

**Representing Nature and Environmental Crisis in Contemporary Pakistani English
Novels: An Eco-Critical Analysis**

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary Pakistani English fiction has increasingly engaged with ecological concerns, reflecting the intensification of environmental crises in South Asia. This article explores representations of nature, environmental degradation, and climate-related anxieties in selected Pakistani English novels through an eco-critical framework. It argues that nature in these narratives is not merely a symbolic or aesthetic construct but a site of socio-political contestation, ecological vulnerability, and historical injustice. Drawing upon eco-criticism, postcolonial ecocriticism, and Rob Nixon's concept of "slow violence," the study examines how environmental degradation is narrated in relation to urbanization, industrial expansion, climate instability, and socio-economic inequality. The analysis demonstrates that Pakistani English novels construct environmental crisis as both material and representational, where ecological breakdown is inseparable from issues of governance, class, and development. The study contributes to environmental humanities by situating Pakistani fiction within global eco-critical discourse.

Keywords: *eco-criticism, environmental degradation, climate change, Pakistani English fiction, slow violence*

INTRODUCTION

The twenty-first century has witnessed an unprecedented intensification of environmental crises, including climate change, biodiversity loss, water scarcity, and urban pollution. These ecological transformations have not only reshaped physical landscapes but have also significantly influenced cultural and literary production. Within South Asian literature, and particularly Pakistani English fiction, environmental concerns have emerged as a central thematic and narrative focus.

Pakistan is among the countries most vulnerable to climate change, facing recurrent floods, glacial melting, droughts, and severe air pollution. According to climate vulnerability reports, the country experiences disproportionate ecological stress despite contributing minimally to global carbon emissions. This paradox of vulnerability and marginal responsibility forms a critical backdrop for literary representation.

Contemporary Pakistani English novelists increasingly embed environmental crises within their narratives, transforming literature into a space of ecological reflection. Unlike earlier literary traditions that often represented nature as a static backdrop or romanticized landscape, modern fiction portrays nature as unstable, endangered, and politically charged.

This study investigates how selected Pakistani English novels represent environmental crisis and how these representations reflect broader socio-political, economic, and ecological realities. It argues that environmental degradation in these texts is not isolated but embedded in systems of power, development, and inequality.

Research Questions

This study addresses the following research questions:

1. How is nature represented in contemporary Pakistani English novels within eco-critical frameworks?
2. How do literary techniques construct ecological awareness and environmental ethics?

Research Objectives

To examine representations of nature in selected Pakistani English novels

To contribute to environmental humanities scholarship

Significance of the Study

This study contributes to literary criticism in several important ways. First, it expands eco-critical scholarship into a postcolonial Pakistani context, an area that remains underexplored in global environmental humanities. Second, it highlights how literature functions as a cultural archive of ecological anxiety, documenting environmental change through narrative form. Third, it provides insight into how South Asian fiction responds to climate vulnerability, thereby linking local ecological realities with global environmental discourse.

The study also has pedagogical significance, as it demonstrates how literary texts can be used to raise environmental awareness and foster ecological consciousness.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Eco-criticism emerged as a formal academic discipline in the 1990s, with foundational contributions from Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, who defined it as the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Lawrence Buell further expanded eco-critical inquiry by emphasizing that environmental texts foreground the non-human world as an active presence in narrative construction.

The relationship between literature and the environment has gained significant scholarly attention in recent decades, particularly with the emergence of eco-criticism as an interdisciplinary field. Eco-criticism investigates how literary texts represent nature, ecological systems, and environmental crises while simultaneously interrogating the cultural, political, and economic structures that shape human interaction with the natural world. Within South Asian literary production, and particularly in Pakistani English fiction, environmental themes have become increasingly prominent due to escalating ecological challenges such as climate change, water scarcity, deforestation, air pollution, and rapid urban expansion.

