

Exploring Ecological Crisis: A Study of Climate Change in Uzma Aslam Khan's *Thinner Than Skin*

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Abstract. This article investigates Uzma Aslam Khan's *Thinner Than Skin* (2012), through the critical lens of ecocritical perspectives. It shows engagement with ecological ideologies that have informed our understanding of climate change. Khan's novel enlists the devastating consequences of environmental and ecosystem degeneration and their cumulative effects on humanity, and the non-human world. Indeed, ecological degradation has become a global issue, where desertification and deforestation are significant environmental concerns worldwide. This study probes the portrayal of the indigenous people of Pakistan's Kaghan Valley, their land, history and culture by underscoring the hazards of growing capitalism and increasing urbanisation. Khan examines the issues of endangering biodiversity and laments the materialistic forces depleting the planet's natural resources. By doing so, she exhorts practical consideration of possible defences against ecocide. This research demonstrates the issues of ecological crisis and its devastating impact on northern Pakistan's natural environment and people.

Keywords and phrases: climate change, ecocriticism, ecosystem, ecological crisis, environment

Introduction

Nature has been the centre of many noteworthy artworks in contemporary world literature studies. Climate change is one of the most pressing environmental challenges facing the world today. Its effects are widespread, far-reaching and felt in every corner of the globe. In recent years, climate change has become a popular topic of discussion in "environmental literature" and "cultural studies" (Gersdorf and Mayer 2006, 9), as many writers and scholars alike seek to explore

how human activities contribute to environmental degradation and ecological crisis. This article seeks to contribute to the growing body of climate change literature and highlight the urgent need for greater awareness and action to address “environmental challenges” (Brauch et al. 2008, 55) present facing our world. The environmental landscapes have undergone significant destruction due to various development factors. The depictions of man’s attitude towards nature in scholarly debates and discussions have changed due to social and economic conditions. A rapidly growing area of study called “ecocriticism” examines various writings and hypotheses about how people and nature interact. Ecocriticism is generally a complex phenomenon which contains a large and diverse number of positions and is defined as an “intellectual movement” (Clark 2011, 4). This study considers the relationship between the recent writings on ecocriticism, which directly address the subject in their analyses of “literature and the environment” (Coupe 2014, 325). In doing so, we refer to Uzma Aslam Khan’s famous novel *Thinner Than Skin* (2012), as an ecocritical framework to conceptualise the claims that living actions will not be enough to tackle climate change because we all are responsible for this action. Uzma Aslam Khan is a contemporary novelist, short story writer, postcolonial writer and environmental activist of world literature studies. She tries to show how the effects of climate change are too strong, horrifying and dangerous to fit into the typical literary frames which used to describe nature’s values. The evidence of global climate change and the global South is especially susceptible to the anticipated rise in “weather extremes, such as prolonged droughts, more intensified but less frequent rainfall and flooding, rising sea levels, shifting migrations of flora and fauna due to temperature increases, and even earthquakes” (DeLoughrey et al. 2011, 26). The US National Oceanic and Atmosphere Administration (NOAA) has defined it as “Climate is determined by the long-term pattern of temperature and precipitation averages and extremes at a location” (NOAA n.d, 1). These changes may take place over a lengthy period of time and have a significant global impact and is generally described as a “change in the state of the atmosphere over time scales ranging from decades to millions of years” (Wikipedia 2022).

Khan’s *Thinner Than Skin* (2012) is one of the novels in Pakistani English literature dealing with the ecological crisis and the impact of climate change. This research examines the description of climate change in literature, with a keen emphasis on Pakistani Anglophone fiction. The ecological abuse of nature by humans in Pakistan for the sake of progress and modernisation is something that Khan has attempted to illustrate. The Pakistani Anglophone female novelist’s writing has been insinuated “even within South Asian and post-colonial studies, let alone in the emerging inter-disciplinary sub-fields of the environmental humanities” (Chaudhuri 2021, 5). John Vidal, an emergent environmental editor, in his article (2009), quotes that:

Climate change is expected to have the most severe impact on water supplies, it said. Shortages in future are likely to threaten food production, reduce sanitation, ...damage ecosystems ... hundreds of millions of people are expected to become water stressed by climate change by ... 2030.

