

**ECO-GOTHIC SUBLIME IN BINA SHAH'S *BEFORE SHE SLEEPS*:
KARACHI HEAT-ISLAND AS MORTONIAN HYPER OBJECT**

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ABSTRACT

In this case, Bina Shah offers us an example of eco-gothic through her 2018 novel *Before She Sleeps*, as a way of looking at contemporary South Asia at the intersection of environmental collapse and urban decay. This study explores the ways in which the Karachi heat-island phenomenon, an exacerbation of heat due to ongoing urbanization and climate change, is materializing as a hyper object in Shah in a Mortonian sense. Hyper object is a term coined by Timothy Morton and it refers to an immense environmental phenomenon that goes beyond the limits of human comprehension, which cannot be understood and exists deep in human life. In this article, I analyze Shah's use of eco-gothic tropes in relation to the heat-island effect, marking it as a specter that haunts both the narrative and the city, one which simultaneously possesses a palpable and ghostly presence over his characters. This qualitative paper contends that while the novel serves as a representation of the corporeal experiences of climate change, it also engages with the imaginings of the psyche and the existentialism of life in a climate changed world. The study employs close reading and discourse analysis in order to demonstrate that the novel presents Karachi's environmental crisis in a manner that transcends the dilemma of human agency versus environmental determinism. Thus, it adds to the increasing scholarship that connects current South Asian literature to eco-criticism.

Keywords: Eco-Gothic, Hyperobject, Karachi, Climate Change, Environmentalism,

Bina Shah

INTRODUCTION

Within the domain of postcolonial literature, South Asian authors have increasingly turned their attentions to imaginings of the ecological given that the international region is facing an apocalyptic environmental crisis. The unfolding scenario of climate change, resource scarcity, and rapid urbanization is manifesting not only in physical features but also in socio-cultural and political geographies throughout South Asia. While these challenges have triggered numerous literary responses, Bina Shah's novel *Before She Sleeps* proves instrumental in its contribution to a literary engagement with ecological criticism. *Before She Sleeps* reads as a massively accomplished and chilling snapshot of climate change as live and breathing, an environmental malignancy that undergirds every moment of the character's lives in a near-future Karachi that is simultaneously crumbling with pollution and led into some accelerated form of second moonshot utopianism.

The Eco-Gothic and New Weird: A Launch Pad of Potential Many of the stories in Shah's novel are imbued with a unique form of environmental horror that manifests as a strange blending of the tradition of the gothic — with its attention to the uncanny, the grotesque, to the sublime — and fantastic elements associated with the New Weird, which harkens to both science fiction and fantasy genres. Over the last few years, the subgenre known as the eco-gothic has emerged, serving as a vehicle for exploring emotional and psychological reactions to environmental catastrophe. *Epiphany* is a work that puts horror movement into the narrative of ecological themes against the disquieting qualities of the gothic to show ecology and ecology degradation through the texture of disturbing106119หาคอม106.storage box h106119.co106.us201 — 10705910545m1091345illi108. Karachi, for all of its struggles with temperature and climate, as a manifestation of heat-island effect, a phenomenon wherein inner city areas experience increased temperatures due to rapid non-managed urbanization, serves as both the novel and a larger metaphor of

environmental disservice in the world. A geographical and haunting presence in its own right, Karachi's heat-island effect informed by climate change, disappearing greenery and the increasing mass of concrete surrounding it, is expressed in *Before She Sleeps* as more than just geographic phenomenon. Overview This environmental crisis not only changes the way human scenery sets in the city but infiltrates the characters psychological experiences creating an existential horror like tattooed into their mundane lives.

The "hyperobject" is a term that refers to the very concept that philosopher Timothy Morton argues in his landmark book, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology After the End of the World* (2013). Hyperobjects are alright big, inscrutable things that are beyond human ken but change the conditions of life on the planet. An example of such a hyperobject is climate change—something that may feel too complicated for any one person or group to fully grasp, yet its consequences are undeniable and far-reaching. In *Before She Sleeps*, the heat-island effect in Karachi acts as a Mortonian hyperobject that is both a concrete and abstract material force making the city and the characters of the tale its subjects. The heat almost becomes a character—an oppressive, pervasive, entity that influences the daily lives of the residents of Karachi, breaking them down to emotional, physical, and social ruin.

