



JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES DEVELOPMENT

www.jssd.org.pk



MORAL ECOLOGY AND SYMBOLIC NATURE: AN ECOCRITICAL STUDY OF *RAJA GIDH*

Laraib Asif¹ & Rahat Bashir²

¹MPhil Scholar, Department of English and Literary Studies, University of Management and Technology,

Email: s2026310003@umt.edu.pk

²Assistant Professor, Department of English and Literary Studies, University of Management and Technology,

Email: rahatbashir@umt.edu.pk

KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Ecocriticism, Moral Ecology, Raja Gidh, Symbolic Nature, Vulture, Kafoor Tree, Environmental Ethics	This study examines moral ecology and symbolic nature in Bano Qudsia's <i>Raja Gidh</i> (1981) from an ecocritical perspective. It explores the relationship between human morality and the natural world by focusing on two central natural symbols in the novel: the vulture (gidh) and the kafoor tree. The study employs a qualitative interpretive method based on close textual analysis and draws upon the theoretical perspectives of Cheryll Glotfelty, Rob Nixon, and Holmes Rolston III. These frameworks help explain how nature in the novel functions not merely as a passive background but as an active moral presence that reflects, responds to, and judges human behavior. The analysis argues that the vulture and the kafoor tree operate as two interconnected elements of a moral ecosystem. The vulture represents the consequences of human wrongdoing, greed, moral corruption, and the accumulation of haram, while the kafoor tree symbolizes purity, warning, balance, and the possibility of moral restoration. The study also considers the symbolic significance of Qayyum's name in relation to balance, continuity, and sustainability. Through these symbolic structures, <i>Raja Gidh</i> connects moral decline with ecological disorder and presents human greed as a force that disrupts both social and natural balance. Previous scholarship on <i>Raja Gidh</i> has largely focused on religious, psychological, cultural, and social interpretations, while its ecological dimensions have received comparatively limited attention. This study addresses that gap by interpreting the novel through moral ecology and environmental ethics. The findings suggest that Bano Qudsia presents nature as an active participant in the moral universe of the novel rather than as decorative scenery. The study further argues that the environmental concerns expressed in <i>Raja Gidh</i> can be read in relation to Sustainable Development Goals 13 and 15, particularly through its warning that moral corruption, excessive consumption, and human greed can lead to environmental destruction. In this sense, the novel contributes to South Asian Urdu environmental literary criticism by linking ethical responsibility with ecological consciousness.
ARTICLE HISTORY	
Date of Submission: 15-08-2026 Date of Acceptance: 16-09-2026 Date of Publication: 22-09-2026	
	
	2026 Journal of Social Sciences Development
Corresponding Author	Laraib Asif
Email:	s2026310003@umt.edu.pk
DOI	https://doi.org/10.59075/jssd.v5i7.301
Volume/Issue	5(7), 2026, 360-376

Introduction

Moral ecology is a theory that states the well-being of the natural world and the morality of humans are complicatedly interlinked. Any opening of ethical conduct on the part of humans. It whether spiritual, social, or ecological. It effects the rest of the non-human realm. In his writings on environmental ethics, Holmes Rolston III, an important thinker and voice behind environmental ethics. He knows as "Father of Environmental Ethics". He suggests that the nature has its own value separate from the human value system. In his book "Environmental Ethics: Duties to and Values in the Natural World" published in 1988. The author Holmes Rolston III mentions that environment possesses essential value that is independent of any human interests. He advocates for a non-anthropocentric approach to ethics, emphasizing the moral duty of humans towards environment and life forms. According to Rolston, basic value means having obligations. Obligations to the individuals of animals and plants generated in nature as loci of basic values. This ethical theory where nature is not meant to be a resource for exploitation by humans but a living moral community. It is the basis of this study's concept of moral ecology. Moral ecology describes the connection of values, beliefs, social norms and environmental influences that shape human ethical behavior. It is not about individual choice. It is about intersection of culture, social and ecological surroundings. This term was highly popularized by the *New York Times* journalist. David Brooks popularized the concept of moral ecology, which emphasizes that moral behavior develops within communities, relationships, and social institutions. This idea highlights how our ethical values and actions are shaped by the social environments we engage with (Brooks). According to Christopher J. Freiman, moral ecology is understood as the network of institutions, practices, and environments that encourage or discourage moral conduct (Freiman 349). This definition underscores how various social and structural elements shape moral behavior. It's meant moral ecology built by society, culture and environment. The title "The Goodwill Towards Nature" shows signifies importance of nature. It explores through nature good thing happens. Likewise, sociological approaches also describe moral ecology as an active system. It means moral ecology effect on socially of individual. It is basically introducing by French sociologist Emile Durkheim in late 19th and 20 centuries. Durkheim argues that morality is rooted in society and shaped by collective norms, institutions, and social practices (Durkheim). This view aligns with the concept of moral ecology, which sees ethical behavior as a product of the social environment rather than just individual choice. Accordingly, family, culture, religion, and social structures together form a moral ecosystem that influences human conduct. The main question about sociologists on morality in society "Why does *this specific society* believe this is right or wrong, and how does that belief affect their behavior?". While philosophy and ethics focus on identifying universal principles of right and wrong, the sociology of morality examines how particular societies construct moral values and how these values influence human behavior. Instead of abstract ethical truths, sociologists study the social institutions, cultural norms, and collective beliefs that shape people's understanding of morality and guide their actions in everyday life (Durkheim). This view holds that human acts do affect society as well as the larger ecological order. For literary study, moral ecology is an important notion which provides an opportunity to understand how stories have been connecting morality with the nature. *Raja Gidh* by Bano Qudsia is an example of a story

which presents a moral ecological system whereby human greediness and unlawful acts along with moral poverty have disrupted the balance between man and nature.

