



DEFORESTATION, FLOODS, AND LOSS: AN ECOCRITICAL ANALYSIS OF SUFIA HUMAYUN'S FICTION

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Abstract

With the rapid change in climate in Pakistan, we see the violent side of nature in the form of floods resulting in loss and trauma for many people. Pakistani fiction writers are sensitive towards the menace of climate change. One such writer is Sufia Humayun. Her debut collection of short stories *Shattered Echoes* (2024) begins with a short story, *Under the Currents*, presenting the dark side of Nature because of human's carelessness by cutting trees and disturbing environment. Therefore, the article explores how the story represents the changing relationship between humans and water after climate change, and how rain and flood become symbols of loss and trauma in the lives of the characters. The study is qualitative in nature and employs Greenham's (2018) six levels of close reading to analyze the excerpts. Ecocriticism, with special reference to the work of Buell (1995), serves as the theoretical framework. The study also employs Rob Nixon's concept of "slow violence" (2011, 2022) as a complementary theoretical framework within ecocriticism to reveal how decades of gradual deforestation culminate in spectacular, traumatic floods. Key findings illustrate that water, once a source of joy and celebration, has turned into a destructive force. Rain is no longer seasonal or life-giving; it appears endless, violent, and deadly. The story repeatedly presents flooded villages, uprooted trees, contaminated lakes at mountain tops, and bodies surrounded by water that cannot be drunk. Memory itself is now shaped by cycles of flood and drought. The characters suffer heavy mental and physical losses as a result. The study concludes that when humans disturb the nature, they also face the consequences in the shape of death and destruction. Reading the story with an ecocritical approach helps readers understand how environmental damage affects daily life, emotions, and cultural practices in South Asian contexts

Keywords: *Under The Current, Ecocriticism, Environment, Floods, Nature, Loss, Trauma*

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1. Introduction

Climate change is a growing environmental threat to Pakistan, and floods have become a consistent intervention that transforms the environment and peoples (Arif & Mahsud, 2024). The 2022 floods have displaced more than 33 million and resulted in over 30 billion dollars in economic losses, which have been increased by comparable disasters in 2023 and 2024 and have made both rural and urban areas susceptible (World Weather Attribution, 2025). The causes of these disasters include the increased monsoon precipitation, melting of glaciers in the Hindu Kush, and deforestation which is washing off natural defenses against water flows. Literary reactions to these crises can provide a prism to look at the interactions between humans and nature and especially in South Asia where colonial traditions and accelerated industrialization increase ecological pressures. The first collection by the Sufia Humayun is *Shattered Echoes* (2024), where the author focuses on this dynamic with the help of the opening story, *Under the Currents*, in which the village is drowned in floods due to the indiscriminate cutting of trees without caring about the consequences of this process. The characters are depicted to lose their way navigating their lives into oblivion, and the water, which was an instrument of life, becomes a source of trauma, which is also a larger trend in Pakistani fiction that addresses the issue of environmental ignorance.

Ecocriticism offers a method to deconstruct these representations with the focus on the contribution of literature towards showing the outcomes of anthropogenic intrusion. The field, which began as a reaction to environmental degradation in the 1990s, has spiraled to meet global inequalities in impacts of climate (Buell, 2005). The most recent research emphasizes texts of the Global South as a way of disrupting Western-constructed perceptions of nature, which anticipates the localized knowledge and colonial practices of extracting resources (Huggan and Tiffin, 2020). Floods in Pakistan are not only a sign of a system malfunction, such as poor infrastructure and a lack of policy that lets down the

less privileged groups, mostly rural women and farmers (Khan et al., 2025). The narrative of Humayun is not an exception to this trend, as the process of deforestation causes a whole chain of devastation: uprooted trees block waterways, rain becomes unstoppable, and the sources being polluted make survival a dangerous matter. These descriptions resonate with the results of research on the 2022 floods which correlate land-use alterations with an increased risk of floods in Punjab and Sindh provinces (Qamer et al., 2023).

The human price in *Under the Currents* does not just limit to physical devastation but also to mental wounds, as people have difficulties in remembering events splintered between floods and draughts. This is similar to empirical studies of the aftermath of flood trauma in Pakistan, where people report to have continued anxiety related to environmental instability (Hussain et al., 2022). According to ecocritics, such literature as that of Humayun creates empathy by reflecting such experiences, and readers should reconsider the anthropocentric priorities (Nixon, 2022). The idea of slow violence by Rob Nixon is quite appropriate in this case because the narrative reveals a slow poisoning of the environment in the form of decades of logging and soil erosion, which breaks into overt disaster, and is not even properly acknowledged by people because of the desire to witness the spectacular (Nixon, 2011; revised in 2022 editions). Humayun criticizes the irresponsibility that turns into seasonal precipitation the fatal floods, by contrasting personal stories with the environmental history, a motif familiar to South Asian cli-fi which is both realistic and speculative in its cautionary messages.

The symbolic development of water in the text is an area that deserves thorough examination because it becomes a source of community celebration and then of seclusion and loneliness that kills hope. After being the center of festivals and fields, rain is now a surprise that occasionally lands in the houses and leaves carcasses in the undrinkable pits, a dramatic contrast recorded in the local flood novels (Kaze, 2020). This change highlights the emphasis of ecocriticism on relational ethics, in which human activities have a feedback on themselves through disturbed ecosystems (Heise, 2021). The sense of place in urbanizing Asia by Ursula K. Heise throws light on the negotiation at the intersection of local affections and global circulations as characters in *Under the Currents* lament the

loss of village with aid-dependent futures. The latest studies of Pakistani fiction affirm it by revealing how water motifs are employed by authors to criticize development models that focus on short-term profitability instead of sustainability (Safi and Khan, 2025).

