perspective allowed humans to exploit natural resources without considering the consequences, driving industrial and technological progress. However, in our current era of ecological limits—where the planet's resources and ability to absorb waste are finite—this mindset is no longer viable. Continuing to prioritize human needs at the expense of the environment poses a serious threat not only to other species but also to human survival. The insensitivity to nature that this framework promotes leads to environmental degradation, climate change, and loss of biodiversity, all of which have dire consequences for life on Earth.

In Waheed's novel, the story concludes with the two lovers, Roohi and Faiz, married and locked in an embrace, escaping the threat of Major Kumar and his gun. Faiz, the male protagonist, is depicted as a young papier-mâché artist and a dreamer with aspirations to create a sprawling painting titled "Faluknuma" with gold colours, deeming it "the biggest

canvas he has ever embarked upon, his life's work" (Waheed 7). The story reaches its climax with the two lovers positioned behind a window curtain, their intertwined and trembling shadows exposed to Major Kumar as he readies his gun to fire. "Kumar lifts the machine gun skyward first... Moreover, he redirects his gaze away from the crowd, away from the shrine, toward the rooftops of the houses opposite. As he squeezes the trigger, his eyes catch sight of two shadows standing in a distant window. The shadows sway, tremble momentarily, yet remain inseparable" (Waheed 330). The work provides a window into how a tranquil way of their lives—the one marked by religious syncretism, amicable cohabitation of many religious communities, and love for art—is upended by violence to the point that even the natural world and the environment are affected. The story is depicted from three perspectives: the militant rebellion, the Hindu-Muslim covert killings, and the army's retaliatory measures. Throughout the novel, the primary plot is subtly connected to these three threads. These factions, which each represent a distinct political ideology and are fighting to maintain their status quo, all suffer the same miseries associated with combat. The trials and miseries endured by the typical person are incomprehensible. Their civil rights, education, and lives have all been methodically suppressed. The only thing that has come of this long war—which no side has won nor lost—is mistrust, animosity, and disregard for one another among the many ethnic groups in the state and the nation. As

Plumwood concludes that "the human-centred framework may once have been functional for the dominance and expansion of Western civilization, removing constraints of respect for nature that might otherwise have held back its triumphs and conquests. However, in the age of ecological limits, we have now reached, it is highly dysfunctional, and the insensitivity to the other it promotes is a grave threat to our own as well as to other species survival. The old anthropocentric model that binds our relationships with nature within the logic of the One and the Other prevents us from moving on to the new mutualistic and communicative models we now so urgently need to develop for both our own and nature's survival in an age of ecological limits. The novel poignantly illustrates how a peaceful way of life, marked by religious syncretism and artistic appreciation, is devastated by relentless violence, with nature and the environment also suffering from turmoil. Through the intertwined perspectives of militant uprisings, secret executions, and army counteractions, the story highlights the shared horrors of conflict experienced by different political ideologies. This ongoing war, with no clear victors, has only bred deceit, hatred, and mutual disrespect among the state's diverse ethnic groups. The ordinary people's lives,

education, and civil rights have been systematically crushed, revealing the profound human cost of this strife. In the context of Plumwood's critique of the anthropocentric model, the novel underscores the urgent need to shift towards mutualistic and communicative relationships with nature. The destructive human-centred approach, once seen as a path to progress, now threatens both human and non-human survival. In the context of Plumwood's critique of the anthropocentric model, the novel underscores the urgent need to shift towards mutualistic and communicative relationships with nature. The destructive human-centred approach, once seen as a path to progress, now threatens both human and non-human survival. As Roohi and Faiz's love endures amidst the chaos, their story serves as a metaphor for the resilience needed to transcend outdated frameworks and embrace a more harmonious coexistence with nature, essential for our collective future. This new relational understanding calls for the recognition of both ecological and human resilience, as the same systems of domination and neglect threaten both. The internal colonial dynamics within Kashmir—where nature, like its people, has been exploited and devalued—echo the need for a collective reevaluation of our relationships with both the land and its marginalized inhabitants.

4.2 The Collaborator

4.2.1. The Ethical Divide: Human-Centeredness and the Marginalization of Nature

Human-centred ethics only give nature worth and significance when it benefits humans or other colonizers. This gives rise to a contemporary divide in which morality is applied to the human realm but not to the non-human realm. Plumwood argues that nature is viewed as operating beyond the purview of ethics and that it places no moral restrictions on human behaviour so long as we do not inflict harm on other people. This instrumental perspective warps our understanding of and sensitivity to nature, impeding our ability to engage the non-human world with humility, awe, and openness. As a result, it leads to limited perspectives and categorizations that diminish nature to nothing more than unprocessed resources for human endeavors. The natural world is portrayed as unnecessary and mostly ignored, acting as a mindless backdrop to our technologically advanced society. According to Plumwood, anthropocentric society treats non-human nature as essentially unimportant (109), which results in the systematic disregard for the demands of nature when making decisions. The refusal to see nature's order, resistance, and survival requirements as limitations on human objectives and businesses stems from this denial of

dependence on it. This disconnect between human action and nature's ecological limits reflects Plumwood's argument that modern society often treats nature as something to be exploited rather than a living, interdependent system**.** Kashmir has long been a tourist mecca known for its natural beauty and serenity. The novel paints a vivid picture of the region's biodiversity, showcasing a plethora of bird and animal species, lush greenery, and abundant water sources. His descriptions appeal to our senses, offering a sensory experience of nature's beauty. However, Waheed's depiction isn't merely romanticized; as an astute artist, he acknowledges the ongoing changes in Kashmir Valley. The natural beauty of Kashmir serves as a reminder of the deep connection between land and people. This relationship is disrupted by human-made conflicts, much like how colonial powers disregard the needs of the land and its non-human inhabitants for their benefit. The calm environment around Roohi's house is destroyed as fighting between Indian forces and freedom fighters intensifies. The violence in the valley directly impacts the beautiful scenery of Kashmir, especially the area near the Line of Control that separates Indian and Pakistani territory. This military conflict mirrors the way colonial powers have historically imposed boundaries on landscapes and people, disregarding the interconnectedness of ecosystems and the communities that depend on them. The landscapes of both rural and urban areas are marked by devastation and violence. The incident happened when Indian forces responded to Pakistani forces' bombardment of a far-off mountain pass with equally devastating results. Sulfur and blood stained the trees in the horrific aftermath. The once-green canopies gave way to dark clouds of smoke. Now covered in ash, smoke, and flames, the stately umbrella pines, with their breathtaking dark green leaves, seemed like crumbling umbrellas. The aftermath was grim, with blood and sulfur staining the trees. Dark clouds of smoke billowed from the once-green canopies (Waheed 229). The environmental devastation wrought by the violence in Kashmir speaks to the colonial legacy of disregarding the land's resilience, treating it as a resource to be exploited or destroyed for human interests. At the same time, nature's role in sustaining life and balance is overlooked.

The natural world is portrayed as unnecessary and mostly ignored, acting as an indifferent background to our technologically advanced society because non-human nature is seen by anthropocentric society as essentially irrelevant; natural needs are frequently disregarded when making decisions. According to Plumwood, this methodical rejection of reliance on nature results in an obliging disregard for its necessities for life, order, and resistance—all of which are overlooked as limitations on human aspirations and

undertakings (109). The protagonist witnesses the complexities and hardships of life in a conflict zone as he navigates his way through the challenges of growing up amidst political turmoil, violence, and betrayal. His perspective offers readers a window into the daily struggles, fears, and hopes of Kashmiri civilians living in a region torn apart by the disputes between India and Pakistan. Through his eyes, one gains insights into the human cost of war, the erosion of trust, and the problematic choices individuals make to survive in a hostile environment. The protagonist provides a deeply personal account of his experiences, including his interactions with family, friends, and neighbours, as well as his internal struggles and moral dilemmas. The protagonist's perspective is a poignant and compelling lens through which to explore the themes of identity, loyalty, and resilience in the face of adversity in "*The Collaborator*." He describes a nostalgic remembrance of a childhood spent in a valley surrounded by mountains, likely in the Kashmir region. The setting is vividly painted with imagery of a tranquil green brook winding through the meadow, mossy hills embracing the valley, and a long ridge connecting opposite sides. Behind these hills lie majestic mountains that change colour throughout the day, presenting a breathtaking sight. However, the mountains also hold a sense of mystery and danger, especially when they become dark and foreboding at night. “These undulating rows of peaks, some shining, some white, some brown, like layers of piled-up fabrics, are to the west and hide in their folds the secret tracks into Azad Kashmir, into Pakistan" (Waheed 12).

The mention of Azad Kashmir and Pakistan hints at the geopolitical context of the region, suggesting that the valley lies close to the border between India and Pakistan. The mountains serve not only as natural landmarks but also as barriers and gateways between different territories. The mention of secret tracks into Azad Kashmir and Pakistan adds an element of intrigue and covert activity to the landscape. The reference to Indian check posts and the mention of "where most of the action takes place" suggest a turbulent backdrop, likely referring to the political tensions and conflicts that have historically plagued the region. The proximity to the border and military checkpoints implies that the valley is a contested and potentially volatile area. It evokes a sense of nostalgia for a simpler time, juxtaposed against the backdrop of a landscape marked by beauty, mystery, and the complexities of geopolitical strife. It captures the bittersweet essence of growing up, where innocence and natural beauty coexist alongside the harsh realities of conflict and division.

