

Toxic Discourse: Hegemonic Oppression and Environmental Disequilibrium

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Abstract

*With ecological changes taking place at a very fast pace and affecting all forms of lives on earth, Pakistani writers have also begun to address how human activities, especially humans' exercise of power for grabbing resources and territories on earth, has done irreparable damage to our environment. This paper reflects on the environmental crisis that the selected novels hint at. The theoretical stance of the study is informed by Lawrence Buell's theory of Toxic Discourse. Making use of textual analysis as a research method, the study attempts to examine Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography* (2001) and Uzma Aslam Khan's *Trespassing* (2003). Elements of toxic discourse have been highlighted which are the outcome of different forms of hegemonic oppression. The analysis provides substantial evidence of falling apart environs that ground David and Goliath's situation.*

Keywords: hegemonic oppression, toxic discourse, ecocriticism, Lawrence Buell

1. Introduction

Due to its close relationship to science of ecology, ecocriticism as a literary theory transgresses disciplinary boundaries by bringing closer the world of literature and the environment in which we live. Contemporary writers put their share along with literary theorists by exposing the environmental problems, the threats that they pose to living beings, their causes as well as their possible solutions. Greg Gerrard opines that ecocriticism aims to seek a synthesis of ecological and social concerns (4). Environmental contamination and deterioration is taking place globally due to which we are witnessing severe climatic changes. A disintegrated ecosystem has become an uproar affair and needs our attention. Besides adverse climatic changes, a decaying environment results in the loss of many precious species of flora and fauna. This is a serious case in which

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we are facing not only economic losses but also losing the battle for our survival. Thus, any oppression done toward the environment leads to a toxic environment to live in. The present research aims to apply the Ecocritical theory to dig out the implied notion of Toxic Discourse which springs out as a consequence of social injustices and war. The focus of the study is primarily to analyze the hegemonic oppression in different forms to bring into light the elements of toxic discourse.

1.1 Research Questions

- What is the nature of the hegemonic oppression presented in the selected novels in the context of the environmental crisis?
- How do four major aspects of Toxic Discourse spring out from hegemonic oppression?

The critical reading of the selected novels is very important, especially in terms of how they exhibit the notion of David and Goliath through a hegemonically oppressed environment. Although the trend of exploring ecocriticism is gradually rising, yet there is much to consider from the ongoing struggle of David and Goliath. This requires a more in-depth investigation, especially considering the environment of Pakistan. Therefore, this study contributes to the growing trend of exploring slow violence against the ecology in the context of Pakistan through the study of two selected novels, *Kartography* by Kamila Shamsie and *Trespassing* by Uzma Aslam Khan.

2. Literature Review

The starting point of ecocriticism as a literary theory is the 1990's, and since then, many efforts have been put into raising awareness about ecological concerns. Pakistani writers have also endeavored to address the issue of ecology. One way in which environmental concerns are brought to the fore is known as the concept of "complex pastoral". Alana Fletcher has defined complex pastoralism in the light of Lawrence Buell's toxic discourse as a text that "inculcates environmental awareness through images of toxified spaces, places and bodies" (5). Lawrence Buell's complex pastoralism is born out of social inequalities and discriminations as he has mentioned in his book *Writing for an Endangered World* (2001), "all Americans are not being poisoned equally" (32) and this phenomenon is applicable all over the world. There are always two different environments that exist, "environment of the poor" against the rich (34). This kind of social discrimination gives rise to the "us versus them

dichotomy" (Buell 41) which could be the main reason for severe conflicts. Such conflicts might be the main cause of endangered ecologies and ailing human beings. This idea has been studied by Umaira Aleem et al., in their research paper. They study the non- Euro- American settings of Karachi Raj to highlight eco-consciousness. By presenting different environmental issues the stance has been maintained that "man cannot afford to have a bad relationship with the environment" (339). Going a step further, Munazza Yaqoob mentions the harmful effects of pollution on psychological state of the characters in *Moth Smoke* by referring to the "parallel between corrupted environment and corrupted human psyche" (93). She further explains how the characters are out of sync with their environment leading lives as commodities in the industrial city of Lahore. The characters in the novel are "not in alliance with the environment" (Yaqoob 98). Shazia Rahman on the other hand has analyzed *Trespassing* in the light of eco-cosmopolitanism where she discusses Salamat as a confiscated and disengaged Sindhi fisherman because foreign fishing vessels, generally Korean, are overfishing in the oceans with the backing of the Pakistani government. The powerful elite deny him his occupation as a fisherman.. This research informs that nature and marginalized characters and their voices are oppressed and threatened. Saba Pirzadeh has examined how slow violence is being inflicted upon nature in the postcolonial context due to neoliberal development, which actually "promises advancement but introduces more anxieties and crises in the process" for both nature and humans (99). The moral and psychic corruption of character is also "attributed to long-term exposure to a degraded environment" (Pirzadeh 103). Similarly, Muhammad Shoaib, in his paper, has analyzed the effects of war on ecology. By linking the ecological crisis in Kashmir to the backdrop of violence and atrocities, he has mentioned the dangers animals, birds and rives face in the region (77).

