Body as "Leased out" Land: Land-Women Embodiment in Devi's and Huq's Selected Stories

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Abstract
This article undertakes a postcolonial ecofeminist critique of Mahasweta Devi's "Douloti the Bountiful" and Hasan Azizul Huq's "The Daughter and the Oleander," set against the backdrop of brutal tribal realities and post-partition migration in India, respectively. Postcolonial ecofeminism, positioned at the intersection of postcolonial and ecological discourse, highlights the shared subjugation of women and nature in the Global South. While rooted in Western ecofeminist concerns regarding the feminisation of nature and the naturalisation of women, it deconstructs the mind-body dualism and examines the women-nature connection through the material realities of ethnic, cultural, colonial, racial, and gendered hegemony. Postcolonial ecofeminism, particularly in postcolonial landscapes, critiques Western ecofeminists' symbolic association between women and land, arguing that such connections must be reevaluated in the contexts where sexual violence and economic exploitation define women's lived experiences. A critical reading of "Douloti the Bountiful" and "The Daughter and the Oleander" reveals that, within impoverished economies, women's youthful and beautiful bodies are commodified as financial resources, often through forced prostitution. Drawing on Neelam Jabeen's assertions, this study contends that in both narratives, the female body functions as an exploited site—analogous to fertile land that is continuously cultivated for crops and cash crops—underscoring the fact that in the Global South, the land-woman embodiment is not merely symbolic but a lived and material reality.

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Keywords
Postcolonial ecofeminism, partition of India, women-land embodiment, bonded prostitution, material reality, leased out land

Introduction

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the word "lease" as "a contract between parties, by which the one conveys lands or tenements to the other for life, for years, or at will, usually in consideration of rent or other periodical compensation" ("Lease"). In this contract, the grantor of a "lease" is called the "lessor," and the "grantee," the "lessee." Both parties are bound by the contract terms, and any failure to fulfill contractual obligations carries consequences. Closely tied to this concept is "leasing out," which refers, basically, to the permission "to access and use the property" (Berglund 1) by a lessor. Here, a lessor agrees to a lessee cultivator for a lease in exchange for cash or any share of production. However, the term "leasing out" reverberates in the tenets of postcolonial ecofeminism, which emerged in recent years as a movement recognising the material interconnection between the exploitation of the female body in prostitution and the leasing of land for production. This perspective forms the foundation of the present study, highlighting the embodiment of both land and woman while extending the analysis to encompass South Asian women experiencing multiple layers of marginalisation.

Neelam Jabeen, a Pakistani critic who proposes postcolonial ecofeminism, argues that in Western ecofeminism, whether essentialist or non-essentialist, the embodiment of women and nature is viewed as "symbolic, while in global South women's connection with nature is unique" (Jabeen 22) extending beyond symbolism. Jabeen enumerates that while Western frameworks consider women metaphorically aligned with non-human entities like land due to attributes like fertility and/barrenness, in the many parts of poor, agrarian societies of the subcontinent this interconnectedness takes on a tangible and embodied reality. Women's bodies are conquered, controlled, and commodified for the benefit of patriarchy, especially in acts of sexual violence like rape and in the commodification of prostitution. Focusing on forced prostitution as a patriarchal means of making money either for sustenance/survival or to meet patriarchal rapacity, the present study shows how "women are treated as land: their bodies are used to reproduce, and at times leased out . . . through prostitution" (Jabeen iii), as depicted in Mahasweta Devi's "Douloti the Bountiful" (1995) and Hasan Azizul Huq's "The Daughter and the Oleander" (1990).

In "Douloti the Bountiful," Mahasweta Devi (1926-2016), an eminent Bengali writer and human rights activist, unfolds a bleak and dark reality of the tribal people in independent India. Portraying the violent sexual assaults against Douloti's body, and her ultimate demise on the country's Independence Day,

Devi challenges the concept of nationality and satirises the notion of Indian independence that remained a myth for the tribal communities. On the same note, Hasan Azizul Huq (1939-2021), a renowned Bangladeshi writer, in his "The Daughter and the Oleander," tells the story of a family grappling with destitution following the 1947 Partition of India. Through the character of the old man who decided to pimp out his daughter for survival, Huq challenges the dominant historiography and the grand narratives of Partition. In their stories, both Devi and Huq expose what Campbell terms "the double bind of being female and being colonized" (xi). Based on the reading of the selected stories, the present study seeks to explore how historical and socio-political factors contribute to the portrayal of female bodies as commodified spaces in postcolonial South Asian literature, and how the concept of "leasing out" reflects the material realities of marginalised women in agrarian societies. Drawing on the postcolonial ecofeminist assumptions of Neelam Jabeen, this paper argues that in this exploitative mechanism of treating women's beautiful and youthful bodies as money-raising machines, female bodies are treated as actual land that is dug and sown for crops and cash crops emphasising the land-women embodiment as a material reality.

