

Landscapes of Loss: Ecocritical Reflections on Munazza Yaqoob's *A Lament for the Peach Orchard*

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Abstract

Contemporary Pakistani anglophone fiction as seen in Munazza Yaqoob's recent collection of short stories "A Lament for the Peach Orchard" grapples with the psychological and ecological impacts of rapid urbanization and the consequential environmental crisis. This paper argues that Yaqoob's stories articulate a profound sense of loss and alienation that arise when familiar landscapes are altered or destroyed, reinforcing the idea that environmental harm is intertwined with human suffering. The primary arc of the paper is the progression from psychological distress of "solastalgia" through the political and ethical commitment as a necessary pathway to the envisioned "symbiocene". This paper draws upon Glenn Albrecht's concept of soliphilia to analyse how the narrator navigates a landscape marked by decline due to human exploitation, with a sense of solastalgia – the pain of losing one's home environment while still inhabiting it. Yaqoob's exploration of "eco-anxiety" highlights the fear and dread surrounding an unstable future, illustrating the existential unease over the on-going collapse of the natural world. This anxiety is a critical progression from paralysis of solastalgic grief towards a politically engaged "soliphilia". Furthermore, Yaqoob's fiction portrays nature as an active, sentient entity as theorized by Donna Haraway and Jane Bennet who ascertain that nature is an active participant in human lives and that humans must recognize its suffering and agency. Yaqoob's narratives, this study argues, challenge capitalistic anthropocentric perspectives and advocate for a reimagined, empathetic coexistence between humans and nature. Henceforth Yaqoob's fiction is not merely an elegy but a vital call for a restorative, symbiotic ethics in a postcolonial context.

Keywords: Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Solastalgia, Eco-anxiety, Soliphilia, Symbiocene

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Introduction

Humans and nature have always been in a complex relationship with each other where nature is the nurturer while human beings are benefitting from the natural world. With the advent of urbanization and industrialization, consumerism and unchecked economic growth, the past century has witnessed a human – nature relationship that is marked by increasingly extractive and exploitative patterns leading to an insatiable demand of natural resources that has exacerbated ecological degradation with a steep decline in environmental conditions. As a result, over 75% of the Earth's terrestrial environment and 66% of the marine environment is affected by human activities causing resource depletion, deforestation, soil degradation, habitat destruction and water and air pollution (IPBES, 2019). An overwhelming demand for timber and agricultural land, relentless urbanization, unrestrained industrial expansion and unrelenting pursuit of consumer goods has led to habitat fragmentation that undermines the stability and ecological balance of the earth. This insatiable pursuit of natural resources resulting from market-oriented initiatives is further intensified by short term economic gains that hinder the long-term ecological health and perpetuate a linear model that works upon “take, make, dispose” (Rockström et al., 2009). The contemporary market-driven trend has led to the migration of larger populations towards the urban areas to elevate their living status and find more opportunities resulting in ecological destruction, loss of biodiversity and many other alarming threats to the natural world.

Pakistan, a postcolonial region is also trapped in cycles of economic dependency, environmental externalities and socio-economic injustices. The policies in the name of development give the illusion to elevate human living conditions are in fact market driven and intended for economic growth (Arundati Roy 1999). The infrastructure, the mega projects and real estate speculations are part of the capitalist mindset that extract value and disregard long term sustainability. Urbanization of Islamabad also is not an isolated phenomenon rather closely associated with capitalist projects that view the land as real estate rather than a living ecological place. According to Plumwood, it is a “resource” for them to be bought and sold, to be altered and restructured for financial profits. These neoliberal projects have ecological costs in the form of water scarcity, air pollution, loss of biodiversity and heat increase (Plumwood 111). The pursuit of growth has thus led to the depletion of resources as the urban expansion is driven by capitalist model rather than fulfilling human needs.

The ecological spaces and working classes in these spaces are not partners in co-existence with the elite lifestyle, but tamed and controlled to serve the dominant masters. Ayaz Mallick records in his article, "Urban Space and (the limits of) Middle Class Hegemony in Pakistan" (2018) that particular groups within the middle class in Pakistan are attempting to shape urban life through ideas of building "world class cities" to match their ideals. These efforts are disguised as modernity but inherently tied to controlling space and shaping urban development to gain dominance through physical actions and narrative control that have led to "proto-hegemonic" objectives with the "emerging spaces of neoliberal urbanism" (Mallick 1114). Both the natives and the environment are relegated to a passive backdrop that is commoditized and sacrificed for economic development. Mallick's critique of urbanization with its spatial and ecological hegemony parallels Yaqoob's concern over the detrimental effects of these projects on the lives of native people in Islamabad. She highlights that the upper class holds more power to exploit both nature and the lower class as they enjoy material luxuries through purchase power yet their exploitation is concealed by the systems that assist them. The ones who are placed in the lower order in this economical hierarchy are relegated to sub human status (Yaqoob 2010, p. 98). They have no say in environmental policies and they are stripped off of their agency to speak for their homeland or their environment. Both the environment and sub humans are at the mercy of these capitalist powers that prioritize market driven initiatives at the expense of environmental destruction.

