

Exploring Environmental and Cultural Impact of Imperialism in *A Lady Cyclist's  
Guide to Kashgar* by Suzanne Joinson

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Abstract

This research examines Suzanne Joinson's novel *A Lady Cyclist's Guide To Kashgar* through the lens of Ecocriticism theory specifically focusing on the environmental and cultural consequences of British Imperialism. The research aims to shed light upon how imperialist ideologies shape not only colonial landscapes but also cultural identities. The examination emphasizes that the overlap of the decline of environment and culture forms one of the most salient aspects of the imperial project as the missionary agenda itself was a means to both intellectual and ecological dominance. The novel investigates the immediate and long-term cultural and environmental impacts of British participation in Kashgar, emphasizing how colonial imperatives disrupted local ecosystems and destroyed traditional knowledge. This study highlights the lasting influence of colonial history on modern identity and environmental issues by examining these impacts across the novel's intertwining timelines. This research engages with postcolonial and ecological studies and is in conversation with populist debates in contemporary literature and cultural studies that seek to critically examine the legacies of empire and their historical narratives through an ecocritical lens. Ultimately, *A Lady Cyclist's Guide to Kashgar* stands out its place in literature not just

as an imperial critique of history, but the relationality of current ecologies and cultural connection.

**Keywords:** Ecocriticism, British Imperialism, Ecological studies, Post Colonialism, Ecocritical, Imperial actions.

## 1. Introduction

The research outlines Ecological Imperialism from a historical viewpoint under the topic "Exploring Environmental and Cultural Impact of Imperialism in *A Lady Cyclist's Guide to Kashgar* by Suzanne Joinson.". *A Lady Cyclist Guide to Kashgar* was written by Suzanne Joinson, born in 1974 in the United Kingdom. Suzanne Joinson is an award-winning writer in the areas of both fiction and non-fiction. *A Lady Cyclist's Guide to Kashgar* is Joinson's most famous novel and a national bestseller in 2012 and was published by Bloomsbury.. It was shortlisted for the 2014 International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award and best first novel award of the Author's Club.

Suzanne Joinson's novel "*A Lady Cyclist's Guide to Kashgar*" contains two narratives, shifting between the early 20th century and the present day. The novel is centered on themes of identity exploration, adventure, and cross-cultural interactions. The narrative explores topics of cultural dislocation, ecological disturbance, and the ramifications of colonialism. Alfred W. Crosby (1931-2018) in his work "*Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900*" (1986), argues that European colonization was more than just cultural and economic domination. He contends that ecological imperialism was also a biological and ecological invasion. As European powers expanded their territories, they didn't just impose their languages, religions, and economies; they also introduced new plants, animals, and diseases that simultaneously reshaped the landscapes and ecosystems of the

colonized regions. This transformation altered local agriculture, disrupted indigenous ways of life, and had lasting environmental consequences that are still felt today.

### 1.1. Theoretical Framework

The study utilizes a hybrid ecocritical approach combining postcolonial ecocriticism, eco-materialism, and place-based narratives.

#### 1.1.1. Environmental Exploitation and Postcolonial Ecocriticism

The study of postcolonial ecocriticism looks at the complex connections among literary representation, environmental degradation, and colonial history. *Lady Cyclist's Guide to Kashgar* examines the environmental effects of imperialism since it is set in both colonial and postcolonial contexts. With an emphasis on how British colonial subjects engage with and interpret their surroundings, this research will examine how Kashgar's landscapes are portrayed in the book. It will also evaluate the novel's critique of the long-lasting ecological effects of colonialism and its challenges to Western depictions of non-Western settings.

#### 1.1.2. Eco-Materialism and the Agency of Place

Eco-materialist theory challenges the notion that landscapes serve merely as static settings, instead arguing that they actively shape human and non-human interactions. This research will examine how *A Lady Cyclist's Guide to Kashgar* imbues the desert and other landscapes with agency, exploring the ways in which these spaces resist, transform, or even consume human actions. Through this analysis, the study aims to contribute to ongoing literary discussions on the material agency of place and its role in shaping narrative meaning.