The protagonist's return to the valley after a prolonged absence stirs nostalgia and fear within them. Descending into the familiar landscape, they are greeted by a scene that evokes

a sense of both longing for the past and apprehension about the present. The valley unfolds before them like a vast green tapestry delicately draped from the surrounding foothills, with a meandering creek serving as its centrepiece. The imagery of the landscape, described as a "large green sheet," conjures a tranquil and harmonious setting, inviting reflection on the memories and emotions it holds. He narrates that, after all these months and years, I am fearful and filled with intense nostalgia when I go down for the first time. The valley appears to be a big green sheet gently suspended from the nearby hillsides, with a rivulet in the centre that seems to be singing or humming. The location remains unchanged: It is a serene, deserted area surrounded by hills and mountains. “The valley looks like a large green sheet hung tenderly from the surrounding foothills, with a singing- humming is more like it, rivulet in the middle. It is still the same – a calm, largely uninhabited, solitary place nestled amidst the rings of our hills and mountains"(Waheed14). The valley remains unchanged despite time, serving as a constant amidst life's uncertainties. His observation that "it is still the same" speaks to the enduring nature of the landscape, highlighting its timeless quality and the comfort it provides amid the ebb and flow of life. As they navigate the familiar terrain, the narrator finds solace in the solitude of the valley, which is depicted as a "calm, largely uninhabited" place nestled amidst the surrounding hills and mountains.

The juxtaposition of nostalgia and fear underscores the complexity of the emotional experience. Nostalgia represents a longing for the past, a yearning to reconnect with cherished memories and experiences associated with the valley. Conversely, fear reflects an underlying sense of apprehension about returning to a place fraught with unknowns and uncertainties. Together, these emotions contribute to the richness and depth of the narrator's inner landscape, shaping their perceptions and interactions with the world around them. As they traverse the valley's tranquil expanse, they are reminded of the enduring bond between landscape and memory and the transformative power of returning to a place imbued with personal significance. In the quiet solitude of the valley, amidst the gentle murmuring of the creek, the narrator finds solace and renewal, forging a deeper connection to the land and themselves.

Plumwood argues that a major aspect of the development of modernity has been the assimilation of the rationality and traits of the dominant subject into bureaucratic, seemingly impersonal mechanisms and institutions that mirror the more extensive apparatus of hegemonic rationality, especially economic rationality. This embedding makes these mechanisms and institutions appear neutral and impartial and, therefore, 'rational'

(32). Waheed evokes the carefree innocence of childhood, whereas the Protagonist recalls the ease with which they could overlook the presence of Pakistani and Indian checkposts that lined the valley. In those early years, the checkposts seemed distant and unreal, fading into insignificance against the backdrop of the untouched landscape. He vividly describes the sensation of running downhill on fresh grass, leaving behind boot marks adorned with intricate designs. This act symbolizes a sense of freedom and ownership over the land, where geopolitical tensions pale compared to the immediacy of the natural world. The sense of unbridled freedom in the natural world contrasts sharply with the imposing presence of militarized checkposts, symbols of state control, colonialism, and the artificial divisions imposed upon the land. They seemed far away, remote, and almost surreal. This disconnection between the natural environment and colonial boundaries echoes Plumwood's critique of how modernity creates artificial divisions that ignore the deep interconnections between people, land, and nature. Moreover, by the time we changed to splash around in the sluggish, low stream, we had taken over the place and did not give a damn who was watching us from that ugly checkpost out on the mountainside. We would lie down on the thick carpet of grass after swimming in the cool water for a long time, gazing up at the incredibly blue sky and coming up with strange names for the clouds that hovered low over our valley before moving on to another one across the mountains. “After swimming in the chilly water, we would lie down on the thick carpet of grass for ages, looking at the really, really blue sky and conjuring up odd names for clouds that hung low over our valley before drifting to another one across the mountains" (Waheed 14).

4.2.2 The Interplay of Belonging and Tragedy in Nature's Sanctuary

Despite the looming presence of the checkposts, the narrator and their companions felt a profound sense of belonging in the valley. Immersed in the beauty of their surroundings, they would splash about in the stream and lie on the grass for hours, gazing up at the expansive blue sky. The act of naming clouds drifting overhead reflects childhood's boundless imagination and playful innocence, where even the sky becomes a canvas for creativity. In the sanctuary of the valley, the worries of the outside world faded away, replaced by a sense of wonder and exploration. The natural landscape served as a refuge, shielding the children from the complexities of adulthood and the harsh realities of geopolitical conflict. Through the lens of nostalgia, the valley emerges as a timeless sanctuary where the innocence of youth reigns supreme, and the beauty of nature captivates the soul. It reflects on the transformative power of childhood innocence and the enduring

allure of the natural world. Amid geopolitical tensions and societal complexities, the valley symbolizes resilience and hope—a reminder of the enduring bond between humanity and the land. As Waheed describes, there are trees here, and the shadows of people going about their everyday business may be seen in them. The breeze is a living, breathing, talking creature that carries noise as it moves across everything. I sense that someone is following me as I make my way to the middle stores. I do not turn around. It is never satisfactory. The street's dust has not seen footsteps in a very long time, save for the eerie impressions left by a bird that may have flown down to see what had become of the chatty shopkeeper who used to discard the remains of stale glucose biscuits every morning. The light is all blue, liquid blue as if the mountains were working together to cast a glowing path for me to gaze down. “The dust on the street has not seen any footprints for ages, apart from the sickly marks of some bird that might have descended to check whatever happened to the talkative grocer who used to throw out crumbs of stale glucose biscuits every morning” (Waheed 18). In the serene setting described, trees stand tall, casting shadows that mingle with figures of people going about their daily routines. The atmosphere is one of quiet contemplation, where the breeze rustles through the foliage, animating the surroundings with its presence. It is as if the breeze is a living entity traversing the landscape, exploring every nook and cranny with a palpable curiosity. Amidst this tranquility, Protagonist walks towards the shops at the heart of the scene, a sense of anticipation tinged with a hint of apprehension. Lingering in the air. There is a subtle awareness of someone trailing behind, a presence felt rather than seen. The reluctance to glance back speaks volumes, hinting at a history of disappointment or unmet expectations.

Plumwood critiqued the anthropocentric worldview, which places humans at the centre of morality and considers non-human nature to be important only because it benefits humans (109). She argued that this perspective leads to the instrumentalization and exploitation of nature, failing to recognize its intrinsic value and the interdependence of all life forms. The once bustling street now lies dormant, its dusty surface bearing the imprints of neglect, save for the occasional marks left by curious birds scavenging for crumbs. The light, with its ethereal blue hue, bathes the landscape, casting a surreal glow that seems to emanate from the distant mountains. It is a luminous corridor, inviting contemplation and introspection, beckoning the observer to peer into the mysteries that lie beyond. Amidst the beauty and stillness, there is an undercurrent of change, a longing for the past and uncertainty about the future. However, amidst the uncertainty, there is a quiet resilience, a

willingness to embrace the unknown and find solace in the transient beauty of the present moment. The protagonist delves into the raw emotional and physical experience of encountering death for the first time. His visceral reaction to touching a corpse is palpable, as they describe the intense need to cleanse themselves both physically and mentally in the aftermath. I cannot eat well, however, owing to the nausea that comes over me for the next few days. It is not easy, picking stuff off dead people" (Waheed 16).

Plumwood connects the domination of nature with the domination of women. She explored how patriarchal structures and values contribute to environmental degradation and advocated for a more inclusive and interconnected ethical framework that respects both human and non-human others (106). Bathing twice in scalding hot water with an abundance of soap serves as a symbolic purification ritual to rid themselves of the unsettling sensation left by the encounter. The vivid imagery of scrubbing and scratching suggests a frantic effort to rid oneself of the psychological and emotional residue that lingers after such a profound experience. The mention of rashes and red nail slashes underscores the intensity of efforts, highlighting the toll the encounter has taken on both their bodies and minds. Furthermore, the persistent nausea that plagues him for the subsequent days serves as a tangible reminder of the trauma they have endured. It is a visceral response to the overwhelming emotions stirred by confronting mortality up close, a reminder of the fragility and impermanence of life. The final line, "It is not easy, picking stuff off dead people" (Waheed 16), encapsulates the stark reality of the situation. It speaks to the harshness of their circumstances, the weight of the responsibilities they bear, and the profound impact that death has on both the living and the deceased. “Even now, some weight presses on me as I step out on this late morning when the light is a clear blue, and the sun is not yet glaring on my head" (18). Waheed intricately weaves together elements of beauty and tragedy, juxtaposing the natural world's splendour with the grim realities of conflict and death. The description of the profusion of tiny yellow flowers scattered among the grasses paints a picture of idyllic serenity, evoking images of a lush meadow bathed in sunlight. However, as the Protagonist's gaze descends upon the landscape, the beauty is tinged with sorrow and horror. "These are erstwhile legs and arms and backbones and ribcages surrounded by sparkling” (Waheed 21). The imagery of destruction within nature mirrors the ongoing exploitation and degradation of both the environment and marginalized communities. Just as the natural world is fragmented and desecrated by violence, so too are the indigenous and marginalized populations bearing the weight of colonial and patriarchal

forces. In this context, the beauty of the flowers becomes a symbol of resilience, yet also of the fragility of life in the face of destruction, a reminder of how both nature and oppressed people bear the brunt of environmental and social exploitation.