The environmental crisis in the major cities of Pakistan is deeply rooted in the politics of urbanization. The capital city, Islamabad's contemporary deteriorating environmental conditions in particular have been shaped by the elitist vision of elevating the living conditions which led to the marginalization of indigenous people. Regarding the initiation of developmental projects in Islamabad, Daechsel argues that the city's developmental map was structured following Doxiadis's technocratic model of ekistics, a purportedly scientific approach that excluded the Potohari people's sociocultural and ecological realities by imposing a rigid spatial order. This planning was according to a modernist aesthetic model that privileged the elites and led to dispossession of local people through restructuring their traditional habitats and disrupting their healthy relation with their land, water and other habitats. This "top-down planning inevitably 'failed' in the Third World" (Daechsel 87) as alongside the indigenous communities, the environment of Islamabad was also exploited for elitist aspirations and treated as a neutral background rather than a living entity that can shape and affect the lives of its

inhabitants when altered. Fatima and Batool also criticize the excessive water extraction resulting from industrialization and rapid urban expansion which is “the leading cause of physical water scarcity” in Islamabad (365). It is a result of the elite driven urban planning with “poor governance” and neglect of environmental rights of local communities as the projects relied “solely upon infrastructure development, ignoring management” (Fatima et al 365). This decline in water quality is leading to increasing health issues for residents of the city. According to Adam, Mukhtar and Amir, although Pakistan’s constitution recognizes the rights of indigenous people to a healthy environment, the state-led developmental projects perpetuate an aggravated condition of ecological degradation. This deterioration is attributed to the persistent high-profile projects that disown sustainable planning with unchecked constructions, “industrial expansion along with rapid growth in population and their demand for only the best quality of resources in life” (24).

Through externally imposed vision of transformation, the lived realities of indigenous populations are not taken into considerations and they are uprooted from their hometowns in the name of development. Similar studies show that “spreading over a vast area, these industries individually inflict permanent damage to our ecosystem and environment” (Adam et al 29) and adversely affect the relationship of local people with their home environment and fracture their cultural memory tied to land. This loss of familiar ecological surroundings has produced deep feelings of dislocation, and cultural loss with a sense of estrangement from a landscape that once formed their sense of self.

Historically, literature has played a crucial role in addressing societal anxieties and shaping public discourses to foster critical engagement with them. Contemporary Pakistani Anglophone fiction, besides other issues, also effectively addresses and embeds environmental themes to reframe humanity’s relationship with nature through ecological consciousness. Munazza Yaqoob’s short fiction is also a significant attempt to reshape cultural narratives by highlighting that normalizing environmental deterioration can lead to irreversible catastrophic conditions. In an age where climate uncertainty is prevalent, her work functions as a critique as well as a catalyst to offer a space to not only mourn ecological loss but also envision environmental renewal. In “*A Lament for the Peach Orchard*”, Yaqoob clearly shows her concerns regarding the environmental decline specifically in her home city, Islamabad. Her work is not merely a literary piece that aestheticize nature but a radical call for saving one’s home environment to preserve natural resources and put

a halt to the fast-paced environmental decline in order to avoid catastrophic conditions. The lament over environmental deterioration is a consistent theme in almost all the short stories in her collection, where Yaqoob expresses her distress over the industrial expansion in the present-day modern societies fuelled by human interference resulting in ecological threats. This study argues that Yaqoob's *A Lament for the Peach Orchard*, is not only an attempt to raise ecological consciousness but, it is also a radical call for the restoration of the essential human – nature relationship.

The solastalgic feelings of the native inhabitants are turned into a creative force to strive for sustenance evoking a sense of love for the surrounding environment. Yaqoob's narrative also serves as a political statement to preserve ecological memory and prompt her readers to live in harmony with nature by contesting capitalocene through symbiocene. It attempts to dismantle the dominant hierarchical capitalist structures by recentralizing nature as an agentic force. Thus, Yaqoob's "*A Lament for the Peach Orchard*" emerges as a potent act of memory and functions as a literary archive against this forgetting, documenting the solastalgia specific to Islamabad's transformation. This reframes Yaqoob not just as an example but as an active agent in a cultural-political struggle.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Peaceful human existence is always marred by certain dominant forces that have controlled and subjugated particular parts of society for exploitation. Nature is also considered at the service of these power structures and treated as a commodity without giving attention to the detrimental effects their domination entails. We are living in an epoch of "capitalocene" where capitalism majorly contributes to imbalance in living conditions and unequal resource distributions. According to Moran, the urban-industrial societies have a major impact on the environmental devastation as compared to the rural indigenous ones (2016). Instead of going for sustainable practices to save the environment, humans strive to benefit from nature by using the natural resources at a rapid rate.

The desire for modernity has alienated humans from their environment intensifying the disconnection between societies and the natural world. Marie Norgaard in prologue to her work "Living in Denial: Climate Change, Emotions, and Everyday Life" (2011) refers to a survey in the United States where people's opinions were taken

and they were of the view that “they care deeply about global warming”, however they believed that this phenomenon was far greater to be tackled by their efforts. They “seemed to want to move the topic from global warming to other familiar topics” (Norgaard xix). This collective lack of response did not seem to be due to any lack of information rather a process of what Macy refers to as “denial” (40).

The communities normalize silence to avoid confronting disturbing realities thereby compartmentalizing the issue. This indifference has reduced public response towards environmental collapse to mere discourse and spreads information with little practical action. Joana Macy calls it as “the great forgetting” and Wade Davis refers to it as “ecological amnesia” a collective forgetfulness towards environmental loss. Davis shows concern that humans’ loss of connection with their environment through collective exploitation is resulting in ecological amnesia. The forgetfulness of “this fluidity of memory” about our surrounding environment “has dire implications” where desperation to satisfy material needs can take us towards “the path of forgetfulness” (Davis 24). Davis also calls it “ecological holocaust” where people “adapt to any degree of environmental degradation” (25).

