

**LIVING LIKE A TREE: NARRATIVES OF
SLOW VIOLENCE IN ARUNDHATI ROY'S
THE MINISTRY OF UTMOST HAPPINESS**

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Elif GÜVENDİ YALÇIN¹

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ABSTRACT

This article bridges postcolonial studies and ecocriticism to explore the entanglement of environmental degradation and systemic marginalization in Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. Mainly anchored in the theoretical framework of Nixon's concept of "slow violence," this study examines how colonial and neo-colonial ideologies perpetuate ecological exploitation and social inequality. Through characters such as Anjum and Gulabiya, Roy critiques the intersection of environmental injustices, displacement, and socio-political exclusion. Anjum's existence within a graveyard, which is a symbolic site of ecological decay, exemplifies the gradual violence inflicted upon marginalized communities, while the extinction of white-backed vultures symbolizes the ecological ramifications of industrial modernity. Additionally, the Narmada Bachao Andolan and the Bhopal disaster serve as critical case studies of environmental racism, highlighting the disproportionate burdens borne by the Global South in the name of development. By engaging with colonial legacies such as deforestation and industrial expansion, the article underscores how contemporary globalization replicates the exploitative dynamics of imperialism. Roy's narrative strategies amplify the silenced experiences of the dispossessed while critiquing the ethical failures of anthropocentrism and capitalist modernity. The article concludes by emphasizing the role of literature as an activist medium, capable of rendering visible the imperceptible impacts of ecological and social violence. In doing so, it advocates for postcolonial ecocriticism as an essential lens for addressing global environmental and cultural issues.

ÖZ

Bu makale, Arundhati Roy'un *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* adlı kitabında çevresel bozulma ve sistemik dışlanma arasındaki bağlantıyı incelemek için postkolonyal çalışmalar ve ekoeleştiri arasında köprü kurmaktadır. Temel olarak Nixon'ın "yavaş şiddet" teorisine dayanan bu çalışma, sömürgeci ve yeni-sömürgeci ideolojilerin ekolojik sömürüyü ve toplumsal eşitsizliği nasıl sürdürdüğünü incelemektedir. Roy, Anjum ve Gulabiya gibi karakterler aracılığıyla çevresel adaletsizlikler, yerinden edilme ve sosyo-politik dışlanmanın birbirlerini nasıl etkilediğini ele almaktadır. Anjum'un bir tür ekolojik çürüme alanı olan mezarlıktaki varlığı, marjinalleştirilmiş topluluklara uygulanan kademeli şiddeti örneklerken, beyaz sırtlı akbabaların neslinin tükenmesi de endüstriyel modernitenin ekolojik sonuçlarını simgelemektedir. Ayrıca, Narmada Bachao Andolan ve Bhopal felaketi, kalkınma adına Küresel Güney'in üstlendiği orantısız külfeti vurgulayarak çevresel ırkçılığın ciddi vaka analizleri olarak öne çıkmaktadır. Roy'un anlatı stratejileri, mülksüzleştirilenlerin susturulmuş sesini duyururken, insanmerkezciliğin ve kapitalist modernitenin etik başarısızlıklarını da eleştirmektedir. Bu makale, ekolojik ve toplumsal şiddetin algılanamayan etkilerini görünür hale getirebilme kapasitesine sahip aktivist bir araç olarak edebiyatın rolünü vurgulayarak sona ermektedir. Bunu yaparken, postkolonyal ekoeleştiriye küresel çevre ve kültür sorunlarına yaklaşımda temel bir mercecek olarak kullanmayı savunmaktadır.

¹ Assist. Prof. Dr., Gümüşhane University, eguvendiylalcin@gumushane.edu.tr, <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7780-16132>

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INTRODUCTION

The intersection of postcolonial studies and ecocriticism has emerged as a critical framework for analyzing the socio-environmental consequences of colonialism and globalization. These fields collectively illuminate how ecological degradation is inextricably linked to the legacies of imperialism, exposing the historical and ongoing injustices experienced by marginalized communities. The colonial enterprise, with its extractive economic systems and anthropocentric ideologies, redefined the relationship between humans and the natural world, often imposing environmental disruptions on colonized regions while preserving ecological stability in the metropole. This ecological imbalance, as scholars such as Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin have argued, is emblematic of the broader asymmetries of power that define colonial and postcolonial relationships (2010, p. 6). The postcolonial subject, caught within these systems of exploitation, frequently becomes both the agent and the victim of environmental transformation.