The imagery of the yellow flowers surrounding human remains creates a haunting tableau, where nature's vibrant hues serve as a stark contrast to the darkness of death and decay. The outlines of human forms, outlined by the flowers, symbolize the lives lost in the conflict-torn valley, their memories preserved amidst the relentless passage of time. His emotional response, expressed through tears and a desire to escape, reflects the profound impact of witnessing such scenes of devastation. The encroachment of the flowers upon the human remains speaks to the inexorable march of nature, gradually reclaiming the land and blurring the boundaries between life and death.

Plumwood emphasized the importance of recognizing the interdependence of humans and nature. She argued for an ethical approach that acknowledges the agency and resilience of the natural world, promoting practices that support ecological sustainability and justice (107). The violence and devastation in this passage reflect a broader ecological imbalance, where the natural world, driven by its instincts and agency, becomes entangled with human conflict and destruction. Plumwood's view of interdependence highlights how the environment, although exploited, remains a force that cannot be fully controlled, as seen when the natural world absorbs and responds to human suffering. The mention of the Pakistani side of the border adds another layer of complexity to the narrative, highlighting the geopolitical tensions that have ravaged the region for decades. The suggestion that similar scenes may exist across the border underscores the universality of suffering and loss, transcending national boundaries and political affiliations. In this context, the region itself is a victim of both internal and external colonial forces, with nature being both a battleground and a witness to the colonial aftermath. These landscapes, split by borders, endure the consequences of human-made divisions and warfare, yet nature's resilience continues in ways the human mind fails to fully comprehend. In the end, it makes people consider how many lives are lost in conflicts and how resilient the natural world is. It serves as a poignant reminder of the need for empathy, understanding, and reconciliation in the face of unimaginable tragedy. Waheed narrates, What if all the animals in the area have started eating rotting human flesh? What if the majority of them now devour decomposing males for breakfast? What if those canines who constantly watch me from the hillsides have joined in the feast as well? Then, wouldn't it get quite terrifying? Every dog, every cat,

every wolf in the forest, every fox in the fields, every tiger, every hyena, every bird, both carrion-eating and non-carrion-eating, every rat, every mongoose – they are all feeding on young boys like me (22). This terrifying vision reflects the unnatural consequences of colonial violence, where the boundaries between humans and nature, predator and prey, are blurred. The animals, typically seen as separate from human affairs, are now part of a system distorted by war and exploitation, echoing the way that human suffering and ecological degradation are deeply intertwined in postcolonial landscapes. Nature, in this case, is not only a victim but also a reflection of the human condition, shaped by the histories of colonialism and the violence that follows.

4.2.3 Unveiling Nature's Sanctuary: A Journey of Reflection and Resilience

Plumwood criticized the overemphasis on rationalism and objectivity in Western thought, which she saw as contributing to the devaluation of emotional, embodied, and indigenous ways of knowing. She called for a more holistic understanding of knowledge that integrates rationality with other forms of wisdom (100). The protagonist grapples with the gruesome reality of death and decay amidst the backdrop of conflict. The vivid imagery of the "big gashes" on the bodies, the missing limbs, and the visceral descriptions of decomposition paint a harrowing picture of the aftermath of violence. His contemplation takes a chilling turn as they ponder the possibility of animals joining in the macabre feast, envisioning a grotesque tableau where creatures of all kinds partake in the consumption of human flesh. The thought of cats, dogs, wolves, and other creatures feeding on the remains of young men like the Protagonist elicits a visceral reaction of terror and revulsion. The imagery of gnawing, pulling, peeling, and chewing evokes a sense of primal horror, underscoring the brutality of nature and the desolation of war. His speculation about the soldiers stationed in the area adds another layer of complexity to the narrative. The juxtaposition of their detachment or acceptance of the gruesome scenes with the narrator's visceral horror highlights the stark contrast between the lived experiences of those directly impacted by the violence and those who bear witness from a distance. The mention of soldiers on the other side offering prayers and blessings for the deceased adds a poignant touch, hinting at the shared humanity transcending political divides and national boundaries. It serves as a reminder of the human cost of conflict and the universal desire for peace and redemption, even amidst the chaos and brutality of war.

Plumwood believes that although we separate ourselves from nature in an attempt to control it, we are unable to speak to it dialogically or have empathy for it. Because it

promotes a widespread denial of dependence and fosters the false perception that nature is non-essential, this human-centred framework of reasoning is particularly harmful when it comes to nature because it ignores its limitations, irreplaceability, and non-exchangeability (120-121). The narrator's longing to return to the childhood river symbolizes a desire to reconnect with the earth in a way that transcends the detached, exploitative, human-centred logic. The river, once a sanctuary of innocence, now becomes a space of reflection, where the loss of connection to nature mirrors the more extensive loss of communal and environmental harmony brought on by conflict. The protagonist reflects on the passage of time and the changes that have transformed their childhood landscape. The desire to revisit the familiar waters of their childhood river symbolises a longing for connection to the past and a yearning to recapture the innocence and joy of youth. The lazy, considered flow of the river serves as a poignant contrast to the turmoil and upheaval that have engulfed his homeland. "I want to take one last dip, one last swim, in the stream of my childhood, in the river that still flows in the same old fashion – lazy and considered, as if pausing now and then to reflect on the macabre change in the scenery around it (Waheed 25). The imagery of jumping into the glistening green water evokes memories of carefree summer days and the camaraderie shared with friends, now lost to the ravages of conflict. His contemplation of their absent friends and the debris scattered along the riverbanks speaks to the profound loss and abandonment permeating the landscape. The river, likened to a personal Hades, bears witness to the tragedies and injustices that have befallen the narrator's community yet remains silent in the face of their suffering. Its cyclical flow serves as a reminder of the relentless passage of time and the inevitability of change, even amidst the turmoil of war. In this way, the river also functions as a symbol of nature’s persistence and the resilience of the land, even when human attempts at control and violence seek to silence or distort its truth. The river’s unwavering cycle contrasts with the ephemeral nature of human conflicts and ambitions, as Plumwood suggests, offering a silent critique of the human refusal to recognize its interdependence with nature.

His poignant questions about the fate of their friends and the role of those who perpetrate violence highlight the complexities of human conflict and the enduring quest for justice and reconciliation. The mention of the unseen figure with binoculars who may have witnessed the tragic fate of his friends underscores the arbitrary nature of violence and the profound impact it has on individuals and communities. Protagonist paints a serene picture of their mother's sanctuary in the kitchen garden, which serves as a refuge from the chaos

of daily life. The setting is imbued with tranquility and beauty, heightened by the majestic backdrop of the mountains looming in the distance. The mountains, described as a "soaring, suddenly rising sheet of rich dark green," evoke a sense of awe and reverence, pulsating with the mysteries of life hidden beneath their verdant foliage. The different creatures in Ma's enchanted grove submit to her every request as she reaches, bends, plucks and mends. She spends hours kneeling among her green plants and herbs in rows and beds and frequently emerges from her labors flushed and colorful. Her eyes glitter with energy, her forehead shines broadly, and she has a few wrinkles on her face where sweat is forming. A bead or two are slowly but precariously gathering at the tip of her dazzling chin. Ma looks lovely. "Ma reaches and bends, plucks, and mends – the various inhabitants of her magic grove bowing to her every wish. Often, she emerges flushed and colored from the work, crouching for hours as she does amidst the low hedges and rows and beds of her leafy plants and herbs (Waheed 52).

Plumwood highlighted the need to decolonize our relationship with nature, challenging the colonial attitudes that view nature as a resource to be controlled and exploited (103). She advocated for respectful and reciprocal relationships with the natural world, drawing on indigenous perspectives and practices. The nurturing presence of the narrator's mother embodies Plumwood's call for a decolonized, respectful relationship with nature, where the act of gardening becomes a reciprocal act of care, rather than exploitation. The reverence with which the narrator observes their mother reflects an intimate understanding of nature's intrinsic value. The presence of the narrator's mother in this idyllic setting adds a layer of warmth and intimacy to the scene. Her diligent care and nurturing of the garden reflect a strong connection to the natural world, as she tends to her creations with tender devotion. Though not actively participating in the gardening, the Protagonist finds solace in simply being present with their mother, observing her work with admiration and respect. In this act of non-interference, the protagonist's role mirrors the Indigenous principle of stewardship over nature, embodying the understanding that being in nature does not always equate to domination or control but rather a harmonious co-existence. The description of the mother's physicality and demeanor further adds to the richness of the portrayal. Her flushed complexion, sparkling eyes, and radiant energy show her vitality and inner strength. Despite the passage of time and the weariness of life's burdens, she remains radiant and beautiful, a testament to the enduring power of love and resilience.

