

Chapter II

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Black Gold Rush

The advent of industrialisation, increase in the usage of coal to power the machinery especially in iron and steel industry and the arrival of railways as a mode of transportation made a crucial impact on the energy choices of the nineteenth century which permuted the outlook of life. During the eleventh century, coal was discovered in China and literature sources like a manual written in the late eighteenth century titled *Classic of the Waterways of Sichuan* is an example of the presence and usage of fossil fuels in China. Oil wells and tubes made of bamboo were also used to store oil.

This tradition of storing oil in bamboo tubes has survived till date especially in the Northeastern part of India like Assam and in Nepal where lamps are made using the flute-like tubes made of bamboo and filled with oil. Small holes on the top of the tube are used to secure the wick and the lamp is lit. This lamp is used for decorating the house and made to float in the river during the time of Diwali, which is an important festival in India also called the festival of lights. In pre-modern China, the usage of bottled oil for illumination purposes was documented by Mark Elvin in his work *The Retreat of the Elephant* (2004).

The first oil wells in Burma were hand dug in the ninth century BCE. They were located in Central Burma and during the colonial period these wells situated in Yenangyaung were visited by the British officers and diplomats. The natural gushing of oil in the basins of the river resulted in the foul smell thereby contributing to the name Yenangyaung which literally means the 'oil stream' and it was known as earth oil as it spurted naturally out of the ground.

Oil was the major revenue for the Konbaung dynasty during the eighteenth century. King Mindon Min, who ruled Burma from 1853 to 1878, married the daughter of an oil field owner to increase his economy. With this marriage, he inherited around hundred and twenty oil wells and also set up a refinery in Mandalay. Thus, with the significant expansion of colonial and oil activities due to the coming of Burmah Shell and the discovery of Yenangyaung Oil Field in 1889, Burma became the earliest and most experienced in oil extraction and trade on a global level. *The Glass Palace* (2000) by Amitav Ghosh is a historical novel set during the Third Anglo Burmese War, the colonial expansion and the Second World War and it provides an effective background picture of the oil exploration activities in Burma during these times.

After a brief recluse, oil re-emerged into modern life in the 1850s, when a series of scientific experiments were carried out in the United States and United Kingdom to discover a fuel resource by refining oil. The successful oil distillation procedure by the Canadian scientist Abraham Gesner led to the discovery of kerosene. In the year 1854, Gesner patented kerosene in the United States and after that it became an important fuel resource in domestic and public spaces, especially for illumination. During that time, the hike in the price of whale oil paved the way for the shift to more affordable options.

Cheaper and undemanding methods of production of kerosene replaced whale oil, which was facing shortage because of exploitation and endangerment of whales in the Atlantic Ocean. Experiments to refine oil continued even after the discovery of kerosene because there was a serious demand for a technology that could make oil a plausible fuel resource to power large- and small-scale industries. The primitive technologies that existed only allowed the extraction of oil available on the surface until the arrival of Edwin Drake and his oil extraction technology.

During his brief stay in New Haven, Edwin Drake made an acquaintance with George Bissell, a local banker who along with a few partners had set up an oil company for commercial drilling and sale. Drake, who was neither a geologist nor a scientist but a man with a history of disappointments in carrying out various heroic missions, somehow became the right person for carrying out the ambitious task that Bissell had in mind. When Drake accepted the leadership for the mission to strike and extract oil from the bowels of the earth, he was given the title Colonel by Bissell and his partners.

A sequence of experiments led Drake to successfully invent a technology to drill oil. He used the steam driven drilling technology that was an improvisation of the model used in Azerbaijan in 1847. The first successful extraction of oil from the underground on August 29, 1849, in Titusville, Pennsylvania by Drake led to the discovery of the forty-two-gallon oil field in the United States. Thus, the prototype of drilling technique by Drake marked the birth of the modern oil industry and the onset of the black gold rush.

The ambitious wildcatters invaded the fields of Pennsylvania in search of oil wells. In 1861, the maiden oil refinery came into existence and for the first-time oil cargo was dispatched from America to London. After the victorious setting up of the production unit in 1865, the first pipeline for five miles was laid down with the capacity of 800 barrels of oil. Commencement of the domination of oil as a fuel resource, and oil expeditions around the world changed the fate of many nations. As the invisible resource was brought to light, the elusive legal framework and the rush to find new wealth made the oil pioneers extract and exploit ruthlessly, and it directly reflected on the fluctuation of oil prices in the market.

The abundant presence and minimal demand led to low prices and bankruptcy for many investors who failed to strike a balance between demand and supply. Thus began the gilded age of America that experienced revolutionary changes in economic growth, technological advancements, social metamorphosis and political disaccords. John D. Rockefeller established the famous American oil producing company called Standard Oil that emerged as the forerunner of the oil industry and modernisation of society.

The discovery of internal combustion engines coincided with the oil boom and paved the way for the coming of automobiles, which would later become the largely fossil fuel dependent commercial sector. In the year 1886, Carl Benz began using the petrol-powered internal combustion engine for commercial production of automobiles, and there was an instant rise in demand for fossil fuels. The steady rise in the demand for fossil fuels and the prospect of wealth brought by it made it an attractive possession and led to global oil expeditions.

Oil, unlike any other energy resource, became an entity that possessed the power to alter the fate of nations whose undergrounds were brimming with it. In 1901, Spindletop Hill oil geyser situated in Beaumont, Texas with the promising capacity of nearly a hundred thousand barrels a day became one of the first largest sourcing of oil. Companies rushed to Spindletop to set up refineries and it resulted in the birth of major oil moguls in America like Exxon, Texaco and Gulf Oil, thereby dismantling the monopoly of Standard Oil and John D. Rockefeller.

Meanwhile, in 1908, Ford motors launched their four-cylinder automobile called Model T, introduced the assembly line system and began the mass production of automobiles. This became one of the greatest successes of industrialisation and raised the position of

fossil fuels in the global market. In 1901, the Middle Eastern oil expedition began when Irish businessperson William Knox D'Arcy struck a sixty-year oil concession deal with the Persian Empire. After several geological surveys and experiments, George Bernard Reynolds discovered oil in Iran.

UK based Burmah Oil company set up a subsidiary in Iran for oil production and was named as Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC) in the year 1913 and large-scale production of oil started in the refinery set up in Abadan, one of the largest in the world at that time. By the end of the nineteenth century, the internal combustion engine powered by oil was used in ships and became an integral part of the military strategies.

The shift by the Britain navy from coal to oil in 1911 under the leadership of Winston Churchill was an important historical decision that inflated the status of fossil fuels in economic and political stratum. Thus, oil came to be a military strategy that determined the security of the nation. Although one of the largest suppliers of coal, the United Kingdom did not have the required supply of crude oil due to the lack of oil fields in the country as well as in its colonies. Thus, their attention shifted to Iran and the APOC.

In 1914, APOC was facing financial trouble with bankruptcy in cards, and Churchill used this opportunity to acquire a majority of stakes of the oil company. On June 17, 1914, under the rightful guidance of Churchill, the United Kingdom acquired 51% share of APOC. APOC became British Petroleum (BP). The conglomeration of Britain and Persian oil resources was a critical event in energy history because oil transformed into a tactical link between hegemony and national security.

Churchill in one of his speeches said if Britain cannot acquire oil, then its supply of corn, cotton and other commodities would be arrested. This highlights the role of oil

resources in global transportation and in preserving the economy of the nation. The black gold rush saw the unfolding of a new fossil fuel powered economy and the geopolitical spaces that would recast the likelihood of nations like Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Nigeria and other countries where the oil resources are found in abundance.

The Arabian Peninsula did not attract much attention during the initial oil rush because of its geographical formation. The members of the BP, after their experience with the Persian Gulf, greatly influenced the idea that the probability of existence of oil in Saudi Arabia is diminutive. Meanwhile, in the 1880s many small sheikdoms like Bahrain and Kuwait had pledged a part of their sovereignty to the British government, which stated that no foreigner would be given concession on Arabian soil without the consent of the British.

At this time, Venezuelan oil production had a rapid growth and by 1939, it was producing seven hundred thousand barrels per day, making it the third-largest oil producer in the world. This gave rise to the phenomenon called the Dutch Disease, where the total economy of the nation depends on revenue from one resource. The Dutch Disease became the condition of Venezuela, Middle East and Nigeria where the economy of the nation is solely balanced on the shoulders of oil extraction, refining and export and had negative effects.

The necessity of fossil fuels rose during the two World Wars and led to the vehement search for oil resources. The Arabian Peninsula at that time did not have any fixed boundaries and was populated with nomadic tribes who were always on the move. The British Nationality Clause with Arab protectorates allowed the United Kingdom to have partial colonial control on the Arabian lands and resources. Under the guidance of Percy Cox, a British

official, boundaries were drawn in the Arabian Peninsula, giving rise to many new sheikdoms, including Saudi Arabia.

The Red Line Agreement by Britain with the United States prevented companies associated with the Iraq oil expedition from holding any individual ventures in the Middle East. Thus, the supremacy of the United Kingdom over the geography of the Middle East in the era of black gold rush was established. Amidst all the chaos ensuing in the superpower nations trying to colonise the Arabian Peninsula, the lands under the control of King Ibn Saud which he named as Saudi Arabia in 1932 were not affected.

Different circumstances in Saudi Arabia were greatly due to the presence of John Philby, a British official who came to Saudi Arabia, converted to Islam, positioned himself as the most trusted advisor of the King and invited the foreign oil companies to survey the desert land in search of oil. It was between the two World Wars that Saudi Arabia transformed from the land of nomads, oasis and few towns to one of the significant countries in terms of economy because of the unification of the lands to create a country by Ibn- Saud and the discovery of the world's largest oil field.

Before the arrival of oil, the Bedouins who mostly populated the region were involved in herding, caravan trade and agriculture for their livelihood. The vast area of the Arabian Peninsula is occupied by Saudi Arabia and surrounded by the Gulf of Aqaba and Red Sea in the West, Persian Gulf in the East and Yemen in the South. Al-Rub al-Khali which means 'The Empty Quarter,' located in Saudi Arabia is the world's largest continuous sand desert. Apart from the desert landscape, Saudi Arabia has four main regions namely Najd, Hijaz, Asir and the eastern province. Initially populated by the nomadic Arab tribes, after the oil boom Saudi Arabia became an amalgamation of various

ethnicities with increased migration in search of work. Thus, the diasporic cultural narrative of Saudi Arabia includes Turkey, Iran, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Philippines, and Westerners who are employed in the various high-ranking positions within the Sheikhdome.

