

# Environmental Discourse: A Comparative Ecocritical Study of Pakistani and American Fiction in English

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## Abstract

This article is an overview of how language communicates and construes humanity's relationship to the environment in different cultural contexts. With reference to *Moth Smoke* (2012), *Trespassing* (2005), *White Noise* (1999) and *A Thousand Acres* (1991) the study explores particularities of American and Pakistani environmental discourse. Informed by interdisciplinary approaches like ecocriticism and toxic discourse the analysis seeks to demonstrate writers' engagement with issues and concerns on environmental degradation. The purpose of the study is to explore the plurality of perspectives that are required to address the environmental contamination taking place globally. To understand the fundamental premise of how different cultures view and frame ecological crisis especially in the form of toxicity, pollution and contamination, this article briefly examines the selected Pakistani and American writers' representation of their society's ecological relationship with the living and non-living world recognising the complex altering relationship between the environment and the social sphere.

**Keywords:** ecocriticism, environment, pollution, comparative study, toxic discourse, language

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Statement of the Problem

The environmental discourse does not simply help to identify shared ecological issues such as—the concept of toxic contamination, impact of pollution, representation of contaminated public and private sphere, and the role of techno-chemical risks, but also raises significant questions of individual and collective agency in distinct cultural contexts. According to Stibbe (2015), the connection between language and ecology is based on how humans treat the natural environment and each other which is influenced by our ideas, thoughts, concepts, ideologies and worldviews (pp. 1–2). Various linguistic features like metaphors, images and tropes used by Pakistani and American novelists underscore the relationality of the environmental problems and anthropocentric attitudes towards human-nature relationship which manifest human complicity without undermining the collective accountability towards perpetuating toxic scenarios.

### 1.2 Research Questions

Why do the American and Pakistani Anglophone writers represent problems of ecology and human engagement with the environment in their works of fiction? What is the nature of toxic discourse in Pakistani and American fiction? Why is it useful to compare texts across regions and cultures, and whether such comparisons offer answers in responding to our present-day environmental sensibility?

The critical readings of the selected texts are significant especially in terms of how they capture the notion of contamination, toxic scenarios and risk associated with them. Moreover, such readings may help direct towards some implications that toxic discourse and risk might have for studying various themes in comparative analysis in literary studies as well. Although, in the last one decade there is a gradual rise in environmentally oriented works by Pakistani scholars (see Rehman, 2011; Munazza, 2014) however, comparative study of Pakistani fiction and literature with other cultural texts is negligible and requires more investigation into the field of comparative studies and environmentalism. Therefore, this study contributes to the growing field of comparative literature and ecocriticism.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 American Environmental Discourse: Toxic Consciousness

According to Lawrence Buell (2009), the ecological concern in American history of environmental writing can be organised systematically shaping many episodes along traditional lines since the advent of industrialisation in North America (2–3). He traces the role of authors like Henry Thoreau, Mary Austin, Aldo Leopold in shaping early American environmental writing tradition and culture. However, Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) generally severs as a revolutionary text of the contemporary environmental movement in North America that challenges and critiques the pesticide industry and the detrimental toxic effects of chemicals used as pesticides (DDT). Later, Cynthia Deitering (1996) wrote in her essay *The PostNatural Novel* that contemporary American novels are littered with references to garbage and trash, signalling a “fundamental shift in historical consciousness, a shift from a culture defined by its production to a postindustrial culture defined by its waste” (p. 196) and traces “toxic consciousness” in the American novel. Novels like DeLillo's *Underworld*, Richard Powers' *Gains*, and Edward Abbey's *The Monkey Wrench Gang* are a few examples that anticipate this toxic consciousness. This type of environmental perception encourages the focus on the detrimental effects of unbound technology and pollution giving rise to multitudes of risk scenarios.