The relationship between human morality and the natural environment has long been subject of examination. Yet, its literary dimensions which are still underexplored within South Asian Urdu fictional tradition. The initial lines of Bano Qudsia's novel:

"It was an October day... the kind of day when white clouds appear in the sky, large and scattered. The air was fresh and cool. The entire day seemed bright and clear, with sunlight filtering through the white clouds. The warmth lingered, but the crispness of early winter could already be felt (Qudsia)."

These starting lines shows how freshness of nature impact on human mind. Here, White clouds refers to something pure and untouched. This study examines Bano Qudsia's seminal novel *Raja Gidh* (1981) through the intersecting lenses of ecocriticism, moral ecology, and environmental ethics. Its arguing that the novel establishes one of the most sophisticated literary articulations of the relationship between human moral decline and ecological disorder in twentieth-century Urdu literature. By reading *Raja Gidh* as a text in which nature functions not as a passive backdrop but as an active moral witness, this study contributes to the growing body of scholarship that situates non-Western literary traditions within global Eco-critical discourse.

The theoretical framework of this work offered by ecocriticism. Literary analysis could be done to understand how literature works in terms of encoding, constructing, and critiquing the relationship between humans and nature. Ecocriticism can be defined as the study of the connection between literature and physical environment, as stated by Cheryll Glotfelty, the founder of the field (Glotfelty). Its claims that texts play an active role in the cultural construction and, more importantly, destruction of ecosystems, denying nature the status of mere background for human activity. Ecocriticism in which Cheryll Glotfelty defines as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (Glotfelty). This is in accordance with some of the major ideas of Lawrence Buell. The first requirement of a true environmental book, as claimed by Buell, is that there should be the presence of non-human environment in it (Buell). It serves as the primary analytical tool used in this research. Ecocriticism highlights the point that literature is not produced in isolation from the physical environment but is always a product of that environment. On the other side, Lawrence Buell (1995), who coins the phrase "environmental imagination," suggests that literature has the capacity to create morally charged natural worlds where the environment has moral agency, symbolism, and witness to human behavior. In *Raja Gidh*, nature functions not merely as scenery but as an active ecological presence, reflecting Buell's argument that the nonhuman environment must be portrayed as "more than a framing device in authentic environmental literature. This approach emphasizes nature's integral role in the narrative's moral and ecological dynamics (Buell). The environmental imagination used by Bano Qudsia is evident in her novel *Raja Gidh*. The natural symbols used by the author. Its symbols vulture (gidh) and camphor tree (kafoor). They are participants in the moral world of the novel. Throughout this research vulture and kafoor tree plays an important part in

this research paper. There are two natural symbols used here, the camphor tree (kafoor ka darakht) and the vulture (gidh). In Lawrence Garden, Lahore, Qudisia successfully creates the setting where a vulture comes to perch under the shade of a camphor tree, waiting for an opportunity to feast on the morally dead soul. The camphor tree has a lot of cultural significance because the use of wood and fragrance of this tree are associated with death rituals within the Islamic culture of South Asia. In this way, the camphor tree is a very good signifier and symbolizes spiritual decay. On the other hand, the vulture stands for nature's response to man's moral decadence. The use of both these symbols the vulture symbolizing ecological justice and the kafoor tree symbolizing forewarning makes up what this study refers to as two facets of the same moral ecosystem. The ecological symbolisms are also enhanced through the names of the novel's protagonist Qayyum whose name is taken from the Arabic phrase al-Qayyum, meaning the self-sustaining and the maintainer of balance.

The study uses qualitative analysis and is based on the theories of ecocriticism put forth by Cheryll Glotfelty, Lawrence Buell, Rob Nixon, and Holmes Rolston III. The link between human morality and the environment is one of the central problems in Bano Qudisia's *Raja Gidh*. In this book, there is a comprehensive discussion about the destructive trends of humans and their impact on the environment and the society. Through his notion of slow violence, which refers to violence that happens gradually and quietly for generations on end. It means is an expansion of this concept, Rob Nixon introduces more dimensions to slow violence. According to Nixon, Slow violence is defined as violence that happens gradually and silently which causing ecology corruption and increasing damage to people and environments.

"Man has united his inventive nature with the journey of poison and disease. Yet, the human temperament is such that his curiosity never ends. When passion and madness overpower reason, they compel his hands to destroy civilizations. He invented weapons to protect himself, but those same weapons have wiped out entire communities. We see that even birds are becoming restless; something in the air seems to be turning poisonous (Qudisia)."

According to Qudisia, this means that there is an association between the damage of the environment and moral corruption. Moral corruption eats society. Men morally eats every living being and bird moral corruption creates hates for birds in human hearts. The novel *Raja Gidh* it provides a reflective discussion on the ethical and environmental issues facing contemporary societies. The novel portrays that the destruction of the natural environment and moral collapse of humans are warmly related. Through the similarity of the vulture, an animal known to exist on the carcasses of dead animals. The novel shows how moral limits established by society and religion have been trespassed. Along with the main narrative of human life, there is also an allegory about the kingdom of vultures. The book, based on the Islamic moral principle of halal and haram, shows how the consumption of anything forbidden, whether it be physical, emotional or inter-personal, corrupts man and his descendants. This paper posits that this story is inherently ecological rather than being religious or psychological. According to Qudisia, human trespassing corrupts nature as well as the soul, and the natural and moral worlds are one and the same.