Through the lens of the kitchen garden, he captures moments of quiet intimacy and maternal grace, underscoring the profound bond between parent and child. The garden becomes a metaphor for the nurturing and growth that characterize their relationship, offering a sanctuary of beauty and serenity amidst life's tumultuous journey. "Square partitions separate the produce in Ma's garden. Green chillies, tomatoes, aborigines, cucumbers, potatoes, wild mint – she grows them all with motherly attention" (Waheed 53). The garden symbolizes a counterpoint to the colonial mindset that commodifies nature. Rather than exploiting the land, the mother's gentle, attentive care embodies a sustainable relationship with the earth, aligning with Plumwood's argument for ecology grounded in respect and interdependence. The protagonist provides a detailed portrait of their mother's kitchen garden, which serves as a vibrant oasis of life and growth amidst their surroundings. The square partitions that separate the various produce illustrate the meticulous organisation and care with which the garden is tended. Each plant – from green chillies to tomatoes, aborigines to cucumbers, and wild mint to potatoes – receives the motherly attention it deserves, fostering an atmosphere of nurturing and abundance. This careful cultivation is not just for sustenance but speaks to a more considerable philosophical practice: maintaining ecological balance and resisting the urge to dominate the land, a stance echoed in Plumwood's critique of human-centred exploitation. The imagery of the gleaming green chillies hanging from slender branches conveys a sense of promise and vitality despite their lopsided appearance. The daily ritual of picking chillies reflects the rhythm of life in the garden, where the cycle of growth and harvest unfolds with quiet grace.

The description of miniature canals irrigating the garden evokes a sense of harmony with nature as water flows seamlessly to nourish the plants. The raw smell of damp earth mingling with fresh water elicits an earthy and rejuvenating sensory experience, symbolizing the end of waiting and the beginning of new growth. The presence of friendly insects and worms, briefly floating and then clinging to floating twigs, adds a touch of whimsy to the scene, highlighting the interconnectedness of all living things within the garden ecosystem. The makeshift fencing, crafted from wilted conifer shoots and axed fir wood, bears witness to the labor of the narrator's father, underscoring the familial bond and collective effort invested in the garden's upkeep.

The protagonist recounts the anticipation and excitement surrounding their expedition into the mountains, referred to as the "mountain of sorrow," or Koh-i-Gham. " It was my first ever trip into the mountain of sorrow, our Koh-i-Gham" (Waheed 81). The

expedition holds two primary attractions for the Protagonist and their companions. Firstly, the group is eager to encounter the famous Bakarwal shepherd Azad Range Wah Wah, renowned for his flamboyant, multicolored sheep and goats. The vivid description of the animals with yellow coats, purple bellies, and scarlet legs captures the imagination and adds an element of wonder to the narrative. Azad's nomadic lifestyle, roaming the high forests with his vibrant flock, symbolizes a sense of freedom and independence that contrasts with the narrator's settled existence.

Secondly, the expedition offers the prospect of reaching a military checkpoint deep within the jungle, where soldiers are known to distribute large, fancily packed milk chocolates to civilians, particularly children. The promise of receiving milk chocolate, a rare treat for the narrator, who had never tasted one before, adds an element of anticipation and desire to the adventure. The mention of the Army's interaction with civilians, characterized by the distribution of chocolates, hints at a more benign era when the military was perceived as approachable and friendly, especially towards children. This detail adds depth to the narrative, providing insight into the dynamics between civilians and the military in the narrator's community.

4.2.4 Echoes of Dissonance: The Tragedy of Neglecting Nature's Voice

According to Plumwood, the disrespect for the agency and contributions of nature is often mirrored in cultures that prioritize private industry and property, as well as the significance of social infrastructure. Due to centrism's blind spots and the tendency of individuals toward self-enclosure, this infrastructure is either privatized—often with disastrous results—or denied resources under economic rationalism and centrism (117). l Typically, significant system failures must occur before these issues are addressed. However, in the case of nature, recovery might not be possible. The protagonist recounts a poignant moment spent listening to Azad's music in the forest, a scene filled with intense and conflicting emotions. Azad's music is played on an instrument whose voice grows increasingly. Shrill and sorrowful evoke a sense of timelessness and majesty, as if it could reign over the forest indefinitely. He is deeply affected by the haunting melody, which resonates with a profound sadness that touches their soul.

She continues ahead to say that the Othering model of human-centeredness is important because it validates the ecological understanding that a human-centred framework creates serious issues for both humans and non-humans. For us to draw

insightful and sometimes unexpected conclusions from the logic of Othering in the setting of nature, it does not need to perfectly match the logic of human oppression (which incorporates aspects of reciprocal consciousness not present here. His internal struggle between the desire to stay and the need to leave reflects the tension between the allure of the music and the constraints of their reality. Despite being captivated by the music, they feel torn by the responsibilities and obligations that await them outside the forest. The dead calm that descends upon the forest, symbolized by the cessation of the wind, intensifies the surreal atmosphere of the moment, blurring the boundaries between reality and imagination. This internal conflict underscores the ecological perspective that humans often marginalize nature's rhythms and allure to prioritize societal demands. Plumwood's critique of human-centeredness resonates here, as the forest's calm challenges the protagonist to confront their alienation from nature. Azad's melody seemed as though it could dominate the woodland indefinitely. His voice was growing louder, stronger, more urgent, and higher and higher, and he refused to put down the instrument. I was sorely unsure about whether to stay or go. It was a strange hour that we spent listening to the music in the jungle. Eventually, there was a dead quiet, and even the wind stopped. Perhaps I am exaggerating now because I was pretty young. Hussain had teary eyes. Finally, I got up, pleaded with Hussain to stand up too, gave him a firm hug when he refused, apologized profusely, and then, turning to face his silhouette as I descended, I fled. "I was desperately torn between staying and leaving. At last, there was a dead calm; even the wind stopped – maybe I am exaggerating now, for I was quite young then, but it was a very peculiar hour we spent listening to that music in the jungle" (Waheed 85). The poignant parting scene mirrors Plumwood's emphasis on the fragility of human-nature connections. The forest, transformed into a realm of both escape and confrontation, symbolizes how nature, often sidelined, becomes a stage for profound human emotions and revelations.

The emotional impact of the music is palpable in the tears that well up in Hussain's eyes, suggesting a shared experience of sorrow and catharsis. Despite their reluctance, the Protagonist's decision to leave underscores the weight of familial expectations and the necessity of adhering to their father's curfew. Embracing Hussain and expressing heartfelt apologies conveys a sense of emotional intimacy and vulnerability, highlighting the depth of their bond as friends. His hurried departure, marked by a longing glance back at Hussain's figure, encapsulates the bittersweet nature of parting and the fleetingness of moments of connection and transcendence. "Pines, those majestic umbrella pines, would

be broken. There would be the quick jaunts of the successful across some gorge or gully, but there would also be those caught in the big red glare of a mortar" (Waheed 112). Ecocriticism reveals the forest as a place where personal and ecological loss converge. Plumwood's critique of a human-centred narrative is reflected in the protagonist's fleeting acknowledgement of nature's sacredness, which contrasts with the external world's indifference.

The scene opens with a sense of distant yet ominous violence as the Pakistanis and Indians exchange artillery fire across a mountain pass. The novel portrays the impending carnage with dread and resignation, emphasizing the certainty of bloodshed. The mention of "Sulphur" suggests the acrid smell of gunpowder and explosives that accompany warfare, permeating the air and clinging to the landscape. The imagery intensifies as the description shifts to the consequences of the bombardment. The majestic pine trees, symbols of natural beauty and resilience, are transformed into war casualties. Their dark green canopies are engulfed in flames, casting dark plumes of smoke against the sky. The destruction of these pines mirrors the broader devastation wrought upon the land and its inhabitants. This devastation highlights internal colonialism's marginalization of ecologies as collateral damage in human conflicts. Plumwood's framework critiques such disregard for non-human agency, urging recognition of nature's shared vulnerability. Amidst the chaos, the narrative zooms in on the human cost of conflict. There are fleeting moments of triumph as soldiers navigate treacherous terrain and achieve small victories. However, these fleeting triumphs are juxtaposed with the grim reality of combat—the indiscriminate brutality that claims lives and inflicts unspeakable suffering. The mention of the "Har Har Mahadev" mantra adds a religious dimension to the scene, underscoring the enthusiasm and conviction that drive soldiers into battle. It reflects the intertwining of faith and nationalism, which can inspire and justify acts of violence in times of war. Against this backdrop of horror and desolation, the narrator's thoughts turn to a personal connection. The name "Hussain" represents an individual whose fate hangs in the balance, caught in the vortex of war. The narrator's plea—"They must not be among them"—expresses a desperate hope to spare loved ones from the horrors described. The interplay between faith, nationalism, and ecological devastation reinforces Plumwood's argument that human-centred conflicts amplify ecological exploitation. The forest, caught in the crossfire, becomes an emblem of both personal and environmental loss.

