

APOCALYPTIC VISIONS: ANTHROPOCENE NARRATIVES IN
CONTEMPORARY PAKISTANI FICTION

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Abstract

The anthropogenic impacts inflicted through the use of modern technology in different spheres of life ranging from social to economic, called the Anthropocene epoch, have made human civilisation's work unlike that of any other civilisation. This dramatic global change has stifled literary and socio-cultural imaginations around the globe. Modern fiction writers in Pakistan are striving to embrace more aspects of ecological crises, climate catastrophes, environmental pollution, and the holistic ideal of apocalyptic visions towards contemporary socio-political realities. The objective of this study is to analyse the responses of modern Pakistani novelists regarding environmental disasters, migration due to climate changes, and the struggle for resources through the Anthropocene concept. The study attempts to understand the uncharted aspects of modern-day post-colonial narratives about global ecological issues in the context of Pakistan, which is burdened by the tumultuous history of colonialism, industrialisation, and political turbulence. This study focuses attention on the contribution of Pakistani fiction to global discourses of the Anthropocene, such as the neglect of sustainable development, the call for environmental justice, and the reconstruction of social relations between man and nature, articulated through the narratives of selected works by Mohsin Hamid, Omar Shahid Hamid, and Uzma Aslam Khan. The research concludes that alongside depicting environmental woes, Pakistani literature serves as a tool for creating ecological consciousness and mobilization.

Keywords: Anthropocene, Pakistani fiction, environmental crisis, climate change, ecocriticism, postcolonialism, apocalyptic narratives, ecological justice.

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BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The Anthropocene is a term used to describe how humans have changed the environment, which serves as an important concept in literary and environmental analysis (Crutzen & Stoermer, 2000). This period highlights the changes brought by industrialisation, such as deforestation, soil depletion, vegetation cover loss, resource wastage, and climate change, resulting in severe ecological crises and threats to life (Steffen et al. 2015). In the past, literature has faced these challenges by depicting 'end of the world' scenarios that include pollution, environmental displacement, and societal disorder (Garrard, 2012). Dystopian speculative fiction and dystopian literature are predominant in presenting worries of the Anthropocene (Ghosh 2016) along with South Asian and Pakistani literature, which is still relatively unknown for such ecological critiques.

Even though Pakistani fiction has focused on colonial history, wars, and the history of identity politics, it has now shifted towards incorporating climate worries and ecocide into its storylines (Ahmad, 2021). Diverse contemporary writers from Pakistan, including Mohsin Hamid, Uzma Aslam Khan, and Omar Shahid Hamid, have responded to the themes of the Anthropocene by depicting the region's environmental susceptibility through dystopian, speculative, and realist fiction. Such works portray the dire socio-political consequences of extreme weather, water shortages, pollution, and other facets which characterise the environmental disasters occurring in Pakistan (Ali, 2019).

Pakistan is one of the most susceptible countries to climate change, suffering from aggravated heatwaves, glacial melting, and flooding in urban areas since these have become commonplace catastrophes (Haq et al., 2018). The 2022 floods that covered over a third of Pakistan served as a painful reminder of the devastating consequences of climate change and re-instigated debate regarding the protection of the environment (Khan & Yousaf, 2022). Keeping this in mind, Pakistani fiction does more than document the climate catastrophe: it reinvents it via apocalyptic and dystopian narratives. Such narratives are meant to warn the audience to take action in the face of the existential crisis posed by the Anthropocene.

Additionally, an Anthropocene interpretation of Pakistani fiction fits with greater ecocritical and postcolonial studies that analyse the environmental damage in relation to the historical processes of colonial plunder, capitalistic growth, and socio-political turmoil (Nixon, 2011). While the Western world moves towards mainstream climate action narrative, Pakistani fictions offer a counter ecological self consciousness based on local history, culture, and environmental conflict. By looking into the apocalyptic imaginations of Pakistani literature, this study attempts to address the issues of climate change, representation, and environmental justice.

RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

The environmental changes caused by humans give rise to the Anthropocene, which is at the focus of cli-fi (climate fiction) literature studies. It is well-known that literature expresses the tensions and impacts caused by the changes to nature, giving life to dystopian stories, and deep critiques of humanity's role in its own destruction (Ghosh, 2016). Although there is an abundance of research focusing on Anthropocene fiction in the West and India, very little has been done in the context of how Pakistani literature deals with ecological disasters, climate change, and apocalyptic fantasies.