This ecological amnesia is a global environmental crisis with an intensely local manifestation. The capitalist modernity has not only led to an ecological crisis but also become an issue of memory. “To acknowledge distress for our world opens us also to a sense of guilt” (Macy 43). Through systematic erasure a disconnection is deepened between societies and sustained through systematic erasure of ecological histories. In postcolonial Pakistan, a country navigating the pressures of development and global capital, this amnesia is enforced by what Arundhati Roy terms as “myth of development” (1999) where natural systems are replaced by the illusion of progress through masking capitalist exploitations with economic growth.

This rhetoric of development has become a means of dispossession in postcolonial countries that disowns ecological integrity in the interest of the broader global capital. This apathy has reduced public response towards environmental collapse to mere discourse and spreading information with little practical action. To prevent this adaptation, a shift in our consciousness regarding environmental issues is requisite to dispute naturalizing the loss of habitat and foster empathy and responsibility towards nature for collective struggle to reimagine the role of humans as stewards of nature. Against this backdrop of colonial extraction, Yaqoob’s work is deployed as a counter intervention to resist ecological amnesia through retelling

the lost tales in a way that can resonate with common readers. In this way, her narratives reconnect human and non-human bond and challenge legacy of destructive capitalism with alternate forms of coexistence.

In order to cultivate feelings of connection and care with the surrounding environment, humans need to be aware of the steep decline in natural resources and environmental harm. The distress and anxiety over this loss is termed as "Solastalgia". The word "Solastalgia" was propounded by Australian philosopher Glen Albrecht to explore the distress of human beings over the loss of their home environment (2005). Solastalgia has its roots in the concepts of "solace" and "desolation". Solace is an alleviation of distress and seeking comfort in the familiar in the face of desperation and discomfort. As for the word "algia", it means pain, suffering or sickness. Solastalgia is the pain resulting from the lack of solace and a sense of dispossession in the present state of one's home and territory (Albretch 45). The awareness of ecological crisis and the feelings of discomfort can prompt the inhabitants to search for the root cause of this fragmented identity and they can understand that it is a result of human activities that prioritize profit over sustainability.

This loss of environment is a result of anthropocentric approach towards resource extraction. "Anthropocene" basically refers to the impact of human activities on the ecological systems highlighting human agency and relegation of environment as passive entity subjected to exploitation. Jason Moore reframes the current ecological narratives and posits that our ecological problems are not the general outcome of all human activities as anthropocene suggests. Moore has propounded the concept of "Capitalocene" and argues that contemporary environmental issues stem from capitalist exploitation that includes resource extraction, commodification of nature to serve capitalist interests and profit driven policies that not only exploit nature but also the people of lower strata of society (Moore 601).

The depletion of resources has detrimental effects on the living condition of native people. Moreover, large scale industrial projects focus more on profit than sustainable practices. Whether it is sewage, toxic gases or industrial wastes, they are dumped in underdeveloped marginal regions that increase the risk of habitat alteration. In this sense, "global capitalism" is the main contributor to the deteriorating condition of the nature and ecology across the globe (Mukherjee 2006 & Curtin 2005). Corporates benefit from industrialization while the marginalized

face the consequences with little say in the policies devised to restructure their living environment. This leads to eco-anxiety and solastalgic feelings of desperation and loss. To reconnect them with their home environment and cultivate feelings of harmony and care, a shift towards “soliphilia” is obligatory. Albretch expresses soliphilia as “French *solidaire* and the love of one’s fellow citizens and neighbours implied by the Greek (*philia*)” (Albrecht 2019, p. 121). The collaboration and political commitment of protecting the places that we love and fight back ecologically damaging practices to mend the broken places back to a state of solace is the main concern of soliphilia.

To cultivate a more genuine sense of harmony and care towards a person’s home environment, there is need of acknowledgement that the world surrounding us is not a passive backdrop rather it is a living entity that participates in the existence of human life. This recognition of the vitality of matter as “thing” rather than “an object” helps disrupt the illusion of anthropocentric agency and envisions humans and non-humans as co-participants of existence. Jane Bennet in her book entitled “Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things” (2010) proposes that objects, matter and elemental forces are “actants” having the capacity to affect human life and be affected by human activities (6). When matter is perceived as vibrant, it reawakens our sense of responsibility rather than treating it as inert and lifeless entity holding no value. This understanding helps cultivate “horizontal” ontology of agency rather than a hierarchical domination and subjugation.

This relational sensibility can be further strengthened by Donna Haraway’s concept of “composti-sm”. The term is introduced in her article “Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin.” (2015) where she emphasizes that in the universe, all living beings whether they are humans or non-humans, animals, microbes, plants and water are interconnected with a continuous cycle that goes through decay, transformation and renewal. Compost-ism according to Haraway is a multispecies kinship as a regenerative process (161). For Haraway, to be “compost-ist” is to live with these organisms being aware of the continuity of all life forms. Her notion of “becoming with” thus envisions a mode of coexistence rooted in care and humility (Haraway 101-103). The coexisting approach is also advocated by Yaqoob in her literary work as it would lead to a symbiotic relationship between humans and nature, that sacrifices personal profit for ecological integrity.