### 2.2 Pakistani Discourse and Environmental Consciousness

Similarly, a survey of recent Pakistani literature demonstrates how Pakistani writers perceive environmental challenges, the widespread contamination and the experiences of those who witness the neglect and abuse of the very environment they inhabit (Yaqoob, 2016). Rafat's revulsion for the way Pakistani society is destroying the local landscape with pollution and contamination is notable in his poem “Karachi, 1955” 1; “Karachi 1968” which is a manifestation of escalating environmental degradation. Kamila Shamsie in her novel *City by The Sea* reflects a common environmental predicament in Pakistan describing the appalling state of the urbanised city Karachi which is no different from other cities due to its environmentally polluted and toxic atmosphere. Anis Shivani in *Karachi Raj* and Mohsen Hamid in *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* highlight the lack of proper sanitation responsible for vector and microbial diseases, poor hygiene coupled with inadequate infrastructure and makes it a subject of their discourse (Rubenstein, 2017). Both Hamid and Shivani are sensitive to the workings of capitalism as one can witness a growing sense of alienation between social structures in Pakistan and unbound consumption for economic benefit by the local elite. Kamala Shamsie explicates risk scenarios foregrounding “war ecology” and destruction of both human and nature in *Burnt Shadows*. The nuclear threat described in *Burnt Shadows*, in historical context, is tragic in consequences as it destroyed the land, people and the environment which Liam O'Loughlin terms as “disaster cosmopolitanism” (p. 91). In brief, Pakistani environmental discourse is diverse and raises significant questions regarding human- nature relationship.

## 3. Methodology and Theoretical Framework

The research methodology is qualitative and primarily based on an intertextual comparative reading of the selected novels. This article draws upon ecocriticism and toxic discourse as a primary theoretical approach to explore various dimensions of ecological disintegration; sporadic contamination and toxic images which are seen responsible for generating possible threats to living and the nonliving environment simultaneously. An analysis of this sort enables one to conceptualise how various cultures represent the natural world, environment and its relationship with humans in different works of fiction. This corroborates with Glotfelty's definition of the term ecocriticism as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment” (1996, p. xviii). Ecocriticism focuses on the relationship between “nature and culture, specifically the cultural artefacts of language and literature (p. xix). Buell further asserts that in an environmentalist discourse we should also focus on our collective state of mind such as attitudes, images, feelings and narratives along with other forms and expression of toxic discourse (2009, p. 1–2). In a broader rhetoric of contamination and risk perceptions one can refer to Lawrence Buell's conceptualization of what he calls a ‘toxic discourse’; a mode of expression that was inspired by Rachael Carson's *Silent Spring* signifying the need to converse and engage into a rhetoric of toxic events and toxicity impacting human beings and their environment. Owing to the significance of this notion, Buell contested in 1998 that ecocriticism needs to engage itself in a toxic discourse to broaden and expand the boundaries of nature writing and environmental representation (p. 640). Likewise, Ursula Heise also observes that paying attention to toxic discourse and risk theory together can facilitate our understanding of the environmental crisis that is represented in contemporary American literature (2002, p. 747). The concept is further extended by Ulrich Beck in “World Risk Society”, that “draws attention to the limited controllability of the dangers we have created for ourselves” (1999, p. 6). Beck argues that novelists too just like scientists and philosophers can contribute significantly in examining the “two faces of risk-chance and danger” imaginatively

in their stories (1999, p. 6).

#### 4. Analysis and Discussion

##### 4.1 Toxic Discourse in Anglophone Pakistani Fiction

###### 4.1.1 Pollution

Due to an alarmingly rapid increase in population growth, urbanization and air pollution in Pakistan the environmental quality is worsening day by day. Little consideration was assigned to factors like pollution and environmental degradation in Pakistan until the beginning of the 1990s (Blood, 1994). With a population of over 190 million people, today, the challenging factor in public health sector and safety in Pakistan is to curtail hygiene and sanitation crisis, and address issues like contamination and pollution in order to promote well-being, death prevention and to safeguard the environment (Saeed, 2015). Pakistani writers realizing the gravity of prevailing environmental predicament in the country have addressed these issues in their works of fiction framing contamination of various type as a major risk to human safety. Consequently, novels like *Moth Smoke* and *Trespassing* represent a society that replicates ecological concerns by capturing a wide range of images that mirrors how toxicity is defined in the Pakistani context. Therefore, the following analysis will focus on tropes like pollution and risk to identify the nature of toxic discourse as visualized by Hamid and Aslam Khan and in general Pakistan thereby addressing the first two research questions formulated for the study.