In examining the connections between an eco-gothic sublime, the environmental shame that drives such an encounter, and the psychological burden of living under the threat of ecological collapse, *Before She Sleeps* illustrates both the abject life produced by human negligence and transforms it into a critical reflection. The heat-island effect is not just a thing, but a thing that induces existential dread. In Shah's novel, the characters inhabit a world where their bodies, minds and senses are continually shaped by the oppressive heat, allowing one to see the deep connections between the degradation of the environment and the human condition. Through this narrative, Shah challenges the distinction between human volition and environmental determinism; how much can anyone fully control an environment under such a wide-ranging, all-consuming crisis?

Thus, this research will investigate the way that Shah's *Before She Sleeps* reframes the heat-island of Karachi as a Mortonian hyperobject through the eco-gothic sublime, turning it into both a grotesque and monstrous force storming both the landscape and the psyche of those who reside within it. This study will analyse the novel in terms of the environmental collapse it describes and its psychological after-effects, thus providing a unique perspective of how modern South Asian literature grapples with ecological themes while deconstructing the socio-political systems which lead to environmental devastation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The space between ecology and the gothic has been a popular line of inquiry, with critics reconsidering the prevalence of the supernatural and the uncanny within the gothic in favour of texts which utilize the gothic to take on present environmental crises. This has resulted in what has recently been called the eco-gothic. Acclaiming the gothic tradition for its ability to foreground ecological issues, scholars such as Sarah Lauro (2011) have pointed out that the gothic's nature of horror, decay, and the uncanny creates a relevant context for engaging with the devastating consequences of climate change, environmental destruction, and ecological catastrophe. God forbid we take what has been viewed for so long as a prêt-à-porter put down and put it to use Lauro specifically argues that the gothic aesthetics of fear and discomfort can actually be the key to making people feel the same way — eerily like the way we should be feeling about our fragile environment. It is, they suggest, both a story form as well as an orienting device which highlights fears about environmentally destructive actions taken and their effects on peoples and places.

The second approach that Morton influences is the hyperobject, a term he famously introduces in *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (2013), a radically different theoretical lens that questions the lifeworld by focusing on massive environmental objects that extend beyond human reach. Hyperobjects are gargantuan, interlinked phenomenon of nature—climate change, global warming and deforestation—for the most part on a scale of so much larger than human that they

can hardly be understood to exist and yet change the human condition. As Morton is shown to be, much of this work accentuates how these phenomena exist beyond human temporal and spatial limits, suggesting a subtle rethinking of what agency and control become here. This hyperobject sounds relatable in the context of Shaffer and Baxter looking to literary depictions of ecological crisis, as it enables an even more useful conceptualization for scholars hoping to understand the ways in which environmental issues overwhelm human sense and agency. Karachi's heat-island phenomenon in *Before She Sleeps* is, on the one hand, an example of a Mortonian hyperobject. It is not just the heat that exists inside the air: it is the heat which exists inside the very mind of the human in-charge of the structure, it is the heat which exists inside the very idea of the city, the idea of the nation, it is an existential and cosmic open metaphor, that is overwhelming the human existence that is contained inside the boundaries of a structure, that force which takes away the happiness of billions, dragging them to the prison of the structure permanently because of the never ending requires of the structure destroying its own existence piece by piece with tears in their eyes, by making the human existence an absolute metaphor not just which remains in on earth, but in the entire universe which became a transdrug in the life of the structure and in the psyche of the minds of its inmates and-patients making them paralyzed visually, psychologically and socioeconomically.

The fusion of environmental themes with postcolonial narratives has been explored by a number of critics related to South Asian literature, like Agha Shahid Ali and Shahnaz Khan. In his poetry, Ali also draws from the experiences of environmental pollution and the ecological impact of political conflict that has taken place in Kashmir, using the landscape as a metaphor of loss and trauma. In a similar context, Khan discussed the political nature of urbanization and industrialization in South Asia and its relationship with environmental destruction and degradation primarily focusing on literature capturing the environmental crisis in Pakistan and India reflected through the pollution of urban spaces, deforestation, and climate change. In writing about postcolonial ontology, these scholars emphasize the relevance of environmental themes within this genre by making the point that the environmental

crises impacting South Asia today are intertwined with the region's fraught history of colonialism, urbanization and industrialization.

