

# Exploring the Confluence of Postcolonialism with Environment with Reference to Ramesh Gunesequera's *Reef* and Dhruv Bhatt's *Oceanside Blues*

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## **Abstract**

The rapidly changing climate has recently been brought to the forefront of international discussion. The ongoing threat of the death or displacement of millions of people has led ongoing discussions of how to best mitigate the effects of climate change. We build our future on the reminiscences of the past, and yet the threat of the climate calls into question the very idea of future. Indeed, our past points to colonialism and imperialism as the very factors that have brought about such rapid changes to our ecosystem. The complications of conservation and empire have always been an obstacle in reconciling the fields of postcolonialism and ecocriticism. This research article will focus on the urgency of identifying postcolonial ecocriticism as one of the major catalysts in pioneering the threats of global climate change. Moreover, it will showcase the significance of place as one of the issues in the confluence of two major theories. The relation between nature and culture is further discussed with attention paid to eco-materialism with reference to two novels: Ramesh Gunesequera's *Reef* and Dhruv Bhatt's *Oceanside Blues*.<sup>1</sup>

**Keywords:** Postcolonial, Ecocriticism, Eco-materialism, Nature, Culture.

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<sup>1</sup> Romesh Gunesequera. *Reef* (Haryana: Penguin Books, 2014); Dhruv Bhatt, *Oceanside Blues*, trans. Vinod Meghani (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2001).

## **Introduction**

The major threat to the present generation arises from the effects of global climate change, which threaten the lives of billions of people and has irreversible consequences for ecosystems across the globe. To study the effect of climate change in present scenarios there is a dire need to account for the effects of colonialism and imperialism. As Amitav Ghosh (2016) explains, “In accounts of the Anthropocene and of the present climate crisis, capitalism is very often the pivot on which the narrative turns...however, I believe that this narrative often overlooks an aspect of the Anthropocene that is of equal importance: empire and imperialism.”<sup>2</sup> It complicates matters that the planet is divided into sovereign nations, and territorialization plays a major role. Populations are heavily dependent on natural resources and often invade other countries in order to gain more. Our generation is witness to the deterritorialization of borders in order to have economic gains over the natural resources be it land or sea.

Global climate change was fostered and developed amidst the thriving history of colonization that changed the economic, social and racial conditions of the times. Dating back to the use of coal from the decades to the petro-based resources, the world still lingers on the use of fossil fuels, which heavily contributes and shapes imperialism with the over-loomng threat of climate change. Seeking from the blunders and the bleakness of the past, this article will focus on the complications of conservation and empire which have always posed an obstruction to the reconciliation of the two disparate fields of postcolonialism and ecocriticism. The scholarship on which this research article builds itself includes works by Rob Nixon, Depesh Chakrabarty, Elizabeth Deloughrey, and George B. Handley. It will argue that colonisation affects the subjugated ‘other’ and the non-human other in that territory. Empires exert dominance over the non-other on the geography, flora, and fauna of the epistemological land.

## **Comparing Postcolonialism and Ecocriticism**

There has been a significant contribution in bridging the gap between two disparate fields of ecocriticism and postcolonialism, much of which will be considered in this section. Deloughrey and Handley propounded a sustained dialogue between these two fields and stated several reasons for their disparity and the necessity for merging them together. They argued that “an

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<sup>2</sup> Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