*Moth Smoke* (2012) is Mohsen Hamid's complex novel that sketches the disintegration of his protagonist Darashiko Shehzad (Daru), coupled with the disintegration of socio-economic, political and ecological environment of the country. The narrative unveils not only the disintegrating relationship between social hierarchies and effects of economic deregulation in Pakistan, but simultaneously portray a society at odds with its environment, which is severely garbage ridden, urbanized and polluted to the core. Daru likes to inhabit what Lawrence Buell (2001) has termed as a "prosthetic environment" (p. 5). For Daru, nature in its true spirit is irrelevant and absent, it is a trait that he shares with Gladney in *White Noise*, because nature as an emblem of sustenance and as spiritual healing code disappears for both the protagonists in the miasma of "white noise" or in Daru's case "smoke" and "dust". Failed in life, the only refuge left for Daru is in hash and cigarette consumption. Hamid's excessive use of images of "smoke" and "dust" are significant which later in the novel gets translated into a trope for pollution and contamination. Daru, described as a promising young man, is engulfed by the smoke of tobacco and drugs, his physical features speak aloud about his health. Above all, his surrounding environment and hostile atmosphere also mirror his internal spiritual and emotional imbalance. Lahore an excessively crowded urban space is steeped in the vehicle exhaust, foul smell and dust, Daru acknowledges:

In the morning, the smell of something burning brings me out of the house...neat moulds of rubbish in front of the neighbour's house smoulder, trash smoke rising only to be beaten down by the rain (p. 216).

Later he describes his neighborhood, lamenting over the waste management predicament in Pakistan, "smoke coming out of fissures in the black heart of a trash pile, like stream from the cooled crust of lava" (p. 216), ironically prompts him to realize that he is in "the right place by the smell, and by faces floating in the great womb of the drug, content to stay there until they die" (Hamid, p. 217). In such a polluted environment interspersed with fumes of smoke and drugs, the absence of a natural environment is felt strongly. In this case, if one is to infer the position in which toxicity plays a part in Hamid's novel it is essential to explore how the author constructs the language used to portray the inhabitants and the habitat. Consequently, Hamid constructs the physical environment and the body in a way that demonstrates features, and together they present a moral semiotic of the person as well as the environmental commentary.

Pakistan's rising air pollution is amongst the worst in the world today; medical journal *Lancet* reports that around 22% of people die each year due to polluted air which has been attributed as an "invisible killer" in Pakistan (Rehman, 2018). A similar situation is echoed in *Moth Smoke* and *Trespassing*. For instance, due to the high level of pollution in Lahore, the sky holds no meaning for Daru, because the "sun is completely blotted out by a dirty sky" (p. 99). On the contrary, Daru's world is of the air-conditioners amidst microbial contamination that is visible in the decaying and decomposing fruits left exposed. The recurrent referencing to the degraded, polluted physical environment and contaminated bodies is an emblem of a kind of toxic discourse which has serious ramifications in Pakistani culture. The inherently overwhelming risk-prone environmental mesh highlighted in the urban "dusty" settings of Lahore, renders its characters oblivious to the natural world; a kind of estrangement. Daru's constant recalling of seasonal and atmospheric changes, his nostalgia for pleasant natural comforts of his childhood monsoon is deliberately coupled with "nuclear monsoons" and Daru's too much claustrophobic "filthy" environment (p. 109). The sudden rise in temperature and un-natural impact of monsoon rain due to nuclear test is symbolic of risk that is accompanied by the "nuclear culture". It is noteworthy that the author is not alluding to

disasters that have irrupted suddenly but points toward a warning that Rob Nixon (2009) terms as “slow violence”.<sup>1</sup> Hamid’s interweaving of tropes like toxicity, too much dependence on hydro-technology, pollution and lack of personal hygiene represents a general attitude of Loharite’s collective behaviour towards environmental space. For such an environmental vision, Buell (2001) identifies a sense of risk, which he recognises as a current state of the present-day ecological manifestations. Hence, characters in *Moth Smoke* struggle to survive in an environment that is surrounded by a biosphere of imperceptible dominions of toxicity, which according to Buell is a result of human interference and modification. For such linguistic descriptions, Buell introduced the concept of “toxic discourse” to signify distinct cultural depictions of environmental risks and threats. The threatening images of— “stagnation”, “sickness”, and disease, microbial contamination like “coloured molds” that “spread like cancer” (p. 231) narcotics and environmental decadence portray an image of environmental dystopia<sup>2</sup> in *Moth Smoke*. The personified images author uses to describe Daru, like “swollen flesh” and “dead skull” become a metaphor for a damaged and poisoned body signifying plausibility of various health risks for Daru and the habitat. Hence, characters in *MS* are enclosed within a biosphere of the invisible dominion of toxicity, which is a result of human interference, and in this context, the narrative poses one of the topoi of toxic discourse; of total contamination, thereby aims at arousing readers fear and disgust.