To this day, Pakistan accounts as one of the most affected countries by climate change and has to deal with a multitude of problems arising from it, such as high temperatures, melting glaciers, lack of water, and pollution in cities (Haq et al., 2018). These phenomena span beyond science or politics, as there is a strong impact in the cultural and literary spheres. Some Pakistani writers of fiction pay attention to these issues and write about the destruction of the environment, wars due to a lack of resources, and refugees resulting from changes in the climate. Still, not much analysis of these new stories has been done.

This study is positioned to add to the scholarship of postcolonial Pakistani literature by examining apocalyptic constructions in modern fiction of Pakistan through an Anthropocene framework. It will further analyse how Pakistani writers portray elements of ecological collapse, social disintegration, and anxiety so as to advance the discourse on environmental humanities, postcolonial ecocriticism, and climate change literature in Pakistan. Pakistani fiction's engagement with the Anthropocene provides an understanding of the local context of the climate crisis and concepts of resilience and sustainability in the region.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The absence of convergence focusing on the representation of these crises, especially within the scope of fiction, is significantly felt. Pakistan suffers from a lack of scholarship on fiction 'cli-fi' (climate fiction) with regards to Pakistan, as all that exists is focused on Western and Indian literary movements. An examination of how the Pakistani narrative constructs apocalyptic and dystopian scenarios of environmental destruction, political violence, and socio-economic instability is critically needed. This will help understand how local narratives have been operating in the global context of environmental anxiety, and how they interact with postcolonial ecocriticism and climate counter discourse.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- 1) In what ways did the modern fiction writers from Pakistan craft a narrative for an apocalypse and a fictive environmental crisis brought about by the Anthropocene Era?
- 2) What practical narratives encompass postcolonial ecocriticism, climate justice, and Pakistan's socio-political turmoil in the Pakistan-centric theses?
- 3) What indigenous or non-western ecological interpretations do these works of literature provide outside the scope of the dominant western narrative cli-fi?

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The Anthropocene has emerged as a significant framework for understanding the environmental crises, ecological collapse, and climate change dystopias in Shaj's contemporary literature. Scholars have studied how fiction engages with humanity's destructive impact on the planet's ecosystems by reflecting, critiquing, and reimagining it, usually encapsulating these narratives as cautionary tales or pleas for environmental activism (Ghosh, 2016; Nixon, 2011). Within the South Asian literary tradition, more so in Pakistan, fiction is being written that deals with the anxieties of the Anthropocene and poses questions regarding ecological decline, conflict over resources, and resultant migration (Ahmad, 2021; Ali, 2019). The purpose of this literature review is to highlight the increasing research on anthropocentric literature, in particular, Pakistani fiction's literature on environmental apocalypticism, climate justice, and eco-criticism.

THE ANTHROPOCENE AND APOCALYPTIC NARRATIVES IN LITERATURE

Often regarded within the scope of climate fiction, or 'cli-fi', anthropocene fiction deals with the consequences caused by human intervention in nature and the ensuing humanitarian disasters (Clark, 2015). This fictional genre is underpinned by apocalyptic and dystopian imagery that speculates on the collapse of ecosystems and social order (Garrard, 2012). In literary fiction Amitav Ghosh (2016) criticises the lack of overt climate stories, claiming that the 'Great derangement' of climate change needs fiction's attention now or never. In the same vein, Streeby (2018) notes the capacity of speculative fiction in rendering future climates and what is possible within these two extremes of devastation and survival.

In South Asia, Indo-Anglian writers have expressed their climate concerns in fiction. Rana Dasgupta is an Indian novelist whose book *Tokyo Cancelled* (2005) deals with the theme of postmodern migration along with Ghosh's ecological collapse *Gun Island* (2019) (Sharma, 2020). While Amar Singh has focused on Indian fiction, Pakistani fiction is gaining ground as bad writing of the Anthropocene.

GLOBAL WARMING AND ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES IN PAKISTAN'S LITERATURE

As one of the most climate-vulnerable countries, Pakistan faces a variety of climate challenges including extreme weather events, glaciers melting and worsening droughts due to climate change (Haq et al., 2018). These ecological disasters are starting to concern the country's literary imagination as authors depict the socio-political turmoil which is coupled with environmental destruction. In *Thinner than Skin*, Uzma Aslam Khan (2012) offers an ecocritical narrative in relation to climate change, glacier retreat and the political economy of indigenous struggle in Northern Pakistan, which is reflective of the Anthropocene concerns (Rahman, 2021). In the same vein, *The Last White Man* by Mohsin Hamid (2022) also climatically and socially allegorises the phenomena which resulted from environmental catastrophe as the impact of climate change (Khan, 2023).