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ecological frame is vital to understanding how geography has been and still is radically altered by colonialism.”<sup>3</sup> As postcolonialists are adept at deconstructing the binaries of the hierarchy, they provide an upper hand to the sustainability and well-being of the physical world. Deloughrey and Handley state, “the field of postcolonial studies has been engaged with questions of agency and representation of the non-speaking or subaltern subject.”<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, in a chapter entitled “Postcolonial Studies and Beyond”, Nixon suggests four reasons for the long span of unanimously normative silences in linking postcolonial and environmental literary studies.<sup>5</sup> These outline the contradictory approaches taken by each field. Firstly, postcolonialism presents hybridity and cultural exchange as a priority, whereas ecocriticism has historically showcased the virgin wilderness and the ‘uncorrupted’ green places.<sup>6</sup> Secondly, postcolonialism concerns itself with material factors such as displacement, mobility and diaspora; ecocriticism focuses on more metaphysical aspects, such as localities and “sense of place”.<sup>7</sup> Thirdly, cosmopolitan and transnational structures are likely to be favoured by post colonialists, whereas the concept of “spiritualized and naturalized national frame” is favoured by ecocriticism.<sup>8</sup> Lastly, postcolonial studies deal with the “marginalized past history from below and border history”, whereas ecocriticism is “subordinated to the pursuits of timeless, solitary moments of communion with nature.”<sup>9</sup> Pablo Mukherjee has emphasized the multiplex dependencies among social, historical, cultural and environmental factors, accentuating the link between space and culture.

Ecocriticism began to outgrow in the English tradition with the works of Jonathan Bate investing in pastoral tradition. Moreover, it materialized in the 1990s under the patronage of the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) in the United States. Cheryll Glotfelty, alongside

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<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George B. Handley, ‘Introduction: Toward an Aesthetics of the Earth’, in *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment*, eds Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George B. Handley (London: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 3-39.

<sup>4</sup> Deloughrey and Handley, ‘Introduction’, pp. 24-25.

<sup>5</sup> Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2011), p. 235.

<sup>6</sup> Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, p. 235.

<sup>7</sup> Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, p. 235.

<sup>8</sup> Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, p. 235.

<sup>9</sup> Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, p. 235.

other theorists, has advocated for a movement that aligns more with major ecological motives. She explains that “despite the broad scope of enquiry and disparate levels of sophistication, all ecological criticism shared the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world.”<sup>10</sup> Landscape and nature provide a link between literature and environment rather than acting as mere metaphors in texts. Eventually, ecocriticism diminishes the certainty that “everything is socially and linguistically constructed.”<sup>11</sup> Certainly, nature cannot be neglected, further posing questions regarding the relationship between culture and environment, unveiling the space beyond language. Arne Naess argues that “One drawback with these reformations is that they make it easy to continue thinking of two completely separable, real entities, a self and place, joined by an external relation.”<sup>12</sup> Moreover, Glotfelty emphasises the physical connection to the world, suggesting the probability of neglecting language so as to bring out nature as it is. However, in this approach, one must consider that language is inherently limiting, and therefore only allows subjects such as nature to be discussed in one way. Kate Soper’s *Nature* presents a multiplicity of meanings that have progressed throughout the past, and subsequently demonstrates that the way we think of nature can be changed by how we *talk* about nature.<sup>13</sup> Thus, ecocriticism has faced the challenge of untangling the language to decipher the world it represents. We cannot entirely efface the imprints of the world we represent as language mediates between the world and its representation.

In a broader perspective, there is no separation of the world and our representation. Humans are part of the world; or to be more accurate, humans constitute the whole being of a world. As Bill Devall insists, “we can make no firm ontological divide in the field of existence: That there is no bifurcation in reality between the human and the non-human realms.”<sup>14</sup> While ecocriticism perpetrates placing the environment in literary texts, other environmental researchers place deep ecology as a more nuanced philosophical approach connecting humans and non-humans in an ecosphere.

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<sup>10</sup> Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), p. xix.

<sup>11</sup> Peter Barry, *Beginning Theory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), p. 243.

<sup>12</sup> Arne Naess ‘Self-Realization: An Ecological Approach to Being in the World’, in *The Deep Ecology Movement*, eds Alan Drengson and Yuichi Inoue (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 1995), pp. 13-30.

<sup>13</sup> Kate Soper, *What is Nature?* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).

<sup>14</sup> Bill Devall, *Deep Ecology* (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith Books, 2007).