The character of Humayun also appeals to the postcolonial ecocriticism that faults the way imperial resource appropriations like the canal systems of the British era have placed Pakistan in the hydrology of floods (Huggan & Tiffin, 2020). These histories are brought to mind by the story of the polluted mountain lakes, in which the colonial engineering disrupted watersheds, which further increased vulnerabilities in the modern period. According to academic authors, such accounts do not exoticize nature as passive, they make nature a force involved in human activity (Huggan, 2023). In the empirical ecocriticism, it has been established that the mentions of such a type of text help to change the readers attitude towards conservation, and the surveys indicate that flood-based stories promote reforestation more (Malecki et al., 2025). Matthew Schneider-Mayerson study of affective responses shows that graphic portrayals of trauma- drowned livestock, silt-choked fields will create moral urgency, and the call upon policy change in flood-affected areas.

Theoretical instruments also add detail to the analysis of *Under the Currents*. The framework of environmental imagination developed by Lawrence Buell challenges the ability of a text to create ecological consciousness by being held to two responsibilities: one to aesthetic art, and another to the real world (Buell, 2005; reconsidered in Heise et al., 2021). This test is passed by the story as it engages in the lyrical depictions of swirling currents and factual acknowledgment of the impact of deforestation, which fits the criteria of literature that reaches an agreement of imagination and activism in what Buell suggests. To supplement this, the six levels of close reading that David Greenham contends on, including linguistic, structural, contextual, intertextual, ethical, and ecological layers, can be used to dissect the working of the flood imagery (Greenham, 2018). The recurring patterns of endless downpour are expressions of inevitability at the linguistic level; the overlapping of time is determined by non-linear flashbacks, which trace the temporal

compression of trauma, and finally, they refer to the 2022 floods in Pakistan, making fiction rooted in the past.

This method shows more in-depth overlaps between the environment and identity. The lives of characters are deprived of homes, relatives, means of earning their living, the gender relations collide, with women having to do most work to replace them, which is also reflected in post-flood ethnographies (Feder, 2020). How biology and narrative are intertwined to draw ecological information by Helena Feder emphasizes the need to enliven the discourse on climatic issues that tend to move in an abstract way. In addition, the material ecocriticism of Serenella Iovino does not see water as metaphor but as a narrated agent with toxins and histories, which narrates human folly (Iovino, 2022). This is symbolized in the Humayun narrative in the form of floodwaters that eradicate the separation of bodies and bio-sphere, a theme that criticizes the unbalanced adaptation initiatives in Pakistan (Mukhtar et al., 2025).

The bigger picture can be seen in South Asian literature, in which ecocriticism is having to deal with forms of hybridization between oral traditions and world genres (Oppermann & Slovic, 2023). The material feminist lens of Serpil Oppermann emphasizes the role of the women voice in the narrative of floods reclaims agency in the face of erasure as is reflected in the silent determination of the main character in the devastation. This possibility is confirmed in empirical research: those who read such literature note an increase in environmental concern, especially among demographics at risk in case of floods (Schneider-Mayerson et al., 2020). Nevertheless, there are still issues, such as availability of variety of voices in the English-language publishing that threatens to marginalize the regional dialects that inscribe region-specific ecologies.

So, *Under the Currents* is an example of how Pakistani fiction addresses climatic realities, and personal sorrow is turned into collective blame. It sheds light on ecocritical reading proposing ways to reforest resilience and offer fair assistance, preserving culture and cautioning against the cost of inaction. This paper therefore adds to the current discussions on the role of literature in climate justice, which should continue to pay careful attention to the peripheral voices.

1.1. Research Objectives

- 1) To examine the transformation of water from a life-sustaining element to a destructive symbol in *Under the Currents*, highlighting its role in signifying human-induced environmental disruption.
- 2) To analyze how flood and drought cycles in the story embody characters' experiences of loss and trauma, drawing on ecocritical perspectives to reveal impacts on memory and community in a Pakistani context.

2. Literature Review

Nazir (2025) argues that Ecocriticism has become prominent in literary studies as a way of questioning the interactions between human discourses and environmental conditions especially in areas characterized by historical exploitation. This methodology is useful to South Asian literature to demonstrate the impact of colonial past on agrarian societies where ecological disasters like floods are experienced in order to amplify the current ecological crises. Conversely, recent scholarship underlines the necessity of structures that can combine postcolonial discussions and environmental issues to the exclusion of Western forms of nature writing. As an example, the research of postcolonial ecocriticism involves considering texts in Pakistan and India in the context of their depiction of water as a space of social inequality, rather than as a space of social inequality. This discipline throws down a challenge to anthropocentric readings to emphasize the material impacts of imperialism on landscapes, rivers and monsoons bear the signs of dispossession. The *Under the Currents* by Sufia Humayun is not an exception as floodwaters are portrayed as the force of revenge against the deforestation process, bringing the larger South Asian themes of nature taking revenge over the human pride.

An early groundwork in this field has been done by scholars such as Mukherjee (2023), who has developed the argument that postcolonial conditions require an eco-materialist approach that takes into consideration disproportionate development. In his review of the Indian novels, Mukherjee reveals how literary images of contaminated rivers are expressions of gradual disenfranchisement under neoliberal policies. This view is also

applicable to Pakistani fiction, in which floods refer to the incompleteness of irrigation schemes of the partition days, which tore up watersheds. It is furthered in the story of Humayun to show how the polluted lakes on top of mountains are a reminder of the forgotten colonial engineering practices that are turning the sacred places into poisonous relics. This kind of story does not allow a romantic vision of nature, but it preempts the work of rural people who are the ones who suffer these changes. The text is also in line with Mukherjee who wants literature to account the material flows of capital and contamination across borders by a personal loss that is combined with the ecological devastation.

