*Munazza Yaqoob**

The Toxic Legacies of Colonialism: A Postcolonial Environmental Reading of *The Miraculous True History of Nomi Ali*

ABSTRACT

Uzma Aslam Khan's latest novel The Miraculous True History of Nomi Ali (2019), presents an extraordinary tale of human brutality, human suffering, and environmental degradation, exploring the deep-rooted and multi-layered connections between colonialism and neo- colonialism. The novel whilst still remaining grounded in the geography, culture, politics and environmental specifications of the region, carries out a historical investigation of the British and Japanese colonial control of Andaman Island to draw our attention to devastating impacts of colonialism and neo-colonial capitalist development models on the environment within contemporary postcolonial societies (e.g., South Asia). Thus, Khan builds up a highly necessary alliance between postcolonialism and ecoriticism, tracing the roots of environmental degradation within both the colonial and neo-colonial oppressive regimes that dominate humans as species– who, indeed, cannot be separated from their links with the trillions of other life forms within the larger biosphere. It is with this in mind that the text navigates the environmental problems that are also major concerns in the postcolonial societies, including: Anthropocene, climate change, humans' and other species' migration and genocide, the erasure of indigenous culture, and the exploitation of natural resources–all of which are rooted in the oppressive regimes of the colonisation of the Andaman Islands. Via my socioecological critique, which aims to explore the novel in the context of it as a powerful resistance text challenging anthropocentrism (which has been exercised in the form of imperial control of the Andaman islands, whereby colonial powers dematerialize nature, displace indigenous inhabitants, and, thus, disrupt the harmony of the biosphere), I attempt to foreground the socioecological potential of the novel. Furthermore, I also aim to analyse the disturbances within the characters' lives–not to mention the degradation of the environment of their land–in order to highlight our main

* Associate Professor, Department of English, International Islamic University (IIUI), Islamabad, Pakistan.

criticism of imperialism, colonisation, and their 'legacies' of environmental hazards within the region. Indeed, The Miraculous True History of Nomi Ali, my paper argues, opposes the paradigms of 'disassociated thinking' and supports an integrated vision of the world, thus forming a meaningful contribution to the contemporary theories of climate change and the Anthropocene, as well as to related environmental problems.

Keywords: *Colonial toxic legacies; climate change; anthropocene, postcolonial ecocriticism; south Asian environment.*

Introduction

Drawing upon the theoretical, political, historical, and cultural currents that shape our contemporary understanding of postcolonial environmental resistance literature, Uzma Aslam Khan's latest novel, *The Miraculous True History of Nomi Ali* (2019), is a powerful addition to the genre of postcolonial environmental fiction, adopting a bold perspective on the colonial history of the region. The novel also presents an extraordinary tale of human brutality, human suffering, and environmental degradation, and, traces convincing links between the colonialism and contemporary degraded conditions of the environment through the historical investigation of the British and Japanese colonialism of South Asia. Besides all of the above, the novel additionally asserts its political commitment by investigating the well-established and multi-layered connections between colonialism and neo-colonialism and its development models, additionally citing their devastating impact on the environment within contemporary postcolonial societies (e.g., South Asia).

My analysis of the novel is in the form of a socioecological critique, 'focused on the intersections of human lives and other components of the biosphere, as well as the inextricability of human oppression from the exploitation of the larger environment' (Iheka, 2018, p .665). In order to explore it as a powerful resistance text challenging the anthropocentrism exercised in the form of imperial control of the Andaman Islands (whereby colonial powers dematerialise nature, displace indigenous inhabitants, and, thus disrupt the harmony of the biosphere), I have attempted to foreground the socioecological potential we witness in the novel.

In the same vein, it is worth noting that social ecology adopts a critical perspective on the deep ecological approach to studying the environment, essentially regarding it as an outcome of 'the burgeoning area of environmental analysis and critique' (Huggan & Tiffin, 2010, p. 11). Furthermore, this approach for social ecology, isolates environmental issues from social injustice and oppressive structures, ignoring the relevant socio-political context of the environment. Conversely, social ecology cannot be

merely 'pastoral and wilderness writing' (Garrard, 2000, pp. 182-186). Instead, according to Opperman and Iovino (2017), it is rooted in 'social sphere', and it is these researchers who also explain that the environmental problems are 'social, cultural, philosophical, and political' (p. 2). When looking at it through this lens, the study of environment and factors leading to its degradation shares its concern with postcolonialism (for postcolonial scholars), which ultimately criticises imperialism and colonisation, as well as their 'legacies' (Huggan & Tiffin, 2010, p. 11). From this, we can gather that postcolonial environmental criticism adopts a critical stance against the deep ecological approach to the study of the environment (Iheka, 2018, p. 664) considering it a product of the 'orientalist methodologies' (Cilano & DeLoughery, 2007, p. 71). This, notably, disregards socio-historical realities indicating 'a lack of concern with inequalities *within* human society' (Guha qtd. in Cilano and DeLoughery, 2007, p. 71).

