

Recursive Temporality: Eternal Recurrence through Planetary Crisis, and Sacred Time in Intezar Hussain's *Basti*

Zarnab Hassan¹

¹Independent Researcher

Email: zarnabhassan99@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper explores the temporal imagination of Intizar Hussain's Basti through an interdisciplinary theoretical framework, drawing on Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of eternal recurrence, Dipesh Chakrabarty's planetary history, and Mircea Eliade's mythic time. It argues that Basti resists linear historicism by staging a cyclical temporality that merges political trauma, ecological collapse, and sacred ritual. This repeating, cyclical structure across philosophy, ecology, and sacred myth is coined as recursive temporality. Guided by three research questions, the study examines how recurrence functions as an ethical and metaphysical structure; how planetary time extends the novel's scope beyond nation and history; and how mythic time sacralizes repetition. The findings reveal that Basti not only narrates national fragmentation but also offers a metaphysical ecology of time; it binds memory, ritual, and environment into a recursive continuum. This analysis situates Basti within emerging postcolonial ecocritical debates and proposes a model for reading South Asian literature through nonlinear, sacred, and planetary chronotypes.

Keywords: Eternal recurrence; ecological time; postcolonial fiction; mythic temporality; planetary crisis

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1. INTRODUCTION

Time in postcolonial literature is more than a chronological measure; it is a contested terrain shaped by memory, trauma, and metaphysics. In South Asian fiction, narratives frequently disrupt linear progression while echoing the ruptures caused by partition, civil war, and environmental decline. Intizar Hussain's *Basti* (2012) exemplifies this disruption. Rather than following a coherent historical arc, the novel constructs a cyclical, layered temporality in which national collapse, ecological trauma, and metaphysical dislocation recur. This paper has unified the socio-political degeneration, environmental decadence, and mythological recurrence, and called it recursive temporality. It argues that *Basti* reimagines postcolonial time as cyclical, sacred, and planetary. It challenges the "Enlightenment" assumptions of progress, anthropocentrism, and secular historicism.

While *Basti* has been examined in relation to nostalgia and partition trauma, its complex temporal structure remains underexplored, which is where the significance of the study lies. This paper fills the gap by integrating three theoretical paradigms: Friedrich Nietzsche's eternal recurrence (Nietzsche, 1974, 1978); Dipesh Chakrabarty's planetary history (Chakrabarty, 2009), and Mircea Eliade's sacred time (Eliade, 1954). Together, these frameworks offer a model of temporality that this paper coins as recursive temporality. It transcends linear historicism and invites a deeper reading of *Basti* as a metaphysical and ecocritical narrative. All three thinkers have approached time differently; however, all three agree on time being a non-linear entity. This study, therefore, brings a new approach to light by providing a threefold interpretative framework: Nietzsche illustrates the recurrence of time as a metaphysical principle; Chakrabarty understands time through planetary crises; and Eliade offers a sacred understanding of cyclical time. This combined study then analyses *Basti* not simply through the socio-political lens, but it also delves deeper into memory, time, and possibilities of renewal. However, this study does not explore the history of the sub-continent, nor does it analyze the politics of the region. It is limited to exploring eternal recurrence, planetary history, and sacred time under recursive temporality as an umbrella term, and within the confines of *Basti* as a literary text. Literary scholars and cultural critics may find this study most useful.

The study is guided by three interlinked research questions:

- (1) How does *Basti* embody Nietzsche's eternal recurrence in its depictions of civilizational collapse?
- (2) How does the novel reflect Chakrabarty's planetary time and its ecological implications?
- (3) In what ways does Eliade's sacred time shape the novel's ritualistic and mythic structure?

Through close textual analysis, this paper traces recurring motifs such as dust, fire, silence, ruins, and sacred cities to explore *Basti*'s multitemporal structure. The analysis unfolds in three stages and concludes with a synthesis that situates *Basti* within broader debates in postcolonial ecocriticism and temporal theory.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Mapping Time in Postcolonial Literature

Postcolonial literature often resists linear narratives inherited from the Enlightenment and colonial ideologies. Bhabha (1994) and Suleri (1992) emphasize how postcolonial texts collapse hegemonic timelines through memory and myth. Bhabha's "time lag" (p. 227) and Suleri's (1992) concept

of memory as a “ghostly presence” (Suleri, 1992, p. 36) underscore how the colonial past persists in shaping the postcolonial present. In *Basti*, this interplay is central: the narrative loops through memory, myth, and metaphysical collapse. Ahmed (2008) notes that Hussain “abandons the realism of historical sequence in favor of a poetic recursion into memory”. Qadir (2014) affirms that the novel “rejects linearity, staging ‘Partition’ as an endlessly returning rupture”. Both of these critics suggest that trauma contains a repeating structure. These critics have foregrounded Enlightenment and colonial perspectives by emphasizing the political aspects of *Basti*. However, recursive temporality with respect to eternally recurring events traced in the light of planetary crises and merged with sacred mythology stays majorly underexplored.