The land-women embodiment: A postcolonial ecofeminist concern

The embodiment of land and women is one of the vital questions in ecofeminist discourses. Ecofeminists argue that because of the reproductive ability of both nature and women, nature is symbolically feminised and woman is symbolically naturalised. In *Ecological Feminist Philosophies* (1996), American ecofeminist Karen Warren explicates this connection as "symbolic". To explain this interconnection, Warren explains how sexual terms like "virgin," "rape," "womb," and similar terms are used for depicting nature, and "cats," "cows," "birds," etc. are often used when referring to women. Warren adds that naturalising women and feminising nature perpetuates the oppression of both women and nature since the "twin dominations of women and nature [including animals] are, in fact, culturally [and not merely figuratively] analogous" (Warren xv). In a similar vein to Warren, Gallo-Cruz argues that the "elevated levels of gender-based violence, rape, torture, and killing" (Gallo-Cruz 103) intertwine women and land that become victims of masculine compulsion of possessing both.

However, considering that mainstream ecofeminism is inadequate to represent the women-nature relationship in South Asian societies, Neelam Jabeen argues about the validity and justification of postcolonial ecofeminism. Rooted in Western ecofeminism, postcolonial ecofeminism takes the land-women connection further to situate it in a broader theoretical context. It explores how colonial and global capitalist systems of the global South disproportionately influence women and the environment—an aspect often overlooked by Western ecofeminists who treat women as a generalised concept. It also emphasises how

the power politics of patriarchy is exacerbated when it is joined by class, caste, and many other forms of differences. As for Jabeen:

> A postcolonial ecofeminism should not only locate a woman-nature connection and society's treatment of both but should also critically examine the woman-nature relationship unique to postcolonial societies owing to the double bind of postcolonial women. Not only gender, but also class, race, religion, geography, and politics affect this relationship" ("Ecofeminism" 2).

In fact, the abuse of nature and the domination of women are closely related to class, caste, the history of colonialism and neo-colonialism, globalisation, and many more nuances. This intersectional oppression unfolds how power operates across multiple domains and emphasises the need for a more sustainable approach to gender relations and environmental stewardship.

Gudmarsdottir in her foundational essay "Rapes of Earth and Grapes of Wrath: Steinbeck, Ecofeminism and the Metaphor of Rape" criticises early ecofeminism for its endorsement of the women-nature connection arguing that the rape metaphor does not "serve for contemporary ecofeminist purposes as a helpful metaphor for the environmental crisis" (207). According to Jabeen, Gudmarsdottir rejects "a symbolic women-nature connection that reinforces women-nature embodiment" ("Women" 2). Similarly, many feminists object to this so-called symbolic association, as it "excludes women from the cultural sphere that mind represents, considering the mind-body and culture-nature dualism" (Field 39). Nevertheless, for Jabeen, the referent of rape in the Western ecofeminist symbolic land-body embodiment should be revised from a postcolonial perspective where rape and prostitution are lived experiences of women, depending on social condition and material status. Jabeen argues that, in the postcolonial South Asian societies, "these so-called symbolic women–nature connections are not merely symbolic" rather, "women's bodies are actually treated as land" ("Women"1).

Kaur identifies that in a postcolonial and capitalist society, "nature is being turned into a commodity" (Kaur 189) and so is the body of a woman. According to Jabeen because of the "marketplace mentality" (18) of patriarchy, "[w]omen's bodies are actually used as a commodity, like land that can provide sustenance" (23). Therefore, in postcolonial South Asian contexts, where women's bodies are treated as 'land' the conception of the women-land embodiment becomes complicated and provides a deeper understanding that this association is not symbolic rather 'material' where "spaces, places, identities and power" (Kaur 194) redefine the relationship. The present study reads the actual land-women embodiment in the stories of Devi and Huq to exhibit that female bodies are leased out like farmable land, which earns money in prostitution.