Uzma Aslam Khan is a Pakistani Anglophone novelist whose fourth novel, *Thinner Than Skin* (2012), is set in the northern provinces of Pakistan. The story revolves around the life of Maryam, a nomad girl living with her husband, Suleiman, in Kaghan Valley. The narrative begins with a description of the storm, demonstrating the narrator's fascination with the natural world, "the wind carried a similar foreboding, not in the shape of ascent but of a wingbeat, and the lake froze in anticipation" (Khan 2012, 1). Nadir, the narrator of the story, has a deep love for nature and walks along the river to get his soul fresh and feel energetic. This study demonstrates the Himalayan region of Northern Pakistan, which reveals the landscape of mighty glaciers, "rivers, valleys and mountains" with the elevation of five mountain "peaks over 8,000 meters" (Khan 2012, 9–10).

Uzma Aslam Khan, in her novel *Thinner Than Skin*, documents the interrelationship between the sterile environment and human perversity. It narrates how Maryam loses her daughter Kiran during the floods in northern Pakistan. Maryam is a native nomadic girl who moves with her family during summer along the side of the mountain. The Gujjars of Kaghan Valley (Khan 2012, 213), a community in Northern Pakistan, offer some insightful reflection on the life of the nomadic community living in the mountain region and the obstacles these hardy people faced every day. Khan portrays the hardships of these communities, "the time of year when nomads all over Asia have moved from their winter homes into summer pastures, and he (Ghafoor) knew it would be the same for Maryam and her family" (Khan 2012, 141). These nomads' sustainable way of lifestyle is being interfered with by a number of different intrusions. They are forcefully compelled by authorities to leave the valley and head to the plains earlier than usual and encounter several challenges as a result of their late arrival in the plains, including the intense heat of the plains and a scarcity of food for their animals. Some of these nomads fall victim to fraud and were persuaded to settle down instead of continuing with their nomadic way of life: "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 2012, 251). Due to extreme weather events (such as freezing cold in winter and heat waves in summer), and the rise and fall in global temperature, these nomadic groups cannot sustain themselves over a long period in the same places. So, they

migrate from the plain areas to the Himalayan and vice versa. Commenting on the migration, Khan (2012, 24) states:

Before Kaghan, there was Karachi at this where the plan had changed. Karachi. To my disgust, this time I (Farhana) had taken photographs of beggars and children running naked in the street, sucking mango pits and smearing their sooty cheeks with orange stains.

This region shows the local settlements' terrible environmental, physical and emotional challenges for the locals. Khan portrays in the novel the poor state of Pakistan and how environmental degradation generates negative images of the poor conditions of Pakistani. Ghosh (2017, 9) observes as the "climate crisis is also a crisis of culture, and thus of the imagination". The root causes of environmental catastrophes like floods and droughts are becoming more evident for all people, especially poor indigenous people.

Theoretical Framework

This research applies ecocriticism as a theory to explore the ecological crisis and the impacts of climate change in Uzma Aslam Khan's *Thinner Than Skin* (2012), which has "brought about a greater engagement with climate change in literary studies, notably the environmentally oriented branch of literary studies called ecocriticism" (Johns-Putra 2016, 266). In order to strengthen the link between the politics of uneven development and global ecology, the study of this novel blatantly exposes the Pakistani development models. The climate change research and methodological debate have been grouped under the umbrella term ecocriticism. It is often known as "environmental/ecological criticism", a hybrid discipline comprising scholars who study literature, culture and the environment. Ecocriticism is a broader term used by cultural and literary critics to study "the global ecological crisis through the intersection of literature, culture and the physical environment" (Gladwin 2019). This interdisciplinary field of study initiates a dialogue between the field of literature and the environment to investigate the representations of nature-related aspects in climate change fiction. Since literature reflects society, it reflects the current issues society faces, and authors believe they must use their writings to reflect the change in the escalating environment. The central idea of this study primarily focused on the human and nature relationship in a time of ecological crisis. It aims to "examine, challenge and criticise these notions, trusting that if these cultural perception change, we can address ecological problems at their roots" (Vécsey 2022, 736).