As discussed above, social ecology observes the intimate links between the models of human societal structures and the nature of these, consequently triggering issues related to social and environmental justice within critical conversations concerning the environment and its degradation. Indeed, for social ecologists such as Murray Bookchin (1971, 1982, 1989), the roots of the environmental crisis reside in the models of human civilization, as well as its development (which is based on the domination of people and control on resources). In a similar vein, the structures of human societies are founded on the grounds of the hegemonic rule of people, being that anthropocentric also results in the control of nature. Further, environmental degradation—as well as other related issues within postcolonial societies of the Global South—is one of colonialism's legacies exercising its oppressive control on all living communities (whether human or not). Notably, in order to embed her concern of the postcolonialism whilst simultaneously addressing the issues related to the environment within the Andaman Islands under colonial regimes, Uzma Aslam Khan adopts a socio-ecological approach within *The Miraculous True History of Nomi Ali.*

Indeed, it is within this novel that Khan puts forward a study of history grounded in the geography, culture, politics, and environmental specifications of the region, discussing the major concerns of postcolonialism (e.g., the Anthropocene, migration, erasure of indigenous culture, the genocide of people, land grabbing, and exploitation of natural resources). Meanwhile, when it comes to my postcolonial ecocritical and socio-ecological interpretation of the selected novel, *I can* trace the 'insidious signals of precariousness and risks' (Oppermann & Iovino, 2017, p. 2) of the region's environmental problems that are rooted in the oppressive regimes of colonisation of the Andaman Islands. As stated by Mukherjee (2010)

concerning Indian Postcolonial literature in English, *this novel* offers a 'searching critique' of the postcolonial regime 'through its *literary* specificity and singularity'; and, as he further explains, 'postcolonial environments' do, indeed, 'wield an important formative relationship with this literary singularity' (p. 9). When reading critically in postcolonial ecocritical context, this novel traces the roots of environmental degradation within the colonial and neo-colonial oppressive control.

Through its varying 'small stories' and narrative strands, the novel navigates the various possible interdependent linkages of the history, culture, and environment; set in the exotic Andaman Islands (circa 1936-42), the novel profoundly reflects on the wounded body of the Andaman Islands under the colonial occupation, which intervenes into the dynamic ecosystem and disrupts the integrated relationship between all life forms. Furthermore, Khan provides vivid descriptions occupying journalistic precision and objectivity of blood-chilling incidents e.g., the force-feeding of prisoners by opening their jaws with iron contractions and thrusting pipes into their throats; yoking male convicts for grinding mustard seeds to extract oil; raping both male and female prisoners; bombing; mining; killing; clearing of forests and silencing the voices in forest. Notably, the central story follows two local-born teenage children: Nomi and her elder brother Zee. Their father, named Haider Ali, is sent to the Islands as a convict, their mother thus being obligated to follow him and settle on the Island. The other critical native characters are Aye (the local-born boy of Burmese origin) and a young woman called Prisoner D 218. With precision and skill, Khan interweaves the stories of all these characters with the overall objective of portraying the human and environmental tragedies that occur during the British and Japanese occupation of the islands.

From the very first chapter, the novelist draws our attention to 'the insertion of colonial histories of dispossession into the otherwise tranquil space of order, leisure, and green aesthetics' (Iheka, 2018, p. 665), which succeeds in developing the central argument of the text, as stated by Reed (2009),

The fate of the more-than-human world and the fate of human beings are inextricably linked, and that the degradation of certain "primitive" peoples and certain "under developed"' communities is devastating for the sanctity of the entire eco as well as terrestrial system. (p. 26)

Khan narrates the history of the colonisation 'from the point of view of those marginalised in dominant stories' (Reed, 2009, p. 27). It is also worth noting that the novel opens with the protagonist—12-year-old Nomi—exploring the Island with her 15 years old brother Zee. The Island appears to her as "breathing", singing with "white beaches" and "so many greens and blues, all glossy and glittering" under "absolutely clear" sky (Khan, 2019, p.