“This issue is very subtle and thought-provoking — it seems that today, for the first time, humanity has become aware of its complete being. Man, through his inventive nature, has journeyed into the realms of poison and disease. Yet the nature of man is such that his thirst never ends. He is restless — compelled by his own hands to ignite fire and madness. He has created inventions that destroy colonies on earth, and he can never end his greed for new treasures. Look, we are turning oil wells into graves for birds! (Qudsia).”

According to Qudsia, such statements show how the novel emphasizes the importance of the relationship between environmental pollution and human moral degeneration. The claim that man's environmental abuse is also a moral and spiritual problem.

Research Objective

- To examine how *Raja Gidh* challenges the anthropocentric view of nature as a passive back
- To investigate how human greed and moral decline in the novel lead directly to the disruption of the natural order.
- To identify and analyses the vulture and the kafoor tree as dual symbols constituting a moral ecosystem in *Raja Gidh*.

Research Questions

1. How *Raja Gidh* do challenges the anthropocentric view of nature as a passive back?
2. How does human greed and moral decline in the novel lead directly to the disruption of the natural order?
3. What is the vulture and the kafoor tree as dual symbols constituting a moral ecosystem in *Raja Gidh*?

Literature Review

This work deals with the interface of ecocriticism, Islamic environmental ethics, postcolonial ecocriticism, and literary criticism of Urdu literature. *Raja Gidh* by Bano Qudsia will be discussed from the perspective of moral ecology and symbolic nature which has been underexplored to date.

The core theory that supports this research is ecocriticism. According to Cheryll Glotfelty, ecocriticism is “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment” (Glotfelty xviii). In this way, she sets literature as one of the mediums through which the link between humans and nature can be understood. Taking forward the definition, Lawrence Buell says that environmentally focused literature gives agency to non-human entities and does not treat them as passive backdrop (Buell 7-8). The “slow violence” idea of Rob Nixon helps in deepening ecocritical criticism as the environmental and moral destruction is seen as a process occurring slowly, and sometimes invisibly, over several generations (Nixon 2). This notion finds its echo in the representation of the results of unethical conduct and the legacy of moral degradation

shown in the novel. Likewise, the idea that nature has its own inherent worth regardless of any human considerations can help in viewing nature symbols in the book from an ethical perspective (Rolston 3-5). The idea of moral ecology is also relevant to the current research. According to Christopher J. Freiman, moral ecology can be defined as “the collection of institutions, social practices, and physical environment that either fosters or hinders moral action” (Freiman 425). The notion of moral ecology implies that morality is formed as a result of interactions with society, culture, and environment. In the case of *Raja Gidh*, moral decline is associated with ecological symbolism. Islamic environmental ethics scholars have equally focused on the ethical connection between humans and nature. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, for example, states that nature represents the manifestation of divine reality, with human beings having the task of managing nature responsibly rather than exploiting it (Nasr). Ibrahim Ozdemir explores this notion by introducing the Islamic terms of *amanah* (responsibility) and *khalifah* (vice regency), which emphasize that environmental ethics is a matter of religion. Richard Foltz goes ahead to prove that Islamic eco-theology incorporates environmental ethics into religion, Sufism, and social ethics.

Although there exists an increasing amount of literature on ecocriticism, the existing criticism of *Raja Gidh* has mainly been done with respect to religion, Sufism, psychology, morality, and social criticism. The moral aspects of haram, inheritance, spiritual decline and other topics have been extensively discussed by critics, whereas the eco-symbolism of the work is hardly ever mentioned. Little is known about the way the vulture, the kafoor tree, and other natural phenomena serve as constituents of the moral ecosystem. In contrast, the current research incorporates various aspects such as ecocriticism, moral ecology, Islamic environmental ethics, and postcolonial ecocriticism, and thus shows that the nature of *Raja Gidh* is not just a background, but the active moral power. In addition, the eco-vision of the novel will be linked to the issues of environment preservation raised in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 13 and 15 in particular), and thus will provide a new interpretation of Bano Qudsia's work for Urdu literary criticism.

The scholarly engagements with Bano Qudsia's *Raja Gidh* (1981) have broadened to encompass psychological, philosophical, spiritual, and comparative literature perspectives in light of the novel's cultural relevance after more than thirty-two editions of the book. One of the most comprehensive analyses of this novel comes from Mohsin Khalid Mohsin, who approaches it through its characterization, social commentary, and spirit of Islamic law regarding the distinction between lawful and unlawful sustenance. According to Mohsin, *rizq* (sustenance) acquired unlawfully – the haram – is not only an infringement of religion but also leads to many other psychological and civilizational repercussions such as insanity, hopelessness, loneliness, immorality, and loss of collective humanity. The distinguishing aspect of Mohsin's interpretation is his ability to combine Islamic ethical philosophy with character analysis, revealing how the application of Sufism and sacrificial spirit in Bano Qudsia's novel serves as the remedy to the destruction caused by the unlawful act, making the halal sustenance the basis of mental and spiritual integrity.

On the other hand, the psychoanalytical aspects of the novel have received considerable attention from Shumaila Mazhar in her path breaking analysis. The author applies a two-pronged theoretical lens that includes Ghazalian Islamic psychology and Freudian psychoanalysis to the novel. Through Attride-Stirling's (2001) three-step thematic analysis approach comprising data reduction, data exploration, and data interpretation, Mazhar aligns Ghazalian categories such as *nafs-e-ammara*, *nafs-e-lawwamma*, and *nafs-e-mutmainna* with Freud's psychoanalytical theory of id, ego, and superego, interpreting the characters of *Raja Gidh* in light of the proposed coding scheme. It is observed that the mental breakdown of Qayyum is a result of the inherent conflict between moral consciousness and sexual urges, which, as Ghazali and Freud, despite their epistemologically distant traditions, agree, forms a structural aspect of the human mind. Mazhar believes that the combination of psychological ideas from the East and West can be an effective way to analyze literature, which is evident from the Ghazalian idea of *nafs-e-mutmainna* as a desirable end that Qudsia envisions in opposition to the haram transgression (Mazhar et al.).

