



## An Eco-critical Analysis of Aamer Hussein's Short Story *A Convalescence*

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### ABSTRACT

*Ecocriticism is the study of the interaction of nature and literature that analyzes how literary works portray the natural world, environment, backgrounds, themes and elements in particular regions or places. Ecological literature is interested in how people interact with their natural surroundings. The focus of this research project is to closely analyze a Pakistani literature short fiction A Convalescence by Aamer Hussein, using an ecocritical lens. It provides the theoretical framework of Greg Garrard's notion of ecocriticism and examines its connections to environmentally oriented literary works and how nature affects human health in the selected work. It also examines how Hussein has utilized language in his literary works to convey his environmental message. In a nutshell, this project emphasizes the importance of nature in man-made culture and further studies on ecocriticism in Pakistani literature to raise environmental consciousness.*



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## Introduction

Literature is a collective, written form of art, which contains fictional and non-fictional stories that work as a mirror to represent life. As stated by Pickering and Hooper (1981), literature is a unique human activity, born of man's timeless desire to understand, express, and finally share experiences. With the passage of time new experiences emerge and manifest themselves in the form of fiction, which is considered as a living reality of human society. The environmental concerns are a day-to-day reality because environmental devastation has shifted the emphasis towards the ecological study of Literature. This rapidly growing field of literature known as Eco-criticism encompasses a range of theories and particular areas of interest to interpret the relationship between literature and the environment. Nature is a mesmerizing piece of art created by God for human beings so that they can find solace, seek refuge and take benefits from it. It gives ecological music in the form of animals' sounds, vibrant colors, picturesque woods, scented gardens and vintage waters but over the past few

decades, the world has witnessed significant changes in every aspect of human lives. Whether it is in the agricultural or Industrial sector, the postmodernist culture has impacted every field of study, whether it is science, arts, or technology. Human beings have been shackled by scientific discoveries and inventions and have forgotten to nurture the values of love and respect for Mother Nature and the environment. So many ills of the modern world most importantly, natural disasters, deforestation, and increasing pollution in the atmosphere have become a hazard of the modern world. The overuse of natural resources without taking its care is causing a disturbance in ecological order and these problems have left the ecosphere in a serious danger. Taking the lead environmental issues are the topics of academia nowadays and the young generation is taking an interest in reading ecology-based literature. It presents a new approach to analyzing and comprehending literary works that enhance the scope of literary and theoretical research. There are some other names used for environmentally-oriented literature such as green studies, ecopoetics, literary-environmental studies and environmental criticism, but it is commonly known as *Ecocriticism*. Ecocriticism, just like Marxism, Feminism, and Post-colonialism, is a literary theory that emerged in the late 20th century. This literary theory addresses the growing concern for environmental issues and the necessity to examine the literature pertaining to natural resources. It is an interdisciplinary field of literature that explores the connection between literature and the environment, investigating how literary works have influenced and mirrored our perception of nature and our position and space within it. One of the preliminary figures of Ecocriticism, Cheryll Glotfelty, in her book *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (1996), emphasizes the impacts of human cultural actions on the ecosphere as people contaminate the environment for their own comforts. Ecocritics posit that there is an interconnected relation exists between human beings and nature, where both impact and affect each other. Nevertheless, ecocritics seek to safeguard the natural world from human interference. These environmentally-oriented literary works beautifully explore the interconnection between humans and nature which is the main focus of eco-literature. The common message is to maintain nature in its pristine beauty; let's not damage what we cannot create. The more ecocritical texts will come into focus, the more man will learn to behave with nature in a proper way keeping in touch with the present environmental crisis (Mishra, 2016). As a literary approach, Ecocriticism provides a theoretical framework to analyze literary texts that are concerned with ecological contexts. Ecocritical research seeks to establish a connection between human and nonhuman (natural) entities, it investigates the ways in which they can coexist. This approach has merged views from two distinct disciplines i.e. ecology and literary criticism. As environmental concerns are growing in our society ecological discussions taking a pivotal part in every forum. This field of study emphasizes the need for an eco-centric (earth-centered) perspective instead of an anthropocentric (human-centered) perspective in literary studies.

Taking the lead from the above discussion the selected Pakistani short fiction has been examined in this study through an eco-critical lens. A renowned Anglo-Pakistani author, Aamer Hussein, has written a short story titled *A Convalescence*. In that story, the author feels nostalgia for his past years, remembers his friends, and recalls visits to different places and the memories that they had made together as if he is counting every single second to pass because he is isolated and he has fractured his leg and now he is in the phase of Convalescence (healing). The short story is taken from his short stories collection *What is Saved* (2024). Hussein's writings are representative of the various cultures, languages, places, and most importantly, of Nature. He is more connected to nature in his writings and this can be analyzed in the titles of some of his short stories, collections, and novels—*Mirror to the Sun*, *This Other Salt*, *Cactus Town and Other Stories*, *Another Gulmohar Tree*, *The Cloud*

Messenger, Lake, Bridges, The Swan's Wife—depict his profound attachment with ecology. The selected short story was first published in Hussein's short story collection (Hermitage And Other Stories, 2018), later his friend, and editor, Sucharita Dutta Asane included it in the (What is Saved: Batori Hui Khushiyan: Life Stories and Other Tales) collection. In her book review of (Hermitage And Other Stories), she writes that *Compression and subtlety are characteristic of Aamer Hussein's writing, as is the engagement with structuring memory and revisiting the past* (Dutta-Asane, 2019).