Glen Albrecht expands this mutual coexistence in his essay “Negating Solastalgia: An Emotional Revolution from the Anthropocene to the Symbiocene” (2020) as an ethical and emotional reawakening of lost connection between human societies and their environment. Through “symbiocene”, Albrecht envisions a mutually regenerative future that emphasizes interdependence as an alternative to ecologically disruptive eras of capitalism. When humans learn to live in harmony with their ecosystems, they attempt to sustain their environment through nurturing and co-flourishing rather than exploitation and extraction. Symbiocene thus becomes a roadmap towards a restorative vision of ecological activism built upon interdependence and empathy. This recognition of shared vitality would prompt the inhabitants towards a more collaborative and symbiotic approach towards environmental issues to contest capitalist exploitation and dismantle dominant power structures.

Methodology

This study analyzes Yaqoob’s short story collection through the lenses of ecocriticism and posthumanism. This paper focuses on three key stories from the collection: ‘*A Lament for the Peach Orchard*,’ ‘*The Other Universe*,’ and ‘*A Moment of Insight*’. We draw upon theoretical perspectives of Glen Albrecht, Jane Bennett and Donna Haraway. Albrecht’s twin ideas of solastalgia and soliphilia complement each other by portraying solastalgia as a driving force towards soliphilic sentiments. The concept of soliphilia is substantiated by Bennett’s idea of vibrant matter that gives value to non-human forms as active participants in human lives. To coexist is to involve in an act of “becoming with” more than human surrounding world. This compost-ist approach is introduced by Haraway as a radical model of mutual existence. Thus, by combining all these theoretical approaches, this study analyzes Yaqoob’s literary work as an embodiment of eco-ethical sensibilities which illuminates that her fiction is not only aesthetics but also a medium for regenerative ecological activism.

Solastalgia- The Presence of an Absence

Humans are connected to their natural environments and any slight change made to it makes them feel nostalgic and melancholic about what is destructively altered. As stated earlier, this paper argues that human beings’ yearning for nature leads to the feelings of Solastalgia – the nostalgic feelings over loss of a familiar environment

with the rapidly changing developmental world that has altered ecologies by restructuring infrastructure, invading natural habitats of animals, exploitation of natural resources like mass consumption of water reservoirs, cutting trees for industrial purposes, commodification of food and harming the local fauna which is home to wildlife. The concept of "Solastalgia" offers a framework that associates emotional distress with the degradation of one's home environment.

It differs from "nostalgia" as nostalgia is a lament over a lost past event while solastalgia is the distress over the currently deteriorating condition of the place a person inhabits. For Yaqoob, the orchard is an archival of ecological memory and its destruction is the erasure of indigenous ecology as she demonstrates, "The fall of the peach orchard is the erasure of history, which witnessed the grandeur and grace of the human soul" (Yaqoob 39). Yaqoob voices her solastalgic feelings over the loss of orchard associated to her past memories as she yearns for the natural environment that has been altered to a great extent due to rapid urbanization and industrialization.

The author shows her concerns regarding the devastation of the natural environment through her short story collection, in which she rejects the apolitical ecocriticism and calls for an "aesthetics committed to politics" (Cilano & DeLoughrey 2007) i.e., the literature should not just be a written discourse but rather the one that is political, with inherent activism. Unlike nostalgia, which is often personal and apolitical, Yaqoob's solastalgia is inherently political. The 'erasure of history' she laments is not a passive process but the direct result of specific urban policies and class-based entitlements in her home environment of Islamabad. In a few decades the city has been rapidly urbanized leading to the violent disturbance and disruption within the natural landscapes, habitats and ecosystem. She shares her feelings of nostalgia and longs for the natural environment that was once rich in greenery with chirping birds, vibrant herbage, fresh air and trees laden with seasonal fruits.

All of that is now replaced with tall concrete buildings, housing societies with modern bungalows and apartments, air contaminated with vehicular emissions, and depletion of water resources due to mass consumption. As described by Yaqoob in the opening story of the book, "The orchard has been burned; with it, all lives have been silenced, and all colors have been ravaged to build this dark abode. What an absurd choice!" (Yaqoob 36). Yaqoob expresses her heartfelt concerns regarding the

alterations made to the natural environment of Islamabad through her short stories, to convey her feelings of distress and nostalgia in a unique manner that can effectively engage her readers to reflect on their actions. Her distress is heightened by realizing human folly that has made them oblivious to their surrounding and their absurd actions that have caused irreversible ecological harm.

Yaqoob calls for contemplation over environmental degradation and advocates for active measures to save the environment, as preservation of environment, according to her, is the preservation of life. The food we eat, the air we breathe, and the water we drink all depend on our environment. By damaging the capacity of our environment to provide us with sustainability, we will risk our own safety (Moran 22). Yaqoob addresses this issue in her stories in a way that her stories move beyond the passive lament and take a form of writing with a political agenda to evoke in her readers a deep concern over the depletion of resources and degradation of environment. According to Young, Postcolonial ecocriticism aligns with activism as it is in accordance with the need of contemporary time and it requires serious political motifs in literary texts in order to save the ecology and its resources.

