

**EXPLORING ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS IN UZMA
ASLAM KHAN'S FICTION**

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Declaration of Authorship

I, Sonia Irum, hereby declare that this thesis is entirely my own work and that all critical and other sources have been clearly and properly acknowledged, as and when they occur in the body of my text.

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Date: January, 2020

ABSTRACT

While most of the research in Pakistani fiction in English focuses on postcolonialism, feminism, 9/11 and linguistic discourses, this dissertation approaches Pakistani fiction through an environmental perspective focusing on Uzma Aslam Khan's novels. In so doing, this dissertation shows how and in what ways Khan foregrounds the environment and starts an environmental debate in contemporary Pakistani fiction in English.

The study is informed by various interdisciplinary environmental approaches and draws insights from Lawrence Buell's theory of ecocriticism. The dissertation concentrates on four novels of Khan, *The Story of Noble Rot* (2001), *Trespassing* (2003), *The Geometry of God* (2009) and *Thinner than Skin* (2012). Chapter 1 traces the background of the birth of environmental criticism; this chapter develops into a discussion of ecocriticism as a theoretical approach in literature with a socio-political edge. Chapter 2 discusses the development of postcolonial ecocriticism, environmental concerns in Pakistani fiction and Khan's creative and critical response to the environment shaped over the years. Chapter 3, 4, 5 and 6 engage the reader in an ecocritical analysis of the four novels in chronological order. This dissertation attempts to identify the way the "state" engages with the ecopolitical discourses and the negative environmental and resultant social health in the Pakistani society through studying the intersections of western imperialism, militarism, state policies, capitalism, consumerism, global climate change and indigenous communities.

I argue that readers can be drawn effectively into organizing their efforts towards environmental concerns as reflected in the young characters in the select novels because Khan's culturally specific ecocritical sensitivity has a global significance, which skillfully and remarkably raises environmental consciousness. Adding to the literature, it presents Khan's distinctive contribution to developing Pakistani ecocriticism.

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To my parents

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

the idea that if the species is to survive, man must recognize his dependence on nature and live in cooperation with her as her friend, rather than in opposition to her as her conqueror. Here in the United States, and throughout the industrialized, western world, the realization is at last beginning to dawn on us that we are living on the brink of an enormous catastrophe, and that civilization may be totally undermined, and possibly the human race itself wiped out, or reduced to a suffering fragment, within the next half-century. And not through nuclear war, though that remains as a terrible possibility, but through the uncontrolled degradation and exploitation of the natural environment and the consequent destruction of the biological underpinnings of life...as of 1970, ecology is not, as some naive commentators have suggested, a passing craze or political red herring, but humanity's inevitable and lasting concern.

(Morgan 399-400)

Fifty years ago, Fredrick Morgan explained concept of ecology which is still relevant. Taking cue from such early advocates of the man-nature cooperation, several writers, theorists and scholars have contributed towards the development of environmental consciousness.

In the recent theoretical developments, the coming together of the environment and literary studies has gained potential significance and recognition in the academic field. In this regard, the environmental study of literature especially, fiction, has proliferated in the last decade (e.g., seminal works by Lawrence Buell; Glotfelty and Fromm; Turner, and others). The ecological studies have evolved beyond nature writings and begun to explore a wide range of ecocritical perspectives.

Despite the rise of political and public interest in the environmental issues in the contemporary age, there have been very few environmentally conscious efforts undertaken in Pakistan. The environmental agencies and departments in Pakistan have explored the effects of environmental degradation. Still, there has been a dearth of

studies discussing the impact of environmental degradation on human psycho-social and political life and related nonhuman beings. Observing the contemporary scenario of environmental awareness in Pakistan, I was interested in exploring how Pakistani writers are responding to environmental issues. I wanted to investigate how they are highlighting the socio- political consciousness related to global environmental concerns. I believe Pakistani theorists, scientists and writers require a better understanding of how to develop a harmonious connection between human and nonhuman components of the society to bring environmental consciousness in Pakistan. The understanding of the issue, however, is not possible without taking into account the past and the present power dynamics in the region. In this regard, I am motivated to explore in Uzma Aslam Khan's novels the impact of British colonization, US militarism, and resultant environmental change and socio-political setups to meet the challenges of environmental degradation. Khan's novels bring Pakistani environmental perspectives to challenge the underrepresentation. For the first time in Pakistani English fiction, Khan's works expand the critical view by bringing the environment as a dominant theme into the discussion.

Another significant impetus for this work lies in my realisation during coursework that, generally, Pakistanis are primarily ignorant of ecological issues and values. No positive actions can be taken unless people become aware and active in demanding a healthy living and a natural environment that is safe and sustainable. Although ecocritics have succeeded in reintroducing environmental values into environmental debates, but we as academicians often fail to achieve the results we want with our students, and even ourselves. This is so because we are relying too heavily on

the textually based methodologies of classical literary criticism. By incorporating the exploration of environmental values in the educational curricula, academicians can bring some innovative changes in the educational system. Creative literary writings about the natural environment can become part of the solution, reforming how human beings perceive, conceive, and behave toward the natural environment.

I began working with several groups and conservation projects in 2015 at Royal Holloway University of London to observe environmental consciousness in a developed country like the UK. I also learnt the background knowledge of the fundamental issue that shaped the beginnings of this research. I began conducting formal and informal interviews, collecting documents, and engaging in research group discussions for analysis. I started with a focus on academic activism and native experiences and found an urgent need to examine the environmental state of Pakistan through country's literary works. Urdu¹ authors (e.g., Mustansir Hussain Tarar, Hameed Shahid, Amna Mufti, and others) have told their stories of nature and its treatment regarding earth and its residents. However, less work is done in Pakistani English novels about the environment and natives' experience of perceiving environmental problems. So, within the framework of ecocriticism, I intend to build an environmentally conscious approach that will illustrate the environmental sensibility in Pakistani fiction in English, focusing on the novels of Uzma Aslam Khan.

“Exploring Environmental Concerns in Uzma Aslam Khan's Fiction” takes up Khan's novels from early 2000s to the present because this period is a rich collection

¹ Urdu is the national language of Pakistan and is one of the official languages of India.

of international political interruptions and intersectional socio-political developments in Pakistan. These developments brought a complicated discourse of nationalism and border securities. Much has changed since I began this project in Fall 2015 when I arrived in the UK. There have been considerable developments in the geopolitical, climate and state security politics. With the elections of 2018, the arrival of Imran Khan's government and the events of the past few years – Billion Tree Tsunami plantation project, ban on polythene bags, etc. – formed the urgency towards this project for me.

I chose Khan's novels because she has identified many environmental themes which highlight that the environment in Pakistani culture is always seen as a less important issue. In this regard to study her novels exploring the "conflicts aroused by environmentalism and producing new environmentalist literary forms" (Coupe 242) will be significant research in contemporary Pakistani literature.

Pakistan on the globe, unfortunately, has been represented as a disputed land with continuous unrest and disturbance. While there are many problems in the country like all nations, terrorism and militarization dominate the western media discourses regarding Pakistan. After 9/11, there was a sudden boom in the literary productions by the Pakistani authors living home and abroad. Most of the works dealt with the discourses of identity politics and religious extremism and ethnic issues. For me, Pakistani writers have made a noticeable contribution to global, national and identity politics through their work. In some ways, they have developed a more positive narrative to replace colonial and imperialist writings. But other aspects of Pakistani politics including ecopolitics have remained relatively unexplored. These authors were

able to step into the international literary scene in Britain and the United States of America as these countries have university departments which include Pakistani literary works in their Postcolonial/South Asian Studies. Though there is still not a broad readership of these works across the globe, some people in Pakistan, India and ex-pats living abroad read these works. English departments in Pakistan have lots of discussions now on these works, and many research students and academicians have started studying Pakistani English novels in the last decade. I feel these texts have mostly been studied and viewed from the perspective of identity politics that the west created (by west I predominantly mean the UK and the USA).

During the production of all these discourses I feel was the most beautiful part of Pakistan was lost. I feel the world did not know or it was kept hidden purposefully by colonizers/imperialists or sometimes even by the powerful natives themselves due to reasons that are explored in this dissertation. Being a developing country, Pakistan has its problems, but it is the discourses like these which establish a stereotypical image of Pakistan. Unfortunately, only those works get nominated for the literary prizes or get reviews in top newspapers which qualify the stereotype. The stereotypical image of being terrorist and uncultured has been created and forced, imposed by the imperialists. I appreciate our writers' efforts to highlight the problems that Pakistan has as it enables Pakistani readers to explore whether these problems are real or they have been created by the foreign powers never to let the country stabilize for their benefit. The foreign enforcements are to such an extent that even natives start to see their home the same way. Perhaps this is the reason one finds imperialistic conditioning of the Pakistani literary and academic community which also penetrates the masses.

While there are a lot of ways of discussing the politics of Pakistan and the international world, I am limiting myself to literary works written in English that deal with environmental issues. Pakistan has a rich tradition of literary writing, but unfortunately, due to the influence of colonization, Urdu could never get a high position in the official and academic institutions. A decline in Urdu research tradition is visible, and there is a minimal number of students in the Urdu departments. These departments are shrinking and diminishing, and their students are considered inferior in the status to, for instance, those who join science or English departments. Some national level effort² has now been started to promote national language, the literature in it and research on this literature, but still, it is a lengthy process.

However, English departments in the fields of humanities and languages have dominated the academic institutions in Pakistan. Before 9/11, the academicians and students read international literature, but after it, there has been a sudden rise in the readership of Pakistani fiction in English in the academic community. For the last two decades, Pakistani novels in English by both male and female authors have appeared on the international scene and are being considered for the literary prizes too. A lot of research has started in analysing the Pakistani novels, but the Zia legacy or pre-post 9/11 contexts mainly dominate the literature that came out from 2000 onwards. For instance, Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), Mohammed Hanif's *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* (2008), Uzma Aslam Khan's *The Geometry of God*

² Upgrading research journals on the national language, renaming National Language Authority as National Language Promotion Department to give it a clearer objective, organizing literature festivals on national and local indigenous/regional languages, promotion of Urdu translations of works in Pakistani regional languages, and most importantly, a decree of the Supreme Court of Pakistan in 2015 according to which Urdu was to be used as the official language of the country.

(2008), Nadeem Aslam's *The Wasted Vigil* (2008), Maha Khan Philips's *Beautiful from this Angle* (2010), Kamila Shamsie's *Broken Verses* (2005) and *Burnt Shadows* (2009) and many more are about the socio-political instability, decline of intellectual scene and impact of 9/11 incident due to Zia regime. However, there have been texts with powerful elements of "pro-democracy, pro-feminism, and anti-Islamization" along with these themes (Shingavi n.p.). Texts like Shamsie's *Salt and Saffron* (2000), Shahraz's *Typhoon* (2007) and *The Holy Woman* (2002), Khan's *Trespassing* (2003), and Hanif's *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* (2011), etc. are examples of this.

In this regard, I find Khan's work a good way to discuss Pakistan from a different angle i.e., environmental. Her writing supports the various indigenous traditions in Pakistan which concern what Pakistan is and not what it has been constructed. Khan's selected works reconstruct Muslim identity in the current socio-political situation in which "ordinary Muslims feel compelled (or are explicitly asked) to explain what it means to be a Muslim . . . To publicly state self-identity has become almost a civic duty for Muslims" (Roy "Muslim Radicals", 23- 24). As Pakistan is grappling with "changing notions of what it means to be Pakistani" (Cilano i), an environmental perspective to construct a Pakistani identity through literature is a unique and significant approach towards imagining a new identification of the country.

Although significant steps have been taken in recent years to stimulate engagement with environmental issues,³ relatively little work has been written that deals with environmental concerns. Even less research has explored the theoretical

³ The steps taken by the government are discussed in the last chapter of this dissertation.

discussions to shape readers' interactions with the environment. This dissertation represents an attempt to begin addressing this gap in the literature.

My dissertation provides a detailed study of environmental discussions in Khan's novels. Therefore, I argue that the frequent images of waste, degradation and the decaying relationship between human beings and nature and the disturbing socio-political acts presented by Khan are pivotal and decisive to understand environmentalism in Pakistan. My study is an opportunity to see various social and political conditions in which the stories happen and help the readers to comprehend Pakistan's historical and cultural circumstances that shape the environmental understanding of natives. Also, the discussion in this chapter briefly discusses how U.S. military power or imperialistic forces and various forms of military control achieve their mission to own the Pakistani land. Since the recent history of U.S. military is dominated by two events: the fall of the Soviet Union and terrorist attacks of 9/11 both of which have strong connections with Pakistani history so during much of the discussion in this dissertation it would be common to hear the U.S. mentioned as western imperialist power. My thesis is a contribution of a Pakistani woman towards Pakistani environmental fiction in English and Pakistani ecocriticism. Finally, my research proposes avenues for future research on Pakistani environmental fiction.

The Birth of Environmental Consciousness

The birth of environmental consciousness can be marked by the publication of *Silent Spring* by pioneering environmentalist Rachel L. Carson in 1962. In chapter 1 "A Fable

for Tomorrow”, Carson envisions a disturbed relationship of human and nonhuman due to human intervention through scientific methods as she writes:

There was once a town in the heart of America where all life seemed to live in harmony with its surroundings . . . prosperous farms . . . white clouds of bloom drifted above the green fields . . . a backdrop of pines . . . foxes barked in the hills and deer silently crossed the fields . . . great ferns and wild flowers delighted the traveller’s eye . . . countless birds . . . trout . . . Then a strange blight crept over the area and everything began to change. Some evil spell had settled on the community: mysterious maladies swept the flocks of chickens; the cattle and sheep sickened and died. Everywhere was a shadow of death.

. . . On the mornings that had once throbbed with the dawn chorus of robins, catbirds, doves, jays, wrens, and scores of other birds voices there was now no sound; only silence lay over the fields and woods and marsh . . .

No witchcraft, no enemy action had silenced the rebirth of new life in this stricken world. The people had done it themselves.
(21-22)

Carson’s book is about the damage human beings are doing to the world and themselves. The author criticizes our unthinking rush towards technology and modernization, and the use of chemicals such as pesticides which she calls by-product of Second World War. She views environmental degradation as a masochist act. In 1963 the Columbia Broadcasting System’s television series “C.B.S. Reports” presented a programme “The Silent Spring of Rachel Carson” in which she said: “man is a part

of nature, and his war against nature is inevitably a war against himself.”⁴ Since then, there has been a shift in academia towards ecological studies of nature and human societies. Similarly, Leo Marx’s *Machine in the Garden* (2000) highlights the loss of pastoral ideal and corrupted landscape in American culture suggesting that withdrawal from nature and extraction of natural resources in an unchecked manner degrades man’s inner moral self (7-8), and humanity seems lost. The works of Raymond Williams⁵ and Leo Marx in this regard are essential to understand the pastoral imagination.

In 1984, the Environmental Justice Movement was inaugurated in America by the citizens of Warren County, North Carolina who protested against the dumping of loads of Polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) to a landfill near an African American community. In a non-violent civil disobedience action, they stopped the trucks delivering the dump. By 1990 the indigenous youth organizers from grass-root level started campaigns and protests and were joined by many people of colour activists to make Indigenous Environmental Network and organized the First National People of Colour Environmental Leadership Summit. In 1987, the United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice (CRJ) published *Toxic Wastes and Race* which by 1990s initiated the so-called “first wave” of academic activist scholarship in environmental racism. Similarly, Wangari Maathai, the founder of the Greenbelt Movement, who won the Nobel Peace Prize understands the environment as linked to issues of peacebuilding and making of wars. She is also the first environmentalist to

⁴ See <http://www.rachelcarson.org/mRachelCarson.aspx>

⁵ E.g., *People of the Black Mountain* (1989), *The Country and the City* (1973), *Border Country* (1960), etc.

win this prize for “her contribution to sustainable development, democracy and peace”.⁶ Her efforts at the grassroots level to link environmental projects to women’s empowerment and peacebuilding work in Kenya and across the Global South makes her important. Her prophetic claim states: “In a few decades, the relationship between the environment, resources and conflict may seem almost as obvious as the connection we see today between human rights, democracy and peace”.⁷ According to studies, rich and advanced countries consume more than poor ones although they have a lower population rate. This proves that it is the distribution of resources and not the population growth that is a reason for the environmental crisis. It can be an increasing rate of affluence and consumption that causes sudden shifts from agriculture to urban existence. Therefore, as environmental degradation refers to social processes and policies that structure the production of organized negligence of environment and misuse of natural resources, so the rise in the public concern over intersectional environmental education across the world is closely linked to environmental consciousness. In this regard, many ecocritics like Gabriel and Garrard, Sitter and Cenkl propose pedagogical practices to teach complexities of environmental change. According to Greta Garrad:

Climate change has been most widely discussed as a scientific problem requiring technological and scientific solutions without substantially transforming ideologies and economies of domination, exploitation and colonialism: this misinterpretation of climate change root cause is one part of the problem, misdirecting those who ground climate change solutions on incomplete analyses. (24)

⁶ See [nobelprize.org2015](https://www.nobelprize.org/2015)

⁷ See <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/2004/ceremony-speech/>

The environmental discussion now occupies the central position not only in scientific and political debates but also in the inclusive and widespread cultural imagination. For Christensen, a life with weather and environment can be imagined where we can “focus on the way the weather shapes the physical contexts, personalities, and destinies of their respective characters’ can help us live with weather and climate” (192).

Ecocritical concerns are also seen as controversial in some cases as the global warming crisis is dealt with differently by some critics. The cornucopians⁸ and postmodernists deny the grand narrative of global crisis. Some critics such as Marilyn Butler think that it is “old fashioned and nostalgic writing about nature under a new, trendy name”.⁹ Coates in this regard says, “According to universally disempowering postmodernist logic, environmental threats (like anything else) are socially constructed and culturally defined: there are no shared, universal threats – different groups privilege those confronting their own particular interests” (185-186). But still, a majority argues that climate change is a fact and humans have affected the biosphere to an extent which has made earth lose its absorbing capacity.

Similarly arguing about the agency of nonhuman actors in geopolitical struggles, Sundberg states that “a posthumanist political ecology refuses to treat nonhuman nature as the thing over which humans struggle and instead builds on and enacts a relational approach in which all bodies are participants in constituting the

⁸ Cornucopians believe that the Earth has enough resources to serve human populations, “The dynamism of capitalist economies will generate solutions to environmental problems as they arise, and ... increases in population eventually produce the wealth needed to pay for environmental improvements” (Garrard 19).

⁹ Butler was still more forthright about Bate's seminal 1991 work of British eco-criticism, *Romantic Ecology*. '[By] far his worst book', she remarked. 'Swampy's smart set', from *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, 4 July 1997, at the ASLE Ecocritical Library <http://www.asle.org/site/resources/ecocriticallibrary>. Accessed 12 Nov. 2009.

world” (322). For her nonhuman nature is “integral to and constitutive of” (332) all geopolitical processes. In this regard, consumerism is one of the most critical factors in the reduction of the environment to an object of consumption.

Environment and Consumerism

According to the *Global Encyclopedia of Environmental Science, Technology and Management*, the environmental degradation is the deterioration of the environment through depletion of resources such as air, water, soil; the destruction of the ecosystems and the extinction of wildlife (Johnson et al.). Misuse and overuse of environmental resources have become a normal social activity, and the “fluidity and plenitude of desire” and “ceaseless channeling of desire” lead to the acceptable social behaviour of consumption (*Key Thinkers* 43). Therefore, in contemporary age, academic, political and public interest in the environmental issues is on the rise. Media coverage has also spurred our collective consciousness about climate change and natural disasters. There is an increasing intellectual awareness of the relationship between social and environmental impacts in the contemporary world. There is a global discussion now in almost every social and academic institution about sustainability and our present patterns of consumption.¹⁰

The market/capital world stimulates the desire to produce targeted behaviour in human beings through consumerism and sells its brands and trends to perpetuate a materialistic ideology for its profit.¹¹ The stimulation of desire is subtle and not so

¹⁰ See Jackson and Michaelis’s report on Policies for Sustainable Consumption for detail.

¹¹ One of the most influential social critical work in this vein is Horkheimer & Adorno’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

subtle ways by advertising/corporate industry prepares human beings to consume more than is needed. A sense of “lack” is created, and a desire of self-betterment is promoted at the cost of interruption in mechanisms of the natural environment which encompasses all living and non-living things. The desire for luxury, comfort and ease is propagated in consumerism, and individuals get driven to the exploitation of natural resources to fulfil their lack. In Fuller’s view, human beings have been “misusing, abusing and polluting” earth’s resources (52). According to the French philosopher, Gilles Deleuze and the psychoanalyst, Félix Guattari the “libidinal investments” of capitalism promote created desires that animate the action and drive people to consumerism (118). This desire makes these people obsessed with controlling nature, and hence, they get involved in eco-degradation. The desire to control and misuse the environment for a person’s comfort has a crucial role in understanding human cognition and the disturbance in the interconnectedness between human beings and other environmental species and factors (“Exploring 24/7 environments”). According to Theodore Roszak human beings are suffering from ecological imbalance. He states in *The Voice of the Earth*, “if psychosis is the attempt to love a lie, the epidemic psychosis of our time is the lie of believing we have no ethical obligation to our planetary home” (16), as a result of which “there is a kind of material hunger – not for the bare necessities – that transcends the needs of the body” (24). Thus, consumerism promotes the ideologies in the name of development and comfort, which result in disturbing relationships between human and nonhuman life. Therefore, we need a critical approach like ecocriticism, which resists capitalist entrepreneurship because capitalism promotes the consumption of resources to maximize profit.

The relationship between human and nonhuman components of the environment is explained by Muir as everything in the universe is “hitched” to each other (104). The economist Kenneth Boulding views all living things having a “cyclical ecological system” (9). Edward O. Wilson’s book *Biophilia* introduces the biophilia hypothesis according to which human beings have an innate ability to connect with nature. Later in 1993, Stephen R. Kellert in his essay on “The Biological Basis for Human Values of Nature” included in a book called *The Biophilia Hypothesis* edited by Kellert and Wilson extended the concept and gave nine basic aspects to understand the connection of human with nonhuman components of the environment. These nine aspects are “utilitarian¹², naturalistic¹³, ecologicistic-scientific¹⁴, aesthetic¹⁵, symbolic¹⁶, humanistic¹⁷, moralistic¹⁸, dominionistic¹⁹ and negativistic²⁰ valuations of nature” (43, 59). The idea of the innate connection of human and nonhuman is also supported by Buell as very basic to humans’ “psychological makeup” (*Writing for an Endangered World* 25). Disturbance in the natural environment not only harms the other living and non-living components in the world but also affects human survival and economic activity. In this way, the eco-ethical concerns in environmental studies highlight how “both natural and cultural places and processes are connected and shape each other around the world and how human impact affects and changes this connectedness” and

¹² Utilitarian: material exploitation of nature, practicality

¹³ Naturalistic: a direct experience of contact with nature, in built sense of satisfaction of closeness to nature

¹⁴ Ecologicistic-scientific: Study of nature’s structure, function and relationship with humans and other species in a systematic way

¹⁵ Aesthetic: Physical beauty of nature

¹⁶ Symbolic: Use of language, metaphors and other such expressions of thoughts

¹⁷ Humanistic: Deep emotional attachment with nature, love for nature

¹⁸ Moralistic: Spiritual and ethical concern for nature

¹⁹ Dominionistic: Physical control, dominance over nature

²⁰ Negativistic: alienation from nature, fear, threat

ultimately harms both human beings and nonhuman beings (Adams 21). Appreciating a “healthy maritime partnership with the landscape” (2) of his coastal bioregion, Michael Vincent McGinnis in *Bioregionalism* (1999) argues that cultural rituals reflect a healthy attachment with the place and this partnership of nature and culture presents a sustainable relationship of human and nonhuman components of the environment (1-2). The global market always impacts the local regions and the world now sees it as affecting the overall health of the planet. The mechanical attitude and technological advancement have disturbed the ecological diversity of “dying planet” (20), and there is a decline in the “livability” (3) of the inhabitants of the earth.

There are issues of economic expansion and technological change in environmental studies but still, greater attention is needed to be drawn towards wars and their environmental impacts, and if a real war is needed, it should be a war against environmental deterioration. A stronger theoretical engagement is needed in creating awareness against environmental degradation that also leads to maintaining environmental inequalities. Al Gore’s *Inconvenient Truth* (2006) and numerous other climate change documentaries, research papers, and books address the war politics beyond borders with an environmental lens.

Similarly, technological fixes cannot help to change human behaviour. Only the recognition of the inherent value of harmonious distribution of resources in the environment can help it because “the basic intuition is that all organisms and entities in the ecosphere, as parts of the interrelated whole, are equal in intrinsic worth” (Devall and Sessions 67). Aldo Leopold’s *Sand County Almanac* proposed a “land ethic” based on the purest principles to take care of the earth. “A thing is right when it tends to

preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community”, he wrote; “it is wrong when it tends otherwise” (224-225). Deep ecologists like Arne Naess (e.g., see his essay “Intuition, Intrinsic Value and Deep Ecology”), Warwick Fox (e.g., see his essay “Deep Ecology: A New Philosophy of Our Time?”), Bill Devall and George Sessions (e.g., in their book *Deep Ecology for the Twenty-First Century: Readings on the Philosophy and Practice of the New Environmentalism*) view environment compassionately.

In this regard, consumption practices have been depicted by writers in different forms, which include objectification, class polarization, psychological disorders, and materialism. But, the role of consumption practices and its resultant impact on the environment is now what contemporary literary authors across the globe have realized to make one of the significant themes in literature.

Literature and Environment

Lawrence Buell in 2005 remarked that ecocriticism “has not yet achieved the standing accorded (say) to gender or postcolonial or critical race studies” (*The Future of Environmental Criticism* 1), whilst Gifford is of the view that in ecocriticism “professional legitimation has been slow to come on both sides of the Atlantic” (23). But ecological consciousness has emerged as a dominant theme in literature in the last ten years. Cli-fi or climate change fiction is now seen as a distinctive genre. With the rise of ecofiction, which engages with environmental degradation and raises environmental awareness, a broader field of research and study in the ecology and literature has emerged. Robin Eckersley opines about the relationship of the human

beings with the environment and introduces a concept of ecocriticism according to which human beings are “constituted by those very environmental relationships” (qtd. in Weisser and Dobrin *Ecocomposition* 86). In this regard, sociologist Ulrich Beck refers to environmental collapse and suggests that “only if nature is brought into people’s everyday images, into stories they tell, can its beauty and suffering be seen and focused on” (qtd. in Buell *Writing* 1). Ecocritics like Buell and Garrard argue that our attitudes and feelings towards the environment can be informed by images and narrative in classic texts and present literary stories. Scott Slovic, the founding member of ASLE, also emphasizes the role of literature in shaping and communicating personal values on global issues like global warming.

As multiple levels of interconnectedness with the natural environment can be explored in literary works, literary study has several approaches that are relevant to environmentally conscious literature. A good number of American and British novels deal with the environment, especially climate change in the last three decades. General public consciousness started in the 1970s onwards. I will briefly deal with environmental representations in fiction globally. For instance, a vision of the global ecology gained popularity in 1971 with the short story of Le Guin titled “Vaster Than Empires and More Slow”, which highlights the biological exploration carried by the scientist protagonist Osden. He finds that biosphere is composed of plants, animals, water, soil, air, mountains, deserts, human beings; they all respond and react to their surroundings. There is a sense of connection: “the connectedness” (118) and “[e]ven the pollen is part of the linkage, . . . connecting overseas . . . all the biosphere of a planet should be one network of communications” (122) with ““roots and no enemies.

To be entire . . . No invasion. No others. To be whole” (123). Trexler and Adeline categorising scientific text as extra-terrestrial or futuristic are of the view that “the depiction of ecological change in extra-terrestrial terms is often allied to a theme of terraforming, that is intentionally making planets habitable by changing their climate” (4). Terraforming is a term introduced by Jack Williamson in his short stories in the 1940s (Stableford 2005). Trexler and Adeline review the science fiction classics with terraformed settings which include *The Greening of Mars* (1984), *The Sands of Mars* (1951), *Red Mars* (1992), *Green Mars* (1993) and *Blue Mars* (1996), and *Dune* (1965). These novels detail “hundreds of years of the colonization and gradual transformation of the Martian biosphere to render it fit for human habitation” (5). *Ecotopia* (1975), *Ecotopia Emerging* (1982), *Hothouse* (1962), *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976), *The Drowned World* (1962), *Always Coming Home* (1982), *Nitrogen Fix* (1980), *Nature’s End* (1986), *The Last Gasp* (1983), *Hot Sky at Midnight* (1994), *The Third Millennium* (1985) and *Three Californias’* (1984, 1988, 1990) trilogy depict a climatically changing world with mixed dystopian and utopian themes. *Heat* (1976) is also considered to be the first novel to address the climate change directly. *The Sea and the Summer* (1987) published as *Drowning Towers* in the US imagined future history as global warming and risen sea levels. *The Greenhouse Summer* (1999) also depict the same. *The Ice People* (1998), *The Road* (2006), *A Friend of the Earth* (2000), *The Stone Gods* (2008), *Far North* (2009) and *Cold Earth* (2009) all introduce climatically changed settings. *The Windup Girl* (2010) depicts environmentally changed future with energy scarcity and genetically modified diseases and other environmental problems. In *News from Nowhere* (2004), Morris critiques environmental degradation and

capitalist production proposing self-sufficient communities on a small scale for sustainable community-building. Ian McEwan's *Solar* (2010) is famous and mixes comedy with climate change issues. Moreover, Garrard reads McEwan's *Solar* as identifying "the end of nature" referring to Samuel Beckett. Markley reads Daniel Defoe's *The Storm* (1704), an early modern travel writing and sees "complex interactions between the dynamic processes of acculturation and acclimatization" and suggests an 'eco-cultural approach' ("Casualties and Disasters" 530) towards the traditional study of literary history.

Ecocriticism

In the 1990s the ecocritics grouped together with the inauguration of the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment (ASLE) in the US to discuss environmental problems in literary texts. Later its affiliated organisations were established in the UK and Ireland as the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment in the UK and Ireland (ASLE-UKI), and in Europe as the European Association for the Study of Literature, Culture and Environment (EASLCE) and the association has branches in Canada, India, East Asia and now in Pakistan too where these ecocritical scholarly societies discuss climate change as a major point in their meetings. Ecocriticism started "to evaluate texts and ideas in terms of their coherence and usefulness as responses to environmental crisis" (Kerridge and Sammells 5). Ecocriticism's success was seen with the publications of books, articles and essays reflecting on the environment in literary works. Various anthologies were published in

the US after Glotfelty and Fromm's work.²¹ *The American Nature Writing Newsletter* started in 1989, and a special section on ecocriticism was published in 1991. In the United Kingdom Richard Kerridge, Laurence Coupe, Neil Sammells and Parham published collections.²² Greg Garrard's *Ecocriticism in the New Critical Idiom* is also an important work.²³ Jonathan Bate is regarded as a British pioneer of ecocriticism with his influential works *Romantic Ecology* (1991) and *The Song of the Earth* (2000). According to Bate the earliest connections between literature and ecology were made by Joseph Meeker in his book, *The Comedy of Survival: Studies in Literary Ecology* (1974), and William Rueckert with his essay his *Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism*, which was originally published in 1978, and later in 1996, was included in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. These two, in Bate's opinion, were the first comprehensive works of ecodiscourse (*The Song of the Earth*). According to Bate, Meeker's work is broadly considered "the first book of explicitly ecological literary criticism" (*The Song of the Earth* 180) while Rueckert's composition according to Bate is the origin of the term ecocriticism where Rueckert

²¹ Glotfelty and Fromm (*The Ecocriticism Reader*) and Armbruster and Wallace (*Beyond Nature Writing*) have previously been cited. In order, the other texts are *Reading the Earth: New Directions in the Study of Literature and Environment*, ed. by Michael P. Branch, and others (Moscow: University of Idaho Press, 1998); Patrick D. Murphy, *Literature of Nature: An International Sourcebook* (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1998); *Literature and Environment: A Reader on Nature and Culture*, ed. by Lorraine Anderson, Scott Slovic and John O. O'Grady (New York: Longman, 1999); *Reading Under the Sign of Nature: New Essays in Ecocriticism*, ed. by John Tallmadge and Henry Harrington (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2000); *The ISLE Reader: Ecocriticism, 1993-2003*, ed. by Michael P. Branch and Scott Slovic ~Athens, GA: University of Georgia, 2003).

²² *The Song of the Earth*

²³ Parham (*The Environmental Tradition*) and Garrard have previously been cited. In order, the remaining works are *Writing the Environment: Ecocriticism and Literature*, ed. by Richard Kerridge and Neil Sammells (London: Zed Books, 1998), and *The Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Ecocriticism*, ed. by Laurence Coupe (London: Routledge, 2000, repro 2004).

ventured with an “experiment with the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature” (107).

We can also trace back in the history of Western Literature and some of the general references to global environmental changes, though a detailed survey cannot be managed in this dissertation. The *Epic of Gilgamesh* and the story of the flood in the Old Testament Book of Genesis and the Last Judgement of the New Testament Book of Revelations can be credited as apocalyptic. Lynn White Jr’s article “The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis” is considered very important in the development of environmentalist thought. The article is controversial as it declares that Christianity “is the most anthropocentric religion world has ever seen” (1205). “We shall continue to have a worsening ecological crisis”, he wrote, “until we reject the Christian axiom that nature has no reason for existence save to serve man” (1207). Middleton combines twentieth-century environmental writing with present-day environmental novels and argues that fiction can do “some of the cultural work of reconciliation between antagonistic social forces” (218) of nature and society. This brings us to the historicist studies of climate change, and in this regard a themed issue on “Climate and Crisis” of the *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* is important as apart from bringing out five significant articles on early modern climatic conditions in different parts of the world, it includes very enlightening “Introduction: Eco-Historicism” by Gillen D. Wood. The journal highlights how important it is to remember about impact of climate on human culture and history.

Understanding of the interplay between culture and environment is central to ecocriticism. The environmental approach to criticism draws ideas from ecology,

ethics, science²⁴ and literary theory into one field and an ecocritical understanding of the culture is becoming a significant part of the literary texts which reflects that an ecologically oriented thinking is needed in the society to move towards better world. In this regard, Wood studies interdisciplinarity between climatology, geography, politics, economic and cultural history and other sources like “poems, diaries, newspapers, paintings, folklore, etc.” (4). Wood criticizes European imperialism and institutionalised racism which makes other cultures and their regions inferior to be exploited. He helps eco-historians to explore “what the hard data of historical climatology meant in terms, in the minds and lived experience of the people who endured or benefitted from a specific meteorological regime, and how human cultures have both adapted to and shaped environmental change” (4). Such interconnection between controlling the environment and British colonization is seen in Rajani Sudan’s studies also. Similarly, Alvin Snider, in his essay called “Hard Frost, 1684”, studies Royal Society reports, diaries, sermons, paintings and other documents to see the impact of weather: winter and coldness on British identity in the seventeenth century. Eric Gidal’s article explores romantic models of utopianism (Shelley’s environmental and moral purification and social harmony) and melancholy (Keats’s use of the language of melancholy) relevant to today’s environmental concerns.

Since the fundamental assumption which governs ecocritical discourse in literature is based on the need to develop an environmentally oriented criticism in the field of Humanities to raise environmental consciousness, ecocritical theory highlights the importance of literature as a powerful tool to develop human and nonhuman

²⁴ Robinson’s ‘Science in the Capital’ trilogy suggests a unity of environmental science and policies to address environmental degradation.

relationships and depict environmental crisis. The contribution of Timothy Clark in expanding the first wave of nature writing through his work *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment* is significant in this regard. For him, this work is an ecocritical movement with a purpose “beyond nature writing” (87). The collection of essays *Beyond Nature Writing: Expanding the Boundaries of Ecocriticism* by Karla Armbruster and Kathleen Wallace furthered similar ideas. Therefore, ecocriticism developed from the representation of nature to dealing with and exploring rich history of nature writing to the theorisation of the debate to “go beyond nature writing” (1-2).

A lot of definitions of ecocriticism have appeared in this interdisciplinary literary field. According to Cheryll Glotfelty in her Introduction to *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ecocriticism is a study of “interconnections between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artefacts of language and literature” (xix). Its “one foot in literature and the other on land” ecocriticism is the study of “relationship between literature and the physical environment” (xviii). For her literature can be related to nature and literary environmental discourse can be studied vis à vis other fields e.g. psychology, philosophy, art, history, politics and ethics. Similarly, for Glen Love ecocriticism is “a broadly based movement embracing literary-environmental interconnections” (1), and Bennett and Teague view ecocriticism as “the study of the mutually constructing relationship between culture and environment” (3). Thus, ecocriticism takes into account themes, tropes and topics in literature and the physical environment to engage with environmental literary representations. Ecocritics understand the environment as an autonomous and

independent entity as well as provide philosophically informed ethics to treat it. In this regard, Scott Slovic hopes ecocritics would criticize politics against environmentalism, which is an important step in exploring more of the environment. Donald Worster is of the view that the environmental cause happened “not because of how ecosystems function but rather because of how our ethical systems function” (27). Similarly, Tait considers ecocriticism as criticism on “casually destructive and disregarding attitude towards the environment” (29) that has legitimised humans’ deeprooted anthropomorphic view of the environment. This also puts ecocritical scholars, writers and studies in a position where they are challenged whether they should be activists advocating and educating about the environment or they should probe and expose the obscurities of environment and literature relationship. Though for me, even taking a stance in the form of writing is greatly educative and political and becomes academic activism. Murphy (2014) supports my take on it as he says that environmental writings help readers with “recognition, acceptance, and the will to act” (149). Similarly, for Adamson folk stories bring “ecocritics and activists new tools” for “making abstract, often intangible global patterns associated with climate change accessible to wider public” (172).

Lawrence Buell’s contribution to this field of study is noteworthy. *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing and the Formation of American Culture* (1995), *Writing for an Endangered World* (2001) and *The Future of Environmental Criticism* (2005) are Buell’s major contributions to explain the diverse expressions of environmental awareness that connect human and nonhuman. Buell, Heise and Thornber (2011) explain the first wave of ecocriticism as dominated by

pastoral imagination in fiction, poetry and non-fiction. A connection between human and nature (nonhuman) was highlighted during that period (Buell *The Future of Environmental Crisis* 20). In the second wave, urbanisation and industrialisation dominated the literature. This period invited debates about the environmental justice approaches and linked literature and environmental studies with postcolonial literature introducing a debate of local affiliations with the land and global rootedness (19). Buell views ecocriticism in the second wave as “the interpretation of Metropolis and outback, of anthropocentric as well as biocentric concerns” (23). He asserts that “environmental criticism arises within and against the history of human modification of planetary space” (62). Heise’s *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global* is also remarkably significant work for environmental studies which reminds the readers of the importance of place and human connection on a global scale alongside local and cultural environmental problems.

For Buell representation of the environment always goes through certain filters when authors write about it (*The Environmental Imagination* 84). He explains one such filter as the ideological one. For him, writers present nature according to specific ideologies but a representation of nature as an “ideological screen becomes unfruitful if it is used to portray the green world as nothing more than the projective fantasy or the social allegory” (36). Also, at the same time, he states that literature should not be only read for ideological properties, but its experiential and referential aspects are equally important (36).

With strands dominant from feminism and Marxism, ecocriticism approaches the text from various points for environmental concerns. According to Attfield, there

are five possible explanations of environmental problem: affluence, capitalism, population growth, technological development and economic growth (9-17). Similarly, ecofeminism, the term initially coined by Francoise d'Eaubonne in 1974, explains the role of women in bringing “ecological revolution” (cited in Warren 2000). For Warren ecofeminism studies the link between women and nature against the other forms of domination (37). For Glotfelty, the developmental feminist criticism inspired ecocriticism. In this regard, Ortner in her seminal paper “Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?” explains:

woman is being identified with, or, if you will seems to be symbol of, something that every culture defines as being at a lower order of existence than itself . . . Now it seems that there is only one thing that would fit that category, and that is “nature” in the most generalized sense. (10)

She views associating a woman with nature as a patriarchal construction to oppress women because “it is always culture’s project to subsume and transcend nature. If a woman is part of nature, then culture would find it “natural” to subordinate, not to say oppress, her” (2) where nature as something crude and primitive is linked to women and culture is regarded as male domain with human consciousness (Beauvoir *The Second Sex* 27, 163, 272). This theory explains the liberation of women and nature from the oppressive structures in the society.

Along the similar lines, ecopsychology, according to Theodore Roszak in his acclaimed works *The Voice of the Earth: An Exploration of Ecopsychology* (1992) and *Where Psyche Meets Gaia* (1995) urges people to respect Earth, environmental unity and the interdependence of all species. Ecopsychology demands that human beings as

individuals, make personal and consumer choices to consume as little of Earth's resources, to produce as little waste as possible, and make the conscious decision to challenge and reprioritize their lifestyles to ensure the health of the natural world for present and future generations. This also leads to consider carefully that:

... a wide range of environmental problems has emerged; those problems include anthropogenic climate change ('global warming'), the depletion of stratospheric ozone (the 'ozone hole'), the acidification of surface waters ('acid rain'), the destruction of tropical forests, the depletion and extinction of species, and the precipitous decline of biodiversity. Yet, while all of these problems have physical (environmental) manifestations, their causes – and their potential solutions – are invariably bound up with human attitudes, beliefs, values, needs, desires, expectations, and behaviours. Thus the symptoms of the environmental crisis cannot be regarded purely as physical problems requiring solutions by environmental 'specialists'; instead, they are intrinsically human problems and they are intimately related to the question of what it means to be human." (Unit 1 The Earth System and its Components)²⁵

The British and American Literature has significantly highlighted literary works as an important factor in the understanding of various environmental complexities. English Romantic poets like Wordsworth and Shelley and American transcendentalists like Thoreau and Emerson are key figures for many ecocritics. Although environmentally conscious writing or environmental criticism existed before anyone thought to theorise

²⁵ Centre for Development, Environment and Policy (CeDEP) Environmental Science and Management Module Code: P120 (P500), Scope and syllabus: Unit 1 Introduction: the earth system and its components (The environmental crisis, An unprecedented crisis https://www.soas.ac.uk/cedep-demos/000_P500_ESM_K3736-Demo/unit1/page_11.htm)
See [https://www.soas.ac.uk/courseunits/P120\(P500\).html](https://www.soas.ac.uk/courseunits/P120(P500).html)

or categorise it, ecocriticism emerged as a distinctive theoretical field in the 1980s. It began to appear in American studies as environmental literary criticism, green cultural studies, ecopoetics, ecological studies etc. For Cynthia Dietering contemporary American novels show a “fundamental shift in historical consciousness, a shift from a culture defined by its production to a postindustrial culture defined by its waste” (196). For her “toxic consciousness” in the American novel are:

The sites in which we dwelled-nature, our bodies, our homes-were becoming utterly changed as a result of environmental contamination. This phenomenon was intensified by new cultural attitude towards nature that placed it under the hegemony of culture. Consequently, our inherited conceptions of these dwelling sites became quickly obsolete, and our previous notions of nature, the body, and home were reconfigured. (*Waste Sites*, 4)

Similarly, in English tradition, if I see Hardy’s novels, I observe a shift in Britain’s relationship to its environment. Richard Kerridge (2000) includes Hardy’s novels in the ecocritical canon. According to Kerridge:

Thomas Hardy is an obvious candidate for the eco-critical canon. The best known of English rural novelists, he is intensely responsive to the natural world and human relations with that world. Some of the most exciting passages of English nature writing are in his novels, integrated with a complexity of cultural, political, economic, and emotional life. (126)

As Britain was the world’s first industrial nation and since the transition in the society happened during Victorian age so, it also indicates that the industrialization freed human being from being dependent on the environment and led to technology and urbanization, and so capitalism became stronger, and affluence became the culture. It

resulted in a society structured around utilization. Tait talks about British urbanization and calls the process “an extraordinary transformation that profoundly affected Britain’s relationship to, and completely reshaped, its environment” (14). He further adds:

For the first time in the history of humankind, a nation abandoned a long-standing way of life rooted in the land and structured around the seasons, and embraced an urban, industrialised future divorced from any daily contact with the non-human world. It was an abrupt and radical change with whose consequences we are still wrestling. (14-15)

This period was visibly overshadowed by environmental change. For Flanders,

The Industrial Revolution had brought with it a pall that hung over all the major cities, made up of the coal smoke, dirt and dust pouring out of millions of chimneys, together with the mist that these prevented from being burned off by the sun. (370)

The ‘green’ was not only discussed in science fiction, but literature beyond science fiction also dealt with the environment. Such writings use techniques of science fiction, but they are not necessarily categorised as one. Some of the thrillers with environmental activism are *State of Fear* (2004), *The Doomsday Report* (1998), *Arctic Drift* (2005), *Ultimatum* (2009), *Portent* (2007), *Stark* (2006), *The Rapture* (2009), *The Carbon Diaries* (2015), *The Declaration* (2007), and *This Other Eden* (1993). The themes in these novels are apocalyptic global warming disaster. Some of them are also political satires. These all are clearly genre fiction, and these are the genre of science fiction, but still, this other literary fiction is read as ecocritical as they indirectly deal with the environment.

Khan's novels in English seem unique in a sense that they also remind us of the romanticism movement in Britain when pastoral dominated the English literary scene after the disappointment with the urbanization and industrialization. The romantic writers felt the loss of simplicity and connection with Nature and wrote about it. I am particularly concerned about having Pakistani and international readers reshape their thinking about what Pakistan is. Khan is a writer who talks about nationality, politics, religion, race, and gender but from a different perspective; Ecology. Thematically her works shows that she despises the colonizing and imperialistic attitudes towards nature. Her narrative style shows that she may be ambitious in her aims, but she is more traditional in her approach towards representing native people.

Similarly, Kerridge (2010), founding president of ASLE in the UK, emphasizes that fictional narratives of climate change should serve as a "mediation between embodied sensuous perception and . . . wider perspectives" (72). Here he supports Heise's (2008) stance on the environmental change as a global phenomenon in proposing ecocosmopolitan approach. The ecocritical concerns in literature from the East can connect with the literature in the West to highlight the collective efforts of the writers towards global ecological consciousness. In this regard, a comparative and transcultural approach to ecocriticism is given by Patrick D. Murphy (2000) as:

If ecocriticism has been hindered by too narrow an attention to nonfiction prose and the fiction of non-fictionality, it has also been limited by a focus on American and British literature. In order to widen the understanding of readers and critics, it is necessary to reconsider the privileging of certain genres and also the privileging

of certain national literatures and certain ethnicities within those national literatures. (58)

This invites inclusiveness of international literatures and broadens the field of nature-oriented literature.

As environmental criticism is gaining momentum, so I see leading English Studies journals in the world release special issues of ecocriticism engaging with the environment. The ecocritical collection *Local Natures, Global Responsibilities* is an excellent source to study various aspects of environmental research in literature. Currently, a significant development in the ecocriticism is going on to bring the new methodology to counter environmental degradation and climate change through literature. In this regard, global risks and hazardous impact through technology are highlighted by Beck as “a new stage of development” in modern society with “unintended consequences” (8). Beck identifies the contemporary modern society as ‘risk society’ and such identifications have brought a rich trend of writing ‘risk narratives’ that anticipate risk of environmental collapse. For Heise much of ecocritical work in American literary studies in the 1990s discusses endangered environment and human interventions as a threat to health. She gives reference to risk theory by mentioning DeLillo and Richard Powers’s works.²⁶ In their separate studies Mayer and Goodbody read *Flight Behaviour*, Robinson’s Trilogy, *Eis Tau* as depicting attitudes towards climate change risk. *Things We Didn’t See Coming* as a ‘riskycape’ is also a good example (Mehnert 2014). In this regard, Rigby in her essay “Confronting catastrophe: Ecocriticism in a warming world” and book *Dancing with Disaster*:

²⁶ Heise, Ursula K. “Toxins, Drugs, and Global Systems: Risk and Narrative in the Contemporary Novel.” *American Literature*, vol. 74, no. 4, 2002, pp. 747-778

Environmental Histories, Narratives, and Ethics for Perilous Times, studies some writers from European Romanticism to contemporary Australian Aboriginal literature as these texts enable the readers to fight the catastrophe. Such environmental stories are also called “narrative of confrontation” (9), which discuss complex interconnection between human and nonhuman, confirming them as an inseparable part of the environment. For Clark such anthropocene writing discusses aesthetic, cultural, political and ethical contexts of environmental problems giving rise to global climate change (2). Likewise, Don Scheese (2002), Mark Tredinnick (2005) and Patrick Murphy (2000) also discuss nonhuman as their central subject in nature writing. Their “retreat narrative” explores civilization and nature as human and nonhuman themes (Roorda 6). In Canadian Literature, Margaret Atwood is a renowned name for the representation of the natural environment in her fiction. Love for the animals and plants found in the wild regions of the Canadian lands is highlighted in her novels which also shows that with the urbanization of the cities, human perception of looking at nature has somewhat changed from fear to love and admiration. Many of her stories show characters who have become more ecoconscious, but there are other characters too who mercilessly are involved in degrading the natural environments through science, technology, and capitalist industry.