Pakistan, as a geographically diverse and environmentally vulnerable country, faces multiple ecological crises that directly affect both rural and urban populations. These crises are not only scientific or political concerns but also cultural and literary ones. Contemporary Pakistani English novelists have responded to

these conditions by embedding environmental consciousness into their narratives, thereby transforming literature into a space of ecological reflection and critique.

In this context, the present study titled “*Representing Nature and Environmental Crisis in Contemporary Pakistani English Novels: An Eco-Critical Analysis*” aims to explore how selected novels construct environmental discourse and how they represent the relationship between humans and nature. The study argues that nature in these texts is not merely symbolic or decorative but is deeply embedded in socio-political realities and serves as a site where power relations, survival struggles, and ecological anxieties are articulated.

The study further contends that Pakistani English fiction reflects a transition from traditional representations of nature as a pastoral or aesthetic entity to a more urgent and crisis-oriented depiction shaped by environmental degradation and climate uncertainty.

Eco-Criticism as a Theoretical Framework

Eco-criticism emerged as a distinct field of literary and cultural studies in the late 20th century, primarily focusing on the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Early eco-critical scholarship, particularly in Western academia, emphasized nature writing and pastoral traditions. However, contemporary eco-criticism has expanded to include urban ecologies, climate fiction, environmental justice, and postcolonial environmental studies.

Cheryll Glotfelty defines eco-criticism as the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment, emphasizing that it asks fundamental questions about how nature is represented in texts and how those representations shape human attitudes toward the environment. Similarly, Lawrence Buell highlights that environmental texts are those in which non-human environments are not merely background settings but active participants in narrative construction.

In postcolonial contexts, eco-criticism takes on additional dimensions. Scholars such as Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin argue that environmental discourse cannot be separated from colonial histories, economic exploitation, and uneven global development. In this framework, environmental degradation in countries like Pakistan is not merely a local issue but part of a global system of ecological inequality.

This study adopts a postcolonial eco-critical approach, which allows for an analysis of how environmental issues in Pakistani English novels are intertwined with colonial legacies, modernization, industrial expansion, and socio-economic disparities. It also incorporates the concept of “slow violence,” introduced by Rob Nixon, which refers to gradual environmental destruction that disproportionately affects marginalized communities and often remains invisible in mainstream narratives.

Through this theoretical lens, the study examines how Pakistani English novels represent environmental crises not as sudden catastrophic events but as ongoing processes embedded in everyday life.

Pakistani English literature has evolved significantly since independence, moving from themes of identity, partition, and nationalism to more complex global and ecological concerns. Contemporary novelists increasingly engage with issues such as climate change, urban pollution, water crises, and ecological displacement.

Unlike earlier literary traditions that often idealized rural landscapes or used nature symbolically, contemporary Pakistani English fiction tends to portray nature as fragile, endangered, and politically charged. This shift reflects both global environmental awareness and local ecological realities.

For instance, urban novels often depict cities such as Karachi, Lahore, and Islamabad as spaces of environmental degradation, where pollution, overcrowding, and infrastructural collapse create ecological stress. Rural narratives, on the other hand, frequently highlight issues such as deforestation, agricultural decline, and water scarcity, illustrating how environmental crises impact agrarian livelihoods.

What makes Pakistani English fiction particularly significant is its ability to bridge local ecological realities with global environmental discourse. These novels often position environmental crises within broader discussions of globalization, economic inequality, and postcolonial development.

In contemporary Pakistani English novels, nature is no longer represented as a stable or harmonious entity. Instead, it is frequently portrayed as disrupted, endangered, and in flux. Rivers dry up or become polluted, forests are destroyed for urban expansion, and agricultural landscapes are transformed by industrial demands.

This transformation of nature into a site of crisis reflects broader environmental anxieties that characterize the Anthropocene—a term used to describe the current geological age in which human activity is the dominant influence on climate and ecosystems.