At the heart of this analysis is the concept of "slow violence," introduced by Rob Nixon, which articulates the gradual and often imperceptible harm inflicted through environmental degradation and displacement (2011, p. 4). This form of violence disproportionately affects marginalized communities in the Global South, whose experiences remain underrepresented in dominant environmental discourses. Slow violence operates in tandem with what Val Plumwood identifies as the anthropocentric and Eurocentric foundations of Western thought, which have long justified the subjugation of both human and non-human subjects (2002, pp. 10-11). By critiquing these ideologies, postcolonial ecocriticism offers a vital lens for understanding the persistent inequalities that shape the Anthropocene.

Expanding on this theoretical foundation, the works of authors such as Arundhati Roy demonstrate how literature can serve as a compelling medium for interrogating these intersections of ecological and social injustice. As an Indian author and activist, Roy has consistently addressed critical socio-political and environmental issues through her writing, carving out a distinct space in contemporary Indian literature. Roy does not separate "nature" from

"culture," suggesting instead that environmental issues and political struggles deeply intersect and cannot be addressed independently of each other (Roos & Hunt, 2010, p. 18). Her second novel, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017), exemplifies this commitment by situating the struggles of marginalized communities within India's complex socio-political and ecological landscape. While her debut, *The God of Small Things* (1997), has largely confined its focus to caste and familial dynamics in Kerala, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* expands its scope across the breadth of India, weaving narratives from Old Delhi to the conflict-ridden Kashmir valley. Roy's ability to intertwine the extinction of vultures, the Bhopal gas tragedy, and the forced displacement of indigenous populations highlights the cumulative impacts of colonial legacies and neoliberal exploitation. In doing so, her richly layered narratives resonate with the themes of "slow violence," offering a powerful critique of global capitalism and environmental racism. By amplifying the voices of those relegated to the margins, Roy's work exemplifies the transformative potential of postcolonial ecocriticism in exposing and challenging the inequities of the Anthropocene.

This study seeks to bridge the theoretical insights of postcolonial ecocriticism with Roy's literary activism, examining how her works challenge dominant perceptions of development, progress, and environmental justice. Drawing on key theoretical contributions from Nixon, Huggan, Tiffin, and Plumwood, the analysis underscores the necessity of addressing the uneven impacts of environmental degradation through a postcolonial lens. In doing so, it explores how literature can serve as a form of resistance, offering new modes of representation that reveal the often hidden forms of ecological and social violence. Through this interdisciplinary approach, the article aims to contribute to the growing dialogue between postcolonial studies and ecocriticism, emphasizing the critical role of narrative in fostering environmental and social equity in a postcolonial world.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Recent scholarship has demonstrated significant progress in bridging postcolonial studies and ecocriticism, establishing crucial theoretical foundations for understanding

environmental challenges through a postcolonial lens. In his essay *Environmentalism and Postcolonialism*, Rob Nixon describes four significant divergences between postcolonial studies and ecocriticism. First, postcolonial scholarship often emphasizes hybridity and cross-cultural exchange, whereas ecocriticism is more inclined toward narratives of environmental purity (Nixon, 2005, p. 235). Second, while postcolonial studies are predominantly preoccupied with themes of displacement, ecocriticism focuses on works of literature rooted in specific places (Nixon, 2005, p. 235). Third, postcolonialism has historically championed cosmopolitanism, in contrast to environmental literature and criticism, which have typically evolved within nationalistic and nationally-bound frameworks (Nixon, 2005, p. 235). Finally, postcolonial studies often seek to recover and interrogate marginalized histories, whereas environmental literature frequently prioritizes timeless, solitary engagements with nature, often disregarding historical contexts (Nixon, 2005, p. 235). Despite these disparities, scholars such as Nixon, Huggan and Tiffin, and DeLoughrey and Handley argue that fostering greater collaboration between postcolonialism and ecocriticism could yield mutual benefits, enriching the critical discourses of both fields.

