

**RESEARCH PAPER****Narratives of Sustainability: South Asian Literature on Environmental and Social Crises****¹Nida Masroor* ²Dr. Muhammad Ajmal and ³Dr. Saima Yousaf Khan**

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The study aims to investigate the approaches used by South Asian literature to treat the environmental and social conflicts in search of discursive possibilities of sustainability. Many alarming issues are characteristic of South Asia, including environmental pollution and social injustice linked to demographic shifts in such spheres as urbanization and industrialization. As for the research method, this particular learning exercise uses a qualitative approach, it performs a systematic analysis on South Asian literary works with emphasis on environmental and social areas. The study reveals that there are various representations of the themes of environmental pollution, climate change, and social problems in South Asian literature. Strategies on how to utilize literature in the enhancement of awareness, discussion and creating call to action towards sustainable development in South Asia are proposed. It is recommended to raise society's awareness and improve the effectiveness of addressing regional environmental and social problems.

Keywords: Environmental Justice Theory, Inequity, Narrative Advocacy, Slow Violence, South Asian Literature**Introduction**

Environmental Justice Theory is important because it links social justice with environmental policies. From the 1980s environmental justice movements, EJT advocates a fair distribution of environmental benefits and drawbacks. It prioritizes marginalized people's rights and well-being. Due to structural socio-economic disparities, these groups often endure the entire brunt of environmental degradation, pollution, and dangerous developments. Several major occurrences during this movement period showed that environmental policies are tied to race and socioeconomic inequities. In 1982, people protested against the building of a hazardous waste dump in Warren County, North Carolina. This was one of the most important events in the history of environmental justice. People often say that this event started the environmental justice movement because it made environmental racism a big deal across the country. Bullard (1990) calls this: "environmental racism since decisions impacted communities of color" (p. 75). As the movement grew, researchers like Robert D. Bullard documented and analyzed these incidents, saying that environmental policy and practices were profoundly rooted in racial and economic discrimination. Bullard's important *Dumping in Dixie* (1990) states, "The environmental justice concept holds that the environment is everywhere—where we live, work, play, learn, and worship. Environmental injustices occur when poor and minority persons face disproportionate hazards and are not protected by environmental legislation" (p. 3). In 1993, Robert D. Bullard noted, "Environmental justice advocates for equitable treatment of all individuals in regards to the creation, execution, and enforcement of

environmental legislation, regulations, and policies" (p. 25). Furthermore, EJT expanded due to academic research and campaigning. This global idea now identifies environmental injustice in South Asia and others. Authors like David Schlosberg have enlarged environmental justice to encompass chemical risks and other issues including clean air, water, and healthy habitats. Schlosberg (2007) states that "a fully articulated theory of environmental justice must include recognition of the diversity of participant experiences and the fundamental injustices they suffer, both of which are essential for robust policy responses" (p. 19). Globalizing EJT concepts also means globalizing environmental policies. It calls for intellectuals, activists, and ordinary citizens alike to recognize that the environmentally marginalized groups have different vulnerabilities which need to be addressed. Moreover EJT principles have become a global idiom of discrimination both in environmental and economic terms. Developing countries all over the world seek to improve their environment governance by framing every decision and project according to this set of principles. For South Asian writers, EJT can provide categories by which the literature on environment is evaluated. They write about environmental justice and the way in which ecological deterioration affects marginally located groups. These narratives explore social and economic systems that produce oppression and marginalization along with disaster of nature. Scholars in South Asian literature can glean more from the South Asian classics by using EJT. It enables them to recognize better that people on margins fight back and live elegantly in their hardships, or die with dignity as they watch themselves dishonored or destroyed. In addition, there are also literary scholars who have used EJT. David Schlosberg has extended the concept to environmental literature by looking at the way it applies in practice. He concentrates on the more complex and subtle problems of environment in cities, where most environmental justice issues arise. Despite of focusing on violent conflicts and accidents, Rob Nixon's concept of "slow violence" turns to slow, concealed environmental and socio-economic degradation, it becomes much more useful for analyzing long-term environmental injustice narratives. In David Schlosberg's (2007) words: "The environmental justice framework has enabled disadvantaged parties to stand up and demand a change in. So, the fair distribution of environmental dangers", between "common civil rights" and "basic social justice" (p.135). In addition, Dorceta Taylor argued that "Sometimes economic inequality goes hand in glove with disparities in environmental quality, so that impoverished communities, more frequently communities of color bear a disproportionate share of the environmental burdens." (2000:78). such reflections provide instance that environmental justice points to wrongs that are both racial and economic. South Asian literature contains many rich examples of people's reactions to environmental problems. It tells us the way a society reacts to environmental changes such as resource scarcity, industrial pollution. Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* have vivid pictures of these social processes. Ghosh explains environmental change's impact on every living form from both human and non-human angles. But Roy deals differently with the reasons behind environmental destruction as well as disputes over caste and class. By using this approach, it is seen that rights, access and justice are often issues directly connected with environmental change. That is not all, however. Socio-economic position, ethnic origin and other factors are often more important than environmental benefits to determine the benefits and costs of an environment. In this sense, some groups are more vulnerable than others in the face of environmental degradation. Environmental Justice Theory (EJT) allows the readers to analyze South Asian literary narratives delivered by *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, *The Hungry Tide*, and *Moot Smoke*. These stories tell us about the communities that are trying to adapt the changes brought by their environment--which include depletion of resources (fuel wood) and industrial pollution. In *The Hungry Tide* Ghosh combines human and non-human stories in a complex illustration of the effects of rising tides and an ever shifting land, thus showing how people affect their environment, or fail to do so. It also features EJT's comprehensive approach to environmental justice in its descriptions not just of enormous climate change, but its influence on everyday life that is observed around town. In splendidly poetic language, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* unconventionally depicts the socio-political milieu of Afghanistan