After a fruitful exploration, in 1933, Saudi Arabia signed an oil concession royal decree for sixty-years with Chevron, a California based oil company. The concession granted access to the eastern lands of Saudi Arabia called the al-Ahsa province, which eventually became the land with the richest oil wealth. The Arabian American Oil Company (ARAMCO) was set up in 1944 and the Ghawar oil field was discovered in 1948 which changed the fate of Saudi Arabia. In 1973, ARAMCO became a Saudi Arabian Oil Company and was owned by the Saudis. The black gold rush led to the western dominance of the oil rich Middle Eastern nations, thereby reconstructing their economic, cultural, social and geopolitical prospects. The Seven Sisters are Chevron, British Petroleum, TEXACO, Gulf Oil, Exxon, Mobil and Royal Dutch Shell and they hold the majority of oil stakes in the Middle East, North Africa and Latin America.

Oil expedition and discovery in the Middle East which stimulated the dynamics of black gold rush is the tapestry over which Abdelrahman Munif weaves his historically significant work, *Cities of Salt* trilogy. Set in the unnamed Middle Eastern kingdom, *Cities of Salt* (COS) first published in 1984, begins in the 1930s, around the same time when the oil expedition was launched in Saudi Arabia and coincides with the first discovery of oil in commercial quantities. Therefore, the story documents the events during and after the discovery of oil until the 1950s.

Threshold of the novel portrays life in Wadi al-Uyoun, a rural area near the oasis with flourishing vegetation, fresh water and tight-knit community living. A paradise for the traders and their caravans, the people of Wadi led a life with a penchant for nature and was leagues away from modernisation. Wadi was a pristine oasis, surrounded by palm trees and brooks and the bedouins lived a life interconnected with their natural ecosystem where their mental health and lifestyle was largely influenced by the weather and the natural environment around them.

When it rained the people of Wadi were cheered by the idea of the surplus water and thriving agriculture and became very rapturous and generous in nature and in times of drought, they exhibited introverted and reclusive characteristics. Thus, the people of Wadi had a close connection with their land and the ecosystem that sustains them and it is strongly emphasised in the characters Miteb al-Hathal and Umm Khosh. Munif transforms Wadi from a mere setting to a character that has formed intricate connections with people and is affected by their actions.

The presence of the natural oasis is treated like the cradle of the mother that offers great comfort and relief to the natives, caravan traders and travellers. Wadi becomes a symbol of hope, comfort and life for anyone who stays or passes by. The allusion is drawn between the palm tree and the birth of a child by associating the growth of the palm tree with the growth of the child into a boy and man. It is an example of profound connections between people of Wadi and their natural environment. Miteb carried Wadi as his sentiment and the significant truth of life that eventually formed his identity. Without the ecosystem that makes Wadi an immaculate place, the people bound by it felt meaningless and their identity was distorted. According to the tribes, the water of Wadi is the elixir of life that determined their existence.

Umm Kosh, a mother who is waiting for her son to return home after his travels with the caravan and in course of time has become old and overtaken by madness shows a fierce resistance when the people of Wadi are expelled after the discovery of oil. She refuses to leave and eventually dies and was buried along with her belongings in the desert before the exodus of the people of Wadi. Thus an eccentric Umm Kosh and her lament is an invocation of the connection between the land, people, memories and the sentiments attached with it.

Left homeless and transitioned to refugees, Wadi soon became non-existent and its people orphaned in the hands of oil. “It could be said that the water of the Wadi that runs in the veins of palm trees, birds, animals, and the people have proved to be tighter and stronger than any other blood ties among the people of the Wadi” (Al-Sarrani 22). A community living without any class differences can be observed in Munif’s portrayal of Wadi and it was in complete contrast with the social change that emerged after the oil exploration began.

The first wave of foreign intervention in the bedouin lands arrived when Americans came to survey the desert. The oil and foreign intervention are represented as negative and ominous forces and are seen as a sign of destruction by the Bedouins. The tribes correlated the Americans with the mythical *jinn*s and believed that the treasure under their sands will be the end of their serene life in this brimming oasis. Miteb named one of the Americans as “Nahs (Disaster)” (Munif, *COS* 67), while the rest named him as “Ghorab (The Crow)” (Munif, *COS* 67). The coming of Americans led to the rise in class structure among the people. Although, it was initially said that the Americans came in search of water, the people of Wadi are able to sense that the intrusion was not for water but for a resource

more valuable than that. The probability of ethnic cleansing and the culture threat that oil and the Americans possessed for the ethnic life in the desert is a social reality that Munif satirises throughout the book in order to assert the cultural and environmental emergency as a result of oil exploration.

Ibn Rashed was appointed by the Emir to take the American explorers around the desert, provide them with all the amenities and assist them in understanding the land better. Ibn Rashed takes up his job very enthusiastically and also acts as a mediator between the natives of Wadi and the foreign delegations. Later he would become one of the important people in the setting up of the oil industry, the rise of Harran and the recruiting of labourers to work in oil rigs. He becomes one of the first persons among the native Arabs to be influenced by the money that would flow if the exploration by the Americans becomes a success. He can be classified as a pro-American.

Another important character who is directly influenced by the American ways apart from the government and Ibn Rashed is Dr. Subhi al-Mahmilji, who after his brief time travelling with caravans, arrives at Harran with his scholarly gait and medicinal knowledge that out did the medicines of Muffadi al-Jedan, the traditional healer of Harran. The native ways of healing were wiped away by Dr. Subhi's western mode of cure and it gained a lot of attention amidst the people and government of Harran. Thus, he experienced a steady rise in his social status and it was further strengthened by his friendly ties with Americans in matters relating to politics, economy, intellectual pursuits and military. Thus, the coming of oil saw the rise of both resistance and acceptance.

The resistance was mostly by the natives who gained a lot of moral strength and inspiration from Miteb who was later transformed into a mythical force, a phantom and a

godly figure that guided the spirit of men into their fight for freedom, justice and home. Meanwhile the acceptance and consent for this new reformation through foreign forces and the oil wealth was exhibited by the characters like the Emir, Sultan, Dr. Subhi, Dabbasi, Johar and Hammad. Along with the consent come power, corruption and greed that results in inequality and division. “Oil, gradually and problematically shedding light, and promising disaster—within two chapters the oasis will be levelled. So begins the Encounter, with its disruptions, losses, material wealth, corruption, and distorted modernity.” (Theroux)

The people of Wadi took a hard blow when the first signs of destruction appeared in the form of big machines brought in by the Americans that were used to destroy the natural habitat. Munif shows the cutting down of trees as the first act of violence inflicted on Wadi after the discovery of oil. It heightens the fact that for the people of Wadi, the natural environment is an important support system that has helped sustain life amidst the harsh desert conditions. When the environment was wrecked, Miteb is shown experiencing an anxiety that made him rebellious at first and later reclusive.

In the beginning, the people of Wadi did not understand the frantic state of Miteb, his resistance to the activities of Americans who are supported by the government and his foreshadowing of a perilous future. Later they referred to him with reverence because of the changes after the coming of Americans, oil and how Wadi ceased to exist and, was replaced by an industrial town named Harran. Amidst all this hullabaloo of wealth and resources that redefined the stature of the Middle Eastern oil kingdom in global politics and affairs, it was the indigenous people and their culture, ecosystem, lands and livelihoods that were lost or worse erased out of existence. As the novel gradually proceeds, the place called Wadi is replaced by Harran and its indigenous people are forgotten and wiped out of historical narrative.

With the arrival of the new wealth, the society was split into oil elites and labourers or working class. The oil elites were mostly Arabs like the Sultan and the Emir, who generally exercised great power in the monarchy and approved the arrival of the foreigners. The rise of Arab Harran and American Harran is an important example of social disparity that existed in this fictional kingdom post oil discovery. The military's protection over the oil elites displays the rise in polarity because of the societal altercations brought by the new wealth. The working class comprises the indigenous Arabs who lost their land and livelihood in the hands of the aristocracy.

The discovery of oil near Wadi led to the forceful evacuation of people from their native lands under the hegemonic domination of the ruling class. They were forced to work in the oil wells under toxic conditions for their livelihood. Thus oil changed the social, political, cultural, economic and environmental way of life for the indigenous people who lost their identity although few were benefited by increased capital, income and contemporisation. Those who saw the oil discovery as an opportunity to raise their standards of living like Ibn Rashed, Naim, Saleh al-Dabbasi and Dr. Subhi, became the capitalist greased by oil wealth.

Emir and his fascination for new technologies from the West like telescope, radio and other modern amenities coupled with his lethargy towards the injustice inflicted upon his own people led to the rebellion where the native proletarians collided with the privileged Americans and their Arab counterparts who portray the oil monopoly where money and power speak louder than national sentiments. Thus, foreign interventions in the name of oil is seen by the natives as a baleful event that altered the fate of the Middle East. Ibn Naffeh is another character who like Miteb fiercely disapproves of the Americans and

their interference. He remarks that the foreign lands are engulfed in corruption due to excessive wealth.

The coming of oil and loss of the natural habitat placed the working class in opposition to the foreign intervention. Meanwhile, the desert landscape changed with the coming of two cities named Harran and Mooran that were influenced by modernisation, technology and urban development that aligned with American ideas of architecture, trade, commerce, defence and other utilities necessary for luxurious life amidst harsh desert conditions. The inequality and injustice led to rebellion of the working class against the bourgeois. The fictional cities of Harran and Mooran constructed by Munif in the trilogy are modelled based on the real Saudi Arabia and the cities that bloomed with the discovery of oil and refurbishment in the dawn of twentieth century. Certain characters and incidents in the novel are also inspired by real life people and the circumstances that surrounded the building of the oil empire.

