

# Postcolonial Ecocriticism and Sustainable Imaginaries in the Works of Janice Pariat

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**Abstract-** This study explores the intersection of postcolonial ecocriticism and environmental justice through the literary works of Janice Pariat. By examining *Boats on Land* and *The Nine-Chambered Heart*, the research investigates how Pariat challenges dominant environmental narratives and highlights the role of indigenous knowledge in fostering sustainable futures. The study argues that Pariat's works present a critique of colonial exploitation and resource extraction, offering alternative ecological imaginaries rooted in postcolonial cultural narratives. This research contributes to the broader field of postcolonial ecocriticism by demonstrating how literature can engage with contemporary environmental issues, emphasizing the importance of indigenous knowledge and cultural memory in reimagining sustainability in postcolonial contexts.

**Keywords:** Postcolonial Ecocriticism, Environmental Justice, Sustainability, Indigenous Knowledge, Literary Analysis

## I. INTRODUCTION

The integration of postcolonial theory and ecocriticism has become a prominent area of research, particularly in understanding how literature engages with environmental sustainability and justice. However, there remains a significant gap in the literature regarding how these ecological discourses intersect with gender and sexuality. Janice Pariat's works, which have been widely recognized for their exploration of postcolonial identity, provide a fertile ground for investigating the complexities of postcolonial environmentalism. Pariat's novels, including *Boats on Land* and *The Nine-Chambered Heart*, offer a nuanced exploration of South Asian landscapes, histories, and cultural identities, making

them an ideal subject for an ecocritical reading that also addresses questions of sustainability and queer theory.

Scholars like Trivedi and Kaushik (2024) argue that postcolonial ecocriticism offers a critical lens through which to examine environmental degradation, yet their work focuses predominantly on the literary representations of environmental justice without fully considering the role of sexuality and identity in these narratives. This oversight limits the potential of postcolonial ecocriticism to account for diverse lived experiences, particularly those of marginalized queer communities in postcolonial settings. By focusing on the works of Janice Pariat, this study aims to bridge this gap by exploring how Pariat's narratives construct alternative ecological imaginaries that incorporate queer spaces, identities, and environmental justice.

The importance of such an analysis cannot be overstated. In a global context marked by environmental crises, it is essential to examine how literature can contribute to the creation of sustainable futures, particularly in postcolonial societies where environmental struggles are compounded by histories of colonization. Pariat's works, with their rich depictions of Indian landscapes and cultural diversity, offer a unique perspective on how environmental issues are shaped by both colonial legacies and contemporary social struggles. By analyzing these works through the lens of postcolonial ecocriticism and queer theory, this study will provide fresh insights into how literature can serve as a tool for environmental activism and resistance.

Furthermore, the study will explore the role of indigenous knowledge systems in shaping sustainable ecological practices, particularly as they are represented in Pariat's fiction. Scholars such as Das (2023) and Li (2025) have emphasized the importance of indigenous knowledge in postcolonial ecocriticism, yet this has not been sufficiently explored in relation to queer theory. By considering how indigenous ecological knowledge intersects with postcolonial and queer discourses, this research will contribute to the broader field of postcolonial ecocriticism and expand our understanding of how literature can offer transformative ecological imaginaries.

The research methodology will involve a detailed textual analysis of Pariat's works, focusing on the representation of landscapes, environmental destruction, and sustainable futures. Additionally, the study will incorporate queer theory to explore how sexuality and identity influence these environmental narratives. Through this interdisciplinary approach, the study will contribute to both the fields of postcolonial studies and ecocriticism, offering new perspectives on the ways in which literature can engage with environmental justice, queer identity, and sustainability.

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Anil Pradhan (2023) The article *Unravelling the Queer Space: Understanding Sexuality through the Works of Janice Pariat* explores how Janice Pariat's works present a nuanced understanding of sexuality, particularly in the context of postcolonial identities. This study is significant as it sheds light on the intersections of queer theory and postcolonialism, positioning Pariat's writing as a tool for interrogating the fluidity of sexual identities in postcolonial settings. The methodology employed involves a close reading of Pariat's texts, focusing on themes of self-discovery and societal boundaries. Findings reveal how sexuality, framed within postcolonial discourses, challenges hegemonic sexual norms. The research contributes to understanding how literature can act as a space for marginalized voices, yet it highlights a gap in the exploration of environmental narratives within postcolonial queer theory.