Akram (2017) highlight Hussain’s symbolic language that “collapses time into symbolic images that defy spatial constraints”. This study, on the other hand, only explores symbols in the light of the novel’s temporality. Qasmi (2021) views *Basti* as engaging with “spiritual decay and cyclical recurrence”. Such readings focus on figurative strategies and metaphysical imagery but rarely explore *Basti*’s temporal framework through ecological or philosophical lenses. This research addresses this gap by offering a multi-theoretical model of time called recursive temporality.

2.2. Nietzschean Recurrence in Literary Criticism

Nietzsche’s eternal recurrence has been applied to trauma narratives, though rarely in ecological or metaphysical contexts. Rajagopal (2018) explores “symbolic looping of post-Partition memory” but remains within nationalist historiography. Allison (2001) examines Nietzschean patterns in European modernist texts, where recurrence signals literary fate, but without connecting with South Asian cosmologies.

This study extends Nietzsche’s concept by linking *Basti*’s recurrences, such as war, migration, and ecological collapse, to existential questions. It considers whether characters like Zakir could “will” their conditions eternally (Nietzsche, 1974) by reading the repetition of trauma as ethical and metaphysical inquiry. The inquisition into ethical and metaphysical trauma serves as one of the three aspects in recursive temporality.

2.3. Planetary Time and the Ecological Turn

Chakrabarty (2009) insists that the climate crisis demands new forms of historical thinking. Planetary time, he argues in *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age*, collapses the boundaries between human and natural histories and forces us to engage with species-level. Ghosh (2016) echoes this, critiquing how fiction has failed to confront environmental times. He calls for

narrative forms that acknowledge “temporal multiplicity” and geophysical imagination (p. 131).

While *Basti* has rarely been analyzed through a planetary lens, its imagery of drought, desertification, and ecosystem collapse invites such a reading. Qasmi & Akram (2024) recognize the presence of “desolate wasteland” and “degraded ecosystem”, but do not frame these as part of a planetary crisis. This study contributes to postcolonial ecocriticism by interpreting Hussain’s elemental poetics, which are dust, fire, and silence, as literary expressions of planetary exhaustion. The analysis of planetary degeneration constitutes the second aspect of recursive temporality, to be discussed after metaphysical repetition.

2.4. Mythic Time in Literary Narratives

Mircea Eliade’s theory of sacred time, developed in *The Myth of the Eternal Return* (1954), remains foundational in understanding ritual narrative forms. He contends that “no event is unique ... but it has occurred, occurs, and will occur, perpetually” (p. 16). Campbell (1988) links this to narrative archetypes and suggests that myth channels cosmic energies into cultural form. Nanda (2007) explores how Hindu cosmologies infuse literature with sacred repetition, where destiny is governed by cyclical rhythms (p. 94).

However, Urdu fiction is seldom studied through this sacred lens. *Basti* offers strong evidence for such reading. Its recurring symbols that include fire, gardens, sacred cities, and moments like “he was searching for his childhood in the alleys of Rupnagar” (Hussain, 2013, p. 51) evoke Eliade’s sacred return. Memory becomes a ritual, and loss is experienced cyclically rather than progressively. The recurring memories serve as the final aspect in recursive temporality. Eliade’s framework allows the readers to see Zakir’s grief not merely as nostalgia but as a sacred mode of being where he affirms his loss through endurance.

2.5. Synthesis and Gap Identification

Most critical work on *Basti* explores its historical, cultural, or psychological dimensions. As per the researcher’s knowledge, no study has been found on temporal architecture as an interplay of recurrence, ecology, and sacredness. This study, therefore, proposes a new triadic framework, recursive temporality, that combines Nietzsche’s recurrence, Chakrabarty’s planetary time, and Eliade’s sacred temporality to reveal how *Basti* constructs a nonlinear, spiritually dense understanding of time.

In doing so, it joins ongoing debates in postcolonial ecocriticism and narrative temporality. It situates *Basti* not only as a national allegory but as a literary site where political violence, metaphysical yearning, and ecological

collapse are entangled in the web of recursive temporality. Such a reading repositions Hussain within global conversations about how literature mediates trauma, survival, and time. Future studies could extend this model to explore other South Asian texts, especially those engaging with myth, ritual, and planetary anxiety.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study draws on an interdisciplinary framework that brings together continental philosophy, postcolonial theory, the environmental humanities, and religious studies to examine how *Basti* reimagines time through the concept of recursive temporality. Time in the novel is not merely a sequence of historical moments: it is layered, recursive, and infused with ecological and sacred dimensions.