#### 1.1.3. Place-Based Narratives and Gendered Mobility

Ecocritical studies often emphasize the role of place in shaping identity, experience, and belonging. In Joinson's novel, the concept of place is integral to both its historical and contemporary storylines. This study will explore how the novel constructs themes of belonging, exile, and displacement through its depiction of the environment. Furthermore, an ecofeminist lens will be applied to analyze how women's mobility—particularly through cycling—intersects with environmental concerns, either reinforcing or subverting colonial and gendered assumptions about space and nature.

The main textual analysis method used in this study is close reading. Through close reading, the study will pay close attention to the depiction of nature in *A Lady Cyclist's Guide to Kashgar* and analyze how those representational tactics are connected to larger ecological and colonial issues. Prominent aspects of the texts, such as descriptive scenery, green metaphors, and the interactions between characters and nature, will be analyzed in depth. This will be complemented by intertextual readings with a range of other postcolonial and ecocritical literary fiction.

Secondly, historical and cultural contexts will also be explored in this research as an additional component of the textual analysis. Placing the novel within the changing context of British colonial incursions into Central Asia, this research will try to underscore the ecological and socio-political aspects involved in imperial expansion. British incursions into Kashgar in the early 20th century will be analyzed using historical records and archival materials to place the novel's representation of landscape and colonial discovery.

## **1.2. Research Questions:**

1. How does *A Lady Cyclist's Guide to Kashgar* portray the environmental and cultural consequences of British imperialism and challenge the colonial narrative through an ecocritical lens?

2. How does the novel use environmental imagery to critique imperialist ideologies, and what implications does this have for contemporary ecological and postcolonial discussions?

### **1.3. Data Acquisition and Sources**

This research is founded on a combination of both primary and secondary sources.

#### **1.3.1. Primary Source**

The novel *A Lady Cyclist's Guide to Kashgar* by Suzanne Joinson.

#### **1.3.2. Secondary Sources**

Scholarly articles, books, and theoretical textbooks on ecocriticism, postcolonial theory, and gender studies. Key texts are Alfred W. Crosby's *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900*, Greg Garrard's *Ecocriticism*, Rob Nixon's *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* and Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin's *Postcolonial Ecocriticism*. Travel accounts, colonial descriptions, and early 20th-century geographical accounts of Kashgar.

### **1.4. Ethical Consideration**

Ethical issues include the appropriate portrayal of non-Western locations and cultures since this study considers postcolonial and environmental discourses. The image of Kashgar's surroundings and people, as described in the book, will be critically examined, with an effort made to prevent the reinscription of colonial notions. In order to convey a variety of scholarly perspectives and provide a fair and comprehensive assessment, secondary literature will also be chosen.

### **1.5. Limitations of the Study**

This research has limitations even if it provides a thorough ecocritical examination of *A Lady Cyclist's Guide to Kashgar*. First of all, the analysis is interpretive rather than empirical because it is literary research, and it concentrates on textual representation rather than specific

environmental facts. Second, even when historical materials are used, the study's goal is to analyze how historical events are portrayed in literature rather than to factually represent them. Finally, because ecocriticism is a wide area of study, this study only looks at place-based narratives, eco-materialism, and postcolonial ecocriticism, leaving out other potential ecocritical frameworks.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The European colonizers were dominant over the “Other” world both in terms of power and ecology. In order to better serve their interests, European colonial powers frequently introduced foreign plants, animals, and illnesses to the regions they colonized. This practice is known as ecological imperialism. Both the native populations and the natural ecosystems of colonized areas were significantly impacted by this process. Additionally, it influenced the experiences and actions of British missionaries working in these regions. British missionaries frequently served as agents or witnesses to ecological imperialism and were an essential part of the colonial system.