Postcolonial studies increasingly recognize that environmental concerns are intricately tied to European conquest and global domination. These issues are not merely incidental but deeply embedded in the ideologies of imperialism and racism that "historically-and persistently" underpin these colonial projects (Huggan and Tiffin, 2010, p. 6). The colonial expansion into indigenous lands introduced profound ecological disruptions. Settlers brought with them crops and domesticated animals, altering native ecosystems by clearing vast areas for agriculture and imposing Western agricultural systems (Huggan and Tiffin, 2010, p. 7). In line with this, Edward Said states that a significant amount of "plants, animals, and crops as well as building methods gradually turned the colony into a new place, complete with new diseases, environmental imbalances, and traumatic dislocations for the overpowered natives" (1994, p. 225). In stark contrast, the plants, animals, and human specimens transported from colonies to Europe were treated as "isolated exotics,"

carefully controlled to prevent any substantial impact on European ecosystems (Huggan and Tiffin, 2010, p. 7). Over time, indigenous populations were coerced or gradually assimilated into Western perceptions of the environment, a process that significantly hindered cultural and ecological restitution, rendering such efforts exceedingly complex, if not entirely unattainable (Huggan and Tiffin, 2010, p. 6). This asymmetry underscores the imperialist intent to dominate colonial environments while maintaining ecological stability in the metropole.

Val Plumwood's critique of anthropocentrism and Eurocentrism provides a critical lens for understanding the intertwined dynamics of ecological and colonial exploitation. Plumwood highlights the ethical failures in Western thought, where dominant human societies are neither ecologically situated nor extend ethical consideration to non-human species. This "hegemonic centrism" perpetuates environmental racism and institutionalized speciesism, rationalizing the subjugation of animals and animalized humans within a "reason-centered culture" that has shaped Western ideologies for millennia (Plumwood, 2001, pp. 2-8). Central to this ideology is the construction of humanity as dependent on its contrast with the "not-human," a category encompassing the uncivilized, the animalistic, and the non-European. This binary fueled colonial justification for invasions, perceiving non-European lands, peoples, and animals as "unused, underused or empty" spaces ripe for exploitation (Plumwood, 2003, p. 53). Plumwood further argues that this anthropocentric worldview, though historically rooted in European thought, has been naturalized across cultures, legitimizing the prioritization of human interests over the "silenced majority" of non-human beings (2003, p. 53). This constructed hierarchy justified the exploitation of both land and people, embedding a narrative of domination that continues to inform contemporary environmental and cultural discourses.

DeLoughrey and Handley, in the introduction to their edited collection, advocate for fostering an ongoing dialogue between postcolonial and ecocritical studies, identifying both the reasons for their historical divergence and the imperative to bring them into closer conversation (2011, p. 24). Their theoretical framework highlights

that "an ecological frame is vital to understanding how geography has been and still is radically altered by colonialism", while emphasizing postcolonial studies' engagement with "questions of agency and representation of the nonspeaking or subaltern subject" (2011, pp. 24-25). In other words, postcolonial ecocritics have a more complex history (rhizomatic), borrowing ideas from many fields, including histories of empire, decolonization studies, Marxism, geography, ecofeminism, political ecology, and environmental justice (DeLoughrey, 2014 p. 321). The emphasis lies not merely on the physical reshaping of landscapes through extractive imperial practices such as plantation agriculture, resource mining, or forced displacement but also on the epistemological violence enacted by colonial mappings that erased indigenous relationships to land and reordered ecological systems through European modes of classification and control.

Building on this foundation, Dipesh Chakrabarty (2012) extends the discussion by complicating the Anthropocene's framing of humanity as a unified species. His analysis challenges the notion of humans as "constitutively one, a species, a collectivity whose commitment to fossil fuel based, energy consuming civilization is now a threat to that civilization itself" (2012, p. 2). Instead, Chakrabarty emphasizes that these differences necessitate a deconstruction of humanity into distinct groups, given the disparate effects of climate change across various communities (2012, p. 14). This theoretical framework becomes particularly significant when examining what Chakrabarty terms "the uneven impacts of climate change" (2012, p. 14). The recognition of anthropological differences necessitates understanding how various groups contribute to and experience environmental degradation differently.

