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From Nature to Crisis: The Role of Narrative in Shaping Ecological Consciousness

Saima Sajid
Lecturer, Dept. of English, Green International University, Lahore

Khawar Ali
Lecturer, Lahore Garrison University

Abstract

Climate change is not only an environmental or scientific challenge but also a cultural and humanitarian crisis that demands new ways of understanding. Beyond rising temperatures and melting glaciers, vulnerable communities experience the climate crisis as stories of grief, resilience, and memory. Pakistan's disasters show climate injustice, with the Global South suffering from a crisis driven by the Global North. This study uses ecocriticism, trauma, and climate justice to show how literature turns ecological catastrophe into testimony. Narratives ensure that experiences of displacement, inequality, and endurance are not erased but preserved in memory and meaning. Works such as Faiz Ahmed Faiz's revolutionary poetry, Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai's river metaphors, and Uzma Aslam Khan's Thinner Than Skin, read alongside Mohsin Hamid's Exit West and global texts by Amitav Ghosh, Margaret Atwood, and Barbara Kingsolver, position Pakistan's ecological fragility within both local and transnational frameworks. As Schwenkenbecher argues, responses to climate change must extend beyond technical solutions to integrate science with justice, memory, and cultural meaning. Pakistan's floods thus serve not only as evidence of ecological breakdown but also as narratives that humanize catastrophe and call for global solidarity in building a more just and sustainable future.

Keywords: Climate change, flash floods, ecological disaster, narrative, crisis

Introduction

"The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers; —
Little we see in Nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!"
— William Wordsworth, The World is Too Much with Us

Climate change is too often framed through statistics and policy—rising heat levels, retreating glaciers, and increasing carbon output (IPCC, 2023). Yet beyond these figures lies another essential layer: the role of narrative. Shifts in climate are not only tracked through data or rainfall charts; they are lived through memories, symbols, and stories (Ghosh, 2016). Communities interpret ecological disruption through the narratives they create around it (Clark & Yusoff, 2017). Floods, wildfires, and droughts are therefore more than scientific events to be recorded; they are experiences that echo across culture, literature, and imagination (Trexler, 2015). It is in the space where measurement meets memory, and where scientific observation converges with storytelling, that the full gravity of the climate crisis becomes visible (Nixon, 2011).

Nowhere is this reality more apparent than in Pakistan. Consistently ranked among the world's ten most vulnerable countries to climate change, Pakistan has become a site where the abstract warnings of climate models turn into lived catastrophes. The floods of 2010, which submerged nearly one-fifth of the country, the unprecedented deluge of 2022 that displaced more than thirty-three million people, and the recurring monsoon devastations of recent years are not isolated events; they reflect a deepening planetary crisis (World Bank, 2022; UNDP, 2023). Yet these disasters are also narratives: rivers reclaiming their courses, villages erased from maps, women forced to give birth in makeshift shelters,

children clutching schoolbooks while wading through waist-deep waters, and governments with international agencies grappling to turn pledges into meaningful relief (Khan, 2023; Ahmed, 2022).

For Pakistan, climate change is not a distant worry—it is a lived reality. Although the country contributes less than one percent of global greenhouse gas emissions (The New Yorker, 2022; Asia Society, 2023), it repeatedly endures environmental disasters far beyond its share of responsibility. This glaring disparity is a powerful testament to climate injustice—not only ecological but also moral and cultural—where nations least responsible for the crisis bear its gravest burdens. The floods, therefore, are not merely meteorological occurrences; they are narratives of inequality, displacement, and resistance. They demand more than technocratic fixes—they require a reimagining of how humanity envisions its bond with nature and with one another (Wikipedia, 2023).

This is where literature and cultural imagination become especially vital. In moments of ecological disaster, literature is not a privilege or an escape; it is an act of survival and testimony. Whether in poetry that reflects collective struggle and dispossession (Faiz, 2006), a prophetic warning text (Carson, 1962), or a novel attentive to the fabric of everyday life (Abdulrazak, 2020), writers reveal that natural disasters are never solely natural — they are cultural events. They enter the symbolic vocabulary of memory, resistance, and recovery. In Pakistan, where oral traditions and poetry remain vibrant and enduring (Rahman, 2011), floods and ecological crises are inscribed as deeply in the national and cultural imagination as they are in government documents and climate records. The flood stands both as event and symbol — at once a concrete devastation and a metaphor for state failure, global inequality, and human fragility.

The recent flooding in Pakistan illustrates this duality vividly. In 2022, when entire villages in Sindh and Balochistan were submerged, media outlets documented families stranded on rooftops, holding on to children and livestock (BBC, 2022; Al Jazeera, 2022). Yet in literature and everyday speech, these images acquired layered meanings: the river as both mother and destroyer, the flood as both punishment and awakening. This interplay between material destruction and symbolic interpretation underscores why climate change must be understood not only through scientific data but also through cultural narratives (Saeed, 2023).