“The ecological thought is a thought about ecology, but it’s also a thinking that is ecological” (Morton, p. 7). The ecological thought transcends the scientific study of ecosystems, mirroring the principles of ecology. It refers to the study of ecological issues, including biodiversity, climate change, environmental degradation, and sustainability. It entails looking at how species interact with their habitats and how humans affect these systems. Postcolonialism, as a theoretical lens examining colonization, investigates the cultural and economic subjugation of marginalized groups, particularly indigenous communities and their lands. The distinction between these two intellectual perspectives, nature and culture, has remained a prominent subject of discussion for more than ten years

(Afzal ). In reaction to the oppression and exploitation of colonized peoples, postcolonialism focuses on the economic and cultural structures that colonial powers imposed. It looks at how colonialism not only enslaved indigenous populations but also seized their land and used it as a resource that the colonists could exploit.

Postcolonialism discusses the impact of imperial power on human societies, emphasizing its consequences for individuals and their surroundings. It is clear that imperialism influences both humanity and the environments they reside (Afzal, 2).

When a region is colonized, the process extends far beyond the domination of its human population—it involves the colonization of the environment itself. The land, animals, plants, and all elements that constitute the ecosystem become subjects of manipulation and control by the dominant power. This exploitation is not just a physical alteration of the environment; it also signifies a cultural erasure. Land, for indigenous peoples, is not only a source of sustenance but a key to their identity. It embodies history, culture, and ancestral knowledge. Intrusion in the form of colonization thus affects both the environment and the cultural integrity of the people who belong to that land.

*“A Lady Cyclist's Guide to Kashgar”* weaves together two stories, both told from the perspective of women without children. The first follows Eva, a young Englishwoman sent to Central Asia in 1923 alongside her sister and a stern, devout missionary. But in an early twist, we discover Eva isn't actually there for religious reasons; she's running away from her dull life in the seaside town of Southsea. Armed with her bicycle and a book deal, she plans to write a cycling guide for the region, trading suffocating tradition for adventure. (Wheeler). Suzanne Joinson's debut novel is formed from the imaginary narrative of one of those early lady cyclists making her way across what is now Kyrgyzstan to establish a Christian mission

in Kashgar. At the same time, a modern-day traveler returns from work abroad to find a homeless Yemeni filmmaker outside her flat painting feathers on the wall. She takes him in at the same time she discovers that, as the sole beneficiary of a woman she has never met, she is now responsible for a house, a garden, and an owl (Bathurst).

In the novel, women were represented among the early Protestant missionaries who attempted to reach China in the nineteenth century. In 1844, only two years after the Treaty of Nanjing had given missionaries access to the treaty ports, Miss Aldersey, a member of the London-based Society for Promoting Female Education in China, India, and the East, set up the first mission school for girls in China. Thereafter, women, both married and single, continued to play an active part in what Protestant missionaries, with a lack of tact that seems amazing to the modern observer, referred to as "the Christian Occupation of China" (Davin). The protagonist, Evangeline, along with her sister, was on their bicycle journey as British missionaries in different parts of China. From Osh to Kashgar depicts the situations of missionaries who reached China in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The importance of both male and female missionaries in China should be understood within the historical context of their participation. Their presence was allowed due to unfair treaties forced upon China by Western nations under military duress. Consequently, missionaries arrived in the country as self-designated guests, safeguarded by imperial powers and not subject to Chinese law. It is not surprising that this advantageous position frequently incited local animosity, which subsequently diminished their efficacy (Davin). No major research has been done on Suzanne Joinson's novel "*A Lady Cyclist's Guide to Kashgar*" through the lens of Ecocriticism theory specifically focusing on the environmental and cultural consequences of British Imperialism. To fill the research gap by reviewing the literature already written on the *Ecocriticism* Theory I wanted to apply this to my research

novel focusing on how ecological imperialism and British missionaries had their impact on the local Eco-system.