Similarly, Khan also exposes the causes of environmental contamination and risks in *Trespassing*. The novel like Smiley’s *A Thousand Acre* also revolves around a family farm. While Khan represents different facets of Pakistani life and culture, politics, and geography, she also highlights environmental issues and portrays a landscape contaminated with images of “waste” and sprawling “garbage”. The city of Karachi is engulfed in smoke and toxic fumes due to massive traffic influx “belching gallons of carbon dioxide” into the atmosphere (Khan, p. 288). The private and public spaces, urban landscapes and Karachi coast represent a picture of the contaminated wasteland. Khan’s perspective on waste on a deeper note represent human indifference and alienation towards the environment. Similarly, authors observation in the following lines depicts reality which people fail to take notice of even though it profoundly shapes collective behaviour, for example in *Trespassing* “Karachiites walked out of necessity, not for pleasure”, a place where, “beauty and hygiene were to be locked indoors, adding to their value. *No one bothered* with public space” (p. 43, *emphasis mine*) is indicative of an undeniable reality in Pakistan.

Khan’s description is an instance of dominant tropes of pollution and waste and, therefore signifies attitudes and behaviour as it becomes a public norm. Like trash-filled streets of Lahore, Khan portrays Pakistan’s biggest city Karachi reflecting a sense of place where polluted and dusty atmosphere only brings “lethargy” and fills one with what she describes as “narcotic dullness” (p.312). The air is so contaminated that it is hard to imagine what is pristine, “whirlwind of opium-thick” smog which is dense as well as grim from where there is no escape (p.312). Linguistic features, like drug-fueled imagery for the wind which is “thick” like “opium”, and metaphoric “narcotic dullness” suggests environmental culture in slumber. Hygiene and the collective human desire to keep the habitat clean is unthinkable and describes the protagonist’s frustration when he covers his nose because of “large patches of land” “dumped” with “trash”:

Polyethene bags hung on tree limbs and telephone wires, plugged open gutters, tumbled along driveways...  
How could he even think clearly when his body struggled at the most basic level: for water, electricity, clean streets (Khan, p. 327)?

Khan’s choice of language frames public attitude towards the environment which also reminds one of Buell’s topoi of “betrayed Eden”, (nature’s bounty sacrificed) whereby public indifference towards environment and complicity are two clear indicators.

#### 4.1.2 The Question of Risk

Many Pakistani novelists like Hamid and Khan address the notion of risk based on the belief that being exposed to environmental hazards and several types of risk follow already defined lines of social inequality and stratification where poor and marginalized are more prone to risks (health, exposure to toxicity, pollution) than those who are socially privileged. Furthermore, on many occasions in *Trespassing* narrator also reflects upon the penetration and impact of toxicity by directing the reader’s attention towards ecological risks which are local as well as global in nature. For example, references towards nuclear threats which are larger in proportion and her concern over large transnational corporations poisoning and “polluting oceans” by dumping larger risks like uranium harmful toxic waste into ocean waters is a major threat to the environment on a planetary scale. Khan’s plea on human violence against nature when she writes: “oceans teeming with plutonium, uranium, and God knows what other poisons” (Khan, p. 48) are an instance of the spatial and temporal web of ferocity and portrays a kind of risk society. The way Khan addresses issues on advance technological threats (Nuclear and toxins like