The rule of Sultan Khureybit in the novel parallels in reality with the rule of Sultan Abdulaziz bin Abdul Rahman Al Saud also known as Ibn Saud who reigned Saudi Arabia from 1932 to 1953. During his reign, he encouraged petroleum exploration in Saudi Arabian provinces. The circumstances in Saudi Arabia after the discovery of oil was starkly different compared to other places in the Arabian Peninsula because of the presence of St. John Philby, advisor to the Sultan. Similarly, in the novel, John Hamilton, a British official, gains the trust of Sultan Khureybit and serves as the chief advisor. Hamilton also takes effort to culturally and religiously imbibe the spirit of the desert to have a better understanding of the geography and the sentiments attached to it. Besides, it is Hamilton who facilitates the arrival of potential oil company investors and convinces the Sultan to undertake the oil expedition.

When the oil wealth began to flourish, Hamilton mediated a friendly relationship between Sultan and the Americans that led to the riches and growth similar to the combined efforts of Philby and Ameen Rihani, a Lebanese American writer and political activist. Their efforts and amicable relationship with American oil moguls steered Saudi Arabia away from the resource curse and paved the road to wealth and development. Thus, Munif ties history with fiction to present an oil reality which is idiosyncratic in voicing out the predicament of the marginalised in the new-found social order that is powered by energy resources.

The Trench (TT) published in 1991 and the second instalment in the trilogy begins in the 1950s whereby now the oil monopoly has been well established and depicts life in another fictional city, Mooran, post-oil discovery. The bedouin way of life and the mud and tent houses are slowly replaced by concrete buildings and technologies including electricity have become a part of life in Mooran. Camels are replaced by automobiles and trucks, mud walls are torn down and, in its place, stood high walls that are made of cement, and radio has been replaced by television.

The rise of capitalistic society can be marked by the possession of palaces and automobiles. “The technology that inundated Saudi Arabia is essentially of the consumer type, except for the capital-intensive, petrochemical industry run largely by expatriates” (Elmusa 346), and it was inflicted upon a civilisation that was not culturally predisposed for it. The days before oil when life was simple became a thing of nostalgia and often reminiscenced by the people of Mooran, especially by those who witnessed the metamorphosis of the society since the first day of oil discovery. Wadi became non-existent and Harran

as it appears in the conversation among the people of Mooran has now become a full-fledged oil exploration site and not fit for residence.

Automobiles as a symbol of prestige and class are evident throughout the story. Dr. Subhi, who is a recurring character in the novel, travels from Harran to Mooran. When he is gifted a car by the Sultan, he is awed and envied by the others in the city. The car is always compared with animals and that asserts how mobility was still considered biological rather than mechanical because the primary modes of transport for the nomads were camels and horses. Sultan's cars are named after the animals. The Cadillac was named "The Hoof" (Munif, *TT* 439), Rolls-Royce was called "The Ostrich" (Munif, *TT* 439) because of the luxury status attached to it and another car was called "The Steed" (Munif, *TT* 439). This explains how the automobiles "...became the horse of the new era" (Munif, *TT* 120) and serves as a good example of ecological impressions on the mechanical aspects of modernity in Mooran.

The importance given to social class and materialistic indulgence in the novel provides a capitalist picture of Mooran where even the homeland and identity is determined by money rather than cultural values. Homeland is no longer the land, ecosystem, people, culture, tradition and sentiments that collectively determine the identity of an individual or a community of people who are a part of it and is instead substituted with wealth and power after the coming of oil. Dr. Subhi says to his son Ghazwan that, "A homeland is not just land or people; a homeland, I have come to see, is wealth." (Munif, *TT* 33) The philosophy of Dr. Subhi that is inclined towards wealth as a means of identity and passed on as a legacy to the generation after is an exposition of the serious impact that wealth had on the elites of the oil kingdom.

Major political altercations in the novel coincide with the events that happened in Saudi Arabia from 1953 to 1964. After the death of the first king of Saudi Arabia, Ibn Saud, in the year 1953, his second son, Saud bin Abdulaziz Al Saud became the king. Under his rule, he established a variety of financial reforms and expedited the infrastructural growth of Saudi Arabia. He sought to maintain a friendly relationship with the United States. He extended support to Arab countries in their conflict against Israel. Giving utmost importance to education, he established the first university in Saudi Arabia named King Saud University in the year 1957 and in 1960 passed a royal decree to establish the General Presidency for the Education of Girls that facilitated education to everyone without gender disparity.

Amidst all the developments, extravagant living and growing national debt of Saudi Arabia subverted the rule of the king and his brother Faisal who was mostly out of the picture and is constantly travelling, returned and seized this opportunity that led to the abdication of the throne. Faisal overthrew his elder brother and inducted himself as the King of Saudi Arabia during 1963-64. Similarly, in the novel, Sultan Khureybit's death was followed by the accession of his fourth son, Prince Khazael to the throne. His two elder brothers died at infancy and the third elder brother, Prince Mansour was killed in the battle of Rehaiba at the age of seventeen. Thus, Khazael, the crown prince, became the king of the fictional kingdom.

Under the rule of the new king, Mooran witnessed a drastic change in the infrastructure, trade and commerce thrived, relationships with the Americans were strengthened with oil and military deals, and modern technologies transformed life in the desert. Along with financial development, the power of knowledge and literacy was understood

and bookshops came into business. The king also established the first college in Mooran named Sultan Khazael College for Sharia. Meanwhile, Khazael's half-brother Prince Fanar was mostly out of the royal narratives and was afflicted with jaundice. He spent time with his mother's family in Ein Fadda and travelled extensively to Switzerland and America for his medical treatment.

After his long absence, Fanar returned to Mooran and took residence in Sultan Khazael's palace and is mentored by Hamilton. Hamilton, impressed by Fanar's travels and intellectual thirst, takes him on several trips to England and later becomes his mentor. With a taciturn air of look, Fanar observes the working of the government, trade and commerce, the follies and the loopholes that ensued the rule of Sultan Khazael amidst the flow of petro-wealth. When favourable circumstances arise, Fanar overthrows his brother Sultan Khazael from the throne and establishes himself as the new king of the fictional kingdom created by Munif. The novel ends with the beginning of the rule of King Fanar and the commencement of a strict regime with increased security, surveillance and strengthened military.

Taking significant cues from history, Munif sets out to explore the three primary facets which include the urban life, class conflicts and corruption through the portrayal of the social and political life in Mooran. Thus, he depicts how oil as a wealth has transformed life in the Middle East by also showing the negative facet where there is loss of land, internal displacement, fatality, corruption, greed, toxic living conditions, environmental destruction and cultural loss thereby documenting a reality that was silenced in history. Oil changed the bedouin form of life because it required them to give up their nomadic

life and settle down, “Life, in brief, had become rootless, hard, and unstable, with no one knowing what would happen next.” (Munif, *TT* 221)

Petrofiction as a literary genre provides a space to explore the nuances of oil discovery, black gold rush, its aftermath and representation in literature. Munif thought that the discovery of oil in Arab countries would be a progress towards modernisation and would be able to provide a better economy for further development. Instead, the oil wealth saw the alignment of monarchy with religious establishments and western superpowers to create a circumstance that was selfish and corrupt thereby impeding the progress.

In the Arabian Peninsula, it was oil that brought in the encounter of the East with the West, the effect of which resonated through all aspects of living like the military and security, the infrastructures that impacted the environment and altered lifestyle and the quality of air and water. By remapping the history of the Middle East from the perspective of oil, Munif voices out for those who are silenced by hegemony and thus, “...petrofiction is an embarrassment to both America and the Middle East, than the censorship of this novel by the Saudi government.” (Xinos 4)

For the Arabian Peninsula, the oil encounter is also the story of transformation, destruction, grief, sympathy and displacement and for the Americans, it is an ineludible overseas expedition which determines their economy, smells reek and causes damage to the environment. There did not emerge any creative writing that would talk about the experience of western oil men in Arabian Peninsula or Persian Gulf because these men were spatially in a new geography while they were culturally isolated. Their living area was the recreation of western urban life and their experiences were limited within those boundaries, thereby making them void of experiencing the authenticity of the desert life and its people.

The difference between the living conditions of the Arab Harran and American Harran in Munif's *Cities of Salt* is a good example of this absence of cultural hybridity. The American Harran had air conditioners, pools and houses that are replicas of the western model and fashion, food and lifestyle remained highly Occident, thereby building this gated community with walls and strong security that is culturally quarantined from the Orient.

The oil industry in the twentieth century had the same impact as the spice trade, silk route, and trade of opium and indigo which can be marked as the entry point of international trade, commerce and facilitated colonisation. The westerners appear along with their big machines in the places that are populated by small living communities or nomadic tribes in a hostile environment like the desert and the postmodern present consists of landscapes that are completely metamorphosed by technological advancements of industrialisation or devastating military activities.

The political conflicts have also turned the oil rich places into potential war zones where the indigenous people are fiercely resisting the capitalistic forces to protect their land, people, environment and culture. The meeting of the Orient and the Occident through the oil makes the narratives sundry and international because of the series of contrast in opinions invoked by the opposite gazes, the Orient on the Occident and the Occident on the Orient, and it is perpetrated by the presence of oil as in Munif's trilogy.

The realistic portrayal of the early days of discovery of oil in the Arabian Peninsula and the changes that ensued are narrated with a tinge of satire by successfully unmasking the oil catastrophe often hidden from history. This trend in petrofiction has opened up discussions on hegemony, capitalism, ecological disaster and cultural studies.

Thus, Munif's trilogy is a significant work of petrofiction that inspired Amitav Ghosh to analyse and expand it into a broad field of fiction loaded with contemporary relevance and urgency because, "The experiences that oil has generated run counter to many of the historical imperatives that have shaped writing over the last couple of centuries and given it its distinctive forms." (Ghosh 30)

Following the Middle East, oil resources were unearthed in many places around the globe. The black gold rush in the Niger delta is an integration of nature-culture interaction and capitalism and the result was the 'resource curse' that has drained the country of its economic and natural wealth, which has led to irrevocable poverty and ecological damages. The oil searches led the American oil companies like Shell to land in Nigeria and upturn the lands in search for the resources.