The effects of wars, violence, and poor urban planning on ecosystems have been highlighted with reference to *The Book of Gold Leaves*. The threat imposed by pollution on avifauna is also debated and characters are lamenting over destruction which show concern and awareness regarding the environment. The reviewed literature shows that the selected contemporary Pakistani fiction has been studied from social, political and psychological angles. However, seldom has it been discussed from the lens of "toxic discourse" whose exigencies stem heavily from the fast growing industrializing culture (1998, p. 639). The dimension of toxic discourse presented by Lawrence Buell, calls for rethinking of standard expectations

about the environment. This study will identify how hegemonic oppression is leading to the spread of the four elements of toxic discourse as identified by Buell in his theory. By dealing with different forms of hegemony; from technological advancement to proxy war to gorilla war, from colonization to marginalization, from ideal pastoralism to complex pastoralism; this research aims to bring into light the nastiness of hegemonic oppression which is producing and increasing toxicity level and can change the face of the earth from green lands to barren wasteland.

3. Research Methodology

In this qualitative research the selected works have been analyzed through the theoretical lens of Lawrence Buell's notion of toxic discourse within the broader framework of ecocritical literary criticism. Textual analysis has been conducted to highlight various instances of hegemonic oppression that lead to degradation of the environment which in turn disturbs the equilibrium of human and natural life on earth.

"Toxic Discourse" has been defined by Buell as "expressed anxiety arising from the perceived threat of environmental hazard due to chemical modification by the human agency" (*Writing for an Endangered World* 31). In simple words toxic discourse can be defined "as a mode of writing that inculcates environmental awareness through images of toxified spaces, places and bodies (5). Rachael Carson's "Silent Spring" which presents images of birdless and budless season of spring in an American town, worked as the primary inspiration for Buell's theorizing of toxic discourse. Her imagery has been employed by many writers to signal to the impending dangers that nature faces. This signifies a need to converse and reconsider ecological threats. Buell asserted that "the threat of hegemonic oppression is key to toxic discourse" (41). That is why toxic discourse is never hesitant in vocalizing how the government, corporate agencies, and industrialists' greed and efforts to make everything profitable gives rise to the "us-versus-them dichotomy", and "ordinary citizens are victims of military, corporate, and government arrogance" (*Writing* 41). Buell's idea of toxic discourse is unique rhetoric in which he manages the close inspection of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* corresponding to an assortment of different texts from the late Industrial Revolution to the present. He argues that mindless industrialization and the social anxieties that an industrial culture fuels are the primary reasons of creating imbalance and toxicity in the environment of nature which has become deadly for both humans and natural species (Buell 27-31). In his

seminal article “Toxic Discourse” (1998) creates a case that refers to the following four aspects of toxic discourse:

i) Images of Total Pollution: Buell refers to a number of historical events and places such as the Love Canal incident 1978 Niagara, the Exxon Valdez incident 1989 Alaska, Chernobyl Incident 1986 Ukraine, Three Mile Island 1979 Pennsylvania and Bhopal disaster 1984 to comment on how the dumping grounds of industrial waste in the cities are in fact infernos and time-bombs that could ruin the cities with long lasting repercussions on human life and nature.

ii) Contamination of Pastoral Vision: Toxic discourse brings to the light the adulteration of pastoral images; places which once were ideal landscapes but with neglect and human’s insensitive practices towards nature have been turned from “simple to complex pastoral” due to toxic waste. Lawrence Buell refers to the garden in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s famous story “The Rappaccini’s Daughter”, which looks a wonderful place but in reality was a toxic place.

iii) David and Goliath: this aspect is an important part of Buell’s stipulations on Toxic Discourse. “all Americans are not being...poisoned equally” (32). There always exist two different environments which Toxic Discourse addresses, i.e., "environment of the poor vs the rich. He relates it to the theme of social justice highlighting the manipulation of government, corporate sector and industrialists in exacerbating David vs Goliath's binary by oppressing the working class. The social inequality leads to creating the feeling of betrayal where the victims encounter a “rude awakening” (33).