6). The children discover a group of Japanese soldiers, who essentially represent the imperial presence and control at the 'Mount Top' (p. 5), using the beautiful landscape as 'their latrine' (p. 9). Nomi pinpoints the foul smell of 'pissing' as being similar to that of 'the camp', set by the British for the prisoner families (p. 9). From this, we can thus say that the author links the colonisers and invaders—whether British or Japanese—as a destructive presence, defiling the terrestrial system of the Island, which as stated by Arnold and Guha, '…were nothing more than a primary source of raw materials and a site for state regulation' (p. 10). As colonisers and invaders, the British and Japanese exercise their imperial control, plunder the resources, and defile the native land and culture, in turn fracturing the coexistence of the colonised communities (Morton, 2010, p. 47). It is as a result of this that they leave poverty and environmental degradation as their legacy within postcolonial societies (e.g., Andaman Islands), the protagonist (Nomi) representing the Island whereby humans coexist with their land and co-habitat with other life forms.

As we further delve into the novel, we discover that Nomi possesses the ability to feel the Island as it breathes like 'a rhythmic rumbling all around her' (Khan, 2019, p. 6); moving around with 'monsoon winds' in her mind (p. 14) she believes that 'seas that flowed into each other', they find complete harmony in the sand, wind, and ants. She also harbours the belief that all these together form the 'body of land' (p. 15); and, as her life falls apart when Zee is monstrously tortured and mercilessly killed by the Japanese soldiers (pp. 179-180), her interconnected world is also shattered. Zee was an integral link to her harmonious life with the Island which was monstrously ruptured at the hand of the imperial power. It is because of this that 'she began to separate: one half of her stood still, watching the other half become everything she had ever seen' (p. 181) after his death. Nomi, however, is still yet to undergo further destruction as she faces even more loss when her father is also drowned as their boats are bombarded, then living to witness the suffering of her mother and friends. In regards to all of this, Khan adopts a postcolonial ecocritical stance that dubs the colonisers (i.e., the British and the Japanese) as intruders to the land who threaten, 'symbiotic network of the entire human and non-human fields of existence' (Mukherjee, 2010, p. 19). As readers perceive within the text, the British and Japanese loot, trample, and damage human life, the land, the indigenous culture and lifestyle of indigenous communities through their military power. Nomi's story informs the readers about the cruelty, misery, agony, and acute suffering of her parents, as well as others within the community who are tortured, executed, humiliated, and pushed into the role of the fodder of the mines and bombing.

Continuing along these lines, Nomi's brother Zee represents the dispossessed and oppressed natives on the Islands who are victimised, trampled, and killed alongside many other life forms, including trees, birds, and animals, as a result of the colonial regimes' goal to establish their imperial rule. It is worth noting that Zee's 'horrendous' crime allegedly justifying his monstrous execution is saving their hen from Japanese soldiers—his crime, essentially, being to claim something that was his. It is here that the author skilfully links the death of Zee and the story of Nomi's dispossession and displacement with the death of various other life forms on the Islands which are trodden and deprived of their precious resources. The death of Zee essentially becomes a central catalyst to the drama of the colonial control on the islands as it quickens the sickness of the land (as well as other agents of the environment on the South Andaman Islands). It is around here that readers are also informed that 'Gurdwara'—the place of worship—has been converted to a 'comfort station' (Khan, 2019, p. 197) whereby women from various colonised territories are brought and housed to provide sex services to the soldiers; similarly, there are also more 'ships in the water and planes in the sky. … sirens followed by bombing, bombing followed by sirens, and all of it followed by stillness' (p. 202). The Island is described as having 'turned red'—not only as a result of the 'blood of comfort women and mad men' and prisoners, but also that of the Japanese soldiers that were killed whilst bathing in the river (p. 268). Cargo ships are bombed and 'food shortage became dire', 'the villages being raided to steal crops and slaughter animals' (p. 274). Essentially, sickness prevails the Island: 'the water drains dripped an iridescent cobalt colour, and blue flies were found everywhere' (p. 259), 'hundreds of prisoners and their families [being] forcibly pushed into the water during bombing to become fodder for the fish, crocodiles, vultures and dogs' (pp. 301-303, 309).