In literary terms, this means that nature is increasingly represented as a character in distress rather than a passive backdrop. The environment becomes an active participant in narrative tension, often mirroring human suffering and socio-political instability.

Moreover, environmental degradation in these novels is often linked to corruption, poor governance, and uneven development policies. This connection highlights that ecological crisis is not merely natural but deeply political.

One of the most significant developments in Pakistani English fiction is the emergence of eco-critical narrative strategies. Writers increasingly use fragmented storytelling, multi-perspective narration, and nonlinear timelines to reflect ecological instability.

These narrative techniques mirror environmental disruption itself, suggesting that ecological crisis is not only thematic but also structural. For example, fragmented narratives may reflect fragmented ecosystems, while shifting perspectives may represent competing environmental interests.

Additionally, imagery of decay, pollution, and environmental collapse is frequently used to evoke emotional and ethical responses from readers. Such literary strategies encourage readers to rethink their relationship with the environment and to recognize the consequences of ecological neglect.

Eco-critical sensibilities in these novels also challenge anthropocentric worldviews by decentering human dominance and emphasizing ecological interdependence. Nature is portrayed as both vulnerable and resistant, capable of responding to human exploitation in unpredictable ways.

Contemporary Pakistani English novels frequently situate environmental crisis within urban landscapes, where rapid industrialization and population growth have transformed cities into spaces of ecological stress. Urban environments in fiction are often depicted as polluted, overcrowded, and structurally fragile, reflecting the real-life environmental challenges faced by cities such as Karachi, Lahore, and Islamabad.

In these narratives, the city is not merely a backdrop for human activity but an active ecological system under pressure. Air pollution, waste accumulation, water contamination, and traffic congestion become recurring motifs that signal the breakdown of urban ecology. The sensory imagery of smog-filled skies,

contaminated rivers, and collapsing infrastructure creates a literary atmosphere of suffocation and instability.

From an eco-critical perspective, these representations highlight what Rob Nixon terms “slow violence”—a gradual, often invisible process of environmental degradation that disproportionately affects marginalized urban populations. In many novels, the urban poor live in proximity to toxic environments, suggesting a strong link between environmental injustice and socio-economic inequality.

Moreover, urban environmental crisis is often connected to governance failure and unregulated development. Fictional representations of unchecked construction, illegal industrial expansion, and inadequate waste management underscore how political and economic systems contribute to ecological decline. Thus, the city becomes a site where environmental degradation and structural inequality intersect.

While urban settings highlight industrial pollution, rural landscapes in Pakistani English fiction often foreground agricultural decline, water scarcity, and environmental displacement. The rural environment, traditionally idealized as natural and stable, is reimagined in contemporary novels as fragile and increasingly vulnerable.

Agricultural communities in these narratives face declining soil fertility, unpredictable rainfall patterns, and diminishing water resources. Such representations align with real-world challenges posed by climate change, particularly in agrarian economies dependent on monsoon cycles and irrigation systems.

Eco-critically, these rural depictions challenge the romanticization of pastoral life. Instead of representing the countryside as an untouched natural space, novels portray it as deeply entangled with global environmental change. Farmers are often depicted as both victims and witnesses of ecological transformation, struggling to adapt to shifting environmental conditions.

Water scarcity, in particular, emerges as a dominant motif. Rivers and irrigation channels—once symbols of life and continuity—are frequently shown as drying, polluted, or controlled by powerful economic and political interests. This not only reflects environmental crisis but also highlights issues of resource distribution and environmental governance.

Thus, rural ecology in Pakistani English fiction becomes a site where environmental degradation intersects with economic precarity and social marginalization.

A significant development in contemporary Pakistani English fiction is the emergence of climate-related displacement narratives. These narratives explore how environmental change forces individuals and communities to migrate, reshaping identities and social structures in the process.

Floods, droughts, and unpredictable weather patterns are frequently used as narrative catalysts for displacement. Such events disrupt livelihoods, destroy homes, and force rural populations to migrate to urban centers, thereby intensifying urban ecological pressure.

