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Decolonial and EcoGothic Tropes in Deepa Anappara's *Djinn Patrol on the Purple Line*

Sanghamitra Devi
Tezpur University, India
https://orcid.org/0009-0000-8298-7926

Esther Daimari
Tezpur University, India
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0585-0787

Abstract

This paper analyzes Deepa Anappara's novel *Djinn Patrol on the Purple Line* (2020) from a decolonial ecoGothic perspective to show how the novel exposes the human and ecological crises in an urban slum known as a "basti" in an unnamed part of present-day India. The paper argues that Anappara uses the child narrator Jai and the gothic tropes of "Bhoot," "Djinn," and "smog" to convey the violent and traumatic experiences of marginalized communities residing in the slum. The novel uncovers child kidnappings, murders, and toxic waste dumps. This paper explores how Anappara employs the imagery of South Asian Gothic tropes as devices to create a postcolonial urban ecoGothic highlighting the ecological and climatic crises that arise out of the gentrification of the city and the growing divide between the slum dwellers and the privileged inhabitants of high-rise gated communities. Finally, the paper posits that Anappara's decolonial ecoGothic creates a vision of the city as a site of trauma, violence, corruption, and environmental degradation within a neocolonial capitalist regime.

Keywords: decolonial ecoGothic, South Asian Gothic, Indian slums, Deepa Anappara, precarity and violence, ecocriticism, postcolonial

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Introduction: *Djinn Patrol on the Purple Line*

Deepa Anappara, born in Kerala in Southern India, is a journalist and author. She gained experience as a writer while working as a reporter for eleven years in several cities, like Mumbai and Delhi. Her works revolve around themes of poverty, child education, corruption, and racialized violence. Her first book, *Djinn Patrol on the Purple Line* (2020), has been named one of 2020's most fantastic books by the New York Times.[1]It has also won several awards, including the Edgar Award for best novel, and was listed in 2020 for the Women's Prize for Fiction and the JCB Prize for Indian writing.

Anappara's *Djinn Patrol on the Purple Line* is an important novel as it highlights the burning issues of child trafficking, human exploitation, and environmental-climate injustice in India. The coming-of-age crime fiction – partly detective, partly supernatural – centres on the adventures of a nine-year-old boy named Jai and his friends, who live in a slum neighbourhood in an unnamed city in India. The fun-loving Jai's life unexpectedly turns for the worse when children his age start disappearing from his "basti." Jai, motivated by watching different crime shows, assumes the role of a detective and, with the help of his friends Pari and Faiz, tries to locate the missing children. While stumbling through the cramped and dark alleys in a quest for answers regarding their lost companions, Jai attempts to solve the riddle of the otherworldly "Djinn," whom he suspects is responsible for the missing children.

Thus, Anappara wraps the serious issue of child trafficking in India with humour, gothic imagery, magic realism, and fantasy. In this regard, Anappara's use of the child narrator Jai is strategic, as the device allows her to puncture the gravity of the subject matter with wit, clever dialogue, and amusing situations. This article argues how Anappara further uses gothic tropes such as "bhoot," "djinn," "smog," and haunted places to create a sense of mystery, darkness, and foreboding to pose an urgent commentary on not only the horrors of child trafficking but how social inequalities in contemporary India are strongly entwined with climate change and environmental injustice.

The article uses theories of the ecoGothic, combining both ecocritical and gothic lenses, to examine how the novel reveals the ecological precarity in Indian cities, stemming primarily from poor management, unequal access to resources, and gentrification, resulting in the unequal distribution of the impacts

[1] See Lorraine Adams' article "Who cares about one missing child in an Indian slum?" in *TheNewYorkTimes*. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/31/books/review/djinn-patrol-on-the-purple-line-deepa-anappara.html?smid=url-share

of climate change. Anappara's novel is thus a decolonial ecoGothic undertaking in which she foregrounds the experience of marginalized slum dwellers and incorporates their ways of imagining climate change. She examines and challenges colonial legacies and neocolonial power dynamics in post-colonial Indian cities, highlighting how the poor and marginalized suffer the consequences of environmental degradation and neoliberal economics most of all.

Decolonial and ecoGothic

EcoGothic is a recently developed discipline created by fusing two previously disparate disciplines – one with a biocentric force and the other centred on humanity, human desires, fears, and trauma. The ecoGothic focuses on ecological catastrophe and explores cultural anxieties about humans interacting with non-humans through strange, hideous, uncanny apparitions. As Sharae Deckard notes in her chapter on Ecogothic, "If Gothic often turns around a 'return of the repressed' that reveals buried social truths, Ecogothic turns around the uncanny manifestation of the 'environmental unconscious', particularly those forms of environmental violence that have been occulted (Deckard, 2019, p.174). While understandings concerning the ecoGothic began with the discussion on the Romantic Gothic and how it is a "space of crisis" and "creates a point of contact with the ecological" (Smith & Hughes, 2013, p. 3), it is important to note that ecoGothic is ambiguous and there are different models of the concept.