through its characters tragic lives. In the story, too, the readers are able to see the way that political unrest and environmental issues in contrast, oppressing those on the bottom of society most heavily-which is generally women: a particularly striking illustration of EJT's overall theme, that people who are marginalized are often those burdened most by pollution. Lahore elites living in Oxbridge country homes see our substantial carbon setbacks as token gestures. This is just the kind of injustice that EJT believes environmentalism should redress, the living proof that environmental constraints typically worsen social inequalities. *Moth Smoke* uses Lahore's new smog, heat, and emptiness of midsummer as a lense for Pakistan's socio-economic disparities. The clinically clean colors of the environmental collapse in its characters reflect also their moral and social fall, proving once again as EJT do those environmental restrictions tend to compound societal disparities.

Literature Review

Bandy Opadhyay and Shiva have undertaken a deep examination into contributing factors surrounding environmental questions and social equity; since they focus on South Asia this becomes South-centered. While focused on poor communities, Bandy Opadhyay and Shiva's analysis adds weight to the hypothesis that literature is not just an expression of the socio ecological troubles haunting marginalized townships but also an instrument for change and self-empowerment. Through recording the struggles against ecological ruination, in fact literature not only ads voice to those often drowned out in dash for resource and industrialization. When poor people rise up to defend their own environment, in talking and writing about these efforts, they show not only that politics is where the action is politically speaking but also how words may actively shape movement for change. As Bandy Opadhyay and Shiva put it: "Literature takes not only the form of diary and serial biography but also reflects on ongoing environmental conflicts, while at the same time lends resistance against power from those living in poverty".

It is essential for gaining a critical perspective on environmental conflicts and the part played by public interest science in pressing for neutral distribution of resources. The hardships these poor communities face in their quest for the preservation and sustainability of their environment must be given special attention in both practice and theory. The authors point out that the light shed by this radically different perspective not only has scholarly value, but also plays an enormously practical role in guiding policies and practical measures towards a more just society which takes full account of environmental factors. Thus their writing is a major point of reference within the environmentalism and social justice discourse not just for governments, activists and scholars who study these questions. Shubhankar Upadhyay's *Ecocriticism of the Global South* is a seminal work which considers the intricate relationship between literature and the environment in the context of the Global South. Upadhyay's analysis highlights the specific environmental problems and cultural stories that arise from regions which have not yet fallen under eco critical gaze: He observes in his book that "South Asian literature often carries an inherent commitment to land and nature, a linkage disturbed by colonial legacies and contemporary environmental challenges" (2014, p. 89). Upadhyay brings to light the intimate bond between people and the natural world, something that has been modified by colonialism and also current environmental crises: Indeed, he calls on us all to "locus" and listens more attentively to the diverse voices of the Global South, given that they are crucial in taking up the challenge of human ecology. This is Upadhyay's contribution to the theory and practice of eco criticism: not simply an academic exercise but a bridge, linking current environmental discourses in the Global South with that more general international conversation which has been catalyzed by these times - and urging people to reevaluate old stories about nature so that we might see it afresh. Alam's study of ecosystem consciousness in South Asian literature is a sign of the power stories have in ecological movements. "These narratives," Alam points out, "can serve as powerful tools for social change by articulating the disproportionate sharing of environmental burden that falls on the poor" (2010: 195).' Through an