Nigeria, a country in West Africa, is a landscape that is diverse with plains, desert, forests, mountains and swamps. Majority of the land is covered in plains and savannas. It also has one of the largest river systems on Earth with the Niger Delta being third largest in the world. The capital of Nigeria is Abuja and some of the major cities include Lagos, Port Harcourt, Benin, Kano, Ibadan, Nsukka, Onitsha and Uyo. Nigeria derives its cultural diversity from around 250 ethnic groups. The ecosystem of Niger delta has mangrove and freshwater swamps and the rain forest is contaminated by toxic crude oil resulting in loss of flora and fauna necessary for the functioning of the ecosystem.

Nigeria was under the colonial control of the United Kingdom from the mid nineteenth century until independence on October 1, 1960. Before colonisation, the land was an important aspect of identity and integral part of Nigerian lifestyle. The tribes had hold of the land, maintained it as a part of the community and it was not available for buying or

selling. It all changed after colonisation and the land became a commercial property that could be owned by individuals. Slave trade in Nigeria began as early as fifteenth century with Portuguese as the main participants and marked the start of colonisation.

In his article titled “What’s New About African History?” written for *History News Network*, John Edward Phillips writes that it was Nigerians who provided the slaves and this led to tension between various ethnic groups. Amidst all the riots, war and prison sentence, slavery remained an important source of income for many Nigerian slave traders. Portuguese were the seminal buyers of slaves. With the presence of Portuguese, Nigeria became one of the largest slave markets, thereby generating the majority of the revenue for the country. In the eighteenth century, Britain entered Nigeria, and they were mainly interested in its resources rather than in slave trade. The British traders settled in the area surrounding Niger River, especially in Lagos and abolished slavery.

Britain began colonising Nigeria by defeating various power structures within the societal setup to gain goods for trading until finally they were able to gain control over a majority of the territory. After gaining control over the Royal Niger Company, Britain set up the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria. The indirect rule allowed the local leaders to have control over their territory and they ruled under the orders of the British. This helped Britain gain access to all the goods and resources of Nigeria that would increase their export, trade and commerce like peanuts, cacao and palm oil.

Toyin Falola in his article titled *Nigeria as a Colony*, opines that Britain implemented the ‘divide and rule’ policy to keep all the ethnic groups isolated from one another and curb the rise of nationalism and unity. After the Second World War, Britain had a hard

time ruling Nigeria because of the internal problems within different ethnic groups, the rise of Pan-Africanism and the support to stop racism and European domination in Africa. The Pan-African movement led to the formation of the first political party in Africa that resisted the British through youth, education, media and farmers. The British immediately implemented changes in their ruling methods but the fierce resistance and the rise of nationalism among the indigenous people finally led to the Independence in 1960. Although the colonisation by the British helped eradicate slavery in Nigeria, the discovery of petroleum resources made the country an important economy and witnessed the hike in capitalistic motives and corruption.

The Niger River delta is situated on the Gulf of Guinea and covers nine states in the southern region. The coastal states are Abia, Akwa, Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo and Rivers. Among these nine states, Rivers is a non-oil producing region. The Niger Delta is also called Oil Rivers because it is one of the largest producers of palm oil. From 1885 to 1893, the delta was called the British Oil River Protectorate and then it was expanded and renamed as Niger Coast Protectorate and became a part of the Eastern region of Nigeria. The Niger Delta is home to ethnic groups like Ogoni, Ijwa, Efik, Ibibio, Oron, Annang, Ogoja and Istekiri.

In 1956, the fruitful exploration led to the discovery of a significant quantity of oil at Olobiri in Bayelsa State and qualified for commercial production. The discovery attracted the attention of the major oil corporations and the bidders. The Nigerian government set to reform their mineral exploration policy which led to oil anarchy. Some foreign oil giants like Shell, Chevron, Total Elf and Addas, landed on the Nigerian delta to set up exploration and production units. Nigeria became the largest producer of oil in West

Africa. Although these oil companies created new job opportunities and promised growth and development, the rise in class division, loss of land and livelihood, destruction of the environment, communal war and the violence have become the proof of futile promises and accursed living conditions.

The Nigerian delta hosted one of the finest lands for agriculture and has vast oil resources. The excessive oil wealth in the delta has made the place a hotspot of political and economic power. The initial tensions in the delta began in the 1990s when the ethnic groups like the Ogoni and Ijwa began resisting the oil exploration in their lands because they were unjustly exploited for wealth and resources. Thus, the lives of indigenous people that are profoundly interlinked with the natural environment was also lost because of the oil pollution, oil spills, gas flares, toxic living environment and the violence that has led them to abandon lands and migrate in search of safe and secure life.

The resistance and political unrest have led to the delta being ruled by three major factions, the ethnic militants, Nigerian military and police. The warfare between the ethnic militants which included blowing up oil rigs and refinery plants to stop the production of oil and protect their lands and the Nigerian government resisting them with the help of military and ammunition has led to reduced foreign investments because of the increased risk.

Petroleum is one of the major revenue generating sectors of Nigeria and has contributed to the ongoing energy crisis. Poverty, corruption and environmental degradation are the result of the unethical oil extraction in the Niger Delta. The unrest was mainly because the loyalty of the Nigerian government was directed towards the oil corporations and the plans for extraction and ways to increase the revenue generation and not with the Nigerian people who were invariably affected because of it.

One of the notable tribal groups that staged protest against the incessant drilling of oil by Shell corporations is the Ogoni people, who have lived in the delta for more than five hundred years. Their ancestral roots can be traced back to ancient Ghana and they migrated and settled down in the delta before 15 BCE. The Ogoni people lived in the Rivers State with Port Harcourt to their east. They, along with Ijwa people, are the most affected because of the environmental destruction due to oil extraction. During the colonisation by British, the Ogoni people were mostly isolated from the slave trade.

In the year 1901, the British entered the Ogoni land and were met with resistance. In the wake of the twentieth century, they mostly led a peaceful and reclusive life until the oil discovery. Since 1956, with the discovery of oil and the coming of the oil moguls like Royal Dutch Shell and Chevron, the Ogoni people have been victims of multiple instances of human rights violation. The Ogoni people were forcefully thrown out of their lands and their homes and ecosystems were destroyed to set up oil rigs. The internal displacement without any compensation by the government put the Ogoni people in pathetic circumstances that led to several protests and humanitarian movements.

The constitutional amendment of 1979 gave the government complete control over all the lands and they were distributed to the oil companies who promised wealth and riches like the West. This was met with great dissatisfaction among the ethnic groups who saw their livelihood and ecosystem being destroyed in the name of new wealth. The deteriorating economic conditions gave rise to poverty coupled with corruption and spearheaded the ethnic resistance against the government and the corporate. Dubbed in popular culture as the Ogoni tragedy or the curse of the Ogoniland, the protest was popularised by notable leaders like the poet Ken Saro-Wiwa.

In 1990, the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) was formed, with Saro-Wiwa as president. It developed an Ogoni Bill of Rights, for environmental justice and opposition to allocation of oil related funds. They also organised a number of peaceful protests. In December 1992, the apprehensions between the oil companies and the Ogoni people escalated and led to violence. The MOSOP issued an ultimatum to the oil companies asking them to pay ten billion dollars as compensation for the damages to ethnic people and to immediately halt the actions that were instigating environmental degradation. Mass protests erupted and gained the support of various indigenous groups and the government banned social gatherings to curb the movement. The major highlight of the protest was the announcement by the Nigerian government that any disturbance to oil production and destruction of the infrastructures like oil rig and refinery is an act of treason. This escalated the protest as it was an evidence of where the corrupt government stands in relation with its own people. The oil production fell during this strike.

In May 1994, the military subjugation increased when the military raided the Ogoni villages and four of their chiefs were murdered. Saro-Wiwa was detained by the military in connection to these murders. By June 1993, the military had raided around thirty Ogoni villages, detained 600 people and killed around 40 people. This increase in violence between the militia and the military initiated the fleeing of the people in search of a safe place to live. Around a hundred thousand people were internally displaced because of this civil war and the civilians' death.

Describing the massacre of Ogoni people, Nigerian playwright and Noble Laureate Wole Soyinka views it as Nigeria's initial experience of ethnic cleansing. In May 1994, the nine Ogoni men famously referred to as 'The Ogoni Nine' with Saro-

Wiwa as one among them was arrested for incitement and imprisoned for a year before their execution on November 10, 1995, under the dictatorial command of General Sani Abacha. This resulted in an outcry from all over the world including global organisations like the United Nations and led to the suspension of Nigeria from the Commonwealth Organisation for three years.

In his satirical work, *Africa Kills her Sun*, published in 1989, Saro-Wiwa opted for a melancholic and resigned tone of narration which can be considered as a foreshadowing of his own execution. In his acceptance speech for the Foundation of the Right Livelihood Award in 1994, he said, ““The inconveniences which I and the Ogoni suffer, the harassment, arrests, detention, even death itself are a proper price to pay for ending the nightmare of millions of people engulfed by the wasting storms of denigrating poverty on the sea of dehumanization”” (Saro-Wiwa, “Acceptance Speech”). In 1999, the democratic rule began in Nigeria and since then the unrest between the ethnic groups and the government has pacified, yet there have been no proper and just actions taken to reimburse the Ogoni people for all the damages, violations and injustice inflicted upon them.

Since 2006, the militant groups in Nigeria, notably, Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND) have been involved in kidnapping of the foreign employees of oil companies and the statistics shows that more than two hundred of them were kidnapped and mostly returned unharmed after negotiations. This kidnapping and negotiation is the primary premise of Helon Habila’s work *Oil on Water* (2010). Habila provides a stark account of the landscape of Niger Delta, the ecological destruction and the cultural altercations brought in by the oil resource that has resulted in the civil war, violence, and migration. The journey of two journalist Rufus and Zaq, in search of the British woman, Isabella

Floode, wife of the petroleum engineer, who was kidnapped by the rebel group for ransom, is the commentary of the military versus militants or the government versus the indigenous people who are fighting hard to protect their land and environment.