nuclear waste dumping) and risks that confront humanity today are significant from an ecocritical perspective. Khan's environmental perceptions recall what Raymond Williams demanded in terms of locating more narratives that seek to trace the dynamics of large international corporations and economic pressures shaping the local spaces invisibly (Nixon, 2009). Khan wrote *Trespassing* after the Gulf war and is seen appropriate in her representation of a technological risk society. The climate in Karachi seemed effected because of disasters like Gulf War, D'Á's observation regarding "black rain" (p. 329) is thought to be a consequence of "bombed oil fields in Iraq" because for many weeks and months soot "fell like ink" (Khan, p. 330). The colour imagery for "rain" as "black" and analogy for soot falling as "ink" suggests the gravity of the environmental predicament. The rain that year was merciless and destroyed her mulberry trees and starved her silkworms. One observes that Khan like Hamid uses appropriate linguistic strategies and interweaves in her narrative plots the tropes of pollution and environmental risks confirming a kind of violence that is close and yet distant, embracing local as well as the global sphere.

#### 4.3 *White Noise and a Thousand Acres*

##### 4.3.1 Risk perceptions and Toxic Discourse in Contemporary American Novel

Published just after the unimaginable disaster of a chemical leak in Bhopal in 1984, *White Noise* depicts a postmodern environment and culture in contemporary America and chronicles "end of nature" in American culture in "evoking nature's absence" (Buell, 2004, p. 271). Set around a college professor Gladney and his family in a small American town of Blacksmith, the novel is an incisive criticism of a consumer capitalist American society. However, the fiction also offers a wide array of discussions for an excursion into a risk society, which the reader comes to understand through the dominant tropes of risks rooted in modern technologies, and how these technologies (Chemical poisons) arouse public anxiety in general (Heise, 2008; Gerrard, 2004). DeLillo satirises the modern American society for its exaggerated "hysteria" for an environment that is contaminated with chemicals and pollutants derived from various technologies (Heise, p. 747). Both Hamid and DeLillo portray different forms of consumption from medicines to drugs, and various other technologies harmful to humans. Similarly, both authors' foreground consumption because it plays a key role in escalating the contemporary w/man's desire of detachment from the natural environment and an attachment on the contrary to the un-natural world of technologies and emissions (Fromm, 1996, p. 34). For example, Jack's wife Babette seeks comfort in drugs and medicines to overcome her fear of dying like her husband Jack who shares a similar apprehension and relies more upon technologies at home than the healthy nature outside. Heise writes in "Toxins, Drugs and Global Systems" that :

much work in the field of ecocriticism, established in American literary studies during the 1990s, assumes that the natural world is endangered and that some of the human activities that threaten nature have also put human health and life at risk. (2002, p. 747)

Heise's observation about American's general apprehension towards toxic exposure is relevant in terms of novels like *White Noise* and *A Thousand Acres* which engages in chemical substances and their potential harm to humans and the natural environment. DeLillo, in *White Noise*, explores two types of toxins; the Airborne Toxic Event (leakage of a dangerous gas Nyodene derivative) in the middle of the novel and the emphasis upon "drugs"—pharmaceutical medicines and their toxic impact. The impact of the gas leakage event on the characters lives in the novel suggests fear and anxiety that permeates the personal and social lives of the characters. Hence, the Nyodene D.discharge works as an essential theme that threatens Jack Gladney's family. At the same time, however, the novel is replete with direct and indirect references to a multitude of risks that are borne of technology that most of the American household encounters on a day to day basis. For example, the public hysteria is revealed at the beginning of the novel, DeLillo writes that school premises were evacuated due to some toxic smoke, which was perhaps caused by:

ventilating system, the paint or varnish, the foam insulation, the electrical insulation, the cafeteria food, the rays emitted by microcomputers, the asbestos fireproofing, the adhesive on shipping containers, the fumes from the chlorinated pool, or perhaps something deeper, finer-grained, more closely woven into the basic state of things. (p. 35)