Numerous writers and ecocritics have taken up the challenge of narrativising and portraying climate change in their critical works during the last few decades. Due to such critical thinking's ability to "provide a personal viewpoint" (Pahl and Bauer 2013, 157), which enables reflection on a reader's personal "commitments and concerns" (Miall and Kuiken 1994, 351), many theorists have claimed that picturing future possibilities like climate change fiction might be more effective as a literary approach. According to these paradigms, climate fiction's strength lies in its ability to bridge the gap between the anticipated social pragmatism of modern writing and its shared focalisation through personal encounters with the dramatic, paradigm-shifting reality of the global environmental crisis. For the reasons—nature is an essential component of Pakistani culture, and the degradation of nature affects both men and women equally—ecocriticism, the study of the relationship between nature and literature, is given less attention than it deserves in Pakistan literary contributions. The present study focuses on the concept of ecocriticism given by Cheryll Glotfelty, Lawrence Buell, Justyna Poray-Wybranowska and Ursula K. Heise. In addition to Uzma Aslam Khan, a few other prominent novelists have recently depicted climate change or ecological crisis in their fictional and non-fictional works associated, like Amitav Ghosh, James Bradley, Liz Jensen, Kim Stanley Robinson and Margaret Atwood. Critics, climatologists, ecocritic researchers and environmental activists like Nicole Rogers, Dan Bloom, Justyna Poray-Wybranowska, Antonia Mehnert and Adam Trexler also play great contributions to the literary world. However, in Pakistan's "Anglophone literature, there is little attention given to climate change", with particular attention to the "agency of nature" (Li and Wang 2017, 138) and the interconnection between the agency of human beings and nature. In the age of climate change, "such a sense of the fate of place being continuous with the fate of self is crucial to modern environmentalism" (Schliephake 2016, 162). Due to historical and methodological considerations, ecocriticism has only lately addressed climate change in these more explicit terms. Such causes behind this are greatly discussed in this essay, as the outlook for future ecocritical climate change engagement.

Results and Discussion

Ecocriticism and the canon of climate change fiction

Climate change has grabbed the attention of poets, novelists, environmentalists and nature lovers around the globe in the twenty-first century. The increase in climate change involvement in "literary studies, notably the environmentally oriented branch of literary studies known as ecocriticism" (Johns-Putra 2016, 266), has resulted in the popularity of climate change fiction. The topic of climate change has been a long public concern, and its impact has become more

intensified. The contemporary writings of the English literary world have given attention to climate change fiction. The renowned contemporary writers of climate change are Kim Stanley Robinson, Amitav Ghosh, Margaret Atwood and Cormac McCarthy. Uzma Aslam Khan highlights the factors that impact climate change in the novel through her fictional characters disclosing her thoughts, expressions and emotions about the storm in the Northern regions and how it affects various natural items in the vicinity. Climate cannot be “experienced directly through our senses. Unlike the wind which we feel on our face or a raindrop that wet our hair, climate is constructed idea that takes these sensory encounters and builds them into something more abstract” (Hulme 2009, 9).