It is the storyline of the aforementioned female Prisoner D 218 that is perhaps one of the darkest of all in terms of the Andaman Islands during this timescale: her story provides a graphic description of the inhuman treatment of the prisoners, who are subjected to physical and psychological torture, rape, and humiliation on the Islands during the British and Japanese colonial regimes. Prisoner D 218, as the text informs, is placed in the category of 'political prisoner'—essentially meaning she had 'done something terrible to the British' (p. 27), and this 'terrible' crime, according to Khan, is her refusal to accept the imperial control on her country and participation in the resistance movement.

As a part of her punishment to claim her right on her own land, she is locked into a cell of 13/12 x 7 with mice and cockroaches, shaven, and given a meagre quantity of food mixed with "live worm", "mice droppings" and stones to eat (pp. 105, 106). She is also brutally raped by the jailer Cillian, as

well as the cell's sweeper (149), is horrifically force-fed and tied to the 'grinding stone' to grind the mustard seeds (p. 130) before she is flogged. Also being subject to other forms of torture until, like Nomi, she is separated from her own self and does not 'want to know her body' (p. 81) anymore. The only thing keeping her going is to 'find the freedom to die on her own terms' (p. 107).

From this, we can view Prisoner D 218 as a symbol for the looted, exploited colonised Andaman Islands, as well as a representation of the natives who refuse to submit to the unlawful rule of the colonial masters, punished for claiming their rights to their land and for the right to live free. With this in mind, the novel is concerned with the socio-ecological ethics as a postcolonial ecocritical text, placing equal emphasis on both social justice and environmental justice. Further, through the story of Prisoner D 218's dispossession and oppression, the novel invites us to 'reconsider what it means to be human' and to have a human relationship with land, essentially creating a parallel study of social calamities and environmental catastrophes. The novel additionally expands its 'ethical concerns' concerning human rights and 'attempts to reconcile environmental justice and environmental movements' (Mason *et al.*, 2014, pp. 4-5). In the context of the novel, colonialism additionally acts as environmental racism (Curtin, 2005, p. 145) and 'Ecological Imperialism' (Crosby, 1986). Khan argues to view environmental racism in terms of 'the connection … of race and environment'—which suggests that 'the oppression of one is connected to, and supported by, the oppression of the other' (Curtin, 2005, p. 145). Indeed, Prisoner D 218's narrative serves the purpose of allowing us to perceive colonialism as environmental racism, which commits violence to both the environment and the colonised communities, thus lending the way to it being an extraordinary tale of the conflict between the anthropocentrism, a will to destroy, and the resistance and courage required to defy this unlawful control.

Similarly, the horrifying story of the 'comfort women' (the women brought from the South Asian colonies to run a wartime brothel) is one of the most painful and agonising episodes within this novel: these women are displaced from their native cities, raped, tortured, and, in the end, killed within a bombing directed at the brothel. It is such characters, all-too-similar to Prisoner D 218, who represent the colonised land and its resources, which are defiled, looted and wasted. Furthermore, the story of Aye (i.e., the young Burmese boy) additionally reveals a variety of forms of the oppression of natives, as well as their multi-layered dispossession under ecological imperialism. Aye, as an indigenous inhabitant of the Islands, knows his land intimately—in terms of both human and non-human life—, and identifies with them deeply; indeed, he can interpret and understand the moods and

the language of the winds, water, and earth, and thus stands as a witness within the text of the damage done to the ecosystem of the Island, as well as the atrocities committed to its inhabitants—both human and non-human. It is along these lines that Khan (2019) writes, 'since Japanese bombers began circling the Island … the rain fell, but he could not name the winds or the silences that accompanied it' (p. 62). He also informs the readers that the bombs and missiles have brought the 'vertigo wind' and silenced all other voices, and that 'the click of bamboo, the bicker of parakeets, the edginess of the sea … the praying mantis' are to be heard no longer on the Island, human sounds, even, having been virtually vanquished. Indeed, we can see here that Khan's ecocritical approach is grounded on the postcolonial theory and is attentive to the many different forms of anthropocentrism, placing all life and their mutual bonding in jeopardy, exploring the various types of vulnerability within contemporary societies.