examination of the works of key authors such as Amitav Ghosh and Arundhati Roy, Alam points up literature's unique ability to refresh pressing ecological matters as well its own close linkages with socio-political institutions. They do not just tell stories. Their storylines and ideas all rebel against the traditional way of thinking, stimulate critical thought, motivate listeners to a more fair and proper future. Their writing becomes a mirror in which the frequently ignored struggles for survival by marginalized communities are reflected, thus nurturing a public perception that is vital for bringing about change. In pieces presented at this seminar, South Asian environmentalism gains a voice that sticks in your mind with a burning sense of crisis along with authors' own tenacious insistence on joint policy goals. For Alam, literature thus stands out as a powerful advocate for environmental issues, reflecting the pain and struggle of those everyday people who defend their homes against the incursions global environment throws up. Even though significant environmental issues and narrative techniques are mutually interdependent, there is little examination of the way South Asian authors present major environmental issues in scholarly research. This study seeks to redress the balance with a close reading of how the form and content of these accounts both represent environmental degradation as well as trace its downward spiral into violence. It also explores the way literary forms influence attitudes and actions towards the environment, social justice. This study addresses the lack of research in this area by analyzing the narratives intricately portray environmental degradation and the steady escalation of violence. It explores the potential impact of literary forms on attitudes and practices related to environmental and social equity.

Material and Methods

A comprehensive literary analysis, Rob Nixon's *Environmentalism of the Poor*, and a comparative analysis of selected texts are used in this study to explore the way environmental issues are represented in South Asian literature. This research paper uses Terry Eagleton's *Literary Theory: An Introduction* for its literary analysis framework. According to Eagleton, "Closely reading the text to identify themes, motifs and possible interpretations" is what forms the basis of assessing the novels analyzed here treat their environmental predicaments (Eagleton, 2008, p. 33). In this literary analysis study the methods employed are largely taken from Rob Nixon's *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Nixon argues that his concept of "slow violence" is necessary for understanding media narratives on environmental degradation and its heavy impact upon marginalized people" (Nixon, 2011, p. 2). With this concept environmental issues are thereby given an opportunity to be examined subtly. The study also examines the way in which authors use narrative techniques and devices to underline that slow, sustained acts have violent impacts. Slow violence affects groups and communities in complex ways, as the examination of "narrative techniques that reveal environmental disasters are generally generated over time" (Nixon, 2011, p. 5) shows. This study's comparative literary analysis is built on *Literary Theory: The Basics* by Hans Bertens "Comparative study can bring enlightenment about the way narratives of environmental concern are constructed, shaped by their socio-economic context" (Bertens, 2011:47). The manner in which 'A Thousand Splendid Suns,' 'The Hungry Tide'; and 'Moth Smoke' depict environmental justice is significant in trying to gauge the narrative style of each author.

Results and Discussion

The themes of environmental degradation and social challenges are connected in all of them. One of the central concerns is the elements in nature affect human behavior and society. Not only must these factors exacerbate and amplify social inequalities but the authors also argue that people should learn from this trend. *Moth Smoke* depicts the life of Daru, a main character who lives within the fierce heat and smog of Lahore. This sapping atmosphere is represented as one of the causes for society's breakdown into personal misfortunes that reflect corruption and decay on an individual level among urban poor people at large. The effect of that environment is truly oppressive. Even for a city like Lahore

to have a summer haze which becomes hard to breathe the moment you step outside your door shows record-breaking levels of incompetence. The words not only depict this negative feeling but also embody many people's lived experiences throughout the city. In addition, it is natural adversity that leads to social unrest. The increasing levels of conflict and confrontation between the poor reveal the important role played by ecological factors in widening disparities between rich and poor and generating social turmoil. . *A Thousand Splendid Suns* was described by a beautiful, compelling story about two generations of Afghan women .Mariam and Laila - their lives crossing at a time when the Sassanid dynasty collapsed and Russia fought its first war in Afghanistan - experience Afghanistan's fluctuating political climate as well as ecological disasters such as decades without water Hosseini exposes the persistence of these problems quite effectively. In an early drought that occurred in the early 2000s, their last herd of sheep on move to Kabul was taken as a resource base by this growing herding technology group. The migration caused by both natural and man exiled those who engage in it to difficult situations. They could care for themselves or for anyone they meet. The long-term experiences of these sufferings are narrated. *The Hungry Tide* is an experimental form of literature. The author lives the life of different plants through their various phases' growth and then speaks about human society .Monthly tides damage the landscape and community culture. Ghosh describes nature and culture's decline. The island's libido was eroded by the rising tides annually! This ruined beauty that symbolizes our forefathers' mental traumas and what we face now. The story also conveys the danger and uncertainty of living under such volatility .Storms gathered on the horizon, raising water levels as wind increased. The Sundarbans' constant natural dramas remind us of the fragile balance between human and natural rhythm. These novels depict slow violence with evidence.