Hubbell and Ryan’s research on *Introduction to the Environmental Humanities* (2021) often seek to directly engage that because of the participation of these “Gujjar” people in maintaining the balance of nature around them, the “ecological problems, enhance human wellbeing and protect more-than-human species” (Hubbell and Ryan 2021, 68). Global temperatures have risen, and snow cover has fast receded because of rapid industrial development and anthropogenic activities in Pakistan over the last few decades:

Glacial growth and decline were equal indicators of global warming, as she liked to remind me, and if glaciers were growing in the old world, there were also growing in the old world, there were also growing in the new. (Khan 2012, 44)

The northern part of Pakistan has similar climatic consequences from glacier growth and retreat. The majority of the freshwater used in Northern Pakistan comes from the melting of glaciers. This novel explores the complex interplay between human society and the natural world, highlighting the devastating impact of human activities on the environment and the greater environmental awareness and conservation efforts. The United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) in 2021 provided an opportunity for world leaders to intervene, make immediate and significant pledges to reduce carbon emissions and “limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels by 2050” (Paraskova 2021).

The larger Himalayas region has experienced substantial effects from climate change. The most frequently reported result is the rapid loss of glaciers, such as “Batura and Ultar glaciers” (Khan 2012, 57), which serve as the primary source of freshwater to the downstream areas. The Himalayas, a large body of ice-covered mountains in Northern Pakistan, act as a natural regulator for the local water supply in these areas. Snowfall is reduced and lessened by melting, which causes localised rapid flooding. These ice masses are being thoroughly explored to comprehend

the current global warming process. The longest and most noticeable moderate-latitude glaciers can be found in Pakistan's northern mountains. The character Farhana who is "more passionate about glaciers. How many Pakistani women know two things about them? It was Farhana who told me (Wes) that Pakistan has more glaciers than anywhere outside the poles" (Khan 2012, 37). The ecological consequences of climate change, "rising sea levels melting ice sheets and receding glaciers, vanishing, coral reefs, extreme weather events (i.e., hurricanes, floods, droughts, wildfires, heat waves)" (Gaard 2017, 122). Buell (2009, 31) comments that "environmental issues have mainly come from the ecocritical movement, which has concerned itself, especially with creative and critical recuperation of the natural world". The effects of climate change, such as elevated global temperatures, rising sea levels, and a rise in extreme weather occurrences, severely harm populations that depend on the environment for survival. The passage from the text that follows explains how closely mountains and glaciers are related:

Apparently, people believed that on days when the mountain appeared – the one that only looked like Nanga Parbat but could not have been – the queen snow melted even faster, due either to her rage at having her beauty overshadowed poor her excitement at beholding her lover. And on such days, his snow also melted faster, due either to his rage at having his beauty uncloaked. (Khan 2012, 64)

Khan makes clear the working circumstances of the local nomadic inhabitants, who are ignorant of the causes of the glaciers' desertification. They believe that the mountains obscure any passion between these two lovers. These nomads, though, are immensely enthusiastic about their love of nature and all of its forms. In upcoming years, we will see many changes on earth, like "rising sea levels, heavier storms and drought and desertification will force hundreds of millions of people from their homes and even their countries" (Wennersten and Robbins 2017, 1). Droughts are likely to affect agriculture and cause water and food scarcity problems, resulting in forced migration, famine and social unrest in the local population. Despite their perceived impossibility, "climate change impacts, such as rising sea levels and increasingly frequent extreme weather events" (Poray-Wybranowska and Ball 2021, 1), severely affect communities that rely on the environment for survival. Due to the increases in atmospheric temperature, the "retreating" of glaciers in "Northern Pakistan" (Khan 2012, 167) becomes much faster than the global average. An ecological crisis emerged relatively at an early stage in the industrial process of Pakistan, which is still primarily a rural nation. Additionally, this research emphasises that nature-based resource conflicts are at the heart of many environmental nation-wise movements like India, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Such conflicts result from an inequitable, lopsided and ecologically destructive expansion. They played against a background of "visible ecological degradation,

the drying up of springs, the decimation of forests and the erosion of the land” (Guha and Alier 2013, 17).