In addition, he critiques global capitalism as the main contributor to the deteriorating condition of the nature and ecology across the globe (Mukherjee 2006 & Curtin 2005). Through the portrayal of her characters, metaphors and themes Yaqoob's work aligns with postcolonial ecocriticism where she delves deep into the concept of environmental activism and promotes active resistance against the notion of gradually accepting the degradation of the natural environment. Her readers are urged to transition from passive grief over environmental loss to active responsibility and ethical action.

Yaqoob's stories reflect the profound grief and loss one feels when the fear of detachment from a familiar place deepens and the person becomes nostalgic while remembering the past or the home left behind. Nostalgia is coupled with the feeling of powerlessness to go back or restore old memories as Yaqoob longs for the vibrant and lush peach orchard of the past and reminisces old memories, "Located to the orchard's left were green hills that, illuminated by the morning and afternoon sun, displayed the magnificent hues of the picaresque range" (Yaqoob 32). The author further positions the present deteriorating condition of nature through the state of the same orchard and expresses her deep sorrow i.e. "But the orchard is no longer there; I see a dark, old, ghastly house among the burned leaves and ashes of the

peach trees" (Yaqoob 34). Longing for a familiar place turned unfamiliar creates psychological unease and a sense of up-rootedness that is heightened by the feeling of an absence that looms over the materiality of contemporary world and overshadows a person's living condition.

When we refer to home as a familiar place, we do not consider it merely a living place but it becomes our identity as we are an integral part of that place and we belong there. In "The Other Universe" this sense of belonging echoes in Yaqoob's words, "We long for a place where real life happens" (Yaqoob 65). Our environment defines us and shapes our behaviors while we represent our environment as we are not isolated from the land or earth we live on. Earth nurtures us and by caring for the earth, and we are caring for ourselves (Charles & Cajete, 2020). Regarding solastalgia, Glenn Albretch's main concern is not the place where people are completely isolated by distance but the transformation of the places where they still live. The place-based distress these people feel from their powerlessness over environmental injustices that unfolded before them (Albretch 44) provoke a sense of anxiety. Yaqoob's lament reflects this anxiety and helplessness over a lost habitat that once was vibrant and bloomed with life and longs for a world rich with greenery and fresh air.

In the short story, "The Other Universe" she shows her exasperation and writes, "This world is infected with disease, hypocrisy, losses, and fears, which turn everything we desire into absurdity" (Yaqoob 68). This lament is not merely over the loss of the ethical order, it is also over the lost environment that is part of the very fabric of our being and cannot be isolated from our lives as "we ourselves are the environment" (Tom 234). The self-reflecting character in her stories is someone who is at home but feels melancholia and distress over the "climate change and toxicity that is affecting all of humanity" (Tom 323). The despair and the sense of futility humans feel is due to disconnection with the natural world which is eroding their mental wellbeing and disrupting humanity's collective sense of stability and purpose.

Industrial Invasion of Human Civilization, Ecological Loss and Echo of Grief

Yaqoob is conscious of the rapidly changing environmental conditions of Islamabad which are attributed to anthropocentrism and constantly reminds her readers that our place of living is not some place we occupy for a short specific time rather it is a

place where we are born, nurtured and eventually buried. We notice the changes in our surroundings, we can relate to the depletion we witness and we can communicate with the place as a conscious living and breathing entity with a past, present and future, with a consciousness, and a will towards life. This richness makes it home, and peace; nourishment for body, mind and spirit; heart's ease. (D Bird Rose 7). For Yaqoob, Islamabad is the home she lived in and with time saw how the familiar place she called home turned into unfamiliar. Yaqoob recalls the good old days and the whispers of nature.

"I can hear the steady flow of water from distant mountains, the whisper of evergreen trees, the rustle of leaves in the gentle breeze, and the profound silence that underpins everything. The vastness of the landscape fills the void in the heart, and the soul awakens and vibrates, beaming with joy" (Yaqoob 75).

By emphasizing the sensory and spiritual connectivity with the natural world, Yaqoob's work reflects a deep affiliation with nature. The sound of running water when coupled with the soft whispers of trees and leaves creates a melody that soothes the heart and heals the soul. Through her vivid imagery, she evokes a sense of ecological harmony where humans find profound joy in nature, as a source of emotional and existential restoration.

The ecological haven as a sanctuary of harmony is gradually turned into an unrecognizable, strange place that loses its natural vigor and life is extracted out of it to serve anthropocentric capitalist structures. This loss of liveliness arouses feelings of ecological grief and solastalgia as the narrator becomes aware of the disruption resulted in the form of urbanization that has deepened the human – nature divide and has left a void that remains unattended. "The journey from my home to the house of loss has been extremely painful" (Yaqoob 120). This pain and loss inflict psychological wounds that lead to alienation and grief.

The helplessness of being unable to restore the old environment deepens the existential and emplaced feelings of desolation and loss of solace (Tom 323). Physically the narrator remains in the native place, but emotionally and spiritually, feelings of displacement and dispossession within one's own home are strengthened. This breakdown of normal relationships between one's home and psychic identity creates a psychic alienation (Albretch 44). The perceived inability to put a halt to these deteriorating environmental conditions or reversing the

process induces a psychic pain. This mourning is not only for the loss but also the emotional paralysis and feelings of powerlessness to restore what is lost.