Scholars such as Sharae Deckard (Gilden et al. 2017; 2019), Elizabeth DeLoughrey (2011, 2015), and Graham Huggan (2015) have analyzed environmental studies from a postcolonial point of view. The intersection of postcolonial and environmental studies recognizes that colonialism and imperialism have had profound environmental consequences. Furthermore, the imposition of Western development and resource extraction models continues to perpetuate inequalities and environmental injustices in post-colonial nations. Thus, from the postcolonial ecocritical point of view, examining how the ecoGothic can be reconceptualized to re-examine ecological fears and anxieties in the post-colonial context is imperative. Pushing the postcolonial Gothic further, Rebecca Duncan (2022) has recently theorized decolonial Gothic to recognize the fictional works that engage with the enduring material realities of (neo)colonial forms of power within national and global neoliberal capitalist systems that remain structured along the lines of colonial categories of race and patriarchy and colonial practices of environmental extractivism and toxic wasting. Neocolonialism is strongly connected with past colonial regimes;

thus, decolonial Gothic stories arise from previously colonized areas of the world, so many of which were and are in the tropics. These forms of Tropical Gothic (Lundberg, Ancuta & Stasiewicz-Bieńkowska, 2019) critique colonial binary knowledge that separates humans from the ecological and spiritual realms.

In this paper, we engage a decolonial ecoGothic, while still maintaining the important work of postcolonial Gothic ideas. In particular, we are interested in how these theories are evidenced through the particular fictional world of *Djinn Patrol on the Purple Line* and its tropical Indian context. In the book, *South Asian Gothic* (2021), Katarzyna Ancuta and Deimantas Valanciunas propose the possibility of a South Asian Gothic. This is a Gothic in which fiction and popular imagination try to suggest "critical commentary on social and political tensions in the subcontinent" and the "increased Hindu nationalism and anti-Muslim communal violence in recent years" (p. 2) by weaving these narratives with supernatural beliefs: "the narratives of monsters, ghosts, haunting, obscurity, darkness, madness, etc., [that] circulate and criss-cross the subcontinent in a variety of media, forms and languages" (p. 2). William Hughes and Andrew Smith contend, "The Gothic is, and always has been, postcolonial" (Hughes & Smith, 2003, p.1). They state that a historical examination of the Gothic and accounts of postcolonialism indicate the presence of a shared interest in challenging post-enlightenment notions of rationality. In this connection, Gina Wisker also declares that postcolonial spaces are "inevitably Gothic, since they, like the geographies of place and history, are haunted by the ghosts of those who were hidden and silenced in the colonial and imperial past" (Wisker, 2007, p. 402). Tabish Khair further argued that in the South Asian context, Gothic writing is "associated with the colonial theme of otherness" (Khair, 2009, p.5). The preoccupation with "otherness" primarily refers to the representation of the Orient as monstrous and exotic and how a sense of terror and uncanny is built because of the hostile relations between the colonizer and the colonized. Such a stance is particularly evident in the writings of Arundhati Roy, Amitav Ghosh, Rabindranath Tagore, and Rudyard Kipling, to name a few. As Sarah Ilott states:

> Postcolonial authors have frequently adopted the Gothic as a mode well suited to registering colonial violence and critiquing colonial discourse. It provided a language suited to horror and trauma; it writes back to a body of imperial gothic literature that supported [the] colonial project through the othering of [the] colonized (Ilott, 2019, p.19).

While much thought has been given to Gothic's inherent relationship to postcolonialism, the role of "ecophobia" and the ecoGothic has not received much attention, especially in the context of South Asian countries. Therefore, this paper highlights how a decolonial ecoGothic mainly emphasizes how nature is territorialized for economic benefit in the age of globalization and neo-imperialism. Local narratives move away from the notion of the Western Gothic fiction of ruins, castles, gloom, and entrapment and often utilize the elements of past and continuing violent colonial and neocolonial regimes of slavery, corruption, and gender exploitation through mythic and supernatural tropes from folklore and traditions. Such stories examine how the legacies of colonialism and imperialism and new forms of these unequal power structures shape ecological relationships and how the dark and uncanny aspects of the natural world expose the violence and exploitation embedded within exploitative encounters with the environment. In the present-day world of neo-imperialism and globalization, ecoGothic addresses the extraction and exploitation of natural resources from economically weaker regions, leading to severe environmental degradation, pollution, and disruption of ecosystems. It also highlights the asymmetrical power relationships where global corporations and the nation state exert control over weaker communities.

Writers like Deepa Anappara undertake a decolonial practice through the ecoGothic. In her novel, she highlights the asymmetrical power relationships where the neoliberal order leads to a decline in the ecological order, culminating in climate injustice and "climate horror." She introduces the Gothic through several tropes, such as "bhoot," a ghost that "transcends and permeates all the religious traditions of the subcontinent" (Ancuta & Valanciunas, 2021, p. 2); and "djinns," supernatural creatures or spirits in Islamic mythology or folklore. According to Islamic tradition, djinn (created from smokeless fire) are capable of both good and evil actions. They possess extraordinary powers and wisdom but can also be mischievous, trickster-like, or malevolent. Anappara links these gothic tropes with the distressing realities of postcolonial India, such as corruption, violence, the creation of slums, climate crisis, and child trafficking. To this effect, Anappara uses a child narrator in her decolonial ecoGothic to exemplify climate change narratives from the margins.