Expanding on this model of analysis, in the further article entitled "Unveiling the Human Soul: Reconnoitering Raja Gidh from Ghazalian Perspective" by Najia Almas and Shumaila Mazhar, the focus of analysis narrows down to the Islamic aspects of the novel, and Ghazalian theory of *nafs* receives a focused application in the context of the central characters of *Raja Gidh*. Using once more the thematic model of Attride-Stirling, Almas and Mazhar claim that Qudsia's characterization relies on the progress of soul in its various stages – from the sinful commanding soul to the reproaching and serene soul. This research confirms the great value of the Eastern psychologies, regardless of the Western ones, in literary analysis, and proves that the issue of self-respect, morality, and spiritual aspirations raised in *Raja Gidh* can be analysed through Ghazalian theory alone (Almas and Mazhar).

The focus of the analysis offered by Professor Aqeel Mughal is the nostalgic and sociocultural aspects of the book, emphasizing those aspects that are not considered in psychological and ethical analyses of the novel. The first thing Mughal looks at in his analysis of the novel is the allegorical nature of the vulture metaphor, that is, the use of the symbol of the animal that feeds on carrion to represent the breaking of ethical boundaries, the way through which the author dramatizes the inheritance of haram transgression from one generation to another. Mughal places significant emphasis on the setting of the novel in his analysis because it is the depiction of the environment and the social world of Pakistan in Government College Lahore and Lawrence Garden that adds a nostalgic element to the novel and makes its moral decay more ethically important. The author mentions that the characters in Qudsia's novel are not easily categorized morally because of their psychological depth.

Comparative studies have placed *Raja Gidh* within a broader tradition of Islamic literary theory. In "Impact of Attar's 'Conference of the Birds' on Bano Qudsia's Novel 'Raja Gidh': A Comparative Study," Muhammad Safeer discusses the influence of the eleventh-century Persian masnavi Conference of the Birds on *Raja Gidh*'s structure and themes. Safeer suggests that the use of a parallel bird kingdom, in which the birds live and feed like humans, in order to depict human

moral transgressions through the feeding practices of vultures is an extension of the same technique used in Attar's poem to depict the process of the birds' spiritual journey towards self-knowledge and proximity to God. Unlike Attar's guide, the hoopoe bird, the vulture in *Raja Gidh* symbolizes a soul stuck in its spiritual journey, one that feeds on forbidden things and hence fails to move further to reach *nafs-e-mutmainna*.

Together, these works prove *Raja Gidh* to be a work of criticism whose complexity consists in the fact that this piece can be analyzed through psychological, spiritual, allegorical, and historically cultural perspectives all at once. The current paper is based on this scholarship, mainly on the scholarship provided by Mohsin regarding the ethical, civilizational perspective and Mazhar in regard to the psychoanalytical approach, which will help us examine the role of halal/haram dichotomy in the novel.

Research Gap

From this corpus of scholarship, it is evident that there is a substantial and fruitful gap that exists, so far, none of the existing literature has examined *Raja Gidh* from the perspective of ecocriticism. Further, none of the extant scholarship has explored the relationship between the Islamic ethics of the environment and the theory of ecocriticism in the context of Urdu literary fiction. Ecocriticism in the Western tradition has been ignorant of South Asian Urdu literature. Meanwhile, scholarship on Urdu literature itself has yet to fully explore the theories of ecocriticism and environmental criticism. In this very gap lies the focus of the present study.

This literature review establishes your paper's full theoretical genealogy, demonstrates command of all relevant scholarship, articulates the research gap your study fills, and provides properly formatted MLA 9th edition references with hyperlinks throughout.

Methodology

The research uses qualitative interpretive research method through a close textual analysis of the novel *Raja Gidh* written by Bano Qudsia. This study uses an interdisciplinary methodology which combines the concepts of ecocriticism, Islamic environmental ethics and postcolonial ecocriticism to investigate the association of morality, nature and ecological symbols in the novel.

The major source for this paper will be *Raja Gidh* (1981), while the secondary sources will be theories of ecocriticism, Islamic environmental philosophy and postcolonial literature. The study mainly concentrates on the interpretation of the significant symbols, specifically *gidh* and *kafoor trees*.

The interpretation is based on three different theoretical approaches. Firstly, ecocriticism of Cheryll Glotfelty, Lawrence Buell, and Rob Nixon considers the connection between the literary text and the environment, with the focus on such terms as environmental presence and slow violence (Glotfelty and Fromm; Buell; Nixon). Secondly, the approach of Islamic environmental

ethics with the help of the ideas of Seyyed Hossein Nasr, İbrahim Özdemir, and Richard Foltz views nature as an embodiment of divine creation and human management (Nasr; Ozdemir; Foltz). Finally, ecocriticism using the ideas of Val Plumwood, and Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann investigates the way in which nonhuman beings turn into the narratological agents delivering moral and ecological message (Plumwood; Iovino and Oppermann). The results can also be correlated with Sustainable Development Goals 13 (Climate Action) and 15 (Life on Land).