In this regard, an urge to investigate diverse human experiences across the nonhuman world across various cultures, ethnicities and nations is evident in Scott Slovic’s *Ecocriticism of the Global South*. It is a complete work to enable developing nations to give voice to the silence and negligence and underrepresentation done to their region regarding ecocritical dialogue. Slovic urges scholars from different

cultures to engage with the environmental problem to expand the discourse. Pellow also points towards environmental justice and the underrepresentation of less developed countries by stating that:

Environmental justice emphasizes the unequal outcomes of market-based and state economic and environmental policymaking on people of color, indigenous populations, and the working class or poor . . . [They suffer] a high burden of environmental harm and [are]excluded from environmental decisions affecting their communities. (49)

Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin have also suggested a new emerging subfield Postcolonial Ecocriticism. Postcolonial ecocritical approaches illustrate the hegemonic relations between social and environmental concerns. For instance, Maxwell reads Turner's *The Sea and the Summer* and discusses the role of postcolonial and ecocriticism in supporting each other to critique contemporary environmental attitudes in fiction. Khan also delves into the "hegemonic discourse of the West" (Rangan 374) where the project of development is translated as something suspicious by the locals. For some critics, people in lesser developed regions are more close to the environment, and Guha in this regard is of the view that "agrarian populations have a finely balanced relationship with nature" (75). But Ahmad and Karrar worrying about Pakistan's rising population and poverty and degrading environment are of the view that globalisation is "busy transforming once predominantly agrarian-societies into urbanised repositories of surplus humanity" (59).

CHAPTER 2

POSTCOLONIAL ECOCRITICISM

As postcolonialism challenges colonial binary representations such as developed/underdeveloped, FirstWorld/ThirdWorld, North/South and centre/periphery, so the “Enlightenment ideals of modernity and progress, and . . . colonial discourses of the “civilizing mission”” are viewed as “discursive tools that justify the neoliberal march of free market capitalism” (Nash 110). There are studies that show that the environmental novel contributes to a great deal of understanding of environment from neglected and marginalized viewpoints like postcolonialism (e.g., by Maxwell) and gender studies (e.g., by Johns-Putra). The latest approaches and new dimensions in the field of ecocriticism are regarded as third wave of ecocriticism as Adamson and Slovic state in the special issue of MELUS:

Literary expression of environmental experience is as diverse as any other body of writing, of course. Yet until recently the community of ecocritics has been relatively non-diverse and also has been constrained by a perhaps overly narrow construing of “white” and “nonwhite” as the primary categories of ethnicity. Therefore, this issue will explore what seems to be a new third wave of ecocriticism, which recognizes ethnic and national particularities and yet transcends ethnic and national boundaries; this third wave explores all facets of human experiences from an environmental viewpoint.
(6-7)

Cheryll Glotfelty adds to the postcolonial discussion by stating:

Ecocriticism has been predominantly white movement. It will become a multi-ethnic movement when stronger connections are made between the environment and issues of social justice, and when a diversity of voices are encouraged to contribute to the discussion. (xxv)

Voices from the third world and underdeveloped communities can be heard in *Varieties of Environmentalism: Essays North and South* by Guha and Martinez-Alier. Criticising the conservation imperialism and politics of biased environmental scholarship they are of the view that the West considers South to be “too poor to be Green” (xvii). The Third world environmentalists and intellectuals perceive the control of the developing country as a neo-colonial method by the North (developed world, First world) to have power on the resources of the South. This conflict between North and South started in the 1970s with the proposition of New International Economic Order (NIEO) when formerly colonized countries thought to form a coalition to counter and challenge the unjust trade rules between North and South. The South demanded to be allowed to have self-sustaining economic growth and industrialization.²⁷ The categorisation in postcolonial theory has been critiqued for quite some time now as colonial binaries such as First World and Third World narrative which assumes that Third World is inferior and so development in these regions is viewed as colonial practice to be opposed (Nash 2004).

Goeminne and Paredis in this regard stress upon the significance of ecological debt for postcolonialism and say:

²⁷ See Bhagwati, J. N. *The New International Economic Order: The North-South Debate*, 1977; Najam, Adil. “Dynamics of the Southern Collective: Developing Countries in Desertification Negotiations.” *Global Environmental Politics*, vol.4, no. 3, 2004, pp. 128-154.

It is well documented how, through the colonial period and the industrial revolution up till now, natural resources have been flowing from South to North and how this has often been accompanied by plundering, ecological damage and social oppression . . . ecological debt is a way of looking at North-South relations and sustainability issues from a Southern peoples' point of view . . . [It] draws attention to how the present situation has grown out of the violent and unjust past. It points to the collective responsibility of industrialized countries and companies in relation to socio-ecological problems. (692-693)

According to Rob Nixon “the most startling feature of environmental literary studies” lies in “reluctance” of American scholars to genuinely engage with “the environmental repercussions of American foreign policy, particularly in relation to contemporary imperial practices” (33). Similarly, when the Western world transfers funds to developing countries, it is portrayed as a charity, but some countries like India doesn't believe this. The Indian government views receiving of such funds for ecological concerns as an “entitlement not aid” (MOEF, 2009b, 41)²⁸ which confirms the “inherently corrupt and/or incompetent character of non-Western countries and their governments” (54). Maybe Uzma Aslam Khan calls for justice by highlighting ecological debt and urges the developed world to compensate what they have gained from colonialism in the past and continue to secure in the form of neocolonialism. Frequently uninvited or forceful encroachments continue to occupy colonized countries' environmental space. In this way in depicting all the cultural responses to

²⁸ See *MOEF, Ministry of Environment and Forests*. Government of India. Climate Change Negotiations. Delhi: MOEF, 2009.

the environment, environmental fiction brings important and often neglected aspects to the reader.

South Asian Fiction

South Asian Fiction in English is developing in ecocritical studies. In this regard, India led with its English fiction before writers from Pakistan and other countries of the region started hinting towards environmental changes. Shikha Kumari, while discussing Indian writers says, “the concern for ecology and the threat that the continuous misuse of our environment poses on humanity has only recently caught the attention of the writers” (1). There is a growing body of work of Indian authors like Arundhati Roy, Aravind Adiga, Amitav Ghosh and others that portrays ecological issues of the country and the region. Ghosh’s environmental trilogy *The Ibis Trilogy*²⁹ is a story of ecological disturbance of land and psychological devastation of human beings. Roy’s *The God of Small Things* (2017) expresses admiration of nature and a critique on the exploitation of natural resources and the impact of industrialization in the local green region. She writes, “Some days he walked along the banks of the river that smelled of . . . pesticides bought with World Bank Loan. Most of the fish had died. The ones that survived suffered from fin-rot and had broken out in boils” (13). Adiga’s debut novel *The White Tiger* (2008) discusses the interplay of socio-economic circumstances and technological advancement that bring materialism and cause

²⁹ The first volume of the trilogy; *Sea of Poppies* (2008), *River of Smoke* (2011) and *Flood of Fire* (2015) discussed indentured labour, opium war, loss of native flora and fauna in the indigenous areas for trade purposed during British rule in the subcontinent. Also, read *The Hungry Tide* (2004) by the same author who presents troubled Sundarban Jungles and environmental and social injustices done to nonhuman and human population for greed and materialism.

environmental degradation in India. Sinha's *Animal's People* (2007) is also an apocalyptic account of the impact of hazardous chemicals produced by American chemical company on local Indians in the slum areas.

As compared to India, ecocriticism in Pakistan is a new arrival in the academic scene, and it is even later in the Pakistani English environmental writing. In an interview, Snehal Shingavi laments that Pakistani literature in the Western academia is generally taken as "stuff available in English written by people in the diaspora who appear in the media".³⁰ Shingavi notes that there are Urdu programmes in academia that stress the importance of Pakistani Urdu literature, but "generally it is exclusively the material produced in English which is accessible". He further adds:

The "Pakistani literature" which makes it to America or the UK speaks from one upper-middle class perspective to another. It has similar concerns about the world, Islam, and American foreign policy and speaks to a global ideology. A number of writers from Pakistan give America and the UK exactly what they want. For example, Nadeem Aslam's *Maps for Lost Lovers* has every single stereotype about honor killing. It also serves as a foil between a safe world, America, and a dangerous world, Pakistan.³¹

He argues that it is critical that the American middle-class finds in such literature a perfect representation of Pakistan. In this regard, if we trace the rising literary texts in the last ten to fifteen years, unfortunately the dominant modes of Pakistani literary representation³² that make it to America or the UK show Pakistan as, Shingavi adds:

³⁰ Snehal Shingavi in an interview with Mushtaq Bilal for *The Missing Slate*, 18 July 2013

³¹ Snehal Shingavi, "What we talk about when we talk about Pakistani literature" in an interview with Mushtaq Bilal for *The Missing Slate*, 18 Jul. 2013.

³² Pakistani writers who are choosing to reinforce these stereotypes for profit and international

lawless, conservative, reactionary, orthodox Muslim, anti-woman, and run by military dictatorships and crazy politicians. It is because people writing in English in the 90s and 2000s grew up under the Zia administration. They are concerned about the state, military, and mullahs and their critique is right. We should be critical of Zia and Musharraf, but they tend to over-emphasize those things and under-emphasize the actual nature of Pakistan, which is also heavily invested in fighting against them. This literature pretends that the fight against dictatorship happens in literature and not in the streets of Pakistan.

But Khan's writing has a potential to change attitudes about the environment as she uses religion, spirituality, science, folk wisdom and intellect to address environment. Use of all these important aspects of culture makes her stance worthy of being noticed and discussed. The environment in Pakistan has not been widely and well understood. Industrialization, lack of environmental management and sustainable public policies and urbanisation urge us to reflect on Pakistan's critical position in global environmentalism (Mehdi 155). In David's view, the contemporary trends of globalisation at a local and international level are transforming the agrarian societies in South Asia, making the regions fall into "over-urbanisation" (10). John Henry Stein, the Sector Director of Sustainable Development Department South Asia Region, reports that:

The extent of urban air pollution in Pakistan – South Asia's most urbanized country – is among the world's most severe, significantly damaging human health, quality of life, and the economy and environment of Pakistan. The harm from Pakistan's urban air

pollution is among the highest in South Asia, exceeding several high-profile causes of mortality and morbidity in Pakistan. (qtd. in Sanchez et al. xv)

The report also states that “Air pollution, inadequate water supply, sanitation, and hygiene are the top environmental priority problems in Pakistan” (qtd. in Sanchez et al. 43). Though Pakistani literature is replete with urbanised as well as raw rural landscapes but a very few English novels from Pakistan portray and create a narrative of a globalised, urbanised and industrialised Pakistan in the grip of a large-scale spread of contamination, environmental degradation and pollution as analyses professor and founder of the ASLE-Pakistan, Munazza Yaqoob (249).

Since there is a lack of inculcation of environmental consciousness in Pakistani society as reflected in the debates among characters, my dissertation challenges that gap in environmental education. The erosion of barriers between humans and the natural world through interaction between the humans and nonhumans as analysed in Khan’s novels gives me a confidence that further research on these works will mark the beginning of a debate on environmental consciousness in Pakistani English Studies.

Antiona Windsor, a British tourist, in her piece “Out of the rubble” published in *The Guardian* on 17 October 2006, presents Pakistan as a “friendly and beautiful country”. It shows a different side of Pakistan to the international community, which unfortunately is not significantly portrayed in the media. Pakistan is an ethnically and linguistically diverse country with diverse geography and wildlife. The structure of the Pakistani economy is mainly based on agriculture, and a large portion of the country's

manufactured exports come from the agriculture sector. ‘The Green Revolution’³³ in 1960 and 70s impacted the yield increase of certain crops³⁴ (Government of Pakistan 77)³⁵ but this endeavour, in my opinion, was for industrial purposes lacking a nationwide awareness about environmental consciousness.

What motivated me to research about identity, connection and roots being a literature student is that there is much more to Pakistan than what has been written about it and highlighted in the western news channels, films and other online sources with reference to the war on terror. Since its inception, ecocriticism has always had a keen interest in the “indigenous art and imagination” which arose from the dissatisfaction with the negative impact of industrial modernity which also set the base for ecocriticism (Buell et al. 428). Buell, Heise, and Thornber argue that “writers from the developing world often juxtapose scientific investigation of the natural world with indigenous form of knowledge” (424). And one of the valuable and most important aspects to Pakistan for Khan is its ecological beauty and the lifestyle of the indigenous community. For Khan and her readers, nature no longer forms an inanimate background but becomes a living protagonist with its important role.

While the world and the writers were writing about terrorism, they forgot to address the terrorism done to the land where people live, the home of the people they were writing about. Just a few media news or killings being done by the natives under

³³ Pakistan also started this revolution as an innovation of the ages for high yields of production of crops and rise in the economy. But poor environmental care could not make the revolution sustainable.

See Kaul, Tashi. “The Elimination of Export Subsidies and the Future of Net-Food Importing
Byerlee, Derek and Akmai Siddiq. “Has the Green Revolution Been Sustained? The
Quantitative

³⁴ See section “Agriculture”, an official document of Government of Pakistan,
http://www.pbs.gov.pk/sites/default/files/50_years_statistics/vol1/6.pdf.

the influence of imperialistic forces does not represent Pakistan. Pakistan is a rural, simple, peaceful, naturally wealthy country which is now gradually losing its beauty due to reasons which are what my dissertation is about as I argue that losing this ecological connection is synonymous to losing a significant part of being Pakistani.

There is still a small section of Pakistani highbrows engaged in the climate change discourse at domestic and international level, but it is these recent couple of years that political parties are taking to make it widespread in Pakistan, but the general population is still not serious towards it. Through this dissertation, readers will be able to understand Pakistan's position in international climate negotiations that ultimately helps to bring a different perception of the growing portrayal of Pakistan as a site of emerging Chinese market and trade route.

When considering literature, Pakistan is recognised as having a wealth of natural resources and being very rich in terms of both regional and Urdu literature, encompassing a variety of different images depicting mountains, plains, rivers, seas and trees providing one of the most scenic landscapes on Earth. Furthermore, folklore and Urdu literature are known to be full of nature and indigenous culture. In Pakistan, the most fundamental genre of expression is poetry, which is written, published and performed across the public domain in the form of *Mushaira* – a form of poetry-reading by the poets in a gathering. Such sessions have become widely prevalent in the country, with people reacting to the verses by chanting the words *wah wah* (meaning wow in English), *bahut khoob* (meaning excellent in English). It is such performances that are considered to be difficult in the sense that infiltrating the imagination of a listener through a plain verse is not a simple task; accordingly, there is a need for the verse to

be descriptive and able to inspire the imagination. The most important of tools, in this regard, can be sourced from nature. It is with this in mind that it can be seen that, in Pakistani poetry in English, Urdu and other languages, verses are decorated and adorned with mother nature's jewels. For example, in Pakistani poetry, a beloved's lips are rose petals, while a lake represents her eyes and dark clouds her hair. She is said to have the voice of a nightingale but the walk of a peacock, with her tears causing floods and her sighs far-reaching earthquakes.

In a comparable vein, Faiz Ahmed Faiz (1911-1984), a famous and widely revered Pakistani Urdu poet of resistance, shows a deep love and passion for nature, with the themes of nature incorporated into his poetry. It could be owing to the fact that he had endured imprisonment³⁶ for his progressive ideas and beliefs he expressed through his poetry and therefore had been cut off from nature and freedom that Faiz had a love for. He frequently uses images from the natural world to explain his idea of a just world. From the perspective of the average reader, the love and sensitivity shown towards nature and beauty, as demonstrated in the poetry of Faiz, as well as the careful execution of such sensations into verse, is considered both breath-taking and wondrous. One example of a work penned by Faiz showcases his creativity with images and is known as *Manzar* (The Scene): he uses 'the lingering blue shadow' as an example, which then shifts and changes to become 'the blue lake'. The lake's beauty and stillness are disturbed only by a falling leaf which creates a ripple effect. In a similar way, other poems and collections, such as *Rivermist* (1992) penned by Dawood Kamal (1935-

³⁶ In late August 2019, Faiz Ahmad Faiz's portrait was removed from the government owned literary organization called Pakistan Academy of Letters which caused an outrage among the masses particularly on social media forcing the conservative officials to put the portrait back to its original place of display.

1987), and *Arrival of the Monsoon* (1985), written by Taufiq Rafat (1927-1998), are also seen to encompass the imagery of nature so widely recognised in Pakistan. Kamal has a beautiful fragmentary style of writing poetry with rural and central as main themes. Fakhira Mubeen writes, “He talks innocently of great Himalyas, starry sky, sparkling waters and trees. As a poet he has a deep connection with his soul as well as the soul of the universe (which is nature)” (1).

Kinza Arshad in her article “Re-Presentation of Romantic Ideals in Taufiq Rafat’s *Arrival of the Monsoon*” writes:

Local fauna and flora, idioms and cultural practices are common in Rafat’s jargon. Through language, he creates a romantic aura seeped in local practices and lifestyle. In comparison to the widely established and historically renowned British Romanticism, Rafat’s romantic ideals are Pakistani in nature. The basic tenets of nature and individuality of man are kept intact by Rafat, who described them in a completely local setting . . . (115)

The metaphor of “liberating wind” is used by Rafat in the poem *Arrival of the Monsoon* to refer to the freedom movement of the subcontinent, and he calls Pakistan “the coniferous lands” which represent the ecoregional significance of the place. He continues using imagery of nature to represent displaced people and writes:

. . . *The birds are tossed
sideways and back, and lifted against their will.*

According to Ayesha Tariq, birds can be a metaphor for diasporic people who were forced to leave their land against their will. In the end, Rafat mentions Monsoon Rain which sweeps away the bloodshed on the streets, it washes away the external and internal wounds of the people and becomes the reason for new plantation and

vegetation, new beginnings. Every tree also shed off the dust of bitter incident of partition in the rain and seemed fresh now (www.academia.edu). His other poems, e.g. “Squirrels”, “Going after Geese”, “Storm, Picnic in the Sun”, “Wedding in the Flood”, “The Sparrow”, “The Kingfisher”, “Grave in the Park”, “Birds on a Polo-Field”, and “The Bottle-Bird Tree” make a lot of nature imagery and can be studied for poetic ecocriticism which has not been done before.

Arguably the most well-known type of literature in Pakistan, second only to poetry, is that of *Afsana*, which may be described as the short story genre of Urdu and other Pakistani languages. One of the significant features of a short story is its locale: in the mountains, on a riverbank, in a boat, on a seashore or in fields or hills, for example, with air, land and water all seen to be fundamental aspects.

There is a story of a lunatic told in Sadat Hassan Manto’s “Toba Tek Singh”, who does not understand why he has been forced to leave his land to go to India following the subcontinent’s partition. He feels an overwhelming and soul-deep love and dedication to his birth land and so, despite his craziness, he is not willing to migrate. Accordingly, he is forced to the border, where there is to be an exchange of lunatics. Hence, the story becomes a tale of the division of geographical lands, Pakistan and India, where the theory of Buell’s “place-attachment” is evident. Manto writes:

But they had no idea where Pakistan was. That was why they were all at a loss whether they were now in India or in Pakistan. If they were in India, then where was Pakistan? If they were in Pakistan, how come that only a short while ago they were in India? How could they be in India a short while ago and now suddenly in Pakistan? (par. 6)

According to Buell, the lands are “settings for the constitution of social relations, and with which people can identify” (*The Future* 64) and so the idea of land division does not have any meaning to the characters. Therefore, violent consequences of land divisions create discomfort because it leaves people emotionally paralysed to identify themselves with land and nonhuman resources and species also suffer the interventions. One day the protagonist climbed up the tree and went a branch higher, and threatened with the punishment he declared, “I don’t want to live in India and Pakistan. I’m going to make my home right here on this tree” (Manto par. 7). His stay on the tree represents nature free of nationalism and borders. He is ordered to cross the border. However, he refuses and stands firm, and ends up dying on the spot – on the piece of land that belonged to no country:

On one side, behind barbed wire, stood together the lunatics of India and on the other side, behind more barbed wire, stood the lunatics of Pakistan. In between, on a bit of earth which had no name, lay Toba Tek Singh. (par. 37)

The story provides a powerful reflection portraying the love of a man for his homeland. A crazy man was used by Manto to demonstrate that the bond between human and soil is a natural relationship as opposed to a political love for abstract ideas.

In “Raees Khana”, a short story written by Ahmad Nadeem Qasmi (1916-2006), there is a wife of a caretaker of a hill-station guest house who is sexually assaulted by a wealthy guest, causing such devastation that the couple’s relationship does not survive. However, as the two separate and leave their home, a rainstorm strikes and prevents them from leaving the guest house. It is with this natural occurrence and their innocent smiles that the two return to their rightful place.

A collection of short stories entitled *Qaim Deen*, written by Ali Akbar Natiq (born 1976), encompasses two different *Afsanas*, which tell how the people of Punjab (the Land of Five Rivers) relate to their rivers. In one of the stories called “Qaim Deen”, a buffalo thief, who is a well-known swimmer, passes over the border separating India and Pakistan, swimming across the river, journeying through a dense forest and entering one of the villages of India, where he then steals buffalos and herds them back to Pakistan under cover of night-time darkness. As a reward and in recognition of such courage and the harm inflicted upon the enemy country, he is given a hero status at home. It is then that the police come to demand of their share, and the religious clerics to ask for their share of charity. The character, recognised as the best swimmer, is also seen to be tirelessly helpful and selfless when it comes to helping his people, especially during instances of flooding that hit the village. However, when there is cooperation between India and Pakistan, the activities of the buffalo thief are reported, and he is arrested and imprisoned for a very long time. This causes the man to feel abandoned and resentful, with anger and bitterness growing during his stay in prison. When released, the people then declare him to be a lunatic as he shouts at them and throws stones at their homes in the expression of his feelings. This makes the situation more complex, with his son then tying him up inside the house with a tree. Once again, a flood hits the village, with the buffalo thief, the best swimmer of the village, bound and not able to save himself from the waters he once loved. The story highlights that nature cannot hurt anyone unless it is directed to do so as unfortunately it is being controlled by humans who never cease to hurt each other.

Arguably two of the most profound examples of eco-writing to have come from Pakistan are that of Mustansar Hussain Tarar's novel *Bahao* (The Flow) published in 2014 and Amna Mufti's *Pani Mer Raha Hai* (The Water is Dying) released in 2018. *Bahao* is a literary lament detailing the death of the waters that were continuously flowing. The novel demonstrates how ancient times could pick up on the arrival of the high waters, which would ensure a fruitful crop and thus extend their livelihoods. Written in the backdrop of the Indus Water Treaty between India and Pakistan, Amna Mufti's *Pani Mer Raha Hai* (The Water is Dying) criticizes the extreme human interference into nature that blocks flow of some rivers and completely destroys the flora and fauna attached to them. Nature, acting as angry being commands the waterless wild life to attack the planners of the treaty. The house of the leading officer is occupied by birds and animals of all sorts. This hints upon the possibility of the situation where human encroachment of nature can be retaliated.

Similarly, the novel *Jagay Hain Khwab Mein* (Awake in Dreams) written in 2015, in Urdu, by Akhtar Raza Saleemi, is located in the Abbottabad mountains, with its location recognised as one of the freshest in the Urdu literature. The protagonist detailed in the story is not only a nature-lover but also an explorer of nature, and a student of philosophy and physics. He feels at one with the earth when sleeping at the mouth of a cave when the snow falls on his village. More specifically, he tries to distinguish the patterns in the stars following a snowfall, notably when the sky is at its most clear. He also observes and tries to capture the past and future times. As the novel showcases, one day after meeting an accident during an earthquake, he goes in the comma, and begins to live in his ancestors' personalities. His lifelong dream of closely

seeing scenes of all ages takes the shape of a series of dreams that he begins living. The plot driven by earthquakes, floods and snowstorms, images coming from villages built in the jungles, waters falling from the mountains show nature recognised at the core of the book's overall plot, positioning the novel as a great pantheistic work.

The short story *Barf ka Ghonslah* (The Nest of Snow) written by Hameed Shahid in 2015, tells the tale of the link between the human and the bird, which takes place on a cold mountainous town. The story tells of a bird being locked out of the house and away from its nest, causing the bird to die during the cold of a winter's night. The bird is mourned over by the story's protagonist, which emphasises how the divide between nonhuman nature and humans is grieved.

Thus, Urdu poetry, short fiction and novel represent nature extensively. Poets are seen using natural objects as standards to define the beauty of their beloveds. Writers show characters that love and respect nature. Going a step further Urdu writers and poets are also representing natural catastrophes as a consequence of the unending human interference in the affairs of nature. The more this body of literature is studied by academics and discussed in classrooms, the more it would educate the people regarding environmental issues.

Contrarily, I see that there are fewer references to the environment in Pakistani English fiction, and even the ones that are found are in very muted tones. So, a few Pakistani Anglophonic books fall into the environmental category, with blurred indicators of being classified as a pro or anti-environmental, sinking into a middle ground. Pakistani English novelists like Mohsin Hamid, Uzma Aslam Khan, Mohammed Hanif and Kamila Shamsie have centered their environmental sensibilities

around issues such as pollution, environmental degradation, atomic and radioactive apocalypse, eco-cosmopolitanism, population growth and gradual rise of the contaminated communities in urbanized metropolitan cities of Pakistan both explicitly and implicitly, consciously and unconsciously. Filth-ridden cities like Karachi and Lahore, urbanisation, disease, crime, deteriorating environmental conditions and changing landscape portrayed by these novelists are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Kamila Shamsie's *In the City by the Sea* depicts Karachi as:

Outside the world was dust. Dust swirled the streets, filled Hasan's nostrils, weighed down the air, made very intake of breath a conscious action. The city had changed in a week. It used to be home, but now it was just a place that existed outside. (38)

In Mohsin Hamid's *Moth Smoke*, Lahore appears no different than Karachi. For him Lahore's atmosphere is "dulled by a layer of dust" (95), "there are no stars because of the dust" (16) and "the sun is completely blotted out by a dirty sun" (99). Similarly, stagnation and sickness in Hamid's *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* (2014) present environmental crisis with a dystopic vision. The poisoned atmosphere in the novel is an example of Rob Nixon's (2011) theory of "slow violence". With a critique of socio-economic problems, the novel is an alarm towards environmental degradation.

Jamil Ahmad's *The Wandering Falcon* (2011) also envisions green spaces of Pakistan's tribal regions in Baluchistan province. Afzul analyses the novel as:

The brutally all-consuming natural terrain of Baluchostan is highlighted through the four natural classical elements such as wind, earth, water and fire, which according to an ancient Greeks formed the basis of analysis in understanding both the natural and the material

world. These non-human spheres whether it be the blistering wind of a hundred and twenty days, the wasted barren land where the borders of Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan meet, the water hole where thirst ridden men find momentary respite, or the fire and armor that the tribesmen always carry, demonstrate how the path between the natural and the unhuman has refused to coalesce in harmony despite the struggle of the Pawindahs, these foot people, to keep it so. (“Ecocriticism” Crossing Boundaries”)

Humans’ unbridled use of resources and unlimited technologies and its impact as discussed by Wallace and Beck are evident at a few places in Shamsie’s *Burnt Shadows* as she conveys that there were “cluster bombs” (235) everywhere and nuclear experiment “did nothing beautiful” (66). Wallace’s “nuclear criticism” (*Risk Criticism* 4) also appears at some points in the novel depicting the risks imagined by the writer in various ways. In such risk scenarios technology rises as a risk (Heise *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet* 143) making the environment not “risk-free” nor pure in any sense. Kamila Shamsie’s *A God in Every Stone* is read by Maseeh with “enough instances to prove Shamsie’s positive stand on saving earth that is being more abused than used by human beings” (“Ecocriticism and Sustainable Development”).

In their comparative ecocritical study of Pakistani and American fiction “Environmental Discourse: A Comparative Ecocritical Study of Pakistani and American Fiction in English”, Makhdoom and Yaqoob analyse Khan’s *Trespassing* as:

Khan represents different facets of Pakistani life and culture, politics, and geography, . . . highlights environmental issues and portrays a landscape contaminated with images of “waste” and sprawling “garbage”. The city of Karachi is engulfed in smoke and toxic fumes due to massive traffic influx “belching gallons of carbon

dioxide” into the atmosphere . . . The private and public spaces, urban landscapes and Karachi coast represent a picture of the contaminated wasteland. Khan’s perspective on waste on a deeper note represent human indifference and alienation towards the environment. (263)

Shahraz’s *The Holy Woman* using an ecofeminist lens also presents the protagonist Zaribano as a property of a man and a fertile land with no desires of her own to be exploited by a man. The narrator in the novel states:

Land represents fertility. For my family and daughter, it spells doom and sterility. To keep the land in the family, my daughter is destined to remain forever barren and childless, denied the joys of motherhood; her arms never to know the aching joys of holding a newborn to her breast. (Shahraz 70)

Umaira Aleem et al. study Anis Shivani’s *Karachi Raj* as “a crowded urban setting, with too many vehicles, blockages, and everyone is “oblivious to other people.” The novel describes a horrifying situation in Karachi. According to Aleem et al.:

The unequal distribution of resources, including wealth, education, and health facilities; the misconceptions about the use of new technologies and doubts about the scientific finding; and ignorance, illiteracy, rigidity, sectarianism are the elements through which nature has been portrayed in the novel. The writer depicts nature regarding deterioration of environment and exploitation as well as mismanagement of natural resources. (342)³⁷

³⁷ Aleem, Umaira et al. “War on Terra and Eco-Critical Discursivity: Analyzing the Role of Cultural Productions in Creating Eco-Consciousness.” *International Journal of English Linguistics*, vol. 8, no. 3, 2018, pp. 339-344.

While these novels except Mohsin Hamid's give just some glimpses to changed and polluted urban life, it is Khan's continuous and systematic work which makes novels fall into the full-fledged genre of environmental fiction or nature writing.

Uzma Aslam Khan

Khan is a pioneer in shaping a canon for environmental fiction in Pakistani literature. Though Khan's work is not limited to environmental themes, her environmental commitment is evident throughout her works, as my analysis shows. Khan has lived in Pakistan, the US and the UK, giving her a broader perspective enabling an understanding and articulation of grass-root politics and complexities of the region in a local and global context. So, it is interesting to note that Khan's works tackle many of the local issues in which the natural environment is a highly significant element. There is a peculiar cultural and nationalistic approach in terms of attending to the environment, but despite having different experiences living in many countries, Khan's attachment to her geographical landscape, the sense of place, the environmental crisis, the animals, the climate and the human and nonhuman relationship make her an important Pakistani writer.

The marginalization of environmental issues is a core concern in her works. The environment is becoming an increasingly important topic of investigation in Pakistan, in various fields, including literature. Categorized into the genre of contemporary Pakistani environmental literature, Khan's novels can establish the basis of an environmental 'canon'.

Human intervention and transformation of physical nature is the subject in Khan's novels. She also stresses the role of socio-economic inequality in environmental geopolitics and critiques militarism and neoliberal globalization like "slow violence", to use Nixon's phrase again, impacting developing countries in the Global South. Sometimes strands from social ecology also dominate Khan's works where readers see growing environmentalism, and its impact on the environment linked to ecocriticism.³⁸ Khan's perception of social injustice done to marginalised communities of human or nonhuman enables readers to understand environmental injustice. Keeping this in view the novels highlight the North-South dichotomy in environmental justice, which is viewed by critics as North owes an ecological debt to the South due to unjust distribution and appropriation of environmental space.³⁹

Khan has written five books so far, and her books deal with the environmental consciousness and indigenous communities as the major theme that none of the other writers writing in her times has discussed. Khan's debut novel *The Story of Noble Rot* (2001) starts with the sweet taste of wine coming from grapes, and we come across a story of Momin with his love for fish and birds. Her second novel *Trespassing* (2006) opens with the marine life description mentioning fish, turtles and silkworms of the silk factory. Rahman (2012) attempts to interpret the novel from eco-cosmopolitanism perspective and also discusses the relationship between the different living and non-living phenomena. Khan's third novel *The Geometry of God* (2009) is about lost species due to climatic change and desert hillsides. With a sense of "enlightenment thinking",

³⁸ As Buell remarks of this 'environmental justice revisionism', issues of 'environmental welfare and equity' are of 'more pressing concern to the impoverished and socially marginalised' than nature preservation: *The Future of Environmental Criticism*, p.112.

³⁹ Anand 2004; Martinez-Alier 2002.

the novel also presents the idea discussed by Habermas,⁴⁰ and I see Khan developing creative solutions taking into account the impact of powerful groups over constructed themes and discourses. Khan's fourth novel *Thinner than Skin* (2012) is a rich portrayal of indigenous Pakistan. *The Miraculous True History of Nomi Ali* (2019)⁴¹ is Khan's latest novel about forgotten parts in the history of the subcontinent narrating alliances and betrayals during war, colonization and partition. It is set in the surreal beauty of Andaman Islands and informs the readers how the islands and seas became a battlefield.

Khan's characters help to understand the living experience of people of various ethnicities and classes including their lifestyles; eating habits, hobbies, entertainment and work routines and through the portrayal of their life experiences, they have laid bare the thinking and the deep recesses of the psyche of these people. Within the confines of her Pakistani cultural and political sphere, Khan speaks a language of the landscape – a language that has sympathy for the land and Nature that surrounds her characters' existence. Her works address other major themes that other writers have been writing about, but the green side of the country dominates her literary works. In this regard, her novels depict a close relationship between literature and the environment as she has "textualized" (Kumari 1) the environmental concerns in her fiction. Therefore, the works selected here are worthy of close attention in terms of their exploration of the environment.

⁴⁰ According to Habermas, socially constructed meanings, theories, and assumptions, and languages always have reality hidden in them. Power relationships are always reflected and reinforced whenever there is an obstruction in reality. This obstruction results in shaping and distorting the knowledge (Innes and Booher, 2010, 23).

⁴¹ At the conclusion of this research, the fifth novel was not released so it is not part of the analytical discussion.

Khan has been chosen for the study because she uses extensive environmental references in her novels. The stories in the novels are ideally suited for literary analysis as they are set in specific locations in the land of the developing postcolonial society, and she has used various literary techniques and made the environment the focus and foreground instead of the background. According to Lawrence Buell, an environmental literary text “gathers itself around a commitment to environmentality from whatever critical vantage point” (*The Future* 11). Therefore, Khan talks about environmental networks, and her stories are important in contemporary times in promoting environmental impulses. Her novels are full of “ecological systematicity” (Taylor 362) and her stories subordinate human interests to nonhuman biotic processes making her work an appropriate choice for ecocritical enquiry.

The natural environment is particularly evident in Khan’s *Trespassing* (2003) and *Thinner than Skin* (2012). These novels directly criticise capitalism, materialism and environmental degradation. Removal and relocation of people are depicted in *Trespassing*. A racialized space is created for the central character, Salaamat in this novel, and he is pushed to relocate himself. This forced relocation of people is also one of the consequences of environmental control. Salaamat becomes a representative of the marginalized groups struggling to maintain his indigenous identity and control over limited resources. This gives an idea of postcolonial environmental politics and environmental justice and makes *Trespassing* a negative critique with a positive articulation.

Thinner than Skin can be seen as a ‘nature writing’. The novel highlights that among the many exciting aspects of Pakistan, its ecological beauty and diversity is a

prominent feature which should not be compromised or taken for granted. The Himalayan beauty is seen via the politics of war, economic concerns and tourism. Khan, in this novel effectively traces the actions that are insulated from public criticism. The traditional life of nomads is shown disturbed with the process of development, factory installations and urban cultural norms. The novel highlights the risks and vulnerability nomads of the region in particular and poor people of South in general face from environmental degradation and resource extraction. It also highlights how nations are faced with unjust environmental burdens due to imperialistic powers. The territorial disputes and military encroachments also highlight ecological disturbance. Khan also highlights the heavy economic and political reliance on logging in relation to wood products manufacturing. There is no action on the state's part to mitigate. Heavy militarized presence is seen which highlights how armed conflict affects ecopolitics and imagination. So, military violence and weaponized landscapes are critical parts of the novel. She points towards the fact that more than any other human action ecological change and degradation are caused by armed conflict and militarization.⁴² Khan provides narratives that tie environmental issues to the wars and migration of weak and subaltern communities and thus, promotes strong theoretical engagement with war and militarism.

Khan argues that policymakers can influence the conditions that make people able or unable to participate and act effectively. She helps the audience in recognising the imbalance of policies and provides the information to increase the audience power. She opposes traditional and orthodox approaches to one of the crucial issues and

⁴² Also read, "The Ecological Cost of Militarization" by Kenneth A. Goulding published in *Peace Review*, vol. 19, no. 3, 2007, pp. 331-334.

through her stories, she is creating a rational dialogue in the academia about the environment.

The analyses also reflect the responsibilities of the industrialised countries to restrict and minimize environmental and socio-economic impacts on developing countries because “the largest share of historical and current global emissions of greenhouse gases has originated in developed countries, that per capita emissions in developing countries are still relatively low and that share of global emissions originating in developing countries will grow to meet their social and developmental needs” (1).⁴³ Pakistan despite facing the worst impacts of climatic change has no voice for the environment in political debates to prevent environmental degradation. Khan creates a space for a coalition of Pakistani students, academics and indigenous and civil groups to counteract and articulate visions regarding environmental consciousness. This also takes readers to wonder whose future generations are being sought to be protected, “the Western World’s or the Third World’s?” (Agarwal and Narain 18). The novels identify the intersection of racism and environmental degradation through unjust environmental protection and policies that occur in groups of colour internationally and poor communities of developing countries. The novels show that the issues of environmental degradation continue to challenge political, economic and natural systems in the country. These novels are saturated with environmental degradation and warn the readers towards future changes due to a scarcity of natural resources and conflicts between different groups of humans.

⁴³ “United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change”, 1992, pp. 1-23.
<https://unfccc.int/resource/docs/convkp/conveng.pdf>

In the field of critical environmental studies, particularly humanities, Khan illuminates the reader with the relationship between humans and the environment and just like environmental sociologists she highlights that in environmental studies this relationship cannot be explained better “without theorizing a link between natural resource extraction, armed violence, and environmental degradation” (Downey et al. 417). She stands as an advocate for the connection between human and nonhuman for better environmental conditions besides being an author. Wapner defines “critical environmental studies” as a step that questions “existing power dynamics and seeks not only to reform but to transform social and political conditions” (7) through multi-disciplinary fields. Khan has furthered the need to revisit environmental studies through English fiction in Pakistani literature. Khan’s generation of environmentally conscious scholarship through intersectional approaches and studies questions the environmental degradation as “how different forms of inequality and social power are viewed as entrenched within society” (Pellow 233). By foregrounding nonhuman as those who occupy a significant space in the controlled and threatened environment, these novels respond to oppression, domination and environmental degradation. In this way, through her novels, Khan participates in the “counterhegemonic ideological production” (Spivak 2010, 27) by academics and creates an academic scholarship. So, Khan’s contribution is not just environmental degradation depiction, but it also serves the purpose of developing environmental justice which according to Foster and Cole⁴⁴ is the merging of legal defense, academic inquiry, grassroots activism and government action.

⁴⁴ Foster, Sheila R. and Luke W. Cole. *From the Ground Up: Environmental Racism and the Rise of Environmental Justice Movement*. New York University Press, 2001.

The ecocritical accounts of borders, weaponisation, strategically operationalised regions and militarisation are a great contribution by Khan in Pakistani novels. Such critical action of Khan through her writing motivates me to take up this dissertation. Therefore, the aim of the dissertation is: to complete picture of Khan's ecocritical significance, by engaging with what has so far been ignored. Birkerts with regards to ecocriticism, asks, "Can literature serve as an agency of awareness? (4); As an ecocritic, I would say yes.

Methodology

The trends through the last thirty or forty years inform the readings I make throughout the study. The growing public noticing environmental issues is the first of these trends. Therefore, this dissertation, "Exploring Environmental Consciousness in Uzma Aslam Khan's Fiction", is the first-ever thoroughly researched work on Khan's literary works which will help to understand Pakistan's position in environmental politics through literary analysis. Keeping in mind the scope of the research, the current study is delimited to an analysis of the novels of only one author; Uzma Aslam Khan. I (the researcher of this study) will help to set socio-political goals to adopt policies regarding environmental consciousness. The study can help to lead academics to take care of the environment, public health and community well-being.

My dissertation is a qualitative research study carried out through close textual analysis of Khan's four novels *The Story of Noble Rot*, *Trespassing*, *The Geometry of God* and *Thinner than Skin* to explore environmental consciousness and the relationship of human being and the natural environment. Ecocriticism offers a broad theoretical framework; therefore, delimiting my subject I chose to use Lawrence Buell's definition

of environmental writing. Khan's creative fusing of local, regional, and cultural references with important insights from natural sciences makes her novels a worthy example of environmental criticism capturing the "interdisciplinary mix of literature-and-environment studies" (Buell *The Future of Environmental Criticism*, viii). It is illuminating to know how Khan's novels qualify as "environmentally oriented work" (7) by engaging in multiple ways incorporating four basic characteristics of environmental literature described by Buell in *The Environmental Imagination*. Khan's novels satisfy Buell's criteria for "environmental texts . . . (1) *"The nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history"*; (2) *"The human interest is not understood to be the only legitimate interest"*; (3) *"Human accountability to the environment is part of the text's ethical orientation"*; (4) *"Some sense of the environment as a process rather than as a constant or a given is at least implicit in the text"* (6-8, original emphasis).

Taking basic principles of Buell's ecocritical theory, this study examines the environmental themes discoursed by Khan to create environmental consciousness in Pakistan. As a cultural commentator, she portrays the ongoing processes in society. Generally following theories of ecocriticism in relation to postcolonialism, a theoretical framework is prepared to analyse the selected novels to highlight how environmental degradation becomes a norm. In this regard, I developed a link between the policies and strategies of powerful groups to consume and dominate the natural environment and environmental resources and the resultant impact on the psyche of the natives and the local surroundings which has given rise to complex interdisciplinary debates. The

study aims to analyse how Khan is addressing and portraying the themes of global environmental debates in Pakistani culture. This is important because throughout my research, the Pakistani sociopolitical setup seemed to have a disconnect between government's announcement of environmental protection policies and actual actions carried after the initiation of projects. Through an ecocritical analysis of the national and international policies, individual human attitudes and behaviors, the impact of imperialism, the role of the environment, and consumption practices, I explore how selected literary works from a Pakistani woman writer highlight the capitalist ideologies and ecocritical concerns and call for the development of ecoethics in the developing countries like Pakistan. From observation and data collected, it seemed that Pakistanis are also unaware of the disconnect and pressing environmental concerns. Maltreatment of natural resources and negligence towards environmental issues has marginalised the environment. Khan engages in discourses regarding environmentalism and uses her writing as a means to present political criticism. This study reflects how the state institutional structures have created a gap between the public and real issues and oppressed the society to think for the environment. The study does not, however, claim that all political groups of the state are evil as there are people working towards marginalised human and nonhuman communities.

Given the current global importance of environmentalism, this study assumes a special significance. It studies the imaginative ways Khan, as a writer-activist and artist, responds to environmental debates. In other words, it examines techniques as well as ideas and beliefs that discuss environmental degradation and how Khan struggles to support and sustain environmental ideas. My study identifies the specific literary and

rhetorical techniques that Khan uses to contest environmental depiction and enables Pakistani readers' ability to creatively and compassionately think about the environmental change. The environmental issues are studied through various textual strategies of representation, including characterisation, language, imagery, descriptions and narrative structures, etc. In this regard the focus of analysis has been on analysing the characters relationship with environment and images of nature used to foreground nature.

I aim to cover debates revolving around the environmental issues through analysis of selected novels and consider how these debates in imaginative works also produced in the academic discourse are linked with international politics. I argue that Khan plays a critical role in narrating environmental issues and shows resistance to an important global issue of climate change.

Analysis of the relationship between human and nonhuman is done through ecocritical theories. The focus of the investigation determines whether the textual representation generates environmental awareness or not. In this regard, the analysis also involves how socio-political factors influence human conditions and affect the environment.

For this study, I define the “imperialists” as the government bodies of the US and other western countries, including the UK. I would also like to clarify that when I interchangeably use the term Global South in this dissertation as Third World or developing country, I mean the countries that were exploited by colonial powers to have control (Thomas-Slayter 2003; Anand 2004). For Isbister, the Third World represents “the poor of the world . . . who are disenfranchised in an international system

dominated by the industrialized countries: the North, the developed, the rich” (16). Though the colonial rule has formally ended, still Pakistan experiences the lingering effects of colonialism as all the colonised countries experience critical situations and exploitative links due to inheriting the legacies left by colonial rule. It is important to clarify that when I use the terms Global North and Global South which overlap in many contexts I do not refer to the countries on the basis of their existence below or above the equator but my concept of these terms is formed by Anand’s view who sees North-South political context as shaped by colonial and imperial history.⁴⁵

Also, I use the term postcolonial as a condition that continues as “the colonial aftermath” (Gandhi 4). It also refers to resistance approaches against colonial exploitation “that often precede and continues long after independence” (Nash 104) because the legacies of colonialism remain “in new forms of domination that follow and extend old imperial lines of unequal interconnection” (105). Similarly, neo-colonialism refers to “forms of political and economic domination through which the West continues to exploit much of the worlds” (113) through “political, ideological, economic, and social practices” (Said 9). While many novels in a clear way, provide the socio-political context of Pakistan, the economic history, as highlighted by Khan will provide the political-economic context necessary to comprehend the environmental issues in Pakistan. The research thus argues that Khan has established a Pakistani ecocritical narrative that targets the naturalisation of imperialism. So, I see Khan contributing to “a critical engagement with colonialism and its continued legacies” (Nash 105) in Pakistan.

⁴⁵ Anand 2004

Since there is a lack of inculcation of environmental consciousness in Pakistani society as reflected in the debates among characters, my dissertation challenges that gap in environmental education, the shattering of barriers between humans and the natural world through interaction between the humans and nonhumans as analysed in Khan's novels gives me a confidence that further research on these works will mark the beginning of a debate on environmental consciousness in Pakistani English Studies. My study also highlights that policies and in fact the authorities perpetuate the ideology of human superiority over nature. Novels like Khan's can help in achieving the goals of environmental education as research on ecological concepts and processes can help understand the human interaction with nature which is lacking in Pakistani English literary studies.

In order to understand the concerns over environmental issues in the novels, I gather a mix of primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include Khan's four novels. For background information regarding environmental issues, secondary sources in the form of related books, research articles from various journals, newspapers and electronic media etc. were accessed through archives, websites and other relevant sources. Most of the documents were publicly available.

Structure (Chapterization)

The study is divided into seven chapters. Chapter one consists of the background of the research and its significance. Chapter two presents an analysis of the available literature relevant to ecocriticism by various theorists. The methodology of the research is also explained in detail. The theoretical framework of the study is also developed in this chapter.

The selected novels are analysed systematically and chronologically in four chapters. Chapter three, four, five and six in keeping with the theories of ecocriticism analyse *The Story of Noble Rot*, *Trespassing*, *The Geometry of God* and *Thinner than Skin*, respectively, to identify the environmental concerns in Pakistani society. The analysis attempts to explore how human beings respond to the natural environment under the influence of capitalist culture. Special attention is paid to the relationship between humankind and the natural environment and psychological impact of environmental degradation on human beings. The working of ideology in propagating consumerism and materialism and the resultant adverse effects on the criticality of individuals in relation to the natural environment is studied too.

Chapter seven brings the outcome and observations found through analysis of the selected novels.

Statement of the Problem

The study investigates the representation of the environment in selected fictional works of Uzma Aslam Khan to highlight the unethical, alienating and dehumanising effects of environmental degradation.

Research Questions

Therefore, my research aims to investigate how and why the natural environment is textualised and set as a foreground in Khan's novels. How do Khan's novels talk about environmental issues? How does Khan rationalize her effort to target the state agencies for their lack of action in response to environmental problems? How does the state institutions protect themselves from public scrutiny for their inaction regarding

environmental issues? How far do the selected texts support the psychological and social transformation of the characters and their relationship with the natural environment (human and nonhuman life like plants, animals and other species and components of the ecosystem)? Does Khan support capitalism concerning environmental issues or present a critique of it through stories of the characters? Does Khan have a political ideology behind the creation of such texts? How does the literary study of these novels contribute to raising the public environmental consciousness in Pakistani society that will eventually feed into attitudes? Additionally, how do these novels define their author as a strong ecocritic?

Studying how environmental degradation is ignored in the socio-political life of the Pakistani characters in the novels is a good means to theorise the nature of such degradation as how it is experienced by individuals and collectives. In this regard, the Environmental Humanities, with their emphasis on context, form and ethics, provide a unique platform to study environmental issues. I will also explore the discursive intersections of US imperialism, militarism, climate change and environmental degradation as represented in novels. Furthermore, such humanistic understanding of environmental degradation will help the readers understand how the environment is controlled through politics and how discourses are created to support and sustain violence of the environment. How authoritative discourses stop readers from finding solutions to environmental problems. Attending to such discussions can also help readers recognise environmental degradation Pakistani authors have previously overlooked. All these perspectives enabled me to approach the texts under study in an ecocritical way. In Gramscian terms there is “an infinite range of strategies” of

resistance to counter hegemonic discourses (Femia 55) and ecocritical lens is one such tool used by Khan and myself in different ways. Khan's counter-colonial strategy of resistance to unjust US domination and other imperialist forces in Pakistan's economic and environmental governance is being held accountable in this dissertation for its exploitation of natural resources.