Similarly, Jack's fear for his son who seems to be losing his hair perhaps could be due to his exposure to some poisonous gas or perhaps air pollution (p. 22). The toxicity is not only felt in terms of chemicals, but his son Heinrich is conscious of widespread toxicity emanating from "electromagnetic radiations", appliances and "electric wires". His apprehension includes radiations that are a part of our daily life in the form of T. V, microwave, and powerlines that he believes will "get you sooner or later" (p. 175). The fear of toxicity is lurking everywhere, from the chewing gum that is considered to be carcinogenic by his daughter to sunscreens and

smokestacks power plants generating radioactive solvents. Similarly, Gladney's wife Babette is experimenting with drugs (Dylar) to overcome the fear of death. These examples expose how environmental threats in the form of various chemicals and toxins that surround common man/w ranges from minor to more complex (Heise). Such a toxic discourse as DeLillo portrays then reveals a world of toxicity, a kind that Ulrich Beck terms as "risk society". Ursula Heise (2002) argues that chemicals like Nyodine D. and Dylar in *WN* are examples of toxins that people are exposed to in the outside world and also within domestic spheres (p. 754). One can argue that the toxic scenarios in *WN* are demonstrations of the ubiquitous nature of risks whose reality as Heise argues, "cannot be assessed with certainty" (p.757). Analyzing multiple forms of pollutants in *White Noise* makes sense because it illuminates and emphasizes what Henneberg has noted that over more than two decades after its publication, the novel is an emblem of perceptive and sharp satirical critique of developments that are no longer exclusively American, but are reminiscent of what is happening around the world but of course with variations and degrees (2011, p. 52).

Likewise, *A Thousand Acres* written by Jane Smiley relies on a similar social scenario of white middle-class American family exposed to toxic environmental risk in a pastoral and agrarian setting. Like Khan's novel *Trespassing, A Thousand Acre* indulges in toxic discourse but of a different kind. While Khan and Hamid focus on filth and urban squalor, Smiley's emphasis is on underground chemical poisoning. One also notices that the trope of pollution, modern technology and its risks are a defining force in *A Thousand Acres* as well with multiple implications that cannot be overlooked ecocritically in an agrarian setting. *A Thousand Acres* with its predominant tropes and metaphors that are central to the ecocritical reading like underground environmental toxins and risk are tangled to more profound moral and ethical concerns; a novel whose American environmental vision is of unique nature, because it exposes ills brought about by detrimental farming practices causing chemical pollution, and precisely that is why Lawrence Buell positions the novel into a broader category and rhetoric of toxicity which he terms as 'toxic discourse'.

The novel is a representation of the anthropocentric ecological vision of rural, working class people, especially women. With horror, fear and disgust toward patriarchal domination and abuse in the novel, it stands out as a complex and compelling narrative in which Smiley accentuates the trope of pollution and land contamination which generates multiple toxic risks and, therefore links the unnatural poisoning of the land and its subsequent exploitation to the unnatural abuse and poisoning of the Clark family's female members. Ginny's five miscarriages and Rose's cancer were perhaps due to the underground chemical contamination of water because of irresponsible agricultural practices on a thousand-acre land. The revelation of this reality is even more significant, as Jess exposes, "People have known for ten years or more that nitrates in well water cause miscarriages and death of infants" (Smiley, p. 165). Later, as Ginny develops a sense of environmental consciousness after analysing her deeply felt sexual trauma, she argues with her husband about the faulty farming practices and maintaining silence:

Jess said to me that the reason for the miscarriages is probably in the well water. Runoff in the well water. He says people have known about it for yours! We never even asked about anything like that, or looked into a book, or even told people we had had miscarriages. We kept it all a secret! What if there are women all over the country who have had lots of miscarriages, and if they just compared notes-but God forbid we should talk about it (Smiley, p. 259)!

Ginny breaks the silence by exposing the violence against women's bodies as well the land practices of poisoning it with a toxic chemical by the farming community and indulges in a toxic discourse that Carson warned of in *Silent Spring*. Similarly, Buell's (2001) tracing of some elements of this type of rhetoric back to the writings of nineteenth-century environmental blight articulates that even the dimensions of toxic discourse that seems realistic have emerged from long traditions of cultural risk representations (p. 36). The primary purpose of tracing such environmental rhetoric was to show that it is precisely through these traditions that some stories acquire the power to represent a toxic risk in terms of what we receive as realistic. Based on such an observation it is crucial to draw out future consequences of events as Heise (2008) has rightly pointed out and makes an essential arena of investigation for risk theorists and ecocritics. Risk analysis and toxic discourse are indispensable for ecocritical analysis owing much to the threats and hazards that are anticipated due to toxic contamination and environmental pollutants. Susan Mizrachi (2009) in context of American fiction and ecological consciousness asserts that a dominant characteristic feature of modern-day American culture is its anxiety about environmental risk, a preoccupation which may unfold possible future catastrophes like environmental contamination, susceptibility to terminal illness, and slow creeping in of chemical toxins, which are predominantly reflected in *White Noise* and *A Thousand Acres*.