3.4. Gothic elements: Buell refers to images of death, gloom, chaos, and fear along with images of nature to highlight the destruction suffered by the environment and the oppressed segments of the society dwelling in “Virgilian Underworlds” (34). The severity of these images is contained in the birth abnormalities in children, women suffering miscarriages, diseases caused by toxicity in the environment.

This research paper uses the above mentioned framework on toxic discourse by Lawrence Buell to examine how hegemonic oppression is a prominent feature of toxic discourse.

4. Analysis and Discussion

The tug of war between weak and powerful and the problem of hegemonic oppression are highlighted by Lawrence Buell. "The threat of hegemonic oppression is key to toxic discourse" (2001e, p.41). Hegemonic oppression could be practiced in various forms like social discrimination, colonization, marginalization, deprivation from resources and basic rights and so on. These are some of the many conditions that lead to social unrest, wars, civil disobedience and so on. Keeping this in prime focus, different instances from selected novels have been mentioned which accentuate how the weak are marginalized and are direct victims of oppression.

This paper deals with the direct and indirect impacts of hegemonic oppression on ecology. There are instances of ecological destruction due to different forms of hegemonic oppression. Hegemonic oppression manifests itself in different forms in the selected works, i.e., different types of wars are happening (proxy war, civil war, colonial war, guerrilla war, atomic war, and technological war). Most important war is between man and nature which is evident in metropolitan cities. In the race of becoming more advanced and developed, cities have become technodystopia. They present a picture of gray wastelands void of any kind of green patches and one will hardly find references of flora and faunas. Despite such red flags about ecology, only a few of the characters seem to be considerate for the environment. This research paper highlights different forms of oppression exercised on nature and humans alike including the war between man and nature for dominance and survival, to expose how this toxicity is deadly for life of all kinds including that of humans.

Kartography (2002) by Kamila Shamsie is a novel set in Karachi, a lively yet dangerous and complex city, which carries bittersweet memories of events set in the seventies and eighties in the backdrop of the debacle of Dhaka and the ethnic violence in Karachi city. A careful analysis of *Kartography* (2002) reveals contamination of Karachi and its effect on the people of Karachi who lived through years of terror in that metropolitan city. *Trespassing* (2003) by Uzma Aslam Khan, has the gulf war in its backdrop and the effects of war are evident even in Karachi. This novel highlights environmental risks that are responsible for causing environmental disequilibrium.

4.1.1 Contamination of Pastoral Vision

In *Toxic Discourse*, Lawrence Buell quoted President John F. Kennedy's words, i.e., "every inhabitant of this planet must contemplate the day when this planet may no longer be habitable" (p. 39). This is to warn about the rising contamination of ecology and to make us aware of the vanishing ecologies. There are a number of examples in both the selected Pakistani novels to support this argument. For example, sweeping away nature is evident in the metropolitan setting of *Kartography* (2002). The novel takes a start in a garden where Karim and Raheen found a cuttlefish skeleton which portrays the harsh realities surrounding environmental disconcert; one hints at the fact that Karachi is a complex industrial city having an ocean of people and traffic pollution it, thousands of mega structures and encroachments that overshadow and colonize nature, and on top of it political and ethnic unrest contributing to the social and environmental violence. Another reality is that fossilized cuttlefish is a metaphor for dying and endangered ecology in a metropolis. Shamsie in *Kartography* (2002) has presented both rural and urban landscapes to accentuate the tug of war between man and nature for survival. The presentation of lush green rural landscape spreading across acres of land with tall old trees along the roadside of the agricultural city of Rahim Yar Khan is contrasted with the urban setup in the metropolitan city of Karachi that represents traffic smoke, noise and concrete buildings on the sides of the roads. In addition, it projects a picture that if man and nature live in harmony, both will flourish and accommodate each other. But, contrary to Rahim Yar Khan, Karachi is a developed metropolitan city with a vanishing ecology and poor environmental conditions. In Rahim Yar Khan, children "walked past cotton fields, past buffaloes wallowing in pools of water, past goats, past chickens, past grass greener than any green in Karachi. . . Never walked in Karachi. . ." (2002, p. 17). The city-scape in Karachi depicts how man has tried to overshadow nature. Instead of living in harmony with nature, man has exploited nature for his benefits but this attitude backfired and people of Karachi now struggle for clean air and water.