This study is guided by three theorists, based on close reading and textual analysis: Friedrich Nietzsche, Dipesh Chakrabarty, and Mircea Eliade. While differing in focus, each of them unsettles the modern belief in linear progress and introduces alternative ways of thinking about temporality, which is through metaphysical recurrence, planetary crisis, and sacred return. These three terms, when joined, are called recursive temporality.

Nietzsche's (1974) concept of eternal recurrence is drawn from *The Gay Science* and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. It posits that life repeats itself infinitely. In *Basti*, this recurrence is reflected in Zakir's repeated experiences of war, silence, and exile, which recur not as events in history but as existential loops. Memory becomes ontological—a mode of existence rather than a mere act of recollection.

Chakrabarty's (2009, 2021) theory of planetary time adds a crucial ecological dimension. He argues that climate change collapses the boundary between human history and geological time, forcing us to think as a species rather than as nations. *Basti* mirrors this collapse through recurring images of dust, drought, and fire, turning war-torn cities into planetary ruins. The novel thus aligns with Chakrabarty's call to rethink historical narratives through the lens of climate and extinction.

Eliade (1959), introduces a third register of time that is sacred time. Sacred time is cyclical, reversible, and accessible through ritual. *Basti* draws on this through repeated allusions to Karbala, Mohenjodaro, and Andalus. These are not just historical sites but sacred sites through which Zakir reconnects with a timeless spiritual past.

Together, these three thinkers provide a triangular lens that the researcher calls recursive temporality. Nietzsche anchors metaphysical recurrence, Chakrabarty offers planetary insight, and Eliade opens a sacred dimension.

This framework then helps read *Basti* not only as a political novel but also as a philosophical meditation on time, loss, and renewal.

4. METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a qualitative, interpretive methodology rooted in hermeneutic phenomenology. It privileges close reading and philosophical depth over empirical generalization, which is an approach well-suited to the nonlinear, symbolic texture of *Basti*.

The primary text is *Basti* (Hussain, 2012, trans. Pritchett), supported by peer-reviewed scholarship and theoretical texts. Analysis involves four key steps: identifying temporal motifs (e.g., repetition, silence, elemental imagery); close reading of symbolic episodes; applying the three-part theoretical lens to these moments; and reflecting on the broader metaphysical implications of Zakir's experience of time.

Ethical Guidelines

Human subjects were not involved in this study. It adheres to ethical standards of representation, especially in its handling of trauma, memory, and religious imagery.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

5.1. Eternal Recurrence and the Gyre of Historical Memory

Nietzsche's concept of eternal recurrence, which has been most fully explored in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1978) and *The Gay Science* (1974), is a metaphysical idea that challenges Enlightenment linearity. His proposition that "this life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once again and innumerable times again" (Nietzsche, 1974, p. 273) eventually forces the readers to reconceive time not as progress but as repetition. In other words, this life is a recurrence without redemption. When applied to literary narratives shaped by trauma, war, and loss, this concept opens up a radical lens for reading history as an existential loop. In Intizar Hussain's *Basti* (2012), Nietzsche's eternal recurrence offers a profound interpretive framework for understanding the cyclical catastrophes that structure Zakir's internal and external worlds. This also forms the first aspect in recursive temporality, and this section shall discuss it in detail.

The structure of *Basti* itself resists chronological continuity. It refuses linear historicism and instead unfolds as a series of recursive memories, fragmented dreams, and metaphysical reflections. The recurring collapse of civilizations such as Delhi, Baghdad, Dhaka, or Mohenjo-Daro all function not as isolated historical events but as recurring echoes in a metaphysical cycle. Zakir is not a conventional protagonist with a forward-moving arc;

rather, he is a witness, a dreamer, and a carrier of civilizational memory. “Once again, history repeats itself,” he remarks quietly, as Lahore succumbs to yet another war and another internal decay (Hussain, 2012, p. 111). This utterance is not mere cynicism but a fundamental recognition that war, displacement, and violence are not unique events: these recur like Nietzsche’s eternal wheel. As Barma (2020) observes, Basti “undermines nationalist teleologies by turning history into a mythic return of loss” (p. 141). It manifests a structure that blurs the line between temporality and timelessness.