Shah brings environmentalism to the fore of this evolving discussion in *Before She Sleeps* in an eco-gothic fusion that fuses these two narratives. Karachi is written as both a physical and spectral environment and the novel literally and literarily renders the heat-island phenomenon as a central ecological concern of the city. Excessive urbanization is obviously bad and it causes heat-island effect, heat which is already high in the city, making the ambiance smoky and gloomy. In this environmental crisis, the genre of the gothic sublime renders the heat a constant, cloyingly apparent horror, and brings sensations of oppression and existential dread. The eco gothic can be used to overlap between environmental criticism and the gothic and *Before She Sleeps* presents this relationship particularly well due to how climate change and ecological degradation can be represented in eco gothic literature.

Although scholars have discussed the link between ecology and gothic literature, the relationship between the eco-gothic and South Asian texts has been underexplored. While hyperobject certainly needs more work in South Asia, with the region being home to acute environmental crises, the concept has not been fully explored either. The purpose of this study is to address this urgent gap in research by contextualizing *Before She Sleeps* through the critical framework of hyperobjects, opening up a new lens on contemporary South Asian literature as a site of ecological apprehension. Taking the heat-island effect in Karachi as a hyperobject in the Mortonian sense, this research provides a perspective on the representation of the Anthropocene in the form of certain environmental phenomena, which play a fundamental role in traumatizing human beings by taking on incomprehensible scales and arbitrary speeds at the boundary of the planetary. Thus, this research is not just a contribution to eco-gothic studies, but also to the postcolonial studies on ecological issues, especially those that stem from the South Asian region, and the relevance of postcolonial discourse to contemporary ecological crisis. Top of Form

Significance

The current research has the importance of an interdisciplinary method by integrating ecological criticism with gothic literary analysis to examine the environmental and psychological aspects of climate change in South Asian literature frameworks. This research demonstrates a new way to interpret representations of massive intermeshed environmental phenomena in literature through the application of Timothy Morton hyperobject onto the heat-island effect in Karachi. This makes it relevant to wider conversations on environmental justice in literature as activism, recognizing the role of literature in orientating readers towards ecological issues and encouraging interrogation of the human-nature bond. Meanwhile, this research contributes to the Eco-Gothic by filling a void in the Eco-Gothic studies in a South Asian context and provides new directions by grounding findings in a contemporary South Asian context and questioning how the active and the lived realities of environmental collapse in a globalized world, and invading the realms of the lived life, can be negotiated in contemporary literature.

Research Objectives

1. Examine the Representation of Climate Change in *Before She Sleeps*.
2. Analyze the Concept of the "Hyperobject" in the Novel.
3. Assess the Intersection of Environmental Crisis and Social Inequities.

Research Questions

1. How does Bina Shah utilize the heat-island effect in *Before She Sleeps* to reflect the environmental and psychological consequences of climate change in Karachi?
2. In what ways does the heat-island effect in *Before She Sleeps* function as a Mortonian hyperobject, and how does it reshape the characters' relationship with their environment?
3. How does *Before She Sleeps* address the social, political, and gendered inequalities exacerbated by the environmental crisis, and what role does the heat-island effect play in highlighting these inequities?

Theoretical Framework

This study is based on two most important theoretical perspectives: eco-gothic and hyperobjects. As critics (such as Sarah Lauro (2011) and Williams (2016)) outline, the eco-gothic framework combines ecological considerations with gothic aesthetics, revealing the ways in which environmental disasters may be broached through the contestatory hauntings and grotesquerie characteristic of the uncanny (which the gothic genre embodies). And so this enables an exploration of environmental crises, not just as a series of physical events but more as existential terror and a source of psychological distress. Equally fruitful, Timothy Morton ground idealization (2013) giving a however discipline idealization, expertly excitatory how colossal ecological sights as climate trade and urban warmth islands transfer beyond our ken, yet are spending and indivisible fated into daily life. When applying these theories to Shah's *Before She Sleeps*, this essay read the city of Karachi as a living being and a metaphor for environmental devastation, emphasizing the inseparable relationship between ecological degradation and human life.