Besides the representation of oppressed and ailing ecology, *Kartography* (2002) also highlights the living conditions of the dwellers of the city pointing to the neglect in management in the development of the city. "Karachi was little more than a cluster of huts within a boundary wall surrounded by marshy ground" (2002, p. 192). Contrasting the past and the present, Shamsie makes one ponder over the neglect of nature and loss of the inhabitants of the city. As the political unrest in the city heightens

the city is no longer safe for its people ". . . gardens too small to properly hide in " (p. 26). It proves that man turns to nature for solace, comfort and refuge. But in the city of Karachi man has not taken care of strengthening the fortress of nature and vegetation around it which has resulted in endangered environment.

Uzma Aslam Khan in *Trespassing* (2003) highlights the way natural landscape has been transformed into an unnatural oppressive environment aesthetically unpleasant and unhealthy for human life: "Sand was replaced by granite, mud with cement, fish with scraps of rubbery mutton. . . Smelled no salt in the air, only smoke and gasses that made his chest burn. The moon was dimmes [sic] by lights thousands of times brighter than those the trawlers [sic] had burned" (p. 126). Besides the lack of natural sight in the landscape Khan weaves the images hinting at technological dystopia sketched out through narration of the growing web of technology which is limiting ecology "the sky was peach-gray pierced by dish antennas, sooty rooftops, and telephone wires. There were hardly any trees" (p.151). "Noise. Always noise. Construction, neighbors, children on the street, generators, loudspeakers. Never a moment of natural silence, the kind in the sunken garden or the cove"(p.312). Khan also mentions the noise pollution caused by traffic, construction machinery and work and the mismanagement and unlawful practices that destroy the peace of the city life, such as excessive use of loudspeakers during political rallies and the noise of generators during power outages. All this leads to a toxic environment that shows that the people are not mindful of the well-being of children, who play in the streets in the absence of parks, which have become a dumping ground for trash or construction material. "Large patches of land where the neighborhood dumped its trash. Polythene bags hung on tree limbs and telephone wires, plugged open gutters, tumbled along driveways"(p.327). The narrow streets are a maze for passersby as they navigate their way through open manholes and hanging cables.

There is no doubt in the fact that growth in the cities is inversely proportional to ecology. As Khan said, turtles and other oceanic creatures started feeling unsafe since the foreign trawlers invaded the coastlines. They used to question themselves, "how much safer it had been when the coastline belonged to fishermen?" (p.1). These lines not only show mourning at the loss of freedom and natural resources but also nostalgia for what once was a comfortable habitat for nature. It also refers to the colonization of nature including the local people who have become

strangers on their own lands and are forced to obey and serve the master. In toxic discourse these sources are identified as “invaders” whose presence and control over the local land leads to “contestation” of “place” (Buell, 1998d, 653).

Uzma Aslam Khan in *Trespassing* (2003) hints at the situation that only the terror of wars but also human negligence towards the falling apart ecology is lamentable: "Youth newly returned from England. . . pointed to the dense smog choking the city and frowned. . . barely twenty years old... Cleaner, and full of promise. Then we got ourselves into a war and we're cut in half" (p.44). The young expatriates returned home, full of promise and hope to build their lives in their homeland but they are filled with a feeling of regret and loss at finding the country in chaos that is ruining the ecology. Not only human life but also marine life is facing threat in the coastal metropolitan city: "Though silt and human waste had destroyed most reefs off Karachi's shore, just around the bend of the inlet was a small forest of coral" (p.45). Civil war created such a situation that an artificial environment is considered as safe and free of violence. People who owned and tended their farms “left the safe environment of the farm, crossed the troubled province” (p. 192) due to unrest and violence of war. Khan hints at the problem of forced migration ignited by war that leads to the refugee crisis. Farmers had to leave their peaceful life on farms due to unrest caused by civil war and live in the congested city that could not bear their burden nor could it provide them a comfortable living.