The cutting of trees and clearing of lands for corporate purposes is a concerning issue that leads to ecological loss and psychological distress. Glenn Albrecht observes that watching land clearing or building demolition... can be the cause of a profound distress manifested as an intense visceral pain and mental anguish (Albrecht 46). The violent eradication of indigenous flora and fauna to make space for luxurious housing societies, roads or markets in the name of urban development is internalized by nature-oriented inhabitants as a form of psychological injury. As the author says, "Sadness wanted me to return home and gather memories strewn there" (Yaqoob 121). The living spaces are a mark of individual identity, ecological memory and collective community for them and any alterations create a sense of powerlessness, dislocation and ecological grief that lead to solastalgic distress and environmental displacement. The anxiety one feels is not over the loss, but the inability to stop or reverse the process of development that engenders environmental degradation.

The emotional, psychological and physical impact of capitalocene finds articulation in Yaqoob's stories. A place of solace, comfort and familiarity is turned to an alien unrecognizable one and the city is losing its ecological identity while those residing in it fear their perceived uncertain future. Yaqoob's narratives articulate this distress over anticipation of environmental catastrophe resulting from capitalizing of natural resources. In her first story titled "*A Lament for the Peach Orchard*" she expresses her grief and devastation and writes, "Nothing has been as terrible and unbearable as seeing the burned orchard and the ghastly concrete structure built on its ashes." (Yaqoob 34). The concrete structure in place of the once lively and fresh green dwelling shows the destructive force that capitalist expansion holds. In the name of urbanization, the once vibrant ecosystem is turned into an uninhabitable place by replacing fertile land with lifeless development. Conservation efforts that are portrayed as saving the natural habitat also have an inherent agenda to serve capitalist purposes.

Donna Haraway draws upon Jason Moore's concept of "cheap nature" and warns about the impending peril of environmental destruction. Cheap nature according to Moore is the overexploitation of nature for capitalist production (160). Moore posits that sustaining extraction and production may not work for long because earth

resources have been depleted and drained to a point that they are on the verge of extermination. Yaqoob presents this depletion as a place burned and destroyed with no vitality or life, "The dry limbs of dead and gaunt-bitten trees wailed in the terrible winds" (Yaqoob 92). Through personification of trees as dead and their wailing limbs, Yaqoob calls for attention to the near future which is likely to be a poisoned and uninhabitable world permeated with pollution and toxicity. This theme reflects Haraway and Moore's critique of capitalocene as they raise concerns over the rapid degradation of the underlying ecological system that is undervalued.

Jane Bennet in her work "Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things" argues that all kind of bodies whether it be humans, things or natural entities all possess life, agency and power (Bennet 13). Yaqoob in her short story collection also parallels Bennet's idea that like all beings, natural entities have a life of their own. As she says, *"I want to hold them...feel their frosty dampness, and hear their tales of regeneration and rebirth myths. Mark me; you can hear it if you choose to"* (Yaqoob 57). *Just as human beings need to be taken care of, protected and given agency likewise the natural environment being a living entity requires such treatment. Bennet further discusses about the "knotted world of vibrant matter" that all beings live in relation to each other forming a web of connections (Bennet 13). It means that if one segment of the web gets damaged it directly affects the others.*

Similarly, Yaqoob echoes the idea that if we harm nature, we are eventually harming ourselves as we have an interdependent relation with nature. Bennet extends the discussion further by claiming that the concept of agency gets redefined and comes into a clear picture when the non-human entities are considered to be active agents having their own agency and power to shape lives rather than being mere objects constructed socially by the humans themselves (Bennet 21). Yaqoob voices her concerns regarding the environment that it needs to be protected and preserved and just like Bennet, she opposes the idea of human-centrism and advocates for the agency of the natural world.

In the agentic natural world of Bennet and Yaqoob, small natural entities like the worms also contribute a lot to the environment by augmenting fertility of soil. In her work Vibrant Matter Bennet talks about worms as the small agency of the lowly worm have a greater impact than the supposedly bigger agency of humans (Bennet 98). These worms aid humans and plants by eating away harmful bacteria and smaller insects but their intrinsic value is neither recognized nor valued. Similarly,

Yaqoob voices her deepest concerns about the natural components and contends that the smaller beings of the natural world are often neglected by the humans. In one of the stories titled as “A Moment of Insight” she illustrates that the balance of earth is achievable through interdependence of human and nonhuman beings. She documents that, *“Here, the interdependence of all life forms is so finely balanced that it weaves everything together. Everything in an ecosystem depends on every other living thing, from the tiniest of microbes to the biggest mammals”* (Yaqoob 105). While planning urbanization, the government policies and corporations take little notice of the tiny beings that reside within that specific habitat. It not only leads to the destruction of their natural habitats but also affects the lives of humans as their presence helps facilitate humans to live a healthy life in a number of ways of which we are unaware. By highlighting this neglect, Yaqoob engages in a kind of political activism where she illuminates that there needs to be an active struggle and practical initiatives regarding the preservation of the natural environment rather than just academic discourse.

Environmental Consciousness and Radical Call for Action

Yaqoob’s stories are not a passive lament or exasperation over depletion of resources, they are a radical call for action to save and sustain ecology. Yaqoob transcends human centered environmental activism and utilizes the literary medium for an entangled imagination of multispecies coexistence. She contests the binaries of life and death mirroring Haraway’s notion of compost-ism and portrays that sustainability can be achieved through inhabiting the “messy middle” of existence where humans are co-agents with animals, plants, water and other material objects. Compost-ism asks for re-imagination of survival not as an escape from nature but getting in healthy symbiotic relationship where nature is not subjugated rather becomes a place of co-becoming in a distorted but breathing living world. As a site of compost-ist reading, Yaqoob’s narrative reflects interspecies collaboration emphasizing that human survival is rooted in material reality and preservation of their surrounding environment. By dismantling fantasies of human autonomy, Yaqoob’s narrative invites readers to work for an ecological future with radical mutuality.