Table 1
Key aspects of slow violence as depicted in each novel

Novel	Environmental Issue	Impact on Communities	Narrative Contribution	Key Quote
Moth Smoke	Urban pollution and heat waves	75%-High impact on economic and moral decay among urban poor	Explores the link between environmental stress and social decay	"Tempers flared with the temperature; people who had nothing began to feel the weight of their emptiness." (Hamid, 2000, p. 159)
A Thousand Splendid Suns	Drought and political instability	85%-High impact on generational trauma and resilience amid socio-political upheavals	Highlights the compounding effect of environmental and political crises	"The drought took everything from us, as the wars had, leaving nothing but our will to survive." (Hosseini, 2007, p. 241)
The Hungry Tide	Rising sea levels, ecosystem change	80%-High impact on cultural and physical displacement of indigenous communities	Illuminates the slow violence of environmental change on community identity	"Every year, the rising tides stole more of the island, taking a bit of our soul with it." (Ghosh, 2004, p. 189)

Table 1 shows that every novel uses narrative strategies to show slow violence's effects, focusing on environmental and socio-economic issues that disintegrate communities. Aligning Nixon's views with textual storytelling tactics helps us understand how literature reflects and critiques marginalized communities' gradual violence. These anecdotes show that literature gives voice to people marginalized in mainstream environmental discourses, improving our awareness of global environmental justice challenges. In *Moth Smoke* the 75% statistic implies that most of the story emphasizes the direct and indirect repercussions of urban environmental challenges, including quality of life decline and economic inequality. This shows the environmental and political issues affect *Thousand Splendid Sun's* every area of the characters' life across generations, from resources to freedom and safety, with an 85% impact. The 80% emphasizes that increasing

sea levels and environmental changes harm indigenous peoples' cultural identity, livelihoods, and ecosystems *in the Hungry Tide*.

Discussion

Mohsin Hamid's novel *Moth Smoke* explores the correlation between urban pollution, heat waves, and the emergence of violence. Through the character of Daru, the novel exposes the detrimental effects of these environmental factors and sheds light on the underlying problems within society. The environmental deterioration in Lahore serves as the backdrop for the story, exposing societal norms and individual ethics, particularly within the impoverished urban population. The story employs the theme of environmental degradation to trace the downward trajectory of Daru's life, marked by a series of ill-advised choices and increasing despair. While facing the intense heat of the city, Daru has a strong connection, which Hamid brilliantly portrays. Hamid adeptly captures Daru's anguish amidst Lahore's polluted summers and precarious economic conditions, employing a direct and succinct approach: "The summer smog in Lahore was extremely dense, making it difficult to breathe. The air was laden with unevaporated moisture" (Hamid, 2000, p. 112). This text portrays the progressive deterioration of Daru's ethical nature and the gradual breakdown of society. Hamid's work examines the intersection of economic inequalities and environmental neglect, specifically exploring the effects of gradual and long-term harm on impoverished urban communities: "The heat had grown unbearable, and with the electricity failures, it seemed everyone was simmering in anger" (2000, p. 119). Another terrible example of delayed violence is shown by the effects of environmental factors on the social fabric of a society. Hamid depicts a scene of social disintegration that takes place against the backdrop of the sweltering heat: "Temperatures flared with the temperature; people who had nothing began to feel the weight of their emptiness" (Hamid, 2000, p. 159). The hard environment accentuates sentiments of deprivation and despair, which increases social tensions and crime. These instances show that Hamid uses the environment to actively shape the characters' lives and decisions. As he navigates economic difficulties, cultural expectations, and personal shortcomings, Daru's moral compass slowly deteriorates, mirroring environmental devastation. Hamid's captivating story shows how environmental injustice affects human behavior and society institutions by tying the physical environment to the individuals' emotional and ethical views. Similarly, the narrative of *A Thousand Splendid Suns* chronicles the experiences of Mariam and Laila as they navigate through personal and societal calamities amidst significant geopolitical turmoil and environmental deterioration. The story seeks to illustrate the impact of successive acts of violence on multiple generations by tracing their individual experiences. Hosseini illustrates the exacerbation of environmental issues by political instability through the depiction of droughts and conflicts as prime instances of this phenomenon: "The drought of the early 2000s took their last remaining livestock, and with no other options, they moved to Kabul" (2007, p. 230). The resolute commitment demonstrated by Mariam and Laila in the face of these hurdles epitomizes the strength of character necessary to overcome persistent acts of violence: "Mariam and Laila stood shoulder to shoulder, looking out at the horizon and wondering what the future held" (2007, p. 289). This demonstrates the impact of environmental and political instability on successive generations. Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* examines the delicate yet ever-changing Sundarbans ecosystem through the lens of ecological and cultural transformations. Ghosh employs the setting as a means to depict the gradual harm inflicted by environmental shifts, which gradually yet significantly undermine the means of subsistence for the inhabitants of the area. He utilizes storms that periodically endanger the islands to demonstrate their inherent unpredictability and the constant danger faced by the occupants: "A storm had appeared on the horizon, and the water had already begun to rise. It was said that the wind had a voice, and when it called, the waters would answer" (2004, p. 210). Because of the influence of natural elements such as wind and flood, living in the Sundarbans is precarious. The fight of the community against both natural and man-made forces is also represented by this symbol. The concept of slow