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Furthermore, Nixon argues that emphasising the escalating ecological crisis in the form of industrialization and depletion of resources places non-human relief and humans as the agents of destruction. Therefore, it is important to interrogate Anthropocentrism and its role in the environmental crisis. Moreover, postcolonial studies attempt to provide an insight into ruinous human actions, particularly of the colonised human and non-human others. The environmental crisis affects everyone, but particularly those who live in the global south and suffer from the loss of their land due to forced migration or sudden climate change that eventually causes droughts, famines or floods. The relentless misappropriation and misuse of resources not only disrupts the environment, but also the communities that are dependent on the particular land. As Nixon states, “the environmentalism of the poor is frequently catalyzed by resource imperialism inflicted on the global south to maintain the unsustainable consumer appetites of rich country citizens.”<sup>15</sup> Natural resources have always been a key interest to empires. Nations have always prioritised resources over environmental stability; these policies overwhelmingly affect Indigenous peoples. Ramchandra Guha specifically identifies Project Tiger in South Asia, which “contributed to the displacement of poor communities who happened to live in the targeted conservation wilderness areas.”<sup>16</sup> Intrusions into ecosystems cause hostile disturbances with conservationist logic that are considered to be ecologically patronizing colonialism. Ramachandra Guha states, “such interventions virtually reshaped the societies into whose habitat they intruded.”<sup>17</sup>

The notion of ‘place’ is a site of confluence between postcolonialism and ecocriticism. The term has epistemological and ontological underpinnings. Tom Lynch, Cheryll Glotfelty and Karla Armbruster in *Introduction to the Bioregional Imagination* discuss the building of identities within local places “by foregrounding natural factors as a way to envision place, bioregionalism proposes that human identity may be constituted by our residence in a larger community of natural beings,”<sup>18</sup> Therefore, to be precise, human identity is created within a place it inhabits. Furthermore, “the more we know a place intimately, the more we can increase our

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<sup>15</sup> Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, *passim*.

<sup>16</sup> Deloughrey and Handley, ‘Introduction’, pp. 24-25.

<sup>17</sup> Ramachandra Guha, *Social Ecology* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994).

<sup>18</sup> Tom Lynch, Cheryll Glotfelty, and Karla Armbruster, *The Bioregional Imagination: Literature, Ecology, and Place* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012), p. 4.

identification with.”<sup>19</sup> Lawrence Buell provides a slightly different approach towards a ‘place’ in the field of ecocriticism by emphasizing the difference between space and place. Space can be described as an abstract concept whereas place reflects meaning and emotional attachment with the land. Human desires are connected with the place and not with an empty space; humans thus develop deep attachments to their environments.

Despite this affinity, there are certainly many scenarios where boundaries that demarcate spaces respond more to administrative than ecological factors. One such example of this is the British government’s separation of Pakistan and India without any consideration of the loss of habitat and lives of people found in those regions. Hartshorne proclaims that “new boundary lines are disruptive to local associations through their nature as a tariff wall.”<sup>20</sup> The 1951 Indian census shows that millions of Muslims and Hindus crossed the borders immediately after the partition. In totality, such metamorphization of geography is linked to “the myth of empty lands.”<sup>21</sup> This example “display[s] a striking aspect of colonial cartography: empire generates Cartesian spaces that favour exploitation of resources and peoples.”<sup>22</sup> Empires dwell upon homogenizing expansion and annexing spaces by neglecting the time and place boundaries. While postcolonialism studies the formerly colonized cultures and the impact, ecocriticism focuses on the significance of the place. A critical discourse can be formed with the confluence of both history and place of a specific bioregion, viable to construct a postcolonial ecology. The possible confluence can be witnessed in the writings of Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of The Earth*, where he asserts that “For a colonized people the most essential value, because the most concrete, is first and foremost the land: the land which will bring them bread and above all dignity.”<sup>23</sup>

Furthermore, Nixon defines ‘Anthropocene’ as a concept of slow violence by stating that it is “a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all.”<sup>24</sup> This

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<sup>19</sup> Bill Devall, ‘The Ecological Self’, in *The Deep Ecology Movement*, eds Alan Drengson and Yuichi Inoue (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 1995), pp. 101-123.