## **Research Questions**

This research addresses the following questions:

1. How do ecocritical themes and elements are represented in the short story *A Convalescence* by Aamer Hussein?
2. How has Aamer Hussein portrayed the relationship between nature and humans and their effects on each other?
3. What environmental message has Aamer Hussein tried to convey through his selected short story?

## **Statement of the Problem**

By examining the degradation of the environment and its significance in the present age and various works of ecological literature through an ecocritical lens, the present study reveals how Aamer Hussein posits the ways in which nature nurtures and nourishes his characters. Most importantly, how he uses literary techniques to convey his ecocritical message of healing power of Mother Nature in the selected literary piece of Pakistani fiction. Through this ecocritical analysis, the readers acquire a sophisticated understanding of the ways in which ecological themes are represented and ecological elements are bring used in literature to throw light on the importance of nature and the ecosphere for the survival of human beings on the planet Earth.

## **Literature Review**

### **Ecocriticism**

Ecocriticism is an interdisciplinary field that explores the association between literature and the natural world. Ecocriticism is a literary theory that prioritizes environmental and natural issues and explains the relationship between humans and their environment and the impact of human activities on the planet (Cheryll Glotfelty, 1996). Joseph Meeker in his book (The Comedy of Survival: Literary Ecology and a Play Ethic, 1997) initially termed Ecocriticism as "*Literary Ecology*". It was William Rueckert who coined the actual term "Ecocriticism" for the first time in his article " (Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism, 1978)." This article floated the term out to the scholarly community, but few people picked up on the word until years later. Scholars had been studying natural themes and environmental issues in literature for many years before Rueckert's use of the word "ecocriticism" in the late 1970s. (Slovic, 2015). The term 'eco' originated from the Greek root 'oikos,' which means household or Earth, and 'logy' came from 'logos' which refers to logical discourse. These terms referred to criticism of the house environment as depicted in Literature (Frederick, 2012). In his book, (The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature

Writing, and the Formation of American Culture) Lawrence Buell defines ecocriticism as “the study of the relationship between literature and the environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist's practices.” Later, Garrard, in his book articulates: “Ecocriticism explores the ways in which we imagine and portray the relationship between humans and the environment in all areas of cultural production” (Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, 2004). Ecocriticism has emerged from the awareness that there will soon be nothing beautiful or safe in nature to talk about unless we take a great care of our environment (Mambrol, 2016). The main objective of this literary theory is to increase awareness of environmental problems and encourage a more sustainable lifestyle for the future. Ecocriticism is most appropriately applied to a work in which the landscape itself is a dominant character when a significant interaction occurs between author and place, character(s) and place. Landscape by definition includes the non-human elements of place—rocks, soil, trees, plants, rivers, animals, air—as well as human perceptions and modifications (Scheese, 1994). Adopting Barry Commoner’s first law of ecosystem ecology that “everything is connected to everything else,” eco-critics presuppose that human culture, specifically its literature, is directly connected to the physical world, affecting nature as nature affects culture vice versa (Glottfely). In fact, Eco-critics are literary experts and environmental advocates. They focus on the complex relationship between the natural world and the literary texts containing ecological elements. Glottfely describes ecocriticism as an “undervalued genre of nature writing” (1996) so, a major objective of this approach is to raise respect for this genre of literature and promote ecology-based writing. Their works highlight the beauty and significance of literature that deals with natural themes, promoting its acknowledgement in the wider literary context. These works also depict the negative approach of human interaction with the natural world, leading to a decline in human gentleness and sensitivity, resulting in his ruthless and aggressive behaviors towards Mother Nature. Ecocritics encourage others to think seriously about the relationship of humans to nature, about the ethical and aesthetic dilemmas posed by the environmental crisis, and about how language and literature transmit values with profound ecological implications (Cheryll Glottfely, 1996).

Greg Garrard is another prominent figure who has supported and contributed to the field of Ecocriticism, an area of literary studies that analyzes the environment and its modern problems, caused by Modern man and modern culture. His notion of Ecocriticism is a comprehensive framework that looks into the complex relationship between Sapiens and the environment around them through literary and ecology-based lenses. His seminal work (*Ecocriticism*, 2004) provides a distinct perspective and a novel framework titled *Environmental Tropes*. These tropes accurately portray nature and the environment-related major aspects.

## **Tropes of Ecocriticism**

The tropes of ecocriticism include eight concepts: *Pollution*, *Position*, *Pastoral*, *Wilderness*, *Apocalypse*, *Dwelling*, *Animals*, and *Futures: The Earth*, out of which only seven tropes are discussed.

### **1. Pollution**

The term *Pollution* has been derived from the Latin word *Polluere* meaning impure. The impurity or contamination of basic natural elements such as land, water, or air is called pollution. Pollution has seeped into our culture in many areas and on various levels of representation (Garrard, 2004). Pollution is too much of something present in the wrong

place, so it is an ecological problem (Garrard, 2004). Several reasons and ways can spread impurity among natural resources and cause this environmental problem, some of them are toxic substances including pesticides, poisonous chemicals, and toxic gas combustions. Moreover, Pollution goes beyond pesticides, it is artificial light, noise, and radioactive are also global pollutants (Garrard, 2004).