Yaqoob bridges the gap between grief and action through her compost-ist approach and highlights the urgency to come forth and take initiatives to save what is left of the natural resources. She recalls the old memories and relations that are nurtured

in a natural landscape under trees, on bank of flowing streams and in the wilderness with the chirping birds. In the text Yaqoob recalls the beauty of her home environment as, "Who can escape the magic of this forest?" (Yaqoob 62) The musical sounds heard in the forests and pleasant sensation evoked as result is preferred over the harsh and unpleasant sound of fast paced urban places. Through her profound and thought-provoking storytelling Yaqoob documents her love for nature and her home environment. She reminisces over a lost past and writes, "I thought back to the times we first sat there and imagined a world free of the industrial feats that humans have created, where verdant landscapes would be studded with thousands of flowers and the ephemeral melodies of birds would fill the air" (Yaqoob 31). Yaqoob's fear of ecological amnesia prompts her to recall the beauty of nature and remind her readers of a healthy and sustainable environment as a means of healing and restoration.

Attributed to urbanization, industrialization, modernization and "the myth of development" (Arundati Roy 5), there appears to be a growing disconnection between humans and their natural environment. Humans need to pay heed to this widening gap between nature and humans, and construct a bond that can mutually benefit both with a slow and sustainable use of natural resources. Yaqoob's stories echo feelings of soliphilia in order to bridge this gap and reconnect masses with the natural world. In one of the stories, she shows her concern about the contemporary lives disconnected from the natural world, "We live in city spaces built with concrete, lit with lead, warmed, and cooled with machines, as ghosts devoid of humanness inhaling poison in an ever-rushing life." (Yaqoob 63). Quest for development and embracing modern ideals has led to this disconnection where machines are like haunting ghosts that swarm and conquer our natural landscapes. Another notable quote from the text that exemplifies the same concern of the author is that: "We forget life back in the solid walls, the sky-high concrete structures, where carbon footprints poison our blood, breath, sight, and minds everywhere"(Yaqoob 63). Yaqoob draws attention of readers towards the slow erasure of nature and the natural elements from the contemporary life. The alarming phenomenon is the replacement of artificial with the natural and it is becoming ingrained into our senses to such an extent that we are eventually going to forget what natural seems, feels, smells and tastes like.

Yaqoob seeks to create a sense of urgency in her readers by rebuilding the lost connection to evoke the lost love for nature and the solidarity we need today to save

nature is evident in her work. The premise of her work is to convey a message of shared responsibility towards preserving nature as active participants through her narratives. Soliphilia is the political affiliation or solidarity needed among us all to be responsible for our place, bioregion, planet, and the unity of interrelated interests within it. Simply put, it is a kind of cavernous fondness and attachment to a region, and is not just mere likeness but is paired with a strong dedication to safeguard and conserve that particular place. In words of Chairman Goode; “the land eagerly wants the resurgence of traditions and the traditional practices” (Tom 322). This longing for land is the traditional ecological memory that is deeply rooted in sustaining its vigor. Through feelings of soliphilia, we can reconstruct the disrupted connection amongst humans and nature with the spirit of ethical and emotional commitment urging communities for a shared responsibility of restoration.

Most of the natural entities on the urban land have become contaminated, damaged and eventually depleted. The urbanized world has less to offer to the land; it is adding more to the misery of the earth rather than providing any kind of advantage. In “*A Lament for the Peach Orchard*”, Yaqoob highlights the invasion of natural world by human beings and records that, “The orchard where the once lively peach trees glowed is now covered with the ash of blossoms and burnt limbs of the trees.” (Yaqoob 35). Yaqoob calls attention to the seriousness of the issue of ecological devastation as she is deeply concerned for her hometown’s environment and desires its revival the way it was before the urbanization. Humans have a natural connection with the environment that gives them peace and solace and when they disconnect from it they become despondent and melancholic.

Yaqoob describes in her stories the condition of modern world in which human beings are stressed, over-occupied and despairing due to the lack of bonding with natural environment. The author’s yearning for an ecology of belonging is manifested in the story “The Other Universe” as she attempts to find ecological intimacy in the shadows of development and contends, “We long for a place where real life happens, where we can let go of the world’s burdens and demands on our souls” (Yaqoob 65). The author highlights the significance of the crucial presence of nature in human lives and puts forward the message that real solace and a true sense of peace can only be found in connection with nature.

Through her stories, Yaqoob is revisiting old times to revive the old bonds and reconstruct a healthy environment. By reliving the old times, Yaqoob intends to

rekindle that love for nature which can compel her readers to actively participate in movements and policies for a sustainable ecological future. In light of Yaqoob's activism, this study draws parallel between her radical call for saving the environment and Donna Haraway's compost-ist approach in her work "Staying with Trouble". Haraway departs from the narratives of mastery and progress that is central to capitalocene and stresses the commitment of humans to a more symbiotic engagement with the environment. Moore critiques capitalist exploitation of natural resources but fails to give an alternative. Haraway gives the solution that is reflected in Yaqoob's stories. Haraway's compostism is a way of moving beyond the passivity or paralysis and advocates for active engagement with nature as is portrayed in Yaqoob's fiction. Solastalgia in this sense does not limit individuals to psychological distress but compels them to extricate themselves from the grip of the anxious self and take initiatives to change what haunts them.