Analysis

Anthropocentrism has been pointed out by ecocriticism as one of the basic epistemological mistakes leading to the present-day ecological crisis. Anthropocentrism is a philosophical principle which makes people the center of moral consideration and regards the nonhuman world. It is merely as an inactive, active scene of human activity. Its means that nature has a passive voice. Anthropocentrism is basically about human treats nonhuman nothing, less valuable and no moral values. As Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Glotfelty and Fromm) suggest, literature was responsible for the emergence and maintenance of such anthropocentric approach to nature. It means that it treated nature not as an active agency with its own morality, but rather as scenery, as a natural resource, or as a symbol. Lawrence Buell (1995), addressing the problem of Western ecocritical treatment of literary texts. It claims that literature takes the environment into consideration must reflect the presence of the nonhuman world not as a mere background, but as an agent of narrative meaning. Moreover, it is exactly such a critique of anthropocentrism that *Raja Gidh* demonstrates using the cosmology that is typically Islamic. In this novel, anthropocentrism plays significant role in characters' lives. Likewise, Gidh symbol of this Urdu fictional writing.

As against the concept of storyline, the anthropocentric pattern is challenged from the perspective of cosmology in *Raja Gidh*. It is the order of creation based on morality, in which humanity has been placed at a specific place and in a specific condition. The concepts of khalifah (vicegerent/steward) and amanah (trust/covenant) can be used to explain this philosophy in Islamic tradition where humanity is not the lord of nature. But merely its trustee who must answer to an overriding moral order beyond desire. The Quran reference to understand this perspective.

“And when your Lord said to the angels: I am going to place a vicegerent (*khalifah*) in the earth... (*Quran 2:30*)”

The *amanah* which is established the trust in Surah Al-Ahzab:

“Indeed, we offered the trust (*amanah*) to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, but they declined to bear it and feared it; but the human being undertook to bear it. Indeed, he was unjust and ignorant (*Quran 33:72*).”

From the lines of novel "I haven't become a philosopher because of sadness.... how would you know, why the sun asks for every corner of the earth, one always wants to stay close to the person they love? (Qudsia)".

By saying "I haven't become a philosopher because of sorrow," Seemi is portraying herself not as a subject. But as an observer who receives morality lessons through nature. She does not ignore nature nor does she reject it. Rather, her philosophy of life is shaped as a response to nature. to the vulture, camphor tree, and the forest community. Basically, her love leads her toward philosophy, toward knowledge and toward reality. She was innocent common but after fall in love with After broke her. She leads toward philosophy. *Raja Gidh's* vulture itself is the strongest and most relentless antagonist to anthropocentrism. Greedy birds, particularly scavengers, are used as symbolic representations of human emotions via atmosphere, metaphors, and signs in traditional literary practice. however, Bano Qudsia does not follow this tradition at all. *Raja Gidh's* vulture is an active moral entity giving meaning to human characters and not the other way around.

"Come down, vulture, it is time now (Qudsia)".

This is line from novel and narrator said this words. When Qayum physical intimacy hits on peaks and he calls himself Gidh. This is symbol that every society has Raja Gidh and eat women body. Likewise, Gidh eats dead birds. Furthermore, this shows moral ecology of society is the most direct instance of agency found in the text. The narrator recognizes that it is time for the vulture and that the conditions for it to come down are morally and ecologically set but does not command it. The vulture descends following its own ecological and moral code rather than obeying human volition. This is precisely the notion that Holmes Rolston III talks about when he discusses basic value (Rolston). The value of the vulture is based on its place within the moral ecology rather than human perception of it. Once haram builds up to death, it descends, it consumes transgression and brings forth gradual violence. Moreover, the fall of the vulture does not require recognition by any human being. It does not matter whether the human characters recognize, accept, or reject it; the act of ethical retribution that occurs through this phenomenon persists. One of the most compelling arguments against anthropocentrism within the novel is the indifference towards the subjective experience of human beings.

"Seemi is crushing camphor leaves in her hand (Qudsia)."

In the same way, the (kafoor) camphor tree does not make an offer to play the role of a mere background element. On the contrary, the kafoor tree plays the role of moral center in the human tale. It is as opposed to being situated on the boundary. Properties of the kafoor tree like coolness, smell, purity and preservability not only become part of the atmosphere but also constitute moral balance to haram consumed by the vulture. The kafoor tree is employed in the Islamic custom for cleansing the dead body for burial. It is marking the line between divine accounting and haram trespassing. The word "kafoor" (camphor) is explicitly named as an ingredient of the drink the righteous will partake of in paradise, "Indeed, the righteous will drink from a cup whose mixture is of kafoor." (Quran 76:5)

Here is how the above mentioned Quranic verse is relevant to this research paper. First of all, by referring to it, you establish camphor as a material associated with divinely bestowed reward and purity; it is not just a fragrant or medicinal plant. But a material of high cosmological value that exists in paradise. Second, camphor is antithetical to haram because of its connection to the Gidh. It is associated with the domain of moral purity, covenant loyalty, and divine favor. This scenario directly connects with the notion of storied matter that has been put forward by Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann (Iovino and Oppermann). Camphor tree is the material that holds the story inside itself as opposed to being the symbol upon which humans cover stories of moral-ecological history of the world in which it exists. This is the ecological form of halal that is grounded, aromatic, purifying, and durable. The warmth and healing nature of the camphor tree offers a non-human moral critique against the callousness of the vulture gang.