As the Protagonist approaches the Khatana house, he finds himself near a tranquil plateau, surrounded by towering rock faces that seem to smile in silent welcome. The mention of the rock faces evokes a sense of timelessness, hinting at the ancient presence of sages or spiritual figures who may have once sought solace in this secluded spot. The reference to a "Peer Baba" adds a touch of mysticism, suggesting a reverence for the spiritual energy that permeates the landscape. Seizing the opportunity to rest, the Protagonist settles near an old tree stump, its weathered surface a testament to the passage of time. They behold a panoramic view of the village below from this vantage point, nestled amidst the undulating slopes. The tin roofs of the houses glimmer in the sunlight, wisps of smoke curling lazily into the sky—a peaceful tableau against the backdrop of the lush green valley and meandering river. “I moved my hand closer to my eyes and narrowed down on each scene one by one – the village, the smoke, the valley, the river, and the trees – it was nice to look at things like this. The jungle in siesta" (Waheed115). In this moment of quiet reflection, he savors the simple joys of observation. With a deep breath, they embrace the encompassing beauty of their surroundings, feeling a sense of calm wash over them. Holding the entirety of their world within the arc of their hand, they engage in a deliberate act of mindfulness, savouring each element—the village, the smoke, the valley, the river, the trees— with reverent appreciation. Despite the warmth of the early winter sun filtering through the canopy above, there remains a lingering chill in the air, evidenced by wisps of vapor rising from thawing branches. The scene exudes a sense of harmony and resolution as nature's rhythms play out in perfect synchrony. The narrator finds solace in the gentle symphony of forest sounds, punctuated only by the rhythm of their breath—a serene interlude amid the bustling jungle, steeped in the tranquillity of midday siesta. The protagonist's visceral reaction to the sound of artillery shells underscores the sheer terror and disorientation that accompany the onslaught of war. The repetitive thumping of shells evokes a primal fear, causing the room walls to tremble and vibrate as if under siege. The imagery of the bed feeling "under bombardment" heightens the sense of vulnerability and helplessness in the face of relentless violence. As the shelling intensifies, the cacophony of destruction reverberates through the air, punctuated by the deafening roar of gunfire, rockets, and other mysterious weapons. The juxtaposition of these sounds against the backdrop of earth-shattering explosions paints a chilling portrait of the devastation wrought upon the landscape. "Sometimes, I think the LoC is like a fireworks exhibition for them,

you know, where they compete to decide who has the better display, who shoots the highest, who lights the brightest, and who burns the furthest" (Waheed125).

His acute sensory perception captures the trembling of a mended windowpane as a tangible reminder of the imminent danger lurking just beyond the confines of their shelter. The magnitude of the tremor suggests the scale of the assault—a formidable force capable of rending even the sturdiest of structures asunder. The description of the forest being pummeled and scorched by artillery fire paints a haunting picture of destruction and desolation. The once verdant earth is rent apart, its mossy surface charred and scarred by the relentless onslaught. The majestic pines, deodars, and firs—symbols of resilience and vitality—are uprooted and cast aside, their twisted branches and scorched remnants strewn across the ravaged landscape. The protagonist's analogy of the Line of Control (LoC) resembling a fireworks exhibition underscores the absurdity and futility of war. Amid death and destruction, the warring factions engage in a macabre spectacle of firepower, vying for supremacy in a destruction contest. The tragic irony lies in the realization that the lives of young soldiers are reduced to mere kindling in the inferno of conflict, their humanity extinguished amidst the fiery frenzy of battle.

Plumwood claims that the human-centred framework may have previously served a valuable purpose for the supremacy and growth of Western civilization by eliminating restrictions on respect for nature that may have otherwise prevented its victories and conquests (101). However, it is very dysfunctional in the era of ecological constraints we have already entered, and the blind spots of centrism and human self-enclosure to the survival of other species, as well as the insensitivity to the other that it fosters, pose a serious threat to our own. As the Protagonist reflects on their childhood memories, he recalls the enigmatic allure of the forest that sprawls above their home like a brooding guardian. Referred to as Koh-i-Gham, the mountain of sorrow, by Ramazan Choudhary, the forest carries an aura of melancholy and mystery, steeped in tales of bygone days. From the safety of their snug window perch, he has long gazed upon the shadowy depths of the forest, marvelling at the secrets concealed within its sombre recesses. In the calm darkness of the night, the forest takes on a life of its own, teeming with imagined creatures and fantastical beings that dance at the edges of the imagination. "Shadows were lurking in the dark, and there was the dead of the forest night—Koh-i-Gham, the mountain of sorrow (Waheed 139). The portrayal of the forest as both enchanting and ominous reflects ecocriticism's focus on the dual relationship humans have with nature—both awe-inspiring and terrifying.

This aligns with internal colonialism, where such spaces are often cast as 'Other,' their complexity ignored or diminished in dominant narratives.

In his youthful reverie, he envisions a world of enchantment and possibility lurking amidst the tangled undergrowth. They conjure visions of winged deer and golden-fleeced lambs, each creature a manifestation of the forest's mystical charm. The forest becomes a realm of infinite wonder, where hidden castles and winding corridors beckon the adventurous spirit to explore its depths. However, beneath the veneer of fascination lies a palpable sense of trepidation—a primal fear rooted in the unknown and the unseen. The forest's towering canopy casts a shadow over the narrator's idyllic visions, imbuing their childhood fantasies with a haunting undercurrent of dread. Plumwood's concept of the 'Other' is evident in the forest's dual role as both a source of imagination and fear. This reflects how dominant narratives often marginalize or mystify the environment, distancing it from human connection and responsibility.

Despite the warmth of Ma's hearth and the comforting glow of home, the forest's presence looms large in the consciousness, an ever-present reminder of the fragility of human existence in the face of nature's unfathomable mysteries. Through evocative imagery and introspective reflection, it captures the duality of his relationship with the forest—a place of enchantment and apprehension, where childhood dreams collide with the stark realities of the natural world. "The forest air was blue and reminded me of the atmosphere that hung over the graveyard soon after countless candles burned themselves out on Shab-e-Barat" (Waheed 140). This description underscores ecocriticism's focus on the interconnectedness of nature and human mortality while also reflecting internal colonialism's tendency to associate natural landscapes with loss and desolation, reinforcing their marginalization.

The forest air hangs heavy with a haunting stillness, imbued with a blueness that evokes the solemn atmosphere of a graveyard after the rituals of Shab-e-Barat, a night of remembrance when candles flicker on the graves of the departed. The image of spent candles symbolizes the passage of time and the ephemeral nature of life, casting a gloomy pall over the landscape. Rahman, a figure shrouded in mystery, gestures for the Protagonist to follow, his movements imbued with a sense of purpose and solemnity. With a small sack slung over his back, he leads the way into the forest's heart, beckoning the narrator into the unknown with a gesture that carries the weight of unspoken significance. Here, the forest becomes a metaphorical 'Other,' much like marginalized spaces in internal colonialism,

where human narratives of mystery and fear obscure its depth and significance. Plumwood's ideas challenge this framing, urging recognition of the forest's agency and interconnectedness with human life.

As they venture deeper into the forest, a palpable sense of unease grips the narrator, their thoughts drifting to memories of lost comrades and the specter of Kashmir's troubled past. The track grows steeper and darker, each step fraught with trepidation as the forest closes around them like a suffocating embrace. The night envelops them in a shroud of mist, obscuring their surroundings and heightening the sense of isolation and desolation. The once vibrant symphony of forest sounds—the chirping of crickets, the humming of cicadas—fades into silence, leaving only the hollow echo of their footsteps punctuating the stillness. With mounting apprehension, the narrator contemplates the solitary nature of their journey, grappling with the weight of existential uncertainty as they navigate the winding paths of the forest. The passage of time becomes distorted, each step stretching into eternity as they confront the daunting reality of their solitude. Suddenly, the tranquillity is shattered by an explosion, a jarring intrusion upon the eerie stillness of the forest. The sharp flare of Rahman's matchstick pierces the darkness, casting a fleeting glimpse of light amidst the enveloping shadows. In this moment, the juxtaposition of light and darkness, silence and sound, serves as a poignant reminder of the fragile balance between life and death, hope and despair that permeates the forest's timeless depths. As the journey unfolds, he grapples with the haunting echoes of the past and the uncertain future that awaits them in the heart of the wilderness.

The protagonist grapples with a profound sense of remorse over their failure to visit the deceased individual more frequently. They lament the passage of time and the missed opportunities for deeper connection and understanding. The absence of flowers at the gravesite serves as a reminder of the transient nature of life, as the vibrant blooms have withered away, leaving only fragile stalks strewn across the ground like discarded sketches. "I feel bad I have not visited him more often. The flowers are gone too. The yellow petals perish. I wonder if he will still be here when the flowers grow again next spring" (Waheed 144). He reflects on the untold stories and unshared experiences that now lie buried with the deceased. They imagine the conversations they could have had—about family, upbringing, and life in Sopore, affectionately known as chotta London. Through these imagined dialogues, the narrator longs to glean insights into the richness of the deceased's

past, from his childhood in a prosperous fruit town to his adventures in English medium private schools and travels to distant cities.

4.2.5 Whispers of Loss and the Echoes of Conflict

Rauf's upbringing in a wealthy household is vividly portrayed, from chauffeur driven rides to school in a green Ambassador to excursions to Delhi and Bombay with his father, a successful apple trader. The narrator envisions the thrill of these experiences—the bustling streets, towering buildings, and bustling markets—that seemed like scenes from television dramas brought to life. It evokes a longing for the stories left untold, the unshared memories, and the unexplored connections. The narrator's reflections show a palpable sense of loss and a yearning to recapture the moments that slipped away too hastily. The imagery of the plane taking off from Srinagar airport symbolizes the departed aspirations and dreams, soaring beyond the confines of earthly existence.