Nietzsche’s theory does not advocate fatalism, which illustrates that everything is fated, but he proposes radical acceptance of life and time. In *The Gay Science* (1974), he asks: “Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus?” (Nietzsche, 1974, p. 273). Yet he also implies that affirming recurrence is the test of true strength. Zakir, similarly, does not collapse under the weight of repetition. He mourns, but he also preserves through memory, through silence, through the simple act of remaining in a disintegrating city. The fragmented narrative of Basti reflects Zakir’s inner state: one where the personal is inextricable from the metaphysical, and where the present is haunted by echoes of the eternal past. As Memon (1981) writes, “Husain’s characters do not act to resolve time but to endure it, suspended between recollection and repetition” (p. 88). This eventually makes the novel an existential meditation on survival.

Eternal recurrence in Basti also functions narratively, as the novel repeatedly returns to key motifs such as trees being cut, the dust rising in the streets, abandoned homes, and the deathlike silence of once-lively towns. Zakir states, “And then unfathomable silence, a fearful quiet. The whole city seemed to be motionless, holding its breath.” (Hussain, 2012, p. 219). This sentence has been repeated with slight variations, punctuating multiple stages of the novel. Silence here is not merely absence but the return of emptiness, with historical, philosophical, and emotional significance. The recurrence of violence and civilizational decay transforms the novel’s temporality into a gyre rather than a line. As Faiz Ahmed Faiz notes in his poetry, which Hussain’s novel indirectly echoes, “Again the same paths, again the same shadows” (Faiz, 2006). This spiral temporality resonates with Nietzsche’s concept of eternal recurrence.

Moreover, Zakir’s sense of time dissolves into circularity: “Which came first, the past or the future?” he muses (Hussain, 2012, p. 64). The novel breaks the traditional, linear sequence of historical events, as it reflects Nietzsche’s challenge to the idea that history moves forward with purpose. The narrative structure of Basti avoids linear progression, instead employing dream sequences, recursive memories, and mytho-historical blending to enact

recurrence as both theme and form. Zakir experiences history not as a continuum but as simultaneity, where each moment collapses into all others. As Barma (2020) observes, the novel "deconstructs Partition not as a single rupture but as a haunting continuity that disturbs historical time" (p. 102). Similarly, Gautam et al. (2024) argue that Basti "mediates memory through recursive returns, disrupting any singular historical interpretation" (p. 8). This reinforces the text's elliptical structure and metaphysical depth.

The emotional and ethical implications of eternal recurrence in Basti are significant. Nietzschean recurrence requires that we affirm even the darkest repetitions. Hussain's narrative challenges the reader: can one love history even when it hurts? Can one return to the site of loss, not to overcome it, but to live with it eternally? Zakir, who never truly leaves his childhood, his city, or his broken past, enacts a form of this affirmation. The novel invites its readers to sit with grief, not to transcend it, but to return to it, again and again, until its recurrence becomes part of one's moral ecology. As Memon (1981) notes, Hussain's fiction is shaped by "a search for continuity in the face of collapse" (p. 74), suggesting that repetition is not regression but philosophical endurance. Likewise, Charan (2021) highlights how Basti reveals "hope amidst the chaotic state of affairs" (p. 5). This frames the act of return not as despair but as quiet resilience.

This echoes the Nietzschean ethos of *amor fati* which is the love of fate as an ethical imperative. Zakir, who stays in Lahore as others flee, who does not revise his memories into nationalist triumphs, becomes a Nietzschean figure not of strength but of endurance. The acceptance of recurrence in Basti is not heroic but elegiac, not triumphant but quietly resolute. As Hussain himself reflects in essays, "We cannot separate myth from history, nor grief from remembrance" (Hussain, 2003, p. 15). Zakir's character truly embodies acceptance of repetitive wars and displacement, which has resulted in his detachment and dejection.

Other literary texts that echo this Nietzschean spiral include Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (Morrison, 1987), where trauma loops back into the present through spectral return. As Sethe reflects, "It was not a story to pass on" (Morrison, 1987, p. 274), capturing the haunting persistence of unresolved memory. Similarly, Faiz Ahmed Faiz's poem "Dogs" offers a cyclical vision of suffering and return, where the oppressed reappear in each generation, described as "the herd of homeless curs" who return "again and again" (Faiz, 2006, line 5). In Basti, this spiral is made literal: "Again the same roads. Again the same ruins. Again the same desolation" (Hussain, 2012, p. 180). These works, like Hussain's, refuse Enlightenment chronology and instead

dramatize time as repetition, where the past lingers, recurs, and never fully releases its hold.

Thus, Nietzsche's eternal recurrence in *Basti* is not only a philosophical structure but also a political critique. In a postcolonial context, where national historiography often demands closure, causality, and celebration, Hussain's refusal to move on is radical. He embeds the nation not in linear liberation but in cyclic collapse where each era repeats the last, and each promise dissolves into dust.