<sup>20</sup> Richard Hartshorne, ‘The Nature of Geography’, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, vol. 29, no. 3 (September 1939).

<sup>21</sup> Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, p. 236.

<sup>22</sup> Lawrence Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), p. 65.

<sup>23</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1968), p. 9.

<sup>24</sup> Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, p. 2.

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reflects the present situation of climate change arises due to “thawing cryosphere, toxic drift, biomagnification, deforestation, the radioactive aftermaths of wars, acidifying oceans, and a host of other slowly unfolding environmental catastrophes.”<sup>25</sup> He further showcases the difference between slow violence and other forms of violence by asserting that it “is neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales.”<sup>26</sup> To analyse the impact of climate change in present scenarios, Philippe Squarzoni presents a case study of “300,000 deaths according to the U.N., 300,000 people in the Horn of Africa, in Bangladesh, India, Vietnam.”<sup>27</sup> These deaths have occurred due to climate-related disasters such as floods and droughts. Victims of climate change are victims of slow violence; they are the metaphorical frogs in boiling water. Nixon continues, “it is those people lacking resources who are the principal casualties of slow violence. Their unseen poverty is compounded by the invisibility of the slow violence that permeates so many of their lives.”<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, Albert Memmi asserts, “Colonization weakens the colonized and that all those weaknesses contribute to one another. Non-industrialization and the absence of technical development in the country lead to a slow economic collapse of the colonized.”<sup>29</sup>

Further, Rebecca Solnit draws attention towards the patronizing attitude the humans portray through the natural world. Solnit points out that “Saving is the wrong word...we never did save the whales, though we might’ve prevented them from becoming extinct. We will have to continue to prevent that as long as it continues not to be extinct.”<sup>30</sup> Ecocriticism has some of its aims and objectives concerning the problems of the natural environment. One who wants to gain an insight into the theory of ecocriticism, an individual will have to study it with cultural theory, psychology, philosophy, sociology. Thus, ecocriticism is a literary and critical tool to protect nature. As Robert Kern says,

Ecocriticism, ultimately a form of environment advocacy, is primarily

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<sup>25</sup> Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, p. 2.

<sup>26</sup> Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, p. 2.

<sup>27</sup> Philippe Squarzoni, *Climate Changed: A Personal Journey through the Science* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2014), pp. 250-251.

<sup>28</sup> Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, p. 4.

<sup>29</sup> Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (Boston: Beacon, 1991), p. 115.

<sup>30</sup> Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism: The New Critical Idiom* (New York: Routledge, 2012), p. 211.

a critical and literary tool, a kind of reading designed to expose and facilitate analysis of a text's orientation both to the world in which it takes shape, along with the conditions and context that affect that orientation, whatever it might be.<sup>31</sup>

Raymond Williams deconstructs the binaries of culture and nature by demonstrating that the relationship between them is hierarchical, with production and capital privileged over the environment. Here, livelihood and lifestyle are considered to be both cultural *and* natural. He continues,

What is now known as the ecological argument should not be reduced to its important minor forms; the dangerously rising scale of industrial and chemical pollution; the destruction of some natural habitats and species... Against this, the ecological argument has shown, in case after case, and then as a different way of seeing the whole.<sup>32</sup>

Homi Bhabha defines postcolonialism as the “study of the way in which cultures recognize themselves through the projection of others”.<sup>33</sup> This reflects the radical alterity of the singular cultures and identities instead of projecting different cultures against each other. Guha debates that by foregrounding a biocentric view, “deep ecology [indicates] a lack of concern with inequalities within human society.”<sup>34</sup> He elucidates that the discrepancy created between anthropocentrism and biocentrism yields an ahistorical representation of nonhuman nature. The protection of wild animals by making and establishing wildlife sanctuaries at the cost of indigenous people's lives and shelter reflects the idea that animals are more important than people or poor people. Postcolonial ecocritics have rightly showcased the status and rights of man. Charles Darwin takes a stand to “let the conjectures run wild” so that “animals, our fellow brethren in pain, diseases, death, suffering and famine... may partake of our origin in one common ancestor – we may all be melted together.”<sup>35</sup>