Bonded labor and leased out body in "Douloti the Bountiful"

South Asian women, being poor and uneducated, are denied identity and autonomy, confined to domesticity, and burdened with socially-defined positions and imposed roles. Moreover, men take advantage of women's reproductive biology for their benefit. Men institutionalise motherhood and objectify women's bodies and sexualities, keeping their "reproductive power... under [their] control" (Kaushal 184). Even in such patriarchal societies, women lack the freedom to decide whether they want to have children, how many children to have, or whether they can use birth control methods or "go for abortions" (Kaushal 184). They are frequently "forced to provide sexual services to men" according to their (men's) needs and whims (Kaushal 185). Moreover, the female body is predominantly portrayed as a sexual object for men in male-dominated media and discourses. This system posits women under the constant control and subordination of men in all spheres of life. However, this identity of women as a "sexual object" becomes doubly oppressive under the class and caste system. Such a dehumanisation of women under the grounds of class, caste, religion, and culture is vividly addressed in Mahasweta Devi's "Douloti the Bountiful." Dealing with bonded slavery, an institution in the poor tribal communities, Devi unmasks the worst facets of it concerning women.

Basically, bonded labor, also known as debt bondage or debt slavery, refers to a laborer's obligation to work for an upper-class landlord until a loan is repaid fully. The person who lent money used to have had full control over the laborer who was bound to execute the orders of the lord during this period. Vats and Sharma's observation about the system of bonded labor is relevant here to cite:

> Under the bonded labor system, a person loses his status as a free labor under a person from whom he has taken a loan, the amount of which may appear to be ridiculously small. He forfeits the right to sell his labor or the products of his labor in the open market. He, or a member of his family has to work under the creditor till the loan is repaid. But the wages are absurdly low and the rate of interest astronomically high. (741)

Therefore, following the rules of bonded slavery, the bonded laborers work for the elite class landowners on a contract for a particular period. If they cannot repay the debt within the promised time, their payment cycle never ends as the interest on the loan keeps increasing daily. In this practice of tribal bonded work, as Spivak remarks, naturally a bonded worker must offer free work to the master "as 'repayment' of a small loan, at extortionate rates of interest, often over more than one generation" (105). However, the worst angle of bonded slavery is the gendered dimension of it as men's debt tragically leads their daughters or wives to turn victims of physical servitude which results in bonded prostitution. In this system, as Spivak asserts, "the girls and women abducted from bonded labor or

kamiya households are thrust together as bodies for absolute sexual and economic exploitation" (112).

In the postcolonial ecofeminist framework, the connection between the exploitation of women's bodies and the exploitation of nature constitutes one of the central arguments. In this respect, Neelam Jabeen's argument of the women-land embodiment where both the land and the female body are subject to dual oppression in patriarchal and colonial systems helps to read women-nature connection. Jabeen's critiques, set against the backdrop of postcolonial societies, illustrate how based on their material reality women are actually "treated as land when they are 'leased out' to 'reproduce' when 'fertile'" (86). This "commodification of women's bodies" shows the "acute oppression of women, where their connection with and treatment like land provides a logic of domination to the oppressor" (86).

A postcolonial ecofeminist analysis of Devi's "Douloti the Bountiful" unfolds the layers of dehumanisation of tribal women in the bonded labor system. In this context, Yook says, female bodies are "doubly denigrated and exploited not only in terms of caste and gender but also by capitalist and patriarchal Indian society" (10). In this story, the cycle of exploitation starts when Ganori borrows three hundred rupees from the "predatory moneylender [who] carries exorbitant interest rates and entraps Ganori in bonded labor" (Yook 9). Ganori's labor is all-purpose, and his worth is regarded as equivalent to that of mere commodities, goods, and animals in the empire of the landlord, Munabar. Tribal bonded workers are "measured and treated only according to their use value and marketability" (Yook 9), losing their ontological worth and human dignity. Since the sick body of Ganori no longer benefits the master, the master considers him a worthless and defective commodity. Therefore, the 14-year-old Douloti, Ganori's daughter had to take "the yoke of [Ganori's] bonded slavery on her shoulders" (Devi 73) as an inherited bonded servant. However, Ganori's debt, "impersonal and transferable in its nature," (Yook 9) entrapped the girl in bonded prostitution and she is handed over from Munabar to Paramananda, who runs a rough trade, forcing her to work as a sex worker in a brothel.