Industrial wastes that contaminate waters, vehicle emissions, soil pollution, noise pollution, and radioactive pollution are some of the most lethal forms of pollution. This kind of pollution includes nuclear weapons i.e. missiles and atom bombs. Human activities for development i.e. Modernization, are the major causes of this much pollution across the globe. From an ecocritical perspective, pollution in the modern sense, reflects the ambivalent role of science as both a producer of environmental hazards and a critical analyst of them (Garrard, 2004).

## **2. Pastoral**

Pastoral is an ecocritical trope that concentrates on the interconnectedness of urban and rural environments. The pastoral trope is a major concern for Ecocritics and is common in British and American literature (Garrard, 2004). Pastoral literature portrays rustic life as serene and sense-soothing, contrasting urban life as contaminated and chaotic. Through such depictions, this trope emphasizes the significance of reconnecting with nature and the critical need to preserve the rustic life from urbanization and environmental degradation. Britannica defines Pastoral as the literature that represents the society of shepherds where they live an unalloyed, raw life that is pure from the complexities of city life. Initially, pastoral was introduced only in poetry, later on; it appeared in dramas and novels. Pastoral has been classified into three major types in Garrard's book *Ecocriticism*. Those types are classical, romantic, and American pastoral.

- **Classical Pastoral:**

The pastoral was written during the classical era, in the eighteenth century. During the Hellenic period, pastoral prominently emerged in poetry, closely linked to the era's significant urbanization. This highlights two main differences: the spatial distinction between town (frenetic, corrupt, impersonal) and country (peaceful, abundant), and the temporal distinction between the past (idyllic) and present (fallen) (Garrard, 2004). The pastoral genre is fundamentally rooted in two key texts that define its conventions and serve as reference points for later writers. Theocritus, a Greek scholar from the Hellenic period, the third century BC, is credited with creating the first pastoral text through his idyllic poems, or idylls, which reflect on the shepherds' song competitions of his youth in Sicily. These works, written for his patron in the Alexandrian court, introduced themes of idealization, nostalgia, and escapism, all of which have become hallmarks of pastoral poetry. Following Theocritus, the Roman poet Virgil, who wrote two centuries later, contributed to the pastoral tradition by establishing the concept of Arcadia. This literary construct represents an idealized retreat, based on a real region in Greece, where the pastoral drama unfolds through interaction among shepherds and similar figures. Together, these foundational texts shaped the essential characteristics of pastoral literature, continuing to influence writers through the ages (Gifford, 2013). Furthermore, Garrard has discussed three temporal orientations of classical pastoral: the elegy reflects on a lost past with a sense of nostalgia; the idyll focuses on a prosperous present; and the utopia that anticipates a redeemed or better future (Garrard, 2004). Classical pastoral portray nature as a source of mental peace and self-discovery for Sapiens.

- **Romantic Pastoral:**

This type of pastoral shows the relationship between city life and the countryside during the Romantic era. Garrard has mentioned in his book that Raymond Williams feels a deep concern for both nature and the human mind. The Romantic pastoral provokes a thought that there are so many inhabitants other than humans so it is the responsibility of humans to preserve Mother Nature on the earth. Additionally, Wordsworth's view of nature is different from his contemporary environmentalists and Ecocritics. Romantic nature is not seen as endangered. Rather, it is admired for its captivating beauty and biodiversity (Garrard, 2004).

- **American Pastoral:**

American pastoral emphasize agrarianism and represent the earth as a means to be cultivated, often drawing a margin between the city and the wilderness. During massive industrialization, American literature emerged in the nineteenth century. It attempts to contradict rural myths and technological facts (Garrard, 2004). American pastoral posit the idea that is distinctive from that of British or Romantic Pastoral. British pastoral focuses on the works of Wordsworth that convey an aesthetic sense of nature. On the contrary, American pastoral focus on the labor aspects of agrarianism through the writings of Henry David Thoreau. This pastoral presents the value of farming and rural life.

### **3. Wilderness**

This trope signifies nature in its uncontaminated state by civilization (Garrard, 2004). It aims to guard the purest nature and other species that live in the ecosystem and refers to a place where humans obtain freedom and escape from the pollution of the city. Wilderness points out two main concepts: the old-world wilderness and the new-world wilderness. The first notion is the old-world wilderness that views it as a wild and untamed territory, conjuring images of enchantment, powerful beasts, and sinister spirits. In this perspective, wilderness is considered sacred and a sanctuary for terrible creatures.

The second concept of wilderness is the new-world wilderness that is sublime, where nature is seen in its most untainted state and is appreciated for its captivating beauty. This idea of *untainted* refers to the woods that are untouched by modern civilization and free from human intervention, thus regarded as *Sublime*.