Arne Naess nonetheless contends that “close cooperation between supporters of the Deep Ecology movement and ecologically concerned

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<sup>31</sup> Robert Kern, ‘Ecocriticism: What It Is Good For?’, in *The ISLE Reader: Ecocriticism, 1993-2003*, eds Michael P. Branch and Scott Slovic (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003), pp. 258-281.

<sup>32</sup> Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 1959), p. 212.

<sup>33</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, ‘The World and the Home’, *Social Text*, vols 31-32 (1992), pp. 143-53.

<sup>34</sup> Ramachandra Guha, ‘Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation: A Third World Critique’, *Environmental Ethics*, vol. 11, no. 1 (Spring 1989), pp. 71-83.

<sup>35</sup> Francis Darwin (ed.), *The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin, including an autobiographical chapter* (New York: Basic Books, 1959), p. 368.

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people in the poor countries requires that the latter trust the former's concern for the economic progress of the poor."<sup>36</sup> This authoritarian call to 'trust us' stands muffled not only because it emulates the power structures of colonial history (and modernization theory), but because it also neglects the constant environmental exploitation of postcolonial regions.

Having established the often-contentious relationship between ecocriticism and postcolonial thought, we will now consider how these themes are addressed in Ramesh Gunsekera's *Reef* and Dhruv Bhatt's *Oceanside Blues*.

### ***Reef and Oceanside Blues***

The above discussion of how best to academically address the climate crisis fundamentally draws on the question of the relationship between humans and the environment. Since the industrial revolution, humans have increasingly treated nature not as an aspect of the earth, but rather as a commodity for their profits and needs. This idea of eco-materialism is highly relevant to both Ramesh Gunsekera's *Reef* and Dhruv Bhatt's *Oceanside Blues*. The effect of imperialism can be seen relatively in the physical, social, and economic backdrops of the two novels. Specifically, Gunsekera's *Reef* addresses the issue of depleting marine ecology with the decline of the Sri Lankan nation.

This novel provides a major insight into the perilous human condition against the milieu of civil war within Sri Lanka. The political situation causes long-standing conflict and extends the continuing ramifications of colonialism in the region. The descendants of Indo-Aryan people formed a large majority in the nation known as Sinhalese, who follows Buddhist religion and speaks the Sinhalese language while other people belong to the Tamil community who after consecutive interventions of Portuguese, British, and Dutch colonization, were merged together in a colony called Ceylon in 1815. In 1972, the nation became known as Sri Lanka. C. R. de Silva explains the situation by asserting that "there are four major issues that have fueled conflicts between Sinhalese and Sri Lankan Tamils – language and employment, regional autonomy, state-sponsored settlement of colonists and access to higher education."<sup>37</sup> Further, K. M. de Silva explains the situation of the conflict:

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<sup>36</sup> Arne Naess, 'The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement: A Summary', *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy and the Social Sciences*, vol. 16, no. 1-4 (1973), pp. 95-100.

<sup>37</sup> R. Chandra De Silva, *Sri Lanka. A History* (London: Sangam Books, 1987), p. 238.