Apexa Trivedi and Usha Kaushik (2024): In *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Revaluating Environmental Narratives in Global Contexts*, the authors analyze the intersection of postcolonialism and ecocriticism, focusing on how literature engages with environmental degradation and sustainability. Their study emphasizes the importance of reclaiming postcolonial narratives to address global environmental crises. The methodology includes textual analysis and comparison across diverse literary traditions to examine how the environment is shaped by colonial histories. Key findings underscore the necessity of reevaluating environmental issues from a postcolonial perspective. However, the paper acknowledges the need for further studies that incorporate specific literary works to explore sustainable imaginaries more deeply, particularly in the South Asian context.

Yajing Li (2025): The article *Ecocriticism and the Dilemmas of Postcolonial Modernity in Nigerian Urban Literature* highlights the tensions between postcolonial modernity and environmental ethics within urban settings in Nigerian literature. Li emphasizes how environmental destruction is intertwined with colonial histories, using Nigerian urban literature as a case study. The methodology, which focuses on literary analysis and historical context, reveals that urbanization has exacerbated ecological issues, undermining indigenous knowledge systems. However, the research fails to address the role of gender and sexual identities in these ecological dilemmas, indicating a gap that this study intends to address by incorporating gender and sexuality into the environmental discourse.

Paramita Das (2023): In her chapter *Interrogating Indigenous Knowledge and Ecology: A Colonial and Postcolonial Ecocritical Study of Janice Pariat's Everything the Light Touches*, Das examines how indigenous knowledge and ecology are represented in Pariat's works. The research offers a critical postcolonial ecocritical reading of *Everything the Light Touches*, highlighting how colonialism has disrupted indigenous ecological practices. The study uses an interdisciplinary approach, drawing from ecocriticism, postcolonial theory, and indigenous studies. The findings emphasize the resilience of

indigenous environmental knowledge, yet it suggests that Pariat's work requires deeper exploration in relation to sustainable futures and environmental justice. The research identifies the need for a broader examination of sustainability in postcolonial ecocriticism.

Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin (2015): *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* offers a comprehensive overview of the field of postcolonial ecocriticism, positioning environmental justice as central to postcolonial struggles. The book argues that the exploitation of nature is intrinsically linked to the exploitation of marginalized communities, and it explores how literature reflects and critiques these dynamics. Through an analysis of various postcolonial texts, the authors argue that literature can be a powerful medium for environmental activism. However, the book calls for further research that integrates a more diverse set of voices, particularly those from the Global South, to enrich postcolonial ecocritical discourse.

Despite the growing body of research on postcolonial ecocriticism, there remains a gap in studies that address how postcolonial literature intersects with queer theory and environmental sustainability. While scholars such as Trivedi and Kaushik (2024) emphasize the need to reevaluate environmental narratives, limited attention has been given to how gender, sexuality, and postcolonial environmentalism converge in contemporary literary works. Janice Pariat's works, which engage deeply with identity, memory, and belonging, provide a unique space to explore these intersections.

### III. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is crucial for advancing postcolonial ecocriticism by incorporating queer theory into the analysis of environmental narratives. By focusing on Janice Pariat's works, the research will provide a nuanced understanding of how sexuality, identity, and sustainability intersect within postcolonial contexts. The significance lies in demonstrating how literature can offer alternative frameworks for understanding environmental justice, particularly in postcolonial societies. This study will contribute to the broader

discourse on environmental sustainability by introducing new perspectives that challenge dominant ecological paradigms. Furthermore, it will highlight the role of literature in promoting sustainable futures through the reclamation of indigenous ecological knowledge and postcolonial narratives of resistance.

### IV. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To examine the ways in which Janice Pariat's works engage with postcolonial environmental issues and contribute to the discourse of sustainable imaginaries.
2. To explore the intersection of queer theory and postcolonial ecocriticism in Pariat's narratives, focusing on how sexuality and identity shape environmental engagements.
3. To identify and analyze the role of indigenous knowledge in the formation of ecological sustainability within the postcolonial contexts represented in Pariat's works.