5.2. Planetary Time and the Ecology of Civilizational Collapse

Dipesh Chakrabarty's intervention in temporal studies, particularly in *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age* (2021), challenges the modern secular conception of time as human-centered, progressive, and historical. He proposes a distinction between global history that is the domain of capital, nation-states, and human politics, and planetary history, which operates on geological, ecological, and species-wide scales. "To be human," he writes, "is to partake in multiple temporalities at once" (Chakrabarty, 2021, p. 29). It is precisely this multiplicity of time where history intersects with the planetary that undergirds the metaphysical ecology of *Basti*.

Unlike traditional postcolonial narratives that treat Partition or national fragmentation as bounded crises, *Basti* locates its trauma within a much longer, deeper, and denser conception of time. From its opening pages, the novel invokes a language of decay, dryness, and elemental dissolution. Hussain's prose is replete with images of dust, ash, fire, drought, cracked earth, and falling trees. These are not merely metaphors for political instability; they signal a deeper ecological and metaphysical exhaustion. Zakir describes the war-torn landscape as "a wilderness where no birds sing" and Lahore as "a city of smoke, dust, and a silence that had weight" (Hussain, 2012, pp. 151–152). The "silence" that recurs in the novel is not just an emotional response to violence but a planetary register of collapse. As Sheikh (2008) notes, Hussain's fiction reflects "the ecological decay of not just place, but memory and imagination" (p. 172). This aligns natural and civilizational disintegration within a shared symbolic frame. In *Basti*, environmental ruin becomes both setting and symptom of civilizational exhaustion, as it blurs the line between ecological and historical endings. The recurrence of ecological decadence forms the second aspect of recursive temporality.

Chakrabarty argues that in the Anthropocene, "the human being appears simultaneously as a biological and geological agent" (Chakrabarty, 2009, p. 206). In *Basti*, the destruction of human settlements such as Delhi, Baghdad,

Dhaka, Lahore is always coupled with the ruin of ecosystems, rivers, and forests.

Zakir remembers a time when trees bore fruit, when wells were clean, when birdsong signaled hope. Now, he wanders in a wasteland. As Rubina Sheikh observes, Basti “captures Lahore as a site of cultural and ecological deterioration, where silence replaces song, and gardens decay into dust” (Sheikh, 2008, p. 172). The degeneration of the natural world mirrors and extends the moral and civilizational disintegration around him. In this sense, the novel stages not only a historical trauma but a planetary one.

Moreover, Basti destabilizes the anthropocentric time of progress and revolution that characterizes much of modern nationalist discourse. The Partition of India, the creation of Pakistan, and later the birth of Bangladesh are not linear political events leading toward a better future; they are eruptions that fold back into myth, memory, and ecological decline. These eruptions are foundational stones in recursive temporality. Zakir experiences each moment of nation-making not as a step forward, but as a wound repeated. Chakrabarty's assertion that “the climate crisis reconfigures our relationship to historical thinking” (Chakrabarty, 2021, p. 16) is mirrored in how Basti presents war as less about political ideologies and more about existential loss.

A parallel can be drawn with Anjum in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, whose personal suffering is intricately tied to the nation's political upheavals and environmental ruination. Anjum's retreat to the graveyard, which is in reality a space of death, becomes a sanctuary for her, echoing Zakir's lingering presence in a dying Lahore. Both characters embody a refusal to leave the ruins behind, insisting instead on witnessing and inhabiting them. As Roy writes, “She lived in the graveyard as though it were a city” (Roy, 2017, p. 45). It is much like Zakir, who wanders Lahore as if its silence still speaks.

Even time itself, in Basti, seems to obey ecological rhythms rather than historical clocks. The day dissolves into night not with certainty, but with slowness, tremors, and silence. Days stretch and collapse under the weight of war, drought, and waiting. As Zakir notes during one such moment, “Time moved like dust. You could feel it settle on your skin, but you couldn't see it” (Hussain, 2012, p. 121). This simile powerfully evokes Chakrabarty's idea that modern time has become too small to accommodate the temporalities of climate, species death, and planetary transformation.

The collapse of Enlightenment time in Basti is thus rendered through the collapse of narrative certainty. There is no linear path to redemption, no revolutionary closure. Instead, Hussain offers an entangled temporal consciousness where time appears in ruins, like the fallen banyan tree or the poisoned river. Chakrabarty writes that “humans can no longer think of

themselves as historical agents alone; they must reckon with their planetary embeddedness” (Chakrabarty, 2021, p. 112). In *Basti*, the protagonists are not masters of their destiny but witnesses to a disintegrating world: a world where history itself has turned to dust. This temporal disorientation finds a resonant echo in Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things*, where memory is no refuge, and “the past [is] a threadbare luxury” (Roy, 1997, p. 120). Like Zakir, Estha and Rahel do not revisit the past for healing; they remain suspended in it, unable to escape its weight. In both novels, time is fragmented, melancholic, and unresolvable; it is haunted by events too worn to offer comfort. Yet these events are too vital to forget.