Rob Nixon's concept of "slow violence" complements Chakrabarty's analysis by providing a lens to examine the gradual, often invisible processes of environmental degradation. The concept of "slow violence," as articulated by Rob Nixon in his *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, provides a vital lens within this framework. Nixon describes "slow violence" as "a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is

typically not viewed as violence at all" (2011, p. 2). This framework encompasses the current climate crisis, which is manifested through processes such as the thawing cryosphere, toxic drift, deforestation, ocean acidification, and other environmental degradations that evolve over extended temporal and spatial scales (Nixon, 2011, p. 2). Unlike traditional forms of violence that are sudden and visible, "slow violence" is "incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales" (Nixon, 2011, p. 2). Nixon underscores a pressing concern: "slow violence" often goes unrecognized, slipping past the immediacy that typically draws public and media engagement. He points to a fundamental challenge in depicting this type of violence, noting that it frequently "remain[s] outside our flickering attention spans and outside the purview of a spectacle-driven corporate media" (2011, p. 6). In this way, Nixon draws attention to the limitations of media coverage, which tends to prioritize visible, instantaneous events over the gradual unfolding of environmental and social harm that characterizes "slow violence".

Unlike more obvious or immediate forms of violence, "slow violence" gradually seeps into the everyday lives and landscapes of marginalized groups, especially within postcolonial societies. Because this type of violence unfolds slowly and often out of sight, its seriousness frequently goes unnoticed. Thus, it becomes necessary to view it not just as a form of environmental harm, but as an ongoing struggle over resources, space, and ultimately, the experience of time itself. To challenge the hidden character of slow violence, storytelling and various representational strategies become crucial. They help make these subtle but harmful effects visible and understandable, potentially shaping policies on environmental justice. Postcolonial ecocriticism therefore not only investigates the lasting ecological damage caused by colonialism but also highlights how narrative can reveal injustices that otherwise remain hidden. This perspective enables a broader consideration of how colonial exploitation has cumulatively impacted both humans and their natural environments, cultivating a deeper, integrated view of postcolonial relations between people and the natural world.

A compelling and innovative means of addressing incremental and often hidden forms of violence against nature, termed "slow violence," is through the medium of writing, which has the potential to awaken public awareness to the profound consequences of human actions on the environment. This literary approach equips writers with new language to express the extensive damage that often manifests in unanticipated and enduring ways. Postcolonial writers, as Huggan and Tiffin assert, have increasingly used literature as a platform for global consciousness-raising, drawing attention to both social and environmental injustices that remain critical across various (post)colonial contexts (2010, p. 33). Through literature's aesthetic qualities and its capacity to convey ecologically oriented social and political messages, writers engage in a unique form of advocacy that bridges artistic expression with environmental justice. Likewise, the role of the writer-activist, as described by Nixon, is to "make the unapparent appear, making it accessible to the immediate senses. [...] challenge perceptual habits that downplay the damage slow violence inflicts[...]The narrative imaginings of writer-activists[...] thus offer us a different kind of witnessing: of sights unseen (2011, p. 15). These narratives, by reconfiguring what counts as visible or urgent, disrupt dominant frames of perception and reinsert marginalized voices and landscapes into the moral imagination. In doing so, they restore depth to flattened temporalities and reframe environmental crises as matters of justice and memory.

Writing, particularly within postcolonial contexts, therefore, serves to challenge perceptual tendencies that minimize the impact of "slow violence". Nixon argues that imaginative writing disrupts established perceptual habits, which often overlook the gradual but devastating effects of environmental degradation. By integrating reflections on empire, resistance, and aesthetic strategy, writers can foreground the long-lasting impact of colonial and neocolonial exploitation on the environment and its inhabitants, particularly in the Global South. Arundhati Roy exemplifies this form of writer-activism by vividly depicting the socio-environmental damages inflicted through colonial violence. According to Roy, she is labelled as a writer activist because of her three political essays which address significant issues like nuclear tests, big

dams, and privatization. She questions why her political essays earn her the title of "activist," while her novel, which is also political in nature, keeps her labeled as a "writer." (2001, p. 10). Roy suggests that this distinction arises because her essays take clear sides on contentious topics and openly seek support for her views, which is seen as unfashionable or too direct in modern writing (2001, p. 11). Roy explains that even fifty years after gaining independence, India is still dealing with the effects of colonialism and trying to prove itself against the stereotypes created by the West (2001, p. 13). Her work underscores the interconnectedness of mobile, immobile, and marginalized communities with environmental degradation in postcolonial contexts.