The Tidalectics by DeLaughter (2024) provides a very impressive framework to consider these watery narratives based on the assumption of the oceanic rhythms, which undermine linear histories of progress. Her analysis of the Caribbean and Pacific literature to the South Asian setting in which flood patterns in literary works such as Humayun are used to destabilize modernization teleological plots. The story shows how the memories of characters are torn to pieces when they experience a recurrent flooding as a way of recollecting past experiences, which reminds DeLoughrey of the concept of the wave of temporality, which erodes colonial chronologies. In this method, the Pakistani fiction employs water to re-establish native time-interval systems, including those of the moon, based on river highs and lows, in opposition to the grid of British hydrology. Due to the emphasis on sensory experience of submersion, the story of Humayun promotes an ecocritical tidal reading that would require ecocritics to see submersion as loss and possible reconnection.

The intersectional theme of floods is also reflected in the Pakistani literature of floods as discussed by Waqar and others (2024) that the destruction of the environment exacerbates psychological disintegration within the community. Frequent flooding in fiction is not a one time event but an accumulation of hurts which connects the physical movement to the emotional discontinuity. The lingering terror of monsoon seasons is reflected in Humayun where survivors tour silt-filled villages filled with drowned relatives in the story. The presentation is based on the ethnographic reports about the post-flood

anxiety, during which the sound of rain evokes hypervigilance even after the waters have subsided. Ecocriticism in this case becomes a bridge between the literary form and the lived experience as the disorientation of the recollection of trauma is reflected in non-linear storytelling of flashbacks through ascending currents. Floods are socio-ecological indictments of state responses that put infrastructure ahead of mental health, which has been criticized in such texts.

The idea of slow violence through the lens of Nixon allows one to unravel this traumatic stratification to highlight traumas that accumulate over time but cause devastation (Nixon, 2022). In the case of Pakistani floods, the framework created by Nixon throws a lot of light on how years of logging and dam construction lead to severe disasters that go unnoticed until they strike. In *Under the Currents*, the slow cutting down of trees is a precursor of the destructive force of flood, which is the attrition of the rural spirit. Nixon believes that literature is a response to this invisibility, and that it speaks to the preempted and Humayun achieves this by having characters oral histories of pre-flood harmony. This does not just write down ecological amnesia, but also opposes discourses of victim blaming where violence is attributed to policy failures via colonial seizures of resources. The observations of Nixon would therefore add value to the interpretation of South Asian fiction where trauma can be seen as a common human-nonhuman disease.

These analyses are further enhanced by Postcolonial ecocriticism that handles the gender aspect in the flood narratives wherein women are usually at the center of the loss. In Pakistani fiction, female characters often have to bear the two-fold weight of domestic destruction and environmental legacy their bodies become the places where the metaphor of inundation is displayed. The main characters of Humayun, such as the protagonists, lament about lost hearths on top of picking up the seeds amid the rubble, shedding light on the gendered disparity of disaster healing. This depiction is a criticism of patriarchal land tenure where women are not involved in the decision-making process relating to the resources, which further leads to the exposition of women to the polluted waters. Ecofeminist readings show the floods of bodily and earthly violations, silt-filled wombs, and eroded fields and demands a reassessment of agency in the time of crisis.

The entanglements are highlighted in the exploration of place and postcolonial ecofeminism through the Pakistani female fiction discussed by Rahman (2023), which demonstrates how the landscape can be used to record the history of resistance that is gendered. This is demonstrated in the case of Rahman through her analysis of both cinematic and literary works to show how the deltas (prone to floods) are used to reclaim matrilineal ecologies, which supersede colonial mappings, which marginalized indigenous women. In the context of Humayun this is represented in the form of the lamenting of women amid the destruction, and passive victimhood is converted into subversion as evidence. The argument that Rahman presents is that these narratives promote eco-locational feminism, in which place-based knowledge is empowered despite being erased. The story is consistent with the ecocriticism advocated by Rahman to listen to smaller voices, to make the personal mourning resonate with the collective activism of the sustainable futures by centering relationships of women and water: the ritual of bathing has become dangerous.

The material ecocriticism framework of Iovino (2024) sheds some light on this, which views matter as storytelling and infused with an ethical narrative. The interpretation of Iovino of Mediterranean waters, into a translation of South Asian monsoons, is that toxic sediments in the lakes of Humayun carry colonial pesticides and contemporary plastics. She claims that literature reveals those narratives, and contributes to the sense of responsibility by immersing oneself in the fantasy. The impossibility to drink the blood of bodies in the story reminds me of the Iovino concept of the toxic sublime, which is beauty but a beauty in which you must be ready to face danger. This method builds on the postcolonial readings by posing water as a postcolonial subject, which has the blemishes of a partition and requires restitutive flows.

Material feminist ecocriticism has been developed by Oppermann (2023) where he highlights this archival role and considers the narratives as co-emergent with the environments. The study by Oppermann of Turkish landscapes compares to the South Asian oralities where south Asian women sing about rivers, and their songs interlace with water agencies to subvert dualisms. *Under the Currents*, silences caused by floods are

replaced by the voices that emerge, which corresponds to the idea of Oppermann about storied matter, which cannot be erased. Foregrounding such traditions, the story is a critique of development discourses, which is silent about indigenous knowledges, and this essay proposes the ecocriticism of development, which respects narrative multiplicity in postcolonial recovery.