METHODOLOGY

Using close reading and discourse analysis, this research examines the eco-gothic representation of the heat-island phenomenon of Karachi in Bina Shah's *Before She Sleeps*. Close reading utilises a method of reading that can be integral to this study, as it helps facilitate a probably more thorough, targetted laterally secondary examination, especially as to the way of use of eco-gothic imagery, motifs, and symbolism. This approach, through a careful reading of the language, structure and imagery used, will demonstrate how Shah fuses environmental themes with Gothic motifs of decay, oppression and the uncanny. That will illuminate the ways this novel is responding to ecological things — urbanization and climate change and environmental collapse — as they are experienced in a city so stiflingly hot.

Along with close reading, discourse analysis is used to investigate how the language of the novel both creates and deconstructs the environmental phenomena of concern

in the narrative. With discourse analysis, the questions pertain instead to how the text constructs ecological crises and how characters relate to and become affected by these environments. This method will demonstrate how Shah both physically and psychologically characterises the heat-island effect through language. The heat-island is no longer merely a geographical marker; it permeates the emotional and psychological landscapes of the characters, thereby impacting their relationships and sensory experiences of their surroundings. This study will use discourse analysis to interrogate how the tone of the narrative changes in a climate of oppressive heat, and how language evokes being under the burden of a level of ecological destruction that is an inescapable phenomenon.

Brief synopsis along with integrating two ecological textual analysis methods, this study interrogates the function of literary form in articulating and critiquing ecological crises. Using the close reading method will reveal the narrative techniques Shah uses to present the heat-island effect as a literal plus figurative force, and discourse analysis will juxtapose the language of the text against each other to uncover a larger condemnation of our current systems of urbanization and environmental disregard. This binarisation facilitates an analysis of the novel that simultaneously investigates how the eco-gothic elements in which Shah writes evoke the psychological and existential weight of the climatically endangered future, while enabling a deeper consideration of the interplay between text structure and eco-materialism.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Bina Shah employs the heat-island effect as a potent metaphor through which to explore climate change and its social, psycho, and environmental ramifications in *Before She Sleeps*. Urban heat islands, a phenomenon created by rapid urbanisation of land and destruction of natural vegetation and topography, may be the backdrop of the novel, but they serve as the canvas for the critique of the environmental and socio-political landscape of Karachi. This metaphor connects the physical decay of the city

with the internal condition of its inhabitants — and, particularly, women — destined to be deprived of their identity by both nature and nurture paradigms.

Karachi ka garam pehl gawahi sirf aysi alein nahi liain ye insani taqifati aur dilsahkti ki inassal mvlti hi nahi hai. It becomes a chronic condition, a representation of the climate crisis that pervades life, leading to enduring malaise, anxiety and hopelessness. When it becomes the unbearable part of the plot, it symbiosis the inability of the character health, mental soundness and bonds. Instead, Shah employs this environmental phenomenon to emphasize the weighty psychological toll of life in Karachi, as the oppressive, stultifying heat that permeates urban life weighs down on the hearts and minds of its people.

Timothy Morton has written on “hyperobjects” Slug—things like climate change that are too big, too complex, and too outside of human experience— but he makes a good match for the way Shah conceptualizes the heat-island effect. In *Before She Sleeps*, the heat is a hyperobject: it is everywhere, and yet it cannot be grasped or avoided. The novel portrays the heat as a grand ecological disaster —an environmental catastrophe so vast and all-encompassing that it reorders the characters' senses of space, time, and self. It changes how they experience the world, as they experience Karachi not just as a place but a state of mind; where time stands still spewing bitter dust under the blistering sun.