Thus, this dissertation argues that we should theorise environmental consciousness in the Pakistani context depicting violence done to nonhumans through and resulting in environmental degradation. My dissertation contributes to the work of 21st century "critical environmental studies" by expanding delineations of ecocriticism to focus on both environmental consciousness and how writers like Khan create awareness about it through novels. Thus, this study examines Pakistan's position in the ongoing climatic negotiations using the ecocritical lens. I situate my analysis within the theoretical perspectives of postcolonialism and ecocriticism, offering a way of conceptualising Pakistani literary environmental discourse.

My study is a critical contribution to rethinking how nature is perceived in contemporary Pakistani culture. It attempts to establish environmental concerns and environmental ethics through Khan's novels in Pakistan. The work tries to emphasise that natural world is not just the outer manifestation 'environment' of the human beings, but it also exists inside them, in their souls and minds. My study highlights the environmental collapse through analysis of psycho-social and socio-political attitudes and conditions represented through selected novels. I attempt to transform the idea of perceiving the environment in Pakistani culture. In the technologically and politically

influenced Pakistani society, I feel a compassionate relation to nature can bring a positive and healthy change in Pakistanis.

In writing and conducting this research, I feel my priority with this research is to advocate for the environmental consciousness, but my position within the country challenges my ability to do such advocacy – especially because I am a woman and will have a degree from abroad. My position as a young, university educated woman from Pakistan holds both positives and negatives for this study. On the one hand, I am a native, an insider who knows the ground realities and is in a better position to criticise the local participants as well as outside influencers for environmental negligence in Pakistan. On the other hand, I might be taken as a biased person trying to create a positive image of my country by criticising the western countries. Also, by criticizing my own government and citizens of my own country, I might be thought of as a comprador intellectual providing the native data to seek recognition from imperialists by showing what they desire or I might be honoured for being native writing back to the empire as does the author under study in my research. I am still determined to provide information to policymakers, thinkers, scholars, and researchers regarding environmental issues.

CHAPTER 3

“He has suffered mental as well as physical trauma”:

Analysis of The Story of Noble Rot

According to Slovic: “Storytelling, combined with clear exposition, produces the most engaging and trenchant scholarly discourse . . . Ecocritics should take a hint. Ecocriticism without narrative is like stepping off the face of a mountain — . . . we must seek an appropriately grounded, conscious language. The language of stories, charged with emotion and sensation, maybe our best bet” (“Ecocriticism with or without Narrative” 1995, n.p.). Khan’s work achieves this aim in *The Story of Noble Rot* (2001) through the story of an impoverished six-year-old boy, Momin, whose mother, Malika, promises: “I’d rescue you from the factory. I told you I’d send you to school.” (95). She is committed to securing a safe future for her child. Momin symbolises the problem of child labour in Pakistan, where children work alongside adult factory workers enduring dire working conditions. The novel highlights that working class people occupy the most dangerous jobs in Pakistan and are the first to be impacted by environmental disasters. By giving voice to underprivileged characters, investigating their ecological displacements and psychological traumas, Khan depicts the changes in the environment affecting human and nonhuman actors.

The novel is a powerful protest against unhealthy working conditions, destruction of the environment by exploitative industries, lack of opportunities for young kids to play in open green and clean spaces and exploitation of poor people by

powerful corporate groups which Khan refers to as The Big People in the novel: “The Big People want you only to satisfy their own greed” (111). It is also an attempt to draw attention to the fight to eradicate poverty and against inequality. It is an attack on industries that poison both people and environment. Momin works at Masood Carpets. His father, Chaudry, is a carpenter who works as a traditional woodworker and his mother Malika is employed as a maid in Karachi’s upmarket residential area.

Parallel to Momin’s story is that of Mrs Hinna Masood who grew up in the Cholistan desert in Southern Punjab region and came to Karachi after marrying the industrialist Mr Masood. The story informs how she misses her indigenous Saraiki⁴⁶ lifestyle despite having adopted the artificial culture of the city. Khan writes:

She was completely illiterate and spoke not a word of English. Compelled by a sense of his social standing, [Mr Masood] employed a full-time English tutor, as well as a woman to cultivate in his wife city manners and tastes that he hoped would inflict a shame of her past. She was Hinna no more. (41)

But she learned slowly, and while sleeping reverted to her native Seraiki.

Momin: A Case of Forced Labour

Momin’s job at Masood Carpets has poisoned his young body. According to Cynthia F. Bearer (1995), professor of pediatrics:

When children are exposed to contaminants, their developing biological makeup—the way in which they absorb, distribute, and

⁴⁶ Saraiki language is considered as a dialect of greater Punjabi. It is commonly spoken in south western Punjab, southern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and borders regions of Balochistan and Sindh province.

metabolise chemicals—will also affect how their bodies deal with the foreign substance. Each of these factors, along with the customs, laws, and regulations that affect the way in which children are exposed to the contaminants, has implications for the well-being of children in the years to come. (11)

Driven by poverty into work, Momin is exposed to harmful and miserable working conditions. The doctor says: ““His bones are permanently damaged. He has been seriously wounded at his job. Hence the, uh, as you so vividly put it, scimitar shape”” (Khan 2001, 82). His body has curved due to a constant sitting posture while weaving a carpet in the dark halls of the factory in Karachi.⁴⁷ Momin’s job at the factory highlights a common exploitation where appalling socio-economic conditions force millions of minors to work in hazardous factories. According to Federal Publications report (2012):

There were strong indications that many children working in the carpet industry and their families were in forced/bonded labor, as one-fifth of the households were indebted, and two-thirds of the indebted households reported having difficulties repaying their debts. (Hansen and Rosell 9)

Momin’s father, overwhelmed by economic concerns ignores his child’s physical and emotional well-being. He thinks the family’s immediate socio-economic survival is more important than his wish to go to school and Momin should not stop working. Chaudry remains oblivious to Momin “who had ceased growing at five and sighed in

⁴⁷ Under the new legislation in 2017, the government of Sindh banned children under fourteen from working as minors were seen working in the factories from brick making to carpet weaving etc.

his sleep like a dead man turning in his grave” (19) and has “a disfigured fist” (105). Momin has inhaled viral agents and dust, endured high temperatures, low light and inadequate ventilation which harmed his health. With the rise of industry, Chaudry has shifted from village to the city of Karachi to earn more money. The factories encroach indigenous land and spread hazardous chemicals into the water channels and air. As nature is assaulted, indigenous individuals lose their territory and livelihood and start working in the factories. In migrating from a village, they have lost homelands and compromised their health. Khan reveals how these developments disturb and dislocate local inhabitants who have survived for centuries on sustainable processes, working in harmony with nature. This is also depicted in both *Trespassing* and *Thinner than Skin*. Momin is very poorly paid yet makes a vital economic contribution to his family. However, the illness and injuries he suffers are a great concern to his mother Malika and she wants to save him from further consequences.

Momin is involved in all aspects of carpet-making: preparation of raw wool to produce dyed yarn, spinning, dyeing, washing, clipping, stretching, binding and hand-knotting. He became an active weaver at a tender age of six. The employment might have saved him from a life lived on the streets, but, “the life he led was perhaps no less perilous than a life on the streets, for by the age of five he had inhaled so much fiber at the factory that Malika could pluck it from the air he exhaled” (16). In the factory, he is exposed to dire health hazards and suffers respiratory ailments having difficulty in breathing due to the heavily polluted dark enclosed environment of the factory. His good eyesight is an asset in creating intricate patterns in very poor light. But his eyes are strained due to insufficient light in the factory workshops. His mother “shuddered,

for the way he squinted at the rising sun” (54). While he slept, his mother “would listen to his body” and “she would cover his eyes with tealeaves, coaxing the blue gossamer lids to cease fluttering, and wonder what visions disturbed the six hours of rest he was permitted” (16). Momin’s fingers have sustained cuts from the sharp instruments used in weaving carpets. As a little boy he uses scissors, cutters, needles and knives, all dangerous tools which add to the difficulty of his work. That is why every night Malika “soothed his tumid fingers, dyed orange with henna to cool the sores” (16). The report by Hansen and Rosell while quoting Vijayagopalan (1993) proves that:

The following hazards and dangers for child carpet workers were identified: work-related injuries, eye disease, eye strain due to insufficient light in workshops, pain due to continuously sitting in specific fixed positions, pulmonary diseases due to wool dust, headaches due to the concentration required by the work, skeletal deformation, weakness and malnutrition due to inadequate food, arthritis, skin diseases, and physical and sexual abuse. (22-23)

The dirtier industries thrive the more hazardous it becomes for workers. Khan criticises government functionaries and business managers for their illegal and violent impact on the lives of ordinary men and women. As carpet exports dwindle due to restrictions on child labour, the “philanthropic Masoods” (24) meet with the diplomat M. Chauclet, an important asset to the French Ministry of Commerce and Industry. Khan exposes the hypocrisy of the capitalist class who exploit the poor as:

Together, father and daughter had described how ignominious the embargo was, based on absurd charges, for the carpets were made by children whose families depended on them for their livelihood, who freely chose to work, indeed, for Tradition. Thus child-labour

propaganda, they argued, was ‘false and baseless’, and actually hurt the very children it claimed to protect, crippling the nation’s economy, forcing the government to subsidise twenty-five per cent of the industry. Carpet manufacturers were establishing welfare centres to ensure the children were well paid, and their health in tiptop condition. (23-24)

Here Khan illustrates how various capitalist interest groups intensify the problems of the country. She wants the reader to respond to critical forms of suffering and injustice as the novel presents a critique of physical, political, social and economic control of lower and marginalised groups to oppress them. Depressed to see her “son’s shrunk body”, Momin’s mother, Malika wonders:

He was nearly six, but barely three feet tall. Was it the angle or did his head, hands and feet really comprise the entire length his body? Did squatting at the loom stunt his growth or was he a congenital dwarf? (54)

Extremely worried, Malika asks the doctor: ““What about his sleep? He moans and picks imaginary lint from the air. What does that have to do with his bones?”” (Khan 2001, 82). The doctor replies: ““He has suffered mental as well as physical trauma”” (82). According to Rob Nixon: “to devise arresting stories, images and symbols adequate to the pervasive but elusive violence of delayed effects” (3) in a contemporary world is a major representational challenge. Discussing the concept of “slow violence” that “occurs gradually and out of sight” he proposes to “rethink – politically, imaginatively and theoretically” about deteriorating environmental conditions and urges writers to engage in “representational, narrative, and strategic challenges” posed by slow violence (2). Momin is exposed to unhealthy environmental conditions at the

workplace with loud noise and chemicals, heavy working loads and physical abuse. The trauma that Momin is experiencing is one form of slow violence which is killing the child from inside. It is visible on his body also but goes unnoticed in a society oriented around greed and profit. Khan's narrative strategy brings a global concern to the front through a local story.

Momin's underdeveloped body is compared with Tom Thumb⁴⁸ and called "twisted little imp" (111) by his new friend Saima in the house where his mother works. Saima reads him the stories, and his favourite one is *The Boy Who Talked To Trees*. Saima also knows that the boy loves nature, so she is seen to "sow wild fancies in the thirsty, freshly tilled earth of Momin's mind" (118-119). There is also a link between mentioning this fairy tale as Saima reads that Tom Thumb:

landed in the House of Big People. 'The Big People tore off his finery, including the good luck dori he wore around his neck, made from two hairs of his mother's eyebrows ... 'The ogres stuffed Tom Thumb in a dress of wood, which sawed his bones to powder. He became an all-purpose tool around house-bait for mice and rats, a broom to sweep out dirt, and a key to open locks. They jabbed him between their teeth like a toothpick, smothering him with their odious breath. They turned him into a bootjack. The stench of their socks sent him doubling over in a coughing fit, causing the wooden dress to crush him further. They twirled him in their ears and ordered. "Scratch!" and he scooped out mountains of sticky, yellow muck with naked fingers. 'Soon poor Tommy developed hideous warts all over his minor frame. If his mother were to see him now, she would never know him. He cried for her. Then he took matters

⁴⁸ An English folklore character, fairytale character with a size of a thumb. The tale is considered to be the first recorded English fairy tale.

into his own hands . . . ‘At last Tom Thumb had a good long rest.’
(109-111)

Similarly, Momin also lands at the house of the Masoods for whom he has worked. But in this case his mother manages to ask the owners to set him free. She stops sending him to the factory and brings him along to the houses where she works without telling Chaudry. The boy spends his time in the garden of their house. The deteriorating psychosocial health of Momin has disturbed Malika. She observes that a boy who was “obsessed with flowers and plants” (119) has become disinterested in his surroundings and is silent most of the time, and she plans to take him out frequently to open green spaces, gardens and water ponds. Momin begins spending time in the gardens of the two houses. Malika feels happy to see her child coming back to life, going to the garden “to paw the earth” (202) around the roses he loves. She feels a bit relieved that at least in the mornings, she gives him “three acres of utmost joy” (104). The boy loves seeing “the rose bed outside”, and the “pond, where the minnows were”. He feels delighted to think that:

in the spring, according to the man who had helped him with the pond, the fish would multiply. The water lilies and roses would bloom. He would plant other flowers in the rockery for the moles to scamper through. (216)

Factories like Masood Carpets are responsible for creating environmental pollutants, hazardous for both human and nonhuman parts of the ecosystem. The accumulation of atmospheric pollutants is highly unsafe for the most vulnerable members of the environment; children. Khan suggests crafting environmental policies keeping in mind the psychosocial well-being of the children who are more vulnerable to industrial

toxins. Momin's body is evidence that environmental degradation can have an adverse impact on the health of society.

Malika: A Woman's Effort to Combat Child Labour and Restore Love for Nature

Malika, Momin's mother, has "hoped to give Momin all the childhood things he had missed while at the factory" (93). Worrying about Momin, she thinks that "he could spend his life surrounded by the creatures he loved. Instead, at this very moment, he was trapped in a room full of splinters, and tomorrow he would return to one of burr" (63). So, she confronts her son's corporate boss, determined to rescue her son from unhealthy factory conditions "which destroyed children like her own" (160) as "she could never, despite her fears, have him pinioned again" (137). Malika wonders that "tycoons" like Mr Masood invest their wealth in controlling the "land", playing "Politics" and exploiting the poor to earn profit through "Carpets" (71). This makes the novel a critique of political leaders who fail to recognise the impact of environmental issues on the population, and especially the poorest in society.

Khan writes: "Malika told herself to at least take credit for Momin's happiness and health. She had liberated him from the factory, and in this, she had accomplished her goal" (170). Her son, Momin is now happy refilling the pond and that other creatures can rest inside it (136). He is delighted to think that it will attract "scores of dragonflies, other insects and naturally, birds" (137). The gardener tells Momin that pond is also big enough for fish and "water lilies. Those queens of all flowers" (137) and the boy listens "with tremendous sobriety" (137). Malika observes:

Momin followed the flight of the birds with deathly calm . . . In silence, he watched the scavengers ascend to the sun with elastic ease. There they floated, without even a flutter. His spirits seemed to lift with them, making life bearable. (56)

Momin starts getting better and recounts with fascination that how much he loves starlings, the “black birds with colourful dots on their wings pecking at the grass” (107) and flaps his arms and floats shrieking “‘I’m a crow! I’m a crow!’” (108). Malika plans to take Momin to “marshy Mancher Lake, north of Haelji” near the ancient town of Sehwan Sharif “where her family had lived for generations before her great-grandfather finally moved to the city. She had never seen the swamp village, famed for its pottery, poetry and mystics” (119). At Haleji Lake:

Malika hoisted Momin onto it. He watched wood ducks dive headlong into the cool depths that were increasingly unable to feed Karachi. The ducks paddled noisily, quacked and drifted effortlessly on. The wet feathers of their buttocks curled fashionably atop their backs. (116)

She watches him draw “circles in the water with his toes, peering past the ripples for fish. The creatures resurfaced, always darting aside before he could touch them. He was content” (117). She sees “Momin’s mouth fell open” when:

swooping majestically before them was a great blue heron. Together they watched its flight, eagerly recording how it carried its curvaceous neck and dainty legs, how the long black feather tapering upward from its eyes sliced the wind. When it vanished, a nightmarish stillness descended on the lake. Malika found herself yearning for the creature’s return, as though it alone could bridge the gap between herself and Momin. (118)

To breathe in an open space is something new for the sick child who has been kept in a dark atmosphere of the factory workshop. Malika's heart sinks to watch Momin gazing "with absolute stillness at an unfamiliar landscape. He rarely even blinked, so eager was he to hold each sight, to frame and preserve it in the as yet brittle recesses of his awakening life" (93). She can feel that "like the trees and flowers preparing for winter, he was cautious and self-absorbed, patiently awaiting spring" (93). Momin's fascination with the nonhumans in the environment awakens in Malika her own love of nature. "Malika lost herself in Momin's imagination" observing Momin "photographing the world with hungry eyes" (94). Malika's stance reflects Khan's pointing the reader to consider how they too might tackle poverty without undermining nature.

The narrative also debates the characters' relationship to the world around them and how their thinking affects this. In the Empress Market she sees children taking delight in picking and twirling "curly pink prawns . . . expecting the prawn to writhe like a worm" (27). "Malika herself draws no pleasure from these 'treats'" as:

There was nothing wondrous about the slimy piles of blue lobster with protruding black eyes daring her to pluck them, and nothing sensational about the raucous parrots shrieking in fecal prisons, 'I can talk!' *The* slobbering, brown puppies for sale were part of her routine landscape, like the goats lined up for slaughter. But, *she* thought, if her own son sought these very diversions, she would perhaps view them differently. (27-28)

Similarly, when she promises to take Momin to Empress Market where he can see "several varieties of birds, dogs and fish", she then recalls "the caged finches, tearful

puppies and beady-eyed lobsters” (92-93) and reflects what effect it might have on little boy to see those creatures trapped for public display. Also, Malika is disturbed to see “a stuffed armadillo” which is “studded with rubies” (83) for decoration. She is told that, “it [was] smuggled across the ocean. Or that the mammal had once existed in the Cholistan Desert, and that this was an indigenous specimen, the last of its line” showcased as “quite a scene at royal dinners” (84). Khan points towards the hunting and killing of rare species of animals in the ecosystem to satisfy human greed and pride.

Similarly, Momin watched “the scavenger kites perched on rooftops and billboards. Momin adored them. He had revealed his love of birds to her last winter, while they gazed wondrously at the scores of migratory herons flying over the city to Haleji Lake. She had told him of the flamingoes of Kutch that built nests of mud on the salt flats with their great jaws and “astounded, Momin had clasped his mouth and felt, for the first time in his minor life, the slack hinges of his lower jaw” (18). This shows that Khan’s characters’ interactions with animals, plants and water occupy a significant space in their lives. Such an empathetic relationship with nonhumans enables Malika to help her son rebuild his connection with nature.

Hinna: A Case of Lost Indigenous Connection/A Case of Natural-Artificial Divide

Hinna, also known as Mrs Masood, grew up in Cholistan desert in the South Punjab region of Pakistan. She misses the smell of mustard oil that lingered in her grandmother’s hair (41). Malika, the other woman in the story, is also fond of mustard smell as “she grew fond of acrid mustard, and had in fact included a dab of it in the secret shampoo” (48). The image of a mustard plant is a powerful reference to the

indigenous culture of South Punjab, as it is a traditional oilseed crop, the second most important crop after cotton. Known as ‘sarson’ in Urdu, the plant is popular in Pakistan, Bangladesh and India as a vegetable and edible oil that is also used for massage. The Kite Flying Festival in Punjab province, known as ‘Basant’ in Urdu, is a centuries old tradition which begins with the coming of Spring when the yellow mustard fields are in full bloom. It is celebrated with enthusiasm and cheerfulness. Pakistani folk songs often mention mustard flowers. It is generally the rural people’s food; pure ‘desi’ food of villagers in the agricultural lands of Punjab. But the organic composition and delicious flavor has brought it fame in urban as well as rural cuisine.

The ambiguous relationship between humans and nonhumans in the modern understanding encompasses “a wide range of emotions and rationales for its exploitation, domination and preservation” (80) according to Uggla. Such a confusing relationship is visible in Hinna’s character, someone who has forgotten the intrinsic value of nature. Hinna is obsessed with “lush gardens” and “the neat, orderly gardens” as “her desert-weary eyes” had never seen such greenery (41). To have as much green around her as possible, “she ordered a wall-to-wall print of the gardens for her living room” and “she controlled” (41) the setting of “the neatly shaven trees in adroitly delineated rows” (24). Khan depicts an environment trapped in the structures of colonisation, perceived as something other, an instrument and a commodity to be used relentlessly in the interest of profit. Mrs Masood orders staff to trim and decorate the garden according to English settings as Mr Masood considers prospects for marriage of his daughter to one of his white friend’s sons. Marriage of their sons and daughters will strengthen his business. And one of the strategies Hinna and Mr Masood employ

to impress the White family is to plant European plants in their garden. The story explains that years before a landscape artist attempted “a typical English layout” (24) in their garden and the “rectangular walled gardens, irrigated by pools and shaded by trees, were meant to represent paradise” (59). There was a “western end of the garden where a stone walkway swerved to the back of the house . . . there’ll be no room to plant giant yews like she wanted” (63). This shows a societal shift regarding environmental consciousness where the artificial is preferred over the natural. Martin et al. propose: “we need fundamental shifts in values that ensure transition from a growth-centered society to one acknowledging biophysical limits and centered on human well-being and biodiversity conservation” (6105). Such a source and user relationship become the basis of domination, abuse and control over nature as suggested by Plumwood (1993).

Hinna also challenges ecological limits as the gardener tells Malika:

‘It’s a crazy idea, really, . . . For bibi Laila’s wedding, they want the whole garden planted with boxwood bigger than my house! . . . The manager tried to tell the begum these things take years to grow but she insisted on having them by December. So we’re transplanting them by December. If you ask me, the garden was more beautiful before than it can ever be with hedges shaped like ducks and deer with weak roots . . . It’s costing her a fortune, . . . ‘We’re having to hire tractors to carry the load.’ . . . This contract pays better than all the ones I’ve had this year put together. Still, it’s a shame for the flowers.’. (62)

A systematic plundering of natural resources for profit disturbs the ecosystem. Khan is highlighting a critical point here regarding the biodiversity of plants. Growing exotic

and foreign plants which are not suitable for the native soil is a major problem. Foreign species of plant are used purely for ornamental purposes and for profit. Often they require artificial chemical infusions that pollute the land. Sometimes the plants become an invasive species, destroying native plants. In this way, the natural habitat and overall enlivenment of the ecosystem is compromised.

Though the “fresh scent of the earth was calming” (62) and the “sound of water flowing freely from the garden hose” (58) make Hinna rejoice, and bring back memories of herself “as a little girl-watching the desert sand frolic like fireflies” (58). But it was a waste and only for the purpose of decoration as “the gardeners were digging trenches and pits, and did not need the water. But she enjoyed the waste”. Trevors and Saier Jr. in this regard ask:

How can we expect to receive the gifts and reap the benefits from the biosphere without taking the effort to understand and protect it? Many people actually seem to prefer to live an artificial existence that requires minimal effort. Laziness may be to blame, but too many individuals also blindly trust in science and technology without understanding the limitations of these disciplines. Thus, blind faith has definite drawbacks. These trusting people do not realise that science cannot solve all problems, as illustrated by the AIDS epidemic, climate change and species extinction. (38)

Khan also criticises the earlier Muslim civilisations like Mughal’s who enjoyed hunting animals as a sport Mr Masood says: “Mughal patterns were often naturalistic, with animals and hunting scenes” (59). He likes hunting in the Cholistan desert and justifies his act by relating it to the scenes of nature weaved into the carpets.

In another example, Hinna has ordered a topiary centerpiece involving a box bush shaped as Santa Claus with his reindeer. But when she visits the garden she sees:

In the centre, instead of a reindeer, stooped something resembling a camel. It was led by a Santa Claus who was neither fat nor jolly but shrivelled and with boxwood needles piercing his eyes like hot desert sand. (99)

The gardeners “struggled to dislodge the last shapeless topiary but this only resulted in more debris being strewn, some of which caught in their hair in a final attempt at ornamentation” (171). The relationship between human and nonhuman is a powerful ideological tool that Khan uses in her work to problematize the relationships between human and nonhuman biotic components. The disturbance in the natural growth of the garden is visible here as the land does not welcome plants which are unsuited to the climate of Pakistan. The soil of the garden resists alterations. Khan writes:

Outside gardeners struggled to keep the camel jockey on the camel, and the camel on his feet. Struck by more bullets, the angels jerked violently, their wands quavering toward the centre of the circle. There stood the animal so like Sirkash, the self-satisfied camel of her Cholistani past. Or was it her present? (100)

Sirkash is an Urdu word which means ‘an obstinate rebel’. The name Sirkash is symbolic here as Hinna imagines or feels that the camel cannot be fixed in this garden because it does not belong here. The animal grows in the indigenous Cholistani deserts and forcing it into an artificial English-style setting is a transgression of natural habitat. This also represents her subconscious as she was raised as an indigenous child and then forced to shift to city which was alien to her. She learned to breathe in an artificial environment, but she is never able to get rid of her rural indigenous past, and she is

never at peace in her city life. Khan writes: “Mrs Masood struggled to place herself in time but the effort was stultifying” (100). She recalls her grandmother’s camel “lolling moodily on the dunes, nibbling the Lana plant” wearing “an intricate mesh of beads and shells” (100). Khan further adds:

The shells were from the desert itself; the Indus had once coursed through there. Astride Sirkash, the grandmother became the tallest creature of the desert. It was said that her powers heightened from that position, so she could see the globe and smell the seasons. That was how her family always knew when to move and where to find the sweetest wells, while others waited in vain for rain. (100-101)

Her agitation is visible as she wonders where the garden she planned has gone:

The more she sought to tame it, the wilder it grew, each sculpted bush shrinking from her grasp like her self-control. She could no longer hear the sprinklers whipping in unison. (102)

Khan also follows a political and critical route which has attracted attention from political activists. M. Didier, a white character and a business friend of Mr Masood says:

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, France produced pile-woven carpets based on Eastern techniques, and perfected them. It’s a tragedy of the East. When the West takes from it, the West thrives. But when it takes from the West, the East makes a monkey of itself.’ (100)

At another place, he remarks:

‘Only yesterday I read an intriguing article,’ He reached for a newspaper clipping in his leather wallet and read: “‘The Pakistan

government has opposed western-and westernised eastern-propaganda against alleged child labour in Pakistan. The Minister of State for Labour and Manpower said that this propaganda was part of a well-organised conspiracy to reduce Pakistan's exports. But the government has successfully countered it, and the sales continue unabated." . . . "Eight hundred and thirty arrests were made for violations of the law." . . . "And a human rights ministry has been formed to take care of the issue in *a systematic way*." . . . "Pakistan has even signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to free its children of this dastardly curse." Then he stood up, 'A memorandum of understanding? A toast!' He held up the glass of Chateaux d'Yquem and saluted the others. 'To the MoU: More of Us!' Glasses clinked." (131-132)

Here Khan gives a strong criticism of weak governmental policies that are instantly compromised by industrial and capitalist forces. Availability of cheap labour in Pakistan benefits foreign investors and the high demand for low-cost products like carpets and furniture intensifies an environment where poor people like Momin are exploited.

The following lines are an apt summary of what Hinna experiences:

And then she saw that the statuettes of the desert nomads, the ones her husband had given, had altered. It was a while before she identified the disparity: they had turned around. They no longer faced the edge of the desert, where sweet well water beckoned. They were headed for lush grounds, a smug, city-smart gleam in their eyes. (133)

She never felt free-spirited in her artificially created garden as she missed the "dusty village" (35) and open indigenous spaces in the "sands of Cholistan" (33), "ant-tracks,

snake-tracks, scorpion-tracks, porcupine-tracks, bird-tracks” (36), her grandmother’s “rustic back”, “for being in the care of the ancient woman”, “commune with the desert”, living “on fern seeds” (39). She dreams of being back in:

Cholistan Desert, carrying water from a toba that was quickly drying. She and her family would have to move again. The rains were late . . . over the sandy tibas where cobras slept. And here were the tracks of a sidewinder, crescent after crescent, as the beast rolled on its flank. A snake without a slither was like a man without a limb. The tracks would soon be lost to the fiery desert wind, the loo” (79).

The novel also makes reference to “the dirty, noisy bazaar”, “bodies hammered” and “crumpled” (15) in a minibus and the “air in the bus was so thick passengers were jostled into numbness” (16), and “congested streets” (18). Similarly, Malika’s husband Chaudry brings another good perspective regarding the sustainable use of natural resources like wood. The man loves “the deodar’ s⁴⁹ wild aroma” and marvel[s] at its reddish hue”, and “when he carved the wood with a chisel he listened, as if the cedar sang, guiding him over its surface” (124). Malika feels that he “painstakingly breathed life into each stalk, petal and vine” (66) engraved in the form of floral patterns on the furniture he designed. Building of conservation parks and forest planting has rarely been a priority for local government budgets. Chaudry’s approach to artistry and wood utilisation represent the sustainable use of natural resources. His approach also reflects Khan’s criticism of the exploitation of forest resources for industrial purposes. His thought is not market-oriented, and he is not driven by consumer culture of mass production of furniture items which entails felling more trees than required. Khan

⁴⁹ Urdu name for Cedar tree

attacks the forest destruction in the country with its catastrophic climatic impact. Chaudry sees his work as involving a duty to take care of the wood he cuts to make furniture. He says:

I will not compromise my knowledge. I will not become one of those cheap labourers who mass-produce furniture for display at fancy showrooms! That's not what I promised. It's those men, promoted like beggars by smart-suited middlemen, who are cheated. They never have a chance to create what they are able to, but like donkeys, merely bray the same two patterns again and again. They have jobs. I have duties. (49)

Khan highlights that consumerist culture demands the cutting down of trees and forests, reducing the earth's ability to turn carbon dioxide into oxygen. Also, it increases carbon emissions as the wooden furniture is transported around the world. The artificially inflated demand for furniture results in deforestation. Deforestation leads to ecological imbalance, loss of habitat for plants and animals, migration of wildlife, flooding, soil erosion and landslides due to deforestation, and contributes to climate change. The indiscriminate logging and uncontrolled felling of trees is Khan's core concern, as conveyed through Chaudry. The mass produced furniture is of poor quality and does not last long, and the value and quality of such products in turn affect social attitudes. Throw-away attitudes in society become a reason for landfills. The waste in such landfills decomposes, releasing gases like methane which causes further global warming. Therefore, the vital importance of forest as a valuable ecological and cultural resource is emphasised by Khan through the character of Chaudry.

The analysis here elaborates how such creative engagement or academic activism can become part of a struggle against corporate ecological exploitation. Khan

diagnoses the international as well as localised effects of capitalism by mapping what Haraway calls “the apparatuses of the hyper capitalist market traffic and flexible accumulation” (n.p.). The novel emphasises the need to bring environmentalism into play within the legal and industrial infrastructure. Through this novel, Khan, as a narrative practitioner skillfully articulates the functioning of capitalist ideologies as they relate to social and environmental issues.

CHAPTER 4

“They trespass.”: Analysis of *Trespassing*

In this chapter, I undertake an in-depth investigation of Uzma Aslam Khan’s second novel *Trespassing* originally published in 2003. *Trespassing* is an account of how readers perceive and conceptualize nature in a Pakistani context. In the novel, indigenous land is used as a literary setting and stage, and also as a habitat. Khan’s narrative constructs an ecological thinking which is still rare in the Pakistani literary field. She gives voice to the nonhuman; the Other. The novel becomes “a creative portrayal of relationships between damaged ecosystems and discrepancies among human attitudes, behaviors, and information vis-à-vis the natural world” (Buell et al. 2011, 428). This chapter examines Khan’s study of human encroachment, dominance and violent control over the physical environment and the underprivileged indigenous communities of Sindh province.

Environmentalism has found rich expression in this novel as Khan blends detailed observation of the natural world with her own reflections on understandings of ‘attachment’ and ‘home’. Her environmental narrative portrays the suffering of victims of environmental degradation. The three main characters in the novel are Salaamat, Dia and Daanish. They belong to different classes and ethnicities, and each has a unique connection with the nonhuman world. A contiguity between these characters is established through their various links with nature. Salaamat is a native, “deeply embedded in a stable ecosystem” (Coupe 286), Dia is a lover of nature while Daanish brings the perspective of an observer of social and ecological politics in the country.

All these characters are enmeshed in ecological and sociopolitical changes. While the corporate world trespasses on their rights to breathe in a healthy atmosphere, these characters, in turn, trespass across man-made boundaries and discourses of the corporate world. Through this, the novel connects them to the natural and nonhuman elements of their environment.

Salaamat: The Indigenous Alien

Human domination of the nonhuman is evident from the very beginning of *Trespassing*, occurring through industrial and corporate encroachments on indigenous resources and places. The first character in the story is a nonhuman specie which sets the narrative in motion.

The “PROLOGUE *Death*” starts with a scared turtle:

The fishing boats dock before the dawn, while the turtle digs her nest . . . She burrows fiercely, kicking up telltale showers of sand, recalling how much safer it had been when the coastline belonged to fishermen.

The atmosphere in these opening pages represent Khan’s overall approach to the environment. The words direct the reader’s mind towards ecology. Violent human invasion resulting in the death of animals and loss of natural beauty is a core environmental concern of the novel. Khan gives voice to the nonhuman: a turtle “with one eye seaward, the other on many huts dotting the shore”, fears the intrusion of technology and unkind industrialist and thinks, “Now the boats sail in like giant moths” (1). Khan voices the turtle’s pain, “though she wonders at their catch, it is for the visitors from the city, hidden in their huts, that her brow has creased beyond her age”

(1). Before exploring further this voicing of the nonhuman, I will first discuss the human invasion that worries the turtle.

Rather than focus on the invader threat to nonhuman habitations as might be expected, the narrative directs the attention to the spaces of indigenous groups (Indus valley fishermen) being encroached by industrial corporate concerns, and, as a result, left polluted, devastated and wasted. The prologue darkly narrates how humans have trespassed their boundaries in using nature as a source of wealth creation. This has resulted in the plundering, wasting and overuse of nature. Having set this scene, the reader is introduced to a human character, Salaamat, a boy not yet fifteen. He belongs to fishermen community and is native to this coastal region. Salaamat is presented in contrast to the other human characters; invaders described as “hidden in their huts” (1). He is a soft-hearted boy watching the turtle, desiring to caress her smooth and oval eggs. The turtle is not scared of him as “she knows him; all the turtles do” (1). Here *Trespassing* complements notion of interdependence, reminding the readers to respect the earth, environmental unity and the interdependence of all species.

The turtle and the boy become connected through their thoughts as the boy recalls his elders’ words, “They trespass” (2). They are further connected by their fear of the loss of place since to earn a living Salaamat has to move to the city because “Fish once abundant close to shore are now disappearing even in the deep. And the fishermen’s boats cannot go out that far, even for the fish still left to catch” (2). Salaamat’s uncle had drowned in his attempt to fish further offshore. The family mourns his death and have decided to break with the tradition and move to the city, “[b]ut he is afraid, as afraid as the turtle is, of the men in the huts” (2). He “wonders at

the turtle” and she “meets his gaze with the soothing, crackly wisdom of his grandmother. He shuts his eyes and drifts into soft sleep” (2). The encounter celebrates an ancient and beautiful connection between human and nonhuman characters. Shortly after this, the reader witnesses the turtle’s eggs being stolen and destroyed by the men in the huts, reflecting the larger picture of nature being taken, plundered and destroyed. Salamat is assaulted for fighting to save the eggs. The men overtake him and drag him out to sea but “just when it seems the sea will swallow him, he touches a giant marbled shell. It carries him over watery hills till his path is smooth. He presses his cheeks into the turtle’s hump of a home, going where she goes” (122). This fight is also symbolic of the fight to stop the city men interfering with his native land and its ecosystem for profit. He is bashed and beaten, and he loses hearing in one ear. Later in his life, Salaamat still recalls the man who lunged for the turtle’s egg in order to present it as a prize to a woman waiting in the hut, and shuts his eyes against the “pain surging in his eardrum” (122) of that memory. Salaamat, a poor and uneducated boy is depicted as the character with the most highly developed sympathy for nonhuman species. This incident and its symbolism gives an apocalyptic vision of the human-nature relationship that Khan warns about. This brutality makes the world an “echo of a fading sea” (121) for Salaamat. Whenever he thinks of his lost village life, he is aroused by fury, he feels as if his “ear cavity had filled with water again, just as it had the day the fourteen-year-old was battered by the egg-thief, and tossed into the chipped slate waves” (121). *Trespassing* reflects Khan’s strong ethical and political commitment to the environmental issues as she criticizes public policies and silence on land encroachments through Salaamat’s loss. She is particularly pointing to and criticizing

the governmental policies that have failed to tackle environmental issues. Through her work Khan theorises a sense of attachment to the ecosystem. The notion of common ownership and stewardship of the ecosystem, embracing all species, is the central theme of *Trespassing*.

Trespassing is set in Sindh of 1980s and early 1990s. Locations used in the novel include the metropolitan city of Karachi and its coastal areas such as Thattha, Makli Hills and Badin. The native community of Salaamat's origin now survives through what Siddall calls "hard work and shrewd commercial sense" (103). The ruthless effects of environmental capitalism are seen when Salaamat's land is taken and the original inhabitants are expelled. Khan writes:

There were fishermen who depended on fish that in turn depended on the mangroves that once flourished in the estuaries. With the fresh water cut off, the trees were withering, and the fish dying. Many of these villagers too had had to leave, and, like Salaamat, bow to those who displaced them. (359)

Khan values human rootedness and "dwelling in full identification with the earth" (Siddall 107) and believes that this sense of rootedness is more powerful in a rural culture than in urban culture, so she creates Salaamat as her main character. Salaamat is ethnically and culturally very different from other characters in the story; he belongs to a native fisherman community, and feels alien in the city of the same region where urbanites disregard him as a product of a deprived and ugly fishing village of Sindh, despite the huge attraction of this same land for the corporate world. Here Khan uses the lens of globalization to critique notions of place. She uses environmentalism as a basis for constructing personal identity as argued by Rahman (2011). Salaamat is

opposed to the very idea that land may be owned and believes that “the foreign trawlers have stolen their sea” (Khan *Trespassing* 2). Corporate industrial business trespass his sea boundary and he is “afraid” of these people from the corporate world who are intruders and destroyers of his rooted life (2).

This innocent indigenous boy suffers rootlessness and marginalization when people in the city call him “foreigner”, “machera” (low cast), “black”, “ajnabi [stranger]” (128), “alien”, and “rotten smell” fish (129). He is “an insider, but still on the fringe” (249). Hence, all city men become “ajnabis” (243) for him. The city men and the trawlers “had stolen their sea space” (122). The values of dwelling and memory are clear from Salaamat’s experiences as Khan describes his feelings for the place; he is dislocated from the sea but wants it back. For Salaamat, the “disruption meant more to him than the distance” (Siddall 107). Salaamat’s people are too poor to matter and as Huggan and Tiffin put it “the livelihoods of local (subaltern) peoples are simultaneously put at risk” (245). Salaamat becomes Khan’s voice of this marginalized human and nonhuman community for concerns over corporate intrusion.

City life engages Salaamat for economic reasons, but he always longs for his lost land. Irum and Yaqoob discussing Salaamat as a member of a subaltern community in *Trespassing* write: “the memories of his lost land always haunt him after he comes to the city” (18). His ear transmits the “echo of a fading sea” (Khan *Trespassing* 121). Villages of the coast of Sindh are seen as profit-making sites without caring for the indigenous lifestyle of the natives, as Salaamat’s grandmother tells him there is nothing left in the village and the fish are gone, which is a loss of their traditional occupation. She proclaims: “Those ships are here to stay” and he angrily thinks of his sick and

dejected father due to loss of traditional livelihood and his mother who labours at a shrimp peeling factory set up by the foreigners, “She worked for *them*. She swallowed her outrage and gave her life to the enemy. They gave back five rupees for every kilo of stolen shrimp she cleaned” and he thinks about all this glancing up at “the moon, textured like a turtle’s egg” (124). Later, recalling his tranquil fishing village and feeling hurt by being called “ajnabi”, “alien” and “outsider”, he thinks: “how dare they call *him* the outsider when it was *his* people who were the original inhabitants of Karachi?” (131-132). His job in the city “was no less shameful than his mother’s at the shrimp factory; they both worked for those who displaced them” (132). His land is “pushed to the periphery” (132) and all the native populations are forced to work under outsiders who claim that the city belongs to them.

Khan uses Salaamat’s displacement to explore the impact of migration of indigenous people to cities searching employment, highlighting the desperately poor living conditions for individual migrants and their communities. The novel becomes a tale of misery wreaked on indigenous communities by urban corporate invasion. Natural native space is encroached by urban business. Indigenousness comes to be regarded as alien. The novel reflects the reality of the indigenous community of the Indus valley in Sindh which has been marginalised through forced mass migration to Karachi as a result of industrialization and corporate takeover. The fruits of corporate and metropolitan development come at the devastating cost of disturbing, displacing and invading indigenous populations and ecosystems. Across the globe, indigenous communities have been relegated to the status of minorities, pushed to periphery and compelled to live in miserable conditions. The novel speaks for the rights of the

indigenous community of Indus valley as well as other displaced communities worldwide.

Salaamat's connection to his homeland is deeply emotional, his loss intensely personal and painful (18). Nowhere in the text is his attachment depicted in economic or political terms or for any other material reason. Khan's depiction of Salaamat's attachment to his land echoes Aldo Leopold's famous "land ethic" (203), it's a sense of emotional attachment Salaamat feels that heals and soothes him. Khan writes:

These capacious rocks spoke to him . . . The sand beneath his toes, the scent of the river, the way his hair blew out of the twine of grass binding it, the sky free of dust and haze, the feathery sisky leaves—all refreshed him . . . If anything, this land the others wanted to split was showing him how to glue back his splintered pieces. (358)

Salaamat is dislocated from a place where he was born and raised and is further alienated in a city of the same region as an outsider. So, whenever he is disturbed by city men, Salaamat reminds himself it was his people who "were the original inhabitants" of the city (129). Another minor character Hamid Bhai from Mohana shares with Salaamat the loss of his rooted land, where his people had lived for thousands of years, "but now were forced to find other means" as "[t]he lake has grown salty. It is stagnant, filthy . . . And what are the people to drink?". He says people "weep now" because of the filth in the sea life brought by industrial occupation (401-402).

Trespassing portrays multiple socio-ecological and economic problems which, as the story reveals, need to be addressed urgently. Through Salaamat's life she advocates that local communities should not be disturbed by outside industrial

invasions. By drawing the readers' attention to land ethics and the rights of indigenous communities in this way, *Trespassing* may motivate readers to conserve natural resources, enhance alternative livelihoods and reduce poverty in the important biologically rich ecoregions of Pakistan. For Khan, the Indus region has a critical ecosystem and efforts must be made to bring economic developments and reduce poverty and help the human and nonhuman indigenous community flourish. Khan tries to show that Pakistanis are essentially an environmentally rooted people, but that rapid industrialization and corporate development have disrupted this, leading to lack of awareness. Negligence has become one of the main reasons for the destruction of the ecosystem. Khan does not remain ambiguous about the relationship with the land. Guriro reports that according to the Centre for Environment and Development, opportunities for livelihood diversification are also reduced through mismanagement of natural resources.⁵⁰

In *Trespassing*, there is “a clash of homocentric versus biocentric world-views” (Dooley 65) because Khan seems to value both the power of land and also believes in the wise use of natural resources, balancing respect for both human and nonhuman life. She does not outwardly discard modernization but believes in balanced use of natural resources and care for the nonhuman life. However, it is not necessary to consider these approaches to be in conflict; as Leopold writes:

For the first time in the history of the human species, two changes are now impending. One is the exhaustion of wilderness in the more habitable portions of the globe. The other is the world-wide

⁵⁰ Guriro, Amar. “WWF-Pakistan launches project for fishing communities.” *Daily Times*, 11 Nov 2016.

hybridization of cultures through modern transport and industrialization. (188)

The portrayal of beautiful indigenous life is contrasted sharply with the urban life depicted in the novel. Salaamat always remembers his land as “a place that for centuries had thrived as a tranquil fishing village” (Khan *Trespassing* 132) while the unsustainable constructed environment of the city space is depicted through unhygienic conditions, poor civic systems, dark rooms, congested space and non-availability of clean air and water. In the city, Salaamat lives in a littered cell (239) in the bus-making shop where he has to face severe and hazardous conditions. Spray-paint used to paint the body of vehicles emits toxic fumes: “His eyes grew bloodshot and nausea became part of the routine” (238). In the city “Smoke permeated every cell in his body” (255), “he smelled no salt in the air, only smoke and gases that made his chest burn” (126), “Sand was replaced by granite, mud with cement, . . . the moon was dimmed by lights a thousand times brighter than those the trawlers had burned” (126), in the buses people “spat paan juice everywhere, extinguished cigarettes on fish fins, blew their noses on crown jewels”. The bus interior is “crusted with rust” (127) revealing the high rate of environmental pollution in commercialized urban places.

Khan’s engagement with “metropolitan and/or toxified landscapes” makes *Trespassing* an example of environmental literature depicting “a growing malaise about modern industrial society’s inability to manage its unintended environmental consequence” (Buell *The Future* viii, 5) and which Ulrich Beck anticipated as “risk society”. Salaamat also suffers poverty that stems from illiteracy and lack of opportunities and is caught up in unhealthy conditions in city life.

The combined impact of displacement, squalor and personal degradation is skillfully portrayed by Khan, representing a further powerful critique of the operation of corporate capitalism. Salaamat is “sick of being dragged into worlds that were not his” (Khan *Trespassing* 233). He belongs to a place where “people had built their lives around the river for thousands of years, but now were forced to find other means” (401). The corrupt, greedy, filthy and artificial urban life trap him to a degree that, at times, he feels as if he is watching all these dreams from “a great distance. None of it touched him any more” (401). But every night close to his return, Salaamat would dream about children twirling dragonflies, and some older boys teaching the younger ones to dive for fish.

Through Salaamat’s thoughts, “If only there’d been a sign: Trespassers will be prosecuted (390), Khan also voices her concern for implementation of environmental preservation laws and rights of indigenous communities. Salaamat’s community suffers food deficiency and malnourishment due to marginalization and loss of occupation. The narrative, hence according to Irum and Yaqoob becomes a story of the “trespassing of the capitalists into the indigenous cultures” (17). Trespassing law and cultural limits for sanctity of human possession are subject to punishment; but no law, no rule and no boundaries have been established that would protect the lives and spaces of dispossessed peoples or nonhuman species.

Throughout the book, the reader is confronted with beautiful, though stylised, descriptions of the natural landscape of Indus valley. These portrayals enable the reader to engage with the environment through an eco-conscious lens. Khan highlights the

personal loss Salaamat experiences due to intrusion of industrialists in his land. Sick of polluted life in city he misses his life in the village as Khan writes:

he could keep sitting, watching the clouds form, wondering how long it would take them to reach his old village, . . . He'd never been back. But he knew those foreign trawlers had been issued legal licenses now. Nearly everyone from his village had left. (Khan *Trespassing* 236)

Now walking down the shoreline, the one stretched all the way to his village, he is deeply saddened: “watching this other world tumble and crash around him” (236). Salaamat also reflects his pain of a lost peaceful co-existence with the nonhuman world: in a scene where Salaamat is painting his bus, Khan writes:

wanting somehow to depict the chronology of his life, he brushed four strokes and filled the shape green. A boat. He gave it a flag. Next was the gray-blue sea carrying large white fish with gills like pockets . . . On shore were the dunes . . . He drew turtles too. (239)

Depicting a resistance to social and environmental injustice, Khan uncovers connections which have long been silenced or considered a non-issue in Pakistani culture. Since Salaamat has always been deeply connected to nature, when he first begins to paint a bus it is the manifestations of the natural world he recalls. He draws “the thick carpet of grass, parrots, a gondola drooping with blue-green tendrils...the lush foliage of mulberries on which had assembled moths, which he gave more pigment than real silk moths” (242). A little moment of satisfaction in the polluted and congested urban space, was the thought that the bus “would parade the hidden life of a native in the city of ajnabis [strangers]” (243). Salaamat imagines that the moving

painted vessel is “*His*”, because the life snatched from him has been painted by him on the bus as a form of resistance and hope.

Khan develops Salaamat’s character to show the dispossessed migrant’s approach to a locality to highlight the sense of ecological belonging and importance of love for nature. Salaamat is shown to possess a surprising knowledge of nature when Daanish hears him describing how the “pen shells used to be harvested for the thread they spun. He said cloth could be made from it. Marine silk – whoever heard of it?” (234). Through such examples, Khan shows that indigenous people of Indus valley have a special and particular knowledge of the local ecology.