### **4. Apocalypse**

Apocalypse is derived from the ancient Greek word *Apocalypsein*. It does not mean the end of the world, instead, it means to reveal. Apocalyptic literature shows the end of history, often using themes of violence and strange images of a changed world (Garrard, 2004). ). Garrard also suggests that the idea of the apocalypse is a metaphor, it symbolizes disaster and represents images of crisis and conflict (Garrard, 2004). Apocalypse refers to a dreadful incidents that lead to destruction and devastation to a great extent. It occurs when several ecological issues outbreak simultaneously. These terrible events include nuclear weapons, toxic chemicals, natural disasters, overpopulation, and even pandemics like COVID-19. Garrard highlights the importance of understanding ecology, stating that the world is not about to end and that human beings are likely to survive, even without modern civilization (Garrard, 2004).

### **5. Dwelling**

The concept of Dwelling is a lasting state that signifies the enduring, deep connection of Sapiens to the land which is linked to their memory, ancestry, and mortality, encompassing rituals, life, and labor (Garrard, 2004). According to Garrard, dwelling can be divided into two main types; Georgic and Primitive. The former type is associated with agricultural practices to support human lives, primarily seen in North America and Europe, which tend to disturb the natural balance. On the other hand, the latter type, also referred to as Indian Ecology, represents a lifestyle that aligns with nature and promotes a balanced relationship with the environment (Garrard, 2004). Dwelling is also considered as an idea of Motherland. It refers to those individuals who leave their home country to go abroad and return to their homeland when they grow older or accomplish the aims for which they left their motherland. Some Ecocritics also argue that the Earth is a place to live. They point out that everything in physical form is temporary and will not last forever. This cycle has a common point that is best understood beyond the physical world, in a metaphysical way.

## **6. *Animals***

This is the sixth trope in Garrard's book. This concept emphasizes the significance of animals in the ecosystem and literary works. Animals rely on the forest for protection from dangers that affect their lives. Humans utilize animal similes for showing certain emotions and states, for instance, *as busy as a bee*, *as brave as a lion*, *as free as a bird*, etcetera. Humans and animals are intrinsically linked to nature, and exploring their relationship can be fascinating. Garrard (2004) suggests that the study of the relationship between humans and animals in the humanities can be approached through two major perspectives: the philosophy of animal rights and cultural analyses of how animals are represented.

## **7. *Futures: The Earth***

This is the final trope in Garrard's *Ecocriticism* (2004) book. The author kept this concept in the end because it covers all the seven concepts discussed above. This trope explores the earth through multiple lenses such as biological, ecological, literary, and political lens. The Earth is the only home for living beings that provide Oxygen. However, human actions such as globalization, industrialization, modernization, and nuclear weapons, caused a great loss and devastation of nature by contaminating and deforesting it, ultimately threatening our own survival. Garrard states in his book that images of the Earth taken from orbiting spacecraft often show how isolated the planet is in space, its delicate beauty, and the small area it occupies within vast emptiness (Garrard, 2004).

These tropes offer a unique lens through which nature-human relations can be explored.

## **Introduction of the Author**

Born on 8<sup>th</sup> April 1955, in Karachi, Aamer Hussein is a Pakistan-born English short fiction writer, translator, novelist, critic and essayist. Paternally, he belongs to Pakistan, and maternally to India. Later He moved to London in his teens and graduated there. He also served as an Urdu lecturer in London. Aamer Hussein is an eloquent self-expressionist, who writes about what he personally experiences and expresses his innermost emotions and write them in a creative way. His overall works—including short stories, novels, and essays—illustrate not only his appreciation for the beauty of nature but also his mental capability to observe human existence as deeply interconnected with the natural world.

He has included ecocritical elements in his works. The titles of his stories vividly depict his affection and attachment to nature. Many times in his stories, Hussein has used the phrase *City by the Sea* as a metaphor for Nature and Culture. The word *City* portrays Modern culture, and *Sea* portrays Nature. In his story *Turquoise* we see a relationship of love and respect as the sea near the largest city of Pakistan, Karachi has receded and sky-kissing buildings have occupied the place. Even then the Sea and city are never in confrontation (Hussein, *Turquoise*, 2002). Another example of an ecocritical element in Hussein's story is *Another Gulmohar Tree*. *Gulmohar tree* is planted beside a road in Karachi. Its presence in Karachi symbolizes the existence of nature in an industrialized area, which once again hints at the co-existence of ecocritical elements (Hussein, *Another Gulmohar Tree*, 2009). *A Convalescence* in this study is taken from Hussein's short story collection, (*What is Saved: Batori Hui Khushiyan: Life Stories and Other Tales*). The stories in this collection are gathered from two other collections named *Hermitage* and *Restless*, the short story under the study was first published in (*Hermitage And Other Stories*). In her book review article, Sucharita Dutta-Asane highlights, "*Hermitage is a tribute to storytellers, to music and art from this shared past, layered with cultural memory and influenced by oral and written narratives*".