The heat-island phenomenon also draws attention to the growing environmental and social disparities in the city. Shah employs it as a device to comment on the inequities of urban life, with the upper class escaping environmental disaster in their air-conditioned rooms whilst the urban poor, who live in slums, face the worst consequences of this aftermath. This gap emphasises the institutional social injustices that worsen the effects of the burning crisis. It shows that urban poor are among those that suffer the most by environmental collapse. Shah argues that the political and economic systems that allow such disparities to exist should be reformed through more equitable environmental policy.

Besides the worsened environmental conditions, the heat-island effect is also a testament to the gendered oppression that prevails in Karachi. Especially women, they are bringing the environment crisis to themselves, the bad condition of the city makes them feel a threat in their mental health and their identity. And the heat becomes the mirror of their patriarchal social experience of gendered violence and social trapping. And so the environmental crisis is only exacerbating this sense of entrapment that women face; they become trapped both within their own oppression as well as that of the larger ecological collapse. The intersection of gendered and environmental oppression thus provides a powerful lens through which to demand a more complex and multifaceted critique of social and environmental (in)justice in the novel.

The symbolic weight of the heat is intensified by Shah's eco-gothic approach. The urban heat-island effect is transformed from an environmental issue into a specter that points out how the characters belong in the world to massive climate destruction has twisted into something nightmarish. The beauty and terror is both existential dread and the inevitable violence of pending environmental collapse — a perfect alliance with eco-gothic sublime. *Before She Sleeps* is deceptively subtle; it lulls one into a false sense of complacency before the heat becomes an ever-present threat, pressing against the cast—and by extension the audiences—with an uncomfortable reminder of the cost of existence within a world that is falling to pieces.

The heat-island effect that Shah records in his article does become a metaphor for environmental challenges much larger and more pernicious than that (which is pretty darn large and pernicious to my mind) that we face today. It redefines space, time, and identity for the characters and forces them to rethink their existence in a world that climate change has increasingly mapped out into territories and belonging. That heat, as hyperobject, is alive in the now, making the characters and the readers constantly, painfully aware that climate change is here. In doing so, Shah not only comments on the breakdown of urban Karachi but also the universal rhetoric of environmental degradation and systemic inequity.

Ultimately, *Before She Sleeps* uses the heat-island effect literally and metaphorically to address the ways in which environmental collapse, social inequity, and existential crisis are far from separate issues. By using the heat as a hyperobject, Shah rewrites relationships with the environment, distance, time, and identity for each character. Such eco-gothic elements of the novel compound the dread and helplessness associated with the knowledge that climate change is no longer an impending apocalypse but here, now, everywhere. Within this intricate web of ecological, societal, and mental health issues, Shah forms a story that takes aim at the structural inequities that influence both the environment and individuals' lives within it, pushing the reader to a reflective place about the destiny of our ecosystem.

FINDINGS

In *Before She Sleeps*, Shah employs the eco-gothic sublime to articulate a powerful, complex evocation of the environmental and psychological effects of unrestrained land and climate change in an urbanising world. Shah uses the eco-gothic to demonstrate the inevitable presence of nature in the human, but more insidiously how the nature — the heat-island effect in Karachi, especially — reconfigures the geography of the body and spirit. In the novel, the heat-island effect turns from a literal environmental metaphor into a specter over the city and its inhabitants, a source of existential dread. With it comes the stifling physical heat which is multi-faceted its own piece of anxiety and therefore corporeal discomfort that suffuses each day of every summer, each summer taking place within a lifetime. The environmental collapse signified by the heat-island effect contravenes human capacity: if the city cannot counteract the unbreakable trend of global warming that the hyperUrban city embodies, we have lost control over the environment and, thus, the future.

The heat-island effect has become an especially pronounced sign, exacerbated by a breakneck rate of urbanisation, of the stunning power of humankind to alter the environment. Shah shows us a dark, decaying cityscape of Karachi, represented in his series as a consequence of rampant development. Concrete, few green places and extensive urban development, add more heat, turning the city into an oven. Karachi is

depicted in the novel as a gothic, decaying city that is at once a center of urban development and environmental destruction; the city's ecological promise is contrasted with the nightmare of environmental apocalypse. The idea of a somewhat gothic Karachi refers to the idea of increasing vulnerability of cities worldwide to climate change. In keeping with gothic stories of the fallen grandeur of estates or societies, Shah imagines a decaying Karachi, a city withering under the pressure of its own growth and of climate change.