Concerning the land-women embodiment in the story, the symbolic implication of Douloti's name, which ultimately takes on a literal turn, carries much significance. In Hindi language, the name "'Douloti' is derived from the word daulat i.e. wealth" (Mishra 5). And "bountiful" carries the meaning ample, plentiful or superabundant. So, the words douloti/doulot/prosperity and bountiful/plentiful/superabundant – all can be connected to a "land" which is supposed to produce a large amount. Significantly, in the story, "Douloti the Bountiful" Devi depicts that Douloti's body has been turned into a 'superabundant' land which can be "leased out" for the patriarchy, allowing her exploited body to serve as "traffic in wealth" (Spivak 128) for generating money. Similarly, she is meant to be more demanding as she is "bountiful and … has

those things in plenty that is in great demand in predatory, patriarchal prostitute trade" (Yook 9). So, the story especially emphasises how the array of "exploitation of land, resources, and women is quite identical" (Mishra 3) where there is "open plunder of daulat [wealth]", causing "shared subjugation" (4) of land and aboriginal women.

In the land-women embodiment, Jabeen's argument of the body as "fertile" land and "infertile" land is relatable to the body of Douloti. At the very outset, we see that Douloti being a virgin girl gets a higher rate of fertility/demand than the other women in the brothel. It is undeniable that in prostitution, the price of the female body increases/decreases based on age, beauty, and physical strength to "quench the hunger of male flesh" (Devi 61). When a woman has physical beauty and attractiveness, she has a high market value for reproducing money like a fertile land; and if she loses any of them or gets impregnated she becomes useless and left abandoned like a barren land.

At the whorehouse, Douloti's body is "leased out" at a high price since she was young and fresh. The oppressive and greedy master knew that more clients mean more money. As Devi mentions, "sometimes ten clients come daily as well. And in Madhpura there is a huge market twice a week, there are three fairs a year. At that time thirty clients enter daily in every woman's room" (Devi 62). Thus, in the context of bonded prostitution, Douloti's body is "defined and transformed into the field of labor" (Spivak 116). Here, the word *doulot*—symbolising both fertile land and human bodies—takes on a grim significance, as Douloti becomes "bountiful" and valuable to the patriarchal capitalist system through both production and reproduction. "Douloti" and "Bountiful" both symbolically stand for resourceful land or fertile land from which more and more crops can be produced; Douloti's fertility is her youth and beauty that has been commodified and marketed. Her "insolvent father's laboring body," (Yook 10) is substituted by her sexualised female body; and she is cultivated by many so that she can pay her father's debt and earn more money for the master. Douloti, thus, is "degraded as a sexual object to be traded" (Yook10) in Paramananda's whorehouse where customers are allowed to consume her commodified body on end. Hence, Douloti, both as land and body, turns out to be an area of intervention for its exploiters and exporters. As a land, she is open to invaders who breach her boundaries, and as a body, she is compelled to transgress moral principles of free will allowing herself to be plundered for the benefit of others.

In addition to Douloti, Devi renders the miserable condition of Somni who was sold to be ravaged and consumed to settle the debt of her husband. When her husband realised that it was impossible on his part to repay the loan by field labor, he started exploiting Somni's body. In her utter hopelessness, Somni says, "Then the god said to my man, You won't be able to repay, you are a *kamiya*. Send your wife (Devi 63)." In reality, Douloti and Somni are not isolated individuals, rather, they are the representatives of the girls and women of the

tribal communities in India where the gendered self of a woman is doubly marginalised both by her economic status and by the subordinate position of her community in the social order. Referring to these girls Devi writes:

"These are all Paramananda's kamiyas
Douloti and Reoti and Somni
Farm work, digging soil, cutting wells is work
This one doesn't do it, that one doesn't do it –
The boss has turned them into land
The boss ploughs and ploughs their land and raises the crop
They are all Paramananda's kamiya." (Devi 59)

Being women since they are not physically strong enough to play efficacious role of *kamiya* like their husbands and fathers, they are forced by patriarchy and circumstances to become the *kamiya*'s field—the source of money—once the male members are proven physically weak. Put differently, the "boss" Paramananda sends them to brothels for being ploughed, so that they can raise crops/money. The more clients the girls have the more tilling takes place, resulting in higher income and greater benefits for the masters. The story bitterly reveals that these girls and women are kept in such sexual service as long as their bodies are "tight" or fertile in terms of demand. Thus, the women in these brothels are robbed of their identity and dignity as women and human beings; instead, they are reduced to sexualised body parts and treated as land that grows crops and earns money for the master.