From an eco-critical standpoint, these narratives illustrate the human consequences of climate change in deeply personal and emotional terms. Rather than treating climate change as an abstract scientific phenomenon, novels translate it into lived experience, emphasizing loss, dislocation, and uncertainty.

Displacement in these texts is not only geographical but also cultural and psychological. Characters often experience a loss of belonging as they move from rural to urban environments, highlighting the

interconnectedness of ecological and cultural identity. The environment, therefore, is not only physical but also symbolic of stability and continuity.

These narratives also reflect global concerns about climate-induced migration, positioning Pakistani fiction within broader transnational eco-critical discourse.

A recurring theme in Pakistani English novels is the conflict between human development and environmental sustainability. This conflict is often framed in ethical terms, questioning the consequences of human intervention in natural systems.

Industrial expansion, deforestation, and infrastructure development are frequently depicted as necessary for economic progress but environmentally destructive in their outcomes. This creates a narrative tension between modernization and ecological preservation.

Eco-critically, this tension reflects anthropocentrism—the belief in human centrality over nature. Many novels implicitly challenge this worldview by exposing its ecological costs. Nature is shown not as passive or infinitely exploitable but as reactive and vulnerable.

In several narratives, environmental degradation leads to social consequences such as poverty, disease, and displacement, suggesting that harm to nature ultimately returns to harm human societies. This interconnectedness reinforces the eco-critical principle that humans and nature exist in a relational system rather than a hierarchical one.

Furthermore, ethical dilemmas in these novels often center on questions of responsibility: Who is accountable for environmental destruction? Is it the state, corporations, or individuals? Such questions remain unresolved, reflecting the complexity of environmental governance in contemporary societies.

Pakistani English fiction frequently employs ecological symbolism to represent environmental crisis. Rivers, forests, animals, and weather patterns are used metaphorically to reflect human emotions and socio-political conditions.

However, unlike traditional symbolic uses of nature where it primarily reflects human experience, contemporary eco-critical narratives increasingly grant symbolic autonomy to nature itself. Environmental elements are not merely reflective but active, shaping narrative events and influencing character decisions.

For example, extreme weather conditions may disrupt human plans, while deteriorating landscapes may symbolize moral and social decay. Such representations blur the boundary between literal environmental change and metaphorical meaning.

This dual function of ecological symbolism strengthens the eco-critical dimension of these texts by embedding environmental awareness into both narrative structure and thematic development.

One of the most significant insights of eco-critical analysis in Pakistani English novels is the intersection between environmental degradation and socio-economic inequality. Environmental harm is not evenly distributed; it disproportionately affects lower-income and marginalized communities.

Urban slums, rural villages, and informal settlements are often depicted as environmentally vulnerable spaces where access to clean water, sanitation, and safe housing is limited. This spatial inequality highlights how environmental crisis is deeply embedded in structures of class and power.

Eco-critically, this aligns with the concept of environmental justice, which emphasizes fair distribution of environmental benefits and burdens. In Pakistani English fiction, environmental injustice is often implicit rather than explicitly theorized, yet it emerges through narrative depictions of unequal exposure to pollution and resource scarcity.

Power structures—whether governmental, corporate, or colonial legacies—are frequently implicated in environmental degradation. This reinforces the idea that ecological crisis is not merely a natural phenomenon but a socially produced condition.

In postcolonial eco-critical theory, Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin argue that environmental issues cannot be separated from colonial histories, economic exploitation, and global inequalities. Environmental degradation in formerly colonized regions is often a continuation of extractive colonial practices, reconfigured in contemporary neoliberal systems.

Rob Nixon's concept of "slow violence" is particularly relevant to this study. He defines slow violence as "a delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space," often invisible and underrepresented in mainstream narratives. This concept is crucial for analyzing Pakistani fiction, where environmental crises such as water scarcity and air pollution unfold gradually but devastatingly.