In the heart of the forest, far from prying eyes and the trappings of civilization, the Protagonist find themselves overcome by a torrent of emotions. The weight of their sorrow becomes unbearable, prompting tears to flow freely down their cheeks. The act of sobbing uncontrollably becomes a cathartic release, a visceral expression of pain and anguish that knows no bounds. Alone amidst the towering trees and the enveloping darkness, he surrenders to his emotions, allowing himself to be consumed by the intensity of their grief. The forest bears witness to their anguish, offering a sanctuary where vulnerability is met with understanding and acceptance. "I was sobbing uncontrollably now. In the middle of the forest, I cried like a child " (Waheed 151).

The imagery of the forest envelops the narrator in a cocoon of solitude and solace. The dark canopies of the trees loom overhead, casting shadows that mirror the depths of their despair. The tall pines stand as silent sentinels, their presence offering a sense of stability and reassurance amid the turmoil. With each step, needles crunching underfoot echo through the forest, punctuating the stillness with a haunting rhythm. His journey through the forest becomes a metaphor for their inner turmoil, a labyrinth of tangled emotions and unspoken pain. Amidst the darkness, a faint moon peers through the canopy, casting ethereal beams of light that illuminate the path ahead. The interplay of light and shadow mirrors the ebb and flow of his emotions, offering glimpses of clarity amidst the overwhelming darkness. In this moment of vulnerability, the forest becomes a silent witness to his pain, offering a sanctuary where they can freely express their grief without fear of

judgment or reproach. Through tears and trembling breaths, they confront the depths of their sorrow, finding solace in nature's silent embrace.

The narrative unfolds on a vibrant summer day, characterized by the blossoming of scarlet roses that adorn the landscape like small red-crowned birds. Against this backdrop of natural beauty, a group of weathered and grief-stricken women descends upon the village, their presence marking the arrival of an unspoken tragedy. Clustered in front of Noor Khan's shop in a semicircle, the women form a tableau of collective anguish, their tear-streaked faces a testament to the depth of their sorrow. While some openly weep, others offer solace and support, their gestures of consolation a fragile attempt to stem the tide of despair that threatens to engulf them. "They would not say anything – who they were, why they were crying, what they wanted. The words 'we have children' made themselves heard more than a couple of times through the din of their wet sobbing. I went inside the shop and let Baba deal with the situation, with this group of women who were still wailing in front of Noor's bewildered face" (Waheed 167).

Despite their outward display of emotion, the women remain reticent, their grief rendered all the more poignant by its unspoken nature. The words "we have children" resonate like a refrain, underscoring the shared bond of motherhood that unites them in their collective sorrow. Sensing the urgency of the situation, the Protagonist rushes home to enlist the help of Baba, their father figure and pillar of strength. Together, they hasten back to the scene, the narrator's heart pounding with a mixture of trepidation and determination.

As they enter the shop, Noor Khan's bewildered expression mirrors their confusion and concern. With Baba at the helm, they confront the emotional maelstrom that swirls around them, offering a steadying presence amidst the chaos. It captures the interconnectedness of community and the inherent empathy that binds individuals together in times of crisis. Through their shared experiences and sorrows, the women and the villagers find solace in each other's presence, drawing strength from their collective resilience and compassion. In this moment of shared vulnerability, the shop becomes a sacred sanctuary where grief can be acknowledged, shared, and ultimately transcended. As the narrative unfolds, the community bonds are tested and reaffirmed, serving as a powerful testament to the enduring power of human connection in the face of adversity.

Two days after the disappearance of Farooq, the search for his whereabouts brings together Protagonist and Ishaq Jan Choudhary, Ramazan Choudhary's elder son, in a grim quest for answers. Their journey takes them along a dirt track leading away from the village, trailing off into the rugged footpaths that wind through the valley's depths. Amidst the tranquil backdrop of nature, their eyes fall upon the ghastly sight of Farooq's bloated and headless body sprawled near a narrow stream that meanders down from the mountain's heights. The visceral description of his remains, resembling an inclined stump or a fallen tree, casts a haunting pall over the scene, evoking a sense of profound tragedy and despair. While searching the area near the dirt track that leaves the village and heads down into the valley's trail, we came across the bloated, lifeless body of Farooq by a small stream that descends from the mountain. It appeared to be a fallen tree or an inclined stump. “we saw Farooq's bloated, headless body lying near a narrow stream running down from the mountain. It looked like an inclined stump, like a fallen tree” (Waheed 183).

The black and red checkered kurta pyjamas that Farooq is wearing, which are made of heavy fabric, are a sombre reminder of the brutality that has befallen him and contrast sharply with the tranquil surroundings. Where his head should have been now lies a bluntly axed stump, a grotesque testament to the brutality of his demise. The image of the headless body juxtaposed against the cascading channels of the shallow brook is poignant and macabre, hinting at the merciless passage of time and the relentless flow of nature's rhythms. The suggestion that the water may have washed away Farooq's head while he bent down to drink adds a chilling layer of irony to the tragedy.

The discovery of Farooq's remains marks a harrowing culmination of the community's worst fears, plunging them into a state of collective mourning and introspection. As his body is laid to rest in the graveyard behind the mosque, the echoes of his untimely death reverberate through the village, leaving behind a lingering sense of loss and unanswered questions. In this moment of profound grief and anguish, the narrator and Ishaq Jan Chaudhary confront the harsh realities of violence and mortality, their shared experience forging an unspoken bond of solidarity amidst the wreckage of tragedy. Together, they bear witness to the fragility of life and the enduring legacy of those who are lost but never forgotten. “Over the valley, over the pine-encrusted mountains and their clouded peaks, over the street, over everything. A mist, a waiting hung in the air" (199).

According to Plumwood, nature is mainly disregarded and portrayed as unnecessary when it comes to the modern culture that we live in. In order to prevent the order, resilience,

and survival requirements of nature from being seen as placing restrictions on human endeavors or ambitions, dependency on it is methodically denied (104). The transition from autumn to winter unfolds gradually, mirroring the gradual descent into a sombre mood. As snow begins to fall, blanketing the landscape in a silent shroud, a pervasive sense of sadness descends upon the narrator. The onset of December passes without incident, marking the relentless march of time and the fading hope of Hussain and the others returning. With the arrival of winter, he resigns themselves to the harsh reality that the mountain passes are likely closed, cutting off the village from the outside world until late spring. The cessation of traffic and the village's isolation contribute to a suspended stillness, as if time has been frozen in anticipation of warmer days.

The absence of excitement and activity weighs heavily on his spirit, casting a pall of despair over the village and its inhabitants. The mist-laden air becomes a tangible symbol of waiting, as if the entire valley is holding its breath in prediction of what lies ahead. Against the backdrop of pine-encrusted mountains and clouded peaks, the village streets lie deserted, devoid of the bustling energy that once animated them. The peaceful stillness of winter settles over everything, enveloping the landscape in a cloak of muted tranquillity. In this atmosphere of suspended animation, he grapples with the uncertainty of the future and the lingering spectre of loss. It captures the profound longing and nostalgia accompanying the changing seasons as the landscape becomes a canvas upon which memories and emotions intertwine. This portrayal aligns with *Ecocriticism*, highlighting how natural cycles and their disruptions profoundly shape human emotions and cultural narratives, underscoring the inherent interdependence between humans and the environment. Moreover, the village’s isolation and the region's disconnection during winter reflect *Internal Colonialism*, where peripheral areas and their ecosystems are marginalized, echoing the sociopolitical hierarchies that exploit and neglect such spaces. Plumwood’s insights about *Ecological Denial* and the marginalization of "the Other" resonate here, as the village and its surrounding environment are reduced to silence and invisibility, further reinforcing their position as overlooked yet essential entities in the broader narrative of human survival and cultural identity.

Waheed paints a scene against the backdrop of a tranquil mountain morning, characterized by the hissing whispers of the chilly air and the weak light of dawn as it heralds the birth of a new day. The protagonist lies wrapped in the safety of his bed, enveloped by the comforting embrace of a quilt and blanket. However, beneath the surface,

a palpable sense of unease lingers—an unspoken fear for what may unfold. The faint light of dawn, the beginning of a mountain day, the comforting cocoon of my bed draped in blankets and comforter, the hissing of the early air, the anxious, self-willed detachment that persisted, and the mostly silent, unvoiced fear of the worst—all of these were broken. A single, deafening gunshot that originated in the village or from the street nearby caused everything to explode. "Everything exploded in a single, crashing-loud gunshot that came from somewhere close by, very close, from the street, from the village" (201).

In a jarring instant, the tranquillity is shattered by the deafening roar of a gunshot, ripping through the stillness of the morning with visceral intensity. The suddenness of the sound reverberates through the narrator's consciousness, jolting them from their nervous detachment into a state of panicked awareness. The subsequent cacophony of explosions—grenades, perhaps—and the staccato ratatat of SLRs (Self-Loading Rifles) thrust the village into a state of chaos and uncertainty. The realization dawns on the narrator: Militants have breached the village's defences, bringing violence and danger to their very doorstep.