In Sinhalese, the words for nation, race and people are practically synonymous and a multi-racial or multi-communal nation or state is incomprehensible to the popular mind. The emphasis on the sense of uniqueness of the Sinhalese past, and the focus on Sri Lanka as the land of the Sinhalese and the country in which Buddhism stood forth in its purest form, carried an emotional appeal compared with which a multi-racial polity was a meaningless abstraction. [...] The fact is that the Sinhalese, although an overwhelming majority of the population of the island, nevertheless have a minority complex vis-à-vis the Tamils. They feel encircled by the present day Tamilnadu and Sri Lanka.<sup>38</sup>

The relativity of the Anthropocene can be traced in the name itself. Although the act of extinction has been showcased as the symbolic interpretation of political upheavals, it can also be perceived as the major Anthropocene activity as Ghosh identify it with the “magnitude and interconnectedness”<sup>39</sup> of global warming.

The novel opens in 1962, where Triton becomes a servant to Salgado, a marine biologist who is enthralled by “the legions under the sea[...], the cycle of light, plankton, coral and limestone – the yield of bleach to ocean.”<sup>40</sup> In Ceylon in 1965, Salgado hesitatingly accepted the government-funded proposal to study the island’s “disappearing” reefs.<sup>41</sup> The probable reasons for the decline of coral reefs could be coral mining, blast fishing or tourism, but Salgado has insufficient data to draw some resolute conclusions. Later his funding was stopped due to various agricultural schemes. Although his project reaches “its zenith” after he migrated to England with Triton. The hypothesis he aimed for in his research failed due to a lack of data where he states that “You see, this polyp is really very delicate. It has survived aeons, but even a small change in the immediate environment – even *su* [piss] if you pee on the reef – could kill it. And if the structure is destroyed, the sea will rush in.”<sup>42</sup> The phenomenon that Salgado discovered is known as mass coral bleaching lately. It is a process that occurs due to change in water temperature or salinity which harms the algae who provides food and energy to the polyps which metamorphose them from colourful shells to white and eventually decayed forever.

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<sup>38</sup> M. Kingsley De Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka* (London: Hurst, 1981), pp. 512-513.

<sup>39</sup> Vincent Suhasini, ‘An Eco-Critical Analysis of Climate Change and the Unthinkable in Amitav Ghosh’s Fiction and Non-Fiction’, *Humanities*, vol. 7, no. 2 (2018), p. 59.

<sup>40</sup> Gunsekera, *Reef*, p. 34.

<sup>41</sup> Gunsekera, *Reef*, p. 55.

<sup>42</sup> Gunsekera, *Reef*, p. 58.

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In reality, full-fledged research on mass bleaching was discovered a decade after Salgado did his research. In 1992, U.N. Earth Summit proposed certain protocols and conventions like International Coral Reef Initiative (1994), the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network (1996), and the International Year of the Reef (1997) to provide awareness in the world. In 1998, the largest mass bleaching occurred due to the El Nino event affecting 16 percent of the world's reefs including the Indian Ocean. Further, the damage was being done in the 2004 tsunami affecting the loss of flora, fauna and human lives.

In the novel itself, nobody takes interest in the decaying polyps; the government and the opposition party are more inclined toward the power games. "Meanwhile a nationwide concern for inland seas grows as politicians the spurious visions of ancient kings. All our engineers, trained in London and New England, suddenly saw great advantages in reviving the traditional skills of irrigation."<sup>43</sup> This reflects that engineers trained in western countries are using their knowledge to exploit the resources of their land and extract benefits. Hence, imperialism is practiced through the shift in roles that paves the way to the neocolonial aspects. Moreover, a spark of revolt can be seen in the speech of Wijetunga, who is an assistant to Mr Salgado, as he states, "Tourists? These people all think tourists will be our salvation. All they see is pockets full of foreign money... they will ruin us... our country needs to be cleansed radically... we have to destroy in order to create... like the sea. Whatever it destroys, it uses to grow something better."<sup>44</sup>

Thus, it can be concluded that Salgado regrets not doing anything to combat the decay of the coral reefs. Additionally, the welfare proposals which are introduced as a part of the revolt use gunshots and bombing that worsen the condition of corals. All of nature is thus under threat, including humans. Salgado reflects, "the earth has spun with its real stars under a beautiful blue robe ever since the beginning of time. Now as the coral disappears there will be nothing but sea and we will all return to it."<sup>45</sup>

Another text that shows resistance against Anthropocene activities and depicts the human-nature balance is Bhatt's *Oceanside Blues*. The novel is written in Gujarati language and set in Saurashtra, a coastal region in Gujarat where an engineer has been allocated the task of surveying the land and

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<sup>43</sup> Gunesekera, *Reef*, p. 119.