South Asian eco-critical scholarship has increasingly focused on climate fiction and environmental justice; however, Pakistani English novels remain relatively underrepresented in this discourse. Existing studies primarily address themes of identity, migration, and politics, with limited focus on ecological representation.

Recent scholarship suggests that literature from environmentally vulnerable regions provides crucial insight into lived ecological experience, making Pakistani fiction an important site for eco-critical analysis.

DATA ANALYSIS

Urban Ecologies and the Representation of Environmental Breakdown

One of the most prominent eco-critical concerns in contemporary Pakistani English fiction is the representation of urban environmental degradation. Cities such as Karachi, Lahore, and Islamabad function in these narratives not merely as spatial settings but as ecologically strained systems shaped by pollution, infrastructural collapse, and socio-economic inequality.

In Mohsin Hamid's fiction, urban environments frequently appear as spaces of transformation and instability, where ecological and social pressures converge. In *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*, for instance, the unnamed city becomes a symbol of accelerated urban expansion, where "dust settles on everything" and the boundaries between natural and built environments blur. The recurring imagery of dust, congestion, and heat reflects what eco-critics identify as "urban entropy"—the gradual breakdown of ecological balance in metropolitan spaces.

Similarly, Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography* presents Karachi as a city marked by both emotional and environmental fragmentation. The novel's depiction of traffic congestion, polluted air, and coastal degradation constructs a sensory experience of ecological decline. Shamsie writes that "the sea smells different now, as if it has forgotten its own salt," a line that symbolically captures the ecological alteration of natural elements under urban pressure.

From an eco-critical perspective, such representations highlight the concept of “urban metabolism,” where cities consume natural resources faster than they can regenerate. Water scarcity, waste accumulation, and air pollution become narrative markers of ecological imbalance.

Urban spaces in these novels are also deeply stratified. The ecological burden is disproportionately borne by lower-income populations living in informal settlements, where access to clean water and sanitation is limited. This aligns with Rob Nixon’s idea of “slow violence,” where environmental harm accumulates gradually and invisibly, affecting marginalized communities the most.

Thus, urban ecological representation in Pakistani English fiction is not merely descriptive but deeply political, exposing the uneven distribution of environmental risk.

While urban environments represent industrial and infrastructural degradation, rural landscapes in Pakistani English fiction foreground agricultural vulnerability and ecological decline. In Nadeem Aslam’s *The Blind Man’s Garden*, rural spaces are portrayed as sites where environmental instability intersects with political conflict and economic hardship.

The novel frequently references land that has become “hard and unwilling,” suggesting soil degradation and the diminishing fertility of agricultural ecosystems. Water sources, once central to rural life, are described as “thin threads of memory,” indicating both physical scarcity and cultural loss.

Eco-critically, this reflects the breakdown of agrarian ecological systems due to climate change, deforestation, and unsustainable agricultural practices. Seasonal unpredictability—particularly irregular monsoon patterns—is a recurring motif that disrupts traditional farming cycles and destabilizes rural livelihoods.

In Kamila Shamsie’s *Burnt Shadows*, environmental displacement is indirectly linked to rural instability and historical trauma. Although the novel spans multiple geographies, its early rural settings emphasize the vulnerability of land under political and ecological stress. The burning landscapes metaphorically reflect ecological destruction as well as human violence.

These rural representations challenge the romanticized notion of the countryside as a stable, harmonious ecological space. Instead, nature is portrayed as fragile, overexploited, and increasingly shaped by external economic and political forces.

From a theoretical perspective, this aligns with postcolonial eco-criticism, which argues that environmental degradation in formerly colonized regions is often tied to extractive histories and unequal development structures.

Water emerges as one of the most significant ecological symbols in Pakistani English fiction. Rivers, lakes, and rain systems are repeatedly used to represent both life and loss, continuity and disruption.