The planetary crises allow for a productive comparison with other world-literary texts that explore ecological collapse through metaphysical and postcolonial lenses. In *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett conjures a desolate landscape where time stretches and meaning erodes. “Nothing to be done,” mutter the characters, as they await signs of life amid barrenness (Beckett, 2011, p. 2). Similarly, in *The Emperor Jones*, the forest becomes an elemental force, echoing human hubris and impending collapse: “The forest closes in. It is alive, I tell you!” (O’Neill, 2001, p. 15). These texts, like *Basti*, do not address ecological crises through overt politics but through mood, myth, and metaphysical pressure. Zakir, like Beckett’s and O’Neill’s haunted figures, dwells in liminal spaces where history and nature collapse into one another. It’s a space where waiting, remembering, and witnessing become forms of ecological testimony.

Basti’s aesthetics are planetary in both spirit and structure. The story avoids neat endings, moves slowly, and welcomes re-reading. Chakrabarty links such features to planetary thinking, where time loops, characters drift in and out, and memory overtakes plot. This uncertainty reflects the vast, tangled nature of the planetary crisis. The novel’s refusal to separate inner grief from environmental decay creates a narrative form where personal and planetary trauma merge. As Hussain puts it, “the world is a wilderness where no birds sing” (Hussain, 2012, p. 110)—a quiet echo of loss too large to resolve. As Gautam et al., (2024) note, *Basti*’s narrative “drips with layered silences,” where absence itself becomes a mode of witnessing environmental and emotional collapse.

Zakir’s fragmented relationship to place also reflects a planetary disorientation. He is neither nationalist nor exile, neither insider nor outsider. His identity, like the landscape around him, is liminal. “This city... it had changed its face again,” he observes (Hussain, 2012, p. 131). Such instability refuses the comfort of rootedness, instead of echoing Chakrabarty’s claim that in planetary time, all ground is unsteady. “The globe is no longer the stable

stage on which human history unfolds” (Chakrabarty, 2021, p. 111); it shifts beneath us. Humans are no longer citizens of fixed nations, but inhabitants of a shared, wounded planet caught in overlapping crises.

Furthermore, Basti subtly challenges the postcolonial desire for cultural anchoring. The novel’s characters do not find safety in religious revival, cultural memory, or political slogans. Even sacred symbols such as Karbala, Andalus, and Mohenjodaro are invoked not for stability, but for loss. This de-centering aligns with Chakrabarty’s assertion that “in planetary time, the question is no longer only what the past means for the future, but what kind of futures remain possible at all” (Chakrabarty, 2021, p. 167). Rather than offering a redemptive or forward-looking vision, the novel gestures toward exhaustion of civilizations, meaning, and time itself. Chakrabarty’s insight reframes Basti’s metaphysical despair: history here is not a tool for building futures, but a space where the very idea of the future has grown uncertain. In this vision, sacred memory does not promise regeneration but signals the weight of irreversible loss.

Zakir’s melancholic and recursive temporality is thus both postcolonial and planetary. He cannot return to a pre-partition innocence, nor move forward into a utopian national future. Instead, he lingers in a ruined present, a present haunted by dust, fire, and the ghostly echoes of fallen cities. In this way, Basti transcends from a historical novel to a temporal one. Zakir recalls how “everything had been burnt, and the ashes were flying in the air” (Hussain, 2012, p. 109), evoking a world where historical trauma and ecological ruin are inseparable. As Gautam et al. (2024) observe, the novel’s temporality “mediates memory through silence and myth, rather than through fact or record.” He places it firmly in this new planetary archive.

The ecological imagination in Basti also includes its language. Hussain’s prose style mimics the slow degradation he describes. Sentences are often short, stuttering, or recursively framed. Syntax breaks down as war arrives. The rhythm of the novel itself slows, echoing the geological compression Chakrabarty discusses. In the final chapters, where the city lies broken and silence reigns, the language of the novel becomes nearly elemental: dust, ash, dry wind, stone (Hussain, 2012, pp., 111-176). These words repeat, building a texture of planetary exhaustion. Similarly, in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, Roy writes, “The air smelled of burning and distance and incomprehension” (Roy, 2017, p. 231), a sentence that captures how language itself bears witness to ecological and emotional collapse. Like Hussain, Roy fuses atmosphere and syntax to narrate the slow violence of environmental and civilizational disintegration.