As this bleak and unrelenting life continues, the pain of loss attacks him, and he shuts his eyes and thinks, “[t]here was not one thing around him that suggested the order he’d slogged to construct since the day he’d left his village” (255). Salaamat reflects that there are no beautiful things to focus on in this life. He is disturbed to realize that “the fat, drunk poacher with the woman waiting in the hut, the one who’d nearly killed him years ago in his village, Salaamat had become him” (377) as the novel also informs how Salaamat gets caught up in criminal gang activities.

Salaamat is a product of a multitude of crimes: imperialism, industrial capitalism, ethnic violence, economic deprivation, social exploitation, land encroachment and murder. Khan highlights how poor, “illiterate, homeless, and hungry” individuals, deprived of their native lands and occupation can be victimized and exploited by powerful groups in society, adding further to the socio-political disturbance in the country. These displaced people are aware that they are regarded only as “Filthy, ugly, destined to drift from current to current” (354). Salaamat longs

for a return to these roots which for him is the real freedom. So, one day as he stares at the river, his friend asks, “How can you be a freedom fighter if you’d rather stare at the river?” In response, Salaamat says:

Every evening after closing her teashop, my grandmother would stare at the sea till she was in a trance. She was tossing her worries out, letting the waves carry them away. Now here I am, on the water again, and I feel like her. Down the Indus flows, taking the worst of me with it. You can call that freedom. (353)

Displacement of Indus valley’s indigenous communities and degrading environmental conditions are once again highlighted when Salaamat thinks about Indus:

More is what the Punjab is all about,’ . . . More food, more water, more wealth, more hideously fat men . . . In much of Sindh, the Indus had dwindled to a trickle . . . mangroves that once flourished in the estuaries. With the fresh water cut off, the trees were withering, and the fish dying. Many of these villagers too had to leave, and, like Salaamat, bow to those who displaced them. (359)

Salaamat also learns to live in the city and use the means by which powerful people exploit those who are economically deprived. In his own case, he has suffered poverty, racial and social discrimination and humiliation as a direct consequence of the power of rich individuals and corporations to take control over his native land and traditional occupation. His return to the natural lifestyle becomes easier when he recalls what his sister from the silk farm recounts what Dia had once told her: “tiny creatures spit the strongest materials on the planet. Bigger creatures stole them to pretend they were strong” (365). He uses this metaphor to explain that the real strength is with the tiny

ones who know the art of creating strength, and can still have the courage to spit it, dispossess it. Fighting for strength or stealing it away from others is against what nature teaches him. Explaining to his friend why he will not support the freedom fighters, Salaamat opines killing people in order to eliminate corrupt and unjust foreign oppressors will not work as he says with a sigh, “You can belong to the land, instead of forcing it to belong to you” (375) because the locals and inhabitants of the land must respect their own land first and form a connection with it. This attitude toward the sanctity of the land gives Salaamat an edge over all those who are destroying it, stealing its strengths away, and using them for their nefarious purposes. All Salaamat wants to do is respect the land.

He suffers a “disastrous banishing of the natural world” (Coupe 240) which is unacceptable to him as modern social and industrial society is inappropriate for him. His nostalgic desire to return to natural landscape strengthens while passing through Thattha and Makli Hills. As he approaches the village he is delighted to see wheat and millet springing around and “the trickle of irrigation canals was heavenly” (386). On his return Salaamat is delighted to see children running along the bank with a string “a dragonfly, beating violet wings as the child twirled the line around and around” (380). Khan writes:

On the long voyage down the river, he recalled his grandmother telling him that the last journey – the one that carried the soul to heaven – was in a quiet boat. All he wanted was for this to be that last journey. (401)

This return of the native after a devastating banishing boosts his desire, puts him in a trance of the kind his grandmother used to be in, making him wish for the journey to be the last one in a quiet boat: “the one that carried the soul to heaven.” This escapism from the bitterness of life, however, is not natural in him, it has been induced by the unjust occupants who drive people like him away from his native land.

In the final chapter “EPILOGUE *Birth*”, Salaamat is back to his native village as a grown up man after living for some years in city. He is seen standing at the sea with his young nephew standing against the dune. Salaamat warns the boy not to go near the huts along the shore, thinking “men don’t drown while fishing, they drown while swimming up to the great ship and peeping inside the portholes” (445). As Salaamat dives into the waves, the little boy is distracted by the tiny mounds of grain erupting beside his feet. The beach turns into a “flurry of lumbering saucers the size of his palm, bursting out from under him, all heading for the sea”. The boy is amused to see turtle hatchlings. The turtles move towards the sea and melt into the waves breaking on the shore. He sees one making for the huts, so he picks it up and gently releases it (446-448).

The young boy’s delight on the birth of nonhuman fellows around him and his natural instinct of helping the new born turtle move towards sea carries Khan’s hope in the next generation of humans and their chances of living in co-existence with nature. It reflects rebirth of hope which died few years ago when Salaamat was brutally beaten and eggs of the turtle were stolen and thrown away by the city men. The young boy’s generation will be taking over within next 10-20 years as economic actors and decision makers in Pakistan, and their love for the neglected natural world around them, may

strengthen their concern for ecojustice in the society. This seems more realistic, particularly as the older generation has not surrendered before all the odds they have faced. Salaamat's dive into the waves also suggests that he might be from one of those 'higher existences', whose perceptions evolve to an extent that renders them unfit for life on dehumanized polluted planet and hence the reader does not see him returning back to the surface. He immerses in water, symbolically away from the changing, deteriorating, trespassed and vanishing natural life. It also reflects cleansing of his body and soul to remove the dehumanizing and polluted effects of modern industrialized world. Through his return, Khan strongly supports what Chellis Glendinning characterises as, "We are creatures who grew from the Earth, who are physically and psychologically built to thrive in intimacy with the Earth" (52). Hence, his dive also installs him as an inseparable human component of biotic system from other nonhuman components in the environment.

Dia: The Ecologically Cocooned Woman

The second main character in *Trespassing* is Dia, a wealthy young woman whose life and interests are bound up with details of the nonhuman world. Through her engagement with Nature, Dia transforms the reader's perception of it. In the section "Detour May 1992", Dia is introduced as sitting in the mulberry tree planted by her father on the day she was born (Khan *Trespassing* 9), saying that she slid howling into the world like a "sweet, dainty, purplish-red fruit" (9). She lives in a house surrounded by trees, "twittering of tufted bulbuls and squawking mynas" and blooming "Jamun and fig trees" (13), and loves visiting the silkworm farm (14). For her, a beautiful place is always a natural one as she loves the beach with coves and land with trees (342).

Khan writes, “Dia’s childhood was spent shuttling from farm to factory, the one an enchanted semitropical paradise, the other a whirlwind of equally enchanting activity . . . she danced between the trees”. Living on the borderlines between the farm and factory, she has her own version of things (98). As a female child, she observed “bright emerald frog”, and “[s]lugs wrapped frilly feet around each other in wild abandon” (299). She observes that “thousands of caterpillars were in various stages of spinning” transforming from “the drunken, lifeless chunk on perforated paper to an agile ballerina leaning forward on its tail . . . It was more like a scene from a fable, in Sassi’s lakhy bagh perhaps . . . the breeding of another life form to suit human interests vanish” (107). These are Dia’s most peaceful and intimate moments of consciousness with the silkworms; Nature. Recording natural rhythms and witnessing the destructive power of humans and industrial capitalism, the character of Dia also brings a strong sense of hope to the novel. She “could freeze even in a room with humidity of over seventy per cent, with sweat dripping from her brows, and binoculars swiftly fogging up” (14) to witness the caterpillars’ artistry spinning their cocoons which they would do only privately. Interesting to note that this privacy is semi-permeable: while they do not like oppressive human intrusion into their activity, and would certainly stop it as soon as a human enters their space, they may allow a peaceful witness of their activity like Dia who painstakingly maintains the peace of the place by not causing any damage to it. She wants to photograph the “mysterious life of bugs on her farm” (193-194). Dia finds beauty in the intricate patterns and processes of the natural world. She observes the molting caterpillars and thinks, “It always happened this way, . . . An insect’s life was so measurable, and yet so mysterious. Perhaps the paradox was the allure” (105). She

feels a spiritual beauty in the weaving of silkworms. She diligently studies them, noting details.

She goes on to attribute a political voice to the insects, “They whispered: Let us vow never to spin our fine threads for these wretched humans again!” (105-106). At another point she wonders, “Could crickets smell human shit?” (313), questioning whether the natural world can detect human greed and destruction of nonhuman life. Dia’s empathetic voicing of the feelings of the insects is meaningful. However, it is Dia herself who is perturbed, feeling for the insects, by the “wretched humans” not the insects themselves. This makes Dia wish, “How much better it would be if these were the kinds of things her college taught” (193). Khan highlights the critical role of youth in understanding the other species of the ecosystem and their engagement with the natural world to become active participants in ecologically sustainable form of social progress.

Through Dia, Khan introduces a new theme of ecofeminism into *Trespassing*. Recurring themes in ecofeminist literature propose that, from birth, humans possess an innate spirituality and that females have a closer affinity to the environment than men. Ecofeminism also posits a connection between the use and abuse of women by men, and men’s abuse of natural resources. *Trespassing* involves a strong thread of ecofeminism. For ecofeminists nature and women are planted and cared for; they also must be guarded in order that they may be eaten and relished; ultimately, they are used and possessed. In planting a tree at her birth, Dia’s father is characterized as regarding Dia, woman, nature, as a specie to be protected and controlled. Salaamat, by contrast, regards Dia and nature as a body to be relished.

Dia's own connection with the nature is established through an early scene where she is sitting on a tree reading about insects (10). She reads aloud a paragraph about the discovery of silk in China four thousand years ago, when an Empress used "*nothing but instinct*" to place little insects from mulberry bushes into a tub of boiling water. She witnessed the unfolding of a vast mesh of fine thread, "*it was a half mile long. She wove it into a royal robe for her husband, the first silk item in history. Since then, sericulture has remained a woman's job, in particular, an empress*" (10, original emphasis). This image stirs Dia's imagination. She imagines the silk filament:

the Empress hastened to twist around her arm like candy-floss on a stick. The attendants gawked. . . a blinding prism growing on the arm of the Empress, as if she spun sunlight. When the sun went down she'd cooked all the cocoons from the imperial garden . . . she sat up alone, occasionally looking out at the moon and down at the mulberry trees, making a robe for her husband that by morning would reflect the rays of the sun, and by next evening, the moon.
(11)

Khan projects an ecofeminist viewpoint through celebration of Dia's closeness to the rhythms of silkworms. Her celebration is also owing to the fact that silk was discovered by a woman (11), and it is in the nature of the woman, just like that of the silkworms, to give: to their husbands, fathers, sons and brothers. But as the Empress makes the royal robe, all she wants her husband is to appreciate the rays, reflecting from the robe, of the sun in the day and those of the moon in the evening, which Khan suggests, today's men have forgotten to.

She thinks about wars fought for greed and control of natural resources wondering:

Would the Empress have squashed the caterpillars if she'd known what would happen twenty-five hundred years after her find? If so, the Sicilians who'd been trying to make silk from spider webs wouldn't have kidnapped and tortured their neighbors, the Greek weavers, to elicit their knowledge.

. . . Now it was the Bengali and Benarsi weavers who suffered. If she'd known how the British would chop off the nimble thumbs that made a resham so fine it could slip through an ear-hole, perhaps the Empress would have trampled over the maggots. Then the subjugated nation's exchequer would not have been exhausted importing third-rate British silk. (11-12)

The imaginary discovery of silkworm is something larger than a piece of descriptive history. It represents a critical depiction of the history of relationship between humans, specifically men, and natural resources; human greed leading to control over and misuse of the environment. This serves as an allegory for contemporary wars, slaughter of people and destruction of nature in order to capture natural resources. The significance of biotic integrity is shown through the interconnection of human and nonhuman elements. Through Dia's personal thoughts, Khan expresses an ecocritical and ecofeminist analysis of many social and political aspects of Pakistani society, including the postcolonial marginalization of third world countries on the basis of economics and natural resources, but also relationships between men and women.

Dia reflects on the relaxed and curious intellect of the Empress as she wonders what made the Empress drop cocoon into the water, and so "metamorphosed into a pioneer. What had moved her not to simply crush the little menaces, as most people disposed of pests today?" (19). Here, Khan's narrative supports the anti-pesticide

movement referred to in Rachel Carson's work *Silent Spring*. The impact of pesticides and the chemical industry is highlighted. Dia's mother, Riffat, passionately and responsibly opposes chemical spraying, pointing out that use of chemical products will kill other insect species and herbs in the ecosystem. Riffat reflects on her own political awakenings when during her studies about textiles in England "a land that had stripped hers of the very plants she hoped to one day reintroduce", Riffat argues:

I understand the conflict, . . . Yet it's in these libraries that I'm learning what we've lost.' How could they create peace from paradox?

She'd ask herself this often in the following years, particularly when training weavers descended from those whose thumbs the British had chopped off because they'd been too adept at turning fiber to tissue. (Khan *Trespassing* 415)

She opposes capitalistic, technological methods and use of chemicals that bring environmental cancers, toxicity resulting in human sickness and ecological damage.

Khan writes that Riffat:

decided to discard chemical dyes. They were expensive, hazardous, and not even colorfast. Though organic dying was a method none of the other factories relied on, it had once flourished in the subcontinent . . . She discovered most colors could be obtained from plants easily grown here . . . Turmeric and myrobalan produced yellow; henna, madder, and pomegranate red; indigo blue; tamarind and onion black; chikoo brown. (99-100)

Dia supports her mother's environmental consciousness, supporting native indigenous lifestyles and dedication for introducing organic and natural methods, as she thinks:

It had taken her mother's vigor to make the project work but eventually, after several false starts, fifteen acres of mulberry trees successfully yielded the sixty tons of leaves required to feed the one and a half million silkworms needed to produce roughly nine hundred pounds of raw silk. (98)

Riffat understood that the South Asian indigenous culture and lifestyle were embedded in nature and hence, through her character, Khan highlights traditional farming versus corporate methods. But she encounters repeated and significant obstacles in her path. Riffat "examined the mulberry stock, drafted notes on her clipboard, . . . She was tired of ringing her lawyer, who'd increased his charges. She'd been forced to hire engineers to tell her if the current water crisis had more to do with the Mafia than the drought" (409). Khan once again highlights the role of capitalist enterprise in controlling resources and creating artificial scarcity. She also highlights the social and economic problems involved in sustaining business and the detrimental effects of industrial waste:

To combat power breakdowns she'd finally installed a high-power generator, but every time the engine revved and black smog lifted into the air she winced. It made no sense: this use of fuel to sustain an industry she'd taken pains to start cleaning by introducing natural dyes . . . it was the choice between a waste of human or natural resources, even as she worked hard to prove the two were the same . . . Both produced their own waste. (410)

Riffat promotes the responsible and carefully managed ways to use chemicals to balance the ecosystem, but Khan also tells us that when the obstacles she faces fail to

deter her, Riffat is personally attacked by chemical industry representatives and lobbyists, receiving threatening and anonymous calls.

Trespassing brings together many varied strands of ecocriticism which together could exert a powerful impact on the environmental movement in Pakistan. It could inspire interest in and concern for the natural environment, including an understanding of ecology as a vast series of interconnected processes and dependencies. It could validate and encourage readers to value notions of a spiritual connection between human and nonhuman elements. The book could promote an understanding of human impact on the environment and the need for accountability and checks on this, leading to a critique of the impact of wider politics, particularly the roles of government and corporate bodies in environmental destruction. It could also raise awareness of significant parallels between men's treatment of women and their attitude to natural resources.

In these ways, *Trespassing* could play a great role in "articulating ecology" and oppose the capitalistic view of "technologically engineered control of nature" as stated by Kroll. Khan explains how manipulation of biotic integrity has resulted in further dependence on artificial technology. Khan writes about the larvae:

their only activity was eating. But having been bred for so many centuries, they'd all but forgotten how to eat. The women had to chop up their food in tiny slivers and change the supply nine times daily or the fussy creatures would starve. If in their wilder days, they required no hygiene, now the perforated paper beneath them had to be scrupulously cleaned, or this too would elicit a hunger strike. (*Trespassing* 104)

This passage reflects the powerful and negative impact of human interventions on the natural world. Khan's work is a plea for a biotic approach to silk industry and similar business to avoid detrimental effects on environment.

Khan also uses the nonhuman voice to describe the reaction of biotic community towards human greed. When an insect population is subjected to severe stress, it develops a resistance which may create problems for human life. Responding to this, Dia says:

Don't you half expect the silkworms to form a guerilla alliance and revolt? People have always depended on animals for food and clothing, and then, four thousand years ago, along came a Chinese empress who made insects our property too. Maybe mutiny is the real reason output is down. (106)

Though Dia seems to have a very far-fetched idea of guerilla alliance and revolt, resistance is visible in the output that is down. Even nature, when used as a commodity or a production machine, harbors the lines of resistance, but this resistance is the kind Salaamat finally adopts: instead of harming greedy humans, just stop feeding their greed.

Khan also explores the position of the women labourers on the farm, and their own developing awareness:

As in the days of the Chinese Empress, now too silkworms were bred by women. With the exception of the gardeners and the security guards, the farm was entirely run by them, which was why they were allowed to work at all.

When they first started, the sight of the larvae had made the workers squirm. Touching had been out of the question. But now the insects were handled as mechanically as braids and babies. (104)

Although Dia is introduced to the reader as focused on the biotic processes of the silk farm, her understanding of these local processes lead to the development of a wider understanding of what Coupe calls the “concealed hazards of industrial life” (243).

Landscape images are used both as a setting, and metaphor for unjustified interruption:

For most of the drive, the land was stripped and parched, dotted with occasional bands of drooping mesquite...Riverbeds ought to teem with life, thought Dia . . . But except for a kingfisher poised regally on a wire, there was no evidence of the fabled grandeur of the Indus. (97)

On another occasion, Dia notices that “[t]hey hadn’t even gone halfway. The land outside was still thirsty and desolate. Not even a kingfisher in sight” (99). This image recalls Carson’s inspiration for *Silent Spring* in the poem by John Keats, “La Belle Dame Sans Merci”, which contains the lines “The sedge is wither’d from the lake, And no birds sing”. There is further imagery of distress caused by destruction of nature when Dia becomes deeply sad to see the dead Lyari River (410).

A landscape in harmony with humans is always present as a setting of Pakistani legends. Pakistan as a country is recognised as having a wealth of nonhuman natural resources, with mountains, plains, rivers, seas and trees providing one of the most scenic landscapes on earth. Hence, both folklore and regional and Urdu literature, encompass a rich variety of images of mountains, plains and waters and indigenous culture. This folkloric and rich indigenous culture is present in this novel, too. When Dia witnesses the decay of the Indus river, she recalls the folk legend about *Sassi Punnu*, and reflects sadly:

Only books and old men like Inam Gul told of princesses like Sassi, dwelling in the glorious lakhy bagh on the banks of the river, surrounded by music, fountains and burnished horses. (97)

Trespassing is a novel constructed of different narratives: public history, national history, history of the Indus valley, history of the indigenous communities of Sindh and the natural history of fish and silkworms.

Water, the precious fluid, acquires a central position in *Trespassing*. Most water borders in Pakistan are surrounded with densely populated human settlement areas and agricultural fields. Over 60% of Pakistan's population live in rural areas with livelihoods based upon the rearing of livestock. These activities, according to Azhar, comprise a significant part of Pakistan's gross domestic product. In the novel, Dia discovers that the River Chenab has been diverted away from the town of Jhang. Khan joins ecocritical theory with a folkloric/mythological approach to investigate the cultural and ecological life of the characters. The majority of legends center on the Indus or Chenab river, as in the folktale of *Sassi Punnu* set on the Indus River in the ancient city of Bhambore. Once a thriving port city at the source of the Indus, for centuries Bhambore has been deserted and in ruins after the Indus changed course and no longer fed the city. Sassi is described as being the folk queen of Sindh; when her parents are forced to abandon her, they entrust her to the river in a box with the hope that she will find a new home in Bhambore, which she does. Some years later in Bhambore, Sassi meets Punnu, a fragrance-seller, and they become lovers.

In the folktale, Sassi is refused the right to love Punnu. The Indus is aggrieved at the restriction put on the two lovers and responds by changing its course, leaving

Bhambore without water and therefore no means of survival. Dia recalls that after her father is murdered, his body drifted down the Indus River. Due to environmental degradation of waterbeds the waters did not accept his dead body. Nor were humans able to care for his body as “villagers had seen too much destruction to care about yet another corpse” (*Trespassing* 12). Khan uses this folktale as allegory for the destruction of human and nonhuman communities witnessed by Dia.

Dia’s character also has a more spiritual side; standing among eight thousand tiny creatures she witnesses them “perform a dance that few humans even knew occurred; this was life” as they “sashayed”, “swiveled”, “bobbed” and “undulated”. Khan writes:

They worked ceaselessly for three days and nights, with material entirely of their own, and with nothing to orchestrate them besides their own internal clock. Each, a perfectly self-contained unit of life. When Dia watched one spin, she came closer to understanding the will of God than at any other time. (107)

Coupe notes that “life depends upon sociability and warmth: in order to survive, our species need both social and environmental networks” (258). This interassimilation is reflected in Dia’s observation of silkworms. Her attachment with the silkworms illustrates a bond of respect for the sanctity of life of nonhumans. It also reflects that sustainable living involves developing mutually enhancing interactions between one another and with the nonhuman world. This lesson comes from her understanding of the psyche of the insects that are always trying to socialize with humans. If nature can work tirelessly to fulfill human expectations, in response why can humans not be friendly to it? This lack of responsiveness will hamper human growth. Echoing

Roszak's Ecopsychological approach, Khan appeals to readers to strengthen a bond out of which humans evolve.

She sees nature itself as a manifestation of God. Harmony with nature and not domination over nature is what leads to clear mind and purity. It also reflects that ecoconsciousness is central to our health and thriving. Khan wants the readers to realize that it is the organizing principle of life. Being around nature Dia feels a lift in her spirit. Just observing cocoons, she is captivated. Her spirituality is inseparable from nature because she finds meaning in it. There is some kind of emotional connection to nature. And from there Khan's understanding of ecopsychology is evident through Dia involvement. This leads the reader to explore why spirituality and nature are so meshed and the physical world that humans see tells things beyond the physical world.

At the farm, she saw baby caterpillars that wanted nothing but to eat, she thinks, "Their greed was like hers" (283). Khan gives voice to this nonhuman counterpart. She familiarizes her readers with nonhumans as an important component, their movement, and way of existence, exploring the similarities between the nonhuman world and the humans. Upholding the values of environmental justice, Khan highlights the voicelessness of the nonhuman biotic community and personifies them to demonstrate their part in the ecosystem. Khan's treatment of the nonhuman world is based on equality, respect, and reciprocity. She gives voice not only to silkworms and turtles but also to the sea. Intimately tied to nature, Dia can instinctively feel these movements. In the development of silkworms, Dia finds similarity with humans.

Khan describes nonhuman inhabitants of Indus valley highlighting the presence of nonhuman life among human habitats. Khan writes that monsoons used to be Dia's

favourite time of year as “before gutters spilled” and “grief afflicted thousands of flood victims”, there were days “lulled by pattering on rooftops, rich smells, bright hues, and a steady, puissant breeze . . . The torpid snail emerged, . . . Earthworms slithered, . . . Ants swarmed, . . . The leggy crane fly sipped moisture from grass” (*Trespassing* 298). By mentioning all these natural elements, processes and phenomenon, she brings them into play as part of human culture. Dia observes “roaches bending backwards in the shower drain. Crickets chirping . . . sang with wings. They rubbed these together in a dance and the dance sang” (312) and Dia once again gives human attributes to nonhuman species.

Dia steps onto a “brilliant green lawn” and absorbs “a residual raindrop on a single leaf”, “hoverflies swilling mist; bulbuls diving for dancing gnats”. Khan writes:

she’d feel things so poignantly it was as if the flaccid sky had sunk
into her bones, teaching her to see life up close, closer than anyone
else . . . she could hear earthworms die, and aphids sweat honeydew.
. . . air turned tawny, bulbuls sang more vibrantly, . . . and think, . . .
God is here; God is detail. (299)

Dia believes in the wisdom of nature itself. She has a meditative relationship with nature when she understands the signs of divinity.

She is also seen fascinated by what Daanish tells her about a land which she has not seen. Khan writes:

She began to see her world from his eyes, as if the rain had pulled
her into the sea, and all the land dwellers had changed to their earlier,
watery state. Insects like the leather jacket suddenly looked more

like a cuttlefish, tentacles rippling as it slid along the wet ground. A spider hanging nearby carried an egg cocoon in her arms, . . . Sopping ivy was seaweed . . . She was beginning to think like that. In her mind, phrases were increasingly punctuated with in *this* country, or, in *other* countries . . . This had always been the only place she knew, loved, and wanted to be immersed in. It was Nini who'd dreamed of that *other*. Not her. (300)

Previously, Dia's only fascinations were insects' activities in private, her contemplation over human-nature link and how human greed had carried them away from nature. Now, Daanish has brought her another fascination: thought of a totally different landscape that belongs to a *them* not to an *us*. Dia's imagination makes her weave interesting threads to see her connection with *them*:

But she was getting entangled in aspects of that faraway world Daanish reluctantly shared with her. To get to his classes, he had to cross a sloping wooden bridge above a stream that in winter rang with icicles and in spring, teemed with carp . . . In fine weather, he said students walked the campus barefooted, and discussed assignments with professors under the shade of towering oaks. It all sounded wonderfully intimate and fabulous to her. (300)

Unlike Dia, however, Daanish keeps comparing Pakistan with the Western countries:

And though he claimed otherwise, she could read his eyes well enough to know there was magic there for him too. And so she was beginning to understand what he meant when he said he was divided. (300)

Analysis of the two main characters, Salaamat and Dia, establishes Khan as a writer-activist who gives a dramatic visibility to contemporary environmental issues of the

global South and engages readers with some of the most difficult challenges concerning nature. Although Khan is rooted in the postcolonial discourse that focuses on the theoretical questions of nationalism and identity, she also embraces the environment as the most significant focus of *Trespassing*.

Daanish: The Ambivalent Native

The struggle for environmental justice and sustainability is best reflected in the character of Daanishwar, known as Daanish, a young middle-class Pakistani man studying in America. Like Salaamat, Daanish is also close to nature and admires beauty. Throughout the novel, he is immersed in his memories of the fresh, lush and clean places in America: “in the sunken garden” where “he could smell the dew as he lay on the grass” and observe that “Pollen dusted the air . . . missing his walks in the cedar forest” (161). He loves “walking and listening, absorbing the grounds”, remembers the “the lawns burgeoned with bluets, buttercups and black-eyed susans; the trees with chickadees, titmice, and the plaintive phoebe”, “rows of enormous oak and cedar trees”, inhales the freshness in the environment deeply and delights in the walks to his favourite “sunken garden, nestled thickly in the trees” observing that “Wild thyme sprang from between the pebbles. The patch had been planted with tricolor pansies, bluebells, and cowslips” (47-48). Lying stretched beside the flowers:

He saw faces in the gnarly old trees. Some uprooted and changed places with one another. Bluebells rang. Cowslips sneezed and a shower of gold dusted his cheek. Up in the sky, white clouds drifted . . . The grass was fluorescent and a touch moist. He ran his fingers through it and the pores of his skin opened as he welcomed each

sensation. A barn owl swooped across his vision. The moon began to rise. He slept soundly till dawn. (47-49)

Daanish does not just see the nature, he hears it ringing and sneezing, and feels its dust and moisture. He likes to be lapped over by it through the night. He also loves beeches, oceans, coasts and seashells, with a special fondness for the seashells his father would collect from around the world. He wears “a collection of seashells from around the world which sustains him in his travels between Pakistan and the United States” (Rahman 2011, 264). The attachment of Daanish to nature, and the comfort which nature brings to solitude, is seen through many such encounters in the novel.

Unlike Salaamat, however, Daanish also has a strong political awareness of the issues affecting his country and, through a developing awareness in the novel, globally. He has strong antiwar sentiments, seeing that war brings deterioration of multiple kinds, including destruction of the environment and its breathing species in the ecosystem.

The solitude of nature excites Daanish, particularly during Easter Holidays: “The campus, devoid of human life, was ceremonious” (Khan *Trespassing* 46). This hints at his conception of human pollution in natural and manmade landscapes. His praise for the majestic campus is a result of a tension between “local and global frameworks of experience” (O’Brien 144) which is highlighted when he appreciates aspects of Western society. When it comes to appreciating the climate of Pakistan, he is used by Khan to explore a range of critical perspectives and to analyze socio-political relationships to the environment in Pakistan. Daanish’s engagement with the natural environment is used to investigate ecological issues like climate change and

environmental justice. Daanish opposes an anthropocentric view of the environment and instead his journalistic eye focuses on the planetary environmental calamity resulting from human impact on the earth's ecological system. He directs the reader to the eco-political state of today's Pakistan and the consequence of ecological disturbances on the economic and social fabric of the country. Global, local and geopolitical debates in the story are introduced involving the perpetuation of neocolonial frameworks that are based on resource-based domination, "environmental imperialism" (Wright 2010, 8). Through the character of Daanish, Khan engages the reader in a wide-ranging ecopolitical dialogue.

Trespassing continuously crosses from fiction to non-fiction through Daanish's journalistic and explicit political critiques. Khan theorises the global condition of imperialism and colonialism through the "complex interplay of 'environmental' categories such as water, land, energy, habitat, migration with political or cultural categories such as state, society, conflict, literature, theatre, visual arts" (Mukherjee 2006, para. 2). For Mukherjee there are always socio-historical and "material co-ordinators of [such] categories such as forest, river, bioregions and species" (para. 2). Through Daanish, Khan develops new theoretical bridges between postcolonialism and ecocriticism. Together with other elements in the book, this establishes a dialogue between human, colonized land, and nonhuman environmental components.

As a character that detests human dominance over nature, Daanish is highly critical of the US dominance over the world resources particularly those of the third world countries through capitalism and the culture of imperialism. Khan highlights the divide between first world "full-stomach" and third world "empty-belly"

environmentalism leading to confusions around the use of natural resources (as qtd. in Nixon 5) through the angst present in Daanish. She also considers postcolonialism from an environmental perspective and highlights several challenging issues of the former colonies: global warming, land occupation, human over-population, pollution, etc. In doing so, she is concise and authoritative in her stance and offers an ideal introduction to this crucial ecocritical subject. Daanish links consumption with US and military expenditure and environmental destruction caused by wars when he reflects:

Such beauty in a country that consumed thirty per cent of the world's energy, emitted a quarter of its carbon dioxide, had the highest military expenditure in the world, and committed fifty years of nuclear accidents, due to which the oceans teemed with plutonium, uranium, and God alone knew what other poisons. It had even toyed with conducting nuclear tests on the moon. The plump sparkling clouds whispered: We're dumping it on *them*, on *them*. It was bloody seductive. (Khan *Trespassing* 48)

Through Daanish, Khan draws readers' attention towards the "Northern environmentalisms of the rich and the Southern environmentalism of the poor" (Huggan and Tiffin 2). Daanish's angst reflects how developed countries are unlocking and burning carbon to keep accumulating wealth, how their over-ambitiousness to extend western hegemony to space is posing constant threats to the globe. It reflects Carrigan's argument of how developing countries are grappling with the exploitative operations of capitalism and the legacies of western colonialism, demonstrating the power of novels to incorporate key theoretical environmental concepts to contribute in the ongoing ecological debates around the world. This also reflects Khan's criticism of the imperialistic powers demonstrated through American intervention in developing

countries in order to capture the resources of these rich lands. The novel gives a sharp critique of the brutality of American imperialism when Daanish learns from Dia that:

Last summer, a black rain fell. People said it was because of the bombed oilfields in Iraq. For months, soot covered the world and fell like ink. Ama said the rain destroyed our mulberry trees, but she'd no way of confirming that. We ran short of food for the silkworms. (342-343)

This gradual and often invisible aftermath of war in the deadly ecological crises, ignored by imperialistic powers, further disturbs Daanish. The destruction is slow violence, as stated by Nixon, because it intensifies the defenselessness of ecosystems and poor people. In the course of this novel indigenous communities are gradually and systematically robbed of their livelihood, disempowered and forcefully displaced in the name of progress and economic development. This in turn fuels social conflicts as desperation due to corroding life-sustaining conditions leads to displaced people turning to criminal acts, as seen earlier in Salaamat's case. Daanish's brief conversation with the old man at the water office adds to the discussion as he informs in broken English, "Last year three million unlicensed guns were buying in country. The Afghan War ending three years ago, but guns keep coming. The Amreekans were arming and training us to fight the Communists but now we are left to fight ourselves. . . They [Americans] just left, those Amreekans. They didn't care what they leaving behind" (Khan *Trespassing* 333). On such occasions Daanish's gave the standard conditioned response. Khan describes the ambivalence of his character here:

But it was too late: his two selves were squabbling. The Amreekan one argued that he had a right to act on his own interests, so stop complaining. The smaller replied that the other was powerful, rich,

and in the habit of dropping old friends to whom he exported arms and torture equipment that made him even richer (333-334).

Pakistan is also a nuclear power, but Khan argues powerfully through Daanish that such military might can never bring peace to the world. Daanish reflects that it is equally threatening for the people who invent these technologies to have control over earth and its inhabitants, and this convoluted thinking disturbs him.

Through Daanish, Khan argues that the ecological crisis in Pakistan or the East more widely are not isolated events, but have their roots in the modern materialistic capitalistic civilization. This, according to Bahaguna, “makes man butcher of the Earth” (as cited in Huggan and Tiffin 2). Daanish draws our attention to corporate capitalism and the relationship between globalization and ecological destruction. Through Daanish, Khan broadens ecocriticism’s field from a more limited Pakistani perspective to a global one. She criticizes the militaristic world orders which destroy the racial, ethnic human and peaceful societies.

Moreover, in a challenging way Khan narrates the separation of corporate urbanized culture from local nature as indigenous communities being close to nature and understanding land and biotic components in ways that capitalists do not. While filling Dia’s hands with shells, Daanish says: “The last time I was here, Salaamat told me these pen shells used to be harvested for the thread they spun. He said cloth could be made from it. Marine silk – whoever heard of it?” (Khan *Trespassing* 234). This depicts Salaamat and his community as “ecosystem people” (Swanson 108) while Daanish’s comment seeks to identify a vision of sustainable indigenous culture’s association with the natural world that was destroyed by corporate colonization. His

political response to acute and complex ecological challenges are based on environmental sensibilities reflecting Heise's viewpoint that sustainable cultures are the "environmentalist thought models" (Heise 2010, 253). Khan's writing involves a conscious and careful engagement with a wide range of ecopolitical processes in Pakistan, illustrating ways neo-liberal economic policies have destroyed the indigenous cultures, economies and environment.

A further example of Khan's understanding of modernity and its relationship with environmentalism also speaks through Daanish's voice when the wild and rural settings of Makli Hills and Thattha coastal areas are depicted in contrast to the urban and metropolitan locales of Karachi. He notes that: "there wasn't a single house, school, university, park or office in Karachi that was free of four encircling walls, though the US Consulate there had the tallest four walls of all" (Khan *Trespassing* 48). He observes the sky "peach-gray pierced by dish antennas, sooty rooftops, telephone wires" and "there were hardly any trees" (151-152). Daanish could see:

service lanes ripped out [as a] part of the Prime Minister's development scheme: yellow taxis, a new highway, and a computerized telephone system . . . But the new lines hadn't been implemented. The roads lay clawed and abandoned like old meat. Once the city awoke, pedestrians would scoop the dirt in their shoes and kick it into the sooty air, to resettle on the next passer-by . . . Karachiites walked out of necessity, not for pleasure . . . Beauty and hygiene were to be locked indoors, adding to their value. No one bothered with public space . . . the little boy . . . unrolled the window and tossed the paper out. He then proceeded to empty his pockets on to the street – more wrappers, a Chili Chips packet, and fistfuls of pencil shavings. (42)

Having no control over what the state does or does not do, the citizens seem not just indifferent to the city's permanent smoke and dust, they, at times, contribute to it as well by randomly adding a wrapper or packet to its streets.

Daanish is concerned to see sunlight soaking up the "runoff gutter water in his street" reflecting "water on the streets and none in taps" (328). This mismanagement of natural resources is usually seen in the third world countries. Most of postcolonial writings reflect these issues as happening due to the corrupt governments. While there is no denying the fact that primarily it is due to government's failure to manage the cities resources, but there is much beyond that as well, lack of resources being one most important factor. Khan writes:

He [Daanish] covered his nose when passing the large patch of land where the neighborhood dumped its trash. Polythene bags hung on tree limbs and telephone wires, plugged open gutters, tumbled along driveways . . . His powerlessness overwhelmed him. How could he even think clearly when his body struggled at the most basic level: for water, electricity, clean streets? What could he begin to do here? And yet, somehow, millions survived. Was it survival or immunity? Was there a difference? (327)

It is interesting to note that having encountered this chaos in "the large patch of land" (327), Daanish's American self loses its ability to even think clearly, while on the other hand millions survived here. However, instead of asking whether or not the citizens had developed immunity against this trash filled environment, the foremost question should be: did they have any better choice than living among the filth?

The environmental pollution, garbage and dust and narrow urban spaces are shown as “There were tiny islands of dry concrete between slimy puddles as thick as the soup in airplane toilets” (327). As a worshipper of neatness who loves to see even buildings (campus, etc.) empty of people, Daanish has become a pilgrim to heaps of trash: “Plastic bags flapped in the branches of the tree sprouting in the center of the dump. Beneath it was a pit stuffed with rotten food, plastic containers and ash from numerous trash-fires...flies...the fiery red ants crawling in feces” (277). This leads to another problem a third world society is usually oblivious to: the trash-fires. In order to get rid of the clearly visible pollutant, and to reclaim the land spaces, trash is burnt by the citizens only to convert it into less visible smoke and ash, though more dangerous. This complete lack of cleanliness in the society is evident in most of its individuals, as Khan shows Daanish seeing around the alleys: “The walls of the corridor were pasted with gray fingerprints and red paan stains” (68). He sees everything that he never wanted to see, from “grubby halls of the hospital” to “the dust-opaque windows...burned litter...the noxious fumes” (69). However, it is only this flaneur who can see all this. The locals seem to have lost that eye that could tell the difference between a heap of trash and a no-trash area. In the study of postcolonial ecocriticism, it is recognized that ecodegradation is often linked to forms of cultural oppression reflected in studies of social ecology and environmental justice. Critics, such as, Slovic, Rangarajan and Sarveswaran emphasize the impossibility of disentangling environmental and cultural problems.

Khan highlights the reality of a daily struggle for life by ordinary people, demonstrating the difficulty of addressing ecological concerns. Therefore, a major reason of negligence of the characters arises from social and economic problems.

Populations have been invaded by a corporate culture which keeps the masses engaged in consumption and struggling to buy goods and facilities that are artificially created and then artificially made scarce. The frequent references to power cuts and shortages of water supply highlight both misuse and overuse of natural resources and deliberate acts of profiteering by people in power. A scene in the water office depicts a dehumanized attitude of authorities arising from a corrupt political system (326). Billions of dollars taken in the name of aid are never used to develop infrastructure or a sustainable ecosystem, and this creates anger and frustration among the population. This scarcity of resources in a country self-sufficient in natural resources highlights the global politics of control over natural resources. Khan writes about Daanish's condition when he finds no water, no electricity:

Because there'd been no electricity since yesterday, the water pump hadn't been switched on. The tank was almost dry and the pressure so low only two holes of the showerhead released a few drops . . . He looked up at the ceiling fan wishing for the telltale whine that sounded when it spun. But the loadshedding continued. (154)

This reflects Ursula K. Heise's (2010) thesis:

environmental problems cannot be solved without addressing issues of wealth and poverty, over consumption, underdevelopment and resource scarcity, as postcolonial critics have highlighted the ways in which historical struggles over colonial and neocolonial power structures as well as contemporary conflicts over economic

globalization have involved and continue to revolve around fundamental environmental questions of, for example use of natural resources, agricultural production systems, pollution, exposure to risk and local and global patterns of corruption. (251-252)

Daanish is also seen arguing over an issue of choices with his American friend when he says: “Sometimes, . . . you’re faced with obstacles that are bigger than you. When there’s no electricity and you can’t turn on the water pump, and it’s a hundred and ten degrees, what choice have you but to sit and let the sweat pour off?” (Khan *Trespassing* 32). This draws readers’ attention to how an individual’s choices are controlled by the “social pressure, physical infrastructure, and institutional channels” (Durning 75). Khan develops an association between social inequality, uneven development in poor countries and lack of control over natural resources which, instead, are used to feed and provide luxuries for the Western world. Daanish calls himself an American orphan “Amreekan orphan” (Khan *Trespassing* 155) as a metaphor for his nation who receives aid from the USA, but is always repressed economically. The non-capitalist developing nations like Pakistan are subjected to repeated imperialist interruptions, so despite having access to modern technology and means, living standards of even the middle class have not improved significantly.

Sick of the continuous electricity shortage, Daanish comes to the window to get some air and observes: “The grass was beginning to scorch in patches. His street badly wanted water. Two lanes away lived a minister, so no loadshedding ever plagued that street... They fanned themselves with newspapers and Daanish knew that in amongst the prayers for his dead father were prayers for bijly [electricity], and a brand new lot of politicians” (157). The narrative then moves to a discussion about global and

national politics which highlights how foreign interference influences national politics, and poor nations like Pakistan, despite being rich in diverse flora and fauna, having ideal weather conditions and an abundance of natural minerals and reservoirs are entrapped in corporate world that does not let it provide for its citizens' basic needs.

Commenting on how this absence of the basic necessities of life affect Pakistanis, Daanish's uncle says: "Our children in Amreeka do very well. There, of course, they have all the opportunity to shine" (157), a cousin adds, "I hear it's very quiet and peaceful over there", while another uncle interrupts that now in Pakistan: "Things are a lot better since the army operation . . . I see how many fewer buses and trucks are being burned. It's because of the troops!" (158). During the discussion they pour out warm Pepsi, explaining: "Without water for tea, it's the best we can do" (158). When they ask if there are plenty of jobs available in America, Daanish tells them, "since the Gulf War there's been a bit of a recession". The conversation makes Daanish reflect that people on both sides of the globe are "exotica-starved". His relations want to hear something good about the Western modern world, knowing it is full of facilities and an advanced lifestyle which they can only dream about. Daanish tells them: "there, people stand in lines . . . The bijly [electricity] seldom goes . . . The air is clean and crisp. In the winter, the snow gives gently under your boots, in autumn the colors are like the softest firelight . . ." (157-161). This scene continues with a little shift from the East/West socio-economic divides to a discussion on issue of brutal wars. Everyone in the room agrees: "That war was a crime . . . What did those poor Iraqis ever do to them? I tell you, oil is a curse. Look at Iran. Look at Libya...And look at the Saudis. Look how low they stoop" (159). His uncle adds that all those living in the holy land of

Saudia are beggars who want money from the USA. America's greed to secure oil and Saudia's greed for dollars blinds them to the consequences of uncontrollable extraction of oil from Earth. The finance-based corporate world dehumanizes individuals of both countries. This is where Khan's environmentalism makes her one of the most informed writers from Pakistan. She criticises not just the heaps of trash and deforestation but also the uncontrollable extraction of oil and burning of carbon which is the most central reason for the climate change leading the world to its end. This greed for the oil based energy also leads to wars as Daanish's uncle, as the scene continues, is angrier at the Muslim world as "they let the Americans bomb" the Iraqis in order to control the supply of oil.

For Daanish in America: "Up in the sky, white clouds drifted. No haze, no smog. No potholes, beggars, burning litter, kidnappings or dismissed governments" (48) but then looking out from the window he notes: "A crow perched on the windowsill. It was large and gray-hooded. Our crows are bigger than American crows . . . They're the only things we have that are bigger" (57). This contrastive portrayal of the two worlds in terms of the size of their possessions gives Khan an edge over writers who are usually found focusing the cultural and civilizational divides. Daanish is aggravated when he reads out a statement issued by the US Intelligence to Anu, his mother. It said: "the risk of missile attacks against the US was on the rise, so America must increase defense spending". He reacts: "Can you believe it? While poor countries are punished for defending themselves, the strongest military power in the world comes up with excuses to keep building its weaponry...The problem is that we require aid at all. Beggars, that's what we are. We can either join the bullies or stay the beggars.

Those are our two choices” (269-270). This contrast is further intensified when Daanish observes that the water office of the Housing Society “was not a building but a wide expanse of dirt” (329). Daanish watches the frustrated and furious crowd trying to make a queue to get an approval for a water tank. He says:

The voices rose and a full-blown stampede appeared imminent. And all for water. It was that tail-biting frenzy he’d felt in his uncles. That inbreeding of disappointment, as if they were all stranded on an island in a long-forgotten sea. (329)

The chances of “a full-blown stampede” and that too “for water” is a hint at the helplessness of a society that is often criticised for not developing socially or economically.

Daanish also notices the spread of consumerism on his return from America as a result of technological advancement and industrial-economic growth. He witnesses a society that is premodern in many aspects, but is rapidly being driven by and addicted to technological, industrial growth and becoming intolerant of a natural lifestyle. Unrestrained industrial growth and lack of awareness of the atmosphere people breathe, disturbs Daanish, leading him to reflect on the mysterious respect and humility regarding the intricacies of the natural world. Khan promotes the idea that the best response to Western intrusion and control over natural resources, and “life-destroying dissociation” (Metzner 67) between human and nonhuman is to develop respect for and desire to take care of our indigenous ecosystem, and keep a balanced relationship to the natural world.

The urban-industrial society’s addiction to technology is also noted by Daanish. Disturbed by society’s addiction to technology, he observes the worst sort of

consumerism in Pakistan: “Sweeping boulevards had cropped up with designer boutiques, video shops and ice-cream parlors. . . Here too, all people want to do is shop and eat” (Khan *Trespassing* 169). Khan uses Daanish to highlight the cultural transformation of social and ecological processes due to capitalism. Diagnosis of such incidents and their effects on society have “significant implications for environmental politics” (Glendinning 41). Daanish’s observation of Khurram is also significant as Khan points towards the structure of modern technology to control the world’s resources and consumers’ behavior. He observes Khurram, the fellow passenger in the flight “happily consumed by a slew of fancy gadgets purchased in the land left behind: a discman, hand-held Nintendo, mobile phone, talking calculator. He warmly demonstrated the marvels of each invention” (Khan *Trespassing* 21-22) because the world of the rich is filled with the technology brands and gadgets. Similarly, Dia’s brother’s obsession with computers shows his extreme dependence on artificial and technical artifacts and he is depicted as a slave to the corporate world (14). As Glendinning puts it: “Technology’s mastery over our lives translates into political disempowerment as well” (48). A society immersed in technological gadgets actually reflects a “mentality of control over the natural world, space, other people, and even ourselves” (49). The conservationist cause of Khan is clear as she highlights how the corporate world is as Wright (1975) says “technologizing” the earth (qtd. in Huggan and Tiffin 256). Thus, the text creates a provocative discourse, and is engaging the reader with contemporary developments in environmental thought through a focus on technology, colonialism and globalization. Daanish explores changes brought by colonization and globalization as his character develops in Khan’s theoretically

grounded fiction and highlights the devastating effects of development in the name of modernization and globalization.

Technology provides a link between personal technological use and tyrannical modes of political power over society established by multinational corporations. Instead of directing technological impacts towards serving basic human needs in as sustainable a manner as possible, capitalist industries and corporations develop technology “from dams to antiaging creams, that allow us an increasing degree of control over the natural world” (Glendinning 48). Here Khan criticises the development of a consumerist society in developing countries which threatens the natural life and balance of the ecosystem. She posits that this consumerist lifestyle leads to a decline in humans’ attachment to each other and to other components of the ecosystem. At another place in this novel, Khan refers to intolerable toilet conditions on airline flights to contrast technological advancement and resultant environmental pollution. Daanish thinks:

Normally, within the first hour, they became open gutters in the sky. The toilet vomited chunks of brown, yellow and red, with the flush serving only to chop up the chunks. Reams of toilet paper poured out of the waste disposal and twisted across the cabinets as if the passenger who sat on the toilet seat had suddenly discovered graffiti. Used diapers filled the sink. (*Trespassing* 20)

Khan also criticises beauty cream and cigarette ads in the novel as a “progressive deterioration” (Metzner 57) promoting consumption hazardous to both humans and the environment.

Hence, in these ways, the character of Daanish draws readers' attention to the exploitative treatment of the natural world through capitalistic developmental models. This focus on ecopolitical scenarios marks a distinct shift to new narratives in Pakistani fiction. Daanish reflects how imperialism and neocolonialism create inequality between developed and underdeveloped countries and also create divides within local cultures as well as complex material and racial difference between imperialist and developing countries. Through Daanish's voice, readers experience multiple examples of colonial exploitation and devastation reflected in the stories of the impoverished, exploited and oppressed. Khan writes skillfully to resist the colonialist exploitation process of colonialism and its resultant environmental degradation. At the same time, her writing imagines an alternative to such processes.