Omar Shahid Hamid's crime novels deal with political violence, but his novels go a step further by integrating the lack of water in Karachi, the pollution and urban decay into his novels as well (Ali, 2019). Additionally, Pakistani short stories from literary magazines in later years have also started to include worries of climate, displacement, ecological harm and have shown recognition of the impact of the Anthropocene (Ahmad, 2021).

ECOCRITICISM AND POSTCOLONIAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE NARRATIVES OF THE ANTHROPOCENE

Studies of ecocriticism and postcolonialism in Anthropocene fiction enable scholars to investigate how colonialism, capitalism, and socio-economic disparity integrate with the environmental decline (Site 1). A significant amount of climate fiction literature produced in the West is focused on future imaginings, while the focus of postcolonial ecocriticism is on actual life in the Global South (Mukherjee, 2010). Nixon (2011) introduces the term 'slow violence' to illustrate the concept of violence done to the environment in which harm is done to the environment gradually, and takes a toll on marginalised people. This is quite pertinent to Pakistani literature which deals with ecological issues alongside class conflict, political cynicism, and poverty (Rahman, 2021).

Other researchers studied how Pakistani prose participates in the contestation of the Western climate fiction hegemony by presenting localised counter-narratives based on traditions, local folklore, and histories (Sharma, 2020). The emergence of Islamic environmental ethics in some Pakistani narratives is an example of anti-environmentalism which claims guardianship (khalifa) as compassionate (Ali, 2019). Fostering and nurturing these views allows us to understand greater and deeper our literature to the Anthropocene.

RESEARCH GAPS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Although fiction focusing on climate issues is on the rise in Pakistan, research on these works is lacking. Pakistani Anthropocene narratives need more critical focus, especially when dealing with issues of political violence, economic insecurity, and migration. Other research could analyse the role of Pakistani indigenous and folk narratives in developing ecological consciousness. In addition, comparative studies of South Asian and Western climate fiction could reveal how other literary traditions deal with the Anthropocene.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

With the aim of analysing the depiction of Anthropocene-induced environmental crises in modern Pakistani literature, this study employs a qualitative research methodology alongside textual analysis. The selected texts will be analysed using an ecocritical framework, with a particular focus on post-colonial ecocriticism (Huggan and Tiffin, 2010) and Anthropocene literary studies (Clark, 2015). Post-colonial ecocriticism will assist in understanding the ways in which Pakistani narratives grapple with the phenomena of environmental devastation in relation to the history and politics of colonialism, capitalism, and globalisation. Moreover, eco-dystopian and cli-fi (climate fiction) narrative theories will be utilised to analyse how these texts imagine

apocalyptic scenarios and societal changes as a result of climate collapse. Close reading will be applied to the strategy of environment(s) of narrative(s) of ecological catastrophe in conjunction with discourse analysis which examines how such narratives confirm or contest major socio-environmental discourses. By integrating ecocriticism and postcolonial studies, this research hopes to illustrate the contribution of Pakistani fiction to the discourse of the Anthropocene.

DATA ANALYSIS/RESULTS

This portion focuses on three contemporary Pakistani novelists Hamid, Khan, and Shahid that engage with narratives from the Anthropocene period depicting environmental destruction, disintegration of societies in the Pakistan context, and a growing societal fear of nature. These authors, Mohsin Hamid, Uzma Aslam Khan, Omar Shahid Hamid, and others represent the multiple facets pertaining to the changing climate, ecological disasters, and the never-ending political turmoil. This research analyses how the authors frame narratives depicting apocalyptic realities in Pakistan through ethnographic discourse.

MOHSIN HAMID – THE LAST WHITE MAN (2022) AND EXIT WEST (2017)

In *The Last White Man*, Mohsin Hamid further explores displacement and ecological changes along with existential anxiety through his Anthropocene approach. *The Last White Man* is a dystopian novel that deals with racial change and societal collapse. In a less abstract form, *Exit West* confronts the reality of climate migrants, illustrating the phenomenon through climate magic realism where reality subsumes magical elements. The magical doors described in the novel functioning as passageways to new continents symbolise climate refugees as they parallel the migration trends of the environmental disasters.