Irfan and his friend Nadir learn about the marriage of local nomads and belief that the mating of glaciers is similar like the place of marriage for the locals. “Irfan’s relationship with the valley and the communities he had spent so much time with, bringing clean water to their towns” (Khan 2012, 155). These glaciers are the primary freshwater sources for drinking and crop irrigation. These locations are the hub of a vast array of flora, fauna and a variety of other living and non-living species. Irfan uses these resources with the amalgamation of his hard-earned labour to produce crops such as “Pears and apricots. Potatoes and hot Maize bread” (Khan 2012, 70) which symbolise his success. Irfan imagines the condition of living in such harsh climatic conditions will be challenging, which he has never experienced before. Eventually, he announces to “return to Karachi and not to go to Gilgit and Hunza because it’s right things to do, the safe things to do” (Khan 2012, 179). Khan’s novel is about the rediscovery of under-represented aboriginal traditions of interacting and knowing the local landscapes. It investigates the “emotions of grief as the story’s narrator attempts to show how lives are unravelled without warning and individuals are shaped” (Sethna 2013) by their environment. It also explores the rediscovery of underrepresented aboriginal traditions of interacting with and knowing the local landscape:

Glaciers in the eastern Himalayas are receding. Some say the Alps will be ice-free by 2100. Greenland’s glaciers are melting so fast that they could sink Southern California and Bangladesh. However, in parts of Pakistan, glaciers could be expanding. It was a possibility Wes and Farhana had come to explore. (Khan 2012, 43)

Farhana and Wes wished to explore the melting of Himalayan glaciers rapidly. They explore some other places across the globe, like the Alps Mountain range, the coastal area of California, and Bangladesh, which have been drowned due to the “anthropogenic nature of climate change” (Chaudhuri 2021, 6). If the glaciers continue to decline at the present rate, “the most populous parts of Asia will face catastrophic water shortages within a decade or two” (Ghosh 2017, 121). The rapid greenhouse gas emission reductions are required to keep global warming at the safe levels. The land to which “she [Maryam] returned found glaciers weathered global gas emissions and spurned newness” (Khan 2012, 44). The leading cause of this for increasing the density of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, primarily caused by human activity such as deforestation, farming and the combustion of fossil fuels. It is pertinent to mention Glotfelty and Fromm (1996, 226–227) who writes:

The alarming growth of the world's population, mounting evidence of global warming, destruction of the planet's protective ozone layer, the increasingly harmful effects of acids rain, over-cuttings of the world's last remaining great forests, the critical loss of topsoil and groundwater, overfishing and toxic poisoning of the oceans, inundation in our garbage, an increasing rate of extinction of plant and animal species.

Climate fiction represents the issues of "anthropogenic climate change" (Trexler and Johns-Putra 2011, 186) as it comes to understanding their representation in prehistory literary discourse of worldwide environmental change. Khan talks about the burning issues which caused "Malika Parbat snow to melt" (Khan 2012, 46); it destroys the large and tiny lakes, bushes, flora and animals. The devastation of climate change and damage may have seen all around the world, but especially in the South Asian region, like "Tajikistan" and Northern Pakistan (Khan 2012, 174), where populations are not only vulnerable to climate change but also lack proper mitigation and adaptation. Natural catastrophes such as famines, drought, flood, earthquake and other akin events always leave man in the dark stage. We are in the midst of a worldwide crisis because we are more concerned with the operation of an ethical system than the health of the ecology. The only way to solve the crisis is to identify the ecosystem's missing parts and try to replace them. Human life is unable to exist without the existence of the natural world. The issue of our indifference to the warnings that climate change will significantly impact every aspect of our lives is brought up in Uzma Aslam Khan's novel *Thinner Than Skin* (2012).