Child narrator and a Magic-Realist EcoGothic

Anappara's novel illustrates a postcolonial urban Gothic where a shantytown slum outcast speaks out against the violence the city's wealthy and privileged class has meted out to the slum dwellers. Nine-year-old Jai is the narrator of the story and is determined to solve the mystery of disappearing children from

the slum, which is set within a sprawling Indian city. Deepa's strategic use of the child narrator heightens the stark contrast between the innocence and vulnerability of the children, and the dark and sinister elements of the Gothic narrative. The unreliability of the child narrator and his limited understanding of the precarity of life in the slum serves to heighten the novel's fear and horror.

Jai's understanding of the disappearance of missing children stems from his fascination with various detective series and crime thriller shows:

> "I'm going to be a detective, and I'm going to find Bahadur," I say, putting on my best grown-up voice. "And Faiz, you'll be my assistant. Every detective has one. Like Byomkesh has Ajit and Feluda has Topshe." (Anappara, 2020, p. 63)

Jai believes that an evil djinn could be responsible for abducting the children. He and his friends assume the role of detectives to discover the whereabouts of the disappeared children like Bahadur, Omvir, Anchal, and many others. Their detective enterprise eventually brings them face-to-face with the harsh realities of life in their basti (the slum village) and the injustices in several spheres of their lives. While the unreliable child narrator's preoccupation with ghosts and djinns can build an unnerving sense of uncertainty in the reader's mind, the unknown is often the true horror. The more experienced reader can navigate through the child narrator's limited perspectives and understand and anticipate a bigger horror to unfold, which is the locus of dread and the uncanny in the novel. The unreliability of the child narrator further blurs the line between reality and imagination, and the figure of the djinn is presented as unsettling until the end of the story. While a human figure named Varun, who kidnapped the children and murdered them, is finally revealed as the villain, the agency of the non-human (the djinn) in the kidnappings is not resolved in the story. Anappara deviates from the format of a pure detective story where the mystery is solved by leaving the ending ambiguous and open to interpretation.

In ecoGothic narratives, the child narrator is often used to address the unfathomable relations among the elements of nature, how anthropogenic activities always impact nature, and how the manifestations are often incomprehensible to humans. Despite their unreliability, Jai's and the children's detective team's strong hunch about the djinn cannot be ignored. Anappara uses the child narrator as a vehicle for social commentary on the neoliberalist developments in post-colonial/neocolonial India, which have detrimentally impacted the poor and the "urban outcasts" of the slums. Thus, Jai's innocent rendition of the children's kidnappings points towards how these issues of slum

settlers are either overlooked or are looked upon negatively. The deep contrast between the child's inherent innocence and the sinister and incomprehensible world of the city adds to the complexity required for the writer to address the intersections of issues of precarity and environmental degradation with human and non-human relationships.

Scholars like Rob Nixon and Joan Martínez-Alier use the term "environmentalism of the poor" to suggest the "myriad of movements in the Third World that struggle against environmental impacts that threaten poor people who are in many countries a majority of the population" (Martínez-Alier, 2002, p.12). Anappara's writing is a form of environmentalism of the poor, as she tries to raise awareness about the challenges faced by the marginalized communities in the slums and thereby amplify their voices. Anappara's environmentalism of the poor intertwines with the child narrator's perspective as Jai's observation and interactions highlight his growing awareness of the issues, such as pollution and its impact on health, as well as the interconnectedness of social injustices. The accretive violence and brutality of Jai's basti is visible when the entire basti experiences the monstrosity of the rubbish heaps while searching for the belongings of their missing children. Jai describes these rubbish heaps: "The waste around us hisses and sputters as we run, it bites our feet, it tries to pull us down" (Anappara, 2020, p. 305). The waste materials are given agency and compared to a living being in Jai's childlike imagination of the trash. Using verbs like "hisses" and "sputters" creates a sense of menace and danger, as if the waste is actively expressing its presence and hostility. The waste "bites" to hinder or harm the characters physically. Such language implies Jai's development of an understanding of the environment around him.

Jai's innocence crumbles as he later discovers the reality of his friends' disappearances. Even his sister is kidnapped and brutally murdered, and the reasons for it remain unknown. Such a journey of the children from a state of innocence to experience (through terrifying and mysterious situations) resonates with the reader's journey into the unknown, emphasizing the themes of fear, darkness, and loss of innocence central to the Gothic. Furthermore, the child narrator's use of magic realist tropes such as the djinn or a magical location (Bhoot Bazaar) and the hovering presence of the smog reflect the cultural and ecological anxieties in the novel. The children's beliefs in these supernatural entities create fear and anxiety and offer readers little escape from the darker reality of the city and its history of discrimination, corruption, and exploitation.