According to Huggan and Tiffin (2010), colonialism is an outcome of a form of 'dualistic thinking' (p. 4) that evaluates nature and all other life forms as 'other'. As 'hegemonic centrism' (Plumwood 4-5), this creates racist attitudes toward both animals and humans, who are animalised and highly mistreated via oppression and marginalisation (8). From the above, we can conclude that an environmental fiction like this acts as a criticism of such 'dissociative thinking' (Oppermann & Iovino, 2017, p. 4) which has sustained its anthropocentric dualistic view and thus created binaries between humans and non-humans. It is this binary between culture and nature that has also established ecological imperialism. This crosses over of the postcolonialism and ecocriticism provides insight in the historical roots of the present environmental calamities (e.g., global climate change; Anthropocene; increasing ecological issues within postcolonial societies, such as South Asia).

'The colonising process,' as Reed (2009) reflects, 'labelled some people as "primitive", "underdeveloped", and "inferior", justified, rationalised, and enabled degradation of the land' (p. 27). *The Miraculous True History of Nomi Ali* skilfully develops links between the destruction of the land and the suffering of mankind by highlighting the migration of humans and other species, as well as fragmentation of their habitat, cultural disasters, and spread of disease within the affected regions of South and Southeast Asia as a result of the British and Japanese colonisation. It is with the above in mind that we can understand the extent to which the novel offers useful insights to explore the large-scale environmental catastrophes within the contemporary world, as primarily caused by the colonial plundering and exploitation of natural recourses and the atrocious treatment of indigenous communities and their lifestyle—previously existing in harmony alongside their ecosystem. The text offers various references to

the bombing and explosion within the mines (which killed both prisoners and natives), although this can be interpreted beyond its surface as this also subtly refers to the murdering of many other life forms living underwater where the mines were installed; and killing of those beings who breath in open air where the chemical particles of the explosions spread. Thus, the novel critically mirrors not only the human condition, but also trillions of other life forms within the biosphere once under colonial rule. It is through such an approach that readers are invited to reflect on the disrupted self-sustaining system of the biosphere, along with the 'biogeochemical processes' (Oppermann & Iovino, 2017, p. 9) of the Andaman Islands as a result of the colonial intervention of the British and Japanese.

Via the unlawful use of technology and military power, colonialism, as one of the most aggressive forms of human anthropocentrism, works only to enforce its economic and political priority agendas. It is within this text that we trace the history of the settlers' to uncover the fact that lieutenant Blair was commissioned by the British to set his sails for the islands for the second time in 1937—and it was within this trip that he brought masons and farmers along with the soldiers. The farmer was assigned to examine the land for introducing foreign methods of cultivation and planting foreign plant species. On a similar note, Khan (2019) informs her readers that after marrying a British officer upon arriving at the Andaman Islands, Shakuntala settles on a farm and plants trees (p. 86). The masons were assigned to work on construction projects (p. 53) and it is here that Khan informs that both the British and Japanese cleared forests in order to build structures (e.g., jails; residence colonies; brothels, landing strips, etc.), which bring 'dysentery, malaria and scurvy' (p. 54). From this, we can see that, by drawing readers' attention to the present environmental catastrophes named the Anthropocene, 'the folding of human into the air, into the sea, the soil and DNA' (Dibley, 2012, p. 139), the text invites readers to think and rethink such a human anthropocentric intervention as a way of grabbing resources and re-forming the terrestrial system. Furthermore, it traces the roots of the Anthropocene and environmental disaster within the human and colonial intervention which enforces the folding of people into the ecosystem and, as a result, altering the DNA of the Island. The British—as the text informs— 'had robbed, raped and murdered the islanders for one hundred and fifty years' (Khan, 2019, p. 56), cleared forests and built structures and plantations. They, additionally brought ships from 'Ceylon to lay down the mines' (p. 62) and killed hundreds of the natives, feeding their bodies to the sea creatures, land animals, and birds. Similarly, we are informed that before the British Malay pirates robbed the islands and 'captured the aborigines and sold them as slaves in the courts of Siam and Cambodia' (p. 53). Later the Japanese also excessively bombed the Island,

thus 'halting' winds, 'tensing' the tree, and causing it to appear as if the 'earth became sky, and the water … tasted of quinine' (p. 63). As if this weren't enough destruction, the text also informs the reader of the fact that diseases (e.g., malaria) spread within the Islands due to the British invaders and settlers clearing the forests, which 'had brought the mosquitos' p. (64). It was in order to treat malaria that they brought quinine and commenced pharmaceutical experiments on the islanders as a way to test various medicines (p. 64), such as 'cinchona alkaloid' and quinine—ultimately exposing many aborigines and local-born children to a variety of strange diseases leading to their deaths (p. 144).