### 3. Challenging the colonial narrative through an Eco-critical lens:

The novel is analysed with the help of Crosby's Ecocriticism theory. This research attempts to provide insight into the Environmental and Cultural impact of colonialism as well as Imperialism, how both female protagonists from different time periods have experienced cultural, language and religious differences. This research shows their journey of self exploration and the consequences of Colonialism and the Eco-critical issues being faced. Evangeline English who was a British Missionary during the year 1923 on the journey from Kashgar to London with her sister Elizabeth(Lizzie) and their mission leader Millicent. Eva who was basically a non-faith and not on the side of converting local Moslems into their religion Christianity. As a result, the conflicts that arise during her journey and the loss of her sister Lizzie and Millicent in Kashgar describes how the effects of forced colonial power and changing one's religion or culture into another through different ways causes immense issues that lead to a lifetime trauma and ecological changes. Eco-critical lense explores how the novel reveals the environmental degradation and cultural displacement caused by imperialism while also challenging the dominant colonial narrative.

*A Lady Cyclist's Guide to Kashgar* deals with the conflict of British Imperial presence which serves as a backdrop for analyzing both cultural and environmental disruptions which are brought by colonial expansion. The novel is based on a first person narrative describing the internal dilemmas of the person facing the influence of Imperialism. As a missionary herself Eva faced the loss of all her precious belongings especially her sister that she didn't get any chance to bury her with dignity illustrates how the victims of Colonialism and Ecological Imperialism feels the loss.

The novel, through its dual narratives, captures the profound transformations that British influence imposed upon Kashgar's landscape and its people. "They were scalded, sun-bleached, like tiny flutes and I called out to the carter to stop" (Joinson 7). The cultural landscape as the days in Kashgar described as the hottest part of the day defines the political situations in the time of early 20<sup>th</sup> century. "They were bird bones, piled in front of a tamarisk tree and I suppose my fate could be read from the pattern they made in the dust, If only I knew how to see it" (Joinson 7).

The analysis has been drawn using Lawrence Buell's concept of environmental imagination, Rob Nixon's theory of slow violence, Alfred W. Crosby's *Ecological Imperialism*, and Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin's *Postcolonial Ecocriticism* to illustrate the deep interconnections between environmental and cultural exploitation in the novel.

Colonial expansion is usually followed by environmental degradation since the colonial powers exhaust natural resources, reshape landscapes, and upset ecological balances. In *A Lady Cyclist's Guide to Kashgar*, British occupation of Kashgar is followed by deep environmental change that mirrors larger historical realities. As Alfred W. Crosby in his book *Ecological Imperialism* says The Europeans had conquered or at least cowed nearly everyone else in the world because the Europeans were the best people in the world. This phenomenon is especially clear in what I call the Neo-Europes (Crosby).

One of imperialism's important characteristics is the imposition of external land use that often ignores local ecological knowledge. Kashgar, which was previously shaped by native environmental relationships, is exposed to a transformation as British explorers and missionaries introduce new agricultural methods and infrastructure construction. "It was the English part that was the problem. Nobody hates the Irish anymore" (Joinson 14).

The journey from Osh to Kashgar in the initial chapters of the novel and by examining the environment through the lens of Eva it can be seen that when someone tries to forcefully

enter into your home, they not only want them to live the way they want but also change their whole environment. Joinson describes the Landscape and the people of Kashgar by illustrating the place-based narrative. Every place has their own distinctive cultures and mostly Europeans want to change their culture into English culture in order to civilize them, which not only takes away their independence to live but also their identity.

“The people of Kashgar have an astonishing acquaintance with the devilries of enchantment, in as much as they make their idol speak. They can also by their sorceries bring about change in the weather, and produce darkness and do a number of things so extraordinary that no-one without seeing them would believe them” (Joinson 17).

This disturbance is explained by Rob Nixon's theory of slow violence, which outlines how environmental destruction occurs over a period of time, with the long-term consequences on the land and its inhabitants. Alfred W. Crosby's Ecological Imperialism gives added context to the problem, declaring that colonial expansion had the tendency to introduce ecological displacement, whereby native ecosystems are replaced by foreign species and ecologically unsupportable land use.