The Slum and the Hi-Fi World

Anappara puts the city at the centre of her narrative and presents it as a dialectical site of conflicting communities and ideologies. Urban Gothic theorists Holly-Gale Millette and Ruth Heholt assert, “Landscape has always been an integral part of Gothic, horror and crime fictions as it is in the urban that we can see the human imprint most starkly” (Millette & Heholt, 2020, p.3). On one side are the rich people who live in gated “hi-fi” buildings, and on the other side are the poor, who live in slums and squatter settlements. Scholars like Mike Davis analyze South Asian cities as repositories for marginalized populations, referring to them as “surplus humanity” disconnected from the formal global economy (Davis, 2006, p. 14). The slums in post-colonial nation-building emerged as the only recognized solution for accommodating the vast surplus of people in the 21st century (Davis, 2006, p. 28). Anappara depicts the city as thriving on social divisions, where the affluent segregate themselves from the impoverished and the powerful isolate the marginalized. As the population in many Indian cities expanded, the urban elite migrated to the luxurious areas, leaving the peripheries to be inhabited by the “other” – the poor, minorities, refugees, migrants, and outcasts. Cut off from essential amenities and opportunities, slum dwellers find themselves susceptible to crime, illegal activities, and poverty. Anappara’s portrayal of everyday life within these slums offers a vivid account of the hardships endured by their inhabitants. She suggests how, in the contemporary period, these spaces have become hotspots and focal points for crime, illicit activities, violence, impoverishment, and climate injustice.

The slums are a phantasmagoric place in Anappara’s novel and an ecoGothic device. The concept of “phantasmagoria” originated three centuries ago with the magic lantern, a device for projecting hallucinatory and ghostly images (Libero & Lahiji, 2017, p. 15). The term captures the idea of the city as a visually spectacular representation of urban space, characterized by its excesses and abnormalities. Phantasmagoria encompasses the grandiose mansions and extravagant objects in the city, created with a sense of vanity, narcissism, and arrogance. Material things have the power to make the city’s inhabitants invisible, as fetishized commodities in the neoliberal context overshadow their worth. In Anappara’s urban writing, however, the phantasmagoria serves to highlight the hyper-visibility of marginalized individuals such as outcasts, the forgotten, the poor, and the oppressed, whose presence is made strongly felt through the stark contrast they pose to the visually striking surroundings of the city. The slums are linked with phantasmagoric places like Bhoot Bazaar (the ghost market) and Shaitani Adda (the hang-out place of the child kidnappers)

that lend an eerie and unsettling vibe to the slums. The unsettling atmosphere in these places is evident from the children's interpretation:

> Maybe djinns hang out here the same way criminals like Quarter hang out at the theka," I say. "This must be their adda." "Yes, the Shaitani Adda," Faiz says. "Doesn't shaitan mean the devil?" I ask. Evil djinns are also called shaitan," Faiz says (Anappara, 2020, p. 208).

The term "adda" refers to a gathering spot or a meeting place where people come together for various purposes. Jai's sense of Shaitani Adda is one of intrigue and fear. He suggests that it is a place where djinns, the supernatural creatures in Islamic mythology, gather. By also comparing it to a spot where criminals like Quarter, a known crook in their community, hang out, Jai implies that Shaitani Adda is not a safe or wholesome place. This sense of place predicts the potential dangers that the characters might face in their exploration of this mysterious slum in the Indian city.

Anappara focuses on exposing the dystopian underbelly of the city to reveal the effects of globalization. She creates a patchwork of the basti that the young narrator Jai, his family, and his friends Pari and Faiz call home. She shows how their slum homes are constantly in danger of demolition and therefore centres on the discourse of doom, decay, despair, and environmental degradation. The Hindi word "basti" refers to a settlement or neighbourhood, often specifically used to denote a slum or an informal residential area. It is a densely populated locality, often characterized by substandard living conditions and inadequate access to basic amenities. The urban economies and geographies in most Indian cities cannot meet the needs of the slum dwellers, and the poor live there precariously without access to water, sanitation, or garbage collection, battling with life-threatening conditions and surrounded by trash. Jai's basti is a dilapidated landscape with cramped spaces, dark lanes, and a filthy dumping ground covered with organic waste and dirt. The deteriorating scenario of Jai's basti is evident when he expresses:

> We are at the very edge of our basti, facing the rubbish ground that's much bigger than our school playground. Right in front of me, a man washes his backside with water from a mug. Pigs dive into the grey-black rubbish, their pink-white bellies splotched with dirt. Cows with dried dung on their backsides chew rotting vegetables, blinking their eyes to bat away flies. Dogs nose through the filth for bones, and boys and girls collect

> cans and glass. Smoke rises from the smelliest piles that people have set on fire to make them stink less (Anappara, 2020, p.140).

A recent news article on pollution in Delhi states how the Ghazipur landfill in eastern Delhi is overgrowing, with 2000 tons of garbage being dumped daily. As a result, the air quality index is 12 times above the World Health Organization's (WHO) guideline value, which should not exceed 5 micrograms per cubic meter. The slums are the hub of such landfills and dump yards. Often, fires sparked by methane gas from the landfill become a significant cause of concern for the residents. The toxicity of the air near landfills poses serious health risks, and the people in the slums are most vulnerable to toxic air due to their work and lack of resources to seek proper health care. Sourit Bhattacharya, Arka Chattopadhyay, and Samrat Sengupta in their article, 'Toxic Ecologies of the Global South: The Ecogothic in Nabarun Bhattacharya's *Toy City*' state: "These examples offer a 'toxic' picture of life and living in the Global South, which has long been the destination of the Global North for dumping hazards and wastes" (Bhattacharya et al., 2020, p.222). In the early 1980s, it became apparent that hazardous wastes generated in industrialized countries were being shipped to developing countries for final disposal.