However, when Daanish chooses to leave the country, he becomes an escapist who runs away from physical realities or moral obligations of life. In depicting this, Khan leaves the reader with his or her own moral choice. Khan has illustrated the detestable colonizing and imperialistic attitudes of the American policymakers and creates a realistic depiction of cultural social and power relationships in Pakistan.

These characters create a high degree of self-consciousness and ecological concern in readers who can also see environment appearing as one of the main characters in this novel in the form of sea, caterpillars, turtles, and silkworms. Khan evokes feelings of wonder, appreciation and empathy towards the natural world as opposed to the stark mechanical world which has come to fore. The feeling of belongingness that Khan shares with the nonhuman world is the core premise of a green reading. Indus is becoming a colonized space from which natives and sea-life are being

removed. The industrialists ravage the environment for profit and commercial advantage that Khan laments because the “capitalist hubris” brings ecological destruction (Coupe 245). A systematic plundering of natural wealth for selfish reasons disturbs the natural order of ecosystem. Khan highlights Karachi as the center of the fishing industry with thousands of fishing vessels (trawlers, gill netters and fishing boats) that use Karachi Fish Harbour. Khan draws our attention to the fishing community in Sindh, highlighting the coastal strips of Karachi and brings marginalized trade and land to the center by pointing out decrease in fish population and absence of official/governmental policies to see water channels and fishery departments. She does not let the suffering of nonhuman be nullified and sets the concern for the endangered world of nonhuman and stirs reader’s imagination and consciousness about the nonhuman.

The relationship between human and nonhuman is a powerful ideological tool that Khan introduces in a developing discourse of Pakistani fiction in English. The novel invites numerous possibilities for the ecocritical study of Pakistani fiction and contemporary literature. Khan tells the physical existence of nature as something with a living presence, a breathing being around us. With *Salaamat*, *Dia*, *Daanish* and the Environment sharing its space, this novel is an example of multispecies coexistence, a phenomenon that has been discussed by many environmental scientists.

CHAPTER 5

“I’m a creature of the open air, not of stale preservatives.”:

Analysis of The Geometry of God

The perception of nature and problems of a confused culture make up the environment of *The Geometry of God*. It is a story of integration of environmental concerns into religious thinking. Through the study of scholarly debates on religion, nature, and culture in the novel environmental stewardship and human-nonhuman interdependence is analysed. In this novel we encounter novelistic details that are original, unique and culturally specific, linking the marginalization of the human and the non-human in post-colonial Pakistan. Borrowing from Mukherjee, I use the term postcolonial not simply as a historical domination of American and British rulers over Asian countries generally and the subcontinent particularly; but a “historical condition of intensified and substantial exploitation of the majority of humans and non-humans” (5). While Mukherjee (2010) discusses the European and North American resourceful groups, I will include discussion of local Pakistani people who, along with the foreigners, play their parts in intensifying the process. That also explains why post-colonialism does not end with “post” as after colonialism but, as Mukherjee says, it is an end to a specific mode of domination which is now shifted to another stage and demands a global struggle.

Although Khan’s novel pays serious attention to historical oppression and injustice, dictatorship, militarisation, bans and patriarchy — one of its core concerns

is the negligence towards and degradation of nature. Through describing different political crises in various narrative threads, Khan tells the readers about the environmental crisis the country is going through. Highlighting such concerns in a bold and unapologetic way makes Khan both a novelist and a critic of capitalism. It is important to note that the time period i.e. late 80s and 90s in which the story is set, there was not much discussions about environmental issues in literary and social scene of Pakistan; but more recently Pakistanis are developing an awareness of environmental issues. The present-day reading of the text makes it highly relevant to contemporary changes in terms of environmental concerns. Khan makes the readers reflect on themselves along with the land and their future. The novel represents religious obligations towards saving the environment.

Adopting a local narrative style, embracing cultural aspects and insertion of very local linguistic phrases and setting show an emphasis on the regional and indigenous aspects of Pakistan in the novel under study. Khan's characters' lives reflect the rise and fall of political sensibilities in a postcolonial country. By highlighting the sociological position of these characters, Khan critiques the cultural and ecopolitical practices on both a national and international level as the characters reflect economic and political concerns of their particular time. Willingly or unwillingly, they are seen as subscribing to a capitalist model and suffering an environmental cost.

In what follows, I want to explore how Khan's novel naturalizes the history of the region. I am going to attend to critical questions regarding the environment by

looking at a specific Islam vs science debate. The interpretations offer ways in which readers can gather the rich meanings that this story carries through four character studies that represent different perspectives on the natural world. Zahoor is a scientist and professor and is the maternal grandfather of two young girls Amal and Mehwish. Following the footsteps of her grandfather whom they call Nana, Amal also becomes the first woman paleontologist in Pakistan. Mehwish is a blind girl closely attached to Amal who is eight to ten years elder to her. Noman is a young journalist of Amal's age and later develops an intimate bond with Mehwish when they grow up. Hence, the complicated relations between a scientist, paleontologist, journalist and pseudo religious powers are used to highlight the liberating spirit of religion which values species other than human beings too.

Pakistan's soil, water, plants, crops and animals are integral part of Pakistani life. Khan in *The Geometry of God* shows this integration of characters attached to "ancient land, ancient water" (42) and other nonhuman agents through the environment, and creates a creative dialogue using multiple critical traditions. This system of attachment of Pakistanis to such material, together with a relationship of human and nonhuman components that define the culture of Pakistan, is what I understand as 'environment'. Khan uses this relationship through her politically motivated work, bringing religion and science into discussion. Religion and science, like these natural elements, do not depend on boundaries of the national state.

In order to engage fully with the text, I will have to revisit the socio-cultural and political contours of the history of Pakistan with reference to the debates in the

novel, and hence, this work of fiction is also a political non-fiction critique. Before I examine the ways in which Khan approaches the environment in *The Geometry of God*, I should attempt to familiarize readers with a brief political history of the country with reference to characters in the story.

Three main characters, and especially Zahoor ul Din and Amal struggle to find a true spirit of religion attuned to socio-ecological realities and concerns. Zahoor's protest, Amal's struggle and Noman's conversion reflect an attempt towards decolonization of pseudotheology which, alongside many other social and economic ills, has become corrupted through the intervention of imperialist forces. Previously, religion was widely used as a tool for debate and analysis of a wide range of issues. In its corrupted form, religion becomes a tool of coercive social control, emphasising rituals and enforcing a narrow and rigid political line and blocking critical thought.

Talibanization in Pakistan during General Zia's regime drew national and international condemnation of both the state's administration and its foreign policies. In Pakistani history, Zia's period (late 70s to early 90s) is the one which has most affected the progress and development of Pakistani society. The period is marked by the implementation of strict religious rules on state institutions, education, media, and judiciary etc. It was the period when intellectual and progressive thoughts were met with strict punishments. Islam was distorted and misinterpreted for political gain. Billions of dollars of American funding were brought to Pakistan to support Jihad against the Soviets in Afghanistan.⁵¹ Communism was propagated as an un-Islamic

⁵¹ Hamid, Mohsin. "Why They Get Pakistan Wrong." *The New York Review*, 29 September 2011. <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2011/09/29/why-they-get-pakistan-wrong/>. Accessed

philosophy and a threat to Muslims in Afghanistan. Pakistan played a role as a proxy state, allowing America to use its bases and military and other resources to fight against Russian influence and the threat of Communism. Pakistani aid to America also assisted the spread of Capitalistic philosophy. Religion was used to influence the minds of Pakistani people, and especially to motivate the military to fight against Russia. Under Zia's dictatorship, the Pakistani Government used religious justification to promote popular acceptance of a Holy war against non-believers.⁵² There was little understanding within the country that they were favouring another non-believer group and would have to pay the price for American weapons. Arab countries, notably Saudi Arabia, also aided America through their intervention in Pakistani affairs, securing lucrative oil deals with America and a long-term source of vast wealth for Arab governments.

In such a scenario, only a mind blocked from outside influences can blindly follow the state instructions, so intellectual and scientific study was discouraged in various ways as we see in Noman's case who misguides the public through writing distorted facts and Quranic interpretations under the influence of foreign fundings received by his father's religious-political party. Intellectualism was regarded as synonymous with being outside of religion, and science was regarded as a challenge the Divine rules. For instance, "*Selections from Darwin*" and "*The Moment of Mu'tazilites*" were proclaimed banned texts (Khan *The Geometry of God* 123). Educational syllabi were censored and filtered. Information supported by

25 Mar. 2017.

⁵² Hussain, Zahid. *The Scorpion's Tail: The Relentless Rise of Islamic Militants in Pakistan and – How it Threatens America*. Free Press, 2010.

misinterpreted verses from the Holy Quran were introduced in science books at school and college levels. When environmentalism could be supported through spiritual religious teachings if not science and modern studies, Zia's regime discarded such efforts as a waste of time.

For me, this was the dark period of social, political and intellectual history of Pakistan. It was this conflict and distortion that has led many Pakistani English novelists to write about that period. Most of the Pakistani English novelists have chosen various themes and ways to show the real Pakistan, because after 9/11 Pakistan has been relatively prominent on the international scene but regarded as a nation with strict orthodoxy, a land of terrorists and no culture as discussed by Eamon Murphy in *The Making of Terrorism in Pakistan: Historical and Social Roots of Extremism*. Khan joins this group of writers, but her focus is on the environment also.

Ecoconsciousness through Intellectual Protest: Zahoor ul Din's Struggle with Misinterpreted Religious Teachings

The scientist and university professor Zahoor ul Din lives a simple life in touch with nature near the "Margalla foothills" (Khan *The Geometry of God* 122). Zahoor's clash with the religious or pseudo religious parties reflects an intellectual protest against Zia's military rule which strived for strict religious teachings and closed the doors to any progressive movement or beneficial opportunity for the country. He encounters religious resistance to scientific ideas. Zahoor is a radical Pakistani with a scientific and spiritual knowledge and criticizes government policies against development and research. He criticizes religious groups who play politics and make changes in the

educational texts, historical literature and religious teachings to support their own political control over natural and material resources of Pakistan. He tells with pain:

They call me western. As if scientific discoveries belong to the west!
Are we to forget that Omar Khayyam gave us a calendar more
accurate than today's? What about antiseptics? Who remembers Al
Zahrawi? The war is giving this government the power to divide east
from west, and to do it in the name of God! (39)

Here Zahoor highlights a very crucial point that nature does not respect national boundaries. Nature is global and egalitarian, but politics is not: it is competitive and coercive. This point is strengthened by David Harvey's concept of "historical-geographical materialism" (150) and Mukherjee's "eco-materialist aesthetics" (*Postcolonial Environments* 19) that it is impossible to study globalized cultures, links and the nature of a region without the mutual relationship and interdependence of these elements on each other. The effects of environmental problems are not only limited to disastrous events, but it also affects everyday lives through polluted air, food, water and land. The complex and diverse link between water, soil, air, plant, animals and humans as shown in the novel make up the environmental criticism and calls for the critical thinking and attention towards material and imperialistic dimensions involved in the link and functioning of these elements.

For Zahoor the spirit of religion and environmental research have a similar goal – protect every life. In one of his lectures he attempts to raise consciousness of public of the need to be inclusive in their approach and to pay attention to nonhuman life as for him, "sea snakes, sea turtles, crocodiles, penguins, sea lions, and whales . . . all sit between diverging branches of life. They're the mongrels of history . . . We're

learning how it happened! It's the story of life" (Khan *The Geometry of God* 81). But he is soon challenged by one of the voices in the audience, "My *arzo* [wish] is to learn about scientific discoveries, not to be lectured on politics!" (84). Zahoor's researcher friend Henry takes up the mike and replies, "Yes. Why does politics have to come into everything in your country? This is science! This is science!". Similarly, Zahoor's urge to consider environmental research and in-depth study of nature is prominent when his friend Junayd who creates art by bending tree branches argues with him about changes in nature ignoring consumption practices and materialistic approaches by saying, "These are *divine* laws. You cannot corrupt them!" (13-14). Zahoor immediately replies, "If they are divine, how can man know them, and worse, enforce them? He will naturally bend them to his will the way *you* shape trees!". Zahoor talks about evolution and scientific research and therefore, is a threat to powerful religious and political groups who work in alliance with the foreign political groups. Environmental and ecopolitical debates are critical to an understanding of wider politics.

At one point in the story the ignorance of citizens is explained further when Amal's blind sister, Mehwish, who is also Zahoor's granddaughter, in her broken language narrates what happened at the press conference, giving readers a clue about the response of general public for whom environment is no concern. She narrates the event as:

Well, I don't no [know]. He and I are talking about the mountins [mountains] how old they are and how there are more and more army fences around the area I found *Amalictetus* the men have to get per mits [permits] from this mince tree [ministry] and that mince

tree [ministry] but they have no funds their labs and tools are so old it is why all our riches are taken a broad then some one got angry he said there is a war we should talk about important things not mountins [mountains] what is rich about rocks can we feed mouths with them can we fight armies with them? Then every one started one man asked if Nana thinks we are disended [descended] from monkeys what about the special creation of man as the Quran says and Nana got angry and they called each other names till Aziz Sahib inter uped [interrupted] them and said there is bilkul no problem will every one please sit down there is proof of fossils in the Quran —.

(58)

Due to lack of research and environmental concerns, Pakistan's natural riches and treasures are taken abroad as the text tells, "Brian's taking one of your rocks with him to America" (22), "Henry has returned after a series of patchy visits, in which he carried back clumps of rock to the United States in his backpack" (304). Khan highlights that while there is poverty, inequality and deprivation in a developing country like Pakistan, it is also rich in terms of its natural resources. The uneven development in countries like Pakistan is also a consequence of foreign interference, largely because these countries cannot stand economically on their own.

The social peace of such regions is disturbed because of rich deposits of minerals become a source of misery and insecurity for them. A 'historically produced discourse' (Escobar 6) in the country is shown which marginalizes environment or a discourse which supports progress and development that widens the gap between Southern and Western countries as says anthropologist Arturo Escobar (32). To illustrate this Khan has chosen the environment as a theme to highlight the conflict and geopolitical and environmental scene in Pakistan. The representation of Pakistan

as a terrorist and violent nation is clearly, at one level, a historical, political and economic matter. These complications can be understood by paying attention to the natural resources which are the real basis for the control and imposition of imperialistic powers. Through environmental discussions Khan delves into culture, politics and religion. She highlights that natural resources and environmental resources are the motivation for having control over the land because the over-popularized cultural debate in contemporary times is sounding meaningless due to economic concerns. The neo-colonial system is being visibly diverted towards national resources of countries like Pakistan which are richly blessed with natural resources.

This point is further highlighted when Zahoor with icy eyes observes the audience and utters a bitter truth, “This gift is a great threat to some, inside and outside our country” (Khan *The Geometry of God* 83). I believe the gift of research, curiosity, intellect and progress that negates any form of control is threat to the powers who want to keep the masses in the state of oblivion. Amal; a young woman in the novel has that gift and is ready to contribute towards the development of a national consciousness but as the novel shows she is being stopped from doing that. Zahoor continues:

It’s a threat because they can’t *control* it. Now, I say to you: why are we losing the hunger to cultivate the gift? These rocks, he lifts one off the table, ‘our soil,’ he stamps on the carpet, ‘building barracks on every field under every star is no way to protect them! They say it is not *safe* to pursue our work. If they leave, we will be safe!’ Several people start booing. ‘We are suffocating between brass and

bread, tank and creed! . . . And they are here today, in this building, spreading their campaign of fear, trying to put a spell on us! (83)

As Zahoor believes “the army steals the land” but Amal’s father says, “it protects it” (156), so as soon as Zahoor utters these words, there is unrest and chairs are thrown. People start shouting. The recruited audience fire questions which negate what Zahoor has pointed out. A man yells, “I have been listening patiently for one hour to this nonsense. Now will you please talk about Kashmir! That is why I came.”, another says, “Without the army, the Roos [Russia] would destroy Islam. So thank Allah and America for our tanks!”, another declares, “I’m proud of my beard! Che Guevara had a beard! So did DaVinci!”, a fourth says, “Why is a man like you wasting his talent on dogs or whales or what-have-you? Can you feed mouths with them?” (83). These people in the audience are members of the religious groups and are sent in such meetings to create disturbance. The religious party the author refers to is widely known to have been created by American funding and aided by them to exert control over the masses through religion.

The discussion above is revealed in the conversation around the table between Zahoor and Mehwish and Amal’s father, a man in his mid 40s whom the girls call Aba as Mehwish states:

‘You always speak as if you are above us!’ Aba’s voice shakes.

‘We cherish[cherish] our religion, which says nothing about *extinction*. Only Judgment Day. The next life is what this one is for!’

‘And buying and selling.’

‘That is a day to day matter! The best way to protect our faith is to keep it separate from day to day matters.’

‘Then why do we need religious laws?’ . . . It was Nana.’ If heaven is not on earth, then keep them separate.’ (156)

Here Khan through Zahoor’s stance is highlighting that religion not only helps society remain humane but makes it sustainable as well. But in the novel, religion is portrayed as an enemy of social justice movements, intellectual, spiritual and political approaches and evolution teachings. The conservative and fundamentalist religious powers in the political essence of the story depict extinction of moral values by false interpretation towards socio-ecological culture and they target Zahoor for his progressive teachings. This conversation reminds Mehwish of a similar discussion at the press conference. She informs the readers about Noman who is a journalist and son of JP (Jamat e Paidaiish) minister. He tells Zahoor that Zia banned the teaching of evolution but “allowed the digging of fossils to continue” (156). Zahoor’s remarks as Mehwish states that in Pakistan:

People are so touchy about the first and so in different to the second. The abstract is more real than the conk reet [concrete]. Isn’t that interesting? . . . Anyway, with religious parties now in civilian gowments [governments], their in flew ants [influence] has spread. They not only hate ideas but rocks - the same rocks they see no problem buying and selling. (156)

In the name of development, the foreign intervention, be it of America, Saudi Arabia or China reminds me of the arrival of another East India Company in the region. If Pakistani “Ministries and Intelligences” (305) for their own material interests become allies with foreign powers to control the natural resources of this country, then it does

disturb citizens like Zahoor who struggle for real development and not another form of colonization.⁵³ Such stories show that wars are almost always fought to gain resources, so we see many other examples where Khan hints towards natural resources being discovered, researched, bought by ‘outsiders’ and sold by ‘insiders’. The colonial operation and ‘financial strangulation of the overwhelming majority of population of the world by a handful of “advanced” countries’ is the basis of capitalism (Lenin 646) and the study of Pakistan echoes the condition of all such societies in the world; though Pakistan has its own particular colonized zones. The sad part is, it’s not always Americans, British or others who intervene but also fellow Arab Muslim countries who colonize the minds and state institutions in the name of religion to maintain a religiously orthodox society. If one ‘outsider’ controls through money, the other uses religion, and here Khan gives a powerful image that complicates the simple sense in the earlier novels that there are only two choices, East and West, because sometimes rich Pakistanis set a “collage of businesses in some holier-than-thou planet like Dallas-Dubai or Jeddah-Jerusalem” (Khan 63). In the form of Dubai, it is clear that beyond the poles of US and China, there are many examples for Pakistan for how to survive in a global world. Even after the British have left the subcontinent and Pakistan has become an independent state, the imperial system still prevails in new forms of entrapments.

⁵³ This refers to the re-negotiation in America-Pakistan friendship in the emerging cold war between the US and China. The receiving of ‘Coalition Support Fund’ from the US for the use of Pakistani ports for American troops during the War on Terror had a devastating effect on the land of Pakistan. Now selling the natural national assets to Chinese government in the name of economic development is again crucial. The role of Pakistan with reference to China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) in US-China relations is again being questioned by Pakistanis. The Chinese influence in Pakistan is critical for Pakistanis as well as Americans for geo-economic goals.

The readers can see that though the novel is more directed towards Islamization of knowledge, debates between Islam and Science and imperialism, the environmental interests of Khan still occupy a special space showing another form of colonialist system. As we know that capitalism thrives on accumulation of wealth and in the scenario of the environmental discussion it's the accumulation and controlling of geographical zones that promise these riches. If Pakistanis are represented as 'backwards' by British and American colonizers, 'advancements' then should be analyzed in their political and economic contexts. If the possession of resources makes one advanced then, third world countries are advanced. However, their wealth is taken and used by those in power who categorise themselves as "advanced" (Trotsky 26-7). The environmental degeneration in such societies which is the result of globalization has a powerful role in extending human and cultural degradation.

According to David Harvey:

Capitalism is under the impulsion to eliminate all spatial barriers . . . but it can do so only through the production of fixed space. Capitalism thereby produces a geographical landscape . . . appropriate to its own dynamic of accumulation at a particular moment of its history, only to have to destroy and rebuild the geographical landscape to accommodate accumulation at a later date. (59)

In ecopolitical context, this novel becomes a critique of the exploitation of natural resources and ignorance of environmental issues and Khan presents a satirical view of colonial interruption and corruption of state institutions and political religious groups. In the modern or present times, socio-economic practices revolve around environment more than ever before since natural resources have become object of management and

control for, mostly, capitalistic powers. Pakistan's rocks and mountains are important. They are precious, and most people fail to understand that ecostrategic and economic concerns are very crucial factors in wars, and control of such natural resources are one of the most important reasons of dispute among nations. The profit-driven achievements of controlling groups have done a huge damage to the cultural history of country and now the natural system of the country is also at stake because citizens have been diverted from the real issues such as consumption, deforestation, over extraction of minerals, pollution and water scarcity. This expansion of capital making an indigenous region like Pakistan into a globalized unit for controlling resources, creates a yet more unstable situation.

Zahoor's entire struggle calls for state intervention in environmental management and development of public awareness through action at national level. The uncharted damage done to nonhuman components of Pakistan's environment, which never makes it into the emergency-centered news, is reflected in the following example where Zahoor's granddaughter recalls his university teaching:

while the Soviets bomb Afghanistan for the seventh year, Pakistan Television no longer broadcasts weather forecasts because predictions of rain have become witchery. Science and history books are being rewritten. Teaching evolution is banned. Nana [Zahoor] says to learn is to search what isn't written or rewritten. He has become a dangerous man. (Khan *The Geometry of God* 37-38)

It also shows that in a way Khan publicly takes up a political position in the form of Zahoor and comes into intellectual field of the discussion through literature. The story

also reveals that a real Pakistan as seen by Zahoor and Khan is not the one which is constructed and represented in the mainstream Western media or other channels of information by powerful groups be they American policy makers, British colonizers or Pakistani dictators. Pakistanis are Muslims, but they don't believe in extremism and violence. Powerful foreign groups like American media have constructed a specific image of Pakistan but Pakistanis are culturally rich people with strong indigenous roots and are attached to their land of habitation. It is the influence of other countries in Pakistan that disturbs native relationship with their land. In general, Pakistanis are rural, hospitable, peaceful and festive people as represented in other novels of Khan and in the local literature of Pakistan, but the foreign political influences have disturbed and produced a chaotic culture and identity crisis. A very small percentage of Pakistanis are urbanized, and they still have their immediate attachments in villages and out of the urbanized environments; as informs Zahoor, "But new Lahore is filled with potholes, rickshaws, smog. Its heart cries Village . . . Lahore is a country child that once saw a skyscraper and longed to become it. So, it chopped down the trees that already gave it height. It is giving up lassi for Pepsi as we speak" (37). Khan targets all the elites of the society whose interests lie with being allies of the transnational corporations. Under the term of cosmopolitanism, they ignore their own national interest, and sacrifice their people and economy. Therefore, Zahoor's character and his influence on the characters of Amal and Noman is a valuable contribution to debate about social and economic development. The creation of such characters makes novel a severe kind of protest literature and strong advocacy and activism is reflected in the novel.

Ecoconsciousness through an Ecofeminist Struggle

This section in the chapter will continue the discussion regarding religious forms that exploit nature, and an interconnection with the religiously instructed outlines of exploitation and repudiation of women will be developed.

Through Amal Khan reevaluates the natural world in Pakistani ecopolitical context. The novel also becomes a story of the struggle of a young girl, Amal, who presents the ongoing debate of Science vs Religion in Pakistan, and a beautiful spiritual as well as political dialogue between science and religion regarding environmental crisis is seen. Her character presents the role of science and religion in the face of the environmental crisis in Pakistan. Since a Pakistani feminist perspective is missing from environmental practice, activism and policy because of women being considered less involved, Khan does not let a woman's struggle go unrecognised. Amal's character challenges the negligence of the Pakistani government, religious parties and civil society towards land and the environment. Following lines from the novel highlight Amal's determination and breaking of the barrier:

The steep shelf above is also pink and green, and as I break into it, instead of exhaustion, I feel exhilaration. My back is strong. My arm swings with ease. I don't have to use both arms. Beside me, Mike strikes a hammer with a violence almost loving. We tear into the rock a few inches above my head, then a foot above his, where I can't reach . . . I look up at the crest of the hill. A sudden burst of recollection: *I should climb it.* (313)

Amal's choice to research fossils is an attempt to control and pay attention to her space and to natural resources. The search for the "lost species" is a metaphor for the loss of an interactive bond amongst human and nonhumans that is being lost in efforts of conservation and development which have produced a competition for survival between humans and nonhumans. The rock excavation is a metaphor for excavating deeper meanings of cultural attitudes towards things. Khan's approach to Amal's protest and Zahoor's resistance form a protest against neoliberal and neocolonial forces. It is the story of protest against commodification of native grounds by globalization. Similarly, Mike's act of striking with a "violence almost loving" also reveals the tradition of androcentrism in American literature as discussed by Kolodny in *The Lay of the Land*, land-as-woman or a weak female object to be violated. Similarly, on her wedding day Amal is angry at her maternal uncle who "thriving abroad" avoids Zahoor because he "can't stand that his own father's at the front of the culture war in the Motherland he can't stand to live in" (Khan *The Geometry of God* 217). Through a patriotic theme Khan presents an ecofeminist stance of treating Mother nature. Amal shows her anger on disrespecting and disowning one's land, "Motherland should be unchanging, idealised not loved, arms open, legs open, traditional finery fading familiar, dusty antique, abused authentic, screaming to be fucked" (217). In Legler's opinion Gretel Ehrlich also does not see nature (land) as an "agentless female object" to be controlled and violated because that represents a pornographic relationship between human and nature, Ehrlich considers land as an agent, "a "speaker" with erotic autonomy" (23). This postmodern critique helps readers revise the relationship with land which Amal shows through her feminist

dimension in research in the mountains. Hence, it creates a discourse in Pakistani literature which highlights an oppressed critical thought and resultant victimization of weaker human and nonhuman participants of the Pakistani society. Readers are presented with a reformulation of environmental concepts to reshape their ideas about connection with the nonhuman.

In the name of religion, a systematic violence is done to weaker subjects, be it a woman or nature. Khan targets the silences and gaps between powerful and powerless groups of the society and a specific environmental matrix that is composed of violation of the human and nonhuman relationship is seen here which makes me think that oppression, degeneration and negligence permeate the world of this novel. The novel brings into focus the need for close collaboration between religion and science to help solve the marginalization of the environment. This style of arguing about orthodoxy and spiritual teachings of Islam, for Khan, is a way to interrogate the roots of concern for the environment. As discussed above the novel's social map is dominated by debates between politics, science, religion and spirituality, Amal's interest in Sufism and her investigation into the natural world brings her to understanding of religion and culture in a clearer way. She is happy that she lives away from human settlements when she witnesses men participating in globalization agendas. Amal and Zahoor are mostly seen surrounded by "hills, millet fields, the prickly grass, the stinging ants and noisy squirrels" (*The Geometry of God* 244). Her childhood is spent in the company of her grandfather, a scientist, a natural historian.

Amal loves to explore the ecosphere. She connects with nature with awe as she observes, "the sun dips behind the cliffs of an extinct sea", the "butterfly fold[s] its

wings and tiptoe[s] back down” (21), “the sun bows to the trees” (40), “chocolate-sunset of siltstone taught me beauty never be enough for me. I have to taste” (305), the “birds circle us in flocks of emerald green wings, each with a trim of salmon pink, before settling on matching pink-green rocks, long delicate beaks and tails beautifully aligned” (312-313), the “flying foxes . . . in the branches of enormous banyan trees” (264), “the tree with upside down roots turns into a house of irritable upside down residents. They yawn, gazing about their gravity-free world with large limpid eyes. A few fly off to hunt. Others find a better angle for stillness and disguise . . . licking fur the colour of Lahore’s soil . . . And they echolocate, like whales” (264). On the first page of the novel, she mentions walks and hills and observes, “it rained last night, the air is sweet and the ground moist” (4). At the tender age of eight, she thinks of a butterfly tilting over the crown of her Nana’s head (8). She says, “I spend too much time in Nana’s company . . . Nana takes me for a walk in the Margalla Hills (4). Once on a trail in the Margalla Hills surrounded by Oak trees, Amal notices, “Leaves rustle. Deer, or maybe a paradise flycatcher” and Zahoor says, “I know you’ll miss these walks and talks . . . But they’re inside you, and there is no need to be rid of them” (40). From her childhood, she is taught to see things through an inner eye. This is highlighted by Khan when Amal’s grandfather, Zahoor whom she calls Nana pulls out small rocks from his pocket and Amal finds them ugly. She says, “I was hoping for a baya nest, neatly stitched with a few dirty eggshells still inside” (4) but Nana says:

‘*Nazar se dekho* . . . look closely, with the *inner eye*. ‘This animal was once alive. It swam in the Tethys’ . . . See how the rock has split into two? . . . See how this part sticks out slightly, like the name on a rubber stamp? That is the fossil. A bone that has become stone.’ I

notice the colour is different where he is pointing. But it's still an ugly rock . . . (4)

This seeing with the inner eye identifies Amal as a progressive person with a 'deep ecological' consciousness, having an intense engagement with nature, observing closely and reflecting on what she sees. When Amal shifts to Lahore, she remembers Islamabad as:

I'll miss these walks. And our house, which faces these hills. I can see their dark outline from the wide windows of my room at night. They are my Tariq, my late-night visitor, assuring me that if continents collide, I'll be able to rethink the contours of these hills before waking up the next day. *Geography first exists in the mind.* Without these hills, what marker will I have? (39)

Her sensibility to environmental phenomena is also undeniably spiritual as "[p]eople are everywhere; yet we are haunted by a deep loneliness for those natural others who have been our companions for biological ages" (Gottlieb 5). Similarly, readers learn that Amal "reads rocks" (Khan *The Geometry of God* 149). While reading rocks, Amal compares one bone with another from a different time. She teaches Mehwish it is a "co relation" which is "only possible big cause [because] people do not only see with their eyes ears and hands but also with their memories" (158). During teaching also Amal concentrates on the concept of "Internal supporting structure" and "correlation" to understand paleontology (228). About Amal, Khan says, She's *she*" (90). Similarly, talking about her husband at a dig, Amal says, "His family, and mine, complain that I go on digs 'alone, with so many men'" (304). Amal chooses to have both family and a career, but she is questioned about her dedication to professionalism and she is

expected to leave her career. The pressures of controversies and taboos follow her into the workplace and her dedication is not viewed as a calling. Under a strict cultural pressure Amal is determined to unlock the barriers as she says, “Since closed doors exist, I’ll learn to be a locksmith” (128). She says, “Since Nana is our parent entity, our Pangaea, I choose his way. I devote myself to the jan of janwar. The anima of animals” (228). In conversation with her friend Zara, Amal reflects on why researching about the species and nonhuman elements is important to her: “It’s about *life*” (131), she explains, and, in response to criticism from her friend that she is obsessed with the digging old stuff and with the past, she insists: “I’m obsessed with the present. And the future.” She adds, it’s not a “morbid fascination” but “a healthy fascination with life.” (131). This deep engagement connects her to spiritual understanding of nonhuman components of the environment. Her encounters with Sufi music have a further significance. The technique of blending music to bring emotion to a story and Khan describes how Sufi music is very much part of the art of the subcontinent. Traditionally, Sufis preferred to live in open spaces in nature away from human settlements. This depiction of Sufi simplicity also stands in contrast to capitalistic offerings which propagate artificiality. Within her world of exploration, however, Amal is not objective like scientists, but intimately involved with the environment.

Amal’s attempt to discover nature and observe it closely makes her conscious as she narrates:

I begin to see something . . . The longer I look at the rock, the more I can almost see *it*, except I don't know what it should be. I slide a thumb over rough sand. *It* is shaped like a triangle. (4)

Later, she concludes,

I'm a creature of the open air, not of stale preservatives. Every movement and colour is life reinforced: fingers of cool air sliding between the heat; sun-bleached river beds oozing crimson salt, sparkling like rubies in the sun . . . This is where I belong, this is where I'm balanced: at the edge of a remnant sea. (306)

Hence, Amal develops the beginning of a grassroots activism in the field of environmental politics. Consciousness of the environment is coded into the theme of and debates within the novel.

On one occasion, as a child, she loses her focus and is seen staring at “a couple sitting under an acacia tree, away from the water's edge”. She thinks, “Acacias help prevent soil erosion”, and “[t]hey have small white flowers when they bloom. They could not have bloomed in the Tethys” (4). So, she loves nature, and starts to become aware of its underground connections. Nana tells her that ““The hills that interest us are underground. The rest — the millet fields, the cliff you've scratched yourself against, the prickly grass that makes you itch, the rocks you've picked, the stinging ants and noisy squirrels — is just surface”” (19). Her understanding of the rocks developed from the time she perceived them first as ugly material, noticing that, “You can tell by the way the couple under the tree is whispering that they aren't discussing soil erosion or ugly rocks (p. 4)”. She has begun to recognise that most people around her are not concerned about preservation of nature or environmental degradation.

Amal's observation draws readers' attention to the conditions under which such attitudes are born. This environmental negligence is an act of barbarity for Amal. Khan presents us with an alternative perspective to the identity of the region through Amal's involvement with nonhuman elements which as Val Plumwood (1993) believes is a help to break down the wall of human/nature dualism (67, 128, 131), so Khan is trying to breakdown the boundary between then human and nonhuman. Khan creates a possibility of viewing the world in "open and non-reductive ways to experience the world" (Plumwood 2007, 17). Khan's works can be categorized under critical green ecological writing which has many cultural tasks. Khan gives a new "experiential framework" (Plumwood 2007, 17) to readers. A spirit of everyday wonder is seen in the characters' attachment to nature. Khan's radical approach encourages the reader to "think beyond these boundaries" and pay attention to the "silenced ones, including the earth and its very stones, cast as the most lifeless and inconsiderate members of the earth community" (Plumwood 2007, 19).

Khan's effort is a way to bring a cultural change in Pakistani society. She presents to the readers ways of experience that honour the more-than-human world. Her approach of decentering reflects gratitude for the support that nonhuman world provides for humans. It widens the sensibilities of readers beyond the traditional limits of human centeredness towards nonhuman components of the world (Plumwood 2007, 20). She physically encounters the rocks and is struck by the mysteries struck in the rocks. Restoring of honour and meaning to physical world is the message of Khan. The story shows what Plumwood believes, "ways respectful to the earth, of other lives

and elements”, readers efforts should be “blended harmoniously” to nourish and honour “ecological body of the earth” (25).

The following scene in the book marks Amal’s struggle to comprehend the socio-political practices of her society which influence modes of thought and moral attitudes of her people. From this point on, she begins to observe the rocks more carefully:

The rocks are even more colourful when I step on them. Chocolate mudstone, limestone like mint powder, sandstone more pinks and brown . . . Nana says each shade helps trace the ebb and flow of Tethys’ slow retreat...Once this was an estuary . . . mid ocean! And now, terrestrial rocks. In seconds we’ve seen what took millions of years to evolve . . . I lose myself in picking rocks, turning them over, rubbing . . . I’m beginning to see more shapes in the rocks around me . . . The jagged cliffs are not like the soft, moist Margallas that grip my joggers and leave them muddy . . . There are no acacias or any other trees. The heat slams my head, tinting everything yellow.
(Khan *The Geometry of God* 18-19)

The focus of discussion between Amal and Zahoor highlights the role and responsibility of Pakistan as a nation as well as human beings towards their environment. Khan suggests that human beings and environment are essentially linked with each other (6). While political parties in the novel ban discussion of scientific theories of evolution and even the mention of evolution in the cultural discourse, Zahoor and Amal regard “Nature” as an evolving concept. These two strong characters reflect on the spiritual awareness of the green world and reveal Khan as a writer who brings a strong social dimension of nature into her writings.

Khan also depicts the fragility of ecosystems, as a result of construction in Amal's favourite city, Islamabad. She uses characters' relationship with the nonhuman, and their ethical responsibilities to highlights how "Profit-oriented corporations and a political elite more interested in preserving power than the environment" (Gottlieb 8) become a hindrance to environmental protection and conservation. Khan also draws readers' attention towards a link between country's main religion and lack of construction and preservation of conservation parks and biodiversity regions in Pakistan. The damaging impact on the ecological health of the region is seen in a rapidly changing Islamabad. Khan mourns the loss of diminishing natural areas which bring a healthy biological and spiritual influence on Pakistani society. Amal narrates her experience of visiting mountains in Islamabad after a long absence as "snow on the high peaks encircling us", she informs, "I inhale sharply. Clean air. tastes sweet. Our footsteps crunch frost" (Khan *The Geometry of God* 258). She walks on the trail and shares her experience of Lahore as, "My eye, now used to billboards supermarkets, flat plains and diesel smoke, has to readjust to mountains as stark regal . . . I'm revived with such vigour, I hurt. I last walked these slopes years ago, just before moving to Lahore". Global corporatism is seen in the buildings of Islamabad and the transformation of this city provides a perfect metaphor for wider globalization and development. On reaching Lahore, Amal says, "The first difference I notice between my two homes: in Islamabad, roads have no history. Only mountains do. But here, in this city of parks, the trees are silenced. Brick and concrete speak" (41). The thematic inclusion of the environment of Islamabad in the novel is very timely and echoes ongoing debates about the rise in temperature and concreting-over

of the densely green areas of Pakistan. Similarly, Zahoor tells Amal that, “Lahore has a past but no future. Heritage but no vision . . . Lahore has closed itself off. It says it’s pulse of the nation but its arteries are clogged! . . . Lahore is property, meat, and late nights!” (38). Khan hints towards emerging globalized leaders in Pakistan who facilitate the path for foreign powers. While talking about the newly built city of Islamabad, which is also the capital of Pakistan, Khan highlights the removal of indigenous Pakistani culture which was lost during construction. The novel invites Pakistani readers to reconsider interpretive frameworks which do not include the environment as an important issue of their lives. The capitalistic governments are merely adding infrastructure and paying no attention to the need for education around sustainability. The Government’s neglect and oppression is visible in the deteriorating state of Islamabad. Developing it as a metropolitan space, the authorities neglected the environment and wrecked the green belts of the city. Margalla Hills, mentioned by the novelist here, are in danger of being lost due to pressure from corporates to build commercial and residential complexes and plazas in the area. Aware of the changes coming to the area, Amal says, “Islamabad is the cosmetic capital of the infant; Lahore, the surgeon. From here the country’s face is carved to remove our pagan features . . . No one objects. No one will have to, till some mortal threatens them” (41-42). The huge scale continuous destruction marks the environmental scene of contemporary Pakistan. It’s a compromise between Pakistani elites and imperialist powers. The government’s criminalization is seen when natural resources are handed over to other countries for profit and little attention is paid to real conservation. A discontinuity between human and nonhuman is seen throughout the social fabric of

society. Amal also points to urbanization of places near Islamabad as she passes by “a village on its way to becoming a town . . . The village has brick walls, not mud, stamped with drying dung” (306). The mindful attitudes which include consciousness of local environment, history, and community for sustainable future have been discouraged by buildings which mimic urbanized cityscapes.

I find profound criticisms of the environmental consequences of globalisation in the novel. It seems meaningless or impossible for Khan to talk about socio-cultural and political history of the region without discussing the environment. Amal who is called “earthy Aristotle” (5) by her grandfather conflicts with society’s politics, economics, and social attitudes. Amal says there is a “difference between love and possession . . . because the war in Afghanistan spoiled our countryside by peppering it with bandits and guns” (129). As Amal grows up in the novel, she faces life and observes the moral failings of the Islamic society. So, her character argues that the issue of environment protection must be tackled seriously on a political level as it has become of global importance. Amal attempts to safeguard the country’s natural resources for the sustainable use of future generations. She further refines her struggle by highlighting the fact that environment has always been a key concern in religion. Amal’s stance reflects the relation of historical religion, to the natural world and its reaction to present issues. This is Khan’s style of arguing about orthodoxy and the spiritual teachings of Islam; it is a way to interrogate the roots of concern for the environment. She strengthens her belief as a Muslim by interpreting classic texts including the Quran to develop an understanding of nature and human relations. Taking into account the religious atmosphere of the country, Khan brings into focus

the demands for close collaboration between religion and science to support the environment. She thinks about the environment both morally and spiritually. For Amal, as stated by Gottlieb, it is “necessary to cultivate mutually respectful relationships” (5). Her continuous struggles from childhood to become a mature woman help the reader maintain the focus and dedication towards her cause, evolving from a personal level into national level concerns as she passionately pursues scientific knowledge alongside a personal intimacy and emotional involvement with the land.

Khan also highlights the patriarchal mindset dominant in Pakistan that hinders women from participating in socio-political activities. Khan conveys the degradation of intellectual thought as Abdul criticises other colleagues in the lab who have some association with the Party of Creation. He says, “this is how your type exactly bends and twists to suit your purposes, calling it Islam!’ (Khan *The Geometry* 236). Amal stays outside of the discussion knowing that it is useless to argue with blocked minds and Khan highlights their fakeness with use of euphemism. She criticises her colleagues by referring to an environmental problem when she says about one of her co-worker Fawad, “He’s not real. Like plastic, he won’t mix well with time” (236). Plastic pollution is another significant environmental issue that affects wildlife habitat and humans.⁵⁴ High level of production and consumption of inexpensive and durable plastic is detrimental to the environment.

The block mindedness of the young men in gender-segregated society is further highlighted when one says about Amal, “If she admires the natural world, she

⁵⁴ Talpur, Murtaza. “Plastic pollution in Pakistan.” *The Express Tribune*, 11 June 2018.
<https://tribune.com.pk/story/1732444/6-plastic-pollution-pakistan-opinion/>

should know her natural place is at home”, “She looks at dead things with feeling!” and so “She does not have a scientist's eye” (237) and Khan writes, “She: Silence. Abdul: Silence” (236) on this understanding. Zahoor supports Amal through encouraging her to enter the environmental field which is dominated by men. He says to Amal, ““I wanted you to explore for yourself. And who knows, sometimes the riches are so visible we don't see them”” (19) but later in the analysis, I explore how this progressiveness becomes a challenge for both of them. Various studies by Warren, Snyder, Bell, Lee, Stanley, Walker and many others have analysed the role of gender in environmental justice and shown that women tend to experience unfair and discriminatory environmental burdens and have little role in environmental decisions. I find this angle being depicted in the novel as well. Junayd stops young Amal engaging with the environment; he says, “digging in the dirt for magic rocks is no activity for girls. If your Nana forces you to do it again, at least bring a doll” (Khan *The Geometry* 21). Such discrimination occurs because a society rooted in capitalist and patriarchal processes perceives women as having less social status than their male counterparts. Amal’s blind sister Mehwish tells an old bookseller that her sister reads rocks and he replies, “What a silly girl! Doesn’t she have anything else to do?” (207). Mehwish also conveys to readers a message about Zahoor’s faith in Amal in particular and young men and women in general who are ready to take steps to bring change in the Pakistani society. She shares a poem recited by Zahoor:

*When girls dig hidden whales, they pre wail [prevail],
When adults get in their way they fail; it will change
...
A prayer unheard is not without creed
A land unfree is destined to bleed; it will change (166)*

Mehwish highlights the obstacles her sister faces in the working world of Pakistani society. The word 'wail' represents grief, anger and a cry of pain women like Amal go through when they are alienated in scientific; analytical and technical fields. Amal is seen complaining about hindrances created by the men she faces in her work. She tells Noman about her male peers in the lab, "Their insults eat creativity. They're vultures, salivating at the temple of doubt" and to this Noman comments, "You let their silly comments get to you?" (272-273). Feeling weak and recognizing a patriarchal response, she replies, "You know what peer pressure is" which silences Noman, but after a pause, he says, "I understand. They have to smear their fingerprints over you." Women like Amal are not encouraged to research, teach and participate in policy making and practice environmental concerns. Amal further adds, "They make me feel like a lab rat". Noman encourages and assures her, saying, "A rat for afterlife, in a laboratory of faith." So, Amal's participation highlights gender aspects of environmentalism within the field of eco-feminism as Khan's is a feminist-oriented approach towards environmental issues in Pakistan. It also marks a radical social change necessary to bring about greater environmental consciousness. A lot of such concerns branch out into other barriers and she is worried about completing her dig, she tells Noman that, "[t]here's still a lot left. I'm hoping we can return soon. Before it's buried again.' Noman thinks, "she sounds doubtful. Either Omar, her husband doesn't want her sleeping in the mountains with a pack of lusty men, or her family doesn't, or the government doesn't. Or all of the above" (*The Geometry* 324). In a field like science where already number of women is disproportionately low as compared to men, Amal faces challenges from elders (family), society (patriarchy)

and the system (government). This intensifies her pain as she is under constant pressure and her ability and commitment to the field is always challenged by the society. Therefore, Noman's thoughts confirm the basic thesis of ecofeminism; that there is an interconnection between the domination of women and the control of nature. She also draws reader's attention to the hope that gender differences in scientific/environmental fields might be normal when she says:

I could pick something other than a shrew – goat, sheep – and sometimes I do, but I like hearing the women laugh when I call us shrews taming shrews, and even enjoy the smirking men. (They're in almost equal number now but by the time they graduate, the ratio will drop – no, crash. Nature is something she needs to stand for but not share in.). (228)

Hence, she is proud of being a “deviant. A woman scientist. Ahead of her time”, she is “Practical intelligence. She's carried her potential long enough” and is now trying to “push her talent outside herself, into the world” (237). Amal's participation in the society as a scientist is also a step towards breaking the division between science and nature as according to Agarwal women are socially conditioned as nurturers.⁵⁵ Men hold the dominant position in the society and most of the scientific field is also dominated by men and they also have an increased rate of contribution in the environmental degradation because they manipulate and exploit nature. But Amal's participation is a positive step in the male dominated field to bring consciousness and

⁵⁵ See Agarwal, Bina. “Environmental Action, Gender Equity and Women's Participation.” *Development and Change*, vol. 28, no. 1, 1997, pp. 1-44.

Also, Agarwal, Bina. “Gender and Land Rights Revisited: Exploring New Prospects via the State, Family and Market.” *Journal of Agrarian Change*, vol. 3, no. 1 and 2, 2003, pp. 184-224.

compassion towards nature through science. Hence the mainstream ecofeminist stance of nature/science biasness is seen to be broken by Khan which weakens the divide between dualisms of reason/emotion, mind/body, culture/nature, masculine/feminine etc. (Warren 23). As science and technology are now the new realities and individuals cannot escape it, therefore Amal demonstrates that a female agency can reduce the gap between science/nature dichotomy because scientific domain has always been seen in opposition to women and nature. The science/nature dualism is disrupted when Amal studies nature through science and acts as a caretaker as well as a scientist. In this way Khan crafts a new direction in Pakistani ecocriticism and Pakistani novels in English. Also, Amal's confrontation with the patriarchal traditions and religious orthodoxy gives rise to a revisiting of ethical responsibility which includes acknowledging the marginalised; other species in the ecosystem.

Hence, Khan confronts the religious and political attitudes towards the marginalised groups of society, be it women or nature. Khan hopes to inspire environmental action from Pakistanis by revealing new interpretations of religious texts. For her religious ethical quality should be extended to incorporate human relations to different species and biological communities. It is my conviction that religion's response to the ecological emergency, as well as to globalization, militarization, and consumerism, will be the most critical factor in deciding Pakistan's future.

Through Amal, Khan confronts the Pakistani attitude toward nature and brings forth an environment-oriented vision of faith. She explores traditional religious concepts and attitudes towards nature and religious interruption in environmental

politics. Hence the novel becomes a story of reevaluation of socio-ecological ethics. Ruether in this regard in “Religious Ecofeminism: Healing the Ecological Crisis” is of the view that exploitation and negation of nature are interconnected with the religiously directed forms of exploitation and negation of women. Amal boldly criticizes pseudo religious research while scratching the bone and thinks Pakistani “theology is as mixed up as this backbone” (Khan *The Geometry* 270). In the end Amal informs the readers:

I’ve gotten bolder – both in love and at work. It takes an old man on trial for youth to find itself, as if this was also part of the condition . . . While Nana waits for the final verdict, I summon a center from which to chart the distant past of a land as much his legacy as that of his accusers’. And as much mine as Fawad’s, or Ibrar’s. I overcome that unnameable hunger — a longing to be understood, and more, believed, and more . . . I lose myself in my work, deaf to those that watch. (270-271)

Her determination takes her to the North-West Frontier Province and the Suleiman Range where the “land lies mined, gray earth with silver glitter scattered in heaps”, the area rich in uranium. Amal notices a convoy of trucks with armed men. She also passes a semi-nomadic group of men and women on foot (311-312). She adds, “My victory was personal . . . Now, at last, I feel the thrill of my first ride into these hills, with Nana and Junayd, nearly twenty years ago” (306). Amal’s character as a woman scientist/naturalist in the academia of an Islamic country contributes to an ongoing argument required to further gender integration into the environmental discourse. Her contribution is beautifully encouraged and enhanced by the support of another woman, her sister Mehwish who can also be viewed as a mentor for Amal’s spiritual learning.