It is here that readers are able to study the two types of violence within the text: 'spectacular' violence and 'unspectacular' or 'slow' violence' (Nixon, 2011, p. 6); the former of which being showcased numerous times within the text (e.g., via beating, chaining, raping, lashing, force-feeding, yoking in grinding mills, etc.), including that toward the environment (e.g., cutting down forests, installing mines, severe bombing, etc.). However, we also shouldn't neglect the fact that there are a variety of form of 'slow violence' demonstrated here, all which being in the form of catastrophic acts low in spectacle but high in long-term effects (p. 6). For instance, the readers are informed that the clearing of forests resulted in mosquitoes invading human colonies which caused malaria and for the treatment of malaria quinine experiments were done on the aborigines leading to various multi-generational health issues. Furthermore, the sea life—mainly fish and crocodiles—became 'ravenous since the Japanese began feeding them corpses' (Khan, 2019, p. 297); dogs and vultures in particular also began to acquire a taste for human flesh after finding hundreds of dead bodies on the Island (pp. 309, 323).

Furthermore, the text draws readers' attentions to the relationship 'between two "colonised others" whose positions of marginality are symbolically linked' (Gerhardt, 2002, p. 523). As much as the text does not describe this in graphic detail, one is able to read between the lines the human oppression and atrocities committed to various lives and is thus able to reflect on the trillions of life forms—organic and inorganic—that were killed during the bombing, mining, and clearing of the forests, as well as the degree to which the habitations were damaged and thus inhabitants were forced to undergo extreme biological changes. The rich narrative of the novel serves as a 'significant site of environmental-ethical reflection' and 'challenges social and political practices of domination, as well as widely accepted forms of ecological exploitation' (p. 533). Khan's novel develops an argument detailing the long-term effects of the loss of biodiversity and the displacement of habitats. Indeed, historical analysis of formally colonised communities confirms the reality of this perspective, as Huggan (2004) also

states that it is impossible 'to analyse modern imperialism and colonialism without engaging with the massive scale of environmental devastation that they entail' (p. 702). Similarly, a report by Schultz published in *The New York Times* in March 2019 states South Asia to be 'smothered in toxic air', another report published by *IQ AirVisual,* measured air pollution in 2018, dubbing South Asian cities—particularly Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh—as the 'world's most polluted' cities. In the same vein, studies such as *Major Environmental Issues and Problems of South Asia* by Hasnat, Kabir and Hossain (2018) inform that the South Asian region can be classed as the worst in terms of air pollution, also stating that this region is facing numerous other environmental issues (i.e., climate change; disrupted ecosystem changes; toxic waste; deforestation; desertification; pollution; pollution of land resources; scarcity of water; biodiversity loss; depletion of resources; degradation of marine resources). Within their paper published in 2017, Krishna *et al*. inform that 'the impact of air pollution transcends boundaries', 17 of the 30 cities are listed being within the region in terms of 'worst in air pollution', the population thus being infected with respiratory problems, amongst other related diseases (p. 1). In terms of biodiversity and habitat loss, A. C. Hughes (2017) states that majority of South Asian countries have lost their forest cover (p. 2), thus leading to the destruction of habitats, the disturbance of ecosystems and terrestrial systems, and the loss of biodiversity. It is with all of this in mind that *The Miraculous True History of Nomi Ali* contributes to contemporary theories of climate change, as well as the Anthropocene, within contemporary postcolonial societies such as South Asia, by building a much-needed alliance between post-colonialism and ecocriticism to trace the historical roots of the environmental degradation.

Notably, Mukherjee (2010) argues, 'Modern capitalism's relationship with the environment now had to be understood through the histories of old and new imperialisms and colonialism that continue to be a crucial medium for the expression of environmental/ecological phenomena' (p. 30), and, thus, as Reed states, 'Postcolonial approaches should be given central positioning in the field of ecocriticism' (p. 25). Indeed, the postcolonial ecocritical stance of Khan's novel explores Anthropogenic acts and processes of the colonial rule of the Andaman Islands. Furthermore, the narrative has been grounded on postcolonial scholarship and, thus, draws attention to the pernicious process of transformation of the colonialised areas into neo-colonial states, which is presented merely as an extension of colonialism. In his *Wretched of the Earth,* Frantz Fanon (1963) regards the postcolonial phase as the continuity of colonialism—also a form of the capitalist expansion that works to exploit the indigenous resources of the formally colonised states. One of the most visible forms of such neo-colonial control is that of the international business and technological projects