UNVEILING SLOW VIOLENCE IN *THE MINISTRY OF UTMOST HAPPINESS*

The Ministry of Utmost Happiness unfolds through two major segments, addressing themes of marginalization and environmental degradation, and centers on the lives of Anjum, a transgender individual, and Tilottama, who navigates the turbulent landscape of Kashmiri politics. Through its fragmented structure and layered storytelling, the novel amplifies the voices of the marginalized, interrogating systemic injustices while drawing attention to ecological decay. The novel's opening scene vividly underscores the symbiotic relationship between human society and the natural world. The character of Anjum, who resides in a graveyard, becomes a living embodiment of resilience. Her relationship with the graveyard space symbolizes her alienation from mainstream society while also positioning her as a custodian of forgotten histories and neglected ecologies. Roy's description of Anjum, "living in the graveyard like a tree," emphasizes her rootedness in this marginal space, a metaphor that blurs the boundaries between human and nature (2017, p. 3). Her identification with a tree aligns her with the nonhuman, challenging anthropocentric hierarchies that have historically underpinned colonial and patriarchal systems of oppression. By presenting Anjum as arboreal, Roy situates her narrative within an ecocritical lens that critiques these systems, where her marginalization as a transgender or *hijra* mirrors the ecological degradation of spaces colonized by human exploitation and disregard.

Anjum's choice to reside in a graveyard which is a space associated with death and marginalization serves as a striking metaphor for the environmental abandonment faced by the disenfranchised. The graveyard, transformed into the "Jannat Guest House," represents not only Anjum's reclamation of space but also a form of environmental resistance, a gesture of creating life and community in a landscape otherwise deemed disposable by urban authorities and elite society. Roy's characterization of the graveyard as both a refuge and a site of despair underscores the environmental dimension of social injustice, as those marginalized by society are forced to inhabit spaces that symbolize both exclusion and ecological decline. As a marginalized transgender Anjum's presence in the graveyard exemplifies what Rob Nixon terms "slow violence," which is the gradual and often invisible violence inflicted upon the poor through environmental degradation. Nixon argues that such disasters represent "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space" (2011, p. 2). Throughout the novel, Roy uses Anjum's environment as a microcosm for larger environmental injustices faced by the poor and marginalized communities in urban India. Nixon's assertion that people like Anjum "are the principal casualties of slow violence" aligns with environmental justice critiques arguing that the urban poor are often forced to live in the most environmentally hazardous conditions, exposed to waste and pollution that the more affluent classes can avoid or manage (2011, p. 4).

For Anjum, the graveyard becomes a sanctuary where she carves out a form of agency in a society that denies her belonging. Her "high branches" confer with "ghosts of vultures," whose absence signifies ecological imbalance caused by human intervention (Roy, 2017, p. 3). This spectral imagery critiques the broader ecological ramifications of colonial and capitalist exploitation, suggesting a world where the marginalized, both human and nonhuman, are forced to occupy the peripheries. The extinction of white-backed vultures serves as a potent metaphor for the environmental costs of India's economic modernization. On the opening page of the novel, Roy describes these birds as "custodians of the dead for more than a hundred million years," representing an ancient

ecological balance disrupted by modern agricultural practices (2017, p. 1).

Roy's depiction of vultures "tumbling off their branches, dead" (2017, p. 1) from diclofenac poisoning exemplifies Nixon's concept of "slow violence", where environmental degradation unfolds incrementally, disproportionately affecting communities relegated to modernity's "sacrifice zones" (Nixon, 2011, p. 4). As the city indulges in the pleasures of modern consumption, symbolized by "ice cream, butterscotch-crunch, nutty-buddy and chocolate-chip" the vultures, unable to adapt to the shifting conditions of capitalist-driven ecological change, succumb silently (Roy, 2017, p.1). Their deaths, unregistered in the dominant discourse of progress, exemplify what Judith Butler terms *ungrievable lives*, lives that do not elicit collective mourning because they fall outside the realm of human-centric concern (Butler, 2009, p. 91). Butler's concept of *ungrievable lives* illuminates the silent deaths of vultures in Roy's narrative, revealing how capitalist modernity dismisses both non-human species and postcolonial communities as unworthy of mourning. By exposing this dual marginalization, Butler's framework bridges postcolonial and environmental studies, showing how "slow violence" renders certain lives invisible in sacrifice zones. Grieving these losses becomes a political act, challenging colonial legacies and demanding accountability for modernity's ecological and cultural toll. For postcolonial ecocriticism, this means engaging literature and activism as tools to restore visibility and value to lives historically written out of the dominant narratives of progress.