As a rising woman Amal is faced by the odds and Mehwish's support and faith in her abilities helps Amal jump multiple hurdles. A stereotypical threat in the form of subtle and implicit biases in the academic field of research affects Amal's performance and fighting with preconceived negative assumptions is made possible by Mehwish's presence. She assures Amal that success is possible. Similarly, Amal also supports Mehwish who is doubly subjected to various forms of bias as a minority group because of being a blind woman. Amal does not practice any discriminatory behavior with Mehwish, rather engages her and guides her in participating in the social life. These two women with their spiritual belief, scientific knowledge and empathetic concern form a beautiful partnership to address critical situations related to women participating in science and environmental fields and establish a space for an informed dialogue about implicit bias.

Econsciousness through an Ecosophical Approach

Mehwish represents a revival of attitudes that foster connections with nature. The interface between a spiritual approach represented in Mehwish and proponent of social change in Noman (the last character to be studied as the analysis moves further) is highlighted through her character.

Through Mehwish Khan evokes feelings of wonder, appreciation and empathy towards the environment as opposed to the stark mechanical world which has come to the fore. "She has it in her" (328) reflects that she is characteristically inclined to connect with nature. Mehwish's inclination shows that nature is not something outside her, it is rather a core part of her being. Pakistan's ignorance and negligence of any

bond with nature is highlighted in Mehwish's positive and deep engagement with the environment.

The novel's opening prepares the reader to observe environmental concerns in the text. While her religiously-observant parents are distraught for the darkness in their daughter's life when they hear doctors say that Mehwish was "blinded by the sun" (25), it is in her darkness that birth takes place; the birth of consciousness of the web of being. From then onwards, she is seen not waking up with the "artificial light" but with the "sun" (26). Zahoor explains this awakening as a clock inside her: "Mehwish talks to the sun. She knows the different times of day. She has an observatory in her head as dark as the one in Samarkand" (30). Her mother usually recites Surah Yasin and Surah Tariq (Morning Star) as a source of comfort in dark despair because of her blindness, but instead of seeing herself as the reason of despair, Mehwish adopts Zahoor's characterisation: "the star is a late-night visitor who knocks on a door. He doesn't comfort the house, he wakes it up" (31-32). Mehwish represents Pakistan. She experiences intensely the darkness of ignorance in the Pakistani society and uses her senses to cut powerfully through this darkness. She represents awakening and mindfulness towards the surroundings which other people lack. In a way she represents "coming to consciousness" (Macy 255)⁵⁶ in the web of life and that is why the bond between both sisters is special; Amal becomes "Mehwish's eyes", "her guardian angel" (Khan *The Geometry* 29) and they become a spiritual inspiration for one another. Noman also informs us more about her as: "The first time I saw them, it

⁵⁶ Macy, Joanna. "Working through Environmental Despair." *Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, Healing the Mind*, edited by Theodore Roszak et al. Sierra Club Books, 1995, pp. 240-262.

was Zahoor and the older girl that intrigued me. Now it's Mehwish. I recognise something in her but can't say what. Something I've lost — or found? An inner knot, craving a dialogue. I want to say, a spiritual one" (116). She avoids the emotional obstacles that stop normal people from feeling a connection to nature. The inner self of Mehwish has interconnectedness. She inspires.

Mehwish brings the real emotional and psychological dimension of experience. She experiences a sense of empowerment from feeling nature close to her in contrast to others who take their environment for granted just as they take day to day activities for granted. They forget how invisibly they are connected to the web of being and therefore they remain oblivious to their ecosystem. Others, like her parents, teachers, Zara, Omar, and Noman's parents do not experience a lack of connection with the environment. Engagement in worldly matters keeps them busy and life moves in a fast and hectic way without any check on hazardous consumerist behaviour. They are busy 'doing' rather than 'being' in nature, and lack understanding of the severity of environmental problems. Mehwish's routine and the working of her senses are different. She feels a profound connection with nature. and lives in it. Nature is not the background for her and a mere presence that remains invisible. She is called "dreamy Plato" (5) by her grandfather Zahoor because she is "serene" and her "nocturnal habits are fascinating" (25), inviting readers to a critical inquiry of environmental spirituality. Khan refers to Plato's *Republic* and Socrates idea of the Allegory of the Cave. For Socrates people who believe that a thing is real only if it is graspable are living without the divine inspiration which enables a person to gain higher insights about reality:

“[h]ow will they rejoice in passing from darkness to light! How worthless to them will seem the honours and glories of the den! . . . there will be many jokes about the man who went on a visit to the sun and lost his eyes, . . . the way upwards is the way to knowledge . . . He who attains to the beatific vision is always going upwards; he is unwilling to descend . . . But blindness is of two kinds, and may be caused either by passing out of darkness into light or out of light into darkness, and a man of sense will distinguish between them” (78).⁵⁷

For Socrates, those who see with eyes are actually blind, as the visible world is the most unclear and least comprehensible. They are living a pitiful existence according to him in a den of ignorance. Those who climb out of the cave of ignorance can perceive the higher reality. All things physical; events and objects are temporary and shadows of ideal forms. Mehwish is not the prisoner of the cave like others around her. Mehwish lives in a reality which is outside the cave. Her life extends beyond her physical eyes, in the interconnectedness with life and all other beings. Mehwish perceives “other” components of the environment as an extension of her. Through her feelings and concepts, she learns about the “other”. The “other” things that disappear do not catch the attention of other characters in the novel, and they do not pay attention to what is left behind or how to preserve it. The distance seems to become a normal part of life. They take refuge in rejection of any environmental disaster, but Mehwish strengthens the closeness with nature. A power to connect with nature is inside her

⁵⁷ Plato. (n.d.). *The Republic*. Retrieved from <http://www.idph.net/conteudos/ebooks/republic.pdf>

that enables her to respond to nature. The characters who neglect environmental concerns are seen as repressing awareness of damage to the environment. This ignorance is highlighted through the attitude of members of the religious groups and government officials.

There is a sense of belonging and harmony in the calm and peaceful character of Mehwish who “breathe[s] the sky” (Khan *The Geometry* 139). Her asthma means she experiences directly the disturbed ecosystem as she suffers the effects of toxins in the air which others do not notice. She responds strongly to “a lot of traffic. Motor bikes shake trucks groan” (139) and “always traffic” (143) on the roads. Mehwish says, “I have difficulty breathing sometimes . . . because of . . . all the “adult petrol fumes in the air” (325). She is “quick to taste a difference between the air of a congested street and an emptier one” (42). This makes Amal aware that: “Even the air is not safe” (45). Amal tells the reader more about Mehwish while recalling one of the lectures of Zahoor. He informs the audience that once, the French philosopher Pascal stood in a white field under a clear starry sky and noticed a flea crawling up a wheat stalk. He cried because “when he looked up at the sky and saw the infinite world above, it felt *right*. But when he saw the tick in the wheat, he realised there was a *second* infinite, and this one worried him” (82). Zahoor explains that Pascal observed the insect’s body functioning and wondered what caused the tick to be arranged like him:

A man in the front row murmurs, ‘The Almighty.’ Others mutter and nod.

Zahoor smiles. 'Pascal's mind blazed, . . . He saw a chain of reactions with no beginning and no end. He saw the universe inside himself.' . . . But not the way he saw the outside universe. He would never *see* the one inside. But he'd *recognised* it. So from now on, the only way to see was by searching. And that is why he wept: his mind would never rest again . . . The gift of infinite curiosity . . . My granddaughter Amal has it too . . . She was only eight years old when she found this,' he picks up a bone, 'a copy of the diamond key' . . . 'Her sister Mehwish also has the gift . . .' (82-83)

Amal opens some more layers of Mehwish's character in the final pages of the novel by recalling the above-mentioned incident. She informs the readers:

In making you miss her, she brings you closer to yourself. Better than even Nana; Mehwish understands why Pascal cried when he saw the little tick. In the drops in the blood in the veins in the knuckles in the feet there was heat there was Mehwish. (288)

Hence, Mehwish's vision is not restricted due to physical blindness; rather this blindness increases her responsiveness and enables her to have fuller participation in life.

A slightly comic aspect of the novel ridicules false interpretations of religion, through depiction of an Islam versus science debate. Religion becomes a frame to analyze the environment and the novel depicts the corporatisation of religion as a means to channel the economic and political processes.

Mehwish is aware of the socio-political situation of her country. She knows about the Khunjarab Pass and the Silk Route which connects China to Hunza Valley (the setting of Khan's fourth novel) and imagines this as a "Bloody" route, playing

with the language and interpreting Urdu titles. An amusing effect is created in the novel by introducing the technique of malapropism. Readers might overlook Mehwish's use of incorrect words in place of words with similar sounds because she is blind and cannot read and comprehend actual words and consider it a nonsensical addition in the novel, but her mistaken use of words is creative and significant. Mehwish demonstrates the immense barriers facing uneducated and illiterate people attempting to make sense of important debates. Even this highly intelligent young blind woman struggles to make sense of what people are saying. She succeeds only through creative re-interpretations of the language which Khan uses to reinforce important messages of the novel. One example is when Mehwish tells the readers, "He also went the Khoon Jirab [Khunjarab] Pass. Khoon is blood and jirab is socks why call a pass Bloody Socks? I do not understand" (48). Khan is referring to a great loss of life of labourers who died during the construction of this route for trade purposes in a dangerous mountainous region. To highlight the situation Mehwish recounts how the Chinese guards questioned Zahoor when he crossed the pass:

what is your per push [purpose] and where is your pass port [passport]? Nana said to one 'I have no per push but to be great full [grateful] for this road into China and also to see some yaks on your side' and the guard got angry he said 'Pass port?' So Nana showed him this is etiquette. I do not have a pass port I will have it only when I have etiquette. (48)

Through this brief conversation on the Pakistan-China border Khan skillfully highlights Pak-China friendship which is a strategic relationship between two countries on the basis of control over resources where China holds a big role in the

economic matters of Pakistan. The use of the word “push” in marketing terms may refer to push and pull strategy. On a symbolic level the Chinese man is talking about supply and demand; “what is your per push” means what is the cost of pushing Chinese products through the construction of channels like Khujarab Pass and Gawadar Sea Port. Hence, Pakistan becomes a consumer of Chinese products compromising its environmental resources and landscape by allowing China to build factories in the beautiful and resourceful valleys of its northern areas. Similarly, Zahoor’s reply to this question is also significant as a concerned Pakistani and caring human being because he says that he has no such intentions of having relationships on the basis of profit, marketing and exploitation of labour in a developing country, but he is grateful for being able to travel through the built route to see beautiful animals like yaks in China. Zahoor’s reply is also representative of a stance that China should only have the ‘pass’ and the ‘port’ if it shows some ‘etiquette’ or ethics based on taking care of the changes in the natural landscape and environment of Pakistan due to the installation of heavy industry and factories for Chinese market. In mediating this exchange through Mehwish’s own interpretation, Khan illustrates how illiterate and uneducated people may nonetheless have a highly sophisticated understanding of complex issues. Khan further highlights the tension when Mehwish says, “Nana and the man said it is so amazing in only twenty years we have built the most difficult road in history on the tallest coldest mountins [mountains] so many lives were lost who nose [knows] where it may lead and so on” (49). Mehwish is also fascinated to know there are yaks and Marco Polo sheep which are “different from the goat and sheeps near aboutrounds [roundabouts] in Lahore before Bakra Eid they bleet [bleat] then pee pull [people] buy

them quickly turning them into experiments” (p. 48). Here the reference to Eid ul Azha or Bakra Eid meaning Festival of Sacrifice that involves sacrificing sheep and cows involves a critique of socio-religious practices involving mass slaughter of animals. People buy cattle but do not look after the animals properly, resulting in unhygienic conditions. Mehwish says that the sheep ‘bleat then pee’ on seeing fellow creatures being killed in front of them. For children like Mehwish it is traumatic to witness the animal they have brought, and fed being led to its death. Through Mehwish, Khan criticizes the custom stemming from 2000 B.C. According to tradition, Prophet Ibrahim (A.S.) was asked to sacrifice his son in the name of God, but his sacrifice was replaced by a sheep. Khan criticizes the hypocrisy shown by devotees who neglect the true spirit of this ritual which involves taking care of the sacrificial animal, keeping the best standards of cleanliness and distributing the meat to needy and poor. Instead, many Pakistani Muslims have made this ritual an ostentatious display of wealth, slaughtering many beautiful and well-fed animals. Khan highlights that there are other ways of doing sacrifice. Islam requires that one third of the meat is to be kept and the rest of it is to be distributed among the poor, but the book questions why animals have to suffer for a centuries old tradition? This is a very critical attack on the sacred practices of religion, but I believe it needs a serious consideration and the author has skillfully highlighted it through Mehwish. Tolerant and progressive religious practice are being promoted here through Mehwish. In this regard, Christopher Hitt argues this need for sensitivity towards the environment and the nonhuman world in “Towards an Ecological Sublime” where he states, “environmental philosophy teaches us that estrangement from nature is a problem,” so humans should “as a rule, strive to

recognize our kinship with nature” (612). He maintains that it will be impossible to “fully realize that ideal”, for “as long as there is an “I”, there will always be an “other””. Hence, binary opposition must be avoided to realise that we are “literal participants in the existence of all beings” because “to harm nature is to harm ourselves. Nature is, then, an extended self, and is entitled to the same concern as any other person”. A kind attitude to Earth by reducing mistreating of other species around us promoting love for animals is shown. The author also points to the poor hygiene. There is a foul smell in the air on these Eid days. Millions of animals are slaughtered in the country. Governments irresponsibility and negligence of people is highlighted through Mehwish’s thoughts. There is blood and slaughter waste everywhere due to lack of slaughter houses and functional waste management, and the disposal sites become breeding ground for diseases. Discarded animal skin, unwanted organs and red roads covered with flies hovering around present a disgusting image on that day.

Khan also highlights anthropomorphisation through Mehwish’s learning of this concept. Zahoor explains it to her as ““Giving animals human character sticks [characteristics]. The cub’s eyes are not human eyes. It does not have human tots [thoughts]. Amal makes it sound as if she understands it”” (Khan *The Geometry* 51). By mentioning this conversation Khan also presents Mehwish as a symbol of the revitalisation of readers’ connections and capacities of environmental awareness. Also “tots” may refer to thoughts signifying humans’ faculty of thinking because a serious attention to critical issues like environment is needed. For Zahoor:

There is a connection between how we relate to wild animals and to God. When we see the lion, what is experienced [experienced] is

not only fear or aww [awe]. It is the desire to konk er [conquer]. The romance of taming the beast. If we could just open the lock, slide the chain, . . . and smooth the snarling with our touch! It is the same as wanting to be chosen by God. To know Him, person ali [personally]. It is a sir ender [surrender] but also a konk west [conquest] . . . You see something [something] like this and have to ask why . . . ‘Now I am having a real ijaz [lowliness, humility] moment.’ He pawses [pauses] again. ‘So, what is God? . . . ‘The Sufi way to God is the peri less [perilous] but joy full [joyful] flight of the alone’. (52-54)

Mehwish’s use of verbal blunders is significant here as Khan combines anthropomorphism, zoomorphism and malapropism. The phrase ‘taming the beast’ symbolises Pakistani postcolonial society which American neo-colonialists ‘conked’ through the war in the name of a war on terror. It also reminds the reader of Rudyard Kipling’s poem ‘The White Man’s Burden’ which is understood by American imperialists as a justification of imperial conquest and as a mission of civilisation. It may also refer to the game conkers played in Britain in which the conkers, i.e., horse-chestnuts are threaded onto a piece of string, and the two players take turns to strike each other’s conker until one breaks. It is a reference to the British Raj in the subcontinent that divided it into two states; Pakistan and India and ruled the land in the name of civilising the natives and stereotyped them as wild, savage brown people required to be tamed.

On the other hand, the distortion of words also shows a native’s desire to mark her struggle against colonization, as ‘sir ender’ suggests removing of the British titles in her culture where a ‘sir’ signifies colonial masters. It shows the desire of a colonised

woman to ‘conk west’ as in break the Western political powers. Then the word ‘pawses’ zoomorphises Zahoor who like a lion has paws and is ready to fight against the odds and destruction brought by the colonisers.

Zahoor also says that he is experiencing a spiritual moment ‘ijaz’ which is a deep personal connection with God. Mehwish uses the words ‘person ali’. Ali (R.A.) the fourth caliph of Muslims, is central to mystical traditions of Islam. He is believed to be the first male who accepted Islam and Muslims regard him as the greatest spiritual leader with prophetic knowledge. He holds the highest rank in all Sufi orders. Muhammad called him ‘Lion of God’. Ali was assassinated in Kufa while praying. Sufis believe that the saintly power in him was inherited from Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) that makes the spiritual journey to God possible. Hence, Mehwish throws light on the character of Zahoor in a symbolic way which shows his life. She sees him as a man of knowledge, a spiritual figure, courageous like a lion who is on a perilous but joyful journey towards understanding God but is assassinated in the end. This whole discussion highlights a spiritual connection between different species of the environment which work as a whole in nature.

Mehwish tries to learn scientific and spiritual processes when she recalls Amal’s childhood experiments:

Sprinkling salt on slugs that ate our zinnias used to be one of her ‘experiments’. I would touch their soft dried up bodies in the flower beds their meat smelled white when it decayed. Only some had eaten the zinnias but all were punished. Ox gin [oxygen] broke them down. This is good for future zinnias . . . When we die the same will happen to us. We will feed flowers. And smell white. (136)

The smell of decay reminds her that the air is full of adulterated petrol which according to her is “when cheap things are added to petrol to cheat young pee pull [people] into buying at normal price” and Zahoor says “young pee pull [people] get stupider every day and maybe he is right big cause [because] the air is very dirty. This is called pull ocean [pollution] which is different from pull nation [pollination] which is what bees do not slugs” (139). Again, Mehwish refers to polluted oceans and urges the reader, specially youth to ‘pull nation’ towards the right direction as it is a ‘big cause’. Mehwish is also seen learning Islamic teachings, and she tries to understand like Amal and Noman that how “the sayings of the Prophet were spoken ‘out of con text’ [context] which pee pull [people] do when they want to make their own unimportant idea sound important. They make a place for it. A pretend box” (149). Once again, the word ‘con’ and ‘text’ can be controversial as it highlights how the religious groups spread teachings from their deceptive texts which trick younger people into believing fraudulent and wrong interpretations of the Quran.

Mehwish tells the reader more about her closeness with nature as:

I draw with dew on the car. It tastes dirty but is my first taste of the day. Ah. I like the smell of wet grass and I know the song of a bulbul . . . A tailorbird never sits on the same leaf for more than a second. It will always tell you when it lands but not when it leaves big cause [because] it will be back soon. It is calling and singing both. A sunbird can squeak but usually only shakes like a moth. Amal says its wings are rainbow. Some birds rarely talk for instance hoopoes. When the grass is freshly cut they walk in it. (152)

Through her openness and sensitivity, Mehwish draws readers’ attention towards the evolution of intelligence through an interplay between the environment and senses via

her ears, nose, lips, tongue and fingerprints. She “knows colours by scent” (32), she thinks her grandfather Zahoor has a “green smell like cold leaves” (49), she smells the zoo as “steamy and tart” (49), and feels “the milky wanilla [vanilla] smell of tube roses” (140).

Mehwish’s spiritual relationship to the environment registers her role in the story along with Amal and Noman as part of a new generation turning towards the evolution of mental and emotional capacities of Pakistani social life.

Ecoconsciousness through a Realization of Civic Duty

As a preface to this section, I feel it is important to highlight the major debate that exists in Pakistan around religion, and the impact of this debate in diverting Pakistanis from critical issues plaguing the society and hindering societal growth. Certain powerful religious groups are promoting the message that this world will soon come to an end, and, since this is the will of God, the world must be allowed to burn and drown. Khan’s writings offer an entirely different approach to religion. For Khan preserving the faith requires a transformation of religion in fundamental ways, redefining spirituality and holiness. Khan considers that religion has a crucial part to play in highlighting the environmental crises Pakistan is facing. A religion like Islam which stresses kindness for both human and nonhuman components of the environment must be presented in a different way as a basis for taking environmental action.

At the outset of the novel, Noman is depicted as a young man, a talented writer whose life alternates between mindless work for his father writing strict religious

pamphlets and typical young male social outings with his friends. He is aware of environmental degradation and pollution, but only to the extent of these as a social and personal irritant:

Motorbikes blow black death up [his] nose. Rickshaws raid eardrums . . . Every inch of this road's taken — tea shops, paan shops, fruit stalls, and the men who strut up and down Lahore's pavements . . . No corner free of finger prints, no air pocket untasted. If the city was a virgin once, only God knows. (79)

His solution comes in the form of social drugs 'calming chemicals kicking in . . .'. Khan uses the character of Noman to provide political and historical context for the novel. Noman shares the dominant political narrative regarding the causes of Pakistan's current woes, and also understands that this analysis provides a narrative that unites people across the widest political and social spectrum. At a tea stall there is a discussion about Jihad and the war in Afghanistan. He says:

When will it end, and when will the General who grows on it leave? The money that godly America sends to fight its godless Roos [Russia] rival — it was supposed to return us to our prosperous heritage, to an Islam that was rich and pure. It hasn't. So, where's the reward for hitching Jihad wagon to the *Suprapower*? Where's the golden past? A few eyes turn to me, and I think, this is the point at which the rich, the middle class, and the poor all meet: the present is dangerous, the past was glorious. It's our jammed intersection. When you're not illuminated by history, you're encumbered by it. (79)

Noman's discussions with a group of young men, Petrov, a soldier who has defected from the Soviet army, Ali, Salman and Faisal, are used to elaborate this widely

accepted narrative. The men display a strong sense of history and international politics, and deep cynical distrust of political leaders. In pursuit of natural resources and political influence in the Region, the Russian ‘Red’ Army fought a long war against the Afghan Taliban. The CIA then intervened on behalf of the US Government, heavily financing and providing training to the Afghan and Pakistani Taliban with the aim of defeating the Russians and shoring up US power in the region. Islamabad was used as a conduit for multinational arms deliveries. Opium and heroin were widely and openly grown and traded, to aid the anti-Soviet actions, while opioid addiction further reduced opposition in both countries. The CIA were aided in these anti-Soviet tactics by the Saudi Government. Martial law was imposed in Pakistan and used to limit freedom of expression and hence any political opposition. As a result of this massive military and political intervention, there were massive desertions from the Soviet Army, leading to its defeat.

Religious texts including the Quran are open to many different interpretations and have been used to support any number of political ideologies and social aims. Khan proposes that classic texts should be re-interpreted and analysed in a more detail to reveal the emphasis laid by God on the importance of nature and the need to safeguard the environment. Through characters in the novel, Khan invites readers to interpret religious teachings as a duty of care towards nature. A reconceptualization of the environment is needed in Pakistani society, revealing that nature and the environment are not something outside of human beings’ social existence. As Mukherjee (2010) states, “environment must be seen as a mutually sustaining network in which humans and non-humans are always linked with each other, and on whose

collective action and prosperity the functioning of the network depends” (147). Khan’s approach becomes a bridge between “fractured communities” (Mukherjee 2010, 155). The novel holds out the potential for a change in mindset as readers witness a change and a sense of realisation in Noman. I believe this novel supports my own belief that in a Muslim society like Pakistan’s, efforts to promote environmental awareness can only become fruitful by bringing religious teachings and environmental institutions onto the same page.

The debate between different interpretations of religion and the direct implications of this for Pakistani society is depicted particularly through the character of Noman and his interactions with religious institutions and other characters in the novel. Noman’s increasing understanding and acceptance of a different religious interpretation appears as an important message of hope for Pakistan.

I see this young journalist gradually converting towards his real responsibilities as a Pakistani. At the start of the book he is a member of the religious group, the Party of Creation, working under his father who is a leader in the party and vice chairman of the Academy for Moral Policy. Noman is seen censoring the textbooks by twisting interpretations of Holy texts as ordered by his party, in opposition to teachings of science and evolution, and the spiritual and intellectual interpretations propagated by Zahoor. This is a reference to Zia’s ban on the teaching of evolutionary sciences in the educational institutions. After Noman meets Zahoor and begins to understand religion in a more rational, intellectual and spiritual way, he leaves the party.

Noman's journey starts after he attends a conference with his father which includes "vice chancellor of the Islamic Forum (of the predestined acronym IF), religious scholars, clerics, delegates from the national space program, lawyers, JP chairman and party members, including tattered but re-sewn factions, and a handful of men who float around as 'advisers'. All unite to put Pakistan's youth on the True Path" (Khan *The Geometry* 73), and Noman is the youngest person there. It is the "fifth seminar on Islamisation of Thought" and General Zia ul Haq has just delivered the first address. Readers see "Sheikh Abu bin Yaqub from Saudi Arabia" also. The VC welcomes everyone, "distinguished scholars, worthy ministers, noble scientists *and advisers*" and states:

We have successfully banned obscenity and established shariat courts and an Islamic educational system and everything in between . . . My focus is my passion is my knowledge. Teaching of any discipline, be it physics or biology or science, or history or the past, without reference to God and the Prophet, Peace Upon Him, leads us away. As such, we are taking measures. (*checks notes*) for men committed to restoring the values that have been snatched from us like light (*searches for a metaphor*) – like darkness – can enter our educational systems. You are familiar with challenges. For example, humanities. In past, students dreamed up mindless fictions, and sciences crawled with foreign notions. I need not repeat. We discussed in detail in last meeting . . . However, despite our best efforts, elements are working against us. They dispense books that tempt children into believing they have own minds. Realising urgency of matter, the President has given his generous support to set up of this institute of importance, the Academy for Moral Policy, headed by vice chairman, Mirza Inayat Anwar. (74)

The conference continues, occupying a substantial section of the novel with speeches confirming these reactionary themes. This allows Khan to depict many strands of reactionary political interpretations that will be familiar to a Pakistani or more general Muslim audience. The writing is skilled, as Khan reveals the ludicrous nature of the speeches without the need for additional comment. For instance: “They say it is gravity. We know it is Allah! (louder applause)” (75). The audience is depicted as whipped into religious fervor and required compliance through religious tropes: ‘There is pollution in our societies because of those who stray! . . . Liars and cheats! Evil-wishers spreading falsehoods’ (74-5). Even a mild attempt at critique by a young party member is strongly rebuffed, with the young man forcibly ejected from the conference and branded as an infiltrator.

Noman’s father notices that there is confusion on his son’s face, and he does not seem entirely convinced of the speeches being delivered. Noman is curious to listen to Zahoor who has a conference in the next room of the hall. Noman’s father continues, ““we are living in dangerous times” (75). During the speech, he looks at his son while using the phrase “invisible cracks have risen”, and their task is to repair all this.

The novel shows that foreign Muslim converts have also played a part in the Islamization of Thought and in support of reactionary political objectives. A Ph.D. scholar, Mohammad Lawrence, tells the conference: ““What “geologists” today call “facts” were first proven in the Quran (recites in English): Have we not made the Earth a resting place for you and the mountains its pegs?” We know not some concoction called Newton’s Law’ (78). The novel depicts Noman as upset, unable to accept this

irrationality. Despite a previous cynicism, this event marks the beginning of Noman's active rejection of his father's fundamentalist and reactionary ideology.

Noman is sent to spy on what Zahoor says in another conference taking place in an adjacent room and is instructed to take notes. His father's voice echoes in his mind "People talk of brain drain when youth leave this country. What about the brain drain when they stay?" Noman feels disappointed and calls this religious party as "Jamaat-e-Waste Product" (78), meaning? this "party's well-funded because of the war" (92).

After attending the two conferences Noman is assigned three tasks by his father as a party leader, "immediate one is to send warnings to Zahoor that if his army-building continues, he will face the music. The second is to publish a monthly periodical to be issued by the Academy of Moral Policy, called *Akhlaq*, in which I'm to prescribe ways to relieve young minds of *maghrib za'dagi*, westernisation. And finally, I'm to accompany him to all seminars as his personal secretary" (88-9). In preparation for the first task, Noman sits down to prepare a pamphlet which opposes science. He quotes from the Quran, "And God sends down water from the skies, giving life thereby to the earth after it had been lifeless: in this, behold, there is a message indeed for people who are willing to listen. (16:65)" and then interprets it as "Rain is His will. Drought is His will. Which we can't question or understand". He deletes all references to Luke and Howard and his so-called meteorology (112). He introduces another verse for censorship, "Have you ever considered that seed which you emit? Is it you who create it — or are We the source of its creation? (56:58)". Noman interprets it as "Creation is His will. Destruction is His will. Which we can't question or

understand”. He deletes all references to Charles Darwin and his so-called evolution” (112).

Noman’s character sheds more light on the war and disturbance in the country as he remembers his father looking pleased “since the beginning of the fifth year of the war in Afghanistan, his party’s received another boost of American aid” (35). He is also disturbed to see double standards applied to political issues and Islamic teachings as he witnesses a ban on the sale of alcohol in Pakistan, while the same government sells its assets and allows its weapons to be used in war for the worldly ambitions in Jamaat-e-Pedaish’s projects in Pakistan (125, 126, 131, 132, 180, 292, 320). Noman reflects, “according to Petrov, unlike his country, mine will never have a revolution. When small gains are negotiable, from families like Salman’s or from God, but preferably from both, it’s easy to lose sight of the big picture” (65). Here Khan draws readers’ attention towards feudal-oriented culture in Pakistan which enslaves local people and harms the progress and prosperity of the country by discouraging education of a deprived group of the society. They do not want to weaken their feudal power by enabling them to be well equipped socially and economically. As a result peasants turn into extremists to rid themselves of feudal cruelty. Politically influential Landlordism constructs another form of hegemony over natives.⁵⁸

An interesting conversation among Noman’s friends highlights role of feudalism in Pakistan in the social development of the citizens. Salman says:

‘The problem is all about land-ownership and law and order. Let me tell you. In the Mughal days this was a clean, splendid

⁵⁸ Martin, Nicolas. *Politics, Landlords and Islam in Pakistan*. Routledge, 2016.

neighbourhood. Then the Sikhs came. They looted homes and converted them to military barracks. The British re-converted them to splendid homes in a splendid colony, including the residence of that fellow-what's-his-name, Sir William.⁵⁹ You know. It was called Bare Sahib ki Kothi' [Master's Bungalow]. (69)⁶⁰

However, despite much common understanding, the class differences between the men are also highlighted through their exchanges. Khan introduces the role played by British imperialists and colonized feudal lords through Salman, "the people's nawab" (68) who tells with pride how the First Punjab Volunteers of the British Army was formed in Lahore where he lives, and his family was part of it. These people "played a key role in the 1857 uprising" (69). Noman is outraged that powerful elitist people like Salman's family, in the name of trade and business have aided foreign imperialists to maintain their domination and control over Pakistani socio-political life. Here Khan refers to the dynamics of "internal colonialism"⁶¹ where hierarchies of power in the postcolonial state and "ultraimperialism"⁶² continue to exist. Thus the imperialist

⁵⁹ Olson, James S. and Robert Shadle, editors. *Historical Dictionary of the British Empire*. London: Greenwood Press, 1996.

⁶⁰ Lord William Bentick was the governor general of British India. The Indian subcontinent included Hindu and Muslim states which were divided by British rule into two separate countries India and Pakistan. After 1947 partition, Pakistan was further divided into East and West Pakistan. East Pakistan is now a separate country named as Bangladesh with a coastline in the Bay of Bengal. Lord William was appointed as Governor-General of Bengal in 1828 after serving in the House of Commons for some years. In 1858 as a consequence of Indian Mutiny, as a Viceroy he headed the central government of India. He is known for introducing modernizing projects in the subcontinent. He made major reforms in the educational system and replaced native language (Persian at the time) by passing English Education Act 1835 and encouraged western-style education to serve the British bureaucracy. After the split of British India into India and Pakistan, his office continued to exist in each country separately for some years. Also read Michael Mann's *South Asia's Modern History: Thematic Perspectives*. London: Routledge, 2015.

⁶¹ Blunt, Alison and Cheryl McEwan, editors. *Postcolonial Geographies*. Continuum, 2002.

⁶² Sidaway, James D. "Postcolonial geographies: an exploratory essay." *Progress in Human Geography*, vol. 24, no. 4, 2000, pp. 591–612

discourse preserves the status quo. Noman is angry at witnessing this hypocrisy and thinks, “Volunteers, my foot. Tell a man kill or be killed and call it a choice . . . Nice. Glorify the Brits then say you fought them”. The following passage depicts an important debate in Pakistan about the role of feudal landlords, with Salman defending them as benign protectors of peasants, while Ali critiques his narrative and Salman’s line of reasoning serves to intensify Noman’s dislike for him. Salman continues:

There were many brave men on my father’s side. Thanks to them . . . – the British eventually began to leave. That was in the 1930s. Then families like mine settled here permanently. We kept the area so pretty for the next three decades you cannot imagine. We gave the people what they want: decent living. There was a good school just behind Sir William’s house and we ran it. We housed them, fed them. You see, old families know. We look after our land, our people. We built the ties between them and their community. It is like the alleys in this old quarter, like the rooms to the courtyard. The people depended on *my* family for order. We were the center. Our schools, hospitals, madrasahs, shops, all were connected to serve a common social value. Now there is no center, no caring. It is each for himself.’ He shouts for the servant to bring more food. ‘The feudal structure, you know, it gets a bad name in the West. But you look closely, it was a kind of socialism. And I am Marxist. Now anyone can buy plots and cut them up. Once an area like this had under a hundred residents. Now there are at least ten thousand and they are ignorant, uneducated people moving in even as we speak. It is a great loss. (69-70)

Ali says “You’re a self-appointed ruler, afraid privatization will strip your power”. Salman replies that the poor men and women stay with lords like him and come to their door when they need help because “they *trust* us?” (70). Ali says “the ‘center’

was plain monopoly... Trust! They just have nowhere else to go! The same reason Arabs and Pathans and Kashmiris and Chechnyans are fighting in Afghanistan. They don't *trust* America or Pakistan or any other state. They need bread. And distraction. Killing, cooking." Salman adds, "Ask *any* of them. If not for us, all their children would be hanging around scratching lice and doing drugs! (70) Salman argues that Noman is "oblivious to the realities of the common man", while on the continuous ringing of Salman's phone Khan writes, "'What are the sisterfucker servants for? Salman hollers, illustrating his connection with the common man" (71). Here Khan illustrates what Mukherjee has noted: "then what we have been calling 'postcolonial' becomes the name of an even more intense form of imperialism where the globalised, cartelized, ruling classes continue an indirect control of the colonies through local intermediaries and compradors" (15). Salman is a comprador.

Noman confesses to readers that Zahoor and Amal intrigued him and later Mehwish too. About her, he says, 'I recognize something in her, but can't say what. Something I've lost – or found? An inner knot, craving a dialogue. I want to say, a spiritual one" (116). He calls them the "curious trio" and their "triangle needs a fourth point," i.e. him.

In Rabat during a conference break a detailed argument between different scholars sheds light on the mindsets influencing and confusing Pakistanis:

Yousuf Saiid, Tunisia: 'The debate between faith and reason is an ancient one. Have we learned nothing from men like Al Razi and Ibn Sina? Their contribution to the civilisations of Fez and Baghdad, to the subsequent European Renaissance?'

Muhammad Ibrahim, Egypt: ‘You are an idealist, my friend, and I envy you your fantasy. We are wasting time on philosophical debates. Our children see, with their own eyes, whose tanks and guns rule our neighbourhoods. It is not Greek logic or Persian wisdom that will save us. What we need is security.’

Yousuf Saiid: ‘But as an educationist you have a duty to learn from the past and promote free inquiry in the present.’

Muhammad Ibrahim: ‘As an educationist I have a duty to keep alive a population to educate.’

Muhammad Wali: ‘We are not talking about crude survival. We are talking about enriched living. You want technology. I want science.’

Aba: ‘We *were* talking about Islam, and what is to be done about the secular elements infiltrating Muslim minds today. In this culture war; we need a defense.’

Muhammad Lawrence, Belgium (remember his mountain pegs?):

Yousuf Saiid: ‘It is a tragedy that you fail to learn from history. By rejecting rationality, the “good majority” became an easy target for Mongols and Crusaders.’

Muhammad Ibrahim: ‘The only defense is military. That is learning from history.’

Sheikh Abu bin Yaqub, Saudi Arabia (remember his djinn light?):

‘Technology and faith marry well. We need to build our countries. *Up*. We need to compete. We cannot compete on a camel any more than on skills in geometry or poetry. We need cars. We have no protection in tents. We need forts. We cannot guard them with a stick.’ (101-103)

Noman reflects on the debate. He feels Yousuf Saiid’s voice filtering through the walls, “You fail to learn from history. By rejecting rationality, the ‘good majority’ became an easy target for the Crusaders . . .” but he is seen confused once again as he adds, “In the hotel, he sounded convincing. But now I agree with Muhammad Ibrahim. You can be as learned as Aristotle or the Mu’tazilites, but in the face of bloodlust, what good is it?” (103).

The subtleties of interpretations stir him, and his awakening has begun.

While travelling in Europe he says that:

Lately, everywhere I turn, someone’s pointing me to a passage in the Book. But not the ones I’m meant to hear. Not the ones that help other books. The passages I hear are the ones to ignore, like these references to water. (118)

This highlights how members of the party distracted him from thinking about the verses in the holy text according to his rational understandings. He keeps thinking. His interest grows. He tries to find links between ancient studies and present researches. He starts an ascent, “I climb up to these ruins. Like a cock looking for a vantage point, every chance I get, I climb. The roof of my house; the terrace-cafe in Rabat; Simla Hill in Lahore (the city’s only hump); these cliffs in Greece” (118).

He is “shivery and searching” to reach better understandings. Khan beautifully uses the metaphor of climbing for Noman to discard misleading sociopolitical and religious ideas and move forward towards better understandings and actions. This metaphor has also been used for Amal in the previous sections where her climbing represents moving up crossing all the pseudo-religious and social barriers.

Noman also remembers that his father was not always like this:

he did love me, once. We had fourteen years of outings and conversation about everything from Lahore’s crumbling gateways to the deep moat outside its city walls. He didn’t only tell me what to think. He asked what I thought . . . Then the war started. Almost overnight, metaphors were abolished. God was stamped out in endless repetition, on a mint of chastened tongues. Our outings stopped. He’s never asked for my opinion since . . .’. Now he believes himself at risk of crumbling . . . restoration is making him sickly. (106)

Noman’s reflections on his aging father are representative of the party as a whole which cannot stand the intellectual awakening and raised consciousness among the youth. Khan uses Noman’s character to criticise the political use of Islam as an ideology of resistance to Western imperialism. Noman wants to take charge of his intellectual and ethical autonomy and at the same time wants to preserve Zahoor’s, too.

Similarly, Khan uses Noman’s character to recall Amal’s colleague insisting:, “geology was a divine art” (226). Previous sections in the chapter show that the physical make-up of the earth is an artistic expression for Zahoor and Amal, and now Noman begins to comprehend this too. This recalling represents the personal

development of Noman who begins to understand Amal's passion for rocks and nature and to experience his own connection with Pakistan's landscapes. Samuelson and Crookes believe that "the sense of beauty is a divine gift for man to have pleasure in his dwelling-place, and to all but certain exceptional minds it is the most pleasing mode of regarding Nature" (206).⁶³ Noman now understands that Amal's research into the mountains is a labour of love. It is an understanding of the bond between humans and the planet humans inhabit. Samuelson and Crookes view Nature as "an artist, seeing in her the Divine art; . . . like a poet, seeing in her the Divine spirit . . . seeing in her the Divine mode of working" (207). However, the novel shows that new personal understandings come at a cost of significant confusion and distress, as illustrated in the following passages showing Noman's awakening to the wonders of the natural world accompanied by his own inability to witness this without finding a religious reference, and ultimately his bewildered understanding that he lacks moral compass of his own.

He ponders and recalls the holy verses, "It is God who has created all animals out of water", "Consider the bee", "Consider how thy sustainer has inspired the bee ... then eat of all manner of fruit . . . (And lo!) there issues from within these (bees) a fluid of many hues" (*The Geometry* 118-119). He thinks that the "translator chose 'inspired' not 'divinely revealed' (120). He is fascinated to see, "honeybees swarming in the driveway, wiping their feet before their waxy temples" (120). He marvels at their method, "point, line, space. Here's the magic of abstract space blooming to perfect proportion! Al Khwarizmi bees. Honeycomb heaven" (120). He realizes that

⁶³ Samuelson, James and William Crookes. *The Journal of Science and Annals of Astronomy, Biology, Geology, Industrial Arts, Manufacturers, and Technology*, vol. 19, 1882.

he has become “a man who can’t even gaze at the stars and tune into cosmic radiation on the radio without searching for a verse to prove the crackling exists” (118). He reads and wonders if he has written such things as, “Today our children are issues. They have lost touch with real history; . . . but what are young men doing today? The only words they spread are freaky. Did I write that?” (119). His confusion is at its peak when he says, “I’ve come full circle. Or crashed. I can argue anything. I have no beliefs of my own. Light and darkness negate each other. The ions of my mind are in deep freeze. Meet Noman, who is an island. Not a synthesis, or even a cultural freak. But an absence” (122).

He also comes to doubt his own history and recollections. Noman cannot recall whether he or his mother wrote the severe and highly damaging criticism against Zahoor, although he understands clearly “it shouldn’t be there” (122). The phrase “The scholar’s ink is holier than the martyr’s blood”⁶⁴ (122) echoes in his mind. Noman “wincing at the reference to Zahoor” thinks of deleting the middle paragraph of his article which says:

. . . Let us remember that, as recently as the last century, Islam’s roots were rotting again. The infidels who robbed our land taught us to think of a universe without belief. And that time has returned.

⁶⁴ This is a reference to the famous saying of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). It has been used by many scholars, however its sources are not confirmed, and it is graded as a weak reference (da’eef hadith) in Islamic scholarship. Islam emphasizes knowledge and there are numerous references in the Muslim’s Holy Book Quran for praising scholars. This hadith can be supported as an interpretation of a Quranic verse {Say: “Are those who know equal to those who know not?”} [39:9]. Also, Islamic expert Akbar S. Ahmed, former Pakistan High Commissioner to the UK in one of his interviews explained that this hadith is one of the key teachings of the Prophet. He said that the Qura’n has around 300 references to “using mind” and the word “knowledge” is also featured many times (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/newsbeat/article/30803391/the-pen-the-sword-and-the-prophet>) Jan 27, 2019

Again we must struggle to save ourselves from becoming slaves of the senses.

Which leads to the question: what is science? For some it is 'blind nature'. Proponents of this science are men like Zahoor ul Din, who obscure the true message of Islam, making it a puzzle full of hidden metaphors and poetry, twisting it this way and that, and generating great support for themselves. But they are themselves blind and the blind must create what they cannot see. The seeing, who adhere to their Shariat, are gifted with a 'third' eye. We see Divine Proofs Revealed. We have lifted the veil from our eyes. We need not 'interpret' or even 'read'. We see ALL, the visible and invisible, angels and djinns.

Those not born with Vision will not cast shadow. They will burn eternally, while we will be rewarded for adhering to our Shariat and our destiny. (121)

This scene in the novel highlights the false doctrine of jihad and countless acts of violence conducted in its name. Noman finally understands the wrong he has inflicted on Zahoor and yearns to visit him. He concludes, "We'll either save or destroy each other. I set off for Islamabad" (122).

On his return to a sense of duty he sees Zahoor on the hill some two years after the conference. He sees "Zahoor determined to change us", the youth (116). Zahoor greets Noman and talks about the warnings given to his community of scientists. Zahoor tells Noman those warnings are sent by "certain primitive groups returned to life with increasing power" has and says they have "severely hampered" their work "not only for ideological reasons but for what was known as *security reasons*". Their "digging and hammering" is taken as a threat (124). Since Noman was the one who

has been sending these warnings, he feels guilty, but feels trapped between his father's instructions and Zahoor's intellectual commitment. He is disturbed and wants to tell Zahoor that "in public I argue for Aba, while in private I argue for you? I've been batting for both sides. Now I want to bat for neither. I don't want to be in any game". He does not want to do a 'match-fix' anymore as he expresses:

Give me a sacred verse, and I can prove both divine will and biological evolution wrong and right. Or give me one of our founder's speeches, and I can prove he was a believer and a kafir.
(125)

After this confession Zahoor is not angry at him. Amal says that "Nana was delighted to welcome an offspring of the *other side*" (221) while Noman tells Zahoor that he was not "enough of a threat" (222). Zahoor can see the spark of change and transformation in Noman and wants to help him to move in the right direction.

However, Zahoor's work remains without permission. In Spring 1996, "American and French scientists get permits to dig up our fields, but not him – remind us daily: he can fight but not win" (267). Noman thinks "Maybe he believes the fight can be won by my generation – or Mehwish's. Maybe that's why he chooses to forgive. Maybe it's not a choice. He *has* to. Hope is his religion" (267).

Noman is pained to see that a "man who needed to walk – needed to drink the mountain air and feel the sunlight pitch and smell the graying shadows and trek all the way up to China just to see different sheep" is unwell (317). He thinks, "he'd lost those conversations. It was the death of a way of looking at the world, that's what he told

'Holistically.'" (318). Noman feels guilty that Zahoor has been "reduced to silence" and is ashamed to "feel the cruelty" of what he's done" (256).

When Zahoor dies, and his body is being taken away, Noman thinks, "It isn't just a shell they remove but the vision that fuelled it" (319).

With his "grief", "guilt", and "unbearable self-pity" Noman also leaves some questions for the readers, "Are the Taliban doing what America promised but didn't, returning us to an Islam that was rich and pure, or is their jihad nothing but a bloody gang war?" (319).

His character also reflects on the new form of post-colonization that is increasingly seen in the destructive cycle of competition in a globalised world, in the form of capturing resources and negligent attitudes towards the environment. As Noman grows conscious of environmental politics, he thinks of Petrov who mines gems from the Pak-Afghan border as Faisal tells him, "The rebels mine gems on a huge scale. Petrov sells them in Chitral, Peshawar, even here . . . Petrov must have always known the best place to find the rarest gems: the refugee camps on the Afghan-Pakistan border" (112-113). Khan points out how Pakistani labour and raw materials are extracted for gains. Baltistan and areas near the Afghan border have been an interest for the various groups of colonisers since mid-nineteenth century for its richness regarding resources and geostrategic location. These Mountain ranges block central Asia from easy access. In the past British East India Company sent officers to cross these mountains to Russianize the natives and control the land. 200 years on the war to capture Kashmir and Kargil continue, with China as the latest colonizer. Pakistan is located in the ideal position for corporate expansion.

Khan highlights how ordinary people are always given a different narrative. In the name of security, the major part of the national budget is allocated to the military, neglecting the development of health, education and research. Military resources are created, and new equipment is bought, in the name of the safety of the nation, and justifying the rule of the military. Prosperity through foreign investment is promised and at the same time the military is employed to carry out security checks and maintain dominance over the population. In the background, natural assets are stolen. The Iraq war, Kashmir conflict, Libyan Crisis, Kargil war and now CPEC are all examples of wars of resources in present times.⁶⁵

Regarding the US's 'War on Terror', Khan shows how powerful leaders take control of the masses to achieve their objectives. In a country like Pakistan where only a small percentage of the population can read, how can a political consciousness develop to consider such issues? The budget allocation teaches the population that military power is more important than other elements, while education and activism can help create a sense of civic responsibility and environmental consciousness which is vital for Pakistan's future.

Noman is transformed as he writes his editor's note, *Al Qalam*, The Pen, and leaves *Akhlaq*. After this he is never welcomed again to his home. Meetings with Zahoor, his research and his approach towards knowledge, morality and ethics influenced Noman, but he was not able to meet Zahoor after he was imprisoned for his scientific research. Noman wonders, "if Zahoor knows how he changed me" (260).

He writes in the note:

⁶⁵ Small, Andrew. *A China-Pakistan Axis: Asia's New Geopolitics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.

Good readers true readers, members of the Party of Creation, scholars of the Academy of Moral Policy, if the second Satan is memory, you create the third: distortion of memory. You are the Past Patrol and Present Police. You pervert Him the way you do all our laws and bills and histories and sciences and Life itself. I use this pen to cease editing today. (261)

In the end Noman shares his experience of a transformed approach:

I sit between the peepul [sacred fig] trees and listen or read. I've read the eight hundred-page *Moment of Mutazilites* three times, front to back, but I start a fourth time this year. Little details preoccupy me. What did Ibn Sina like most to eat, when he wasn't drinking himself silly? Was it sunny or raining, the day Al Kindi was accused of heresy, and his head was smashed with his own big book? What was the first flicker of recognition that drew Ibn Rushd to Aristotle?" (320).