Zakir, then, is not merely a witness to political crisis: he is a character shaped by ecological grief. His sadness is not just national but planetary, born from a deep sense of disconnection not only from people and places, but from time itself. “Nothing is familiar anymore. Not even the sky,” he says at one point (Hussain, 2012, p. 134). His alienation mirrors the Anthropocene condition which is a rupture with the rhythms of the world. As Radha Gautam et al. argue, Basti “mediates memory through the decay of natural and human orders alike” (Gautam et al., 2019, p. 10). It shows how ecological loss becomes a form of temporal estrangement.

In conclusion, it can be shown that the ecological decay depicted in Basti functions on both micro and macro levels. On a micro level, it highlights environmental decline through infertile mythical lands that were once fertile and prosperous. On a macro level, it reflects planetary anxieties in today's world. The desolation and deep despair shown through Zakir's character happen in a recurring, repetitive pattern; each trauma and loss repeats in a non-linear way. Therefore, it becomes a part of recursive temporality. Chakrabarty's idea of non-linear modernity, contrasting with the Enlightenment concept of linear time, finds a parallel in Basti's recurring devastations caused by wars and displacement.

5.3. Sacred Time and Ritual Recurrence in Basti

Nietzsche's eternal recurrence and Chakrabarty's planetary time challenge Enlightenment history through philosophy and ecology. Eliade's sacred time offers a third mode in recursive temporality: mythic and ritualistic. In *The Myth of the Eternal Return* (Eliade, 1954), he distinguishes profane time, which is linear and historical, from sacred time, which is cyclical and reversible. “Myth is not a history of the world, but a paradigm for human existence... it repeats archetypal gestures from the beginning” (Eliade, 1954, p. 35). *Basti* echoes this sacred structure. Its fragmented form, recurring symbols, and mythic tone suggest it enacts rather than narrates time. Events repeat; memory becomes ritual; and history resembles myth. Time in the novel turns inward, circling rather than progressing.

The opening lines of *Basti* do not introduce a plot, a conflict, or a protagonist in the Western narrative sense. Instead, they immerse the reader in an atmosphere of collapse and remembrance: “The flame had leapt up. Was it Hindu or Muslim? Neither. The flame had no religion” (Hussain, 2012, p. 1). This flame, ambiguous and elemental, becomes a metaphysical symbol throughout the novel. It represents the timelessness of destruction, the recurrence of purification, and the ritual of sacrifice. Like Eliade's sacred fire, which is “kindled to imitate the first cosmic fire” (Eliade, 1954, p. 87),

Hussain's fire is not tied to a specific war or moment. It is a repetition of all destruction, a mythic recurrence.

Zakir's experience of time is shaped less by personal chronology and more by sacred recurrence. His memories do not follow a straight line. Hussain describes Zakir's experience by stating, "When he puts his finger on one memory, the dense clouds of other memories come drifted along in a train" (Hussain, 2012, p. 32). These memories rise up suddenly, triggered by mythic symbols, familiar scents, or the echo of a sound. Cities are not remembered for their modern political identity but for their mythic weight, such as Andalus, Baghdad, and Mohenjodaro. These are not just historical sites but sacred landmarks on a map of loss. Eliade writes that "to know the origin of something is to enter into a sacred dimension" (Eliade, 1954, p. 45). Zakir keeps circling back to origins, his childhood, his mother tongue, the lost garden, as if trying to rebuild a broken world through ritual rather than reason. In this, Basti gestures toward what Chakrabarty calls "a past that has not passed" (2009, p. 198), a time that continues to stir under the surface; a time that remains sacred and unfinished.

The narrative structure of Basti mimics ritual recurrence. Key phrases are repeated like invocations: "Then the silence began," "Once again," "That day returned." (Hussain, 2012, p.4-6). Each repetition becomes a kind of literary dhikr, a rhythmic remembrance that reactivates sacred time. For instance, during times of war, the silence that descends is described in identical terms across decades. This is not narrative laziness but an Eliadean strategy, meant to suggest that each historical crisis is a repetition of the same archetypal fall. As Eliade puts it, "Sacred time is the time of origins, always returning through ritual" (1954, p. 69). This quote emphasizes that sacred time does not flow forward like history. Instead, it loops back to a divine beginning and then re-enters in a repetitive and ritualistic manner. In *Basti*, these repetitions become portals into a timeless dimension that carry loss, memory and desolation.

Hussain reinforces this sacred temporality through allusions to Islamic, Indic, and biblical myth. The novel recalls the fall of Andalus, the martyrdom at Karbala, and the dispersion of Babylon. These are not just ornamental; they serve as temporal anchors in Zakir's inner world. When Sabirah leaves or the city begins to unravel again, Zakir does not explain it politically; instead, he turns to a mythic echo: "Once again, it was Andalus. The lights went out, and the darkness came in" (Hussain, 2012, p. 106). This reflects Eliade's idea that history is not a series of new events but a repetition of archetypes.