## **Research Methodology**

### **Methodology**

This research project aims to examine ecocritical element present in the selected Pakistani short fiction therefore a descriptive qualitative method has been used to analyze the text of selected short story *A Convalescence* (2024) by Aamer Hussein by utilizing an ecocritical lens. The data collection included reading various articles and books on the particular topic. The research data have been collected through heuristic and hermeneutic reading techniques. The data for this study has been obtained through both primary and secondary sources. The primary source for data collection is the short story collection *What is Saved* (2024) in which it has been published. The secondary source is related articles, sites, and e-journals. The data have been collected in the form of words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs that consist of information about ecological elements.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study adopts a latest literary criticism theory, Ecocriticism. The theoretical framework used in this research is Greg Garrard's notion of environmental awareness of ecocriticism. The data, collected from articles and books have been analyzed using an ecocritical approach suggested in the understanding of Garrard's view on ecological perspective in ecofiction. Subsequently, this study utilizes Garrard's ecocritical tropes for analyzing the selected short story. The data have been organized into seven distinct concepts i.e. pastoral, pollution, wilderness, apocalypse, dwelling, animal, and the earth.

### **Data Analysis**

The research project intends to critically evaluate the textual content of the selected short fiction *A Convalescence* by Aamer Hussein. In *A Convalescence*, Hussein has portrayed a rich tapestry of ecocritical elements that can be analyzed through Garrard's ecocritical lens. The project has utilized Greg Garrard's notion of Ecocriticism and the ecocritical tropes introduced by Garrard in his book (*Ecocriticism*, 2004). He has proposed eight tropes, but this research brings six tropes that are widely analyzed in the selected work of short fiction.

## **1. Pollution**

The term *Pollution* refers to the contamination of essential natural elements like land, water, and air. It is characterized by the presence of harmful substances in excessive amounts. Human activities, particularly modernization, are major contributors to global pollution. In ecocriticism, pollution is associated with environmental degradation and human activities that harm the natural world. This trope investigates not only the contamination of the physical environment but also its impacts on emotional, cultural, and social aspects of human-nature relationships.

### **Pollution in *A Convalescence***

Rashid's pigeon serves as a representation of natural autonomy. However, the reactions from his friends and roommates indicate the theme of dominance and mistreatment.

*Rashid has been adopted by a pigeon.*

*It flew into his hostel room in Jamshoro at dawn and just stayed on.*

*His roommates don't like it; they want to chase it away.*

*But it won't go. He's placed a clay bowl for it.*

*He's videoed himself with the pigeon (Hussein, 2024).*

When he posted his picture with his ecological friend—a pigeon, people suggested him to exploit the bird in one or in another way, recommending him to clip or tape the wings of the pigeon because it is flapping around the room, coming and going on its own will. Some people even offer him to sell the bird, this reflects the trope as a symbolic pollution, illustrating the interference of humanity with the nature's autonomy.

*Rashid writes that when he posted pictures of his new friend he had a barrage of unwarranted responses.*

*Pigeon-fanciers wanting to borrow or buy it, telling him to clip its wings with a scissor, or tape them down.*

*His roommates still want to banish it (Hussein, 2024).*

This suggests that human tries to dominate and impose man-made boundaries on nature, metaphorically polluting its liberty.

Another example is when the narrator walks through Regent Park where he sees that a swan is surrounded by tourists with cameras.

*As I walked through Regents Park one August afternoon, it was lying on the edge of the lake, surrounded by tourists with cameras. Was it ill, I wondered? They moved away and the swan shuddered, spread its wings, slowly, and began to dance, a languid, elegant performance.*

*I took a series of photographs.*

*It seemed to know I was enthralled. Then it slid into the water and moved away on the lake* (Hussein, 2024).

This emphasizes the invasion of urban culture into natural settings. The tourists view the swan as an object of exhibition rather than a living being which signifies a kind of *Cultural Pollution*. Nature is reduced to a mere amusement, resulting in a separation between people and the natural world.

*Shahbano has been writing story after story for children. Jackals, peacocks, lions and all the beasts of the jungle parade through her stories* (Hussein, 2024).

Shahbano, Hussein's friend, writes children's stories that feature nature and animals, showing her love and desire to protect nature. However, the difference between her stories and the city around her suggests that modern life is contaminating nature.

Although this story does not portray pollution explicitly, it provides some indirect references that address human interference with animals and the environment.

## **2. Pastoral**

Pastoral trope examines the affiliation between rural and urban settings, describing an idealized view of nature that underscores the serenity, simplicity and significance of rural life. This trope reflects a nostalgic longing for an untouched, pure natural landscape. It also reflects a simple, idyllic lifestyle in harmony with the natural environment.

### **Pastoral in *A Convalescence***

In this short narrative, the pastoral is not shown as a pure pastoral but there are some elements that convey the sense of nostalgia and nature. It also highlights the importance of reconnection and preservation of nature. When Hussein ponders over his visits to different cities, exploring multiple cultures and his childhood memories in Karachi, it brings him back an intense feeling of nostalgia.

*Looking out from the window in front of me I saw bougainvillea and a white flower I didn't recognize: From the window to my right I saw two old trees I'm sure I once climbed*

(Hussein, 2024).

When he visits his friend Shahbano's patio office and looks out from the window, he sees his childhood home in Karachi, he recalls the half-forgotten memory and says that he is sure that he once climbed these trees. This remembrance makes him long for a simple past and a strong bond with nature. Likewise, he recalls the time in Chennai with his friend Mukund and says that:

*I made it to Chennai where he lives; he drove me past the fort to the sea, and back past the university buildings and a ruined palace to the centre of town. It felt like summer*

(Hussein, 2024).