Hence, the character of Noman critiques inhumane modernity and religious interpretation. It is this negligence and corruption of religion that is highlighted through his character, bringing distorted and brutal concepts, garbling of facts and teachings of Prophet Muhammad and the Holy Quran, the two most sacred sources of belief for Muslims. His approach to Islam is to conduct his own critical readings of Quranic texts. In the end, Noman goes back to philosophers to aid his understanding of the world. He says, "Plato loved this world but he loved the one that can only be imagined even better. Aristotle loved this world completely. He believed it possible to find happiness within its physical borders. I want this hope" (321). He combines imagination, a dream of "heaven on earth" like Plato's with Aristotle's earthly

appreciation of the world to pay attention to the place of his dwelling. Noman's character suggests a hard struggle to change and overcome old ways, but still represents distinct possibility of hope. Hence, Khan has given four perspectives towards the environment: Scientific — Zahoor, Practical — Amal, Spiritual — Mehwish, and Religious — Noman.

All four characters reflect that extreme perspectives concerning science and religion and other cultural fields are always problematic. They also address ordinary educated Pakistanis with the aim of helping them realize that care for nonhumans is a profound religious idea.

CHAPTER 6

“We were intruders”: Analysis of *Thinner than Skin*

Thinner than Skin, a story of the struggle of the indigenous Gujjar tribe and subaltern nonhuman community against capitalistic development, is a theoretical intervention into the mainstream ecocritical paradigm. It depicts different forms of “engagement” in which human and animals are “co-participants in the same world” (Ingold 75), and the novel reflects both an intellectual and political struggle by Uzma Aslam Khan for environmental purpose, opposing nonhuman invisibility and exploitation in numerous ways. Animals and plants populate the landscape of the narrative. Some animals, plants or their parts are used to depict rituals in the story.

The story along with the themes of love, militarization and religious fundamentalism is focused on environmental problems. In this novel Khan depicts ethnically, religiously and linguistically diverse characters from the South and Central Asian regions. The two main characters Maryam and Nadir, with their contrasting backgrounds and peculiar concern for nature and other nonhuman species in the environment, set the story in motion. Their narrative threads, in first person and third person, are interesting and interweave two ecocritical spaces, one urban and the other rural.

Maryam is a Gujjar woman of the native indigenous community who learns from nature and enters into its spirits in her own ways. She is a true biophilic⁶⁶ character. Her mental operations remind me of William Wordsworth’s “Come forth

⁶⁶ A biophilic human has a tendency towards interacting with other forms of life in nature.

into the light of things” from his “The Tables Turned” which suggests attuning of one’s self with larger entities. In Maryam’s case the waters, winds, mountains and plants enable her to have a fulfilled, meaningful existence. Maryam practices Shamanic⁶⁷ rituals to bring her closer to nature and environmental manifestations. She sees herself as part of nature: she nurtures it and gets nurtured in return. Maryam’s indigenous and mystic character and rootedness with the land and the flora and fauna of the region, have gifted her a strong and spiritual bonding with the environment. She perceives the messages of the ecosystem and is seen in conversation with the biotic community of the land. The name Maryam is also significant, reflecting the Virgin Mary, who is a saintly figure in both Christianity and Islam as a woman who stands for love and peace. Similar calmness is seen in Maryam’s character as she faces the death of her young daughter, Kiran. It is old-world values and beliefs that find reflection in Maryam’s character. Maryam is familiar with the natural world, seeking companionship and strength in what is often considered banal and ignored. Maryam lives her life with “butterflies” (*Thinner* 148) flitting around bright “stars” (3), “drawing the night around her shoulder like a shawl” (3), walking “along the shores of the lake” (2), and “mountains” (2).

Nadir Sheikh is a landscape photographer with a similar response to the environment. He experiences a sheer moment of awe when he sees beauty of the Kaghan Valley. He is introduced through his statement: “It was a landscape I excelled

⁶⁷ Shamanism as a religion is practiced by indigenous people of Asia and other regions. They believe in healing powers which include danger intuition, clairvoyance, ecological empathy, death sense, spirits, supernatural detection etc. See Singh, Manvir. “The Cultural Evolution of Shamanism.” *Behavioural and Brain Sciences*, vol. 41, 2018, pp. 1-61. doi: 10.1017/S0140525X17001893.

at, or wanted to” (10). The story is centred on Nadir’s picturesque journey to a valley lying deep in the mountain. The tale becomes a fantastic vision of a prince in search of beauty. Nadir is seen moving towards the river “inhaling a mid-summer chill deep into [his] lungs” (8). Breathing in such an environment is a pleasurable sensation for him because it carries “purity of the place” and the kind of contentment he seeks when he says, “which was why it was here, more than anywhere else, that I came closest to feeling I’d rather be here than anywhere else” (9). He loves running beside the river in a “valley shadowed and graced by nomads” (9). He jogs along the river and feels energized. Hence, the novel appears a realistically romanticized work which reminds me of the early romantic era. Nadir seems to me a modern Wordsworthian character who, being sick of the world, would turn to nature.

More ecological discussions are introduced through two characters, Wesley, Nadir’s American friend, and a German-American-Pakistani friend, Farhana, both working on the environment. They contribute to central parts of the story as Farhana wants to travel from the Ultar Glacier to the Batura Glacier to study glaciers in Northern Pakistan. This interest is evident again when Farhana, with a Nature magazine in her hand, tells Nadir that Wes gave up med school for the environment (93). Nadir is happy to learn of Farhana’s passion for nature and Pakistani landscape. He says:

she was passionate about glaciers. How many Pakistani women know two things about them? It was Farhana who told me that Pakistan has more glaciers than anywhere outside the poles. And I’ve seen them! (37)

Another character, Irfan, is a Pakistani and understands the local culture, and is engaged in a project in this area. Complexity and chaos and disturbed cognition are seen in the story through yet another character, Ghafoor, contesting the romantic, rustic, indigenous character of Maryam. The two characters love each other but Maryam's attachment to the nonhuman environments is in stark contrast to the estrangement of Ghafoor from the nonhuman environment, as he is involved in destructive activities that harm human and nonhuman life i.e., a bombing campaign. Maryam loses Ghafoor who is mostly called "Farebi" in the story by the villagers. Farebi in Urdu means "cheater". He is involved in unlawful activities and is found to have destroyed some places in the valley.

What is immediately clear from the first page of the novel is that it depicts nonhuman life as part of the narrative. The characters of Nadir and Maryam are engaged with nonhuman life forms and the nonhuman has the attention of the characters. The themes of the novel are in line with the "ecocritical age" (xi), a term used by Coupe in *The Green Studies Reader*. Khan depicts the natural landscape of Pakistan in order to defend the source of Pakistan's character, both physical and spiritual. Loving nature as an extension of humankind and as its most beautiful companion is what Khan shows through the characters of Maryam and Nadir.

Khan uses symbolism⁶⁸ rather than realism to depict the death of spirituality and love of nature. She has chosen a symbolic narrative rather than criticism because she feels it is a more powerful approach. In this story she uses characters as symbols

⁶⁸ Nineteenth-century art movement. In literature as a figure of speech it is used for an object, person or situation to convey deeper meanings other than its literal meaning.

to convey deeper meanings. The death of Maryam's daughter Kiran is symbolic, depicting the death of the old ways of life. It is also what binds the characters of Nadir and Maryam together. Kiran is depicted as a genuine inhabitant of the northern region. She "was the child of gypsies, her bare feet caked with the soil of mountains" (Khan 111). Kiran represents the nomads and her death symbolizes the death of the nomadic culture. She drowns in the frozen water of the famous and beautiful lake, Saif ul Mulook,⁶⁹ while in a rowing boat with Farhana and Nadir. She falls from the boat and Farhana and Nadir are not able to save her. Maryam and other inhabitants of the Kaghan valley regard these tourists as intruders, foreign to their native land, who have brought misery. Kiran in Urdu means 'Sun rays' which stand for life, energy, hope, happiness and warmth but these die when foreign influences disturb the peace of the valley. The Lake also felt the intruders, Nadir thinks:

The tide did not recede. It was the same tide that had confounded us when we first got here; . . . and we were intruders, duly rebuked by being splashed from all sides. (109)

The further out they rowed, the fiercer grew the waves. Nadir suffers the painful guilt of not being able to save the drowning Kiran. The tragedy wreaked on the happy rural family by these outsiders, urbanized people, is a metaphor for the lack of love for a simple and natural life. The accident conveys a deep sense of loss. Farhana is unable to understand the hospitality of the nomads, in trying to help she brings harm without knowing that "the nomads need to be protected from – tourists, men with guns, forest

⁶⁹ The lake is situated in the Kaghan valley and is named after a legendary love-stricken prince, Saiful Malook.

inspectors, or religious extremists” (Jabeen 359). It is a lament, a symbolic loss of death of a beautiful indigenous child.

Highlighting the nomadic culture of the Himalayan region is very timely as Pakistan is currently paying attention to this region and it is an important region for the CPEC (China-Pakistan Economic Corridor) as discussed in the previous chapter. Irfan understands the nomadic lifestyle and is involved in the project to bring water to the region but he thinks:

Do they need it? If for thousands of years people had survived, with varying degrees of success, by building irrigation channels from glacial melt, despite their poverty and isolation, did they need a man from the city bringing them pipes and taps? It was a fine line, the one between helping and hurting. To do nothing could mean becoming a passive witness to a potential calamity. (Khan 71-2, original emphasis)

This shows that Khan’s vision is not romantic. She does not suggest everyone to become like the original inhabitants of the land, but a cost-benefit analysis is worth executing before assuming that industrialization is good for all. This is further highlighted as Khan informs that nomads believe a healthy community depends on men and women with a deep understanding of natural resources. Talented women with the “knowledge of yak milk, butter, fertilizer, and, of course, wool” and ability to “cooperate” (40) were selected for the ritual of ice mating. And the healthy sustainable life happened because of men with specialized knowledge of “firewood, agriculture, trekking, and herding”. Their sustainable lifestyle depended on the fact that “they did not feel that which gave them life” (139) be it earth, plants or animals.

By reminding the readers about old and beautiful indigenous lifestyles and landscapes, Khan takes them back to ancient Pakistani native culture and landscape. Highlighting the biotic community as part of the indigenous rural life, the story is also the author's attempt to preserve the images and core cultural manifestations of the country's national identity. The novel shows that Khan sees human beings as an extension of the ecosystem and the land, as discussed by critics such as Paul Shephard (1969), Daniel White (1998) and Neil Evernden (1978). Khan tries to "recapture in full consciousness, that original lost sense of identity with our surroundings" (qtd. in "Beyond Ecology")⁷⁰ which Northrop Frye (1961) has talked about in *The Educated Imagination*.

Khan depicts environmental networks, and her novels are important in promoting contemporary ecocritical impulses, and I find this story full of "ecological systematicity" ("The Nature of Fear" 362), making this novel a good choice for an ecocritical inquiry. This chapter analyses the setting, themes and characterization in *Thinner than Skin* to explore how environments are politically constructed (Mukherjee 2010). The analysis highlights the political reasons behind the ecological degradation of an immensely rich and vibrant landscape. It also investigates how Khan proposes that human beings are inherently distinct from their nonhuman community but are not superior to the environment. It further informs how seemingly antithetical biotic components coexist beautifully in this world, reflecting the idea of coexistence with the environment presented in the novel through romanticism and modern ecocentrism,

⁷⁰ Evernden, Neil. "Beyond Ecology: Self, Place, and the Pathetic Fallacy." *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, University of Georgia Press, 1996, pp. 92-104.

a particular strand of deep ecology. According to English Professor and Zen Buddhist, Gary Snyder, Deep Ecology is explained as “transform[ing] the five-millennia-long urbanizing civilization tradition into a new ecologically-sensitive harmony oriented wild-minded scientific-spiritual culture” where “economics must be seen as a small sub-branch of ecology” making a “planet on which the human population lives harmoniously and dynamically by employing various sophisticated and unobtrusive technologies in a world environment which is ‘left natural’” (qtd. in Sessions 108).⁷¹ So, themes of conservation of wildlife and oppression of indigenous human and nonhuman communities dominate the novel. Khan criticizes the way foreigners and locals master the natural world for the benefit of human commerce.

The northern region of Pakistan (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan) with Karakoram and the Himalayan mountain ranges serves as the setting for this novel. I myself visited the region in 2010 (Kaghan Valley), 2013 (Azad Jammu and Kashmir) and 2018 (Gilgit-Baltistan) and was amazed to see a land blessed with enchantment but peppered with military check posts and heavy machinery at work building roads and bridges. The Chinese installations particularly seem to have destroyed the environment. Some parts of the region now have the appearance of a “militarized zone” as Deckard says and present a topic of “war ecology” (36) for research. The natural treasures including many beautiful untouched beaches, valleys and glaciers, I fear in no time will come to be dominated by industrial development.

⁷¹ Sessions, George, “Deep Ecology, New Conservation, and the Anthropocene Worldview.” *The Trumpeter*, vol. 8, no. 2, 2014, pp. 106-114.

But despite the capitalist encroachments the majority of the population preserves its indigenous lifestyle, keeping the beauty of the region intact.

Since, this region is a famous attraction for tourists from all over the world, Khan depicts a beautiful landscape to foreign readers alongside a Pakistani readers' view of foreign tourists. The novel creatively connects the history and culture of Pakistan through nomadic stories of Kaghan. For Nadir, Kaghan valley with its beautiful town Naran is a "lush alpine forest" and no one would want to miss "all the green" in this beautifully damp and shadowy valley (Khan *Thinner* 30). When Farhana asks what the north of Pakistan is like, Nadir says, "It's – isolated. Isolating. Cleansing" (57). The valley is "isolated" because it is far from the urban regions of Pakistan, and travel to this area is difficult due to less developed roads and harsh weather. By "Isolated" he imagines the region as separated from human influence, or less disturbed by human intrusion, by "isolating" he means the place has the power to possess its visitors and take them away from the rest of the world, in many cases only momentarily though, and by "cleansing" he means it is purifying, peace giving, and relaxing (57). Through Nadir's vision of this place as pure and calm, Khan is referring to the danger of disturbing this region which the reader discovers as the story progresses. While highlighting the degradation being done to the environment, Khan reveals a beautiful Pakistan which must be seen and preserved.

As a Pakistani and a Muslim, Khan also invites readers to consider that ethics only exist through deeds. Islamic teachings must be reflected in everyday decisions regarding environmental treatment and policies. In so doing, Khan introduces

EcoIslamic⁷² themes in the novel by discussing religion and ritualistic traditions. The novel presents the contradiction between belief and practice in the Islamic extremists' fundamentalism as Khan writes, "[t]he voice on the radio always said radio was sin" (292) and "Muslim of the steppe . . . was too animist for the Muslim of the town, and the Muslim of the town, for the Soviets and the Chinese, was just too Muslim" (143). On the other hand, the character of Maryam shows that there is a divine spirit in every natural object and there exists a deep bond between the spirit of nature and the human mind that produces complete peace and harmony. She feels a strange sense of peace and harmony in nature by practising her native rituals. She is in touch with her inner self. Various life incidents show that she is mentally and physically active due to her faith in the healing power of nature and the teaching of religion to remain kind towards nature and lead a spiritual life. Khan mentions the Shamanic rituals performed by Maryam, which show her respect for the environment but at the same time, she mentions other so-called Islamic things happening around which according to her are unIslamic e.g. cutting of trees, killing animals, land encroachments, etc. She reminds readers of the beauty of Islam by highlighting softer and ecological, spiritual aspects of the religion as it is written in the *Quran*, "And desire not corruption in the land. Indeed, Allah does not like corrupters".⁷³ The corruption and the undignified attitude towards the environment is what disturbs Nadir and Maryam throughout the book.

⁷² To study ecoIslamic themes, visit www.ifees.org.uk/about/ and read about The Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences (IFEES) which is a UK based multi-dimensional organisation working for a green way of life from Islamic perspective.

⁷³ Mentioned in verse 77 of Surah Al-Qasas (The Story) which is the 28th Chapter of the *Quran*. See <https://quran.com/28/77>

Moreover, Khan proposes that as believers of Islam, Pakistanis are responsible for maintaining the “unity of God’s creation, the integrity of the Earth, its flora and fauna, its wildlife and natural environment” (“The Assisi Declarations on Nature” 1986).⁷⁴ Khan highlights the declining role of religion in the characters’ lives through showing Maryam as a strong follower of Shamanic rituals which keep her close to Nature. On the other hand, Maryam’s husband, who is also Muslim, is not happy with her and is himself ignorant of Islamic teachings which stress taking care of the environment. Khan highlights by contrast how others are paying attention, while many Pakistani Muslims have ignored the environment. Khan reminds Pakistani readers that Muslims must be responsible towards the world and the environment, all of which are the creations of God. Other Muslim characters like Ghafoor are also shown as neglectful of the teachings of Islam concerning the environment.

Imperialistic, aggressive, and exploitative tendencies are seen as the government officers regard all things around them as mere objects of consumption, be it for luxury or venting their frustration. The officers confiscate land for new installations; they kill trees and native species of sheep and cows to promote their own selfish interests and do it in a manner so gruesome that the narrative only brings the reader closer to the cause of ecocriticism, aiming for protection of and increased sensitivity towards the nonhuman world. This makes me recall some ahadith⁷⁵ of Prophet Muhammad connected with planting trees and protecting them, “If you have

⁷⁴ In 1986, HRH Prince Philip, then International President of WWF called a meeting in Assisi in Italy (birth place of St Francis, the Catholic saint of ecology) to discuss the role of faith in saving the natural world. An approach to the care for nature was emphasized through teachings of major world religions.

⁷⁵ A record of the sayings or traditions of the Prophet Muhammad considered as important and major source of Islamic teachings and moral principles.

a sapling, if you have the time, be certain to plant it, even if Doomsday starts to break forth”⁷⁶ and,

If a Muslim plants a tree, that part of its produce consumed by men will be as almsgiving for him. Any fruit stolen from the tree will also be as almsgiving for him. That which the birds eat will also be as almsgiving for him. Any of its produce which people may eat thus diminishing it will be as almsgiving for the Muslims who planted it.⁷⁷

Hence, the novel’s ecopolitical and ecocritical/ecosocial theme maps the impact of capitalism’s inequity. Khan passionately urges her readers to recall Islamic teachings regarding nature and develop compassion towards the nonhuman world.

Presenting Pakistani Indigenous Communities (Human and Nonhuman)

Due to abundant references to folklore and rich indigenous culture in the novel, the ecocritical lens reveals grassroot Pakistani society in the contemporary age. This makes Khan particularly important and distinctive among contemporary fiction writers from Pakistan. Khan keeps adding new dimensions to this novel. She presents Pakistani indigenous communities and traditional cultures as the setting. Khan continues Urdu thematic traditions through local legends⁷⁸ and myths and gives water a significant role in the lives of the characters. Through local Pakistani and indigenous themes, she addresses environmental issues of global concern. Unlike the urban

⁷⁶ See al-Munawi, *Fayd al-Qadir*, iii, 30

⁷⁷ See Bukhari, *Tajrid al-Sahih*, vii, 122; Muslim, *Musaqat*, 2.

⁷⁸ See Irum, Sonia. “The Nature of Folklore.” *Dawn* [Islamabad, PK], 9 June 2019, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1486934>. Accessed 9 Aug. 2019.

characters, natives of the Kaghan Valley are detached from material consumption. This is a true depiction of the cultural set-up of Pakistani rural communities whose indigenous practices are in harmony with the environment.

Since, the State Emblem of Pakistan is a quartered shield depicting wheat, cotton, jute and tea⁷⁹ revealing that Pakistan's national identity reflects key aspects of the natural world. The agricultural ecosystem of Pakistan is a suitable lifestyle for the nation although this lifestyle is diminishing as a result of urbanisation. Water, the precious fluid, has a central position in this novel. Most of the water borders in Pakistan are surrounded with densely populated human settlement areas and agricultural fields. The novel shows a rural Pakistani culture which is based on indigenous and sustainable methods of living. According to national statistical offices more than 60% of Pakistan's population lives in rural areas.⁸⁰ Hence, Pakistan's principal natural resources are land and water along with domestication of cattle, sheep and goats. Most rural Pakistani inhabitants' livelihoods are based on the rearing of livestock; cattle and goats, and this comprises a significant part of Pakistan's gross domestic product as stated by Azhar in "Overseas Migration and its Socio-Economic Impacts on the Families Left Behind in Pakistan" (2012).⁸¹ Wiener cites G. M. Trevelyan while discussing rural occupations. What Trevelyan states about agriculture applies also to herding which is not an industry but "a way of life, unique and

⁷⁹ See <https://web.archive.org/web/20070701023430/http://www.infopak.gov.pk/Eemblem.aspx>

⁸⁰ Abbas, M., A. M. Nadeem, B. Hassan, M. Z. Rafique, and S. Huang. "A Study on Historical Development of Landownership and Landed Aristocracy in Pakistan." *Pacific Rim Property Research Journal*, vol. 22, no. 3, 2016, 217–230.

⁸¹ Azhar, I.A.K. *Overseas Migration and Its Socio-economic Impacts on the Families Left behind in Pakistan: A Case Study in the Province Punjab, Pakistan*. 2007. University of Kassel, PhD dissertation.

irreplaceable in its human and spiritual values” (87) for indigenous communities like Maryam’s. The story shows how uncontrolled scientific progress has led to material prosperity for some, which also dehumanizes people. The articles, “Transition from Karez to Tubewell” (2007)⁸² and “The Crises of Identity” (2012)⁸³ show that resistance to modernization, social and cultural changes exists among Pakistani village inhabitants. Dynamic changes affecting all indigenous cultures in the country are also represented in *Thinner than Skin*. Hence, Khan provides an insight into cultural activities and concerns through the lens of ecology, and the novel can be studied as a text for an ecocritical course in Pakistani Studies. Khan while referencing these natural elements, processes and phenomenon, highlights that these elements also exist in human culture and connection with these makes a human culture in the ‘ecocritical age’. Khan points towards the simple rural culture of Pakistan where the oral tradition of story-telling is still common. Visitors to these valleys are likely to be approached by local dwellers who tell legendary tales replete with nonhuman images. In this way Khan has rescripted the image of beautiful local Pakistan which has been a foundation for much Urdu literature, illustrating the local culture, occupation, places and myths and participation of nonhuman life.

The feeling of connectedness with the nonhuman world that Khan shares through Maryam is the core of a green reading. Khan helps the reader develop the

⁸² Mustafa, Daanish and Muhammad Usman Qazi. “Transition from Karez to Tubewell Irrigation: Development, Modernization, and Social Capital in Balochistan, Pakistan.” *World Development*, vol. 35, no. 10, 2007, pp. 1796-1813.

⁸³ Naz, Arab, et al. “The Crises of Identity: Globalization and its Impacts on Socio-Cultural and Psychological Identity Among Pakhtuns of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Pakistan.” *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2011, <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/3746/e4130f4a1b84ee032f630f6c60a74ca9cc36.pdf>. Accessed 23 Apr. 2018.

capacity to hear the voices of other species who can shape our imagination, offer meaning and help rediscover the natural world. It helps to develop a heartfelt empathetic relationship between human and nonhuman (Aizenstat 97). Maryam understands the uniqueness of the connection with each of her cattle and, more than property, she sees them as companions and wants them to flourish. Maryam loves animals because “when you call, they come”; she looks at the buffalo Noor who has “a stalk of grass between her lips that she twirled like a cigarette” (Khan *Thinner* 3), she speaks “tenderly to the two horses tethered outside their hut” (207). “She knew every colour and curve of this family” (3). She gives human names to these animals to feel closer to them. The filly, Loi Tara (Morning Star) nuzzles Maryam’s neck, “What do you want me to do?” Maryam asked, stroking first the filly, then the mother . . . Loi Tara inspected Maryam’s palm . . . Finding Maryam’s palm empty, Loi Tara allowed herself to explore Maryam’s finger instead. Maryam teased the forelock; she smoothed the silken line of a perfect nose” (208-09). Maryam values animals as her family and animals love her unconditionally. She enjoys the strong attachment and their companionship. Indigenous communities and nonhuman components like sheep, goats, cows, horses, birds, lakes, mountains, trees can be seen as suffering and marginalized, but Khan tries to bring them to the centre from the peripheries. Through this novel Khan reminds her readers of the presence of the various fellows in the nonhuman community. Khan gives importance to the myriad of lives other than humans; “horse”, “sheep”, “buffaloes”, “goats” (1), a beautiful “owl” (7), “lizard” (20), “seagulls and the swifts” (34), “hummingbirds” (35), “sheepdogs” (65), “Kingfisher” (89,129), “An audience of eagles and hawks dipped and twirled in a sky”

(140), “doves” and “hawks” (145), “butterfly” (148). As the narrative progresses, Khan gives more information about the natural world: “wind”, “lakes” (1), “mist” (2), “sunlight”, “sky” (2), “water’s depths” (3), “river” (9), “cactus . . . Joshua trees . . . purple clouds” (10), “moon”, “silhouettes of the trees” (11), “clouds” (13), “pinewood” (18), “rounded hills”, “sprouting thick forests of deodar and pine” (19), “sun” (34), “cliffs and cypresses” (34), “the purple flowers with the bright white hearts!” (35), “glaciers” (37). Similarly, Nadir loves “seminomadic tribes who made their summer homes on the lake’s shore” (65). “They’d come with their cattle, horses, and sheepdogs”. Nadir spotted “a few goats” near the lake and some on the hills to the north of the lake.

Khan uses the long walks taken by Nadir to argue that friendly consumption of the wilderness is very important to maintain our natural selves. Perhaps Nadir is in search of his inner self and is trying to extract what Mathew A. Taylor calls, “naturalness” (“The Nature of Fear” 356) from nature. Thoreau in “Walking” writes, “I believe that there is a subtle magnetism in Nature, which, if we unconsciously yield to it, will direct us aright” (*Thoreau: Collected Essays and Poems* 2014).⁸⁴ When Nadir becomes wearied at heart, he walks to calm his anxieties. Nadir reflects as he rushes out a “disturbed man” on his “solitary walks” (Khan *Thinner* 59): “My body knew where it wanted to go as if it had programmed the route from some earlier time” (59). His nightly walks are important to him because “to lose those walks would mean losing normalcy” (92). Nadir is distressed and angry as he says, “I shut off my phone.

⁸⁴ Thoreau, Henry David. *Henry David Thoreau: Collected Essays and Poems*, edited by Elizabeth Hall Witherell, Library of America, 2014.

I shut off my computer; I went for a walk” (104). At one place in the story, Nadir is very disturbed and feels peaceful back at home (in Pakistan) at the bottom of a hill near the nomads’ tents and thinks, “I was now entirely at peace” (71). This reminds me of similar feelings expressed in the last poem of T.S. Eliot’s *Four Quartets* (1942):

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time. (Little Gidding)

Nadir seeks serenity which he finds in his walks along the pure waters of River Kunhar, which according to a legend is also called “nain sukh, that which soothes the eye” (Khan *Thinner* 11). This helps him get his mind back on track and feel tranquil and refreshed. Dana Philips notes Thomas Lyon, who refers in the preface to *This Incomplete Land* to a transcendental experience which is an awakening of psychological and spiritual sense, and likens such awakening of perception to an ecological way of perceiving which is crucial to nature writers (*The Truth of Ecology* 232, 235). The simple, rural, pure and spiritual feelings surround Nadir one early morning, and he feels the lake “resting, even asleep” (Khan *Thinner* 120). He says, “I detected the first signs of activity from the tents. I heard pots clanging, water flowing. I saw the dogs scratch themselves. I heard goat bells and buffalo bells and a long, drawn-out low, as soulful as a call to prayer” (121 – 122). His head is as clear as the air and he pays attention to the call to prayer, azaan floating in from the hills, and feels peaceful. Nadir attributes a living creature quality to the land and the water and glacier of the Kaghan valley for him are like a buffalo. He personifies the manifestations of

nature. For Nadir, the land is as living as any other human or nonhuman creature. This can be interpreted as equating the nonhuman component of the ecosystem alongside animals and himself, shedding any form of discriminatory approaches towards the land; earth. This equaling of a valley with a living moving being is an important point as it abolishes boundaries or difference between the animate and inanimate factor of the biosphere.

More exploration of nature is found when readers discover that Farhana wants to research the glaciers in Pakistan by “reading the ice” (94). When Khan describes the ice mating scene, it depicts a biological tendency of humans to bond with the natural world. Nadir watches the process in awe. He personifies the glaciers by symbolically assigning human traits to the inanimate ecosystem. Complete silence is needed during the ice-mating ceremony for which an oath of silence must be sworn by Nadir as, “There was a belief that words disturbed the balance between lovers-in-transit” (41). He calls the union, the idea as the most beautiful thing he had ever seen and calls it, “A pilgrimage to love” on the “sacred soil to which the ceremony belonged” (41). This is the most beautiful thing for him. As the nature lover, Nadir falls in love with the language of the glaciers. He loves having a bitter taste of glacier melting in his mouth and sometimes salty glacier water inside him froze (14), he loves rinsing his eyes and drinking it (12). For him, glaciers “galloped and groaned, cracked and crept. They were foul-mouthed. They were serene” (95), “glaciers were slow moving, sluggish, with bouts of extreme rage. Between stasis and thrust, they rattled and creaked, moaned and bickered, adjusting and readjusting their old, old bones” (43).

Similarly, Maryam understands that “the mountains were not as fixed as many believed” (2). She knows them all; the Karakoram, the Pamirs, the Himalayas and she feels them as living beings in motion like the “two lovers, Malika Parbat and Nanga Parbat, the Queen and the Nude” (2). Upholding the values of environmental justice, Khan highlights the voicelessness of the glaciers but also personifies them to show them as part of ecosystem. Intimately tied to nature, Maryam can instinctively feel its movements. In the pair of glaciers, Maryam reads similarity with humans. Here Khan feminizes and masculinizes the glaciers; her attitude is characterized by benevolence. Regarding such sensitivity, Dana Phillips observes that humans need to return to “feeling the textures of life”, which she proposes can be achieved by “a greater degree of sensory indulgence” (207). Mountains attract Nadir too. The deserts and mountains of Pakistan; he calls “horizontal wilderness” and “perpendicular one” (Khan *Thinner*, 36), they both made him happy. Such landscape is also present as a setting of Pakistani legends like Adam Khan—Durkhani and Saif ul Malook⁸⁵. Although the majority of such legends centre on the Indus and the Chenab river there are also many tales relating to the mountains, as in the case of the story of love and dedication of Adam Khan—Durkhani⁸⁶ that was lived and immortalised in Swat, often described as a beautiful and scenic valley. Similarly, Yousaf Khan aw Sher Bano⁸⁷ is a well-known Pashtun folktale discussing a young man residing in the Kharamar hills. Khan gives voice to this nonhuman counterpart. She familiarizes her readers with glaciers as an

⁸⁵ A Punjabi folktale immortally composed by Sufi poet Mian Muhammad Bakhsh.

⁸⁶ Heston, Wilma Louise and Mumtāz Naṣīr. *The Bazaar of the Storytellers*. Lok Virsa Pub. House, 1986.

⁸⁷ A Pashto folktale

important component, their movement, and way of existence, exploring the similarities between the nonhuman world and the humans.

But at the same time, if for a moment the readers rethink other minor characters' handling of nature, they will understand that these characters are scared of nature too. The industrialists and military officers experience ecophobia as Nature is inherently powerful and can dominate anything. So, to overcome this fear these characters in the story consider nature as inferior and make strategies to control it. Instead of developing a friendly – love relationship, they dominate it and that domination is subjugating the environment. It can also be said that ecophobia is a feeling generated by the industrialists and businessmen to drive indigenous community towards consumption and practices that degenerate Nature, broadening the distance between indigenous people and their environment and nature. Shallowness is promoted to enable people to dominate the environment and to favour the production conditions of capitalism.

The cutting of trees and loss of natural habitat put a huge strain on the local population. The timber mafia⁸⁸ in this region is responsible for major deforestation. Local communities who resist are threatened by the illegal powerful groups who “tore down the old, old trees and poisoned the Gujjar dogs and fenced off the land and charged the moon for two stems of ginger and claimed a killer was hiding in their midst” (Khan, *Thinner* 195). But there are other voices who address environmental degradation encouraging readers to nurture their ecophilia to connect with nature as the Romanticists did from late-eighteenth-century.

⁸⁸ The mafia involved in organized crime of illegally logging timber.

Highlighting the Pakistani Environment and Challenging the Construction of a Stereotypical Image of Pakistan in the Western Media

Khan responds to the ecological consciousness of the academic world with an ecological gaze of her own. For her, among the many eye-catching things from Pakistan, is the ecological beauty which she believes should not be compromised or taken for granted. The question of how Pakistanis have been persuaded to neglect the beautiful aspects of their land, culture and rights of indigenous people is an important inquiry that makes this novel critically significant. Khan offers a powerful critique of the changing socio-political and ecopolitical structure of Pakistani society that underpins these developments.⁸⁹

Nadir's observation of Pakistan with "the army on the ground and the drones in the air" (Khan *Thinner* 25) "signaled" (12) a warning of the American invasion and resultant eco-violation in Pakistan which is destroying its land. Nadir says, "while people blew themselves up around us, and a bird swung circles in the sky" (241). The bird that Nadir refers to is actually an American drone, "a Predator unmanned aerial vehicle armed with Hellfire missiles, described as MALE. Medium-altitude, long-endurance" (102) that routinely "gaze" over the region with "stupid eyes" (100) from

⁸⁹ For more understanding on environmental politics in Pakistan read Yaqoob, Munazza.

"Environmental Consciousness in Contemporary Pakistani Fiction." *Ecocriticism of the Global South*, Scott Slovic, et al., Lexington Books, 2015, pp. 249-62.; Rahman, Shazia. "Karachi, Turtles, and the Materiality of Place: Pakistani Eco-Cosmopolitanism in Uzma Aslam Khan's *Trespassing*." *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, vol. 18, no. 2, 2011, pp. 261-82; Rahman, Shazia. "Land, Water, and Food: Eco-Cosmopolitan Feminist Praxis in Sabiha Sumar's *Khamosh Pani*." *Environmental Communication*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2011, pp. 187-201.

a “Playstation in Cactus Springs,” Nevada. The drones captured “entire villages . . . A target became a non-target, a non-target became a target. Before a camera could tell them apart, the world could be saved” (100-103). But the novel indicates that the news like this is always filtered on the Western media and destruction of communities, loss of species and a local culture is never mentioned. Only the act of violence is portrayed as an act of bravery to save the world from misery. This is further elaborated by Khan when Nadir says:

soon after the war began, a Pakistani shepherd found unexploded US cluster bombs. He kicked one by accident while herding his sheep. It tore apart his hands and legs and made the news and elicited anger. Since then, if any shepherd lost his limbs, even the story was lost. (104)

Khan reveals the presence of emissions in the air which Northern region Pakistanis breathe as a result of concentrated bombing missions. Despite alarming levels of pollutants, the media pay scant attention to this. Khan also writes of two bases: Cactus Springs in Nevada and Shamsi Airfield in Pakistan, involved in “Operation Enduring Freedom” to target Talibans (103). Nadir informs the reader that:

Pakistani Airfield was used by wealthy Arabs to launch a different predator. Falcons. They were flown in on jets to hunt the endangered Houbara Bustard, a pheasant with aphrodisiac meat, though the real aphrodisiac was watching a falcon spray a Houbara’s feathers. (Falconry was forbidden to Pakistanis, yet Pakistan produced more falconry gear than any other country, all for its Arab patrons. Call it hospitality.) Ironically, since the start of the war and use of the airfield by US forces, the bustards could no longer be hunted on the same scale. But people could. Had Shamsi Airfield been gifted to

the CIA to launch predator MALE? Irfan threw these questions at me. (103)

Khan criticises not only the American intrusion in the name of the war on terror but also the Pakistani government's role in perpetuating this violence. She challenges Muslim ethics and Arab imperialists' illegal acts of hunting endangered species through Falconry,⁹⁰ the lack of any government response to this.

Another example of Media manipulation is depicted through an American interviewer asking Nadir, "Where are the beggars and bazaars or anything that resembles your culture?" (12), as he thinks Nadir's photographs lack "authenticity". The interviewer pays no attention to the landscape Nadir has captured. Nadir feels disturbed and sees prints by Linde Waidhofer⁹¹ outside the office taunting him. He thinks:

A Waidhofer can be a nature photographer of the Wild West, but a Sheikh must be a war photographer of the Wild East! He must wow the world, not with the assurance of grace. He must wow the world with the assurance of horror. (13)

Khan further highlights the importance of the environment in this region as she writes, "Central Asia [is] divided not into states, but into mountains and steppe, desert and oasis" (138) which has attracted the foreign powers to capture its resources. Similarly, Khan refers to the war in the East and skillfully relates it to environmental pollution and geopolitics. In this regard Hall argues that "environmentalists frequently characterize capitalism as a metaphorical "war" on the environment, but it seems few

⁹⁰ The hunting of wild animals in their natural habitat through a trained bird of prey.

⁹¹ A famous American nature photographer

have articulated how *war* is war on the environment and human populations working, living, praying, and learning in it” (17). For her, environmental literary violence is a force that creates “social inequalities by disturbing environmental burdens and benefits” (18). Moreover, “it makes some lives and ways of life more secure while making other lives more insecure. Thus, the environmental military violence secures uneven power relations” (18). Khan also highlights the domination by powerful countries over Pakistan in geopolitical contexts based on extraction of resources for capitalist expansion. This can be termed as “environmental military violence” which tends to secure the authority of the state to control its resources (17). Nadir’s thoughts on this reflect Daanish’s character in *Trespassing* (analysed in chapter four of this dissertation) who wonders at the American national policies:

Up in the sky, white clouds drifted. No haze, no smog. No potholes, beggars, burning litter, kidnapping or dismissed governments. Such beauty in the country that consumed thirty per cent of the world’s energy, emitted a quarter of its carbondioxide, had the highest military expenditure in the world, and committed fifty years of nuclear accidents, due to which the oceans teemed with plutonium, uranium, and God alone knew what other poisons. (Khan *Trespassing* 48)

Khan highlights that the First world countries have apparently clean environments because they are “dumping” all the poisons “*on them*” (Khan 2012, 48, original emphasis) disregarding the environmental justice ethics. This is a form of “selective justice” (362) according to Jabeen. The term “them” here is used to highlight the othering done by United States’ policies which disrespect the life in other countries and deprive other nations of environmental preservation.

Reading further the American interviewer says, “We might be interested in you but not in your landscapes” (Khan *Thinner* 39). This haunts Nadir as when Farhana expresses her desire to visit Pakistan; Nadir wonders what images she wants to see because she only knows Pakistan through the Western media. But he hopes that she sees the beauty of Pakistan through his eyes and conversations which would always mention Pakistan with a fondness for its beauty. Later, in the story Nadir focuses once again on Pakistan’s position as he thinks about the reasons why Farhana started getting cold feet about coming to Pakistan a few months before they left because she gets from the American news channels that Pakistan has “border badlands . . . al-Qaeda hideouts, suicide bombers, bearded fanatics” (Khan *Thinner* 102). Similarly, he finds himself annoyed when he takes a photograph in Karachi “of beggars and children running naked in the street, sucking mango pits and smearing their sooty cheeks with orange stains” (24). He took these images because the American interviewer said:

Why are you, Nadir Sheikh . . . wasting time taking photographs of American landscapes when you have material at your own doorstep? . . . We sell photographs . . . sometimes for a lot of money . . . Americans already know their trees . . . Next time you go home, take some photographs . . . Show us the dirt. The misery. Don’t waste your time trying to be nature photographer. Use your advantage.
(11)

Nadir is expected to commodify “misery” of his war-torn country for the international audience. This also shows how people from native countries are exploited to perpetuate violence. These pictures are taken and shown to the world which establishes a stereotypical image of Pakistan. But eventually Nadir hits the delete

button in his camera. Other beautiful and peaceful aspects of Pakistan for instance, linguistic diversity, rich ethnicity, green landscape, beautiful waterlands, sufi music, traditional village festivals etc. rarely come up in the global market of representation. And Khan is bringing that back.

Khan points towards colonizers and the colonized during the conversation between Nadir and Farhana's dad, Mr. Rahim. Rahim tells:

my father had a fierce aversion to what he called the fascist eye. He was terrified of its power to replicate an imagination that could not resist it. He bemoaned it, right until his death, the way the Third World is seen by the First World that makes up these terms. What he called ghorna [an Urdu word meaning to stare]. Their gaze. On us. (53)

With "Their gaze. On us" Khan again highlights the stereotypical images of Pakistan in the western media. The western media projections have degenerated the real image of Pakistan, and unfortunately, some native writers have perpetuated the same image. But Khan wants to give an ecological image of Pakistan to the national as well as the international reading community. Through a Pakistani indigenous story, she calls for the establishment and reconnection of human-nonhuman relationships and for peace and happiness at a global level. That is why she is critical of the 'lens' through which Pakistan is observed by the Western world. The camera lens used by Nadir symbolises this perceptual lens. The media lens reproduces selected scenes for imperialistic purposes. But *Thinner than Skin* tries to reveal another side of Pakistan, from behind a different lens, through the characters of Nadir and Maryam.

The stereotypical construction of an image of Pakistan makes it impossible for Nadir's American friend, Wes, to believe that Pakistan has abundant natural beauty which is never shown on the media. Upon arrival in Pakistan he says, "This doesn't look like Pakistan" (29). Then what is Pakistan? One that is created by the imperialists and warmongers? Is Pakistan only a terrorist state? If yes, then who made it so? Why are prominent Pakistani writers perpetuating a discourse created by them? These are some of questions, the exploration of which will further add to the understanding of geopolitics and environmental concerns in Pakistan.

Criticising Capitalist Intrusion and New Forms of Imperialism and Colonization

The novel shows that how one of the richest wildernesses with rivers, lush valleys and the highest peaks in the world is under threat. A centuries-old culture is at risk of extinction due to intrusions of various sorts for economic gains. The "dying indigenous breed", "diminishing forest" and "felled trees hidden in water wells" (216) reflect ruthless capitalist expansion and unjust political interference and exploitation. In recording the serene life in companionship of cattle and plants, Khan offers a perfect example of nonhuman life existing happily and undisturbed in its own space till the intrusion by human beings occur. Both human and nonhuman suffer the loss of connection which happens because of urbanization, modern technology and militarization.

Referring to negative impacts of certain technological gadgets, Khan informs that Nadir's eyes are always hungry to capture nature (98) but in Kaghan he would

leave his camera behind on his nightly walks and think, “leaving it behind made me look at the world differently” (9). He starts thinking about his two states as “with” and “without” (9). When a camera is not with him he can think of his love, beloved, “Farhana weighed more prominently on my mind” (9), but when he is with his camera photographing, he would never think of her once. Farhana wishes him not to become a person who “spends his life behind a lens” because technology dominates his emotions. Another important line in the novel is by Irfan who takes out his cell phone and frowns, “We’ve lost contact” (47). He should have been worried about the contact he has lost with nature rather than technology. Nadir responds, “Good”, having left his own phone behind in Karachi and not missed it once. For Nadir, real contact is with nature and not with techno-interruptions. The choice of this region as the setting for this novel is significant. Many other rural areas of Pakistan have already witnessed the introduction of new technology, but this region for most part is still untouched. The parts now being colonized by intruders is the focus of Khan’s writing in the following paragraphs.

The colonizing and imperialistic attitudes of the American policymakers is detestable for Khan as the novel shows. New forms of colonial masters are seen, including Chinese industry, government agents as well as Islamic extremists. Khan despises the mentality of control over the natural world through militarization, industrialization, local government officials, mafias and foreign influences.

The physical exploitation of the earth is particularly disturbing for Khan. According to Gomes and Kanner, “The unacknowledged dependence makes us act as parasites on the planet, killing off our own host” (115). Nature is taken as “an identity

that is backgrounded by the government led institution and the allied corporations” (Sultan and Khan 126). Therefore, the most disturbing changes in the land are the entrance of money and profit in the lives of the natives, introduced by outsiders in the name of business and prosperity. These replace religion and virtues like kindness and goodness towards both human and nonhuman communities of the Kaghan valley.

The powerful groups represented in the novels are all men, revealing yet another lens through which to examine the book, that of ecofeminism. Roszak in *The Voice of the Earth* states:

there is no question but that the way the world shapes the minds of its male children lies somewhere close to the root of our environmental dilemma . . . How are the minds of our male children shaped so that many find themselves powerfully drawn to fantasies of conquering lands, nations, or women? From the perspective of feminist psychology, part of the problem is that men are told, from early in life, that to be respected and admired as men they must be separate from others. (qtd. in *Ecopsychology* 113)

Khan does not want the present societies to be “jeopardizing the prospects for future generations” to meet their own wants and needs (74). Khan draws the attention of readers to the concept of “maldevelopment” in which colonization continues with development plans for the Third world constructed and implemented by the First world. As a result, colonizers become increasingly wealthy while the colonized become poorer. According to environmental and anti-globalisation activist Vandana Shiva (1988):

‘Development’ could not but entail destruction for women, nature and subjugated cultures, which is why, throughout the Third World,

women, peasants and tribals are struggling for liberation from 'development' just as they earlier struggled for liberation from colonisation. (2)

This story of the indigenous land reminds me of *The Wasteland* by Eliot which according to Lawrence Buell is a call to "envision a dying society" (Berry 9).⁹² Similarly, Colonization and new forms of imperialism highlight the subjugation of local communities making the developing countries "uneven" (Mukherjee 2010, 7) among other countries. She presents the impact of colonialism on the disputed border lands of northern Pakistan, the region of ancient Silk route. She explains the geopolitical and ecological concerns and political tensions. In a review of the novel, Tolle states that "The indigenous communities of Central Asia know this fact too well: every day, the encroaching influence of new occupiers from China, Russia, India, Iran, and the United States further destabilizes their rhythmic ways of life" (131). The intrusion of foreigners/outside/city dwellers in the Kaghan valley leads to significant changes in the structure and function of the local life and ecosystem of the most important part of Pakistan, the northern region, comprised of Karakoram and Himalayan mountain chains. According to Gomes and Kanner:

that the despoiling of the Earth and the subjugation of women are intimately connected. It is not a coincidence that when women are raped, the land becomes parched and desolate, and when "feminine" qualities are oppressed, the human mind is cut off from participation in mystery and left with a disenchanted world. In patriarchal cultures, it is common to find patterns of domination and control aimed at both women and the land. Ecofeminists have suggested that

⁹² Berry, Geoffrey. "An Ecomythic Reading of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*." *The Trumpeter*, vol. 31, no.1, 2015, pp. 1-13.

these same patterns can be found on the individual level, both interpersonally and intraphysically. (112)

Nadir describes the valley as cupping “nine lakes in its canines, sprouting the thick forest of deodar and pine, towering over 4000 meters before halting abruptly at the temples of the Himalayas and the Karakoram” (Khan *Thinner* 19-20). Kaghan is continued to Gilgit-Baltistan through the Chinese built Karakoram Highway also known as China-Pakistan Friendship Highway which also connects Pakistani borders with the Chinese borders. It also connects Gilgit-Baltistan to the ancient Silk Road. Pakistan, Afghanistan, Tajikistan and China are connected as the route cuts through Eurasia and the Indian region. The highway is of strategic and military significance for Pakistan and China and is also important for the sensitive and disputed state of Kashmir between India and Pakistan.

According to Glendinning humans need “to meet basic human needs in as sustainable a manner as possible” (48). Khan propagates older ecological models of “harmony, equilibrium, and balance” (Taylor 360). The industrialists and military officers are not ethically helping the economy of the region but are acting to colonize nonhuman species. Local rulers and officers oppress the local tribes and destroy healthy sustainable lifestyles as Maryam’s mother says:

It was the Angrez who invented the whole business, the whole revenue generating forest policy that bound the herders forcing them to pay a grazing fee and tree-cutting fee. Before the Angrez, they had been free to graze and chop. And the sedentary folk had been friendly. (Khan *Thinner* 251)

“Angrez” (Urdu word for Englishmen) as colonisers still haunt the locals and any local authority behaving in this way is taken as synonymous with the British colonizers. Thus Khan brings imaginary and real cultural history into her environmental discussion of the landscape (Yaqoob 259) and refers to an episode of historical abuse perpetrated on Pakistani native communities and their land. Jeannette Armstrong reminds the readers “that not all human beings drifted into a state of alienation from their habitat; many were driven from the land by a dominant culture in the grip of forces that now look madder than any form of “superstition” that colonizers or missionaries may once have attributed to indigenous people” (316-324). Maryam thinks, the “animals were meant to graze high in the summer pastures, not down here in the plains” (*Thinner* 207) and she understands her mare Namasha’s whining as she is “sick of lowland grub” and “wanted the air of the mountains, the way it sweetened the grass. She wanted the crunch of snowmelt on her tongue” and is not happy with pre-monsoon heat” and “flies around her eyes” (208). She is distraught to think “the Kaliani breed too might be extinct” (207) due to the artificial breeding of the animals by the government for profit, while government, militants and mafia all have been plundering the land and animals of the indigenous communities. Nature is used by the government without any harmony and cooperation, whereas Maryam treats Nature like family. Khan criticizes the consumerist and exploitative pursuit of economic growth where short-term profits are the only dominant value. The forced migration from mountains to lowlands destroys communities and disturbs animals. Gomes and Kanner opine that “The living system, on which we depend and of which we are a

part, is engulfed and made into a servant” (115). In Metzner’s words it’s the “progressive deterioration” (57) to plunder the biosphere.