EXEMPLARY TEXT AND ITS ANALYSIS

“A young man and a young woman met in a classroom. They did not talk to each other.” (*Exit West*, p. 1) “They were in a city enlarged by the radiant hope of refugees, but it was still in peace, or perhaps, wasn’t yet in open warfare.”

This excerpt reveals a foreboding threat, with one interpretation suggesting displacement is underway. Hamid’s depiction of an unnamed setting reflects the consequences of climate change even though it is rooted in modern-day Pakistan, which suffers from environmental degradation. His work illustrates the lack of political will to address the problem of climate change and advances a case for global responsibility in dealing with climate emergencies.

UZMA ASLAM KHAN - THINNER THAN SKIN (2012)

Thinner than Skin is deeply embedded in the ecological zones of Northern glacial Pakistan, especially the northern glacial region. The novel blends political and personal narratives with the environmental degradation of Himalayan and Karakoram ranges and exposes the issues of eco-feminism, indigenous resistance, and climate change. Khan narrates how environmental destruction already leads to the loss of identity, culture, and nature through powerful ecological imagery and folk tales.

TEXTUAL EXAMPLE & INTERPRETATION:

“The sound of ice splitting resembled an old man who was shifting in his bed but having a hard time waking up. However, this awakening would be harmful.” (*Thinner than Skin*, P. 137)

In this example, the “melting glaciers” have caused climate change to such an extent that it is wounded beyond recognition. This excerpt showcases how the Anthropocene affects Pakistan’s northernmost regions where local populations and water bodies are endangered because of glacier melting. By employing indigenous viewpoints and folklore, Khan counters the prevalent Western climate narratives with a more local, ethno-eco-conscious perspective.

OMAR SHAHID HAMID – THE SPINNER’S TALE, 2015

Omar Shahid Hamid, an author of crime and political thrillers, blends the Anthropocene into *The Spinner’s Tale*, which incorporates eco-sabotage and terrorism alongside state violence. The book illustrates the nexus between political terrorism and ecological violence: water shortages, tree cutting, and city waste pollution.

EXEMPLAR INTERPRETATION OF TEXT

“We tried to hide the heat with electricity, turn the cold into ash, burn it in a gigantic furnace, and slowly distribute the warmth. The world we inhabit has transformed so much.” (The Spinner’s Tale, p. 99)

This excerpt indicates, beyond a doubt, the environmental devastation experienced by Karachi. The city is battling a multi-faceted socio-political crisis that leads to lethal consequences. In some cases, Hamid's book offers a vision of the Anthropocene where decline brings together climate change with violence and urban destruction.

CONCLUSION

Through these novelists, Pakistani fiction alongside Hamid, Khan's and Mohsin's literature bridges together seamlessly in interwoven Anthropocene-themed accounts. Focused on bleeding edges of climate migration along an onto-epistemic void, eco-violence and eco-activism begin at the centre in these narratives, then critically examine the South's urban collapse alongside the politics of nature. All together, they respond to Western climate fiction with narratives based on the Pakistani context.

DISCUSSION

The increased attention given to the narratives of the Anthropocene by contemporary Pakistani fiction writers suggests their immersion in deep ecological crises such as climate change and ecosystem damage. Through the works of Mohsin Hamid, Uzma Aslam Khan, and Omar Shahid Hamid, it is clear that Pakistani fiction addresses global environmental issues while simultaneously locating these concerns within the local socio-political and ecological settings. This discussion reflects the major outcomes of the research while situating them in the context of Anthropocentric Literature, Eco-fiction, and postcolonial environmentalist discourse.

These stories are in sync with the increasing themes of Anthropocene fiction wherein the environment transforms from being a passive background to an active character that influences humanity's existence. Experts comment that this form of narrative serves both as a caution and a wake-up call (Ghosh, 2016) as it attempts to compel civilisations to face the consequences of anthropogenic harm. These selected Pakistani texts utilize transnational climate anxieties to mark their contribution to the conversation while focusing on the deep environmentalisation of socially disadvantaged groups.

POSTCOLONIAL ECOLOGIES AND ENVIRONMENTAL INJUSTICE

The representation of ecological disasters within Pakistani literature also dovetails with postcolonial approaches to the environment. Some scholars like Nixon (2011) have framed “slow violence” to capture the systemic, invisible violence against ecosystems and people by neocolonial capitalism and its environmental disregard. The silence of the science approach in Uzma Aslam Khan's narratives, which includes indigenous people and environmental experts, challenges the Western-centric discourse of the environment by showing the negative impacts of climate change on ex-colonial countries.