Green studies postcolonial criticism of this commodification by Huggan (2024) examines the environmental narrative that manages to maneuver around the market logics. The deconstruction of eco-tourism by Huggan in South Asian writings is echoed by the same in Humayun with contaminated idyllic villages turning into rubble. He cautions against the greenwashing aestheticizing crisis, which is a trap that the story is not guilty of because loss has its basis in lived work. The framework by Huggan then informs the readings on the connection between flood and world inequities, and calls literature to intervening in such myths of sustainable development.

Rewzana and Pain (2023) note that where there are overlaps between class and caste in flood trauma, stratified exposures manifest, with the marginalized population being disproportionately submerged. Landless workers in Pakistani fiction have to cross toxic floods as the elites are in highlands, which can be traced back to the feudal structure. This is embodied in the story of Humayun where some of the characters roam in areas that have been abandoned by the elite, and their defeats go unchecked. Ecocriticism in this case questions how literature exaggerates subaltern ecologies, confronting universalist environmentalisms.

These stratifications are tackled through the sense of place in globalizing Asia by Heise (2023), which promoted ecological cosmopolitanism to scale the local attachments up to the transnational level. Heise is also urban in his interest in rural floods, though the villagers of Humayun are negotiating place in the displacement. She states that texts create networked consciousness whereby Punjab of silt is interconnected to the glaciers of the Himalays. This view serves as an addition to the representation of fractures in the community in the story, and literature acts as a mediator between personal lives of isolation and alienation and the collective life of the planet.

The book by Clark (2024), the ethics of ecocriticism, discusses this demand by asking whether or not literature admits of creating scales of harm that are unthinkable. The insights of Clark with regard to the Anthropocene aesthetics are applicable also to the flood scenes whereby the rain never stops, and a story cannot be told. He conceives reading as an ethical act that addresses the problem of the scale vertigo, which Humayun faces in the form of intimately crafted vignettes. The work by Clark therefore presents the text as an ethical call to arms by encouraging the ecocritics to turn empathy into political pressure to repair climate.

These impacts are measured by Schneider-Mayerson, through a survey of the changes in environmental attitudes deployed by texts (Schneider-Mayerson, 2023). His analyses of cli-fi reactions are similar to those of floods, where there is an increased concern after the reading. This, when applied to Humayun, implies that the story could be used to promote the ideology of reforestation. The use of data offered by Schneider-Mayerson justifies the role of literature in affective pedagogy that connects humanities with behavioral change in postcolonial settings.

The climate change in literature by Johns-Putra is a study of these projections, which details the temporalization of crisis in literature (Johns-Putra, 2024). Her description of time breakages in South Asian cli-fi is consistent with the Cyclical memories of Humayun where neglect in the past predicts the floods in the future. Johns-Putra presents the prognostic power of fiction to position it as rehearsal of resilience. This puts the story into the context of a hypothetical archive, where there is a threat of emissions going unchecked, and adaptive traditions are still respected.

Comparative ecocriticism, which is endorsed by Bartosch, advances this connection, leading to the rise of the so-called planetary poetics, which decenter Euro-American canons (Bartosch, 2023). In his cross-continental analyses, Bartosch involves South Asian waters, and there is a process of mutual learning in flood management. In the case of Humayun, this shows some affinities to Latin American riverine epics which adds to the interpretations of water as connective tissue. The approach of Bartosch therefore

broadens the textual scope, thus imagining literature as a community of eco-justice in the world.

The postcolonial literature is ecology reclaiming the flood knowledges that were repressed by colonial science. The riverine rituals revisited in Pakistani fiction predict the swells by the migration of birds, as opposed to the technocratic predictions. Humayun incorporates those, with the characters reading currents such as texts, subverting flood as fate.

This erasure is criticized by the indigenous climate justice offered by Whyte, which focuses on the traditional ecological knowledges in the vulnerability assessments (Whyte, 2024). Whyte uses the same approach of settler influences as colonial hydrology in Pakistan, whereby local flood management was replaced by dams. The ritual survivals in the story represent the epistemologies of kinship in Whyte, which is resilient. This prism places Humayun as decolonial praxis, in which ecocriticism gives voice to oppressed individuals to have equal futures.

The disproportions of the anthropocene in South Asian fiction require ecocriticism, expressing an ability to historicize geological agency. Floods are manifested as anthropomorphic phenomena, but the waters are anthropomorphized in texts in order to make nonhuman claims. Line of agency is obliterated as the currents of Humayun speak their warnings.

The provocations of anthropocene put forward by Chakrabarty challenge this scale, putting the centrality of humans into deep time objections (Chakrabarty, 2023). The species-being idea would be relevant to flood groups, in which Pakistani villagers blend with eroded landscapes, as developed by Chakrabarty. He encourages narratives, which recount geological liberties culminating which Humayun does by mythic floods. The structure by Chakrabarty therefore adds some depth to the geological strata of the story, making floods reveal anthropocene reckonings.

Ecocritical readings have implications on policies in which literature guides the adoption of adaptive strategies. Pakistani flood discourses and literature encourage reforestation at community level, which criticizes top-bottom engineering. The request of

the extension of the planting of trees by Humayun is a conversation with policy that transforms fiction into the blue print.

The material ecocriticism of Sullivan is linked with governance, and narratives are considered policy interventions (Sullivan, 2024). The European cases presented by Sullivan also go all the way to South Asia where there are flood stories that are pressurizing inclusive planning. Ethical readings in Humayun provide practical results, such as watershed restoration. The policy-setting role of ecocriticism as an ally in policy-making is the response to a combination of academy and activism that Sullivan offers.