## 5. Conclusion

In the light of the research questions formulated and subsequent analysis of the selected novels, one can say that Pakistani and American writers address environmental apprehensions owing much to their cultural values, attitudes and anxieties. Although American and Pakistani Anglophone fiction differs significantly in their scope and impetus towards their representation of toxic discourse and risk perceptions, however, both discourse types underscore the writers' concerns by emphasizing the possibility of rapidly growing environmental risks affecting the ecology as well those inhabiting that environment and brings to our attention what usually remains neglected.

However, there are profound differences that define the particularities in Pakistani and American fiction respectively. DeLillo's *White Noise* that was released a month after the Bhopal accident in India sheds light on how American people were already perceiving and narrating stories in the backdrop of such hazardous calamities arising out of chemical poisons generating a broader sense of the "post-industrial imagination" (Wallace, 2016). That is why perhaps *White Noise* and *A Thousand Acres* represent environmental contamination and toxic consciousness of that period. This shifting phenomenon shaped a new attitude in American culture towards the environment. American public began to see themselves in a different light concerning their relationship to the natural world and recognised their complicity in post-industrial ecosystems grounded in waste and pollution (Deitering, 1996).

On the other hand, in an age of environmental uncertainty and sociopolitical upheaval in Pakistan, in contrast, Pakistani writers continue to critique how the relationship between the human and the landscape suffers due to economic deregulation and neoliberal models in Pakistan that are seen responsible for creating social and ecological disparity and toxic disintegration. Furthermore, because of weak infrastructure, inadequate economic resources, lack of public will to protect the private and public space from environmental pollution, absolute lack of waste management services and lack of political will to counter these challenges is posing risks to people and ecology of the country simultaneously. By examining various tropes of pollution and technological risks, the study reveals that Pakistani writers are waging a crusade against garbage, filth and contamination which they profoundly exhibit as toxic. They show that working of what Nixon terms as layered "slow violence" in Pakistani context which is a gradual diffusing of environmental fall out into the fabric of society in the form of various pollutants, contamination (water, land, body) diseases, mental and psychological sickness is primarily visible in the disenfranchised communities which are framed as potential "risks" in contemporary Pakistani society. These are examples of local materiality exposing the web of various forces that infuse and thus shape the local habitat suggesting that Pakistani environmentalism will remain compromised unless this burden of garbage and the burden of economic deprivation is addressed.

While Pakistani environmental discourse reflects Pakistan's urban squalor and decay, in American discourse the previously held notion on nature worship and inhabitation reversed and was altered especially in the late 20th century. The imaginations on rural-urban spheres, as well as human bodies, were reshaped (Buell, pp. 639–665; Deitering 2–3), this altered vision with respect to nature and humanity's relationship in American culture is visible in the novels of Smiley and DeLillo which is unique environmental imagination and shapes American environmentalism which is both opaque as well as explicit in exposing ecological horrors as a cultural allegory and is an intense response to a growing cultural awareness of ecological contamination.

To conclude, one can say that transcultural communication bears significance because reading different cultural experiences in comparison can contribute to creating a culture of shared meanings and worldviews. Comparing texts with other discourse types also produce new meanings and new cross connections to meet the needs of a situation. Comparative ecocriticism can facilitate in bringing fiction and environmental philosophy together, proving to be a vital locus for imagining our mutual interrelation with nature and for anticipating ecological forms of co-inhabitation. It is argued that this comparative study is a way of facilitating an environmental sensitivity and sensibility so that more ecological approaches of being a part of the world may be considered from different parts of the globe.

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## Notes

Note 1. “Slow violence” is a term used by Rob Nixon (*Environmentalism of the Poor*, 2011)

Note 2. A term borrowed from Lawrence Buell to denote a dystopic vision

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