The indigenous lives are entwined with the ways of nature, and it greatly defines their identity rather than any other materialistic pursuits of life. The journey up the delta with stops made in small villages inhabited by the indigenous tribes is a portrait of the intimate connections between people and their environment, “The houses seemed to belong more to the trees and forest behind them than they did to a domestic human settlement” (Habila 11). All of this living was interrupted when Niger Delta became a major oil field under the control of Shell Corporations and that was the beginning of the conflict between the natives, the government and the oil company that has caused imbalance in the delta. The Ogoni territory was severely affected by the oil exploration in terms of ecological damage. The oil extraction, gas flares and the spill resulted in severe land and water pollution, thereby wrecking the ecosystem. The gas flares that burn throughout the day and the pollution are the reason for acid rains and increase in health complications like respiratory problems.

In 2008, the government under the presidency of Umaru Must Yar’Adua announced the decision to replace Shell and it initiated a different response among the natives. For some Ogoni people, the removal of Shell was a great victory and on June 9, 2008, thousands of them marched the streets of Port Harcourt to Governor House to deliver a message to Yar’ Adua through Governor Chibuike Amaechi that this decision was the victory and fruit of non-violence. Marvin Yobana, the president of Ogoni Youth Congress in a Crisis Group Interview on July 7, 2008, said that this victory is also an

initiation of "...a framework for resolving conflicts in other parts of the Niger Delta."

(qtd. in *Nigeria: Ogoni Land after Shell* 7)

For many others who had their livelihoods depended on the land for their living did not welcome this change of operator. The major goal behind the removal of Shell and the extended standoff of oil activities was the restoration of the ecosystem. The prolonged exposure to the unethical extraction has made the land unfit for farming and the polluted water has been derailed of fishing. According to these people, disposition and not replacement of the operator is the solution to the Ogoni struggle. Thus, not all the members of the tribe were satisfied with this supposed victory of non-violence. The stoppage of the oil activities helped restoration of the land for farming. If necessary steps were not taken by the government to clean up the ecological damages, the Ogoni community was stringent of protesting even with the new oil operator. In 2006, the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) did a survey of the Ogoniland to record the ecological damages caused by the gas flares and the oil spills to assess the clean-up possibilities. The committee visited various villages in the Ogoniland and was supposed to present a plan that would be effective in restoring the environment of the Ogoniland during the first quarter of 2007 but it was not successful as the operations required foreign expatriates and the committee was hesitant in bringing them in because of kidnapping and security issues.

Analysing the conflict in Ogoniland, it is important to understand that consent and the right to participation in the decision-making activities is the beginning point to solve the unrest. The likelihood of this happening is diminutive in the capitalistic oil game where resources and manpower are ceaselessly depleted without thinking about further consequences.

"Lack of a sense of ownership, participation and benefit from the oil industry has been a

major source of the anger, alienation and aggression throughout the Niger Delta.”

(*Nigeria: Ogoni Land after Shell* 11)

Saro-Wiwa’s lesser-known semi historical book, *Genocide in Nigeria: The Ogoni Tragedy* (1992) documents the “ecological warfare” (Uraizee 75), happening in Nigeria and how the minority like the Ogoni are mistreated in the hands of ethnic majority in collaboration with multinational oil companies. The oil fields of the Ogoniland have contributed around thirty-billion dollars to the Nigerian treasury yet what they got in return was “...the political marginalization and economic strangulation of the Ogoni...” (Saro- Wiwa, *A Month and a Day: A Detention Diary* 80) and cultural genocide.

The general stench of death that fills the once thriving ecosystem makes life in the delta unpredictable because, “It’s the oil and the fighting. It affects everyone in a strange way” (Habla 90). The account of reality of the Niger Delta, environmental injustice and the war has altered the motives of the oil exploration. Habla’s novel portrays the truth about the destruction in the absence of exaggeration and provides a realistic commentary on oil and how it has greased the ways of life in the Niger Delta. Thus, Habla’s significant work of petrofiction has become a testimony of how search for resources that could raise the prospects of the nation has instead transformed into an environmental and a humanitarian crisis. Hence the book is a pivotal narrative that talks about oil encounters and its aftermath in Nigerian literary history.

In order to regulate the oil revenues and maintain equality, a union named The Organisation of the Petroleum Export Countries (OPEC) was formed as an intergovernmental body during the Baghdad conference that took place from September 10-14, 1960. The founding members are Iraq, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Venezuela. The oil rich

countries in order to protect their rights and facilitate a policy that ensures the stabilisation of the economy, uninterrupted flow of petroleum, steady and consistent income for the producing country and profitable return for those investing in the petroleum industry formed this organisation.

The birth of OPEC happened at the time when decolonisation was in full swing and the countries painted with nationalism were reclaiming their identity and rights through freedom struggle and declaration of independence. The United Arab Emirates joined OPEC in 1967 and Nigeria became a part of it in 1971. Currently thirteen countries are members of the OPEC and follow a unified protocol in production and distribution of petroleum to strike a balance between demand and supply.

In 2020, the COVID 19 pandemic also adversely impacted on the global economy and the energy production because of nationwide lockdowns and restricted movements. It was reflected in the fluctuation of the price of fossil fuels in the global market because of less demand. This resulted in the members of OPEC to work collaboratively in restoring the stability by making huge production adjustments in the oil history and their efforts were recognised by major organisations like International Energy Agency, International Energy Forum, G20 Energy Ministers and African Petroleum Producers' Organisation.

Apart from the infamous gold rush, Alaska with its unique geographical composition was also an oil field and attracted world attention when traces of oil in commercial quantities were first spotted. Although a part of the super power nation, when it comes to oil exploration, the environmental conditions and the plight of the natives are on the same radar like Nigeria in terms of ecological damages and poor contingency measures.

Alaska, also called the 'Last Frontier' is in the North American continent and known for its extremely cold climate, glaciers, icebergs, marine life and indigenous culture. Alaska has lakes, marshlands, wetlands with permafrost cover and glaciers. The southern coastal region of Alaska has many growing cities like Anchorage, Palmer and Wasilla. This region is highly populated and known for petroleum plants, tourism, two military bases and is one of the major economic sectors of the state. The Southeast region of Alaska is colloquially referred to as the Alaskan Panhandle, and most of the area is covered by Tongass National Forest. The region is rich in forest and glaciers and plays an important role in fishing, tourism and forestry, thereby contributing to the economy. The stretch of coastal land that extends from the west of the Bering Sea to Cook Inlet is the Southwestern region of Alaska. The interior region is largely populated by Native Alaskans with fishing being the main occupation and Bristol Bay hosts the world's largest sockeye salmon fishery. The Bush of Alaska is remote and hosts around three hundred native villages that still retain the nature-oriented lifestyle and depend on fishing and hunting for their livelihoods.

It is generally believed that the first people who arrived to Alaska must have walked from Russia 13,000 years ago. Russians must have reached Alaska through the Bering Land Bridge which is a six-hundred-mile land mass between Russia and Alaska or sailed through sea. In 1784, Russians settled in Alaska after it was spotted by Vitus Bering and at that time the United States government purchased lands in Alaska at the rate of two cents per acre. The harsh climatic conditions proved that this purchase by the States was a bad decision until the first discovery of gold in 1872. After that everyone's attention turned towards Alaska and it officially became a state of the United States in 1959.

Although Alaska is famous for gold and petroleum, it is also the largest exporter of mineral zinc. The indigenous life in Alaska is integral in understanding the geography and culture of the area. The indigenous group of Alaska includes Yupik, Inupiat also called as Inuit, Central Alaskan Yup'ik, Eskimo, Eyak, Aleuts also known as Unangan, Tlingit, Tsimshian, Alaskan Athabaskan, Haida and Chugach also known as Chugachigmiut. There are several other native Alaskans, some of them tracing their roots back to Asia. The Alaskans made their initial contact with Russians in the eighteenth century when a ship from Siberia landed on the coast of Alaska.

Like any other colonisation, the Russians interacted with Alaskans through trade in Aleutian Island. After trade, the Russian missionaries settled in Alaska and influenced the faith of the people thereby colonising the place. The Aleutians engaged in fur trade with Russians through the barter system. The Russian fur trading company was called Shelikhov-Golikov Company and later changed into Russian-American Company. The company used colonialism and violence as a means to exploit the indigenous people. In 1866, the Russian Czar passed orders to his minister in Washington, Baron de Stoeckl, to persuade the United States to buy Alaska which was then considered a wasteland because of its harsh and hostile nature.

Even the American congressmen were against the purchase of this wilderness and Stoeckl had to resort to bribery to close the deal. In the year 1867, the gold reserves caught the attention and Alaska was purchased by the United States for an estimated 7,200,000 dollars from Russia without the consent of the natives who were the majority of the population. The transfer of power did not recognise the natives as the citizens and their lands were forcefully declared as open lands which could be claimed by any White person without

any remedy or compensation for the natives. Alaskan natives have been greatly affected by colonisation and urbanisation because they did not have any legal means to protect their basic rights and the land.

During their 125 years of occupation of Alaska, Russians noticed oil seepages in Iniskin Bay and Cold Bay, but did not take any action to dig and extract. In the 1890s when the first wave of black gold rush arrived at Alaska, the explorations began in Iniskin Peninsula situated in the western shores of Cook Inlet and in 1898, the first oil well was drilled there. The oil well was not large enough to extract and supply for commercial uses. The harsh conditions of Alaska meant increased expenditure for the oil companies and thus not much interest was shown by the oil giants until the wake of the new century saw the discovery of oil in Kattala situated in the south of Copper River Delta.

Since the 1900s, many oil wells have been reported in Alaska, yet they are not suitable for large production. Meanwhile, concerned about the nation's need for fuel, the then President Theodore Roosevelt under the presence of Congress initiated the Mineral Leasing Act in 1920 which laid a leasing agenda for fuel resources like coal, oil and natural gas. The leasing plan was soon adopted by all the states in America, and congress helped set up strategic oil reserves. The largest Petroleum Reserve Number Four with the acronym PET. 4 was set up in the Arctic coast of Alaska.

During the Second World War, the demand for fossil fuels increased and resulted in the Canadian and United States Army collaborating to finish the oil pipeline from Norman Wells in Canada to Whitehorse, Yukon Territory, and Skagway. The pipeline was completed in 1944 and was used for transportation of oil yet the negligible amount of oil from the Alaskan field led to the abandonment of the pipeline by the army. In 1957, the unearthing

of the Swanson River oil field in Kenai Peninsula attracted the attention of big oil corporations like Richfield, Shell, Chevron, Texaco, to name a few.