In the line “Why does the sun require every corner of the earth, when everyone would want to remain close to the one he loves(Qudsia).” The novel’s non-anthropocentric worldview is extended into the world beyond the Earth. Here, the movement of the sun across the earth is described as the mahabbah, cosmic love, which infuses all aspects of nature rather than as an event of celestial mechanics. This is a concrete example of Nasr’s theophanic concept of nature. The universe is alive with divine attributes such as love and moral purpose. It is a good illustration of the theophanic conception of nature by Nasr. In his book “Religion and the Order of Nature”. Nasr argues that the world is a living entity in which the divine attributes of love, mercy, wisdom, and moral purpose are present in an actual sense and not merely symbolic (Nasr, Religion and the Order). For Nasr, all events of nature are ayats, which means that they are signs of God in which the divine attributes are revealed to the senses of man (Nasr, Man and Nature). This idea implies that the solar path across the entire globe is a theophany, in which the attribute of love (mahabbah) is revealed through cosmic movement.

This verse from the Quran stating that “whichever way you look, there is the Face of God” (Quran 2:115). In which is divine presence behind all directions and behind every aspect of nature, forms the basis for this interpretation. In William Chittick’s account of this theophanic cosmology, based on Ibn Arabi’s teachings, “love is the motive force of creation,” that is, “all creatures participate in this love according to their ability and mode of being” and “the cosmos was created by God out of love” (Chittick, Sufi Path of Knowledge 194). In the theophanic sense that its movement is an expression of the divine love that sustains the whole universe, the sun not only moves but also loves. For this reason, the theophanic statement by Bano Qudsia of a connection between this celestial movement and the human experience of staying near their beloved is not a romantic figure of speech. It is a theophanic statement in which the moral-ecological world of *Raja Gidh* contains the attributes of love and moral purpose that according to Nasr define the Islamic cosmology. As Nasr points out, “human love is participating in the divine attribute of love which causes the movement of the sun” (Nasr, Religion and the Order). As Nasr claims, “divine attributes become noticeable to the human senses” (Nasr, Islamic Art). It is not about literary figures; rather, they are theophanic events: the aroma of the camphor tree, the cold blood of the vulture society, and the sunlight illuminating all corners of the earth. In Bano Qudsia’s novel, the separation

between nature and humanity is erased by making the movement of the cosmos akin to love. What this involves is positioning human love within a cosmos that preexists human experience as well as transcends human experience; this is not an anthropomorphizing of nature but a cosmologization of humanity. Humans fall in love for the same reason that the universe does what it does. It is out of need, and not because the universe falls in love. This anthropocentric perspective of nature being mere backdrop is not a philosophically neutral stance; it is an epistemology of a certain historical period namely that of colonialism in which helped colonizers extract and exploit the natural resources of South Asia by turning the whole of nature into mere raw materials for their own purposes. The fact that *Raja Gidh* was written in a postcolonial Pakistan makes its implicit criticism of this epistemology evident in the form of a cosmological perspective. Islamic moral ecology where the non-human world is neither passive nor just a means to an end.

One of the major concerns of both Islamic environmental ethics and ecocriticism is the relation between ecological destruction and the failure of human morality. Although these two frameworks adopt very different epistemological approaches to the issue. In Rob Nixon's theory of slow violence, human greediness leads to the destruction of nature that takes place gradually and without spectacle. The ecological damage done in this case develops slowly over time. Meanwhile, Islamic environmental ethics argues that the violation of boundaries set by moral principles, known as haram, has consequences that affect not only individuals but also their communities and, ultimately, the environment. *Raja Gidh* combines both of these approaches by narrativizing the concept of slow violence as one of moral-ecological destruction, which is generational and concludes in the violation of nature's own law.

The theological sub-text in *Raja Gidh* traces the source of ecological disruption to the primal crime committed by "Qabil against Habil" (Qudsia). It is not only a theological metaphor but rather an ecological statement. According to the cosmology of Bano Qudsia, the murder committed by Qabil marks the introduction of haram into human genealogy as a moral-ecological condition passed through generations. The murder of Habil, the first case of human violence against another human being. It is also the first case of human violence against the moral law of creation. In this case, crow teaches humans how to create graves with mud but humans do not thank crow for it. Instead, they believe that crow is the most useless creation of God. Here, crow taught man how to dig graves using mud, but the man does not even thank the crow for this. He considers crow as the most useless creation by God. The man is always greedy and he never thanks his Creator for the same way as he thanks the crow.

The sin itself gives rise to the vulture or, to be more precise, the need for the vulture. An animal should exist that will have the ability to eat haram when it leads to death. Thus, the vulture mentioned in the story is not a natural incident in the moral universe but is the outcome of human sin. This is one of the most extreme ecological interpretations, where it is believed that moral failure on the part of humans results in some natural phenomena like scavenging, carrion, and death ecology.

“But we are people of the wilderness. We were raised from childhood on those men. We belong to the vulture community; how could we think of giving Seemi favors... we were not even of warm blood; how could we understand that some people survive only relying on their bodies. (Qudsia)”

The “vulture community” (gidh biradari) depicted in the novel in which the human beings carrying haram in their origin and who “were raised from childhood on those men” of the wilderness. These are the personification of the ecological consequences of greed. The description given by themselves is brutally precise from an ecological point of view: “We are people of the wilderness. We were raised from childhood on those men. We belong to the vulture community; how could we think of giving Seemi favors... we were not even of warm blood.(Qudsia)”

Cold blood in the present case is no mere metaphor. It is a condition which combines morality and ecology. The incapability of the vulture community's cold-bloodedness is that of the warmth required for sustaining the ecological relation. It shows love, compassion, stewardship, and covenant. Greed that is, the willingness to take without giving back, to consume without restoring, to own without caring. It is the very kind of orientation towards the environment that is ecologically lethal according to Qudsia. It is the incapability of the “vulture community” to realize that “some people survive only relying on their bodies.” In contrast, it indicates that Gidh among us are people. People eat broken souls when they feel mentally upset.