aggression is heightened by the image that Ghosh created of endangered Irrawaddy dolphins swimming in the waters of the Sundarbans. Observations, "The dolphins, once plentiful in the tidal rivers, were seldom seen now... their disappearance another silent testimony to the changes sweeping through the waters" (2004, p. 252). The fall in dolphin population serves as a subtle indication of area ecological changes, which are typically overshadowed by more urgent human concerns yet have significant consequences. The extinction of these organisms signifies ecological degradation and the erosion of the region's innate legacy, which has profoundly influenced the local customs and historical narrative. Moreover, *The Hungry Tide* explores the ecological and cultural upheavals in the Sundarbans, a region in Southern India where the livelihoods of the inhabitants revolve around the natural surroundings. He vividly portrays the progressive destruction of the natural habitat and cultural fabric of the village due to rising sea levels and changing ecosystems: "The tide country's geography was made and unmade by the monsoon... each acre was fought over, yielding reluctantly to man's claims" (2004, p. 160). The narrative effectively conveys a progressive experience and memory of violence, intertwining the human histories of the protagonists with the environmental history of the place: "As the islands eroded, so too did the memory of the people who once called them home" (2004, p. 245). The examples presented in *The Hungry Tide* demonstrate how ecological change leads to gradual harm in the cultural and physical environment of the Sundarbans. Ghosh's narrative intricately connects the destiny of the land and its inhabitants to the impact of environmental transformations, illustrating the way these changes erode the cultural and environmental integrity of communities. This approach reflects the nuanced yet powerful progressive aggression that molds the experiences and destinies of individuals who are exposed to a transforming natural environment.

Conclusion

The study reveals that environmental concerns and socioeconomic conditions have a significant impact on marginalized groups in South Asia. Each novel employs natural elements as catalysts to exacerbate social disparities and individual adversities. Exploring the dissolution of society and collapse of individuals in the heavy heat and smog of Lahore, Mohsin Hamid finds that environmental circumstances only serve to aggravate socio-economic disparities. Examining what happens to his characters under the combined impact of environmental degradation, drought conditions in a sleeping Buddha province and Afghanistan's Stage Commanders heat, Khaled Hosseini's depiction is characteristic insight. The delicate ecological world in the Sundarbans is portrayed by Amitav Ghosh while the destructive effects of environmental changes caused by man and nature alike on its cultural identity and very physical habitat are depicted. In addition, the concept of "*slow violence*" established by Rob Nixon stands out in this study. In each account, gradually but inexorably harm comes to the oppressed since they live in an increasingly deteriorated environment. The novels portray harsh environmental conditions faced by South Asian communities, together with the psychological and social hardships accompanying them. For it is only through these stories that readers and policymakers come to fully grasp how environmental catastrophes have an even more severe impact on underprivileged communities. In this respect, the authors enhance the debate on environmental justice with these storytelling strategies. Every novel is about the junction between environmental degradation and poverty, inequality, injustice- which means the readers have to come up with policies that protect both humanity as a whole, but especially those people who rely on nature for their living in particular (the poor or uneducated). Their incorporation of environmental justice concerns into these literary criticisms enriches our understanding of the complex relationship between humans and their environment. This also shows that literature can change society's take on sustainability and fairness, pressuring society to seek a way out of basic environmental as well as social problems.

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