Theodore Roszak (1992) argues that “repression of the ecological unconscious is the deepest root of the collusive madness in industrial society; open access to the ecological unconscious is the path to sanity” (62). Metzner, leading theorists of “green psychology” explains the dissociation from the natural world as “the ecologically disastrous split – the pathological alienation” (55) between humans and nonhumans. The novel suggests the consequences of treating the nonhuman environment with contempt. Similarly, according to Paul Shephard in his book *Nature and Madness*, exploitative developmental projects have threatened the natural progress of civilizations, as a result of which “civilized humanity began to pervert or lose the developmental practices that had functioned healthily for hundreds of thousands of years” (qtd. in Metzner 56). Khan depicts the traditional life slipping away with nomadic tribes “giving up free grazing rights, purchasing small plots of land from the state that told them what to plant and when. The same cash crops . . . [for] the same people who took away their grazing rights” (Khan *Thinner* 251). Khan also exposes the illegal cutting of trees resulting in deforestation in Northern Pakistan. Native tribes used to “wait fifty years for each pine, deodar and fir to reach maturity. Only after maturity could each be cut. Hardly anyone waited anymore” (248). The “remorseless suppression of biodiversity” (Coupe 3) is evident in this novel. The story subordinates human interests to nonhuman biotic processes. The novel’s critical focus on the degrading effects of capitalism is also rendered through the recurring references to beautiful scenes and imagery which are feared to be lost, if not preserved e.g. “the free

grazing lands are turned to state farms” (Khan *Thinner* 245). Khan criticizes the utilitarian vision of nature.

Khan also warns the reader about global warming as she writes, “Glacial growth and decline were equal indicators of global warming” in both West and the East (44). Nadir draws the reader’s attention to climatic change when he says:

Glaciers in the eastern Himalayas are receding. Some say the Alps will be ice-free by 2100. Greenland’s glaciers are melting so fast they could sink southern California and Bangladesh. But in parts of Pakistan, glaciers could be expanding. (43)

Khan gives reference to the classic story of Prince Saif ul Malook and Badar ul Jamal stemming from Pakistan’s Hazara region, telling of the love held by a prince for a fairy. Nadir’s narration of the story of Queen of the Mountains (46) is symbolic.⁹³ The name ‘Land of the Fairies’ is given because of a beautiful view of the lake and the towering ‘Malka Parbat’, which stands clear and apparent, but invincible over the location. The lake’s depth has never been measured. Nadir holds a sacred status of Malika Parbat and gazes at her not directly but “in the lake”. Nadir says that the Northeast of the Queen appeared “the most photographed and feared peak in the Himalayan Chain: Nanga Parbat. Naked Mountain” (64). Gazing at the lake (64-65) to see her reflection also shows attachment to water. Referring to the myth of lovers, he says, “Malika Parbat’s reflection was being admired and broken by a stream of exhausted pilgrims and a dozen boats” (63). He takes it as symbolic to tell how humans

⁹³ According to the locals in this valley the fairies and demons “through the extremity of weather display their anger”. See <https://dailytimes.com.pk/87662/saif-ul-malook-the-lake-of-fairies/>

appreciate at the same time and destroy. He tells that the two lovers were nearly drowned, but took refuge in a cave; “the cave is copulation. It’s our only hope” (46). Here Khan suggests an idea of going back to old society where simple life was much happier compared to now. We cannot go back to the stone age, but Pakistanis can certainly work towards negating and abolishing capitalistic consumerist practices that separate them from nature.

Jinn (The Evil force) in the folktale tries to separate the two lovers and brings floods and storms to destroy the region where the lovers are hiding. This can be interpreted as global warming caused by capitalist developments that are harming the world. A materialistic, capitalistic force like Jinn cannot experience true “love or happiness but is tormented when others do” (46). Once again, Khan uses metaphor and narrative to convey an ecocritical message.

Khan also highlights the uncontrolled tourism in Pakistan which stresses and destroys natural areas leading to dangerous environmental problems. While trekking up the glacier and heading for the lake, Nadir is disturbed by the “brown scud marks across the glittery white expanse” as “the jeeps slid across the ice, white-knuckled drivers steering wheels that kicked like steeds” (44). The glaciers are “packed with tourists and trekkers” and “the filth left behind by those transgressing against the glacier’s beauty” (47) upsets him. Gomes and Kanner in this regard are of the view that:

Industrial society assumes a right of access to the entire planet. No place is considered by its own rights off-limits to humans. If a mountain is difficult to climb, it is considered all the more heroic to

“conquer” it. It is not surprising that mountain climbers, in their eagerness to overcome natural limits and obstacles, often ignore their impact on the land. As a result, we see the ecological devastation of some of the most awe-inspiring lands in the world. Few people realize that K2 in Pakistan, the second highest mountain on the planet, is also possibly the most polluted . . . Rather than respecting these difficult natural features, people blame the “cruelty of nature” when the inevitable tragedies occur. (116)

Maryam senses that the snowmelt was strong and obsessive this year “as if last year’s vices had not been smoked out completely” (Khan *Thinner* 2). She knows “if you did not get rid of such things they had a way of getting rid of you” (2). By showing the unpredictability that the elements hide within themselves, Khan gives the glaciers an aura of danger too.

While rowing on the lake, Nadir is conscious of himself as an outsider: “we were intruders” (109). He notices military convoys and thinks, “it was unusual in this valley . . . The trucks were as twitchy . . . creeping up and down the valley’s spine . . . The whole country was teeming with convoys of one kind or another” (20). The intrusion of the technology is also highlighted as militants too are disturbing the wilderness. Khan writes, “These valleys belonged to the farmers down in the plains, and the hoarders around” (68) and the local tribes “want the tourists to leave” (70). Indigenous people are not happy about the intrusion of foreign individuals which has led to destruction and suspicion. This response by individuals in small communities mirrors the author’s wider attack on American intervention in developing countries to capture the rich resources of these indigenous lands. As Saba Pirzadeh states that South Asian writers like Khan reveal “how postcolonial ethno-nationalist movements

use environmental objectification to justify their militant ideology and represent nature as inert territory meant to be violently conquered” (15). The novel thus becomes a critique of the brutality of American imperialism.

Capitalist development also poses the threat of extinction to endangered plants and animals. Environmental studies scholars have investigated the intersection of science, anthropology, law, literature, history, art and philosophy to articulate how nonhuman life is or should be signified in relation to human cultures and lives. According to Aizenstat, “The rhythms of nature underline all of human interaction: religious traditions, economic systems, cultural and political organization. When these human forms betray the natural psychic pulse, people and societies get sick, nature is exploited, and entire species are threatened” (93). Khan seems to support the “new welfarist” movement which “seeks to improve the treatment of animals at the hands of humans” (“The Animal” 819).⁹⁴ Khan reminds the readers of “our former closeness with the Earth” and its nonhuman species (Metzner 61). Khan gives explicit reference to the connectedness of Maryam with other nonhuman communities in nature as they all wait, sensing the torture inflicted on beautiful indigenous land and nonhuman life. The suffering of the nonhuman does not go unnoticed and the description of the horse dying in a bomb blast or the disappearance of a greener part of the valley stirs feelings of both pity and guilt for the brutal manner in which the killings are carried out. Metzner states, “we as a species are suffering from the kind of *collective amnesia*. We have forgotten something our ancestors once knew and practices – certain attitudes

⁹⁴ McFarland, Sarah E. ““The Animal” is a Verb: Liberating the Subject of Animal Studies.” *Journal of Advance Composition*, vol. 30, no. 3/4, 2010, pp. 813-823.

and kinds of perception, an ability to empathize and identify with nonhuman life, respect for the mysterious, and humility in relationship to the infinite complexities of the natural world” (61). At the beginning of the story, reader sees Maryam waiting with her daughter Kiran, “mare and the filly, the three buffaloes, the four goats, and all the stupid sheep”. They all can sense the intrusion and disturbance in their land as Maryam feels the “wind carrying the dissipating heat to her nostrils just as the horse’s nostrils flared in panic . . . They sensed it, even the stupid sheep detected it, the fat Australian ones the government tricked them into buying (*Thinner* 1). There is a cry of a panicked horse cutting thorough the valley:

he was racing forward, straight into a fence of barbed wire masked in a thicket of pine . . . Every living creature had felt the horse impale himself just before his cry rang through the valley like a series of barbed wires. (1)

For Khan, animal exploitation is inhuman. Pointing towards critical animal studies⁹⁵ which highlight oppression and exploitation of animals, her examples show an anticapitalistic streak in the story. However Khan’s stance is clearly ecocentric as opposed to anthropocentric, as revealed when she writes critically of Australian cows and artificially bred sheep introduced to replace traditional native species. Donna Haraway in *When Species Meet* also defines that human and nonhuman are relationally entangled (330). Khan holds a view that animals must be cared for with love regardless of whether an artificial genetic modification is torture inflicted on the animal species. It is unclear whether any ethical theory could adequately address the rights of animals

⁹⁵ Taylor, Nik and Richard Twine. *The Rise of Critical Animal Studies: From the Margins to the Centre*. London: Routledge, 2014.

– but Khan discusses them on simple human-friendly and compassionate grounds, as companions, expressing her views through fiction rather than criticism.

Maryam is upset to see “alleys that once chimed with horse bells now clattering with cranes” (*Thinner* 136). Maryam also worries about the inactive, artificially produced, cattle and tells her daughter about the corruption of the local government:

fat Australian sheep the government was selling them, to replace the thin desi kind . . . Indigenous sheep yielded twenty kilograms of meat and two kilograms of wool. Foreign sheep yielded forty kilograms of meat and eight kilograms of wool. But they were finding out, too late, that foreign sheep were not as strong as thin desi sheep. They could not survive the icy winds and sudden snowdrifts of Kaghan Valley. They were fussy eaters. And they were slow-moving, adjusting poorly to nomadic living and complaining too much . . . Another thing, . . . their wool. So long it gets all tangled up in thorns as we look for better feed, just for them. No. These foreign sheep are better off staying in one flat dry place . . . They are sedentary sheep. (190)

Maryam is depressed to find that:

Australian sheep because of their silly diet, forced the herders into pastures that were closed to them. They were forced to pay fine. Huge fines. One year a fat sheep nibbled two stems of a ginger plant with twelve stems. The plant could afford to lose two stems. But no, they were made to pay a hundred rupees per stem. The government was closing off their freedom to roam the land . . . this too was killing the sheep they had been forced to buy. Even their goats were meddled with. The government replaced the sturdy Kaghani goats and the fierce Kilan goats with those that yielded more mutton but

ate all the feed and left the indigenous goats bleating in hunger.
(190-91)

This makes the novel a tale of exploitation, reinforced by a compliant and sterile Kaghan administration. The conception of nature as totally manipulable, able to be objectified and transformed, reflects a “dominant paradigm in the modern era” (Rigby 156)⁹⁶ which bring mental depression instead of unsatisfying social prosperity.

As in all her other novels Khan depicts a strong woman at the centre of this novel. The title of the novel reflects the oppression of both women and environment: when Maryam’s daughter asks if her own skin is as thin as the goat’s, Maryam replies that it is thinner: “if a goat can be shred so easily, so could a woman” (*Thinner* 124). Maryam’s daughter must “grow a second skin to protect the thin one” according to Tolle, “but the second skin must remain hidden in order to work. Without mentioning the veil, Maryam rejects it by offering an emotional – but equally spiritual – alternative” (Tolle 133).⁹⁷ The story points out that Maryam is delighted to finally find a place where:

[t]here were no barbed wires here. No one tearing down the trees.
And no forest inspectors telling the nomads to stretch their limbs
barely as far as the length of a blanket, only to deprive them of a
blanket altogether. [Animals] were free to graze. The highlands

⁹⁶ Rigby, Kate. “Ecocriticism.” *Introducing Criticism at the Twenty-First Century*, 2nd ed., edited by Julian Wolfreys, Edinburgh, UP, 2015, pp. 151-178.

⁹⁷ Tolle, Andrew. “Uzma Aslam Khan’s *Thinner than Skin*.” Review of *Thinner than Skin*, by Uzma Aslam Khan. *Pakistaniaat*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2013, pp. 131-133.

Neelam Jabeen in “Ecofeminism and Pakistani Anglophone Literature” (2018) also presents an ecofeminist debate in Pakistani Anglophone fiction and is of the view that, “A postcolonial ecofeminism should not only locate a woman-nature connection and society’s treatment of both but should also critically examine the women-nature relationship unique to postcolonial societies owing to the double bind of postcolonial women” (355).

belonged to those who had been coming here for so many summers.
(Khan *Thinner* 3)

At a critical point in the novel, Nadir finds himself in the helpless situation of being caught in the glacial heights by militants and is also haunted by the revengeful eyes of Maryam who holds him responsible for the death of her child. Nature turns harshly against him. But Maryam has developed a respect for Nadir, and her empathy for a fellow human being leads her to save him. She becomes an example of biophilic existence who is in harmony with the human and the nonhuman alike. It is important to note that Maryam's feeling of connectedness, forming the basis of community life, unites her with the world around. Despite being extremely poor, Maryam is rich in human relationships and has the will to deal with life as it comes (70-71). The transforming power of empathy is seen in the relationship of Maryam and Nadir as in the end she no longer rages against him. Her pagan heart has been calmed through healthy companionship with nature. This story engages the heart as well as the mind, demanding that the reader reconsiders the impact of a new wave of imperialism and international development, and questions the dominant narrative that development is always progressive and positive.

CHAPTER 7

Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations

As an early-stage Pakistani ecocritic I started exploring Pakistani fiction in English and observed the theme of human domination over nature through all four novels of Uzma Aslam Khan. I noted that each of Khan's multilayered books addresses many themes that other Pakistani writers have written about, but for me, ecological politics dominates her literary works. Khan's art is infused with the ecological themes that dominate contemporary discourse. However, her works focus on a particularly Pakistani ecological argument with capitalism, through narrating environmental processes and pro-environmental attitudes.

Having analysed selected texts of Uzma Aslam Khan with reference to critical theories in ecocriticism, in this chapter, I conclude that Khan's aim is to motivate active engagement and direct attention to the obstacles to ecoconscious discourses in Pakistan. Khan presents the environment as a social problem to encourage eco-literate citizens with environmentally conscious values, morals and attitudes. Pakistan's anti-ecological trajectory given its richly diverse landscape, is an act of sheer ignorance. The question of why Pakistanis have not made the environment a priority and why so little attention is given to longer-term consequences were questions that formed the basis of this study.

Pakistan has been the subject of recent debate in the UK House of Commons regarding tensions in Kashmir, the setting of Khan's fourth novel *Thinner than Skin*. India and Pakistan, as two nuclear powers, engaged in an aerial strike which trespassed

each other's airspace, causing concern internationally. Debbie Abrahams, a British Labour Party politician and MP stated: "Both India and Pakistan are nuclear powers. This isn't just an issue for the region, it is an issue for the whole world".⁹⁸ Boundaries that the British created between India and Pakistan during partition of the subcontinent in 1947 have re-emerged as a major international concern. Khan has stepped forward to raise the profound interconnectedness between issues of this disputed territory with environmental concerns.

In the same way, referring to Neeley who has been the leading environmentalist of the Coalition,⁹⁹ Ray (215) has researched the complexity of environmental issues by demonstrating how environmental destruction is linked with global international economic policies. She demonstrates how "blaming the victims" (fails to challenge dominant societies' role in creating the problem. Likewise, Khan tackles the power geometry of the borders and land, where "'international economic policy' is literally a feature of the landscape" (Ray 215). A confidential 1991 World Bank statement by then chief economist at the World Bank, Lawrence Summers, recorded in a memo, revealed such economic policies when he argued for the transference of waste to developing countries. According to the Global Policy Forum (Mokhiber and Weissman n.p.) he states:

⁹⁸ See <https://www.parliament.uk/business/news/2019/february/government-respond-to-urgent-question-on-kashmir-escalation/>

⁹⁹ Thorpe, S. Activists say bring down the wall. *People's World* [online]. 12 June. Updated 12 June 2003, 09:27. [Viewed 15 March 2019]. Available from: <https://www.peoplesworld.org/article/activists-say-bring-down-the-wall/>

For further information read Cunningham, H., (2012). Gating ecology in a gated globe: Environmental aspects of 'securing our borders'. In: H. Donnan, and T.M. Wilson, eds. *Borderlands: ethnographic approaches to security, power, and identity*. USA: University Press of America. pp. 125-142.

Just between you and me shouldn't the World Bank be encouraging more migration of the dirty industries to the LDCs [least developed countries]? I think the economic logic behind dumping a load of toxic waste in the lowest-wage country is impeccable and we should face up to that . . . I've always thought that countries in Africa are vastly underpolluted; their air quality is probably vastly inefficiently low compared to Los Angeles . . .¹⁰⁰

Khan stands out as an important political commentator because she highlights numerous economic policies and foreign interventions in Pakistan which have had a devastating impact on the environmental landscape. Her writings deliver an understanding, and a sense of involvement for Pakistani readers into the environmental discourse as she presents an ideological correlation between the environment and national politics. *Trespassing* highlights the permission granted to foreign trading trawlers in the waters of Sindh resulting in extinction of fish, loss of livelihood for local fishermen and loss of habitat for the turtles on the coastline. The development of industries in Karachi supplying foreign countries destroys the natural landscape, polluting it with dirt and toxic waste and brings an end to local businesses. Similarly, in *Thinner than Skin*, the local species of cow and sheep are replaced by foreign species which are not compatible with northern environments. As a result, local people suffer loss of business and livelihood. Control of natural forests and highlands by the Pakistan military restricts the movement of tribal people within their own land. The settling of Chinese trade companies, bringing heavy machinery and

¹⁰⁰ See <https://www.globalpolicy.org/component/content/article/209/43247.html>

Summers apologized after the memo was leaked. He said it was intended to be ironic and it was a thought experiment. Later reports suggested that he did not write the memo although his name appeared on it.

factories in Gilgit-Baltistan depicted in the novel has become a recent debate in Pakistan regarding the environment of the region.

My research finds that the inclusion of ecological concepts and their portrayal within the contemporary global debates reveal Khan's books to be important ecocritical texts. In contemporary times when global warming and climate change are burning issues, Khan's contribution as the first Pakistani woman ecocritic in English literature must be acknowledged. Her books speak to both Pakistani and international readers through the experiences of multiple characters in her novels. Alongside human characters, the natural world is also given a full voice. My analysis reveals that the voicing of nonhuman elements is a powerful technique used by Khan in breaking the silence of negligence towards the environment. By showing readers that attention to such detail can become a crucial dimension in literature, she has made ecocriticism visible in Pakistan. Khan introduces to the world the beautiful Pakistan, with its ancient traditions and its rooted indigenous people. She has set her eco-narrative in the heart of the Pakistani literary academia. She has helped to remodel Pakistani literature through her critical revision of cultural, social, economic and political issues, as well as her understandings of class, gender, race, colonisation, and environment. Her literary vision is an activist counterpart to imperialism.

Environmental consciousness is present in all of Khan's novels in varying degrees, but *Trespassing* and *Thinner than Skin* develop a detailed critique of the relationship of the environment to capitalism, colonial legacies and imperialist expansion, through their critique of anti-environmental ideologies and practices. The doctrine of human dominance over nature is skillfully articulated through these

Pakistani English stories. Khan highlights the treatment of nature in the anthropocentric conception of otherness. By foregrounding nature, she reveals how nature has been in the background in Pakistani English novels.

Nature is always seen by capitalists as an agency of “invisible inputs to rational economy” (Plumwood 1993, 141). Analyses show that Khan makes this invisible visible by presenting it as one of the significant themes among many others. The introductory pages of the selected novels mention nature: *The Story of Noble Rot* shows hibiscus and sandalwood, *Trespassing* depicts turtles on the seashore, Margalla Hills are mentioned in *The Geometry of God*, while horse, sheep, buffaloes, goats, wind and lakes are referenced in *Thinner than Skin*. Most importantly Khan does not represent nature as a means of economy but depicts it as an important component, breathing with human beings. Starting the story by acknowledging the nonhuman characters also shows that by considering nature as other, humans alienate themselves from nature. In this way, nature is depicted as insignificant and unworthy of moral consideration, justifying the exploitation of nature by corporate industries and individuals. The Pakistani government’s negligence in acknowledging the congested and hazardous conditions in the factories resulting in diseased bodies of the workers in *The Story of Noble Rot*, impact of the loss of the natural habitat in Sindh coastal areas and ban on natural farming of silkworms appear in *Trespassing*; filthy conditions in the zoo highlighted in *The Geometry of God* and drillings and blasting of natural areas make a mark in *Thinner than Skin*. Each of the novels depicts instrumentalization: the radical exclusion of nature as an important component to be taken care of.

Khan criticizes mechanization of nature in *Thinner than Skin* when, through genetic engineering, local species of cows are hybridized, and Australian cows are imported with the aim of increasing profit. However, these new animals are not compatible with the local environment and cause difficulties for the local population while the native species become extinct. Khan references the mass slaughter of animals in *Trespassing* for religious festivals to illustrate the anthropocentric attitude of humans towards the nonhuman. Through the struggle and pain of turtles in the same novel, Khan depicts animals as nonhuman others, suffering because of an anthropocentric ideology.

Khan criticizes both internal political groups, including religious parties, politicians, ethnic groups, businessmen and foreign companies and national governments including China, Korea, USA, Saudi Arabia, India and UK, for their exploitation of the environment. The patriarchal and colonialist agenda of controlling the natural resources of the natives is a powerful theme in the novels.

Khan also appears as a powerful writer championing an ecofeminist critique which highlights nature when it is misused, polluted and destroyed in the name of development by capitalist companies owned and directed by powerful men often from outside the country. Being a woman, she delves into the female characters and gives women an important position in the literary world which is elsewhere silenced by patriarchal domination in the literary world as well as the wider society. She not only highlights the connection between nature and human beings, but she tries to save readers from the loss of it, before it is too late. She critiques the capitalist, industrial and hyper-technological world which is the cause of environmental degradation in

Pakistan and across the globe. In this regard, I believe Khan makes a powerful contribution to Pakistani feminist ecocritical research. Therefore, a strong pro-environmental and ecofeminist stance is seen through Khan's female characters. Some characters are not named, including Amal's and Noman's mothers, illustrating patriarchally dominated layers of hierarchies and colonization. Consequently, a kind of double colonization of women in the novels is depicted. Dia, Amal, Mehwish, Riffat, Mrs Masood and Maryam engage in close relationships with nature. But these women also represent parallels between oppression of nature and oppression of women by powerful male dominated organisations and patriarchal structures in the Pakistani society. Mrs Masood in *The Story of Noble Rot* as a wife of a businessman is made to forget her indigenous lifestyle in the Cholistan desert to adopt the artificial culture of the city, Riffat as a woman in *Trespassing* is threatened because she runs her farm using natural processes, Salaamat as a dark-skinned fisherman is displaced from his native town and loses his local occupation, Amal as a woman scientist in *The Geometry of God* faces hurdles in gaining respect working in the field with men to study geology, and Maryam a poor tribal woman in *Thinner than Skin* is forced to keep hybrid sheep and cows she cannot properly feed. As an ecofeminist, she has highlighted the marginalisation of all human and nonhuman components of the ecosystem that do not support industrial growth. These women, child labourers, local fishermen, tribal groups of the Naran and Kaghan valley, fish and turtles in Karachi, trees in Lahore, mountains in Islamabad and northern areas make up subordinate groups surviving at the peripheries of the new social and ecological structures in Pakistani society. Khan is moving from environmentalism to indigenous activism to

identify the marginalisation of human and nonhuman components of the environment. This makes Khan a metaphoric paleontologist of the traditional structures which supported the populations which are now powerless, subaltern, and weak.

Khan gives voice to the environment through her narratives illustrating how she is affected by the changes in her society. More than any other author writing in Pakistan today, she presents a myriad of environmental landscapes to readers and depicts the disproportionate imbalance in the environmental care in the society. Khan covers a lot of territory geographically and describes and celebrates beautiful landscapes in almost all provinces of the country through the four novels. Places like Karachi, Kashmir, Kaghan Valley, Gilgit-Baltistan, Lahore, and Islamabad are shown to be affected by environmental negligence and political disturbances. Noman and Amal are two characters in *The Geometry of God* that represent two cities; Islamabad and Lahore. The internal struggles of these characters mirror the internal struggle of the nation. Similarly, a vision of Islamabad, Lahore and the Northern areas is present in this novel. She contrasts Islamabad, a green city with fresh and unpolluted air with Lahore, depicted in many novels as a congested and polluted city. Khan's characters hail from different regions of Pakistan: Lahore, Karachi, Islamabad, Naran, Kaghan, Kashmir, Gilgit-Baltistan, Cholistan desert and Baloch territories so that she can paint a picture with a bigger structural sense, providing a more detailed and nuanced vision of Pakistan.

In Khan's work readers can isolate some key features critically describing a wide range of traditional cultural practices that reflect environmental concerns. The representations of animals and nature, cultural myths, the depiction of a loving

relationship between humans and nature and the idea that nature is an infinite resource for human use are all part of traditional cultural narratives which are highlighted by Khan. So, her works advocate action because the novels skillfully help readers to investigate the environmental problems and solutions to it. This, for me, is an extra step towards ecological consciousness which Khan takes in moving the Pakistani literary debate forward.

My analysis of the four novels demonstrates that the ecological consciousness of indigenous communities is a major theme that no other contemporary Pakistani writer has discussed so thoroughly. She introduces an international audience to a beautiful Pakistan and its rooted indigenous people. Threads of environmental movements appear in all the four novels, such as Romantic movement (1800s) and Animal Advocacy Movement (1900s)¹⁰¹ in *Trespassing*, *Thinner than Skin* and *The Geometry of God*, Deep Ecology (1970s)¹⁰², Labour and Environmental Movements¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Also known as the animal rights movement, animal liberation movement and animal personhood. It is a social movement that recognizes animals as beings not things. It promotes an end to the discrimination between humans and animals on legal and moral grounds which categorises animals as property to be used in research, clothing, food and entertainment business; Francoise, G. *Rain without Thunder: The ideology of the Animal Rights Movement*. USA: Temple University Press, 1996.

¹⁰² Naess, Arnes. "The Shallow and the Deep, Long-range Ecology Movement. A Summary." *Inquiry* [online], vol. 16, no. 1-4, 1973, pp. 95-100. [Viewed 15 March 2019]. Available from: <https://iseethics.files.wordpress.com/2013/02/naess-arne-the-shallow-and-the-deep-long-range-ecology-movement.pdf>

See Section 2, Naess, A., (2008). The Long-range Deep Ecology Movement. In: A. Drengson and B. Devall, eds. *The Ecology of Wisdom: Writings by Arnes Naess*. ANT-N ed. Berkley, CA: Counterpoint. pp. 99-144.

For anthologies on the deep ecology movement, see Sessions, G. ed., 1995. *Deep Ecology for the Twenty First Century*. Boston: Shambhala and Drengson, A and Inoue, Y. eds., *The Deep Ecology Movement: An Introductory Anthology*. Berkley: North Atlantic Books, 1995.

¹⁰³ See Blair Mountain Battle. Also see various labour-environmental alliances.

in *The Story of Noble Rot*, the Green Party (1970s)¹⁰⁴ and Save Silent Valley (1973)¹⁰⁵ depicted in *Thinner than Skin* through Maryam's life in the Kaghan Valley, The Chipko Movement (1973)¹⁰⁶ highlighted in *Trespassing* through Dia's attachment to plants and her childhood hours spent sitting and hugging trees, Eco-Jihad (1980s)¹⁰⁷ represented by Zahoor and Amal in *The Geometry of God* and Indigenous Rights (2000)¹⁰⁸ highlighted through deforestation, and rights of the native communities in

¹⁰⁴ Green Party arose in the early 1970s in various parts of the world. It is a group of political parties campaigning mainly about environmental issues. It was inspired by the Australian movement "Green Ban" in which building workers refused to do construction on culturally and environmentally significant sites. This group of environmental parties follow Green Politics or Ecopolitics which is a political ideology that promotes environmentally sustainable society based on nonviolence, grassroot democracy and social justice.

See Robbins, P. *Political Ecology: A Critical Introduction*. 2nd ed. UK: John Wiley & Sons Ltd. 2012.

Also, Mulvaney, D. and Robbins, P. eds., (2011). *Green Politics: An A-to-Z guide*. London: SAGE Publications.

¹⁰⁵ A people's movement in India that saved a forest from suffering ecological destruction due to hydroelectric Project in Kerala. See <http://www.conservationindia.org/case-studies/silent-valley-a-peoples-movement-that-saved-a-forest>

See Storm over Silent Valley (n.d.). Available from: <http://envfor.nic.in/divisions/ic/wssd/doc3/chapter18/css/Chapter18.htm>

¹⁰⁶ A successful movement led by village women in Uttar Pradesh India to stop the allotment of a plot of forest area to a sporting goods company. The women went into the forest and circled around the trees to prevent men from cutting them down. The movement helped to ban the felling of trees in many regions and had a huge impact on the natural resource policy of India.

See Chipko movement (n.d.) in *Encyclopedia Britannica online*. Available from: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Chipko-movement>

¹⁰⁷ Eco-Jihad is a term used for a collection of Muslim environmental activist organisations and movements. Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences (IFEES) founded by Fazlun Khalid in the 1980s is a UK-based organization working for the protection of environment anchored in Muslim faith; Islam. This foundation is regarded as the mother of all Islamic environmental movements and organisations with local and international projects. See <https://en.qantara.de/content/islamic-environmentalism-the-call-to-eco-jihad>. Also, Abdelzaher, D.M., Kotb, A. and Helfaya, A. "Eco-Islam: Beyond the Principles of Why and What, and into the Principles of How." *Journal of Business Ethics*, vol. 155, no. 3, 2017, pp. 623-643.

¹⁰⁸ There are several civil societies, non-governmental groups, networks and movements which acknowledge indigenous societies, promote indigenous aspirations and struggle for the rights of indigenous communities and their right to their lands and territories opposed to the ideas of "development". The movement opposes the invasion of lands by multinational corporations and protects exploitation of natural resources. See Recognizing Indigenous Peoples' Human Rights (n.d.) in *Cultural Survival*. Available from: <http://www.culturalsurvival.org/ourpublications/voices/article/recognizing-indigenous-peoples-human-rights>

Thinner than Skin. Ecocritical theoretical debates permeate all four texts. Therefore, Khan's works are not just a presentation of ecological concepts but the creation of pro-environmental ideology. Khan theoretically infuses environmental ideas into her narratives and in so doing she is popularising the theory of ecocriticism, as well as acting as its powerful defender.

After a close study of the selected four novels I concur that "the reorientation of human attention and values according to a stronger ethic of care for the nonhuman environment would make the world a better place, for humans as well as nonhumans" (Buell 1995, 6). Readers need to give nature central importance, and in this regard, Khan's novels oscillate between androcentrism and ecocentrism advocating concern for environmental destruction. For instance, she depicts animals realistically inhabiting their natural setting and highlights how their link with humans forms a core of environmental education. Objectified and anthropomorphised animals and nature in the novels highlight the colonization of animals and inferiorization of nonhuman, criticised by Khan to arouse an ecological consciousness within the reader. The turtles in *Trespassing* represent animal needs and reflect the real impact that humans have on animals and nature. Similarly, Khan highlights how humans associate success with conquering nature, as minor characters in *Thinner than Skin* are engaged in cutting trees for profit, foreigners and locals install machines to break mountains for trade routes, precious stones are smuggled across borders and cattle are genetically modified in pursuit of profit. *The Geometry of God* highlights the restrictions made by pseudo-religious parties on studying and understanding the environment, resulting in a powerfully-distorted belief of nature as an inferior component created only to be used

by mankind. It justifies the wars over natural resources. Similarly, invasion of the sea and coastlines in *Trespassing* depicts human greed to control nature.

Overall, as shown by this study, a strong textual, as well as pictorial representation of environmental consciousness, impregnates Khan's novels, depicting varying degrees of human domination over nonhuman components of the environment. The novels show compassion, courage, kindness, respect, and responsibility as core values of ecological character and environmental conscience, and support for these values is raised by eco-spirituality in Mehwish and Maryam; love for birds and plants in Momin, love for romantic landscapes in Nadir, civic sense of care for the environment in Noman, Islamic understanding by Zahoor, scientific study by Amal, ecofeminism in Dia, eco-cosmopolitanism in Daanish and deep-rootedness with native waters and the land by Salaamat. These characters help create a high degree of self-consciousness and ecological concern in readers.

Environmental representations in the selected novels produce ideologies of environmental education by narrating ecological concepts and processes. Khan repeatedly shows that an environmentally conscious life on every level is essential in order to develop an environment-friendly social set up for future generations of Pakistan. My research also confidently predicts that the young generation are more concerned about the environment and adopt social practices and environmental attitudes more easily in various roles, and the representations within my study support this. Noman's return and rethinking represent a return to duty. Young Pakistanis, Noman and Amal's engagement in the public sphere is an encouragement to activist involvement. Through this, the novels offer hope. A sense of citizen participation is

seen through them, and through the development of innovative thinking. Young Pakistani readers can see themselves as participants rather than mere spectators in the process. I see an urge to offer hope in each of the novel's young characters. Momin's survival and Noman and Amal's participation revises and redefines a sense of environmental consciousness and ethics. A new wave of activism and change is represented by Amal who becomes the first female paleontologist in Pakistan, despite the many hurdles created by her colleagues, the military and orthodox political parties. Noman leaves a well-established religious party when it bans scientific enquiry into environmental subjects and allies itself with pro-war interests. Daanish, studying in America, uses his training in journalism to argue against biological warfare and control of natural resources in developing countries. Dia stands with her mother to support indigenous business and organic farming against capitalist business companies. Nadir reveals irritation over stereotyped images of Pakistani society and travels to engage with the natural landscape of Pakistan and explore the diverse flora and fauna of the country. These acts show that the new generation stands for hope as they become conscious of the devastating effects of climate change and environmental destruction.

Attitudes of different generations are depicted through the characters of Momin, a six years old child, Zahoor, a man in his 70s, Amal and Noman's parents in their 50s, Amal, Noman, Dia, Daanish, Nadir in 20s, Mehwish and Salaamat who are in their late teens, and Maryam, Malika and Mrs Masood, middle-aged women. Through these different generations Khan has shown the process of consciousness and the sacrifices involved during the emotional journey depicted in each story. The

feeling of belonging that Khan shares with the nonhuman world is the core premise of a green reading. Industrialists ravage the environment for profit and commercial advantage that makes Khan lament how the “capitalist hubris” brings ecological destruction (Coupe 245). Therefore, these characters cannot help but create a high degree of self-consciousness and ecological concern in readers.

My study presents an opportunity for further research in understanding the environment as a basis for critically influencing the thoughts and actions of Pakistani readers in particular. Through constructing an environmental narrative in Pakistani English ecofiction, Khan has made an invaluable contribution to an ecoconscious perspective within Pakistani academia. She encourages “theory” to become “practice” through her works. A new conceptual dimension to Pakistani literature and teaching is formed through her literary journey. Her novels will help researchers engage with ideas alien to them and allow critical reflection on nonhuman voices. At the conclusion of this case study in 2019, I believe Khan’s literary examples have shown that the voices of ecological others are no longer on the periphery, instead they have developed into a mainstream concern in Pakistan. I further believe that such fresh new approaches provide the means to encourage readers to act as well as think. I encourage readers of this study and future researchers in the field to join me in continuing this developmental process in Pakistani postcolonial ecocriticism and indigenous ecological studies.

Trespassing beautifully connects the history and culture of Pakistan through stories in a creative way. Characters make visible the effects of capitalism through its attention to environmentally specific manifestations of myths and disturbances in the

indigenous regions. The novel offers rich new angles to explore the environment and makes a remarkable contribution to rethinking the role of literature in addressing local environmental issues. The novel reveals that traditional creative writings from Pakistan include previously overlooked environmental perspectives. Her narrative structure brings together narratological and ecocritical concerns.¹⁰⁹ Salaamat is a native, “deeply embedded in a stable ecosystem” (Coupe 268), Dia is a lover and observer of nature while Daanish is an outside reader of the environment. In fact, the environment appears as one of the main characters in this novel in the form of the sea, caterpillars, turtles, and silkworms. All these characters are enmeshed in ecological, social, and political changes. The novel develops against a background of imperialist stories, resource control and new settlements in Pakistan. The title confirms that trespassing or transgression has tragic results. Among the various forms of trespassing, ecological destruction is one of the most significant. In the novel, the topography, emotional attachments with the land, subtleties of physical borders and boundaries, history and politics are all intertwined with the environment of Pakistan. Water, at the beginning and end of the novel provides an important element of the story, calling for an ecopolitical discussion. The novel addresses the poor quality of drinking water, resulting from pollution, over consumption, absence of sufficient storage systems, lack of sustainable management of natural aquatic resources, and declining aquaculture.

The first transgression occurs through control of the water channels and sea life by foreigners. The novel creates awareness of historically marginalised and exploited human and nonhuman communities. Khan makes a space between

¹⁰⁹ For further reading on econarratology, see James, E. *The Storyworld Accord: Econarratology and Postcolonial Narratives*. University of Nebraska Press, 2015.

androcentric and ecocentric themes and develops an environmentally pluralistic framework in the form of *Trespassing*. The depiction of the nonhuman not only draws readers' attention to nonhuman aspects of life but also makes these characters ecologically global. This is the ideal eco-cosmopolitan character according to Heise's (2008) theory of eco-cosmopolitanism which attempts "to envision individuals and groups as part of planetary 'imagined communities' of both human and nonhuman kinds" (61). Khan's stance can be understood as a shift from nationalistic identity to a more human-scale attachment to place and owning of the environment. Through three main characters in the novel, Khan has addressed the connection with nonhuman beings of the environment, issues of pollution, loss of species, sea erosion, natural resource depletion and poverty as the result of capitalism and wars. Dia, Salaamat and Daanish's awareness of physical materiality of the place is evident in the story. Their emotional attachment to their land; their rootedness, makes them care for the nonhuman on their land. Daanish's love of collecting seashells from across the world is a transnational act of crossing humanmade physical borders of lands. Being a local from Karachi, his connection and love for the sea and seashells, not only in Pakistan but also from the Pacific and Atlantic oceans where he lived as a student, make him a global character. Dia's spiritual attachment with the caterpillars and the farm and her imagination of the world history related to local silkworms in Sindh also take her to thinking about China, Greece and other places beyond Pakistani borders. Equally, Salaamat's attachment to the land and its waters surpasses ethnic differences and political ideologies. These characters appear as eco-cosmopolitan beings, another area

inviting future research. Therefore, *Trespassing* sets the tone for future environmental writings.

The Geometry of God revives Islamic environmentalism, and the role religion might play in the coming years to save environmental resources. The novel targets the alienation readers experience as a result of restrictions on freedom of intellectual thought and a lack of scientific inquiry. Khan stands up to these religious and political dispositions through Amal's confrontation with the conventions of a patriarchally-controlled society. Self-censorship and reserve are apparent in Khan's writing on this subject, as in my own analysis, since religion is a sensitive matter in Pakistan. *The Geometry of God* examines the intersection between religion, politics and the environment and Khan skillfully combines imagination and ethics in this novel.

The main focus of the discussion between Amal and Zahoor is to highlight the role and responsibility of Pakistanis as a nation, as well as human beings, towards their environment. Khan suggests that human beings and the environment are essentially linked to one another. Khan highlights the fact that the environment has traditionally been a key concern in Islam, and she considers the role of religion a vital means of highlighting the importance of the environmental crisis facing Pakistanis. She proposes that classic texts like the Quran should be interpreted in a more nuanced manner to reveal the emphasis laid by our Creator on the need to safeguard the environment. This novel suggests that it is essential to distinguish between what religion really teaches and the interpretations made by certain followers. The efforts of writers like Khan can only become fruitful by bringing religious teachings and environmental institutions to work together. The novel suggests that misinterpretation

of religious texts has been used to counter even limited environmental proposals from the government.

The Geometry of God highlights social and political hindrances created by individuals who have distorted Islamic teachings regarding care for the environment. Such distorted morality ends up reproducing the structures and ethics that cause problems. In the name of religion, politics is played to divert the minds of citizens from real issues because the religious and political groups in the novel do not want critically-minded citizens. Religious parties and corporates interests both promote a very limited public discourse centered around Jihad and blasphemy laws. For millions of Pakistanis, religious values are the framework for living life. Pakistanis can take nature's crisis more seriously by understanding the connection between God, holiness, ecology and social justice issues. Thus, religious teaching is a catalytic agent for stirring ordinary men and women into political action to become a vital force for progressive change. That is why Khan presents a dialogue between religion and science and shows a concern for deep Islamic values by transforming Noman, who represents the true spirit of Islamic thought through Zahoor's intellect and scientific knowledge.

The problems highlighted in Khan's writings are becoming yet more entrenched, the country needs urgently to respond to the prospect of imminent ecological crisis. Discussing the risk of ecomedia reproducing what it critiques, Estok (6) is of the view that political gains are "diluting the material to such a degree that important abstract concepts are blurred, thus preventing thinking people from seeing key connections" and in my view Noman represents this lack of clarity. The novel

reflects and promotes a fundamental shift towards environmental commitment and invites scholarly study of science and the environment. It calls attention to the need for socio-political groups to use progressive interpretations of Islamic rules in calling for protection of the environment. Khan strategically outlines the political and economic modes of domination that impact on the environment. Political and military systems in Pakistan were key to polarising society in 80s and early 90s under General Zia's dictatorship, and continue to resurface at critical moments. Such stories provide a clear but generally unnoticed link between contemporary politics and the environment. The environment in this novel is a combination of natural and cultural histories. The patterns make the study of *The Geometry of God* another metaphoric literary excavation, enabling the reader to dig up a narrative that has long been marginalised.

Readers see Khan invoking religious discourse in relation to the rights of the nonhuman and care of the environment. The novel suggests the kind of moral imagination needed to reconnect to the environment. Ultra-orthodox interpretations of religion render it destructive and potentially dangerous. As an ecological restorationist, she attempts to erase the disruption of human and nonhuman relationships. The restoration of the lost link between species is also shown in the story through the discovery of vital fossil evidence. The narrative becomes an act of healing the rift between characters' inner and outer worlds. Khan probes the possibility of environmental disaster in this novel and reflects profound spiritual and political responses to the environment.

Thinner than Skin is a call to return to the wonders of nature. The novel beautifully constructs human interaction with the environment. The book is set in a valley. Deep Ecology (the intrinsic value of nature) and Preservationism (the need to protect and preserve the environment) permeate the narrative. The story shows that Khan's characters are accountable to their environments whenever they create any disturbance in the natural processes. As nature turns against Nadir, Maryam senses a kindred spirit with innermost desires towards the manifestations of nature, and her empathy for a fellow human being causes her to forgive him. Nadir's positive attitude towards the natural world touches Maryam and she makes peace with him, by not holding him accountable for her daughter's death. Khan evokes feelings of wonder, appreciation and empathy towards the natural world as opposed to the stark mechanical world which has come to fore in her other novels.

The description of the horse dying as a bomb explodes, and the vanishing of a greener part of the valley stir feelings of both pity and guilt for the brutal manner of the killing. Here, Khan has highlighted the idea that human society both socially and psychologically cannot remain unaffected by disturbances in its connection with the nature. One of the most disturbing changes is the arrival of significant money and profit in the lives of the natives, brought by outsiders in the name of business and prosperity.

Eco-theory in literature is new in Pakistan, and its conscious arrival has identified Khan as an ecocritic and eco-fiction writer. From one novel to another, I investigate how she has used her writing to create space for the development of politically aware and activist readers. I see Khan, the subject of my study, as a

contemporary prophetess. Through her vision, understanding of the culture and use of imagination, she has created a beautiful and crucial environmental dialogue within Pakistani academia. Through ecocritical themes, she has illuminated many new directions for future research in Pakistani academia. Khan creates images which enmesh with ecocritical ideologies, and her books are stirring the sentiments and perpetuating the idea that nature is important and climate change is real.¹¹⁰ A few ecocritical dissertations at MPhil and PhD level have started in Pakistan on individual novels, but to date my research is a first full length case study of her works with reference to environmental consciousness. Khan's novels are a significant and timely contribution to the worldwide environmental emergency. Far more than well-written and intriguing narratives, stories for simple pleasure, Khan's novels present a critique of the devastation of the human and nonhuman health, soil, air and water. These works are a reflection of disturbed experiences. I think her narratives of encounter with nature, with a sociocentric approach, add to "narrative scholarship" (Slovic, qtd. in Buell 138). Khan's novels invite ways of thinking about a reader's relationship with the environment of Pakistan. She represents through her words and images a widely dismissed discourse in the culture of Pakistan. Her works respond to the recent resurgence in the humanities regarding the relationship between the environment, ethics and aesthetics with environmental issues. Her novels are an environmental, political critique situated firmly in a literary field, brimming with a skillful juxtaposition of creativity and critical understanding of modern Pakistan. In diverse

¹¹⁰ For further reading, see Estok, S. C. "Virtually There: "Aesthetic Pleasure of the First Order,"" *ecomedia, activist engagement. ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, vol. 24, no.1, 2017, pp. 4-21.

ways she has heightened the consciousness of readers to include love for animals, love for waterways, love for green spaces, and love for the changing seasons. She has taken up the urgency of the literary and cultural debate about environmental crisis and presents theoretical, national and ethical implications of the representation of nature in everyday culture. Khan's works seem unique to me, not just because they bring Pakistani literature in English to an international arena. In these times of climate change and environmental degeneration, her works stand out in the way they address these issues. Khan deconstructs the normative conceptions and dominant representations of Pakistan in the literary world. Her novels foreclose the idea that human selves are inherently distinct from their nonhuman community and are not superior to the environment. There should be coexistence. Seemingly antithetical biotic components are coexisting in this world. Her works show that humans need not subordinate the natural world. The socio-political focus of her work is the environment; her ecological approach which distinguishes her from other writers writing in her times. She is an ecologically minded postcolonial writer with indigenous political emancipation. Contemporary nature-inspired Pakistani English fiction can be said to have been initiated by Uzma Aslam Khan. Her novels are a work of ecocriticism, although I cannot be sure if she would wish to be defined herself, first and foremost, as an ecocritic.

In the past two years, the major political parties in Pakistan appear to have developed a focus on climate change as part of their election campaigns. Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, Chairman of Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) highlighted the problem of disposal of solid waste to grapple with the issue by bringing "strong recycling

initiatives". He stated, "oceans, beaches, cities and villages are choking with waste" and keeping the environment clean should be made a "national effort".¹¹¹ The efforts of PPP's government in 2013 regarding climate change through a national climate change policy (NCCP) did not go well during Pakistan Muslim League's (PML-N) rule from 2013 to 2018. However, PML-N passed the historic Pakistan Climate Change Act 2017 and approved Pakistan's first National Water Policy to control water shortages. The present government of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) is also paying special attention to environmental issues by launching the 10 Billion Tree Tsunami campaign which spans five years. The party also promises to present a yearly national "eco budget".¹¹² While the consciousness of political leaders and parties towards climate as well as the water scarcity issue is appreciated, it is the implementation of these concerns which still needs to be seen.

This study indicates that it is high time to shape readers' cognitions, attitudes and behaviours towards environmental issues because Climate change and environmental degradation are among the biggest problems faced by Pakistan.¹¹³ Serious climate commitments are required at the national level to deal with the threats Pakistan is facing, which include rampant pollution, flash floods, deforestation, glacial melt, sea intrusion, a looming water crisis and higher average temperatures, that can result in drought-like conditions. Environmental consciousness must be generated throughout the entire population. Khan's novels can help produce environmentally informed and

¹¹¹ See <https://www.thethirdpole.net/en/2018/07/09/does-the-environment-matter-in-pakistans-elections/>

¹¹² See <https://www.geo.tv/latest/204478-has-environment-taken-front-seat-this-time-in-elections>

¹¹³ According to the Global Climate Risk Index 2018, published by German Watch, Pakistan is 40th on the list of highest risk developing countries regarding environmental issues

responsible individuals. Khan's works are an attempt to inculcate values of the environmental movement through Pakistani literature, and to produce environment-friendly Pakistanis with strong ecological consciousness. By bringing the natural world, the ecosystem and human ecological relationships into focus alongside other significant themes, Uzma Aslam Khan draws readers' attention to another side of Pakistan which can be a "New Pakistan" (the slogan of the present government) not only to the world, but to Pakistanis themselves. My research shows that along with many other themes developed in these and other postcolonial novels, the environmental argument in Khan's books has made her work of particular and critical relevance for Pakistani ecocritical studies.

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