As Nixon says, “To address violence discounted by dominant structures of apprehension is necessarily to engage the culturally variable issue of who counts as a witness”. In the novel the question that finally arises is rather the protagonist Eva was the victim because she lost her sister or the people of Kashgar or the Turk Muslims who became the victims of these missionaries?

The novel explores how colonial powers took advantage of the colonized people, we have seen many examples of how the British people entered into a land and pretended as if it was theirs. They usually arrived as guests but then after sometime started doing their work as

if working on their mission of harming them. In the novel the three missionaries who are on the journey to convert the local Turk Muslims, were caught and ended up in a house arrest for a long time because they helped a girl giving birth but eventually the girl died so they were blamed for killing the girl. A Muslim family initially gave them shelter to live in their house but later on the missionaries leader Millicent tried to convert one of their daughters (Khadeja) to Mohammed (head of the Muslim family). It shows how they attack the religion and the life of innocent people in order to only complete their mission. “Remember, he is tolerating us infidels in his inn because we are women, the undangerous sex - we should not waste this opportunity” (Joinson 19).

Colonial powers often viewed their colonies as sources of raw materials, leading to significant exploitation of indigenous resources. The novel illustrates this interaction through depictions of landscape changes driven by British interests. The commercialization of nature—whether through land acquisition, deforestation, or control over water sources—reflects the broader pattern of environmental imperialism seen in colonial histories.

“European humans have triumphed because of their superiority in arms, organization, and fanaticism, but what in heaven's name is the reason that the sun never sets on the empire of the dandelion? Perhaps the success of European imperialism has a biological, an ecological, component” (Crosby).

The question creates a parallel between European imperial hegemony and the ecological distribution of the dandelion and suggests that European imperial victory may involve a biological or ecological factor, as in the case of the dandelion. The cultural impact of imperialism is deeply intertwined with its environmental consequences. British colonialism not only altered the physical landscape but also disrupted indigenous traditions, languages, and social structures. The novel portrays this through the interactions between

British characters and the native population of Kashgar. “Regardless of the house arrest I believe there have been a number of powerful signs indicating that we should set up a mission” (Joinson 42). “This house will suit us, I am sure. We will setup our Mission here” (Joinson 44).

The British characters in the novel such as Millicent, Evangeline, Elizabeth, Father Don Carlo often display a sense of superiority over Kashgar’s cultural practices, imposing their own values and belief systems. Father Don Carlo informs me that he has achieved many conversions.

“He is doing magnificent work for the Italian church” (Joinson 49).

Therefore, it is to be observed that changing others' religion into their own beliefs is the first step and mission of colonizers. This imposition is clear in how British travelers seek to alter local traditions, either by attempting religious conversions or imposing Western gender norms.

Greg Garrard's postcolonial ecocriticism emphasizes that colonial stories frequently overlook or undermine indigenous ecological and cultural wisdom, substituting them with Eurocentric perspectives. Ecocritics may not be qualified to debate or solve problems in ecology, but what they *can* address, is “ecological problems” which are “features of our society, arising out of our dealings with nature” (Garrard p.6).

As the novel progresses, it becomes clear that British imperialism plays a role in the decline of native identity. The erosion of local customs represents not just a cultural disadvantage but also an ecological one, since Indigenous communities' sustainable practices for engaging with their environment are threatened.

“The General is feared. He beheads people without trial. He hates the Universal Mission of Christianity from the West” (Joinson 51).

Instead of glorifying British exploration, the novel depicts the imperial influence in Kashgar as unwelcome and frequently harmful. This subversion is clear in the way the protagonists Eva and Freida face personal conflicts and ethical dilemmas while interacting with the local community. The personal conflict of Evangeline who lost her sister and had to travel in the deserts and mountains without the count of days, food and water with an infant. On the other hand the personal conflict of Freida who was yet never a supporter of colonization but because of her belonging from a broken home and the separation of her and her mother.