The slum's air quality is also affected by smog. The idea of the smog that enwraps the basti features a gothic presence in the novel that attacks people's health. Jai, in one such instance, describes the all-encompassing nature of the smog, which has even engulfed the outer edges of the basti. "We come out into the smog that has wiggled into every corner of the city and coats our tongues with ash" (Anappara, 2020, p. 102). The dread posed by the smog is as deadly as the one posed by the djinn, who has supposedly kidnapped the children. The rich people who live in "hi-fi" apartments in gated communities are not much affected by the smog. Thus, neoliberalism disproportionately benefits the wealthy and exacerbates poverty, inequality, and climate injustice. Commenting on the differential impacts of climate change, Dipesh Chakrabarty noted that global warming is producing a new geological age and creating planetary citizens who have unequal rights to carbon space, and the development that goes with it (2012, p. 10). He argues that specific communities have historically contributed less to carbon emissions but bear the brunt of the consequences. The marginalized communities that rely on natural resources for their livelihoods are heavily impacted by climate change. Displacement, loss of access to clean water and food, and increased vulnerability to climate change-related events make the lives of the poor precarious. On the other hand, the rich are protected from the harsh effects of

climate change due to their access to “lifeboats.” Scholars and activists like Naomi Klein (1970) and Vandana Shiva (1988, 2002), have also emphasized the disproportionate impacts of climate change on marginalized communities and the need for adaptation measures and equitable access to resources.

The inaccessibility of the hi-fi buildings also adds to the ecoGothic as Anappara connects the revelation of the murder of slum children with these buildings. The inaccessibility of the hi-fi buildings represents not only the physical divide between the slum and privileged residents but also the social and economic disparities perpetuating marginalized communities’ exploitation and vulnerability. The hi-fi buildings are exclusive enclaves, guarded and gated, effectively separating the affluent from the impoverished. This separation symbolizes the power dynamics at play, where those in the hi-fi buildings enjoy privilege and protection while the slum dwellers are left to fend for themselves. The wealthy residents of the city subject the lower-class slum women, who work as their housemaids, to verbal abuse and mistreatment. Despite having responsibilities such as caring for their own small babies or sick children at home, these slum women are forced to work for long hours and even late into the night without being granted any time off, especially during the city residents’ parties. As a consequence of this exploitative treatment, the young children in the basti suffer. Some try to avoid being at home, where they may encounter violent fathers like the alcoholic Laloo, and thus, unfortunately, become victims of the kidnapper.

As the story progresses, it is revealed that the hi-fi buildings are not only symbols of wealth but also the setting for the horrifying crime. The murder of slum children within these supposedly secure and luxurious spaces exposes the dark underbelly of the hi-fi buildings and the corrupt power structures within them. This revelation further enhances the ecoGothic elements by unmasking the horrors hidden behind the facades of modernity and progress. The revelation that a resident of Golden Gate Apartment, Yamini Mehra, is the main culprit involved in the kidnapping and murder of children also establishes the brutality and tyranny the upper class constantly asserts over people with low incomes in a contemporary neocolonial regime.

The juxtaposition of slums and hi-fi buildings highlights the grotesque nature of the unequal society depicted in the novel, where the pursuit of wealth and comfort comes at the expense of the most vulnerable members of society. Moreover, it underscores the theme of systemic injustice and the destructive consequences of unchecked power, social inequality, and disregard for the environment, adding to the novel’s dark and unsettling atmosphere.

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Djinn, Bhoot, Bhootbazaar

Anappara uses vernacular supernatural tropes from Islamic mythology and Hindu beliefs to carve an urban ecoGothic that illustrates the suppressed and collective pain of the marginalized people of the slums. The bhoot (the ghost of a deceased man), chudail (a tree spirit, often the ghost of a woman who dies in childbirth), dayan (a female witch in Indian folklore who practices black magic), pretatmas (an evil spirit), dak bungalow (the Indian equivalent of large western castles or ruins), and the practices of black magic and tantra are some of the well-known motifs in Indian Gothic. Katarzyna Ancuta and Deimantas Valanciunas (2021), acknowledge the influence of global interconnectedness in the development of the Gothic genre. Anappara's text is an example of the confluence of diverse cultural traditions in creating a Gothic that surpasses the limited western understanding of the term. The use of djinns, bhoots and local Gothic motifs encompasses cultural manifestations of the Gothic and its interaction with historical and local narratives. These South Asian tropes are used by Anappara to emphasize traumas, anxieties, and violent histories of the marginalized in Indian cities.

In the novel, the claustrophobic, congested slum area implies a scary and unsustainable landscape, brought to life as a gothic space through "Bhootbazaar." Bhootbazaar, which translates to "Ghost Market" in English, represents a symbolic and metaphorical space within the story. Its inclusion in the narrative evokes a sense of mystery, otherworldliness, and the supernatural. Bhootbazaar implies a realm where the boundaries between the living and the dead and the real and the fantastical become blurred. It suggests the existence of a hidden, parallel world that coexists with the everyday reality of the characters. A metaphorical space where lost and missing children are rumoured to be sold or traded, it is also where the desperate and grieving parents of disappeared children might go in hopes of finding or learning the truth about their disappearance. The market embodies the characters' fears, uncertainties, and quest for answers and closure.