conducted by the West within the formally colonised state. Such corporations aggravate the excavation of the resources from the postcolonial states and actually cause further environmental hazards: for Fanon, 'decolonisation is always a violent phenomenon' (p. 29). Similarly, in his reading of Vassanji's novel *The Book of Secrets* (1994), Iheka (2018) also argues that coloniality brings more violence and suffering for the natives (pp. 209, 2011). Similarly, in *The Miraculous True History of Nomi Ali,* the Japanese also decide to leave the Subcontinent after the British defeat, and the natives finally achieve freedom. However, this freedom had already been infected with the internal civil war dividing the Indian Subcontinent into two independent states (India and Pakistan), ultimately triggering a violence that force the people to flee from their hometowns and regions and migrate to different states—including the Andaman Islands (Khan, 2019, p. 367). After such a large amount of human tragedy in the form of trauma, migration, and violence, such 'freedom' also led to even worse control over the region in the form of subtle neo-colonial control. Before leaving, the British reopened 'the sawmill on Chatham Island… The crashing of the forest coming down — a sound that had stopped during the war—had returned. Businesspeople flocked to the islands for Andaman padauk, as valuable as Burmese teak' (p. 363). Having been cleared by convicts to prepare the giant ships *Darya-e-Noor* and the *S. S. Noor* to export raw material and force migration, the trees were 'being cleared again' (p. 368), the narrative thus traces the continuity of colonialism and environmental crimes and registers its protest against oppressive regimes and techno-business corporations. When looking at the novel through this lens, we can say it assumes a powerful environmental criticism in the field of environmental humanities, meticulously exploring the treatment of humans and environment as 'other' under the colonial control of the Andaman Islands, which have left a deep-rooted and far-reaching impact on all life within the region. Armed with its concern and an integrated vision of the world, this novel dismantles this anthropocentric vision and argues against the paradigms of 'disassociated thinking' that have resulted in global climate change, droughts, floods, water scarcity, food shortage, and pollution.

Thus, we can say that Khan's novel uncovers the silenced and buried voices of the oppressed human and non-human subjects that have been forgotten or simply paid no significant attention to within the meta narratives of the colonial history of the subcontinent. The novel navigates the inextricable relationship between human beings and other non-human life forms within the system of the biosphere (Clark, 2011, p. 5). Khan's ecocritical approach, grounded in the postcolonial theory, looks beyond the 'limited human vision [and its] narrowly humanistic perception of what is consequential in life', instead extends to what Glen Love claims to be the

'morality to the non-human world' (p. 25). The novel provides a rare attentiveness to the many different forms of the anthropocentrism that places all life in mortal danger, as well as the various types of vulnerability within contemporary societies. It adopts a socioecological approach to explore this issue, offering insight as a way to study the history of colonised societies (e.g., the Andaman Islands) in terms of their political, social, economic, and environmental contexts. The suffering of humanity is placed as parallel to the plight of trillions of other life forms under the oppressive control of colonialism, the genocide of the people being intimately linked with the genocide of the land and other species—thus establishing the argument of issues such as forced migration, the genocide of people and land, and racism falling under both categories of postcolonial and ecocritical concerns. In this sense, the text also documents the continuity of humankind's anthropocentric behaviour—which has finally become one of the biggest challenges of the contemporary age (the Anthropocene). Through the stories of the various characters that are subjected to oppression and a variety of colonialism-related atrocities, the narrative of this epic novel reveals the deep impacts of the toxic imperial vision of erasure of culture, indigenous lifestyle, and ideologies of reformation and appropriation.

My reading of the novel also argues that the environment cannot be excluded from the complex matrix of the colonial histories of the impacted regions (Iheka, 2018, p. 678). In order to provide critical insight into the socio-political dimensions of human life under oppressive colonial regimes, as well as to present historical analysis, Khan illustrates a strong link between humans, non-humans, and their past and present stories. We can conclude that the novel offers a comprehensive environmental analysis of colonialism's vicious, oppressive control and interventions, in turn aiding in our understanding of the ecological issues within the world today. The excessive bombing, mining of the sea, opium trading, stealing of bird's eggs, merciless killing of people and animals, clearing of forests, forced labour, and rapes that plagued the Islands during British and Japanese rule, all wield a far-reaching impact on not only the human condition, but also on the ecological wellbeing of the islands and subcontinent as a whole. As a whole, the novel indicates the way in which the past of the region haunts its present in terms of the present crisis of climate change.