The industrial use of diclofenac reflects how global capitalism disproportionately affects the Global South, where ecological damage is externalized, and the socio-economic vulnerabilities of marginalized groups intensify. By situating the graveyard within a rapidly urbanizing city, Roy critiques the imperialist ideologies that frame nature as a resource to be exploited in service of human progress. This resonates with Nixon's concept of "slow violence," where the long-term degradation of ecosystems and non-human species remains invisible, overshadowed by the immediacy of urban growth and consumerism (2011, p. 2). Nixon contends that in an era dominated by visual

spectacles, it is imperative to shift our focus toward a subtler form of violence, which is neither overtly dramatic nor instantaneous, but rather accumulates gradually over time incrementally and imperceptibly (2011, p. 2). In Roy's narrative the poisoning accumulated, unnoticed by most, until a keystone species nearly went extinct: "Not many noticed the passing of the friendly old birds. There was so much else to look forward to" (2017, p. 1). Here the novel directly comments on society's inattention to slow-moving catastrophe. The extinction of the vultures and the parallel disappearance of sparrows from the city did not produce the spectacle that galvanizes action. On the other hand, it was quiet, creeping, and conveniently overshadowed by the consumerist optimism of a "modernizing" India.

Anjum's ability to "confer with the ghosts of vultures" and feel their presence "like an ache in an amputated limb" suggests an ecological mourning that transcends species boundaries (Roy, 2017, p. 3). Her interactions with these ghostly remnants critique the disconnection of modern urban life from the natural world and serve as a postcolonial ecocritical commentary on the lasting scars of colonial exploitation, which have devastated both cultural and ecological systems. In line with this, Poray-Wybranowska states that the contemporary focus on environmental stability and sustainability can be directly linked to the ecological disruptions caused by colonial interventions in the landscapes of colonized regions (2021, p.37). The vultures' extinction parallels the societal erosion within urban spaces like Delhi, where both humans and non-humans endure the consequences of unchecked development and environmental neglect.

Roy's depiction of the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA), a real-life movement against dam construction that led to mass displacement, underscores the novel's engagement with environmental justice as a site of resistance. In the novel Gulabiya Vechania living under a plastic sheet by a billboard advertising a luxury car, represents the disenfranchised rural migrants displaced by large-scale development projects like dams. Gulabiya's memories paint a vivid picture of his village as it once was, untouched by the dam's reservoir. He recalls a time when "[...]fish didn't swim through his windows. Crocodiles didn't knife through the high branches of the Silk Cotton trees. Tourists

didn't go boating over his fields, leaving rainbow clouds of diesel in the sky" (Roy, 2017, p. 113). This imagery effectively emphasizes the physical inundation caused by dam construction, but it also highlights the psychological trauma of displacement. Anthropologist Thayer Scudder coins the term "developmental refugees" to refer to individuals displaced by megadams, which have displaced an estimated 30 to 60 million people globally (Nixon, 2011, p. 152). These projects, often funded by institutions like the World Bank, have overwhelmingly led to declines in living standards, including nutrition, health, infant mortality, and life expectancy, despite their stated developmental goals (Nixon, 2011, p. 152). In other words, ironically while these dams are supposed to represent development and progress, they are causing some people like Gulabiya and his whole family to become refugees in their own country.

Such displacement is not isolated but emblematic of what Deane Curtin identifies as "environmental racism," the systemic connection between race, environmental degradation, and oppression (2005, p. 145). Curtin observes that, "the oppression of one is connected to, and supported by, the oppression of the other" (2005, p. 145). Furthermore, Huggan and Tiffin explain that environmental racism manifests sociologically in the discriminatory treatment of marginalized communities, often through the transference of ecological burdens from industrialized nations to economically disadvantaged regions (2010, p. 4). This includes the rerouting of commercial waste or the placement of polluting industries in vulnerable areas (Huggan and Tiffin, 2010, p. 4).