“Where life in England begins and ends” (Joinson 72).

Missionaries' encounters with Kashgar's people and landscape serve as a critique of the colonial mindset that views the East as an exoticized territory to be conquered and controlled. The postcolonial literature often employs irony and subversion to expose the contradictions within imperial narratives. It was not their first journey as a missionary but the cultural disruption that they caused everywhere because of the colonizer mindset and changing people's religions and taking advantage of their alienation which they found within their family and religion.

Just as W.B Yeats have said in his poetry

“Things fall apart, A centre cannot hold”( The Second Coming).

Joinson provides an alternative narrative from the dominant narrative of imperialism. The existence of strong local characters resisting cultural and environmental destruction corresponds with Eco-critical narratives interested in indigenous agency during colonial occupation. “Millicent has been taken away, And Lolo has gone, I fear that Millicent will take Lizzie or Lolo will take Ai-Lien but then I remember that they have all gone. I must sleep. I do not know what to do” (Joinson 175).

From an ecocritical perspective, *A Lady Cyclist's Guide to Kashgar* reveals the cultural and environmental destruction that follow British imperialism and challenges the colonialist discourse. The novel dissects the exploitative process of imperial growth and the manner in which the landscape and the people are victimized in foreign occupation. Using slow violence theories, ecological imperialism, and postcolonial ecocriticism, this analysis illustrates the complex manner in which Joinson's novel dissects imperialism's long-term effects.

#### 4. Critique of Imperialist ideologies; Implications for contemporary ecological and post colonial discussions

Suzanne Joinson's *A Lady Cyclist's Guide to Kashgar* does more than offer a historical critique of British imperialism; it offers a multi-layered critique that engages with concerns in current ecological and post colonial theory. The focus shifts from the direct impact of imperialist actions to a more general reading, one which illustrates how the novel deconstructs imperialist ideologies and highlights their lingering effects in the contemporary global environment.

The ideology of Muslim country in the minds of the English community is nothing but merely a terrorist. In the novel the second narrative of Frieda who is from the present day London when heard about a man Tayeb that he is from Yemen she only thought about Muslims being extremist.

“Yemen. What did she know about Yemen? Nothing. Almost nothing. Once a British colony. Desert. Muslim. Home of terrorists. Everyone owning guns” (Joinson 97).

Joinson in her novel talks about The Myth of Civilizing Missions. One of the myths of imperialism is that colonialism introduced civilization and progress to 'uncultured' regions. Joinson shatters this myth through the presentation of the flawed and regularly morally ambiguous British characters in *A Lady Cyclist's Guide to Kashgar*. “To ask about our mission. Do we have any converts?” (Joinson 105). “After dinner we talked about the Moslem situation in this area. I had not realized it was quite so devastating” (Joinson 105).

Most colonial actions claimed that they were assisting others by "civilizing" them. Joinson illustrates a kind of dangerous thinking: religious conversion. The female characters in the novel, particularly Millicent, do not attempt to civilize the Kashgar Muslims by reforming their government or making them modern. Rather, they attempt to convert them to

Christianity. “The inside of the Moslem women’s quarters and families and it is there that we begin the process of conversion. Slowly, but surely” (Joinson 105).

Religious conversion acts as an instrument of control that disturbs local, cultural and ecological harmony. As in the novel, the technique for spreading their religious values on other people and doing their mission shows how the colonizers want the world to only work the way they want. They apply different tactics only to force their laws and values upon others. “I mean that you have been distributing pamphlets that are provocative. The locals don’t like your approach, you’re taking up with Mohammadan girl”(Joinson 107).

The novel under discussion is mostly based on religious Imperialism rather than just civilizing the Non-Western people. The imperialist ideologies have lasting implications for ecological and postcolonial discussion and these ideologies shape how the colonial and imperial powers viewed nature, people and land which lead to the environmental and cultural degradation, ongoing neocolonial structures and exploitation of the resources.