4.1.2 Images of Total Pollution

Buell explains the second aspect of toxic discourse: images of total pollution, through the example of the Love Canal incident which is linked to “environmentally induced illnesses” among the residents of the place due to the contamination of water (1998d, p. 642) and the concept of betrayed Eden that exposes the illusion of “snug bastions of bourgeois domesticity” which in fact are “suffused with noxious lethal vapors” (p. 647)..These instances also expose the tug of war for dominance and the results of marginalization. The selected novels also exhibit images where one can easily trace hegemonic oppression resulting in marginalization and social unrest which are the root cause of increase in the pollution level in a metropolis. In the war-torn and hegemonically oppressed metropolis, there is no clean air to breathe, noise pollution in the form of the deafening noise of traffic, and no clean rain to enjoy. The race of technological advances have increased the breach between man and nature and between

rich and poor. This technological hegemony is described in *Trespassing* (2003) as; "The sky was peach-gray pierced by dish antennas, sooty rooftops, telephone wires. There were hardly any trees" (Khan, p.151). Khan also mentions the hegemonic oppression that indicates the damage done to the ecosystem, for instance, black rain in Karachi as the result of the bombing of oil refineries in Iraq, "black rain fell. . . Because of the bombed oil fields in Iraq... Soot covered the world and felt like ink. . . Rain destroyed our mulberry trees. . . Ran short of food for silkworms" (p. 343). This is an explicit description of the havoc the Gulf War created for organic life. Furthermore, in *Kartography* (2002), the metropolitan city Karachi is compared with rural area Rahim Yar Khan to measure the harm done by pollution. For example; "Karachi's air was heavy. . . I had to open my mouth and imagine there was a Hoover in my lungs in order to inhale the amount of oxygen that had flowed through my nasal passage with one swift sniff in the rural atmosphere of Rahim Yar Khan" (p.47). This shows how metropolitan cities are turning into living hells due to tug of war between nature and man, ecology and technology, center vs periphery, and so on. To give a graphic representation of pollution in the city, Shamsie paints the picture of traffic on the roads, "Snaked through the congested parts of Karachi with its colorful buses maniacally racing one another" (48). Besides, pollution from factories, traffic and war was causing acid rains that were damaging historical buildings, making the glorious past vanish; as pointed out about the historic Mohatta palace that is turning into "decaying pink building" (Shamsie 2002). Depressing absolute images of neglect and decay appear in the text pointing to the ecological losses, sometimes vocalized by characters in a casual manner. For instance, *Kartography* (2001) takes readers back to 1971 when ". . . they bombed the oil refineries, and the smoke covered the sun, . . . When the bomb fell in the empty plot next door to us, the heat from the blast was so incredible the blades of the ceiling fan in our bedroom curled up like a tulip, and don't you think that would have been worth quite a lot as war memorabilia if I hadn't checked it out? (Shamsie, 2002, p. 228). Furthermore, Zafar wrote an apologetic letter to Maheen in which he mentioned ". . . waiting for a dawn that never came because the oil refineries were bombed and a thick cloud of smoke shut out the sun. We tell these stories and contain the horrors of war into four-line anecdotes that we tell over tea and biscuits" (p. 232). The destruction of the city due to war and terror becomes an item of discussion but not a serious concern for the dwellers. This imagery shows exhibit of power. This is hinted at through a grim image of weapon application on the sea shore, i.e, "Rocket

launchers and gunfire in the boat basin. . . Incredible illumination of the night sky when the rocket launchers exploded" (p. 235). Karachi, the *city of lights*, witnessed a new phenomenon but this illumination is not the sign of progress or development but a sign of danger of war and chaos.