Thus, in her powerful narrative, Devi paints a poignant picture of tribal women's vulnerability in India by depicting the destitute tribal daughters and wives who bear the devastating consequences of their fathers' and husbands' debts. The bodies of these girls are exploited until the bodies become barren or unproductive or unusable. Thereby, they are enmeshed in bonded prostitution to reimburse the money that the men borrow from the rich and powerful patriarchs. The women as land continue to be drought-stricken in the brothel as Devi says, "And the number of clients goes up, up, and up in Douloti's room. Douloti starts drying up fast" (80). In fact, at Rampiyari's House, Douloti has been exploited as a money-making machine for patriarchy. Over eight years, she earned her master Paramananda more than forty thousand rupees that is more than ten-fold of the principal amount her father originally loaned. Nevertheless, the debt has never been repaid. This very series of Douloti and other girls' forced involvement in prostitution portrays the prototypical lives of women living under such systems. Devi sheds light on how capitalism, class, and male dominance intersect to fuel economic deprivation, physical exploitation, and gendered oppression. Through the experiences of the tribal bonded prostitutes, Devi emphasises how the bonded labor system is a unique experience for postcolonial tribal women, which Western feminists fail to address. In these poverty-stricken tribal lives, where farming is the primary means of livelihood, women contribute less directly to

cultivation through "field work, digging soil, [and] cutting wells" (Devi 59). However, in a grim irony, they themselves are turned into land that is dug and sown by many clients/farmers so that the land owner can earn more money. This stark revelation reinforces the implication of the postcolonial ecofeminist land-women embodiment wherein women's bodies are treated like a leased-out land, which profits patriarchy with sustenance and economic prosperity through prostitution. After discussing the representation of women's sexual exploitation in Devi's "Douloti the Bountiful," in what follows, I will touch on similar issues in Huq's work.

Partition and leased-out b**ody in "The Daughter and the Oleander"**

Hasan Azizul Huq's story "The Daughter and the Oleander" was written against the backdrop of the Partition of India (1947). Partition, in fact, is not only the history of the division of India's land but also the harrowing tale of the traumatising inhuman experience of people, especially women. Urvashi Butalia reports that "75,000 women are thought to have been abducted and raped by men of religions different from their own (and indeed, sometimes by men of their own religion)" (41). Reflecting on the brutal nature of partition, Menon and Bhasin point out how as a sign of "communal violence against women" men enjoyed the "tattooing or branding of their breasts with a crescent moon or trident marked permanently" (42) and as the mark of extreme sexual violence they even cut the body parts including breasts. In its cutting and piecing the land and the women, partition rendered them analogous, positioning both as sites of violence and control. Moreover, those who have survived had to face even a worse reality in their material exposure to displacement and poverty. On that account, it is not an exaggeration to claim that women carry the violence of partition in their female bodies. Huq's Ruku, the central female character, in "The Daughter and the Oleander" embodies the experiences of women who suffer the repercussions of power politics and malevolent violence during partition.

The story weaves Ruku, the daughter of an old refugee, with her horrible experiences in a post-partitioned patriarchal household, where she, like countless other women, is systematically exploited, mirroring the fate of the land they inhabit. As a consequence of partition, she along with her family has been displaced from her home and replaced in somewhere which unsettles her permanently. The truth of the undivulged reality, that her father concealed in hypocrisy, was her compulsion into prostitution to earn survival for her family and herself with the consent of her father. Here, the body of Ruku is victimised by her father who treats her just like a piece of land to earn money and produce food for him, for which he as a father was responsible. However, he transferred his yoke to his daughter as if nurturing the family against the diseases of penury were her sole burden as an able mother figure.

Catherine Roach argues that in the dominant patriarchal discourses, a mother is largely considered a figure who "provides all of our sustenance," (49) helps "disappear all of our waste products" (49) from our sights, satisfies all our wants and needs, and all of these she does in a selfless manner, "without any cost to us" (49). Moreover, anthropocentric precepts such as the belief that "nature is a storehouse of riches which will never empty" (49) and that humans may exploit the natural resources "at will for any purpose without incurring any debt or obligation of replacement" (49) are embedded in the instrumental point of view of male discourses. Thus, Ruku is forced into the dual role of a patriarchal nurturer, compelled to offer all nourishment from her own body, or reduced to an anthropocentric storehouse of infinite resources, expected to produce infinitely without depletion.