His memories of spending time in Chennai by the sea, enjoying the summer air, reveal his desire for peaceful moments in natural settings. This underlines an idealistic view of pastoral that provides a sense of nostalgia and escape from urban, busy life.

### **3. Wilderness**

This trope represents nature that is untouched and uncontaminated by human beings, the forests that are still unspoiled from modernization. In this narrative, there is the new-world type of wilderness, which represents untouched nature appreciated for its beauty and characterized as sublime, free from human interference.

#### **Wilderness in *A Convalescence***

In this story, there is the new world type of wilderness, which represents untouched nature appreciated for its beauty and characterized as sublime, free from human intervention.

*Mukund and I met again in Abu Dhabi a decade ago and have met in London every year ever since.*

*Often we spend hours over drinks, reminiscing about our school days in the Blue Mountains*

(Hussein, 2024).

The narrator and his childhood friend Mukund recall their school days in the *Blue Mountains*, viewing the wilderness as a pristine place from their youth. Although these mountains are now just memories, they represent a significant connection to nature. The connection highlights a different place from their current urban lives.

The repeated narratives surrounding Swans, especially the one narrated by Shahbano about a king who captures them, represent the conflict between wilderness and human authority.

*Shahbano sends me a tale she wrote about a pair of swans and a king: the swans lived in a lake where they fed on pearls.*

*When they ran out of pearls, they flew far in search of sustenance.*

*They found themselves in a royal garden where the king welcomed them with bowls of fresh pearls.*

*I tell her of one of the swan tales I know: we often to come back to the swans.*

*In the version I know, the king traps the swans in a pearl-strewn net, until their companions come to rescue them (Hussein, 2024).*

In this story, the Swans' carefree existence on a distant lake is disrupted when the king invites them by offering them their food—pearls, just to capture them. This tale reflects wilderness as an untouched lake by humans as the king invites them rather than capturing them in their lake, and mankind's fascination with pristine nature and urge to control the wild.

The story serves as a critique of how wilderness, symbolized by the natural lake environment of Swans is endangered by human actions. The tale conveys the message that genuine wilderness is a place that should remain unspoiled and free from human interference.

#### **4. Apocalypse**

Apocalypse trope often depicts the fear of the end of the world and environmental collapse. It refers to terrible events that cause existential threats to the ecosphere.

##### **Apocalypse in *A Convalescence***

In this story, there are no clear world-ending, destructive events, but they reflect gradual environmental changes. The disappearance of familiar places, and changes in human interaction with nature, these aspects suggest a slow and silent apocalypse.

*I was meeting Mehreen later the same day.*

*I rang her and asked her to come to collect me from the street where she once lived.*

*She phoned several times, she was lost,*

*She couldn't remember how to reach the place she once called home.*

*Anything you recognize? The wall? The trees? I asked. She shook her head.*

*Too tall, too high, she said.*

*Through the window we saw the mango tree we used to climb - But the tamarind's gone, she said, and the wall is higher now (Hussein, 2024).*

When Hussein recalls his visit to Karachi and notices that modernization has altered nature, particularly the trees in his childhood.

On the other hand, when Mehreen, his childhood friend, is unable to recognize her former home due to environmental changes/ shifts. This transformation indicates the gradual apocalypse as the tamarind tree has perished and the walls are high. This is how environmental changes cause emotional disconnection with nature.

Another example is when the narrator is confirmed and bedridden due to a fractured leg. This state prevents him from his walks in nature, ultimately missing the freedom and serenity that he feels in nature.

*I miss my walks most of all.*

*I live a few minutes away from Little Venice Canal; though I'm a semi-agoraphobe, I walk and walk, taking photographs of trees, flowers, water, birds, pavements, bridges over the Thames, passers-by in the snow and rain. Now that I've been reclining or supine for weeks, indulgent and alone for hours, I have photographs that appear in my Facebook feed as occasional amusement, virtual records of past years—the river Indus in Hyderabad in September, the hills around Medina in April, images captured unaware with strangers, casual shots with Rashid in Jamshoro, Shahbano in Karachi, Mukund in Chennai and London (Hussein, 2024).*

The photographs of nature that the narrator reviews during bedrest function as a *forward glance*, and also carry a sense of finality and preserved images of the natural environment, birds and pavements that may disappear in future. He captures the fleeting moments of

nature, friends and different places that are affected by the modern era. This shows a worry about guarding the natural landscape before it is drastically damaged and is unable to recover.

Shahbano's tale of Swans trapped by the king through a pearl-strewn net suggests that being trapped means losing freedom, ultimately signals hopelessness and doom.

*The king traps the swans in a pearl strewn net.*

*There is another fable in the narrative that Shahbano translated.*

*A wounded swan is rescued by a prince who tends to it.*

*When his cousin, the hunter who shot it down,*

*came to claim the creature when its wing healed, the young prince said:*

*It is neither yours nor mine, but one of God's creatures.*

*Free birds and animals shouldn't be caged.*

*When the time comes, I'll set it free and it'll fly away.*

*Such is the nature of birds (Hussein, 2024).*

The difference between the narrator's free Swan in Regent Park Lake and Shahbano's trapped Swans suggests how easily nature's autonomy can be bounded. The *pearl-strewn* symbolizes the modernity that traps nature and causes a gradual apocalypse. Garrard's apocalypse trope is shown in the story, reminding the reader that the ending will not always happen with loud bangs. Instead, it happens quietly.