Existence of nature and the stability of the ecosystem

According to Khan, if we never interfere with nature, it won't rebel against us. Moreover, in the absence of such a balanced and mutual "relationship between humans and nature, humans will have no chance to enjoy the prosperity and development of the whole ecosphere" (Das 2017, 88). The title of the novel, *Thinner Than Skin* (2012), alludes to the earth, which is covered with a thin layer of gases that shield us from harmful solar radiation, similar is to how our skin protects our organs by covering the whole body. Additionally, this novel explicitly depicts the swift annihilation of "ancient cultures, animal species and deforestation" (Makhdoom and Yaqoob 2019, 175). This depiction of glacial ecosystem vitiation highlights the gap between species-level horror of glacier loss, well-preserved information and specific instances of socialisation that shape particular emotional attachment to the natural world.

As the brief descriptions of this novel and its story suggest, climate-change-fiction focuses on stories that revolve around two different characteristics of narrative. Firstly, it refers to a catastrophic climatic event, either showing it considerably or establishing the action in its dystopian result. Secondly, it frequently addresses the psychological allegations of climatic turn in the life of Maryam and her daughter Kiran, which range from ethical to political challenges. Pakistan is specifically vulnerable to climate change due to its generally warm climatic zone. In such a topographic locality, the increase in temperature is expected to be greater than the global average. The rivers flowing through Pakistan are primarily fed by “the cool cover of highland deep in the Karakoram ranges” (Khan 2012, 194) and Himalayan glaciers, which are reported to recede rapidly due to global warming. The large source of Pakistan’s economy is a highly populated agrarian climatic zone. The increasing risks of irregularity in monsoon rains which in resulted the large number of floods and extended droughts.

Maryam enjoys the moisture proximity of the arcs, “the rich debris of glaciers and deltas”; she adores her gloves and socks. Even though the extremities and “violent beauty of the Pacific coast to the secret tides of the protected bays” (Khan 2012, 34). Khan strongly emphasises improving the environmental conditions of the Hunza and Kaghan valleys. Glaciers and deltas are abundant in such terrible locations, which highly influence the environmental ecosystem. Khan discusses through the character of Nadir that the consequences go beyond simply making the “Sonoran Desert and the valleys of the Himalayas” (Khan 2012, 35) warmer and much cold drier. The “meteorological description indicates the possibility of a warming climate as the summer becomes unprecedented[ed]” (Li and Wang 2017, 144), hot and winter fall passes unusually dry.

Due to the lack of rainfall, the flow of “the valley floor sprawled terraced fields, all the way down to the Hunza River” (Khan 2012, 268), declines day by day, affecting soil moisture levels and irrigation scheduling, which ultimately affects the growth and development of Pakistan. The region’s naturally abundant biodiversity serves as both the locals’ main source of sustenance and tourism destination. The elegant attraction of “Lake Saiful Maluk” attracts many tourists from everywhere in the world. However, melting glaciers in the “Nanga Parbat glaciers, Ultar glaciers and Ghulkin glaciers” (Khan 2012, 272) are increasing day by day, which is a major cause of an increase in automobile factories, deforestation, material waste, urbanisation and the establishment of small new factories. Fictional realism has been “oriented more towards the human, the social and the artificial than towards the natural world” (Phillips 2003, 163–64). Irfan, who appears to understand the nomadic way of life better than the other characters, wants to bring fresh water

from the lakes, but the disrupted tourist lifestyle has contaminated the area and produced hazardous elements for the residents there:

The mating of glaciers that Irfan had begun devoting himself to bringing water to these and neighbouring areas. And ever since, one question had never ceased needling him. It was this: “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. (Khan 2012, 71–72)