Affective ecocriticism by Mossner is the exploration of the empathetic depth of media, drawing parallels between movies and novels (Weik von Mossner, 2023). Her research on immersive storytelling can be used in flood virals which would make the improvements in the coverage of Humayun. Ecocriticism is conceived by Weik von Mossner as the practice of cross-media as multimodal affects build resilience. Such futuristic orientation does make the field vital in the digital postcolonial terrains.

The literature review supports the power of ecocriticism in the unpacking of *Under the Currents*. Mukherjee is materialistic and Weik von Mossner is affective, scholars shed light on how floods are relationships between loss and possibility. Pakistani fiction therefore becomes an important witness, calling forth the continued academic interest to the ecological justice.

3. Methodology

The research design adopted in this study is a qualitative one that aims at discussing how the environmental crisis is represented in the short story *Under the Currents* by Sufia Humayun. Qualitative approaches are appropriate to the interpretative needs of literary analysis, especially when the character of the analysis is on symbolic change, trauma, and the relationship between people and nature. The main method is the close reading of the chosen text pieces which describe water, rain, floods and after effects. The identification of these passages depends on the purposive sampling, whereby the most important moments are those in which nature is transformed into something destructive, as well as

those in which the characters describe the loss. The production of data is achieved by repetition of reading, marking of recurring patterns (endless rain, uprooted trees, undrinkable water, submerged bodies), and following the narrative role of these devices. The process of interpretation is inductive and the meaning patterns are developed out of the text as opposed to applying external categories. In order to guarantee rigour, the analysis is carried out in a systematic protocol based on the six levels of close reading introduced by Greenham (2018), including linguistic, structural, contextual, intertextual, ethical, and ecological. Each tier is used progressively on the same excerpts yielding stratified findings that remain based on textual evidence. Validation is ensured with the help of transparent recording of interpretive moves and the constant appeal to the original source (Richards, 2023; Felski, 2020).

4. Theoretical Framework

It is grounded in ecocriticism, and especially utilizes widely accepted criteria of environmentally oriented literature established by Lawrence Buell. According to Buell (1995, 2005), true ecocritical texts are distinguished by four characteristics which include attention to nonhuman environment as presence and not a background; attention to human responsibility to the environment; attention to environmental process and not an environmental object; ethical stance that challenge human values as the only source of value. *Under the Currents* meets these requirements by describing water as a dynamic entity, which reacts to deforestation, preempts human interference in the natural processes, and undermines anthropocentric priorities with the suffering of characters. The framework by Buell, therefore, gives the first prism to determine the environmental orientation of the text.

This is carried over to postcolonial ecocriticism that challenges the nexus of ecological destruction and the past and present of colonial and neocolonial exploitation. According to Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin (2020), imperial resource extraction and its legacies cannot be divorced of environmental crisis in the Global South. Colonial canal systems and dam projects conducted after independence have essentially changed the

riverine ecologies in the Pakistani setting, which generate the very flood vulnerabilities that Humayun talks about. They read such traces of past injustice in the mountain lakes defiled and the waterways choked, on the basis of their approach.

In order to study the particular processes involved in trauma and symbolic reversal, the analysis uses the slow violence concept introduced by Nixon (2011, 2022). According to Nixon, slow violence is the kind of harm that is gradual, attrition-based and is not very noticeable until it explodes to a disastrous effect. The erosion of soil and deforestation are processes that build up over time, but which end abruptly, with the explosion of the flood that pours down the village. This temporal incongruity is the reason why the story swings between drought and flood as well as the incoherent memories of the characters.

5. Analysis

5.1. From Life-Giver to Destroyer: The Symbolic Reversal of Water

The water occupies a central position in the South Asian cultural-ecological stories, where in most times it symbolizes renewal and continuity. Floods such as the Indus keep agriculture and rituals going and the monsoons are taking the part of folklore and our day-to-day lives, indicating seasonal renewal. This is the elemental power that supports the existence of humans, and leads to the connection between people and the earth. However, under the influential conditions of increasing speed of climate change, there are significant changes in such symbols. Deforestation, urbanization and global emissions have changed the Hydrological cycles by making predictable rains to be unpredictable deluges that erode these bonds. This tension is often expressed through water motifs in the Pakistani literature and the way colonial histories of extraction and contemporary development drive up vulnerability. According to scholars, South Asian fiction is increasingly reflecting water as an active agent of the human folly, which demonstrates the consequences of broken ecosystems (Monaco, 2024). This dynamic can be understood through the concept of the environmental imagination as suggested by Lawrence Buell who argues that textbooks are able to achieve a dual accountability between aesthetic depth and ethical involvement to the nonhuman world (Buell, 2005). Sufia Humayun concentrates on the subtext of water

in *Under the Currents* to demonstrate that these flows that were initially life-sustaining are now sources of destruction and that deforestation contributes to the power of chaos. This arc, of a nostalgic harmony to the present-day threat, can be traced in the excerpts of the story in accordance with ecocritical demands of literature revealing the anthropocentric overlookings (Heise, 2021).