4.1.3 David and Goliath Situation

David and Goliath is an important aspect of Toxic Discourse and this refers to hegemonic oppression and marginalization, emphasizing how ordinary citizens are "victims of military, corporate, and government arrogance" (652). According to Buell, "the threat of hegemonic oppression is key to toxic discourse" (41) as it "carefully preserves an us vs. them binary ... The threat of infringement is fundamental to toxic discourse" (652) There has always been a tug of war between the weak and powerful for representation, proper due rights as human beings, natural resources, and the environment in which they live. The weak segment of the society facing "unwanted industrial encroachment and outside penetration" (647). According to Buell in *Writing for Endangered World* (2001), "All Americans are not being poisoned equally" (2001e, 32), and this phenomenon is applicable all over the world. There are always two different environments that exist, "environmentalism of the poor against the rich" (Buell 34), which leads to serious conflicts. The environment of the poor is colonized by the powerful, and the weak are always marginalized in it despite being the actual owners. As Khan in *Trespassing* (2003) narrates, "coast now belongs to foreign trawlers and sea creatures like turtles are no longer safe. Fishermen start moving to the city" (2). A grim situation is presented where David is the one who is losing the battle. The actual inhabitants have to find new places to live peacefully, or colonizers hire their services, "mother laboured at a shrimp-peeling factory set up by foreigners. . . Five rupees for every kilo of stolen shrimp she cleaned"(124). Also, sea creatures are not feeling safe because fishing is being done on a big scale, and big boats are sailing in the sea. Besides, the seaside is being developed by building highways and factories, making it unsafe, noisy, crowded and polluted for sea creatures. Turtles know that now there is a highway on the shore, and they cannot lay eggs there. Another situation referring to David and Goliath aspect, presented by Shamsie in *Kartography* (2002) is the plight of the poor, the nomads, who were living there for years and had settled there permanently. They were the inhabitants of a place but were treated as untouchables by the villagers. She mentions nomads being treated as "untouchables"... "the nomads could stay as long as they drank water from their own wells, and

did not mix with the villagers" but they cannot have any claim on the land (2002, p. 42). Buell comments on this situation as "a common sense of place and social identity disrupted by the toxic menace" (1998, d, p. 653). Class distribution deprives the poor of basic necessities of life and creates a divide between the environment and natural resources. Moreover, this inhumanity and hegemonic attitude is not a new thing because the powerful seem unconcerned and casual about the ongoing crisis and discuss the miseries of war in the calm lap of nature when "the sun is setting into the sea" (Shamsie 2002, p.145) or "over tea and biscuits" (2002, p.232). For the rich, war is an interesting subject of gossiping to be discussed in social meetings. However, they are not concerned with bloodshed and the surrounding environmental disaster. Buell's claim of two different environments is further justified in *Kartography* (2002) when Raheen wrote to Kareem about Karachi, "Electricity failures and water shortages. Humidity that sheened my skin with sweat, seconds after I stepped out of the air-conditioned car. What water there was, was warm. Electricity repairmen needed police escorts to guard them from Karachiites living in the dark and heat for days at a time" (2003, p. 234). The situation vividly depicts that the rich have their own artificially created environment where they're unable to face severe weather conditions. Such artificially created technological hegemonic utopias are facilitating the rich but are adding to the environmental problems for the poor and creating an unbearable situation for them to live in.

In a David and Goliath situation, a segment of society faces marginalization just like nature. Buell's *Writing for Endangered World* (2001e) has presented the us-versus-them dichotomy (p. 41) and "served versus damned" (p. 44) concepts which are representative of the monopoly of the power to secure their interests without considering the curse they are inflicting on the opposite. Plumwood, in her conversation on reason/nature or human/nature dualism, contends that an idea of a progressive system or "dualistic otherness" is made "by distorting difference" to set up the authority of the privileged (2005, p. 58-59). In this sense, marginalized humans also fall in the category of nature. According to Plumwood, "the category of nature is a field of multiple exclusion and control, not only of non-humans but of various groups of humans and aspects of human life which are cast as nature"(p. 4). Thus keeping in view ideas of both, Buell and Plumwood, in this context some marginalized groups of people and other species of nature can be observed facing a tug of war.

The genesis of marginalization and hegemony, according to Buell, can be the hegemony of military, corporate and government bodies that create an "us-versus-them dichotomy" (Buell, Toxic, 1998, p 41). To serve their purpose and appease their greed they ignite different forms of hegemony and upheave unrest. This claim of Buell is well presented in *Trespassing* (2003), where workers and the environment get affected by the civil unrest or strikes, "The MQM announced a strike. . . Camping of civil unrest. . . Buses were burnt. It was disastrous for both the farm and the mill: the workers would not be able to leave their homes" (Khan, 2003, p. 110). Workers are, of course, those poor people who are earning their bread and butter by working on farms and factories, but if there would be strikes and buses are burnt, then those strikes cause trouble and harm not only the environment but also the working class by confining them in their house. Buell proclaims it "victimhood" of all Virgilian neighborhoods. Critiquing this exploitation and "victimization of the workers" (Toxic, 1998, p. 251) he stresses the need for urban and workplace reforms. Moreover, it was workers who were supposed to feed silkworms. If they are not going to the farm, then it is definite that there would be no or less food for silkworms which will eventually lead to death of the silk worms, reopening the fundamental questions in the ecocritical debate about the interconnectedness and interdependence of species in the ecosystem where the weakest (worms and workers) are exposed to greater threats