It relates to the analysis of dualism provided by Val Plumwood, since the cold and warm dichotomy in the novel reflects the dualistic logic of exploitation, according to which the other (whether it is a person or not) becomes a mere object of extraction. The vultures' cold-bloodiness is precisely the epistemological condition necessary for the exploitation of nature, namely the inability to understand its intrinsic value. Val Plumwood's analysis of dualism is pertinent in this regard. Plumwood notes that “dualism is the logic of colonization”. It is a master logic which creates a master identity and a subordinated identity and defines the latter purely in terms of resource and instrumentality (Plumwood, Feminism). The binary between cold and warm identities in *Raja Gidh* fits perfectly into the more general dualism of exploitation. The vultures' cold-bloodedness is not only a biological or ethical disposition, but, in the terminology of Plumwood, an epistemological one. It is “the condition of the master identity constituted through the denial of the other's subjectivity, which cannot see the other as a subject and sees only potential use where there is actual life” (Plumwood, Feminism). This epistemological position, according to Plumwood in *Environmental Culture*, is “backgrounding”. Here, nature is being seen as a mere backdrop of human activity. It is as resource devoid of any intrinsic worth (Plumwood, *Environmental Culture*). The notion of slow violence by Nixon offers insight into the temporality of haram and its ecological ramifications in *Raja Gidh*. The disturbance of the natural order depicted in the novel does not take place instantaneously or spectacularly, but builds up gradually, through time and generations, and below the threshold of visibility until it reaches catastrophic proportions. The haram enacted by Qabil does not lead to the immediate destruction of the moral ecology of the community; it corrupts it slowly, through bloodlines, relationships, communities, and conditions the arrival of the vulture. This kind of temporality is central to the

ecological discourse of the novel. Moral degeneration cannot be understood as an event, but as a process, namely as slow violence on the soul of the people similar to the slow violence caused to the environment. In the novel, the communities do not select ecological disaster; they inherit it through bloodlines tainted with haram, social relations based on predation rather than conservation, and epistemological conditions – cold-bloodedness – making ecological care impossible. This is Nixon's delayed destruction at the moral-ecological level: the consequence of primordial transgression spread over centuries to come and manifest itself only in the arrival of the vulture.

The phrase “Love has nothing to do with marriage, nor does marriage have anything to do with love (Qudsia)”. It is one of the precise diagnoses of moral-ecological disruption in the novel. In Islam, the marriage is *mithaq*. It is agreement, a moral bond which creates the structure of relations between people and provides its ecological aspect. Love deprived of the covenant is the desire devoid of responsibility. It is the orientation towards the other in which greed is present rather than stewardship. Love deprived of its covenantal nature is the beginning of the destruction of the moral-ecological system that supports humanity and the whole world. Seemi is the living evidence of this kind of ecological destruction. She survives “only relying on her body (Qudsia).” The moral-ecological bonds of support were destroyed by the selfish greed of the community of vultures. Her vulnerability is not only her personal issue, but the ecological one because the moral-ecological order was destructed by the haram of many generations. The natural order does not only show this situation, but reacts on it, bringing the carrion-eating vulture to the carrion of moral bonds.

This is because the novel's explanation of greed and decline in moral values as causes of environmental destruction is similar to the principles espoused by the SDG 13 and SDG 15. Modern science recognizes overconsumption, greed, and violation of ecological boundaries as the key elements causing climate change and biodiversity loss in which is the same principle articulated by the novel through the concept of haram. The moral ecology articulated in Bano Qudsia's work is in line with the SDG model's requirement that ecological sustainability is achievable only through not just technology, but a complete overhaul of human values and actions. It is a change from cold-blooded greed to *khalifah*.

The dual symbolism Moral Ecology in *Raja Gidh* by Qudsia. The notion of a moral ecology in Raja Gidh is shown through two non-human agents: the vulture and the camphor tree (*kafoor*). Utilizing the theory of material ecocriticism from Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann, these creatures are not merely symbolic but narrative agents that convey moral values through their materiality (Iovino and Oppermann 1–6). In addition, the idea of intrinsic value presented by Holmes Rolston III indicates the inherent moral value of nature apart from its utilitarian function to man, adding weight to the ecological relevance of the vulture and the camphor tree (Rolston 2–5). Vultures serve as a reminder of moral responsibility and ecological accounting. Just like vultures are supposed to scavenge and recirculate organic materials in nature, they metaphorically bring to light the impact of haram (unethical behaviors), making immoral

practices come to surface. Using the idea of slow violence from Rob Nixon, the vultures show the gradual buildup of moral and ecological violence that finally calls for reckoning (Nixon 2–3). On the other hand, the camphor tree stands for purity, healing, and moral regeneration. Camphor has traditionally been used for cleaning the body of a deceased person in Islamic society, and in the philosophy of the Sufis, it represents the scent of purity from God. Therefore, the camphor tree is a sign of halal, spiritual regeneration, and conciliation between humanity and nature.

The combination of the vulture and the camphor tree creates an eco-moral system with two elements. While the first one is a metaphor for moral corruption, the second one brings purification and regeneration. Thus, Bano Qudsia shows that morality is an ecological process in which human activity shapes both ecological and ethical aspects of reality.

Conclusion

This research paper has examined moral ecology and symbolic nature in Bano Qudsia's *Raja Gidh* (1981). Its drawing upon on the theoretical framework along ecocritical perspective of Glotfelty, Buell, Nixon, and Rolston III. Along lenses Islamic environmental ethics of Nasr, Özdemir, and Foltz. The analysis demonstrates that the novel constructs a dual symbolic moral ecosystem through two nonhuman agents. The vulture (*gidh*) and the camphor tree (*kafoor*) in which whose ecological functions carry active moral significance.