Bhootbazaar can also be interpreted as a manifestation of the adverse effects of climate change. Jai tells us how the "filth-ridden" slum is "constantly veiled in the pervasive blanket of smog" (Anappara, 2020, p. 9). Smog and pollution are associated with human activities that release harmful emissions into the atmosphere, leading to poor air quality and environmental degradation. Smog is a type of air pollution that occurs when pollutants, such as vehicle emissions, industrial gases, and particulate matter, combine with fog and atmospheric conditions, creating a hazy and toxic mixture. The smog in Anappara's narrative

can be associated with a sense of the uncanny as it comes alive to delineate the tension between human and non-human nature. Jai says that the "smog looked like the devil's own breath. It hid the street lights and made the darkness darker" (Anappara, 2020, p. 52). The smog here is symbolic, personifying or anthropomorphizing the environment and blurring the boundaries between the human and non-human worlds. The smog's uncanny presence indicates its agency to alter the landscape and create an atmosphere of discomfort and fear.

The Bhootbazaar, associated with the darker and hidden aspects of society, can symbolize the obscured and gothic nature of the smog. Like the bhoot or the ghost, the smog remains unseen until its effects become evident through its manifestations on the body. During various instances, the smog comes alive by taking on various uncanny and ghastly appearances. Jai describes how the smog once combed his hair by taking the form of a human and how once it whispered in his ear in the form of a warning after his sister went missing, saying: "Should have been you-you-you" (Anappara, 2020, p.271). The smog becomes a potent symbol of pollution, industrialization, and the degradation of the natural environment. Furthermore, the smog's ability to obscure and distort the landscape and cityscape aligns with the Gothic tradition's fascination with hidden and obscured realities.

Anappara highlights how developmentalism has inflicted "slow violence" on post-colonial nations, gradually pushing them towards more and more environmental toxicity and turning areas into ghostlands. Jai notes how the dump yard was once a productive ground for vegetation. Instead, the land gradually transformed into an enormous disposal site for toxic, unwelcome waste:

> I stand up to get a good look at the rubbish ground and feel sad for the kikar trees and the thorny shrubs that were living here long before people started dumping trash around them. Some of the trees are still alive but their leaves are black with soot, and the wind has bandaged their branches with Maggi wrappers and plastic bags. (Anappara, 2020, p.141)

The "slow violence" of unseparated toxic waste disturbs the ecological balance of the land. New Materialist scholars such as Jane Bennett (2010), Rosalind Fredericks (2014), and Michele Acuto (2014) have studied the active and agential properties of garbage and waste. Bennett (2010) says they have a "vital materiality" that has "tendencies of their own" and can "produce effects dramatic and subtle" (p. viii). Even as a "discarded or unwanted commodity"

(p.6), garbage joins other non-human bodies, acts alongside human actors, and affects the broader course of events in various ways. The unmonitored dumping of materials in slums produces complex ecologies over time and a series of long-term humanitarian crises. The figure of the smog in the novel suggests the eventual annihilation of the land as a human habitat as the smog gains control and "haunts" the place, thereby accentuating its uncanny character.

In the ecoGothic, nature is often portrayed as a monstrous force, as exemplified by various thinkers like Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (1996), Margaret Atwood (2004), and Timothy Morton (2016) in their works. The representation of nature as malevolent landscapes with ominous weather patterns or menacing animals highlights the power and unpredictability of nature, which can overwhelm and challenge human existence. It also highlights the agency of nature as an active and independent force that can shape human lives and challenge human control. In the novel, the figures of the djinn and the bhoot imply the mysterious and unpredictable forces that exist in the world, including the natural world. Nature can be both enchanting and dangerous, beyond human understanding and control. The presence of djinn and bhoots in the narrative connects the human realm with the metaphysical, blurring the boundaries between the natural and the supernatural.

The uncanny apparition of the djinn hidden in the smog, is, according to Jai and his friends, the prime suspect in the disappearance of the missing children. Emilio Spadolo (2014) points out that djinns are "ambivalent figures of danger and power, difference and disruption, jinns and jinn-rites are conventionally tied to the danger and difference of socially marginalized Muslims (p. 8). Jai's fear of the djinn also refers to the undercurrent religious tensions among the slum dwellers, where the Hindus try to blame anything evil on the Muslims. Jai's fear of the djinn is intertwined with the beliefs he has been fed by the elders, which create a potent mix of superstition with issues of poverty and child trafficking:

> I picture a djinn crouching down on the roof, his eye turning like a key in a lock as he watches us through a hole, waiting for Ma and Papa and Runu-Didi to fall asleep so that he can draw out my soul. Djinns aren't real, but if they were, they would only steal children because we have the most delicious souls. (Anappara, 2020, p. 9)

Jai worries about the djinn because he thinks it will steal his soul when his parents and sister sleep. Here, Jai's fear of the djinn is closely related to his

economic condition; his fear is intensified as his house is dilapidated with holes in the roof.