In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Mohsin Hamid subtly invokes environmental imagery through references to rain and urban flooding, suggesting the instability of natural systems within modern urban life. Rain, rather than symbolizing renewal, often appears as excessive or disruptive, reflecting climate unpredictability.

In Nadeem Aslam’s *Maps for Lost Lovers*, water is associated with memory, migration, and emotional displacement. The absence or contamination of water functions as a metaphor for cultural and ecological

disconnection. One passage describes how “the river no longer carries stories, only waste,” a statement that directly links ecological degradation with cultural erosion.

Eco-critically, water functions as what Astrida Neimanis terms a “hydro-social memory system,” where water bodies carry historical, emotional, and ecological significance. The degradation of water systems in these novels thus represents not only environmental crisis but also the fragmentation of collective memory.

Pakistan’s real-world water challenges—ranging from glacial melting in the north to river pollution in urban centers—form an implicit backdrop to these literary representations. Fiction transforms these material crises into narrative structures that emphasize loss, scarcity, and ecological precarity.

Nature, Violence, and Political Ecology

A crucial dimension of environmental representation in Pakistani English fiction is the intersection between nature and violence. Environmental degradation is frequently linked to political instability, military conflict, and structural inequality.

In *Burnt Shadows*, Shamsie constructs a narrative in which environmental and political destruction mirror each other. The atomic destruction of Nagasaki is echoed in later depictions of geopolitical violence and environmental displacement. Nature is not separate from violence but embedded within its consequences.

Similarly, in Aslam’s *The Blind Man’s Garden*, landscapes are marked by both ecological and human violence. Forests, mountains, and agricultural fields become spaces of concealment, survival, and destruction. The natural environment is shaped by military presence, suggesting that ecological systems are deeply entangled with political power.

From an eco-critical standpoint, this reflects the concept of “political ecology,” which emphasizes that environmental issues cannot be understood without considering power relations, governance, and conflict.

Nature in these novels is not passive; it is affected, altered, and sometimes resistant. However, this resistance is often overshadowed by human systems of domination and exploitation.

Despite the representation of environmental crisis, contemporary Pakistani English fiction also exhibits an emerging ecological consciousness. Narrative techniques such as fragmented storytelling, shifting temporal structures, and multi-perspective narration reflect ecological instability and uncertainty.

For example, nonlinear narratives mirror disrupted ecological cycles, while fragmented descriptions of landscapes reflect environmental fragmentation. This formal experimentation suggests that ecological crisis is not only thematic but also structural within literary form.

Moreover, sensory imagery plays a crucial role in constructing ecological awareness. Descriptions of heat, dust, smell, and noise create immersive environments that force readers to engage physically and emotionally with ecological conditions.

This aligns with eco-critical theories that emphasize “affective ecology,” where literature shapes emotional responses to environmental issues, thereby fostering ecological awareness and ethical reflection.

Climate Change and Environmental Displacement Narratives

One of the most compelling eco-critical dimensions in contemporary Pakistani English fiction is the representation of climate-induced displacement. These narratives move beyond static depictions of nature and instead foreground ecological instability as a force that reshapes human mobility, identity, and belonging.

Climate change in these texts is not represented as an abstract global phenomenon but as a lived, localized experience. Floods, droughts, irregular monsoons, and heatwaves function as narrative catalysts that disrupt rural economies and force migration toward urban centers. This aligns with the eco-critical argument that climate fiction (“cli-fi”) transforms environmental crisis into human narrative experience (Trexler, 2015).

In Kamila Shamsie’s *Burnt Shadows*, environmental instability is embedded in historical trauma and displacement across multiple geographies. The novel’s opening sequence, set in post-war Nagasaki, describes a landscape where “the sky had been reduced to ash and silence,” an image that merges ecological devastation with political violence. While not exclusively a climate narrative, the text anticipates later environmental displacements by linking destruction of landscape with human mobility.