The vulture represents the consequence aspect of this ecosystem. It responds to accumulated *haram*, makes the slow violence of moral transgression visible, and enacts ecological reckoning (Nixon 2). The camphor tree represents the possibility dimension which embodying *halal*, purification, and covenantal integrity. The natural world's affirmation that moral restoration remains possible (Nasr, *Man and Nature*). Together they constitute a complete moral-ecological cycle rooted in the Habil/Qabil theological framework that grounds the novel's cosmological vision.

Previous scholarship on *Raja Gidh* has focused predominantly on theological, psychoanalytic, and social dimensions, largely neglecting its ecological significance. This study addresses that gap, establishing that nature in the novel is neither passive nor decorative. It bears witness, responds to wrongdoing, and ultimately judges human excess. Human greed does not merely damage relationships. But it destroys the natural order itself, severing the covenant of stewardship (*amanah*) that Islamic environmental ethics identifies as humanity's fundamental ecological obligation (Özdemir 5).

Raja Gidh is more than literary fiction. It is a literary SDG warning, demonstrating through symbolic narrative how moral decay leads directly to environmental disaster, anticipating the concerns of SDG 13 and SDG 15 decades before their formulation. Bano Qudsia's closing question "to reach beyond one's destination, which stage must one still pass through?" "A person has to pass through who knows how many different paths to get from abnormal state back to a normal?" (*Qudsia*). It remains the most urgent ecocritical question South Asian literature has posed. The

stage of genuine *khalifah* consciousness, warm-blooded, covenantal, and ecologically accountable.

References/Works Cited

- Almas, Najia, and Shumaila Mazhar. "Unveiling the Human Soul: Reconnoitering *Raja Gidh* from Ghazalian Perspective." *Journal of Asian Development Studies*, vol. 12, no. 3, 2023.
- Brooks, David. *The Second Mountain: The Quest for a Moral Life*. Random House, 2019.
- Buell, Lawrence. *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*. Harvard University Press, 1995.
- Chittick, William C. *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination*. State University of New York Press, 1989.
- Chittick, William C. *The Sufi Path of Love: The Spiritual Teachings of Rumi*. State University of New York Press, 1983.
- Durkheim, Émile. *Ethics and the Sociology of Morals*. Edited by Robert T. Hall, Prometheus Books, 1993.
- Foltz, Richard C., editor. *Environmentalism in the Muslim World*. Nova Science Publishers, 2005.
- Freiman, Christopher. "Goodwill toward Nature." *Environmental Values*, vol. 18, no. 3, 2009, pp. 343–359.
- Ghosh, Amitav. *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*. University of Chicago Press, 2016.
- Glottfelty, Cheryl, and Harold Fromm, editors. *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. University of Georgia Press, 1996.
- Huggan, Graham, and Helen Tiffin. *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment*. Routledge, 2010.
- Iovino, Serenella, and Serpil Oppermann, editors. *Material Ecocriticism*. Indiana University Press, 2014.
- Iovino, Serenella, and Serpil Oppermann. "Material Ecocriticism: Materiality, Agency, and Models of Narrativity." *Ecozon@*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2012, pp. 75–91.
- Mazhar, Shumaila, et al. "Exploring the Inner World: Study of *Raja Gidh* in the Light of Ghazalian Theory of Soul and Freudian Psychoanalysis." *International Research Journal of Arts and Humanities*, vol. 47, no. 47, 2018.
- Mohsin, Mohsin Khalid, and Imama Riasat. "'Raja Gidh': Philosophy in the Context of Halal and Haram: A Special Study." *Zaban-o-Adab*, vol. 17, no. 2, 2024, pp. 92–105.
- Mughal, Ageel. "Presenting Elements of Nostalgia in *Raja Gadha*." *TAMSAAL*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2024, pp. 1–9.
- Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. *Islamic Art and Spirituality*. State University of New York Press, 1987.
- Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man*. ABC International Group, 1997.
- Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. *Religion and the Order of Nature*. Oxford University Press, 1996.

- Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. *The Encounter of Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man*. George Allen and Unwin, 1968.
- Nixon, Rob. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Harvard University Press, 2011.
- Özdemir, İbrahim. "Towards an Understanding of Environmental Ethics from a Qur'anic Perspective." *Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust*, edited by Richard C. Foltz et al., Harvard University Press, 2003, pp. 3–37.
- Plumwood, Val. *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason*. Routledge, 2002.
- Plumwood, Val. "Nature in the Active Voice." *Australian Humanities Review*, vol. 46, 2009, pp. 113–129.
- Qudsia, Bano. *Raja Gidh*. Sang-e-Meel Publications, 1981.
- The Quran*. Translated by Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Wordsworth Editions, 2000.
- Rolston, Holmes, III. *Environmental Ethics: Duties to and Values in the Natural World*. Temple University Press, 1988.
- Safeer, Muhammad. "Impact of Attar's 'Conference of the Birds' on Bano Qudsia's Novel 'Raja Gidh': A Comparative Study." *Makhz (Research Journal)*, vol. 6, no. 4, 2025, pp. 190–199.
- Slovic, Scott. *Seeking Awareness in American Nature Writing: Henry Thoreau, Annie Dillard, Edward Abbey, Wendell Berry, Barry Lopez*. University of Utah Press, 1992.
- United Nations. "Sustainable Development Goals." *United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs*, 2015.