Anand Vivek Taneja asserts in his book, *Jinnealogy* (2017), that "jinns are linked to deep time, connecting human figures thousands of years apart. In these stories, long-lived jinns serve as interlocutors connecting figures as distant in time..." (Taneja, 2017, p.10). Scholars like Brian Cox and Andrew Cohen (2016) have established how geological time, unlike the time of human history, is of another dimension altogether. It is measured in millions and billions of years rather than in mere centuries and millennia. Considering djinn as ancient beings that have existed long before humans, one can speculate that they have witnessed and experienced events spanning deep time. Rosemary Ellen Guiley and Philip J. Imbrogno, in their research on djinns, say: "The djinn hide in the shadows, biding their time and watching us…they are powerful shapeshifters and can live for thousands of years." They further mention that according to the ancient lore, "the djinns once occupied this world, and they seek to reclaim it" (Guiley & Imbrogno, 2011, pp. XXI-II). Quoting the Geiger-Marsden experiment, conducted by Hans Geiger and Ernest Marsden of the University of Manchester in 1909, Guiley and Imbrogno state that in order to understand the djinn and their location in time and space, one must be prepared to perceive the multiverse beyond the range of physical senses. Thus, djinns can be interpreted from the scientific as well as the metaphysical point of view as beings that surpass both physicality and linear time.

Anappara here associates the djinn with historic time by creating a landscape of colonial influence in post-colonial India through the gothic tale of an ancient ruin pervaded by supernatural entities, which speaks of the legacy of a mystical and horrifying image of India's imperial and colonial pasts connected to the visit of the Mughals to India and how other colonial rulers eventually overthrow them. While narrating the story about this mysterious visit of the djinns to the abandoned ruins, one of the caretakers of the ruins designated it the "Djinns home." He says:

> We believe djinns moved into this palace around the time our last kings died, their hearts broken by the crooked victories of white men who claimed to be our rulers (Anappara, 2020, p. 261).

The djinn in Anaparra's novel may be related to how Jai often looks at things around him in terms of their temporality. He states how the earlier, healthier environment gave rise to the current, smoggy, filthy, slum-ridden landscape of

his basti. Jai recalls his father's account of how the slum they currently inhabit and call home was earlier vacant land that was then planted with crops by farmers, who later sold it to developers and builders. The land still bears the imprint of its former life as an agricultural field in the collective memory of the basti residents. When Pari and Jai journeyed to the city to look for their lost friends, Jai recalled his father's story about the devastation of the farming landscape and asserted:

> All this land, na, I say, "it was once empty. That's something Papa told me. He said the land was at first full of boulders, which farmers pounded with tractors to grow mustard. But after working hard for years, they sold their land to suit-boot builders from the city, and now the farmers sit at home, boredom curling out of their mouths and noses in clouds of hookah smoke. (Anappara, 2020, p. 98)

The hookah smoke curls back to the resurgence of smog and djinn and suggests a return of the suppressed as a monstrous agent of fear to avenge people for their careless ways or for destroying the ecological balance.

In the novel, while the supernatural djinn, from the child narrator's perspective, was fashioned as an entity with gothic proportions, the ending reveals the human as the enormous monster and agent of unbelievable levels of evil and destruction, both in their impact on the environment and particularly in their treatment of the marginalized. The characters that are revealed as committing the heinous acts of kidnapping and murder are not supernatural or mythical creatures but ordinary people, showcasing the inherent darkness within individuals and the systemic failures of neocolonial regimes that allow such atrocities to occur.

The crimes committed by humans represent the unchecked development that destroys natural habitats. Anappara's portrayal of humans as agents of evil and destruction challenges the idea of inherent goodness and raises questions about accountability and the need for societal change. The juxtaposition of humans with djinns and bhoots highlights the capacity of human beings to perpetuate injustice and violence, often surpassing the malevolence attributed to mythical creatures. It is interesting to note how, in Anappara's novel, the bhoots and djinns also assume the roles of protector and rescuer. People experiencing poverty prayed to the djinns in times of helplessness. When the callous police officers inflicted violence on the Muslim slum dwellers, they prayed to the djinns for help.

In the same way, humans like Mental and Mamta reach their fullest humane potential only after they are dead and have turned into spirits. The myths of Mental and Mamta, or Junction Ki Rani, are magic realist ecoGothic devices that underscore the need to recognize and protect the vulnerable from the monstrous potentials of humans. Mental looks after the ragpicker children as a boss. He opposes the conventional boss figure that uses and abuses the young children to further their own ends. Instead, he cares for the ragpickers and saves them from misfortunes:

> One of them whispered Mental's real name into the wind, which was a secret known only to them, and a shadow stirred in the lane. The boys thought it was a cat or a flying fox, though there was a charge in the air, the metallic taste of electricity on their tongues, the flicker of a rainbow-colored bolt of light, gone so soon they could have only imagined. (Anappara, 2020, p. 5-6)

Another myth incorporated in the narrative, "Junction Ki Rani," is that of a mother named Mamta, whose ghostly presence on the city streets is aimed at protecting young girls from rapists and abusers. Mamta's backstory reveals how her daughter was brutally raped and killed; however, she could not avail of any justice because she was poor. She eventually dies, transforms into a ghostly spirit, and avenges rapists who trouble girls on the streets.