Richfield, a California based oil company drilled the first oil well and on July 15, 1957, the company reported that the oil capacity is at nine hundred barrels per day making it the major commercial discovery of oil in Alaska. Further exploration led to discovery of natural gas fields near Swanson River oil field, Shoal oil field in Port Nikiski and oil wells in Cook Inlet. Thus, the black gold rush began its game in Alaska, leading to major societal, economic and landscape changes that raised the prospects of the state at the cost of environment and culture. The discovery in Kenai Peninsula and Cook Inlet are very significant in understanding the demographics of post-oil Alaska.

The oil wells opened up new job opportunities in Alaska which witnessed numerous people migrating to get jobs in one of the oil wells. Along with the coming of huge population, Alaska also saw the rise of other commercial sectors for trade and commerce. The native villages surrounding the western shores of the Cook Inlet like Anchorage and Tyonek witnessed a significant development following the discovery of oil. The economy of these places is largely dependent on petroleum and has been subjected to rise and fall in relation to the production and roped to an unpredictable future.

In 1967, the largest oil field in North America was discovered in Prudhoe Bay in the Arctic Coast and led to the construction of the Trans-Alaskan oil pipeline in 1974 and the oil production began in 1977. Since then, the North Slope has contributed to twenty percent of the total oil used in the United States. The oil and gas revenues facilitated an outside contact for the North Slope and saw the arrival of modernisation which resulted in increased infrastructure and lifestyle changes.

The technological advancements have widened the possibility of oil in the North Slope and its capacity is estimated to be thirteen billion barrels. Fighting against the land claims of the native people and the environmental protest, the Trans-Alaska pipeline was laid to transport the oil from Alaska to the global market. Today, oil is an important revenue generating resource for Alaska, and it has deeply impacted the people and the ecosystem associated with it.

The loss of land and livelihood had led to people taking up jobs with the oil corporation to carry on with their everyday life. Within these circumstances, the onshore activities are generally supported until there is proper environmental protection because of the revenue generated by oil and gas. The offshore activities on the land that has significant wildlife and environmental value generally face a lot of opposition from the people especially the natives who believe that their lifestyle, cultural values and the geography that defines them is violated. Alaskan oil adventure has also led to many ecological disasters like oil spills, loss of aquatic life, landslides, water contamination and disruption in the food chain. The ecological imbalance has greatly affected the native life because their livelihoods depend on the coast.

The conflict regarding the offshore activity is mainly because of the clash between the federal and the state authorities that wanted to expand their oil activities to increase the revenue for the state and it was faced with oppositions from the Inupait people and other regional authorities of Alaska because they feared that the oil spill would affect the marine animals and the noise pollution would disrupt the migration pattern of marine mammals like whales. Based on personal experiences, an Inupait woman says, “The culture is the most important part of Alaska. Its cultural groups really define Alaska. When people

think about Alaska they don't think about oil and gas development, they think about the Eskimos and people in the Arctic. The face of Alaska really is the Native people.”

(qtd. in Mikkelsen et al., 139)

Mei Mei Evans in her book *Oil and Water* (2013) delineates the aftermath of the Exxon Valdez oil spill that occurred on March 24, 1989, in Prince William Sound Island in Alaska. It was accounted as the second-largest oil spill in the United States, with the spill of 41,000,000 litres of North Slope crude oil covering over five hundred square miles and reported the highest ecological detriment. The spill estimate shows that sixteen percent of the total four thousand and eight-hundred-kilometre shoreline was oiled. The book begins with Gregg Anderson and his skipper Lee on a fishing expedition. On their way out, they witness the oil spill that has happened after the collision of the Kuparuk, ship carrying oil for Mammoth Petroleum, with the iceberg.

The severity of the oil spill emotionally wrecks Gregg and Lee and they make headway to the mainland only to learn that Alaska has experienced an oil nightmare. Evans takes inspiration from the original events that followed the worst oil spill in Alaska and sets to explore the collateral damages done by the spill on the geography, culture, nature and economy bound by it. The indigenous people who led an interdependent life with nature are also severely affected by the oil spill.

The nature-culture relationship and the imbalance created by the oil spill is effectively dealt with by Evans as she portrays the reality of the aftermath of an oil spill and brings to light the poor disaster management policy and the politics associated with it. The importance of oil revenue has made the government overlook several aspects of

the society and the ecosystem, and what succeeded it is the danger of being flung into catastrophe without any chances of restoration.

The industrial development in Alaska brought in by the oil is a matter of dilemma to the indigenous people because they experience the bane and the boon. The increased state revenue has helped Alaska upgrade its infrastructure and equip the schools, hospitals and other public services with all the facilities. Apart from that, the Alaskans also hold shares and are also employed in the oil company and it benefits them. The annual income through oil company employment is generally higher than what farming or other activities could render on a daily basis. Evans shows the dilemma between the people who are opposing the action of Mammoth Petroleum and others who get paid by the petroleum company for working in animal rescue and spill cleaning and how it strains their interpersonal relationships.

While Lee, who has great affinity with nature only volunteers and views the payroll by Mammoth Petroleum as a cruel capitalistic game, the other sect like Tessa sees this pay as a means to raise their financial situation and also validates that this is one of the ways in which Mammoth can repay for their careless transportation, poor disaster management and unreliable contingency plans. This difference of opinion caused a major rift between Tessa and Lee, and it is one of the examples of quandary among the natives regarding the oil exploration and revenue in Alaska. By giving importance to matters like financial security and upgraded lifestyle through oil revenues, people tend to forget the long-term effect of it on the future of the environment and lives sustained within it.

Oil and other minerals increase the revenue and the quality of life, but it also means compromising the traditional ways that define the identity of natives. The oil

activities have greatly affected the subsistence farming that has been the major occupation for the natives. The disruption in the lifestyle because of oil also saw the rise in depression and suicide among the citizens of Alaska because of the pressure from the oil corporates. The former chair of the Inuit Circumpolar Council, Patricia Cochran expresses the position of indigenous people in relation to industrialisation when she says to *The Guardian* that, “I was raised in a traditional way and regard it as my job to be a steward of the land. I see this [industrialised] world of hedonism and consumption as a sign we have lost our moral compass.” (qtd. in Macalister)

The premise of the book by Evans is relevant till date as the careless extraction and transportation continue because, “Oil is a fact of life, people” (Evans 134). This oil centric living results in numerous disasters that have prolonged effects on the environment. Oil spills are one of the ways in which the toxic crude oil enters the food chain and disrupts the natural process. Animals like sea otters and seals were the most dominating casualties among others during the Exxon Valdez oil spill. A study on the effects of the Exxon Valdez oil spill on the birds conducted by Stephen M. Murphy and team and published in the year 1997 as “Effects of the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill on Birds: Comparisons of Pre- and Post-Spill Surveys in Prince William Sound, Alaska” in *The Condor* shows that nearly 30,000 carcasses of animals were collected in the spill areas namely Prince William Sound, Kenai Peninsula and Kodiak Island.

Ecological Consulting Incorporation’s 1991 unpublished report titled *Assessment of Direct Seabird Mortality in Prince William Sound and the Western Gulf of Alaska Resulting from the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill* states that the estimate of the total mortality of the birds ranges from 3,75,000 to 4,35,000. Among them the highest mortality rate was recorded

for murrees, grebes, sea ducks, cormorants and murrelets. The fumes arising from the toxic oil polluted the air, leading to health hazards for the Alaskan citizens. A minuscule look into the society that is raised on the foundations of the oil wealth and the autocratic hold that it has on all the other sectors as rendered in the petrofiction highlights the oil centric life in the contemporary times and the ecological adversities that encompass it.

A data study by Hart Crowser Incorporation titled *Estimation of Oil Spill Risk from Alaska North Slope, Trans- Alaska Pipeline, and Arctic Canada Oil Spill Data Sets* published in April 2000, shows that between 1970 and September 1999, there were 126 oil spills identified and out of which 111 of them were in Alaska while the rest was in Canada. The spill from Alaska was mostly because of tanker accidents as in Evans' book, operation and other support facilities and during the exploration or extraction processes in pipelines, wells and refineries. In each spill the adverse effects were mainly due to failed or unreliable contingency plans. Amidst all this the oil activities are still in full swing in Alaska as the global demand and supply of the fossil fuels must be met to keep the economy afloat.

In recent years, the peak oil situation and the unethical extraction has made oil gain a critical cultural outlook and oil narratives have unfolded the various ways in which energy resources determine the way of life. It is also important to note that the discovery of oil opened up many job opportunities and increased employment. Evans also brings to light how the people of Alaska are economically benefited by the oil company throughout their lives by holding shares, jobs and stable income. This helps in understanding the presence of oil in everyday life of Alaska. Nevertheless, considering the greed and the capitalistic game that surrounds the oil industry, these beneficiary impacts are always sidetracked and almost negligible in global conversations about oil catastrophe.

The developing countries with abundant natural resources like oil and other commodities must have economic prosperity but that has not been the case all the time. With abundance of natural resources comes corruption and stagnation that has resulted in economic depreciation and resource curse. Being rich in resources also opens up various possibilities for one to benefit from it individually and this is the prime motive behind the resource curse. The countries that export crude oil are more prone to this type of situation because of poor governance.

Countries like Iraq, Uganda, Venezuela, Syria, Iran, Nigeria and Russia that are major exporters of crude oil and occupy the lowest position in the Corruption Perceptions Index according to 2020 while Norway, another country with abundant oil resources and active export occupies seventh position meaning that it is the least corrupt country in the world. Thus, the equal and stable growth equation of the natural resources is very simple and a rational and shrewd management of it has the capability to accelerate positive economic growth.

States like Alaska do not experience resource curse because of comparatively less corruption and transparency in terms of decision making and revenue management in relation with the oil resources. The transformation of the natural resources from the state of depletion to sustainable management can be made through the combined effort of ethical decisions by the government, law and the mindfulness of every individual. The parallels in oil history encompassing the development and the consequences on the Niger Delta, the Arabian Peninsula and the great frontiers of Alaska serve as the great example of the resource curse, oil centric economy, cultural and political presence of oil in everyday life and the environmental fiasco with looming questions of the future. Thus, oil discussions

are more indispensable because in literary field, the ecological and cultural deliberations provided by petrofiction act as a record of transition that happened in the society after the coming of oil and a medium of awareness in the era of climate crisis.