The passage, “She felt transported to there when a land where the rains used to be celebrated with joy and pakoras over a cup of tea” (Humayun, 2024, p. 2), evokes a prelapsarian era of communal delight. Rain in this case represents plenty, which is connected with the ritualistic senses and social fabrics are interwoven. The ritual of exchanging pakoras in rainy season reminds of monsoon festivals when water feeds both the fields and the spirits. This memory is caused when there is ongoing conflict, which shows how water lost its glory. The framework by Buell sheds light on how these opposites bring about ecological awareness with the readers being called upon to question the divide between the harmony and the discord that now exists (Buell, 2005). These motifs can also be found in South Asian literature such as the novella *The Hungry Tide* by Amitav Ghosh where tidal rhythms previously symbolized the strength, but it now predicts the submersion (Ghosh, 2004). This tradition is continued by Humayun, who employs the concept of nostalgia to criticise human activities such as cutting down trees that wiped soil of its grip to be eroded by rains instead of being enriched. The expression brought there means displacement, not only time-related, but also spatial one because floods literally move lives. The change is an indication of greater disturbance: water, which once acted as the cultural anchor, is being washed away, and this phenomenon is the same as the 2022 floods in Pakistan, which displaced millions of people through an overburdened deforested watershed (World Weather Attribution, 2025). The text is, therefore, the appeal by Buell to texts that engage place-sense of the environment by connecting the personal reverie to the strain of the planet (Buell, 2005). The contrast of happiness and suggested sorrow allows Humayun to criticize the irresponsibility that turns sustenance into jeopardy, and reforestation is a reparation worth consideration.

In the passage, “The rain still coming and the cloth, believe it or not, still wet” (Humayun, 2024, p. 18), water’s persistence borders on the absurd, defying natural rhythms. Clothes, which portray an image of identity and shelter, are still wet, bringing pain into the ordinary. This endless rain denies the cyclical end, but it is a repetitive torture that permeates life. Ecocritics claim that such representations strike against anthropocentric concepts by depicting the revenge of nature against disproportion (Nixon, 2011). The environmental imagination that Buell considers is the strength of a narrative to suggest nonhuman agency, which is accomplished in this case by the voice of rain (Buell, 2005). The feel of not believing it or not expresses the astonishment of human beings in the disobedience of water, a characteristic of climate fiction that the elements are defiant (Monaco, 2024). This reverberates real monsoons magnified by land-use modifications in Pakistani environments where bare hills direct runoff to villages (Qamer et al., 2023). Humayun also uses water used by a life-giver to irrigate crops to serve as a tyrant; the damp water symbolizes destruction everywhere. This has been placed at a cheaper than the rest: roots taken out with axes, make erosion quicker, and gentle showers transformed into sieges. The fact that the passage is short enhances irony because ordinary objects are disloyal to the idea of habitability, which is consistent with the idea of eco-cosmopolitanism described in the text by Heise about associating local floods with global emissions (Heise, 2021). By this, water becomes one of the symbols of reversed dependence, in which human modification comes back as never-ending suffering.

The passage, “Thank God the rain stopped. Still water feels better than the frantic and my friends crossing over the forces the forces of a lake” (Humayun, 2024, p. 20), captures fragile relief amid lingering dread. Stopping is of no good; stagnating bodies are a stay of rest against a frenzy, but both are dreadful. Water splits language in this instance, just as its turbulent stream the pushes the waves of a lake back and forth like an echo, as in accentuating danger. This dynamic to static transformation of the threat is a feature that shows the destructiveness that water has. According to Buell, ecotexts that are effective tend to blur the human-nonhuman line, and this leads into ethical reckoning (Buell, 2005). In Humayun’s rendering, water dissolves distinctions, as friends navigate “forces” that

mimic living adversaries. Such anthropomorphism is frequently used by South Asian cli-fi to criticize the cost of development, as in tidal stories by Ghosh where the waters in the east take control as the habitat is losing (Ghosh, 2016). This fragment is an indication of the anthropogenic chaos: stripped streets give rise to artificial lakes, which entrap the populations in waters where no man belongs. Still water ironically favors the lack of movement over movement, but they both reject the state of normalcy, which is echoed in the testimonies of flood survivors who have reported being psychologically trapped (Hussain et al., 2022). This transformation puts in indictment careless trees that were previously taking in surplus that is no longer there and the water collects and becomes poisonous. This is supported by his contribution to planetary scales, whereby local symbols are compiled into indictments on a global scale (Heise, 2021). Humayun, therefore, uses water as temperature gauge of destabilization, its surface serenity hiding much violent instability.

The image in the passage, “Heyan floated in a lake at a mountain foot water sloshing at the edges” (Humayun, 2024, p. 20), defies topography, positing a lake where none should form. Mountains, bastions of stability, now cradle aberrant waters that “slosh” invasively. This unusual water intrusion upwards is the sign of landscape inversion in which elevation is no protection. The dual responsibility of Buell is expressed through the rawness of the scene which makes ecological fact the basis of surrealism (Buell, 2005). The feeling of floating is one of vulnerability, floating bodies in unnatural spaces created by excess. Anomalous waters are used in regional fiction to criticize hydrological interference which is similar to Roy dams in *The God of Small Things* that give birth to artificial floods (Roy, 1997). In this case, the speed of siltation is increased by deforestation, giving birth to highland lakes, which pollute sources (Monaco, 2024). Sloshing on the edges implies threatening containment, water experimenting limits such as a cage force. This text turns life-giving mountain springs into rivers, purity to turbidity. The slow violence by Nixon explains the history: the gradual process of losing trees leads to the acute -flooding, and it is usually not noticed until the disaster strikes (Nixon, 2011). The symbol of Humayun therefore reveals the magnitude of disturbance, of felled tree

trunks, floating relatives, and it calls upon the futures envisioned by Buell of restoration repairing divisions (Buell, 2005). Water, her vein that used to be, is her hemorrhage.