4.1.4 Gothic Images (Virgilian Underworld)

In the selected novels *Kartography* (2002) and *Tespassing* (2003), there is evidence of hegemony in different forms that is presented through nature images overshadowed by technological hegemony, lamenting the loss of ecology and men covet to conquer the surroundings at any cost. In such ongoing conditions a gloomy picture arose that grinds to a halt and becomes a Virgilian underworld. Lawrence Buell's Virgilian Underworld is a place that lacks clean water, clean air, clean living place and basic necessities of life, a slum-likepoverty- stricken area that is home of lost souls. Such Virgilian Underworlds are portrayed in *Kartography* (2002) as; ". . . your lungs can't take any more congestion or pollution or stifling newspaper headlines. A pier in the middle of a field that was clearly used on occasion as a rubbish dump should have been absurd, or sad, but instead was suggestive of both constancy and change" (Shamsie, 2002, p. 78). *Kartography* (2002) by presenting Raheen as a mouthpiece in a letter to Karim summarizes the rising situation of pollution and diminishing natural beauty as: "pollution simultaneously chokes you and makes you

gasp at the beauty of unnatural sunset" (p. 248). Similarly, *Trespassing* (2003) has presented an image of Karachi during the monsoon season as "All the roads around him were knee-high in putrid waste. . . For the last twenty-four hours there had been no electricity" (Khan, 2003, p. 299). Situation of the sewer is no better than in those mentioned living areas, "runoff gutter water in his street" (p. 326). Furthermore, deprivation from basic necessities is also evident when Danish and other people jostle in the lines for water in the government office. And this water shortage is not limited to people only, but green plants are also suffering for water which is highlighted by the sad image of "thirsty tree" (p. 392). This is depicting a scenario of mismanagement and unjust oppression from the government. Also, people seem so indifferent about using their living area as a dumping zone of waste and converting it into a slum-like area. Rather than owning and maintaining their living places, people are living like commodities. This carefree attitude is perilous for the ecosystem and adding to displeasure, "large patches of land where the neighborhood dumped its trash. Polythene bags hung on tree limbs and telephone wires, plugged open gutters, tumbled along driveways" (p. 327). Besides this, there is so much noise pollution prevalent in Karachi that one begins to yearn for peace to calm his ear, "Noise. Always noise. Construction, neighbors, children on the street, generators, loudspeakers. Never a moment of natural silence, the kind in the sunken garden. Or the cove" (p. 312). These details highlight that the world of the ones living at the fringes of the social landscape is "Virgilian underworld" as postulated by Lawrence Buell, "slums allegorized...in classic-biblical terms as 'the home of the lost souls'" (Buell, Toxic, 1998, p. 654). The plight of the socially marginalized people is the result of unjust and oppressing hegemony of the powerful. The physical environment has been conceived as a social construct and thus a symptomatic register of political or economic power, or a cite of cultural contestation" (1998, p. 641). Buell sums up the condition of the dwellers of underworld by quoting from DeLillo's *White Noise*, which proves true in the light of the evidence gathered from the selected novels as well, "these things happen to poor who live in exposed areas. Society is set up in such a way that it's the poor and the uneducated who suffer the man impact of natural and man-made disasters" (1985, p. 117).

5. Conclusion

The primary purpose of the ecocritical reading of the selected texts was to explore the link between hegemonic powers, technological hegemony,

marginalization, tug of war between the rich and the poor, and us versus them dichotomy. The study reveals how toxicity and its various elements as mentioned by Lawrence Buell spring out of the issues presented in the selected novels. The analysis highlights the concerns raised by the writers regarding the damages done to the environment for human and nonhuman species alike. Man's inhumanity to and manipulation of nature and natural resources results in damaging the ecosystem. The resourceful and powerful groups are consuming and marginalizing nature as well as people in nature friendly occupation. War and political unrest created further havoc for nature and humans. The study provides understanding of the selected texts from the ecocritical lens of Lawrence Buell that insists on the interdependence of ecocentric and anthropocentric values. The selected texts lament the loss of pastoral but at the same time raise consciousness for devising plans to reverse the damages.

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