Discovery and abundance in the past and scarcity and demand in the present laid the groundwork for diversified visions of the future that are open-ended, intuitive and probable. The speculations of the energy future in accordance with the exploitation and the peak oil situation of the present has led to imaginary creation of plausible realities and catastrophes that might alter the way of life on the planet. The American Civil War (1861-1865) was fought because of the eleven states that repudiated to form the Confederate States. The Northern States were called the Union and the Southern States were called the Confederates. The Union wanted to reinstate the unity of the nation and remove slavery to acquire the new areas in the western region from the slave owners.

One of the major social evils of 19th century America was the slavery and it was extensively practised in the Southern Confederate states. The slaves who worked in the South known for plantations saw this civil war as a fight to reinstate their autonomous rights that had been granted to them through the Declaration of Independence. Abraham Lincoln, the sixteenth president of the United States was a seminal figure in the Civil War. He was in favour of abolition of slavery and when he was elected as the president in 1860, the disunion that resulted in the formation of the Union and Confederate states took place.

The westward expansion in the 1830s led to the discussions of whether the new states would be joined with the North referred to as the Free States or the Southern Confederates. Among various causes debated for the beginning of the civil war, slavery remains as the central issue that separated the North abolitionists from the South slave

owners who saw it as their principal way of life. The Mason-Dixon Line was a division between Pennsylvania and Maryland indicating the partition between the Free States and Slave States.

The new republic remained separated over the issue of slavery and by the mid-19th century, the cultural practices and economic conditions above and below the Mason-Dixon Line were starkly different. After four years of conflict with bloodshed and destruction, the Union won the war and the Confederates surrendered on April 9, 1865, and saw the emancipation of over three million slaves in the South. Few days later, on April 15, 1865, Lincoln was assassinated by John Wilkies Booth, a Confederate spy from Maryland. The Civil War greatly shaped the historical narrative of the United States, especially the South and its past legacy.

In cultural and political discourse of the United States, the term Second American Civil War was loaded with speculative intonations to represent any major revolution that has the magnitude of the first civil war and can make definitive changes in the way of life. A lot of political movements and violence have gained the title of being the possible instigator of a Second Civil War and Third World War by the historians. One of the famous speculative depictions of the world war is *The Third World War: The Untold Story* (1982) by Sir John Hackett is an example of retro-futuristic vision which includes military, technology, science, nuclear weapons and other geopolitical conditions as the cause of the Third World War in the year 1985.

Currently the boundary of possibilities for the civil war has moved past political conditions to include environmental concerns like scarcity and exhaustion of natural resources. The running out of natural resources has also been cited as one of the many

possibilities for the Third World War. Omar El Akkad's *American War* published in 2017, set in the near future, tells the story of the Second American Civil War that happened between 2074 and 2095 because of fossil fuels. The fossil fuels were outlawed, and the struggle between the Northerners and the Free Southern States is a remaking of the Civil War in the United States during the 1860s between the northern and the southern states surrounding slavery. The story of the civil war and its aftermath is told through the Chestnut family. Sarat Chestnut rises as a prominent rebel against the North and was trained to be a homicide bomber.

The war gives rise to many rebellion groups, refugee camps and other resistance activities. The different energy circumstances have led to the creation of a new empire called the Bouazizi. The Bouazizi Empire is an important development in the novel as it highlights the other side of the energy problem, where an efficient energy shift has prevented the catastrophe. History repeats itself in the future and fossil fuels that are mentioned as "prohibition fuel" (Akkad 178), is the epicentre around which war, violence and migration are depicted. The climate change and the resulting altercations to the ecosystem are also a critical part of the speculative perception of Akkad.

Interestingly America that dominates the global oil discussion and economy in the post-World War era is shown as the disintegrating country with fallen economy living under the aid of the newly formed Bouazizi empire and it is a foreshadowing of dubious future that awaits those countries that are overlooking the energy and environmental red flags in the name of modernisation, development and increased revenues. Therefore, the speculative leg of petrofiction in literature functions as a clarion call to act in the present to formulate lifestyle changes that can avoid the future perils.

When the chronology of the civilisation and the development is redrawn with fuel usages over the time as the parameter, an energy history is rendered that opens up new dialogues on power and politics that has shaped the face of modernity and exploring their aesthetics and representation in popular culture has led to understand how everyday life is strongly bound to the presence of fossil fuels and impacted by its rise and fall. Petrofiction tends to produce an oil reality through literature, thereby exposing the multitudes of risks that fossil fuel brings into the working of a society because of greed, exploitation and corruption.

Munif in his works *Cities of Salt* and *The Trench* portrays the initial discovery of the oil and the changes in the prospects of the Middle East. It provides a commentary of the social life and portrays the distinctive class sections that are brought by the new wealth. Munif explores the muffled voice of the natives who have sacrificed their livelihoods and are the victims of injustice in the hands of the perpetrator, the fossil fuels, thereby providing a social, cultural and economic record of life after the discovery of oil.

While Munif's works concentrate more on the socio-cultural strata of life, Evans and Habila in their works *Oil and Water* and *Oil on Water* include environmental impacts of unethical extraction and exploitation of fossil fuels. Habila's work rivets on the resource curse and how the discovery of fossil fuels has equally disrupted the political, economic and environmental conditions of Niger Delta with the portrayal of the civil war, cultural ramification of the indigenous people and the loss of the ecosystem that binds them.

Evans brings forth the reality of the unethical extraction, transportation and poor disaster management during the oil spill in Alaska and highlights how it affects the people and the wildlife that are closely knit with the landscape for their identity and survival.

Bringing to life an extensive ecological disaster, she also shows how the chaos ensues when the surrounding ecosystem is destabilised and becomes irrevocable because of manmade disasters. Thus, the works of Habila and Evans link culture with nature to show the importance of the ecosystem in producing meaning and identity to the civilisation embedded in it.

Consolidating the presence of oil in the past and the present, Akkad's speculative account of the future in *American War* where fossil fuels are outlawed takes a panoramic view of the fallen American society where there is not only political and economic collapse but also necessary ecological and cultural damages highlighted by climate change, migration and diseases. Thus, Akkad's portrayal connects all the sectors to conjure an unfathomable reality which is a depiction of the bleak future of the black gold rush. The petrofictions chosen for study are unique in that way as they present different realities arising out of the internal working of fossil fuels in determining the circumstances of the past, present and future of life on earth.

The representation of fossil fuels and their aesthetics in literature is further enhanced by a few notable works catalogued here. During the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in 2010, the novella of Austrian fantasy writer Gustav Meyrink titled *Petroleum Petroleum: A Prophecy* (1913), became famous for its speculative and satirical depiction of an oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico with contamination that was far worse than the Exxon Valdez disaster. *Oil!* (1926) by Upton Sinclair documents the Californian black gold rush set during the First World War and has resemblance to the Mexican Revolution that happened in 1910. The oil imperialism in Mexico and the extraction of oil in California are woven together in this story to portray the class conflicts and the international

relations determined by the presence and production of oil. Clarence W. Barron's *The Mexican Problem* celebrates Edward L. Doheny, an oil tycoon responsible for the development of oil fields in Mexico and it is a vindication of American oil industries and the government's intervention in the affairs of Mexico. Sinclair takes inspiration from Doheny and transforms the vindication into an accusation and provides a narrative of oil industry and capitalism.

Scotland was caught in the industrial shrivel since the 1950s and the discovery of oil in 1969 made changes to the country, especially in the North. Oil became the resource that would make Scotland internationally powerful, economically stable and self-sufficient. The interest of the multinational oil companies and the presence of military bases of British and America in several parts of Scotland posed a threat to its independence. This caused derangement to the local communities and the ecology of Scotland. Set in this premise, *Greenvoe* (1972) by Mackay Brown is a literary revival of the Orkney Island in Scotland that has been subjected to modernism, capitalism and the cultural alterations with the coming of oil. The novel deals with the story of what happened with the arrival of black gold, how it affected the inhabitants of the island and the resistance that followed it.

Kuwait was a small province in Basra which was under the rule of the Ottoman Empire. The oil expedition and the eventual discovery transformed Kuwait from a remote area in the desert to an important country. Understanding the oil and its magnitude, the British and the French "...carved it out as a small, independent country they could easily exploit" (Abulhawa 82). *Men in the Sun* (1962) by Palestinian writer Ghassan Kanafani is set in the time of the oil boom in Kuwait which resulted in migration of several people in search of jobs in oil fields for their livelihood. Through the gripping tale of three men

fleeing from refugee camps in Iraq to Kuwait and their arduous journey through the desert to find a job and make their life better, Kanafani presents migration, exile and displacement of many Palestinian people amidst the oil boom.

Against the Loveless World (2019) by Palestinian-American author Susan Abulhawa revolves around the life of Nahr amidst the Palestine-Israel conflict. The book shows how Nahr and her family migrate to Kuwait as refugees after losing their home and sets up life amidst a lot of people who have been chased out from their homes that include Jerusalem, Akka, Gaza, Bethlehem, Nazareth, Jenin, Yafa, Haifa, Nablus, Mandal and many other Palestinian cities. Nahr remarks that the migration to Kuwait was because, “The oil boom offered opportunity to build a new life there. Although Kuwait never allowed us more than temporary residence — making it clear we were always guests — Palestinians prospered and had a major hand in Kuwait as the world knows it now.” (Abulhawa 22)

Shah of Shahs (1982) written by the Polish journalist Ryszard Kapuściński is a non-fiction that discusses the Iranian revolution. The book discusses the golden period of Iran when the oil encounter made the country a treasure and became a benchmark for narratives that elaborated the cultural aspect of the oil encounter in a specific geography.

Love in the Kingdom of Oil (2001) by Nawal El Saadawi presents a fictional Middle Eastern kingdom that has grown rich after the discovery of oil. The patriarchal wealth-ridden kingdom portrayed by Saadawi in her book compares women to oil, a wealth that can be possessed and exploited in the hands of men. Thus, Saadawi’s book opens up gender roles and performativity in the realms of petrofiction.