The contrast between the distant echoes of artillery fire across the Line of Control and the immediate proximity of gunfire within the village heightens the gravity of the situation. No longer has a distant and abstract threat; the violence now poses a direct and immediate danger to the narrator and their community. The abrupt escalation of tension closely follows Khadim Hussain's call, adding a layer of ominous foreboding to the unfolding events. The suddenness and proximity of the gunfire serve as a grim reminder of the fragility of peace in a region plagued by dispute and instability. In the face of this sudden upheaval, the narrator's heart races with fear and uncertainty, grappling with the surreal reality of violence erupting in their backyard. As the events unfold, the village is plunged into turmoil, and its residents are forced to face the harsh realities of life in a conflict zone.

As the Protagonist navigates the familiar streets of the village, a palpable atmosphere of apprehension hangs in the air. Sunken, sullen shadows seem to materialize from the crevices of the landscape, casting an eerie pall over the surroundings. " The field appeared like a graveyard from a distance. Scattered in the middle were half-slouched figures as if they were fallen gravestones. Grey, grey, grey" (204). These shadows, emerging from behind trees, old clay walls, and foothills, symbolize the lurking presence of uncertainty and fear that permeates the village. The anticipation of encountering familiar faces adds to the narrator's sense of anxiety. They pass by Noor Khan's shop with a sense of expectation, half-hoping to be greeted by his reassuring presence. However, the dusty

shutters remain closed, devoid of any signs of life. The absence of familiar figures heightens the feeling of isolation and disconnection. The protagonist's gaze turns towards Gul's house, a once-familiar landmark imbued with melancholy and abandonment. They are unaware that only Gul's half-mad father remains there, a poignant reminder of the village's dwindling population and the toll of conflict on its residents. From a distance, the open field resembles a graveyard, its empty expanse punctuated by slouched figures that evoke the image of fallen gravestones. Forward, symbolizing the uncertainty ahead. Once a bastion of community and familiarity, the village now stands on the brink of an uncertain future, its residents grappling with the weight of their collective grief and apprehension. The pervasive greyness of the scene mirrors the sombre mood that hangs over the village, as if even the light struggles to penetrate the veil of uncertainty and despair.

4.3 Discussion

"*The Book of Gold Leaves*" by Mirza Waheed is a literary masterpiece that intricately navigates the labyrinth of human emotions, political turmoil, and environmental degradation in the backdrop of Kashmir's tumultuous history. Through its eloquent prose and vivid imagery, the novel transports readers into the heart of Kashmir's breathtaking landscapes, where the serenity of nature belies the underlying turmoil and conflict that have defined the region for decades. Rather than merely serving as a picturesque backdrop, Kashmir's natural beauty becomes a character in its own right, symbolizing both the resilience of the human spirit and the devastating impact of war and occupation on the environment.

At its core, the novel is a poignant love story that unfolds against the backdrop of violence and uncertainty. The central characters, Faiz and Roohi, embody the hopes, dreams, and struggles of an entire generation caught in the crossfire of political upheaval. Their tender and enduring love serves as a beacon of light amidst the darkness of war, offering a glimpse of hope and redemption in a world torn apart by conflict. As they navigate the treacherous waters of love and loss, their journey becomes a powerful allegory for the resilience of the human spirit in the face of adversity.

Through the lens of Faiz and Roohi's story, Waheed explores the complex dynamics of power, politics, and identity in Kashmir. The pervasive militarization of the region, depicted through the eyes of characters like Major Kumar, draws attention to the human cost of war and the ethical difficulties experienced by those who are ensnared in it. As the

lines between right and wrong blur, the novel challenges readers to confront uncomfortable truths about the nature of power and the consequences of unchecked violence.

In addition to its exploration of human conflict, "*The Book of Gold Leaves*" also delves into the ecological costs of war and occupation. Through lyrical descriptions of Kashmir's natural landscapes and waterways, Waheed paints a vivid portrait of a region under siege, where the delicate balance of ecosystems is threatened by pollution, deforestation, and environmental degradation. The depletion of natural habitats for animals, the pollution of freshwater supplies, and the extinction of species serve as urgent reminders of the interdependence of human civilization and the environment. In conclusion, it is a force that transcends its setting to explore timeless themes of love, loss, and resilience in the face of adversity. Through its rich tapestry of narrative and imagery, Mirza Waheed invites readers on a journey of self-discovery and reflection, urging us to confront the complexities of the human condition and the urgent need for peace, justice, and environmental stewardship in a world plagued by conflict and strife.

The novel "*The Book of Gold Leaves*" by Mirza Waheed demonstrates the severe effects of conflict, bloodshed, and poor urban planning on Kashmir's air, water, and land as well as its natural ecosystem, which includes flora, fauna, and other living things. The diverse ecosystem of Kashmir pleasures visitors as well as sustenance for the indigenous populace. Nevertheless, a number of causes, primarily related to human activity, contribute to the substantial deterioration of these natural resources. The state's ecosystem, encompassing its water and land systems, has been severely disrupted and harmed. The removal of natural cover from the land due to armed conflict, deforestation, hunting of animals, pollution, shrinking water bodies, and road development through forests has resulted in soil erosion and biodiversity loss. The surroundings and ambience of Srinagar are intricately woven throughout Waheed's story in "*The Book of Gold Leaves"*. The novel provides a comparative analysis of the ecological circumstances before and after the outbreak of violence, highlighting how the social and political unrest directly affects the ecosystem. The study sought to investigate the novel's treatment of ecological issues and themes. Nearly all the characters express sorrow over the transformations unfolding in the city's natural and urban surroundings, highlighting the poignant contrast between the pristine environment of the past and the environmental degradation of the present.

"The Collaborator" delves deep into the human experience amidst conflict, offering a nuanced portrayal of the complexities and challenges faced by individuals living in

wartorn regions. Through the Protagonist's perspective, readers gain insight into the emotional and psychological toll of political turmoil, violence, and betrayal. The vivid descriptions of the valley's landscape evoke a sense of nostalgia and longing juxtaposed against the harsh realities of war and death. The novel captures the essence of resilience and survival amidst adversity, highlighting the enduring bond between humanity and the land. As the Protagonist navigates the tumultuous landscape of Kashmir, he grapples with questions of identity, loyalty, and morality, offering readers a compelling exploration of the human spirit in the face of conflict and despair.

The narrator's admiration for Rauf's cosmopolitan upbringing is tinged with a sense of longing and nostalgia for a lifestyle beyond their reach. They marvel at Rauf's fluency in English, his familiarity with Western literature and philosophy, and his effortless charm and sophistication. Through Rauf's experiences, the narrator glimpses the possibility of a different life—a life defined by education, culture, and opportunity. However, beneath the veneer of privilege lies a more profound complexity—a sense of displacement and alienation that Rauf grapples with in his search for identity and belonging. Despite his outward confidence and charm, Rauf's inner turmoil and existential angst betray a profound sense of dislocation and estrangement from his cultural roots. The mention of Rauf's struggle to reconcile his Kashmiri identity with the demands of modernity and globalization reflects the broader tensions that permeate Kashmiri society—a society caught between tradition and modernity, nationalism and globalization, hope and despair. In Rauf's story, the narrator sees a reflection of their struggles and aspirations—a longing for connection, meaning, and belonging in a world fraught with uncertainty and upheaval. As the Protagonist reflects on Rauf's untimely demise, they are haunted by the realization that the deceased's vibrant spirit and zest for life have been extinguished forever. They mourn the loss of a friend, a confidant, and a kindred spirit—a loss that leaves a gaping void in their lives and the fabric of their community. The absence of flowers at Rauf's gravesite serves as a poignant reminder of the impermanence of existence and the fragility of human life. In the face of such profound loss, the narrator grapples with feelings of regret and remorse over missed opportunities for connection and understanding. They vow to honor Rauf's memory by cherishing the moments they shared and by embracing the fleeting beauty of life with gratitude and humility. In recounting Rauf's story, the Protagonist confronts the universal themes of mortality, identity, and belonging that resonate deeply with readers from all walks of life. Through Rauf's experiences, the narrator invites us to reflect on our

journeys of self-discovery and to confront the existential questions that lie at the heart of the human experience. In the end, Rauf's story serves as a poignant reminder of the fleeting nature of life and the imperative to embrace each moment with courage, compassion, and grace.

The absence of excitement and activity in the village sets the stage for a profound sense of desolation and foreboding that permeates the narrative. The mist-laden air and deserted streets serve as poignant symbols of waiting and anticipation as if the entire valley holds its breath in anticipation of impending doom. Against the backdrop of majestic mountains and clouded peaks, the tranquil stillness of winter belies the underlying tension and uncertainty that hangs heavy in the air.

Waheed's depiction of a tranquil mountain morning quickly gives way to chaos and fear as the sudden roar of gunfire shatters the peace. The juxtaposition of the serene dawn with the violence that erupts in the village underscores the abruptness and brutality of the conflict. The narrator's sense of safety and detachment is shattered in an instant, replaced by a visceral awareness of the danger that lurks just beyond their doorstep. The immediacy of the threat, as evidenced by the proximity of the gunfire, lends a chilling intensity to the scene. The villagers, once insulated from the distant echoes of artillery fire, are now thrust into the heart of the conflict, forced to confront the harsh realities of war firsthand. The intrusion of violence into the intimate confines of the village disrupts the fragile equilibrium of daily life, plunging its residents into a state of panic and uncertainty.