## **5. Dwelling**

Dwelling focuses on the idea of human and nature's coexistence in harmony. This trope emphasizes humans to maintain a respectful and reciprocal relationship with the environment rather than dominating nature. It also critiques the modern disconnection from pure nature, where humans feel at home.

### **Dwelling in *A Convalescence***

In this short fiction, the characters and the narrator, respect and care for nature and coexist with it.

*Rashid has been adopted by a pigeon.*

*It flew into his hostel room in Jamshoro at dawn, and just stayed on.*

*When he came home from classes it was gone, when he came back from dinner it was back.*

*He's placed a clay bowl for it in a niche in the wall, by the skylight (Hussein, 2024).*

At the very beginning of the story, the character Rashid, along with his ecological friend, is introduced. In *A Convalescence*, Rashid welcomes the pigeon into his hostel room, provides it food, places a clay bowl, and lets it come and go on its own will, this shows the idea of *dwelling*. Instead of considering the pigeon as a problem or something to rule over, Rashid treats it as a companion, respecting its freedom. He also repels pigeon fanciers and refuses to clip the bird's wings or sell it by stating that it should stay free from boundaries. This aligns with Garrard's idea of dwelling where Rashid creates a relationship of coexistence with nature, creating a meaningful connection with the environment.

*I was also befriended by a bird last year, a swan.*

*As I walked through Regents Park.*

*I miss my walks most of all.*

*I walk except to empty my head, fill my eyes with colors and as we say in Urdu, eat the air* (Hussein, 2024).

The narrator shares a strong bond with different birds, such as Swans and Crows, and the places he is familiar with. His bond with a swan in Regents Park, the familiar sights of Karachi, and the childhood memories of old trees show that he values and adores nature and appreciates the presence of nature around him. Even though he is bound to his bed because of a severe leg fracture, he yearns to be outside again among the trees, birds, lakes, and pavement he walks on.

## **6. Animals**

This trope points out the importance of animals in the ecosystem and literature. Forests are homes for wildlife, they maintain pure nature in forests. The interconnectedness of Humans and animals with Mother Nature is captivating because they share the same space to sustain their lives.

### **Animals in *A Convalescence***

The selected short fiction *A Convalescence* is rich in several eco-centric examples. The Animal trope in this narrative is vivid through several interactions with birds such as Rashid's pigeon, the narrator's swan, and Yusuf's crow. In this story, animals, particularly birds are portrayed as independent living beings.

The pigeon disturbs the normal routine of university students when entering a hostel room and compels the characters to acknowledge its existence in an urban setting. Similarly, the swan in Regents Park, although seems adorable and graceful to the narrator, is not trying to entertain the visitors, rather it quietly glides into the water, ignoring human attention. The autonomous decision of the pigeon to come and leave the hostel room and its human companion Rashid, and the swan's conscious choice to engage in dancing and then suddenly slide away into the water portrays Garrard's that animals are conscious creatures who interact autonomously.

Shahbano, in her fable about swans looking for pearls, uses animals as symbols that represent qualities like loyalty, wisdom, and purity. In her story within a story, swans represent a connection with nature as they live in a lake full of wilderness.

The narrator's cousin Yusuf befriends a crow, breaking societal stereotypes that crows are bad-luck or villainous creatures.

*Yusuf, my cousin in Mumbai, likes taking photographs of birds.*

*In his balcony at home a crow comes to visit him and feeds from his hand.*

*He calls the crow Hoppity (Hussein, 2024).*

Yusuf's crow which eats from his hand, shows that people can form a special, personal bond with the animals. Yusuf treats the crow respectfully and enjoys its presence without caging or controlling it. Instead of considering the crow as a scary or troublesome bird, Yusuf chooses to feed it by hand and name it *Hoppity*. In this way, Yusuf challenges the negative societal views.

The author, Aamer Hussein questions the societal notion of crows considered as *Evil*. He is of the opinion that the Crows can be heroes.

*Why are crows in fables always the villains?*

*Does he deserve to be the hero of his own story?*

Most of the Pakistani and Indian people believe that crow's cawing is a sign of misfortune or death. However, this narrative gives respect to crows, as well as other ecological creatures and elements, and this story supports Garrard's ecocritical notion that animals should be appreciated for who they are, rather than being limited to traditional, symbolic roles (Hussein, 2024).

## **Discussion**

The data analysis has demonstrated the eco-critical elements that are part of the short story *A Convalescence*. The short story under the study is thus said to be a piece of green literature that traces the Ecological elements. Aamer Hussein has portrayed the love and significance of nature and its coexistence with humans in this story. The title *A Convalescence* is used as a metaphor. In the story, he directly talks about his fractured leg and its phase of healing but indirectly he talks about how nature and ecological friends heal our spirits. Even the titles of most of his stories contain natural elements. Some of them are *The Swan's Wife*, *Cactus Town*, *Another Gulmohar Tree*, *Dove*, *The Cloud Messenger*, *Lake*, *The Wounded Swan*, *Turquoise*, *Hibiscus Days*, and *The Lark*. In his short story *A Convalescence*, there is a discussion of a Pigeon, Dawn, Skylight, Park, Swan, Lake, Plum Blossom, Sea, Weather, Wildlife, and the Blue Mountains.