The exploitation of the people of East seemed easier for the western society and to expand their land and laws by not only taking complete hold of their land but also exploiting their mental health, for stealing their land the most important and initial step which they targeted was to attack their religious beliefs. Tayeb in the section of present time London explained the exploited minds of the people of East who have self exiled them and now have lost their identity and think of East as ‘Victimized East’.

“He’s too lost in his visions of the victimized East” (Joinson 114).

Joinson discussed the protest which the colonized people do because of the colonization. They lost their country, home, dignity and especially their self identity. She portrays how the West has put so much fear in our minds that we cannot even express the amount of destruction that the Colonialism has caused. In the novel Tayeb was a photographer and calligrapher who was living in London illegally. He came to London for a three month

language course but he is now there for almost fifteen years. This shows the extreme desire for one person to live in a western society. We can also relate it with the famous ‘American Dream’ of American society.

“Still, despite this, people write on walls all the time.

We write what we cannot in newspapers or books”(Joinson 114)

The imperial ideologies have historically justified the exploitation of natural resources. Imperialism enforced a capitalist, exploitative perspective on land, substituting native ecological wisdom with monoculture agriculture, resulting in desertification and a decline in biodiversity. If we go deeper into the discussion of how the imperialism have caused so much devastating changes into the ecology of the world we will know that the colonizers or the imperialist have somehow no regret of what they have done to the rest of the world, only in order to expand their land and to force their power on the rest of the world.

The consequences of this imperialism can be seen from both sides. In the novel Millicent tried to convert one of the daughters of Mohammed (Khadeja) only because she got to know about her one weakness that Khadeja’s family do not love her much because she is not that good looking as compared to her other siblings. The sense of insecurity and loss of self identity was caught by Millicent and she behaved as if she is her only well wisher. She tried to convert Khadeja and asked her to live with them and leave her whole family as well as her religion. As a result, her only weakness caused her death when her father got to know that she had converted her religion into Christianity. “Someone has informed Mohammed that we are trying to convert Khadeja”, “She fell into the river they say, though of course everyone knows it was Mohammed who drowned her” (Joinson 119-121).

Joinson in her novel explores that not every westerner is a colonizer or have a mindset of forcefully taking someone’s belongings i.e land, culture or religion. Evangeline who was a missionary was later exposed that she is a ‘non faith’ when realised that converting Khadeja

into their religious will cause so much trouble for her that she has to leave her whole family and bear the result of leaving her religion. She thought that she should go and tell everything to Khadeja's father so he can stop her by doing such thing but this might cause trouble to her more. The death of Khadeja lead to the immense consequences of their downfall and the failure of their mission.

“Now we have the blood of too many dead on our hands,  
Millicent. They will kill us now” (Joinson 123).

Alfred W. Crosby's concept of ecological imperialism suggests that colonization was not only a cultural or political phenomenon, but also an environmental one. European imperialists changed ecosystems by bringing in non-native species, modifying agricultural methods, and ignoring indigenous environmental knowledge. In *A Lady Cyclist's Guide to Kashgar*, these environmental changes are subtly depicted through the outsiders' failure to appreciate or comprehend Kashgar's terrain.

Materialism is one of the key aspect for the discussion of Post colonialism and ecological imperialism.

“Materialism is Evil. This was the mantra of Frieda's childhood” (Joinson 124). She discussed the decay of humankind because of this distruction, man wants to stay free in the air but become happy while seeing others in the cage.

“Despite himself, he caught images of birds and tried to capture the sense of freedom that comes with watching a bird in flight. Birds carry messages, he wanted to say, but it is up to us to have the skill to be able to decipher thos messages. Wasn't the invention of writing inspired, in China, by the flight of cranes? (Joinson 142).