Omar Shahid Hamid's *The Spinner's Tale* (2015) addresses the relationship between environmental damage and urban blight, radicalisation, and political violence. His description of the dismal state of Karachi's ecology illustrates how the sociological crises aggravate pre-existing inequalities. This is consistent with environmental justice theories that claim ecological catastrophes tend to affect marginalised communities, especially from the Global South (Martinez-Alier, 2002).

OTHER METHODS OF NARRATIVE CONSTRUCTION AND RESISTANCE TO ECOLOGICAL DESTRUCTION

Other prominent features of the Anthropocene in Pakistani literature are self-consciously different ways of constructing a narrative. Whereas much of the so-called climate fiction, especially in the West, revolves around apocalyptic scenarios and technological panaceas,

Pakistani writers seem to infuse their narratives with local ecological knowledge, magical realism, and history to construct and portray alternative climate change crises.

In “Thinner Than Skin”, Uzma Aslam Khan employs local myths and native ecological practices to broaden the scope of ecological storytelling while resisting the primary narratives that consider climate change as an issue ready to be fixed using Western methodologies. In the same way, Mohsin Hamid in *Exit West* taps into magical realism to metaphorically examine climate displacement, implying that new imaginations of migration and ecological catastrophe are important. These arguments will be familiar to proponents of a decolonial environmental frame who focus on the need to add indigenous, non-Western, and non-environmentalistic points into the environmental conversation (Whyte, 2018).

CONSEQUENCES FOR FICTIONAL LITERATURE OF PAKISTAN AND THE ANTHROPOCENE

The examination of these novels addresses the climate fiction debate in the Anthropocene by showing how Pakistani literature claims its place in the global sphere of climate fiction. Pakistani climate fiction women writers fill the gap in climate fiction literature which has predominantly been constructed by the Western world; these narratives shift the focus to issues such as environmental justice, historical injustice, and life in climate-exposed regions. This is important in expanding the narrative of the Anthropocene and the discussion about climate change beyond the Global South.

The increasing popularity of eco-fiction in Pakistan exemplifies a larger phenomenon in South Asian literature where climate change and environmental destruction are becoming key focal points. This illustrates greater awareness among Pakistani authors regarding the severity of ecological catastrophes and their responsibility to reconceptualise humanity’s relationship with nature through writing.

CONCLUSION

In exploring the bearing of the Anthropocene on Pakistani fiction, this research focused on its environmental issues of concern such as climate change, ecological collapse, and degradation in the context of apocalyptic fiction. Evaluating the narratives of Mohsin Hamid, Uzma Aslam Khan, and Omar Shahid Hamid showed that Pakistani writers are participating in the Anthropocene debate not only by focusing on the local environmental issues but also by incorporating global historical socio-political factors. These stories make important contributions, providing a critique to the ecological catastrophe, environmentalism, and climate change as it interfaces with migration, urbanisation, socio-economic injustice, and inequality.

This study also found that Pakistani fiction exercises a closed range of narrative techniques, including magical realism and indigenous ecology, to counter climate fiction’s overriding Western perspective. These postcolonial and eco-critical approaches to the narratives also address the wider context of Pakistan’s environmental degradation within the historical framework of exploitation, neocolonial resource grab, and institutionalised injustices. In addition, this research has pointed out the role of literature in raising attention to climate issues and the necessity to act in order to change the course for future generations.

It is now crucial to incorporate perspectives from the Global South in the outputs of literary criticism given the mark that the Anthropocene Epoch is leaving on human frameworks across the globe. Pakistani fiction possesses rich engagement with environmental and socio-political issues and thus offers critical insights into the lived experiences of the climate change impacted people. Perhaps future work could investigate how gender, class, and Indigenous epistemologies further complicate these narratives, or conduct relationship studies with other South Asian and international literatures of the Anthropocene.

In the end, it can be claimed as I do in the book *“Apocalyptic Visions: Anthropocene Narratives in Contemporary Pakistani Fiction”*, that literature is more than a response to ecological catastrophe; it is an active site of struggle and re-imagination. While documenting the

Anthropocene, Pakistani writers have captured human upheaval, ecological imbalance, and justice issues while simultaneously calling the people to action in addressing the dire issues of the era and providing the needed change.

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