For Shazia Rahman, place has "material effects on the lives of its people" (15) in the postcolonial context. The darkest aspect of the Partition is that people have been displaced from their land/home and forced to live the life of a refugee in the newly formed nations. The old man and his family are also dislocated and have been going through the "partition trauma" (Rahman 86). The wound and bruises the new place brings to them reverberate in the old man's words:

> For those who had to leave their homeland, inside and outside are the same…. Makes no difference. We'd have starved in this jungle, if we couldn't count on you. We would never be able to raise food from the land in the yard. We were never good at it. You people are. We are from a dry area, you know? Everything is different there, the way of life. We'd have starved here if it weren't for you young men! (Huq 297)

The historical decolonisation of India left many of its people recolonised and entrapped in a nexus of migration, oppression, and dehumanisation. The family in the story, being part of the downtrodden vicious cycle of poverty, indebtedness, and servitude become the victims of migration and place. As a refugee, Ruku's father has lost his home, his means of livelihood, and perhaps the land that once provided sustenance for his family. The uprooting rendered him a man without a place, thrust into an unfamiliar world that he was unable to cultivate for survival, or adapt to a way of life he could not manage. Consequently, being a member of the exploitative and oppressive patriarchal group, he discovered an easy way out of commodifying his own daughter's body. Since he cannot farm the land anymore, he treated his daughter's youthful body as a piece of land, a means of production and sustenance.

In the land-women embodiment, the bodies of Ruku and her mother can be analyzed from the perspectives of fertility and infertility. Ruku's father's attitude resembles the greedy and terrible attitude of the selfish patriarchal society towards productivity and barrenness. Ruku, as a virgin and fertile body/land, like Douloti, has more value to the males who have come to quench the erotic thrust and to the father who can earn more money by exploiting her body. On the

contrary, as an old woman Ruku's mother has lost her physical strength and attractiveness and thereby carries no economic value for the hegemonic patriarch. Consequently, "like a barren portion of land" (Jabeen7), that male-dominated society cannot appropriate to its interest, the mother receives a jarring response. When the mother, realising her daughter's impending danger, attempted to utter something, an ear-piercing scream silenced her voice immediately. In Huq's words, "An old woman's voice says something. It is followed by an angry brutal shout, Shut up, bitch. Shut up! Then all is silent again" (Huq 298). Indeed, as an elderly woman, Ruku's mother is viewed as someone unproductive and insignificant in relation to money-spinning, hence she is animalised and her agency is silenced in a brutal manner.

Moreover, the metaphor of silence more intriguingly concretises the embodiment of Ruku and land. Throughout the story, Ruku's voice is heard nowhere – no words are spoken of denial or resistance. Instead, like a cultivable field she is laid open to be excavated every night, perhaps, by the customers her father used to bring home. Undeniably it is the very means by which he and his family survive, as affirmed with his confession that: "We'd have starved in this jungle, if we couldn't count on you" (Huq 297). For survival the girl has been reduced to a dumb land, bearing the burden of production as her only responsibility she silently endures all sort of mal(e)treatment to her. When saying "we'd have starved here if it weren't for you young men!" (Huq 297) her father hypocritically let Suhas and Feku – the young men– ravish her, she becomes a body – a silent "leased-out" land – to be exploited. Her body as land becomes the site of cultivation, providing sustenance for herself and her starving family. Under such circumstances, it is clearly noticeable that if the family is recolonised by partition, the girl, Ruku is doubly colonised being the woman of a marginalised community who cannot help but lose herself to silence in the process.