The manifestations of environmental racism identified by Curtin and elaborated by Huggan and Tiffin find powerful literary expression in Roy's depiction of displaced communities, where former landowners become servants and squatters in landscapes they once called "home". For example, Gulabiya's mother "worked as a sweeper in a dam-engineer's house that was built on the land that she once owned," and she has "to steal mangoes from her own trees" or she "live[s] in a resettlement colony in a tin hut with tin walls and a tin roof that was so hot you could fry onions on it" (Roy, 2017, p. 113). Here, the once-familiar landscape becomes a site of alienation, exclusion, and servitude. This scenario echoes

environmental justice discourse, which emphasizes the need for equitable distribution of both environmental benefits and burdens (Huggan and Tiffin, 2010, p. 5). In this narrative, the original landowners suffer from the burdens of displacement and environmental degradation while remaining excluded from the proclaimed benefits of development.

Roy also sheds light on the large-scale displacement of indigenous adivasi communities, driven by the government's attempts to clear forests for mining and industrial projects:

In 2008 the situation much worst inside the forest. Operation Green Hunt is announced by Government. War against People. Thousands of police and paramilitary are in the forest. Killing adivasis, burning villages. No adivasi can stay in her house or their village. They sleep in the forest outside at night because at night police come, hundred, two hundred, sometimes five hundred police. They take everything, burn everything, steal everything. Chickens, goats, money. They want adivasi people to vacate forest so they can make a steel township and mining. Thousands are in jail (Roy, 2017, p. 421).

The contemporary displacement of Adivasis under Operation Green Hunt, marked by the burning of villages, looting, and the militarized occupation of forests, closely resembles the colonial-era strategies aimed at alienating indigenous communities from their lands. As Graham Huggan notes, "current ecological crises cannot be separated from historical legacies of imperialistic exploitation and authoritarian abuse" (2004, p. 702). During British rule, the dispossession of Indigenous groups was systematically enforced through legal and administrative frameworks designed to render their traditional use of resources illegal. In a similar vein, the modern Indian state's deployment of paramilitary forces to clear forests for industrial development perpetuates this legacy of environmental and cultural erasure. As Gadgil and Guha document, Britain's unprecedented deforestation efforts by the mid-19th century were fueled by demands for shipbuilding, iron-smelting, agriculture, and railway construction (1993, p. 118). These activities, intertwined with geopolitical rivalries, transformed vast forested landscapes into sites of environmental degradation and

dispossession. A colonial forest conservator remarked that Britain exhibited unparalleled "disregard for the value of the forests," a sentiment mirrored in the Indian state's prioritization of mining and steel townships over the rights and livelihoods of Adivasi communities (Gadgil and Guha, 1993, p. 119). This sentiment finds a disturbing parallel in the ecological damage wrought by contemporary mining and industrialization projects in South Asia. The colonial and postcolonial state's approaches share a fundamental disregard for the sustainability of forest ecosystems and the traditional knowledge systems of Indigenous populations.

Beside growing environmental decay due to deforestation and displacement of people, Roy also draws attention to another environmental disaster. The Bhopal gas tragedy, one of the most catastrophic industrial disasters in history, profoundly impacted thousands of lives in India. The incident resulted in numerous fatalities, while others suffered permanent blindness and severe health complications. As Roy describes:

The Union Carbide pesticide plant in Bhopal sprang a deadly gas leak that killed thousands of people. The newspapers were full of accounts of people trying to flee the poisonous cloud that pursued them, their eyes and lungs on fire. There was something almost biblical about the nature and the scale of horror (2017, p. 151).

This tragic event underscores the exploitative tendencies directed toward marginalized communities, who bear the disproportionate burden of industrialization and economic development, often at the cost of their health and well-being. The Bhopal disaster exemplifies the systemic inequalities where the poor are sacrificed to sustain national economic growth, exposing deep fissures in socio-economic structures. Nixon's concept of "slow violence," offers a crucial framework for analyzing the extended consequences of the Bhopal disaster. Although the immediate loss of life and severe injuries received significant global attention, the enduring suffering of survivors remains a critical aspect of the tragedy. This suffering includes long-term health complications, the contamination of local water supplies, and the ecological degradation of the affected region. These outcomes demonstrate the insidious nature of "slow violence",

which emerged from Union Carbide's inadequate safety measures and the subsequent failure to address the disaster's aftermath. The long-term effects of this neglect disproportionately burdened marginalized communities, thereby deepening existing social and economic inequalities.