### V. METHODOLOGY

The methodology for this study involves a close textual analysis of Janice Pariat's *Boats on Land* and *The Nine-Chambered Heart*, exploring how themes of environmental justice and indigenous knowledge are represented. The analysis is informed by postcolonial ecocriticism, drawing on the works of Trivedi and Kaushik (2024) to frame the colonial and postcolonial dynamics that shape ecological narratives. The research also incorporates queer theory to examine how sexual and gender identities intersect with environmental struggles. By contextualizing these themes within the broader discourse on sustainability, the methodology seeks to uncover how Pariat's literary works challenge conventional ecological paradigms and present alternative models for environmental justice rooted in indigenous knowledge and cultural narratives.

#### Analysis of Environmental Justice and Cultural Narratives in Janice Pariat's Works

In examining Janice Pariat's literary contributions through the lens of postcolonial ecocriticism, the focus of this analysis is on the intersection of environmental

justice and indigenous cultural narratives in her works *Boats on Land* and *The Nine-Chambered Heart*. Pariat's writing engages deeply with the historical impacts of colonial exploitation, highlighting how the extraction of natural resources from indigenous lands has caused long-lasting environmental harm. Through her exploration of marginalized communities, Pariat challenges the dominant ecological paradigms, offering a profound critique of colonial practices that have disrupted both the environment and local ways of life. This analysis also seeks to identify how these marginalized voices contribute to the broader discourse on environmental justice, which emphasizes equitable environmental benefits and protection from harm.

A significant element of Pariat's work is the exploration of indigenous knowledge, especially in relation to the environmental crises faced by postcolonial societies. Indigenous cultures possess an intrinsic connection to the land, nurtured through centuries of sustainable living practices. However, colonial encroachments have led to the loss of this knowledge, as modernity disrupts these age-old systems. In *Boats on Land* and *The Nine-Chambered Heart*, Pariat's characters wrestle with the erasure of their cultural ties to the land, confronting the harsh realities of colonial modernity. This chapter explores how Pariat reflects the tension between maintaining traditional ecological practices and adapting to the pressures of modernity, suggesting that indigenous knowledge is crucial for promoting sustainability in the postcolonial world.

Indigenous ecological practices, deeply entwined with cultural traditions, present alternative models for environmental sustainability. Pariat's works highlight these models, illustrating how indigenous communities resist the ecological destruction brought about by colonialism. In both novels, the characters' efforts to reconnect with their cultural roots are framed as acts of ecological resistance. The study argues that Pariat's portrayal of indigenous knowledge is not merely a critique of colonial exploitation but also an active engagement with the potential of these knowledge systems to address contemporary environmental challenges. By foregrounding the voices of those who have been historically

marginalized, Pariat invites readers to reconsider what constitutes ecological justice.

In *Boats on Land* and *The Nine-Chambered Heart*, cultural narratives are presented as essential tools for reimagining a sustainable future. These narratives, deeply rooted in local traditions and lived experiences, offer a counter-narrative to the colonial imposition of Western environmental practices. Pariat's characters often turn to their cultural heritage as a means of reclaiming their environmental agency. This chapter explores how these cultural narratives provide a space for postcolonial subjects to resist the homogenizing forces of modernity, fostering an alternative ecological consciousness. Pariat, through her characters, illustrates how cultural heritage can act as a form of ecological resilience, enabling communities to navigate the complexities of environmental justice.

Cultural narratives in Pariat's novels are not just about remembering the past but also about reimagining future possibilities. By invoking stories that intertwine human experiences with the natural world, Pariat critiques the ways in which colonialism has severed these connections. The novels emphasize that the future of the environment cannot be understood separately from the cultural values that have historically governed relationships with the land. Through this, Pariat challenges the assumption that modernity and progress must necessarily align with environmental degradation. Instead, she advocates for a vision of the future in which ecological sustainability is built upon the knowledge and values of indigenous cultures.

In the context of environmental justice, Pariat's works underscore the need for a framework that takes into account the historical and ongoing inequalities faced by indigenous communities. The environmental justice movement calls for the equitable distribution of environmental benefits and protections, especially for marginalized groups. Pariat's narratives highlight how the colonial legacy continues to shape environmental outcomes for indigenous communities, who often bear the brunt of ecological damage while having limited access to the benefits of modern environmental movements. This chapter examines how Pariat's works contribute to the conversation on environmental

justice by foregrounding the experiences of these communities and advocating for their inclusion in global ecological conversations.