The revelation of the murderers of the young children also makes it evident that humans are more vicious, malicious, and deadly than the genuinely terrifying and supernatural beings in the novel, like bhoots and djinns. Jai also undergoes a recuperative transformation due to the severe complications and realities he encounters throughout the story, as he finally realizes the brutalities and complexities of his own life after losing his elder sister to the kidnappers. This is evident when the young Jai, who once was a massive fan of numerous detective series and crime shows, grows to despise those same criminal shows that are broadcast on television. Jai even says:

> I'll never watch Police Patrol again. When they act out real stories of people getting snatched or killed, it will feel as if someone is trying to strangle me, I just know it. A murder isn't a story for me anymore; it's not a mystery either. (Anappara, 2020, p. 334)

At the novel's end, Jai experiences one of the most spectral moments when his dead sister's spirit tries to get in touch with him and gives him a sense of reassurance in the form of a star in the sky. This defining scene captures the ecoGothic vocabulary throughout Anappara's narrative. Jai, while experiencing this life-altering moment, says:

> I gaze up at the sky. Today the smog is a curtain thin enough for me to spot the twinkle of a star behind it. I can't even remember when I last saw a star. (Anappara, 2020, p.341)

Thus, using the tropes of various gothic and supernatural beings, Anappara attempts to discuss the depressing realities of child trafficking and climate injustice in contemporary India through the young narrator Jai and his childlike sensibility.

In the final episode, the residents of the basti, despite their differences in caste and creed, come together to resist the oppressive control imposed on them by the wealthy upper-class residents of the city. Driven by their desperation to find their lost children, the basti inhabitants bravely gather outside the Golden Gate Apartment, which was previously off-limits to them. When the police and security guards refuse to let them in, the basti dwellers forcefully enter the premises. Fueled by anger and years of pent-up resentment, they hurl objects at the police, watchmen, and balconies of apartments. Their collective action demonstrates resistance, a refusal to accept their marginalized position, and a determination to challenge the existing power dynamics. By daring to enter the high-rise apartment, a symbol of wealth and privilege, they break down physical, metaphorical, and mental barriers – they decolonize their minds. Through their actions, they reclaim a sense of agency, power, and resistance against neocolonial domination and social inequality.

Conclusion: Children Still Missing

Anappara in *Djinn Patrol on the Purple Line*, using the authentic voice of the child narrator Jai, incorporates various gothic tropes such as "djinn," "bhoot," "smog", and other socio-cultural myths of Indian society to portray the depressing reality of missing children in contemporary India and climate injustice in Indian cities. Anappara, with her journalistic eye, skillfully builds a setting with places that conflict with one another in order to show how poverty is in relation to wealth, injustice in relation to justice, corruption in relation to innocence. For instance, although the basti and the hi-fi buildings are close by each other, and are in relation, for the poor must work for the rich; they yet

appear far away due to the garbage field and the Purple Line metro station separating the two conflicting sections of the city. Anappara combines decolonial thought and ecoGothic descriptions to convey the lived anxieties of an outcast basti battling against poverty, corruption, religious intolerance, marginalization, gendered violence, and the escalating issue of environmental and climate crises in a post-colonial India under a neocolonial regime.

Anappara carves a decolonial ecoGothic to incorporate voices on climate change from the margins, the poorest section of society, as she uses the child narrator to exemplify the naïve yet growing consciousness of the poor about climate injustice. She establishes the mutually reinforcing relationship between the (poor) human and non-human nature by using precarious landscapes to critique the current environmental and climate crises brought on by neoliberal globalization. Anappara shows a filthy basti and its surroundings, comprising heaps of hazardous waste disposal sites and the omnipresent smog, which obstructs people's vision, hiding malevolent djinn or child traffickers. These gothic tropes depict the unseen evils in India's slums and situate how individuals in positions of authority incite animosity and communal politics among underprivileged groups. Through a decolonial EcoGothic, Anappara places her text in the context of broader national issues where children drop out of school, work hazardous jobs like collecting garbage to support their families, or are forced to leave their homes due to religious persecution or hunger. Although it is established that a child goes missing almost every eight minutes in India, likely being trafficked for prostitution, engaged in slave labour, or harvested for organs, children are still forced to live on the streets and expose themselves to precarious conditions. As the title of the first chapter of the novel, "This Story Will Save Your Life," suggests, the most ironic aspect of the book is that even though these stories are shared, they hardly manage to save the lives of children. Anappara continues telling the stories of missing children and their precarious lives in slums in the hope that they will save the lives of children in the future. And such Gothic stories of children and slums are not limited to India, but resonate around other slum cities of the tropics.

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Sanghamitra Devi is a PhD Research Scholar at the Department of English in Tezpur University, Assam. She completed her Masters in English from Gauhati University, Assam in 2018 with specialization in Literary Theory. She has one-year experience of teaching English Literature to graduate students in Biswanath College, Assam. She has qualified UGC-NET in 2019. Her research topic is EcoGothic in South Asian literature. Other areas of research interest include Eco Critical Studies, Post-colonial Studies, Indian Literature, and Gender Studies.

Esther Daimari is an Assistant Professor (PhD) in the Department of English, Tezpur University, Assam. Her research interests include Landscape and Literature, Ecofeminism, and Ecocriticism. She has published research articles in journals such as *South Asian Review*, *Southeast Asian Review of English*, *Journal of the School of Language, Literature and Cultural Studies*, *Dibrugarh University Journal of English Studies*, and *Muse India.*