The ruins in Yaqoob's stories when analysed from Haraway's perspective of the compostism echo the commitment to "becoming with". Nature is always there for us, not to be controlled but to live with in harmony. The embodied resistance against capitalocene aligns with Yaqoob's narrative that highlights the dangers to our environment, the fear of destruction and the call for collective struggle to avoid future catastrophe. As Yaqoob records in her story "The Moment of Insight", "Lead me to the path of healing; together, we will construct a sanctuary for our healing and the healing of all others who have gone through this inner turmoil" (Yaqoob 105). The title itself is self-explanatory as Yaqoob posits that there is an urgent need of introspection and collective action to heal not only individual psychological health but also foster environment friendly practices that restore our relationship with the earth.

When our practices are informed by long term stewardship and environmental justice, the process of contemplation over ecological deterioration can prompt a process of regeneration and collective healing can be made possible. Albrecht argues that to defeat solastalgia and the fear of unsustainable practices, all of our emotional, intellectual and practical efforts must be redirected towards healing the rift that has occurred between ecosystem and human health (Albrecht 55). To restore the emotional and psychological bonds between people and their sense of place, soliphilia is the ultimate way as the love for nature with a political underpinning to help restore our sense of responsibility and negate solastalgia to revert the danger we fear to come. Albrecht calls it the love of the totality of our

place relationships, and our willingness to become politically responsible to protect nature and conserve natural resources (Albrecht 121). Yaqoob's stories give us an insight into the lived experiences of the people living in contemporary world as they are in "an age of solastalgia" (Albrecht, 2012). In a material-oriented world where nature is muted, their hope for a sustainable future is like a distant dream the realization of which is farfetched. The text puts it as, "In your world, the roads are too dark and winding, the dawns are pale, and the dark shadows obscure the bright moon" (Yaqoob 75). The physical landscape as well as the emotional inner self is shadowed by uncertainty, suffocation and desperation.

To overcome this grief, Yaqoob calls for "Soliphilia" as an ultimate answer that would redirect us to think and act in ways that benefit the nature and environment. A positive stance is taken to restore hope for reinstating one's self in a lost place and departing from the feelings of disorientation and erosion of place-based identities. The revival of natural ways of life and living is the only solution to the environmental crisis prevalent in the contemporary times. Grief induced by the environmental degradation is countered by ecological activism by placing a finger on the wound, finding its cause and treating it to be healed. Henceforth, we argue that the wound is environmental degradation, its root cause is capitalism, the medicine is soliphilia and the healing is symbiocene.

Conclusion: Symbiocene, Ecological Harmony and Human Well-being

Munazza Yaqoob's short story collection, "*A Lament for the Peach Orchard*", reconciles humans with their surrounding environment by poignantly retracing the old memories of green landscapes and soothing scenery. From an ecocritical lens, this paper explores Yaqoob's stories to highlight the narrator's ecological trauma and the nostalgic feelings over the loss of natural habitats. Yaqoob's lament in the stories and the title of the book is a symbolic representation of the lament of nature. The narrator feels psychological distress over decline in environment as a result of urbanization, pollution, industrialization and capitalist resource extraction. She embodies Albrecht's solastalgia through her mourning of the ruins in form of environmental degradation and dreads a future where reviving nature may be a far-fetched dream. This anticipation leads her to fear for environmental catastrophe that might await us in near future. This eco-anxiety prompts her to write about nature to cope with the existential grief over collapse of nature. The feeling of

anxiety in her work is not a passive lament, but a rational response to address the real-world issues.

Through her narrative, Yaqoob articulates the sense of alienation over an altered landscape that once felt like home but has now turned into some unfamiliar place. The forest, the trees, the birds, the flowing waters all is portrayed in an aesthetic way to evoke feelings of love for the nature. These emotions are not just abstract idealization of nature but material realities. Through her artistic articulations, she compels her readers to realize the coming dangers of losing one's home and rescue what is left of the ecology of that place. Albrecht termed this love for nature as soliphilia which can be observed in Yaqoob's narrative as a soliphilic text with its pronounced political commitment for ecological consciousness and preservation. Yaqoob's collection of short stories echoes what Donna Haraway and Jane Bennet envision about nature as a living vibrant entity that actively participates in shaping our existence rather than a passive background. Yaqoob's collection manifests that the natural world that surrounds us is a living presence capable of influencing human perception.

This study, therefore argues that Yaqoob's narrative plays a crucial role in fostering eco-consciousness by communicating the sufferings of nature. There is a transition from passive lament to active responsibility towards nature. The stories about nature tend to restore the lost connection between humans and nature. The spirits who mourn over ecological degradation are the ones who vow to revive nature and save their home environments. Yaqoob's stories encourage the readers to be in a symbiotic relationship with nature in opposition to capitalocene that exploits and subjugates nature as a resource for mass consumption rather than a living entity. This mutual relationship, the symbiocene, envisions a future where there is a harmonious coexistence between humans and the natural world. Yaqoob's fiction, henceforth, attempts to advocate for a reimagined future in the context of postcolonial ecology, raises ecological consciousness and calls for radical action.

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