References

Arnold, D., & Guha, R. (Eds.). (1996). *Nature, culture, imperialism: Essays on the environmental history of South Asia*. Oxford University Press.

Bookchin, M. (1982). *The ecology of freedom: The emergence of dissolution of hierarchy*. California: Cheshire Books.
---. (1971). *Post-Scarcity anarchism* (2004 ed.). AK Press.
---. (1989). *Remaking society*. Black Rose Books.

Cilano, C., & DeLoughrey, E. (2007). Against authenticity: Global knowledges and postcolonial ecocriticism. *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and* Environment, *(14)*1, 71-87.

Clark, T. (2011). *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Crosby, A. W. (1986). *Ecological imperialism: The biological expansion of Europe, 900-1900*. Cambridge University Press.

Curtin, D. (2005). *Environmental ethics for a postcolonial world*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Daigle, B. F. (2017). "It is the grass that suffers": Postcolonial ecocriticism and M.G. Vassanji's *The Book of Secrets*. 197-214.

Dibley, B. (2012). "The shape of things to come": Seven theses on the anthropocene and attachment. *Australian Humanities Review, (52)*, 139 – 153.

Fanon, F. (1963). *The Wretched of the Earth* (C. Farrington, Trans.). Grove.

Garrard, G. (2000). Radical pastoral. *The green studies reader: From romanticism to Ecocriticism*. L. Coupe (Ed.). Routledge, 182-186.

Gerhardt, C. (2002). The greening of African-American landscapes: Where ecocriticism meets post-colonial theory. *The Mississippi Quarterly*, *(55)*4, 515-533.

Hasnat, Tanjina, G.N., et al. (2018). Major environmental issues and problems of South Asia, particularly Bangladesh. *Handbook of Environmental Materials Management*. C. Hussain (Ed.). Springer, 1-40, Retrieved from

https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-3-319-58538-3_7-1.

Huggan, G., & Tiffin, H. (2010). *Postcolonial ecocriticism: Literature, animals, environment*. Routledge.

Huggan, G. (2004). Greening postcolonialism: Ecocritical perspectives. *Modern Fiction Studies*, *(50)*3, 701-733.

Hughes, A. C. (2017). Understanding the drivers of Southeast Asia biodiversity loss." *Ecosphere*, *(8)*1. Retrieved from https://esajournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1002/ecs2.1624.

Iheka, C. (2018). Dispossession, postcolonial ecocriticism, and Doris Lessings's *The Grass is Singing*. *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, *(25)*4, 664-680. Retrieved from https://doi-org.ezproxy01.rhul.ac.uk/10.1093/isle/isy070.

Khan, U. A. (2019). *The Miraculous True History of Nomi Ali*. Context.

Krishna, B., et al. (2017). Tackling the health burden of air pollution in South Asia. Retrieved from https://ecommons.aku.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1348&context=pakistan_fhs_mc_chs_chs.

Love, G. (2003). *Practical ecocriticism: Literature, biology and the environment*. University of Virginia Press.

Mason, T. V., et al. (2014). Introduction to postcolonial ecocriticism among settler-colonial nations. *ariel: A Review of International English Literature*, *(44)*4, 1–11. Retrieved from 10.1353/ari.2013.0037.

Morton, T. (2010). *The ecological thought*. Harvard University Press.

Mukherjee, U. P. (2010). *Postcolonial environments: Nature, culture and the contemporary Indian novel in English*, Palgrave Macmillan.

Nixon, R. (2011). *Slow violence and the environmentalism of the poor*. Harvard University Press.

Oppermann, S., & Iovino, S. (2017). Introduction: The environmental humanities and the challenges of the anthropocene. 1-21. Retrieved from

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/310845293_Introduction_The_Environmental_Humanities_and_the_Challenges_of_the_Anthropocene.

Plumwood, V. (2002). *Environmental culture: The ecological crisis of reason*. Routledge.

Reed, T.V. (2009). Toxic colonialism, environmental justice, and native resistance in Silko's

Almanac of the Dead". *MELUS, (34)*2, 5-42.

Schultz, K. (2019, March 5). South Asia is smothered in toxic air, report finds. Retrieved from
https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/05/world/asia/india-air-pollution.html

"World most polluted cities 2018 (PM 2.5)." *IQ AirVisual*, Retrieved from
https://www.airvisual.com/world-most-polluted-cities.