Roy's critique of globalization in her *Power Politics*, including the rallying cry of "Trade Not Aid," provides a critical lens through which the Bhopal disaster can be understood (2001, p. 17). She argues that contemporary globalization operates as a form of neo-colonialism, where transnational corporations exploit local resources and populations without direct oversight, thus ensuring profit without accountability. As Roy notes, "Creating a good investment climate is the new euphemism for third world repression" (2001, p. 17). This rhetoric parallels the circumstances of the Bhopal disaster, where economic growth and industrial development were prioritized at the expense of human lives and ecological balance. The disaster, framed within Roy's critique, becomes emblematic of the global economic order's systemic inequalities, in which the marginalized are sacrificed for the interests of corporate and state elites. Furthermore, Roy states that:

[i]n India, in order to clear the way for "development projects," the government is in the process of amending the present Land Acquisition Act (which, ironically, was drafted by the British in the nineteenth century) and making it more draconian than it already is. State governments are preparing to ratify "anti-terrorist" laws so that those who oppose development projects (in Madhya Pradesh, for example) will be counted as terrorists. They can be held without trial for three years. They can have their lands and cattle seized (2001, p. 17).

The parallels between the colonial past and the neoliberal present are starkly evident in Roy's comparison of the Land Acquisition Act, a relic of British colonialism, and its contemporary amendments to facilitate "development projects". These legislative changes not only displace vulnerable communities but also criminalize dissent, as seen in the labeling of protestors as "terrorists" under draconian anti-terror laws. Such measures mirror the systemic neglect and repression exemplified by the Bhopal tragedy, where corporate malfeasance and state

complicity combined to produce one of history's most devastating industrial disasters. In other words, the disaster underscores the enduring colonial dynamics that shape the postcolonial world, where the language of development and progress often conceals the deepening of socio-economic inequalities and environmental degradation.

CONCLUSION

The intersection of postcolonial studies and ecocriticism offers a powerful lens for understanding the intricate dynamics of environmental degradation and social injustice. By foregrounding the colonial origins of ecological disruptions and their lingering impact on postcolonial societies, this framework reveals the persistent asymmetries of power that continue to shape environmental and cultural discourses. The works of Huggan, Tiffin, Plumwood, Chakrabarty, Nixon, and others collectively emphasize that environmental challenges cannot be divorced from histories of colonial exploitation and systemic marginalization. Central to this analysis is the recognition of Nixon's concept of "slow violence," that illuminates the incremental and often invisible harm inflicted upon marginalized populations and ecosystems, challenging conventional perceptions of violence.

Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* exemplifies how postcolonial literature can serve as an activist medium, bridging the aesthetic and the political to critique ecological and social injustices. Through vivid imagery and fragmented storytelling, Roy explores the intertwined narratives of marginalized individuals and degraded environments, positioning her novel as a potent commentary on the enduring legacies of colonial and neoliberal exploitation. Characters such as Anjum and Gulabiya embody the human cost of environmental degradation, while the extinction of vultures and the destruction of indigenous communities illustrate the ecological consequences of unchecked development.

Roy's engagement with real-world issues, such as the Narmada Bachao Andolan, Operation Green Hunt, and the Bhopal gas tragedy, further underscores the critical role of literature in exposing the hidden costs of globalization and industrialization. Her critique of "development" as a euphemism for exploitation resonates with contemporary

discussions on environmental racism and the neocolonial dimensions of global capitalism. By situating these issues within a broader historical and ecological context, Roy not only critiques the systemic inequalities that underpin modernity but also advocates for a more equitable and sustainable vision of the future. Ultimately, the synthesis of postcolonial and ecocritical perspectives demonstrates the necessity of addressing environmental issues through a multifaceted and inclusive lens as can be seen in Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. This approach challenges dominant narratives of progress and development, foregrounding the voices of those most affected by environmental degradation. By amplifying these perspectives, both in academic discourse and through literary activism, scholars and writers alike contribute to a deeper understanding of the enduring connections between colonial histories and contemporary ecological crises. Through such efforts, postcolonial ecocriticism fosters a vital dialogue that bridges the human and the nonhuman, the past and the present, and the local and the global, offering a path toward environmental justice and cultural restitution.

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