Irfan understands that the local nomads have their own knowledge and special skills to sustain themselves. Water plays a vital function in every country or region of the world. The earth’s ecosystem depends heavily on water, and the water that flows from these glaciers is critical for irrigation in rural and urban areas. The study of the novel *Thinner Than Skin* covers the real pictures of various natural beauties, valleys, lakes and landscapes of the northern Himalayas, mainly focusing on “Malika Parbat, Nanga Parbat and Lake Saiful Maluk” (Khan 2012, 75). Some old memories of Farhana’s mother have been linked to these valleys. Maryam is more interested in stories related to “mountains and the legends of the valley” (Khan 2012, 85). Here, Khan tries to demonstrate that how the bad mentality of a few people may easily disturb the large population’s ecological style as Irfan and Maryam noticed during their survey in the Kaghan valley, large numbers of “broken Coca-Cola bottles, biscuit wrappers, plastic bottle caps” (Khan 2012, 155). Maryam is also passionately interested in the rolling regions of the Himalayas Mountains. She had once lived close to these lakes, rivers and mountains. Khan represents the ecological crisis and depicts various natural disasters in different parts of Pakistan’s Northern Province. The region has been majorly affected by the “drinking water, irrigation farmland and food security” crisis (Khan 2012, 239).

Modernity, advancement and ecological injustice

In modern literary studies, climate change has been most commonly assessed and symbolised by sea-level rise and increased atmospheric carbon dioxide, specifically “the effective manipulation of time by humans” (Wolkovich et al. 2014, 1356). Climate change is currently the greatest existential threat to the global human as well as non-human community. Environmental researchers acknowledge that “climate is changing and that human beings are largely responsible for these changes” (Ghosh 2017, 151). A serious reading of her novel can make every reader realise how Irfan hints at a sustainable ecosystem to maintain a healthy life. This unity between communities on the receiving end of an ecological crisis and engaging social activists to understand the education research to negotiate political protest

has been a hallmark of environmental struggles in Pakistan. “I(Farhana) opened my eyes and saw a downpour of the sill. How did the water appear clear from above? How could it reflect us so sweetly when filthy inside? I surface, blinked dived again” (Khan 2012, 113). As the character Farhana describes the lake’s fresh and clean water as it plunges repeatedly, she has worked in the Mount Shasta field and believes that she knows the receding cause of the Himalayan glaciers. Still, Nadir is doubtful of Farhana’s intentions in terms of landscape knowledge conceptualisations as acquiring. In order to illustrate the way of life of nomadic tribes, Khan uses the modern socio-political, religious and “geograph[ical]” (Khan 2012, 39) structures of the regions of Northern Pakistan to weave her fiction. Buell (1996) suggests that a focus on what he describes as “the environmental imagination will ultimately bring about a change in what we consider to be the basic tenets of literary theory” (2–3). The eco-friendly link between terrestrial and aquatic life forms a strong bond representing water purification in lakes without disturbance. On the other hand, marine life in the Kaghan Valley lakes has been harmed due to the use of hazardous chemicals to destroy fish and other organisms in the lakes. The problem of complexity lies at the heart of the developing genre of climate change criticism, which assumes “the idea that climate change is a slippery concept” (Johns-Putra 2016, 276) with literary and existential difficulty. The narrator of the novel witnesses the valley, which surrounds the beautiful lakes, forest, water, mountains, pine trees, birds, animals and their sweet voices in the “morning call echoed clearly over the lakes across the valley” (Khan 2012, 121), which seems nature has lent its voice to both living and non-living things. Such glorification and beautification of nature have changed from time to time, what Nadir feels during the early morning and soon after sunset, as he realises how the colours of natural elements change on earth. In Khan’s novel, Wes and Farhana seek to research glaciers’ melting fast. Maryam sees glaciers through a ritualistic perspective, “marrying glaciers was coming back” from a diverse township, which is well-preserved with the mat of straws through the “dwindling supply of meltwater” (Khan 2012, 203). With the changes in the idea of climate change rather than “fight against climate change” (Hulme 2009, 361) by using technological innovation, we need a more constructive and imaginative engagement. Nonetheless, the outlines of ecocriticism as we have characterised them explain why climate change engagement has been delayed with “winter temperature on the rise, summer temperatures dropping” (Khan 2012, 203). The climatological description suggests “the possibility of a warming climate as the summer becomes unprecedentedly searing, and the fall and the winter” (Li and Wang 2017, 144) pass unusually dry. In the context of climate change, Khan’s apocalyptic narration addresses the changing perception of nature’s agency and its consequences. Khan uses a variety of natural components, including plants, air, water and everything else around us, to illustrate the basic principles of nature

and its creativity. She criticises the manmade environment in which we despoil, contaminate and manipulate nature. Through this, the changes that happened in the global environment will affect the eco-friendly community whose livelihood depends upon natural resources, as Khan depicts in the novel through the characters of Maryam and her daughter Kiran:

They had migrated to upper Kaghan Valley with their cattle in April, intending to stay through the summer before returning to the lowlands, where those who had chosen a more settled way of life cultivated maize, potatoes and beans. This had been the way for centuries. Their cattle needed to graze in these hills before returning to the plains for the long, merciless winter. (Khan 2012, 153)

This novel prompts us to re-examine the effects of climate hazards on the interaction between humans, nature and animals, “revealing a complex interplay between humans and nature in the face of the Anthropocene’s amplification of environmental crisis” (Li and Wang 2017, 139). Ghosh (2017, 123) in his non-fiction work *The Great Derangement* raises literary concerns regarding climate change that the planet will face “a climate crisis sooner or later”. The anthropogenic activities are primarily to blame for the escalating trend of climate-related disasters in various parts of Northern Pakistan, including glacier retreat to the “north and sea-level rise to the south” (Khan 2012, 152). During times of “ecological crisis, the world is thinned not only because of” environmental devastation but also “the destruction of a sense” (Buse 2013, 277) that humans have a place in it. The ecological principle of Heise in her book *Imagining Extinction* (2016), helps us to understand “how the lives of species are being reshaped by human actions, ... the long-term consequences of human actions might be, it cannot be called upon to determine what our relationship to other species should ideally be” (Heise 2016, 199). Nature should not be overlooked; it has retaliated furiously in the form of earthquakes, landslides, floods and other natural calamities whenever man has exploited natural reserves unethically. Humankind may have achieved great wealth, but the importance of ecological balance for the survival of living beings cannot be ignored. Humanity’s increasingly materialistic outlook has alienated it from the peaceful pleasures of nature. The novelist hopes to restore people’s confidence in nature by defining specific myths and beliefs. She demonstrates her commitment, renews people’s faith in the environment, and claims that artificial bonding cannot erase the realities of human existence.

Conclusion

Uzma Aslam Khan's *Thinner Than Skin* (2012) undergoes rigorous analysis, probing its thematic engagement with the ecological crisis and the repercussions of climate change. The study elucidates Khan's narrative strategies in elucidating these pressing concerns, offering insights into the literary response to contemporary environmental challenges. The analysis reveals that the treatment of nature in this literary work reflects the impact of various natural disasters and climatic changes on Pakistan's inhabitants, which led to a poor state of agricultural and natural resources. This has resulted in significant harm to the people living in the country. This study shows the important perspective of ecocritical work gained from the depiction of climate change issues in literary works. Khan demands rapid action to preserve natural resources, including mountains, forests, water and the regional biodiversity, in order to improve the environmental circumstances of the Kaghan Valley. The novel shows the devastating effects of deforestation, mining and other exploitative practices on the ecosystem and the people who depends on them. Moreover, it brings to light of the unequal distribution of resources and the role of capitalism in exacerbating the climate crisis. Khan's eloquent prose captivates with profound insights, weaving a compelling narrative that delves into the repercussions of environmental degradation. Her writing skilfully evokes the complex interplay between humanity and nature, urging contemplation on the urgent need for sustainable practices. Khan, through her fictional and artistic work, seems to warn mankind against the impending dangers, where humans need to ponder over "to be, or not to be that is the question ... whether it's nobler in the mind to suffer" (Shakespeare 2008, 96). It is time for everyone to use their conscience and not make cowards of us all. This study has made significant progress in our understanding of ecocritical theory with special references to ecological thinking that touches on the issues of ecological crisis, globalisation, climate change and global warming.

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