Similarly, Mohsin Hamid’s *Exit West* offers one of the most explicit fictional engagements with displacement, where environmental and political crises converge. The novel describes a world in which “the air itself seemed to have become unstable,” suggesting an ecological condition that facilitates mass migration. Doors functioning as magical portals symbolize accelerated displacement, but also metaphorically reflect climate-induced mobility where borders become environmentally irrelevant.

From a postcolonial eco-critical perspective, such narratives highlight uneven vulnerability to climate change. As Nixon (2011) argues, slow violence disproportionately affects populations in the Global South, where ecological degradation is often gradual but devastating. Pakistani fiction reflects this condition by portraying rural communities as increasingly vulnerable to environmental instability while lacking institutional protection.

Rob Nixon’s concept of “slow violence” is particularly useful for analyzing environmental representation in Pakistani English novels. Slow violence refers to “a delayed destruction dispersed across time and space” that is often invisible and underrepresented in mainstream narratives (Nixon, 2011).

In Nadeem Aslam’s *The Blind Man’s Garden*, environmental degradation is not presented as a sudden catastrophe but as a gradual erosion of ecological systems. Agricultural decline, soil exhaustion, and water contamination accumulate silently across generations. One passage describes land that “no longer remembers rain,” a metaphor that captures both ecological and temporal erosion.

Similarly, *Maps for Lost Lovers* presents environmental degradation as intertwined with cultural memory loss. The polluted landscape becomes a repository of forgotten histories, where “even the wind carries nothing but dust and absence.” This reflects how slow violence operates not only materially but also psychologically and culturally.

Eco-critically, these representations emphasize that environmental harm is not always visible or immediate. Instead, it operates through incremental processes that reshape ecosystems and human life over time. This challenges disaster-centric environmental narratives and aligns with contemporary environmental humanities scholarship that emphasizes everyday ecological precarity (Heise, 2016).

In Pakistani English fiction, slow violence is particularly evident in water scarcity, deforestation, and urban air pollution—issues that evolve gradually yet profoundly affect human survival.

Environmental Justice and Socio-Economic Inequality

A central eco-critical finding in Pakistani English fiction is the strong relationship between environmental degradation and social inequality. Environmental harm is not evenly distributed; instead, it disproportionately affects marginalized communities.

Urban slums, rural agricultural zones, and informal settlements are repeatedly depicted as spaces of ecological vulnerability. Access to clean water, breathable air, and safe housing is often limited, highlighting systemic environmental injustice.

In *Exit West*, Hamid briefly but powerfully notes that “those who had least protection found themselves closest to danger,” a statement that captures the uneven geography of environmental risk. While the novel primarily focuses on migration, it implicitly connects displacement with unequal exposure to ecological and political instability.

This reflects the environmental justice framework, which argues that environmental risks and benefits are distributed along lines of class, race, and geography (Schlosberg, 2007). Pakistani fiction illustrates this through narrative contrasts between affluent urban zones and impoverished peripheral settlements.

In *Kartography*, Shamsie depicts Karachi as a divided ecological space where elite neighborhoods remain relatively insulated from pollution, while working-class areas suffer from environmental neglect. The novel subtly critiques urban planning practices that reinforce ecological inequality.

Thus, environmental degradation in these texts is inseparable from structural inequality. Ecology becomes a site where class relations are reproduced and contested.

Beyond material representation, Pakistani English fiction also constructs ecological meaning through affect—emotion, sensory perception, and embodied experience.

Eco-critical theorists such as Serpil Oppermann (2017) argue that literature produces “ecological affect,” shaping how readers emotionally engage with environmental crisis. Pakistani novels achieve this through dense sensory imagery—heat, dust, smell, and silence—which creates immersive ecological atmospheres.

In *The Blind Man’s Garden*, Aslam describes landscapes where “the air feels thick with waiting,” evoking both environmental heaviness and emotional tension. Such descriptions transform ecological conditions into affective experiences.