Marjane Satrapi’s *Persepolis* (2000) is a graphic novel that tells the story of Marji and her childhood in Iran amidst the Islamic revolution, her brief period in Austria and

the homecoming. The book begins with an introduction in which Satrapi writes how with the discovery of oil Iran enters a new phase of modernisation, “And with oil came another invasion. The West, particularly Great Britain, wielded a strong influence on the Iranian economy” (Satrapi, Introduction). The events of *Persepolis* are governed by the omnipresence of fossil fuels and qualify as a good example of graphical representation of oil in literature.

Bernardine Evaristo’s award-winning work, *Girl Woman, Other* (2019) offers a glimpse into the oil exploration, intersection of identities and the effect of it on the natives of Nigeria. The character named Bummi remembers the death of her father Moses because of the fire accident caused while illegally refining diesel. She expresses her anger and grief surrounding the death of her father by imagining the blowing up of oil rigs, cleaning of the Niger Delta and scenarios where the government is unable to fight the militants who are standing up for their environment. She relates the oil activities to death and loss and asserts that if these explorations had not taken place, then her father would have been alive and led a life of a peaceful fisherman and, “she imagined the skies opening when the job was done and the pouring of pure water from the now hygienic clouds for as long as it took for the region to be thoroughly cleansed and replenished” (Evaristo 171). Jewell Rhodes Parker’s book *Bayou Magic* (2015) is considered a children's petrofiction as it details talking to the children about the oil spill, the damages caused by it and the effect. The book was inspired by the BP oil spill that happened in the year 2010.

The Road (2006) by Cormac McCarthy is a speculative and post-apocalyptic novel set in the United States that depicts the life of the father and son in the society that has collapsed, and fossil fuels have dried up. *The Windup Girl* (2009) by Pablo Bacigalupi is also a speculative fiction set in Thailand in the twenty third century when the carbon-

based fuels have exhausted, and climate change has led to rising sea levels. The energy kinks have replaced fossil fuels and genetically hacked animals called the megadonts are used to manually power the factories and bicycles that have replaced automobiles as the mode of transport.

The dieselpunk is the representation of the diesel aesthetics during the interwar period that lasted between November 11, 1918, to September 1, 1939, and the 1950s when fossil fuel powered technology was the epitome of futuristic vision as the shift from steam powered engine which was definitive of the Victorian age to fossil fuel powered engines which was at the beginning stages during that era. The term dieselpunk was coined by the game designer Lewis Pollak in the year 2001 to describe his new tabletop role playing game called *Children of the Sun*. The dieselpunk is also a travel back in time to the roaring twenties and the jazz age with the help of science fiction. Thus, the dieselpunk also contains within it science fiction that starts from the end of roaring twenties, includes the Cold War period, attains the pinnacle during the Red Scare, which means the rise of communalism, leftist movements and anarchism, and also includes the speculation of the future war torn situation where the primary cause is the nuclear weapons.

In literature, genres like alternative history and World War history are mostly associated and classified with dieselpunk literature. The fantastic imaginations of science fiction writers like HG Wells and Jules Verne added more elements to the steampunk literature in the post-modern narratives with an eclectic combination of the revival of the past or the nostalgia and cynical worldview of the time. The birth of the dieselpunk can be traced back to when the provider of the steampunk during the Victorian era started to think about the future of the steam-powered technology and an optimistic scientific

revival where the steam was slowly being replaced by fossil fuel powered machineries and later dieselpunk became a relevant narrative in the 1930s which was the time when the society was slowly recovering from the World War I and the economical crash was on cards.

Metropolis written by the German writer Thea von Harbou and published in 1925 based on which her husband Fritz Lang directed a movie in the same name in the year 1927, is a science fiction novel that shows the technologically advanced futuristic dystopian society with big machineries, huge factories and other extraordinary scientific elements which at the time of the publication of the novel are mere speculation and fantasy. The book qualifies as a very good example of dieselpunk where it portrays the catastrophic outcome of war and the formation of a totalitarian society with class division and exploitation of the labourers. The dieselpunk therefore is a science fiction genre that takes place during the era when the petroleum-based technology and combustible engines were at its highest glory. The dieselpunk technology that has increased the speed of mobility has definitely improved the dynamics of life with important modern inventions like automobiles and other transport facilities that are predominantly operated on fossil fuels like petroleum and diesel.

The two broad categories of dieselpunk are Ottensian and Piecraftian dieselpunk. The Ottensian dieselpunk is usually distinctive with strong male protagonists who are fearless adventurers daring all the hurdles to achieve their motives. *Railsea* (2012) by China Melville is inspired by Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* (1851) and *Mortal Engines* (2001) by Phillip Reeve are good examples of this kind. Generally, the picture of

dieselpunk involves fossil fuels especially petroleum or diesel fuelled anxiety for the government and that is the characteristic of the modernity that surrounds it.

The Man in the High Castle (1962) written by Philip K Dick is an alternative history novel set in 1962 where the axis power has won the Second World War and depicts the political game between Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan that are ruling the United States. The book also has a novel within a novel called *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy* where the Axis power is defeated by Allies. The novel according to Dick was inspired by *Bring the Jubilee* by Ward Moore published in the year 1953. Moore depicts an alternate history of the American Civil War in the year 1863 where the Confederate States instead of the Union had won the Battle of Gettysburg and it is referred to as the War of Southron Independence on July 4, 1864. The novel then portrays the mid twentieth century where there is war between the Confederates who are ruling the United States and the German Union. The depiction of the war and the technology used in it qualifies it to be a dieselpunk fiction.

Red Wheels Turning by Hugh Ashton published in the year 2011 is an alternate history fiction where the American Civil War never happened. The book features some of the extraordinary weapons like the Netopyr tank also called The Tsar Tank developed by Russians during the First World War. The tank was a tricycle model with each wheel powered by a Maybach engine with the capacity of 240 horsepower. The Maybach engine is currently associated with Mercedes Benz, one of the first and leading automobile manufacturers in the world. Another powerful weapon discussed in the book is Zaamurets, a Russian armoured train powered by fossil fuels that was used during the First World War. It was captured several times and the last known owner of it was

Japanese Kwantung Army in 1931 and it was renamed as Train No. 105. There is no evidence in history of what happened to Zaamurets after that. The usage of fossil fuel powered technology makes it a good example of dieselpunk fiction. Thus dieselpunk is an inventive perspective of oil narratives that brings retro aesthetics into conversations.

The dreams of better living conditions are mostly benchmarked by materialistic pursuits and in the Indian scenario they are more often associated with migration to Gulf countries for work to achieve their idea of rich life as exhibited through expensive accessories, highbrow living conditions and so on. Amitav Ghosh questions the null representation of oil in the Bengal literary scene that has created a name for itself in the genre of travelogue. There are rich accounts of travelogues to America, China, Europe and quantifiable amounts of short stories, and novels written by expatriates living in American countries yet there is no representation of life in the oil kingdom in Bengali literature.

While Ghosh questions the absence of oil representation, Priya Menon in her article titled, “Kerala’s Own Petrofiction: Literary Interventions in Gulf Migration Studies”, unearths the unseen and disguised affective presence of oil in the life of emigrant workers by analysing few regional literary texts like *Goat Days* (2008) by Benyamin, *Herbarium* (2006) by Soniya Rafeek, a lyrical poetry called *Kattu Pattu* and a travelogue by Muzafer Ahamed titled *Camels in the Sky* (2018). Kerala, a state in India plays a major role in labour production for the Gulf countries. Although these migrations are vastly affected since the COVID 19 global pandemic, the role of oil-based workers is the least recorded in history.

Petrofiction as a literary genre provides eminent commentary on the ways in which oil resources have become an integral part of the modern lives and facilitates the

fact that oil loaded with economic, political, and cultural prominence helps understand that oil is not just an energy resource but also a history. According to Martin Heidegger, “Nature becomes a gigantic gasoline station, an energy source for modern technology and industry” (50). Heidegger provides a totalising view of modernity entirely based on the presence of oil resources, thereby reinstating the fact that fuel resources propagated historically significant changes in the progress of the civilisation.

By documenting the energy history, offering realistic portrayal of the “...commodity-dependent world and the culture it exudes” (Schuster 210) and widening the horizon of its imagination by providing probabilities of future, petrofiction becomes a testimony of the oil ridden modern life and the catastrophes that would befall it. The opening up of this dimension within the literary, cultural and artistic medium to review the representation of the energy resources, especially the fossil fuels, has helped identify and understand the dominance of oil in modern life and why it is important in the current age of climate crisis. The re-reading of literature from energy perspectives has unearthed the oil motifs and has impacted the due course of interpretations in past and current times. Hence, petrofiction functions as an efficient medium for reinterpretation of history from energy perspectives.

Oil, unlike other commodities, has garnered wide public attention and global coverage through disastrous oil spills, the indigenous fight against unethical drilling, Gulf wars and energy scarcity. Petrofiction acknowledges the multifarious discussions on oil and becomes the literary representation of the energy timeline because: “The very best petrofictions being produced today understand oil not as a social problem to be (somehow, miraculously) ameliorated, but as a core element of our societies.” (Sezman 3)

The current epoch is also marked by a geological time unit called the Anthropocene which is the most recent time period in the history of Earth where the deeds of the human species are having consequential effects on the climatic conditions and ecosystem. The environmental and energy urgency of the Anthropocene epoch has opened several emergency operations on fossil fuel usages around the world, and petrofictions in such a scenario can be used as a medium of awareness.

The presence of fossil fuels in the social spaces and the power it wields on international affairs has given rise to geopolitical spaces that are largely shaping the fate of many countries. The political relations on an international scale and the dynamics of the civilisation is determined by the presence of fossil fuels and thereby constructing a carbon based societal apparatus that stands as the assertion of oil centric modern life. Thus, oil has become an inevitable aspect of modern life and “...without oil, we are often told, the economy will simply collapse, and our modern way of life with it.”

(Introduction, Barrett and Worden xviii)

The brief energy timeline that is created based on the historical context on which the primary sources chosen for study are located as presented in this chapter becomes important in understanding the intricate ways in which fossil fuels are embedded into the history of civilisation. The proceeding chapter intends to provide a neocolonial critique of the petrofictions chosen for study and evaluate the autocratic presence of oil and its repercussions.