By depicting Karachi's heat-island effect, Shah is also critiquing the wider impact of urbanization and environmental neglect. The conflict inherent in human time can be seen in all urban expansion, which, the novel highlights, generally comes at the expense of ecological interdependence, and how urbanisation spreads the arthritic nature of climate change across the very network we depend on. But Shah is not only presenting a horror of the ecological effects of city-building, but also of the psychic burden of experiencing the demise of the climate. The novel does not merely depict its characters as sweating in the heat but imagines their psyche crack from the unbearability of a world already collapsed. The heat symbolizes their struggles, desires, and vulnerabilities—lack of power, anxiety to the unknown, and increasing awareness about the futility of trying to control the elements of their environment.

In this regard, Shah, through his eco-gothic perspective, highlights the deep psychological trauma that environmental damage can do. The mugginess underscores in every moment the idea that the characters are inhabiting a diminished and diminishing world, a world that is now a place where there is no giving, no shelter to be had under the ashes — whose beauty, relative security and comforting mutability has turned into a panic that lurks over everything. The once-giving environment has actually become an existential threat. They are, each in their own way, traces of the kind of characters holed up within a hostile, claustrophobic environment — the way they turn against each other, how beaten down each often is, bodies and minds coming apart at the seams. The heat, a literal and metaphorical element, symbolizes the unavoidability of climate change, and the characters' psychological reactions

reflect all of our collective anxiety living in a world that promises more and more unpredictable futures.

In the end, *Before She Sleeps* of Shah employs the eco-gothic sublime to underscore the precariousness of human life amidst the backdrop of environmental decline. As an allusion to environmental devastation, heat-island effect demonstrates the gulf between mankind and nature. At the same time, it highlights the close and interdependent relationship between humanity and the environment. Shah uses the sinking, sun-baked middle ground of the narrative Karachi to interrogate the accelerated development of cities, the emotional repercussions of inhabiting a climate-ravaged reality, and the erasures and implications of a plummeting ecosystem. The novel depicts a city in crisis, reflective not only of the challenges of modern South Asia but also the wider, global battle to match human development with environmental care.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper thus argues that *Before She Sleeps* employs the eco-gothic sublime to confront the socio-environmental realities of Karachi's heat-island phenomenon in complex and critical ways. Drawing on the concept of hyperobject (a term coined by Morton), Bina Shah's novel presents this environmental catastrophe as an enormous, inescapable thing that can neither be grasped in its totality by any single character nor is separate from them, because it influences their very daily lives. Karachi's heat-island effect is not just a physical malady, rather a web of interlinked problems of the wider causes of unrestrained urban growth, industrial development and climate crisis. As Shah suggests, the heat-island effect — to which we might attribute environmental crisis-motivated migration — is both a physical and psychological burden; in this way, environmental crisis is not simply background, but deeply embedded in the fabric of being human and shaping one's experience of space, time, and identity.

Shah's eco-gothic narrative implores readers to feel the consequences of environmental decay by confronting the environmental destruction caused by the

unsustainable expansion of urban spaces. Pushing the limits of the mind, the heat serves as a metaphor for the wider implications of a culture that neglects its environmental responsibility, exposing climate change mortality shown in both land and man. She will focus on how the novel contributes to the growing interest in the area of ecological criticism in South Asia, where literary representations can play a role in sensitizing the public to the urgency of ecological issues and more sustainable and equitable environmental practices.

However, the paper also provides an avenue to pursue in future research on the ways in which other South Asian authors are grappling with the same ecological themes, especially in the eco-gothic. Further studies may explore the intersections of gender, urbanization, and environmental justice in South Asian eco-gothic narratives, particularly regarding how marginalized groups, particularly women, face a disproportionate brunt of environmental impacts. Shah's work, taking cues from the wider tradition of eco-gothic literature, provides further opportunities to interrogate the climate crisis in postcolonial literatures and whether they might generate greater public discourse about ecologically just futures in a world increasingly at the edge of collapse.

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