Pariat's use of postcolonial ecocriticism challenges traditional environmentalist frameworks, which often overlook the experiences of indigenous communities. By analyzing her works, the study reveals how colonial histories have shaped current environmental struggles, particularly those involving land rights, resource extraction, and environmental degradation. Pariat's characters embody the struggles of postcolonial subjects attempting to reclaim their land and environment from the ongoing impacts of colonialism. The chapter will explore how these struggles are portrayed in her novels, offering a critical examination of the ways in which colonialism continues to shape the environmental challenges faced by indigenous people.

Environmental activism, as depicted in Pariat's works, emerges as a form of resistance to colonial and postcolonial exploitation. Her characters are not passive victims but active agents in their fight for ecological justice. This resistance is not only against the exploitation of land but also against the erasure of indigenous cultures and identities. By portraying these characters' efforts to protect their lands and their knowledge, Pariat underscores the role of activism in challenging both environmental destruction and cultural marginalization. This chapter argues that Pariat's works are a call to recognize the intersectionality of environmental justice, where struggles for land, culture, and identity are interconnected.

Pariat's exploration of gender and sexuality within the context of environmental justice further complicates the relationship between ecological resistance and cultural narratives. In her works, environmental struggles are often framed within the broader context of social justice, including issues of gender and sexual identity. This intersectional approach highlights the ways in which environmental harm disproportionately affects marginalized groups, including women and LGBTQ+ individuals. By incorporating queer theory into the analysis of her works, this study reveals how Pariat's characters navigate the complex terrain of

identity, resistance, and ecological justice. This chapter discusses how Pariat's novels reflect the interwoven nature of these struggles and offer a vision of environmental justice that is inclusive and intersectional.

## VI.DISCUSSION

As reviewed in the literature, scholars such as Trivedi and Kaushik (2024) highlight the importance of revisiting environmental narratives from a postcolonial lens, where the exploitation of natural resources is not only a colonial legacy but also a tool of resistance (Das, 2023). In line with this, Pariat's works engage with environmental justice by addressing how colonialism has historically displaced indigenous communities and marginalized their knowledge systems. The notion of sustainability, as presented in Pariat's texts, intersects with environmental activism by positioning indigenous voices at the center of ecological dialogue. Pariat's novels invoke the cultural memory of these communities, drawing attention to the cultural practices that, in many ways, present sustainable alternatives to modern environmental practices (Huggan & Tiffin, 2015).

In examining the colonial extraction of resources, Pariat critiques how modernity has often come at the cost of ecological stability, while also presenting models of resilience. Scholars like Li (2025) argue that postcolonial literature can provide important critiques of environmental destruction, and this study builds upon these arguments by showing how Pariat uses literary form to critique and reimagine these environmental justice narratives. By invoking indigenous knowledge, Pariat's works suggest that postcolonial societies can reclaim their ecological futures by revitalizing sustainable practices rooted in tradition. This reinforces the discussion in the review that calls for a broader inclusion of indigenous perspectives in postcolonial ecocriticism.

## VII.CONCLUSION

This study underscores the critical role of literature in addressing the intersection of postcolonialism, environmental justice, and sustainability. Through the

works of Janice Pariat, this research illuminates the way postcolonial narratives can offer alternative ecological imaginaries, challenging dominant environmental paradigms. By emphasizing the significance of indigenous knowledge and cultural narratives, Pariat's works provide a pathway for reimagining sustainable futures that resist the exploitation of both people and the environment. These findings contribute to postcolonial ecocriticism by demonstrating the transformative potential of literary works to engage with contemporary ecological issues. Pariat's novels, as explored in this study, offer a powerful critique of colonial environmental practices while providing a space for marginalized voices to reshape ecological futures.

By critically engaging with the cultural memory of indigenous communities, Pariat's works challenge the dominant discourse on sustainability, urging a return to ecological practices that respect and nurture the environment. This study enriches the field of postcolonial ecocriticism by offering new insights into how indigenous knowledge systems and cultural narratives can inform sustainable environmental practices. As the world faces unprecedented environmental challenges, the need for inclusive and diverse perspectives in environmental discourse becomes ever more urgent. Pariat's works provide a valuable contribution to this ongoing conversation, making a compelling case for the importance of reimagining sustainability in postcolonial contexts.

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