The passage, “When Kiran woke up to find that it had stopped raining, submerged and exhausted in the rain...” Composed of awakening and immersion, the cessation of rain is ridiculed by leftover engulfment (Humayun, 2024, p. 13). “Submerged... in the rain” paradoxes end and persistence, bodies as extensions of the element. This effect of blurring is what dissolves the corporeal autonomy, water intruding into the flesh and exhaustion. Such mergers are considered material entanglement by ecocriticism and the challenge to dualisms (Iovino, 2022). The ethical charge that Buell uses his lens to bring out the passage is weariness not only physical but also existential, brought about by excess (Buell, 2005). Submergence motifs in the Pakistani tales follow the flood traumas, in which waters survive storms (Kohari, 2022). This is compounded by the process of deforestation as the pools of water accumulate in the lowlands covering the living. The wakefulness of Kiran with deluge is a symbol of interrupted cycles rain as an intruder is not a visitor, as Heise, in her eco-urban flows, where country innocence collides with the world in excess (Heise, 2021). The ellipsis as of a fading away to ambiguity, the heritage of water stays like an unspoken accusation. This final upside down twist where the thirst is cooled down to drowning breath encapsulates the human guiltiness since without forests, the water will not be tamed. The symbol of Humayun therefore initiates the imagination of Buell, who fancied the responsibility of narrative submersion (Buell, 2005). Throughout these lines, the arc of water that is both ally and antagonist reveals the human causes of disruption forcing an ethical re-alignment.

As the *Under the Currents* analysis shows, it is possible to note that water experiences a total symbolic turnaround in the story. What used to be seen as the source of life, fertility and community celebration have now become the source of destruction, contamination and isolation. The change is closely associated with the anthropogenic activity of the natural landscape, especially the massive deforestation that used to balance the absorption and runoff of rainfall. The novel does not portray water as a passive or innocent object but as a force that goes beyond its limits, crosses land and body, home and

nature, innocence and contamination. In this transition, the text relates the degradation of the environment as the transforming factor that renders a primary need into the tool of existential danger, which is a wider trend in the modern Pakistani and South Asian climate-impacted territories where the seasonal rains are no longer predictable and deadly.

5.2. Cycles of Extremes: Flood-Drought Trauma and the Reshaping of Memory and Community

Pakistan has its share of cyclical extremes of flood and drought, and in this situation, monsoons fill to burst and drier winds desiccate the land. These trends amplified by climate change interweave with social processes of division and distribution of power, forming group minds. The region literature tends to transfer these rhythms into the individual stories exposing the ways in which elemental oscillations dismantle identities and relationships. Ecocritics emphasize that such cycles embody “slow violence,” where incremental harms accumulate into profound dislocations (Nixon, 2011). Floods represent sudden disruptions, and droughts represent continuous gaps in the Pakistani fiction, both leaving a traumatic mark on the land of the memory. Buell’s environmental imagination underscores literature’s capacity to “storied” these losses, weaving nonhuman forces into human chronicles to foster resilience (Buell, 2005). *Under the Currents* makes use of this, describing circles that write histories of grief, disintegrate communities, carving marks that cannot be washed out. In fragments, the excerpts break this embodiment, beginning with bodily infiltrations, by mnemonic binarities, exposing ecological and cultural wounds in South Asia that are combined (Monaco, 2024).

The passage, “its roots which were hanging loose through the branches almost touching space” (Humayun, 2024, p. 15), depicts a tree’s demise as prelude to watery havoc. Roots, anchors of earth, hang in the sky, causing the normal to turn into the abnormal. This forest trauma is a premonition of floods since bare hills are prone to erosion. Ecocritically, uprooted forms are community disintegration, in which the failure of nature is a reflection of social disintegration (Heise, 2021). The nonhuman narration of the passage, as emphasized by Buell, is accompanied by roots that touch the space and create alienation with the universe (Buell, 2005). According to Pakistani folklore, trees

represent heritage, and their death is relative to the ancestral death in floods that engulfed households. The photo represents the drought-flood alternation: dry soil dries and breaks under the axe, anticipating storms which loosen up the debris. The trauma of characters manifests in this gap, green buffer loss corresponds to bare life, which was observed in 2022 in flooding, which cut down settlements (Kohari, 2022). Drooping freely also signifies precariousness, hanging as displaced souls, which affects the memory in visual haunts. The prelude is the slow violence of Nixon: the creeping, which allows the rush of flood, traumatizing by anticipation (Nixon, 2011). Humayun therefore connects the processes of elements with the processes of the psyche, their societies that ghost after ghost with soil, tales, alliance now displaced by the flood of water.

The passage, “in 2007, the year monsoon rains had stiffened a lot. They flooded her own vision... It was either that or floods” (Humayun, 2024, p. 22), temporalizes trauma, monsoons stiffening into rigid invaders that blur sight. The flooding of vision suggests the perception overload, the downpour of the clarity by the cloud of the degree of the indefiniteness. The mnemonic hijacking of the past is represented by this cycle of droughts giving way to the monsoons which is refracted by extremes. According to Buell, textual works such as this one develop otherness identification; nonhuman rhythms require narrative space (Buell, 2005). Sternified rains become the seasonal colonial famines made climatic in South Asian fiction, as Ghosh makes them in his hypothetical histories (Ghosh, 2016). The repetition was either that or floods polarizes life, drought-flood in the same inalienable extremes, loss of moderation. It is in this erasure that the trauma of characters is deposited: 2007 is not a step forward but a turnaround point, images buried in constant floods that inundate individuality (Hussain et al., 2022). The ecocritical perspectives look at this as the dissolution of communities, floods that leave those who survive alone, droughts that create scarcity competitions (Monaco, 2024). It is expanded by Heise, which is his global sense of place, and cycles of personal haze all the way to changes in the Indus Basin (Heise, 2021). Humayun’s passage reveals impacts: memory, once linear, cycles chaotically, communities fragmented by waters that “stiffen” bonds into survival pacts.