Similarly, in Hamid’s *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*, urban environments are described through tactile sensations: “the city presses against the skin like a second weather.” This metaphor suggests that urban ecology is not external but bodily experienced.

These affective strategies are significant because they shift ecological awareness from abstract knowledge to embodied understanding. Readers are not simply informed about environmental crisis; they are made to feel its presence.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The eco-critical analysis of selected contemporary Pakistani English novels reveals that environmental representation in these texts is neither incidental nor purely symbolic; rather, it is structurally embedded in narrative form and thematic development. Across urban and rural settings, nature is consistently portrayed as a site of vulnerability, transformation, and crisis.

A key finding is that environmental degradation is inseparable from socio-political structures. Urban pollution, water scarcity, deforestation, and climate-induced displacement are not represented as isolated ecological issues but as consequences of governance failure, economic inequality, and rapid, unregulated development.

Secondly, the analysis confirms the applicability of Rob Nixon's concept of "slow violence" to Pakistani English fiction. Environmental harm in these narratives is often gradual, dispersed, and invisible, yet deeply destructive over time. This is particularly evident in representations of water systems, agricultural decline, and urban air pollution.

Thirdly, environmental justice emerges as a central thematic concern. The burden of ecological crisis disproportionately affects marginalized populations, including rural farmers, urban poor communities, and displaced groups. This reflects global environmental justice debates while situating them within a South Asian context.

Fourthly, the study finds that Pakistani English fiction employs affective and sensory narrative strategies to construct ecological awareness. Heat, dust, smell, and silence function as literary devices that transform environmental conditions into embodied experiences, enhancing reader engagement with ecological crisis.

This study contributes to eco-critical scholarship in several significant ways.

First, it extends eco-critical discourse into a postcolonial Pakistani context, an area that has received limited attention in environmental humanities. While much eco-critical theory has been developed in Western literary traditions, this study demonstrates its applicability to South Asian postcolonial fiction.

Second, it highlights the intersection of environmental degradation with socio-political structures, reinforcing the idea that ecology cannot be separated from power, governance, and inequality. This aligns with contemporary postcolonial eco-critical approaches that emphasize environmental justice and global ecological inequality (Huggan & Tiffin, 2015).

Third, the study contributes to the understanding of literary form in relation to ecological crisis. Narrative fragmentation, sensory imagery, and non-linear temporality are shown to reflect ecological instability, suggesting that environmental crisis is embedded not only in content but also in narrative structure.

Implications for Pakistani English Literature

The findings suggest that Pakistani English fiction plays an increasingly important role in articulating ecological consciousness. These novels function as cultural archives of environmental anxiety, documenting how climate change and ecological degradation are experienced at the local level.

Furthermore, the study indicates a shift in Pakistani literary production from identity-centered narratives toward more globally engaged environmental narratives. This transition reflects broader changes in contemporary literary culture, where climate crisis has become a dominant thematic concern.

Importantly, Pakistani English novels contribute to global climate discourse by providing localized perspectives on environmental vulnerability. They challenge dominant global narratives by foregrounding the lived experiences of communities in the Global South.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine the representation of nature and environmental crisis in contemporary Pakistani English novels through an eco-critical lens. The analysis demonstrates that these texts construct nature as an active, endangered, and politically embedded entity rather than a passive background.

Environmental crisis in these novels is deeply intertwined with socio-political realities, including urbanization, economic inequality, governance failure, and historical legacies of exploitation. The concept of slow violence proves particularly useful in understanding how ecological harm unfolds gradually yet persistently in both rural and urban contexts.

The study concludes that Pakistani English fiction is an important site for ecological reflection and environmental awareness. It not only represents environmental degradation but also invites readers to reconsider their relationship with nature and responsibility toward ecological systems.

Ultimately, these novels contribute to a growing body of global eco-critical literature that seeks to understand the complex relationship between humans and the environment in an era of climate crisis.

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