<sup>44</sup> Gunesekera, *Reef*, p. 111.

<sup>45</sup> Gunesekera, *Reef*, p. 172.

passing the report to the authorities to establish a chemical factory. The region was occupied by tribal people. The novel explores how the narrator changes his mindset following experiences with both the natural environment and the Indigenous people who inhabit the land. The novel also considers how nature is the sole element of survival and how it helps with the impact of continual changes in the climate. Central to the novel is the depiction of humans living sustainably with the land. This is clear in the protagonist's experience visiting Valbai's Vadi place, a small farm with a well. He is shocked by their hospitality, as no one in his neighbourhood talked to one another. Further, when he reached the estate bungalow he was asked not to go "upstairs with your shoes on" as rainwater is collected there for the upcoming year.<sup>46</sup>

Another instance of this occurs in his meeting with Noorbhai, a forest officer, who tells him about the lush jungle and birds which are now replaced by the brazen lands and few 'babul' trees. Another character that highlights the importance of the man-nature relationship is Bengali Baba, who argues that writing the report and changing the landscape to the industrialized setup will ruin the ecosystem, and that the protagonist will be solely responsible. Baba approaches human-nature relations in an esoteric manner. Earth, he explains, was born like a ball of fire; it took millions of years to cool it down, and through certain reactions water, seaweed and plants were born. Eventually these perished, but they were quickly replaced by new life. Baba emphasises this as the natural way of things. These events are highly reflective of reality. Nature has perpetually been treated as a commodity, with Greg Garrard explaining that the ascent of capitalism has turned nature into an entity of market assets with goods and resources without having any moral constraints on it.<sup>47</sup> Living in nature's proximity allows the protagonist to awaken his soul and contemplate that "Beyond doubt, there exists in this universe a secret code by which the animate and the inanimate are able to interact."<sup>48</sup>

Dhruv Bhatt's *Oceanside Blues* provides insight about nature as a healing, affecting the emotion and psyche of the human being who inhabit it. He explains, "I had always observed that those who lived in close proximity of nature inherited its essence – simplicity, candor, fortitude and openness."<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Bhatt, *Oceanside Blues*, p. 23.

<sup>47</sup> Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, p. 69.

<sup>48</sup> Bhatt, *Oceanside Blues*, p. 183.

<sup>49</sup> Bhatt, *Oceanside Blues*, p. 157.

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The text also gives a reflection on how dangerous the consequences of nature could be if not treated properly in the form of natural catastrophes. It also showcases the importance of animals with an incident of not killing a scorpion in the novel as they consider that every creature has the right to live and has senses to protect themselves in the harshest of environments. The mindset of the people needs to be changed as the novel tries to showcase that humans are one of the beings in the chain of survival and not the inventors of nature. It also advocates how nature should be treated and every species has its individual role to play in the survival of mankind.

### **Conclusion**

Postcolonial nations and ideologies have immensely suffered in the name of conservation. Ecocriticism while addressing the concept of slow violence showcases the damaging human interaction with the environment and seemingly embarks on the path of imperialism. By acknowledging the confluence and critical analysis of postcolonial ecocriticism, it can be verified that it can make a huge impact within humanities to prognosticate and bring change to the world. The close reading of texts such as *Reef* and *Oceanside Blues* with the eco-materialistic aspects within postcolonial ecocriticism assists in generating an environmental cognizance and calling attention to the neocolonial attitude in the present scenarios by applying new patterns of commitment with cultural forms and nudging every possible obstruction that cultivates the ongoing modes of being in the world.