The passage, “Dad had died with the sun-blinded in July flooded or vomiting blood with the black-died hands and parched earth. It was either that or floods” (Humayun, 2024, p. 22), extremes converge in paternal demise sun’s blaze or flood’s swell, both lethal. Scorched, desiccating earth, black-died hands through scorched labor, and drowning, counterpoint floods all suggest desiccation and drowning respectively. This ambisexuality represents bodily trauma, body is a battlefield of cycles. The violence revealed by Nixon includes attrition heat and hydraulic fury both of human-enhanced nature (Nixon, 2011). The ethic of passage is challenged by the imaginative side of Buell, whose death binaries compel them to be responsible with respect to vulnerable relatives (Buell, 2005). Family loss is frequently anchored to the element in the Pakistani narratives: the flood songs written after 2010 where dry fields are followed by wet graves (Sultana, 2022). Blood vomiting makes drought visceral and earth replicates viscose in sterility, and floods serve as ghostly alternative. According to Heise, these polarities create eco-anxiety, communities that are torn apart in resource battles (Heise, 2021). Humayun therefore describes cycles as mnemonic builders, loss crystallizing into lore, binding and weighing down, which presents the situation of Pakistan where floods take 1,700 lives annually in a cycle of scarcity (World Weather Attribution, 2025).

The passage, “Water water everywhere. And all the boards did shrink. / Water water everywhere. Nor any drop to drink” (Humayun, 2024, p. 21), alludes to Coleridge, repurposing mariner’s curse for flood’s irony ubiquity without utility. Shrinking boards give the effect of a structural failure where the homes are bowing down due to overburden. This paradox of trauma is expressed in this saturation: in the overflow of loafing the thirst, in the chains not allowing the balance. Ecocritics interpret such cries as intertextual criticism, the plenty of water ridiculing human pride (Iovino, 2022). The dual responsibility of Buell is a beacon, verse with a mixture of literary and ecological reproach (Buell, 2005). Water wars Coleridgean motifs are used in South Asian cli-fi to criticize the scarcity of drinkable water during contamination by flooding the drinking supply (Deckard, 2020). The refrain Water water everywhere is like waves and leaves an ear mark on the memory, groups of people singing survival hymns. No drop to drink means great

loss purity contaminated by silt and sewage, the prelude of droughts magnified. The traces of slow violence in Nixon can be traced back: the upstream logging contaminates the downstream water, trauma built up in the cycle of contamination (Nixon, 2011). Here experiences of characters become solid, separation in abundance shattering unity, with floods separating relatives on boards of decreasing size. The planetary ethic by Heise links this to the inequity of the world with Pakistan taking a hit on the emissions (Heise, 2021). The effects of invasion manifested through Humayun include the overloaded yet water-deprived memory, people lost in the midst of in-potable plenty.

Lastly, the passage, “the palm tree beetles... the cemetery stood the panchayat needed to settle the score by crawling all over him” (Humayun, 2024, pp. 17-18), shifts to drought-fostered infestation, beetles as proxies for neglected balances. Palms shrivel in a drought and release the ghouls to the graves and to the assemblies, crawling up and down his face causing him to lose track of the boundary between death and desecration. This is a manifestation of ecological reaction, vectors of cycle birthing that claims human space. Buell understands such encroachments as nonhuman claims to narrative, which require ethical enlargement (Buell, 2005). The author uses insect surges in Pakistani fiction to signify the underwater aspect of flood-drought, arid lands to give birth to plagues after the flood (Rafat, 2018). The panchaya twist council accountancy through bugs devastates the community rituals, beetles paying what nature requires. The loss is expressed in profanation: cemeteries, the storehouses of memory, run over, turns cycles on reverence, stamps revulsion with its cycles. Nixon explains why it became violent: since deforestation welcomes pests, slow harms which burst in swarming (Nixon, 2011). Touching him everywhere expresses violation, trauma somatic in the way insects reflect flood consumption in both its invasive, both combative. This is seen through the material ecocriticism of Heise as dialogue of the biosphere, communities degradee themselves through nonhuman agency (Heise, 2021). Humayun therefore reveals effects: recollection trapped in infestation, solidarity decadentized in collective spleen, cycles creating girding but scarred Pakistani in the unstable climatic condition.

The second significant revelation is the manner in which the repetition cycles of floods and droughts transform the personal memory and the group identity. The story creates a traumatic dichotomy whereby characters no longer perceive weather as change within a steady force but as a movement between two kinds of death drowning or drying up. These extremes overwrite personal histories, lineages and cultural practices and generate a collective memory that has ceased to be based on continuity or celebration and is now the story of repeated loss and survival. Lack of the ecological balance is directly transferred into the realm of psychological and social disintegration: the relationships become weaker under the pressure of the state of constant crisis, the traditional knowledge becomes less relevant, and the future imagination is restricted by the necessity to repeat. The narrative, therefore, shows how climatic instability within a deforested environment creates a lasting trauma that recounts the personal consciousness and the societal unity within the rural Pakistani situations.

6. Conclusion

The motif of the lifeliving water that has long been common to South Asian tradition, *Under the Currents* by Sufia Humayun is changed into a sharp symbol of environmental revenge and general sorrow. The story makes human insensitivity toward forests directly responsible to the disastrous effect by following the reversal of the rain of celebration to catastrophe and exposes the traumatizing switching of the flood and drought. The story accomplishes what Buell (2005) calls true environmental imagination: it does not attempt to separate aesthetic form and ethical urgency, and it makes readers perceive the material effects of the disturbance to the environment in daily life, bodies, and memories. Within the larger frame of Pakistani literature in reaction to climate crisis, the text demands that preservation of the state of tree cover, water cycles and cultural continuity should start with recognition of loss. *Under the Currents* is lamentation and at the same time silent request: until the relationship between human necessity and nature is restored, no village and no story will have been spared.

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