The sudden escalation of tension following Khadim Hussain's call adds a layer of ominous foreboding to the unfolding events. The villagers, already on edge due to the mounting tensions in the region, are acutely aware of the potential consequences of the intrusion. As the gunfire intensifies and the chaos spreads, the narrator grapples with the surreal reality of violence erupting in their midst. In this moment of crisis, the village's resilience and solidarity are put to the test as its inhabitants rally together in the face of adversity. The fear and uncertainty that gripped the narrator's heart reflect the collective anguish of a community under siege, struggling to maintain a sense of normalcy amidst the chaos and destruction.

Through the lens of the narrator's experience, Waheed captures the profound impact of conflict on individual lives and communities. The sudden eruption of violence serves as a stark reminder of the fragility of peace and the enduring human cost of war. As the

narrative unfolds, the village becomes a microcosm of the broader struggle for survival and resilience in the face of unimaginable tragedy. The forest itself takes on a life of its own, closing in around them like a suffocating embrace, heightening the sense of isolation and desolation. The once vibrant symphony of forest sounds fades into silence, leaving only the hollow echo of their footsteps punctuating the stillness. This sensory deprivation amplifies the narrator's existential uncertainty as they grapple with the weight of solitude and the haunting echoes of the past. The explosion that shatters the tranquility of the forest serves as a stark reminder of the fragility of life and the ever-present specter of danger. Rahman's matchstick, casting a fleeting glimpse of light amidst the enveloping darkness, symbolizes hope amidst despair, offering a flicker of illumination in the face of uncertainty.

As the Protagonist approaches the Khatana house, the tranquil plateau and towering rock faces evoke a sense of timelessness and mysticism, hinting at the ancient presence of spiritual figures. The panoramic view of the village below, with its shimmering tin roofs and meandering river, symbolizes a serene tableau of everyday life amidst the natural beauty of the landscape. The protagonist's deliberate act of mindfulness, savouring each element of the scene with reverent appreciation, highlights his connection to the world around him and the simple joys of observation. However, the tranquillity is shattered by the sudden eruption of artillery shells, which evoke a primal fear and disorientation. The imagery of the bed feeling "under bombardment" underscores the vulnerability and helplessness in the face of relentless violence. The cacophony of destruction, punctuated by earth-shattering explosions and deafening gunfire, paints a chilling portrait of the devastation wrought by war. The protagonist's analogy of the Line of Control (LoC) as a "fireworks exhibition" for combatants underscores the senseless brutality of conflict, where lives are lost in a futile competition for dominance. The trembling of the mended windowpane serves as a tangible reminder of the imminent danger lurking outside, while the description of the forest being pummeled and scorched by artillery fire highlights the devastating impact of war on the natural world. The absence of flowers at the gravesite serves as a poignant reminder of the transient nature of life and the inevitability of death. The narrator's sense of remorse over their failure to visit the deceased individual more frequently reflects a more profound longing for connection and understanding in the face of loss. The withered petals and fragile stalks strewn across the ground evoke a sense of impermanence and decay, underscoring the cyclical nature of life and the passage of time.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The current study set out to explore the intricate intersection of internal colonialism and ecocriticism within Mirza Waheed's novels *The Book of Gold Leaves* and *The Collaborator*, focusing on the profound impact of conflict on both the environment and marginalized communities in Kashmir. By employing the theoretical frameworks of Val Plumwood's concepts of Ecological Denial and The One and The Other, this study delved into how Waheed's narratives critically engage with the themes of environmental degradation, exploitation, and the socio-political consequences of internal colonialism in a war-torn region. The study's objectives centred on uncovering how internal colonialist ideologies contribute to environmental destruction and how marginalized human groups are further exploited within this colonialist framework. The overarching aim was to highlight how literature offers a nuanced critique of environmental and social injustices, especially within contexts of political domination and conflict.

The study's guiding question revolved around how internal colonialism, as depicted in Waheed's novels, leads to environmental destruction and the exploitation of marginalized groups. By analyzing *The Book of Gold Leaves* and *The Collaborator* through an ecocritical lens, the research explored how environmental exploitation is a direct consequence of internal colonial practices. Waheed's portrayal of Kashmir, a region historically burdened by political conflict and territorial control, offers fertile ground for examining how nature and human communities are both casualties of this ongoing struggle for power. The dual approach of ecocriticism and internal colonial theory allowed for an integrated understanding of how Waheed critiques the consequences of conflict on Kashmir's natural environment and its people.

Ecocriticism, rooted in the idea that human culture is deeply interconnected with the physical world, served as a framework for understanding how Waheed's depiction of nature in Kashmir reflects broader socio-political dynamics. Internal colonialism, on the other hand, illuminated the power dynamics within Kashmir, focusing on how dominant groups exploit both human and natural resources within a shared territory. This study, therefore, bridged the environmental and social implications of conflict, positioning

Waheed's novels as literary critiques that reveal the complex and intertwined nature of ecological and human exploitation.

The second objective was to investigate how socially marginalized groups are exploited through internal colonialist practices in the selected texts. This analysis revealed that Waheed's portrayal of the Kashmiri people—particularly the marginalized communities caught in the crossfire of conflict—reflects the socio-political and environmental exploitation they face under internal colonialism. The framework of Othering proved crucial in understanding how Waheed critiques the subjugation of these communities, who are treated as expendable in the larger colonial struggle for power and resources.

In *The Book of Gold Leaves*, Waheed's depiction of Roohi and Faiz's love story amidst the chaos of conflict highlights how the lives of ordinary Kashmiris are profoundly affected by the political turmoil that surrounds them. The beauty of the natural environment serves as a stark contrast to the suffering endured by the characters, emphasizing the disconnect between the land's inherent value and the exploitative practices of those in power. The study found that Waheed's narrative aligns with the idea of Othering, where marginalized human communities, like the Kashmiri people, are sidelined and dehumanized in the same way that nature is devalued and exploited. This exploitation is both material, in terms of labor and resources, and symbolic, as the identity and culture of the Kashmiri people are suppressed by the dominant political forces.

Similarly, in *The Collaborator*, Waheed's portrayal of Protagonist's village as a microcosm of Kashmir's larger struggle reflects the exploitation of marginalized communities within a framework of internal colonialism. The village's isolation, both physically and politically, symbolizes the broader marginalization of the Kashmiri people, who are caught between opposing forces vying for control of the land. The study showed that Waheed uses the environmental devastation of the village—its forests destroyed, its fields abandoned—to illustrate the broader socio-political exploitation of the region's people. Othering, as a theoretical framework, allowed the study to dissect how Waheed critiques the marginalization of these communities, revealing how their exploitation is deeply tied to the degradation of the land they inhabit.

Through the analysis of Waheed's novels, the study found that the concepts of Ecological Denial and Othering offer invaluable insights into how internal colonialism

manifests in both environmental and social realms. The findings suggest that Waheed's works serve as poignant critiques of the ways in which environmental degradation and the exploitation of marginalized communities are intertwined. By portraying the Kashmiri people and their environment as intertwined victims of internal colonialist ideologies, Waheed highlights the need for a more equitable and sustainable approach to both human and environmental justice.

The application of Plumwood's theoretical concepts allowed for a deeper understanding of how environmental concerns are sidelined in favor of political and economic gain, particularly within regions marked by conflict. Ecological Denial helped explain how the natural world is deliberately exploited and destroyed in Waheed's narratives, while Othering illuminated the socio-political marginalization of the Kashmiri people. Together, these frameworks offered a comprehensive lens through which to analyze the profound impact of internal colonialism on both the environment and human societies.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that Waheed's *The Book of Gold Leaves* and *The Collaborator* provide a powerful critique of the intertwined effects of internal colonialism and environmental degradation in Kashmir. Through the use of Ecological Denial and Othering, Waheed exposes the complex relationships between conflict, environmental destruction, and the exploitation of marginalized communities. The findings reveal that Waheed's works serve as a call to action, urging readers to recognize the deep connections between social and environmental justice.

The study also highlights the critical role of literature in shaping our understanding of these complex dynamics. Waheed's novels not only offer insights into the lived experiences of those affected by conflict but also underscore the importance of ecological consciousness in addressing broader social and political issues. As we move toward a more equitable and sustainable future, the intersection of ecocriticism and internal colonialism offers valuable perspectives on how to address the environmental and social injustices that continue to shape our world. Through Waheed's poignant storytelling, this study contributes to the broader discourse on the necessity of environmental justice and the urgent need to confront the socio-political structures that perpetuate inequality and exploitation.

Future researchers could expand on this study by exploring other literary works from conflict zones that have not been thoroughly examined through an ecocritical lens. While this research focused on Waheed's novels, comparative studies involving writers

from other politically volatile regions may offer a broader understanding of the relationship between environmental degradation and internal colonialism. Additionally, exploring more contemporary ecological theories or interdisciplinary approaches, such as ecofeminism or postcolonial environmental studies, could provide new insights into the intersections between power, conflict, and the environment. Future work could also examine the role of non-human entities in shaping narratives of internal colonialism, considering the perspectives of species and ecosystems affected by conflict and colonization.

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