Aamer Hussein has eloquently articulated the modern time challenges that are characterized by the invasion of fast-paced lifestyles, capitalist corporate traditions, and technological innovations, illustrating individuals as vulnerable and isolated. Simultaneously, the relentless pursuit of industrialization and urbanization has made humanity a threat to the ecosystem, driven by a strong desire to manipulate natural resources and ecological assets.

Hussein's selected works focus on subjective experiences rather than objective representation. His writings describe nature through the four senses such as visual, auditory, olfactory, and

tactile perception. In the short story under study, the natural environment is rarely depicted as merely a background or setting instead, it is portrayed as an integral part of the experience of his friends and the author himself. The author is very responsive to the water element and Swans provide a sense of relief and healing for the author. Friendship plays a leading role in almost all of his works. In order to escape the horror of loneliness, the author seeks help from friendship. Sometimes, he's surrounded by his friends and sometimes he is in contact with them but there are some situations when he seeks refuge in nature by making nature his friend.

During the convalescence period of his leg, the author seeks escape from isolation but due to the bedrest, he is unable to go out with his friends although sometimes they visit him. Most of the time they are bound to their daily life works so the author longs to meet them and when he finds no way to meet his friends and go out to feel nature. He finds solace in the memories of his natural friends—swans, birds, ponds, trees, sky, mountains, and rivers. In the selected story, the author tells his readers that he had captured a photo of a dancing swan in a lake and after that, he never saw his swan friend. Here is a portrayal of the theme of the friendship between man and nature and hence it can be counted as an ecocritical element.

*It is neither yours nor mine, but one of God's creatures. Free birds and animals shouldn't be caged* (Hussein, 2024).

The author is also in favor of setting the birds and animals free, according to Hussein, such is the nature of birds. Throughout the story, Hussein is recalling nature and friends because he has fractured his left leg and now missing his walks badly.

*I miss my walks most of all. I walk and walk, taking photographs of trees, flowers, water, birds, pavements, and passers-by in the snow and rain* (Hussein, 2024).

The author is missing nature because its love is in his genes. As he is a diasporic writer and has a huge exposure to different cultures so, he is well aware of the worth and healing power of nature. He knows that nature heals the physical, emotional as well as psychological wounds of every human being, without any territorial boundary. He indirectly points out that nature is mankind's doctor and therapist. He is missing his old friends from the subcontinent region with whom he can connect himself well because humans need the support and company of friends during the ailment. Not only human friends, but he is missing nature not only from afar regions but also from the current place in which he is living because nature follows no boundaries, no borders, no caste and creed, no distinct society. Nature is nature, it is universal. It is as it was hundreds of millions of years ago but today it's decaying. Therefore, we find plants at some specific places that is why we are missing them, and that is why not only we are suffering from several health issues but our souls are also wounded. So the author is seeking convalescence by recalling the memories of his companions and revisiting the photographs of natural beauty. This gives a notion that like family and friends, nature is also our friend and a healer.

## **Conclusion**

The present study explores the environmental elements that are embedded in the selected short fiction of Aamer Hussein *A Convalescence* which represents ecocritical settings in multiple times and locations. Ecocriticism encompasses a wide variety of concepts, theories and areas of academic scholarships. The emphasis is particularly on exploring the relationship between literature and the environment. Nature, in his work, is crystal clear in

several landscapes. The ecocritical elements in Aamer Hussein's short story *A Convalescence* are skillfully woven along with human emotions. These elements in the short story emphasize the innate connection between man, his well-being, and nature. Hussein has portrayed metaphorically that nature serves as an ointment that can heal and provide comfort and companionship during tough times when people feel confined or face challenges in life. The story reminds the readers of the significance of the human-nature bond. It emphasizes the need to respect the presence of nature and live in harmony with it.

Hussein's story depicts that nature does not serve as a mere background to enhance the beauty of the earth rather it is an essential aspect of human existence on the planet Earth, connecting humans across the borders and cultures. The title of the story serves as a metaphor for healing both the body and the spirit that is achieved through witnessing raw nature and if isolation occurs, it is achieved through the memories of the natural landscapes, friends, and nostalgic locations. The narrative emphasizes the need for environmental awareness and protection of nature by portraying its interconnectedness with humans and the challenges of the modern era. *A Convalescence* praises nature's role as a healer and a companion of mankind. *A Convalescence* highlights that nature is a healer of humankind so we should take care of it to maintain the beauty of planet earth because it affects us and gets affected by us.

This study has analyzed the data of selected literary text by utilizing ecocritical lens and applying Greg Garrard's six ecocritical tropes, namely Pollution, Pastoral, Wilderness, Dwelling, Apocalypse, and Animal. The author gives environmental awareness to his readers and compels them to ponder over the ways of preserving the nature by indirectly highlighting the ecological issues. In the selected short story, the harmonious blend of nature and culture is depicted, which this research has highlighted.

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