Douloti's and Ruku's embodiment

From our reading of the stories of Devi and Huq, we have witnessed that both Douloti and Ruku live within oppressive material conditions where impoverishment and patriarchal socio-political structures rule and determine their fortune. Their suffering is more structural than individual, shaped by national and economic policies that exploit the most vulnerable. Their struggles reflect broader systemic failures—caste-based economic exploitation in Douloti's and Partition-induced displacement in Ruku's case. Both girls are denied agency over their bodies due to their material realities—one as a tribal girl in debt bondage and as a refugee the other. While Douloti's fate unfolds the continued oppression of downtrodden communities in independent India, Ruku's tragedy highlights the aftermath of Partition—one of the greatest political incidents in Indian history. Their lived experiences critique how patriarchy, poverty, and systemic exploitation continue to dehumanise women in the subcontinent. Under

such socio-economic conditions their bodies are treated as the only means of survival. Instead, the stories unveil that the bodies are treated as leased-out land that is exploited and commodified for survival, and ultimately devalued and discarded. In this postcolonial ecofeminist analysis, it is vividly portrayed how their bodies are analogous to cultivable land, which is plowed, harvested, and expended for economic gain by patriarchy. Although in the land-women embodiment both are exploited as land, the nature of their exploitation differs in a subtle way. While Douloti's body is systematically appropriated in a long-term cycle of debt bondage and institutionalised prostitution, Ruku's leasing can be considered as desperate, perhaps a momentary transaction for survival within a displaced refugee family. Ruku seems to be in a state of passive acquiescence, unaware of the full implications of her exploitation. Unfortunately, the abuse comes directly from her father, who treats her body as an economic asset. Leasing of her body can be considered temporary, similar to how land may be rented in times of crisis but remains in family control. In contrast to Ruku's, Douloti's body is indelibly tangled in the class and caste system with no chance to escape. Douloti is controlled by a larger and longer-lasting patriarchal system— moneylenders, landlords, and brothel owners. Her body is similar to permanently leased land that generates continuous profit for landlords while destroying the tenant. Although she is painfully aware of her enslavement, she fails to avoid her inalterable reality. Her dehumanising suffering is social and political. Such systemic exploitation left her dead, mocking at the political and patriarchal notion of freedom and justice. However, either to meet momentary crisis or to repay the debt in an eternal bondage labor, women's body is the only means of economic production in both of the stories.

In "Women, Land, Embodiment: A Case of Postcolonial Ecofeminism," Jabeen dwells on the land-women embodiment, taking Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* as a case in point, in which the male family members compelled Ira and Kunthi— major female characters— to use their bodies to earn money due to their extreme poverty. In the process, Kunthi becomes a prostitute "to earn money or food" (Jabeen, "Women" 6) whereas Ira also "leases out her body to be used by other men in exchange for money. She uses her body for the sustenance of the family" (Jabeen "Women" 7). The current study clearly recounts that there is no difference between these women in Markandaya's canvas and Douloti and Ruku in Devi's and Huq's portrayal. Instead, they are the scapegoats, their bodies have been treated as sites of reproduction and survival. Both girls' exploited and commodified bodies reflect Jabeen's claim that the South Asian women provide "sustenance when the land doesn't yield enough. [They] use their bodies instead to make up for the loss from the land" ("Women" 6). The given analysis of the stories unwinds this formidable truth that Douloti's and Ruku's bodies have become the land that the male-dominated society farms

and from this farmed land money is produced when the land seems unfarmable to patriarchy.

Conclusion

The material reality of the postcolonial Indian women is shaped by the intersection of colonial history, gender, caste, land, power, and politics. Although both the stories, analyzed in the paper, are set in decolonised India, the male-governed society's internalisation of colonialism as a mode of control remains evident in its treatment of Douloti and Ruku. It is an undeniable truth that colonial powers treated the land in colonised regions as a source to be exploited for economic gain. This exploitation was extended to local populations, especially women, who were intentionally placed in subordinate roles.

The extraction of land resources (such as in agriculture or mining) parallels the subjugation of women's labor and roles in the economic system under colonial rule. Although Partition promised freedom, democracy, and justice to all the men and women, in post-partitioned India, the tools of exploitation remained the same and the poor and caste women couldn't overcome their status beyond a sexualised "cultural sign, to materialise [themselves] in obedience" (Butler 522). The lived experience of Ruku and Douloti has revealed that they are their father's properties while Somni, her husband's. In *Postcolonial Ecocriticism* (2010), Huggan and Tiffin identify the land in the postcolonial regions as a "disputed object of discursive management and material control" (20). Douloti, Ruku and other girls' embodiment both in "Douloti the Bountiful" and "The Daughter and the Oleander" exemplify that like land, women are the object of "material control" in such regions. As material properties or land, they are "leased out" in prostitution validating the postcolonial ecofeminist idea that female bodies are battlegrounds for economic reproduction for patriarchal survival in poverty-stricken materiality and/or masculinist hunger for money.

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