By presenting the land as resistant, foreign, and ultimately impenetrable to British ways, Joinson invites the reader to consider the environment as a willing actor in the imperial

encounter—a victim of coerced assimilation and a symbol of resistance. Rob Nixon's theory of "slow violence" harm that is slow, belated, and frequently invisible can be seen on every level of Joinson's novel *A Lady Cyclist's Guide to Kashgar*.

The destruction of the world through imperial ideology is not a catastrophe but is delivered in the form of gradual erosion of culture, nature, and self. The British missionary women of the 1920's timeline do not wield guns, but they facilitate a cultural and ecological decline, whose consequences can only be discerned decades down the line in Frieda's story. Frieda's modern quest for information regarding her mother's colonial history reveals the long-term impact of such ideologically traumatic experiences. Nixon explains that "slow violence is faceless, spread throughout time and space" (Nixon 2).

*A Lady Cyclist's Guide to Kashgar* provides an intersection of postcolonial and ecofeminist critique. Millicent and Evangeline, as women in a patriarchal world, are powerful as instruments of the empire. Evangeline in the end of the novel after reaching Urumtsi says,

“I am the first British women ever to have visited Urumtsi and  
as such, I seem to be considered a sort of celebrity”(Joinson 227).

They are also oppressed and complicit, revealing what ecofeminists have termed the "double bind" of imperial gender roles—where women are instruments of a patriarchal order that excludes them as well. “I remember long afternoons in Southsea when Millicent was hard at work convincing Mother of the importance of our journey” (Joinson 173).

The colonial disruption cannot only be seen in the early 19<sup>th</sup> or 20<sup>th</sup> century but it can be seen in the present time as well. Joinson portrays that through her novel by providing us dual narrative of both early 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century. “Belief in Conversation between the West and East, the ongoing colonial power assertion under the guise of dialogue” (Joinson 177).

Furthermore, one of the imperial ideologies is the influence of other colonizers among the land, culture and environment. When Evangeline reached Urumtsi she saw the influence of Russia there. She says

“For the first time I could see the influence of Russia: Cyrillic script on walls and signs, and Russian bublikis rolls and black bread displayed on bakers’ trays” (Joinson 225).

Suzanne Joinson's *A Lady Cyclist's Guide to Kashgar* is more than historical fiction; it is a significant work that disrupts the ideological underpinnings of the empire and its enduring ecological and cultural legacies. Reading through Crosby's ecological imperialism and Nixon's slow violence the novel invites us to consider how stories of progress, salvation, and moral duty were—and remain—deployed to justify domination. It invites the ideological underpinnings of imperialism to be challenged and offers a path forward for narrative and ecological recovery.

By centering marginalized voices, excavating hidden harms, and deconstructing the cultural discourses of empire, Joinson's novel richly contributes to debates in progress regarding decolonial ecologies, historical justice, and memory politics. It is an invitation to remember—and to resist.

## 5. Conclusion

Suzanne Joinson's *A Lady Cyclist's Guide to Kashgar* presents a deeply human and critical examination of British imperialism and effects on both cultural identity and the environment. Through the portrayal of missionary women as participants in an ideological

system that sought to convert and control the novel portrays the consequences of Imperialism and British Colonialism. Joinson's use of a dual narrative, spanning both colonial and contemporary timelines, brings to light how these imperial ideologies have not vanished but have evolved and persisted. The physical and emotional landscapes of her characters reflect ongoing struggles with inherited trauma, environmental change, and cultural displacement. The theoretical lenses of Crosby's ecological imperialism and Nixon's concept of slow violence help to clarify the broader implications of Joinson's work. They show that colonial violence is not always dramatic or immediate—it can unfold slowly, over generations, and often remains invisible unless actively remembered.

Ultimately, this study argues that *A Lady Cyclist's Guide to Kashgar* is more than a historical novel; it is a relevant and timely critique of the ideological roots of environmental and cultural harm. It contributes to the ongoing work of decolonizing literature and environmental thought by centering overlooked voices and questioning inherited assumptions.

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