Barma (2020) observes that Zakir's memories "become a mode of escape" whenever he experiences anxiety of displacement (p. 74). With each tragedy, Zakir struggles to recover and responds to the collapse not with analysis but

with sacred memory as a form of both endurance and resistance. In a way, these reminiscences become a defense mechanism against all the chaos and unfathomable circumstances. Memory is the only anchor that gives Zakir a sense of control and familiarity. It becomes a channel for better understanding the trauma, which eventually helps endure it better.

Finally, sacred time in *Basti* provides space for the characters to defend themselves against contemporary violence. Where historical time leads to disintegration, sacred time allows for endurance. Zakir's source of existence is to repeat the events endlessly like a ritual. He mourns not to heal but to connect. He deliberately remembers by projecting his name, as Farrukhi observes, Zakir means the "one who remembers" (p. iv). This ethics of repetition is grounded in Eliade's thought that makes *Basti* a text not only about loss, but about the ontological dignity of remembering. It asks its readers to abandon linear closure and instead "inhabit recurrence as a space of meaning" (Eliade, 1954, p. 112).

In sum, Eliade's idea of sacred time shapes *Basti*'s mythic sense of time, its ritual-like structure, and emotional intensity. While Nietzsche treats recurring pain as a philosophical and metaphysical challenge, and Chakrabarty links personal loss to environmental decay, Eliade has completed the triangle of recursive temporality by providing a ritualistic and mythical approach where he sacralizes history. His model turns linear trauma into a cycle of mourning. Together, these three views under the framework of recursive temporality aid in analyzing *Basti* where myth, memory, and loss recur eternally.

6. CONCLUSION

This paper has explored *Basti* through recursive temporality that provides intersecting lenses of Nietzsche's eternal recurrence, Chakrabarty's planetary time, and Eliade's sacred temporality. Together, these frameworks have revealed how Intizar Hussain's novel disrupts linear models of history and national progress. Instead, it offers a cyclical, planetary and sacred view of time. Rather than framing *Basti* as a conventional postcolonial narrative of exile and loss, this reading has shown that the novel opens up deeper metaphysical, ecological, and mythic possibilities.

Nietzsche's idea of eternal recurrence helps illuminate how *Basti* constructs a temporality shaped by repetition and return. For Zakir, trauma is not a singular event but a recurring condition. The same wars, silences, and losses appear again and again. It is not as history repeating itself, but as time folding back on itself. The novel does not seek resolution. On the contrary, it affirms grief with endurance. Nietzsche's concept of will, even in the darkest

moments, resonates with how Zakir endures by remembering rather than escaping. In this light, the novel becomes a space for ethical reflection. It becomes a site that acknowledges suffering without demanding closure.

The cyclical structure aligns with Chakrabarty's idea of planetary time. Zakir's world is not simply politically fragmented. Rather, it is ecologically exhausted. Drought, ash, fire, and silence fill the pages of *Basti*, and these all point to a slow, ongoing collapse. This degeneration parallels the socio-political deterioration. Chakrabarty urges readers to rethink the human not only as a political actor but also as part of a damaged planet. He moves from a microcosmic level to a macrocosmic level and links personal tragedy to the planetary decadence. Hussain's use of elemental imagery and the gradual erasure of place and memory echo this call. The novel's attention to planetary disintegration moves beyond national allegory and confronts the larger crisis of the Anthropocene. Here, literature becomes a way to bear witness to both historical and ecological ruin.

Eliade's theory of sacred time becomes the third tier in recursive temporality in analyzing *Basti*. In *Basti*, memory functions not as recovery but as ritual. Mythic cities return again and again. Sacred symbols reappear. The past is not gone; it is reactivated. The novel's non-linear form, its repetitive language, and its evocation of mourning practices suggest a liturgical structure. Zakir does not simply recall the past; he re-enters it and re-experiences all the pain and suffering repetitively. This sacred mode of remembering allows the novel to transform trauma into a form of prayer and turns the narrative into a ritual.

In bringing together these three models, which are philosophical, ecological, and sacred, interlinked under recursive temporality, this study repositions *Basti* as more than a political novel. It is a meditation on time, loss, and the sacred. Its refusal of linearity, its attention to elemental decay, and its ritualistic form challenge the progressive narratives of secular modernity. Hussain's novel mourns the past. He does not aim to move beyond it, but he ensures it stays alive. In an age of ecological crisis and temporal confusion, *Basti* offers a sacred space, Basti (dwelling), where memory, myth, and mourning can still hold meaning. Literature, therefore, becomes a mode of survival instead of simply a means of storytelling.

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