Moreover, framing the crisis through literature makes it possible to grasp its emotional and ethical dimensions. Scientific studies show that Pakistan's Indus River system faces growing instability from accelerated glacial melt and increasingly erratic rainfall patterns (World Bank, 2022; Rasul et al., 2012). Yet poetry and narrative convey what these changes mean for the fisherman in Thatta, the farmer in Dadu, or the child in Swat whose school has been swept away. They remind us that climate change is not a distant abstraction but a lived reality, woven into the fabric of everyday life (Saeed, 2023).

The recent floods in Sindh and Balochistan illustrate this duality vividly. In 2022, when entire villages were submerged, media outlets documented families stranded on rooftops, clutching children and livestock (BBC, 2022; Al Jazeera, 2022). Yet in literature and everyday discourse, these images carried layered meanings: the river as both mother and destroyer, the flood as both punishment and awakening. This interplay between material destruction and symbolic interpretation demonstrates why climate change must be understood not only through science but also through culture (Saeed, 2023).

Moreover, literature and cultural expression make visible the emotional and ethical weight of Pakistan's climate crisis in ways statistics alone cannot. While reports warn that the Indus River system is destabilized by glacial retreat and erratic rainfall (World Bank, 2022; Rasul, Dahe, & Chaudhry, 2012), writers and artists translate these abstractions into lived experience. Muhammad Abdul Basit's poem *Floods in Pakistan* depicts a nation submerged, demanding climate justice despite its negligible contribution to global emissions (Basit, 2023). Aamina Ahmad, reflecting on the 2022 floods, emphasizes that "a third of the country is underwater, 35 million people displaced… $30 billion in damage," grounding abstract figures in human suffering (Ahmad, 2022). In Sindh, folk singer Sham Bhai uses traditional song to communicate climate knowledge, while rap activist Urooj Fatima channels her own flood experiences into urgent critiques of state neglect and global inequality (AP, 2025). Similarly, poet-journalist Nasir Aijaz laments in his *Memoirs* that the seasons have lost their reliability, giving way instead to droughts, deforestation, and floods (Aijaz, 2025). Taken together, such cultural voices reveal that climate change is not only a scientific or political crisis but also a cultural reality—one narrated as much through poetry, song, and story as through policy reports and statistics.

Thus, to speak of climate change in Pakistan is to speak of **narrative power**. It is to recognize that every flood has two currents: the visible waters that devastate lives and infrastructure, and the invisible stories that flow through memory, culture, and imagination. Both are equally real, and both shape how societies respond. This recognition pushes us to

think beyond mere adaptation or mitigation and to consider how climate discourse itself is framed, whose stories are told, and whose voices are silenced.

The Pakistani floods, then, can be read on two registers:

1. As environmental phenomena triggered by global warming, deforestation, and poor governance.
2. As symbolic events that expose fractures in global politics, local resilience, and human imagination.

This dual reading reflects what scholars of **ecocriticism** emphasize: that the natural environment is never outside culture but always mediated by human narratives. Floods are not only about hydrology but about history, memory, and representation.

This article, therefore, proceeds with a dual aim. First, it seeks to situate Pakistan's recent floods within the broader global discourse on climate change, highlighting the injustices faced by vulnerable nations. Second, it aims to foreground the role of literature, culture, and narrative in shaping our understanding of ecological crises. For it is only by recognizing the cultural dimensions of climate change that we can fully grasp its urgency and moral weight. Political action and literary imagination are not opposites but companions in this struggle; together, they can help envision a more just and sustainable world.

As Faiz once wrote, *"Bol, ke lab azaad hain tere"* (Speak, for your lips are free). In the age of climate catastrophe, speaking is not merely an act of resistance but of survival. To narrate the flood is to refuse silence, to insist that devastation be remembered, and to demand that global attention turn not only to the numbers but to the human and cultural stories those numbers contain.

Climate change is often framed in numbers, policies, and scientific projections: rising temperatures, melting glaciers, increasing carbon emissions (IPCC, 2023). Yet beneath these statistics lies another dimension, equally profound — the narrative dimension. Human beings do not only experience the climate in terms of degrees Celsius or millimeters of rainfall; they live it as story, as metaphor, as memory. When nature rebels in the form of floods, fires, or droughts, it speaks to us in ways that transcend science and enter the realms of culture, literature, and imagination (Nixon, 2011).

Nowhere is this more visible than in Pakistan. Ranked consistently among the top ten most vulnerable countries to climate change, Pakistan has become a crucible where the abstract threats of climate models become devastatingly real (Germanwatch, 2022). The catastrophic floods of 2010, which submerged one-fifth of the country, and the unprecedented deluge of 2022 that displaced over thirty-three million people, are not isolated disasters but symptomatic of a larger planetary crisis (World Bank, 2022).

For Pakistan, climate change is not a distant future but a lived present. With less than one percent contribution to global carbon emissions yet facing recurring environmental catastrophes, the country embodies the paradox of climate injustice (Rafique & Rehman, 2023). This injustice is not merely ecological but moral and cultural: those who contribute least to the crisis are condemned to bear its heaviest burdens (Sultana, 2022).

It is here that literature and cultural imagination play a vital role. In times of ecological catastrophe, literature does not merely serve as an ornament or escape but becomes a tool of survival and testimony (Heise, 2016). From Faiz Ahmed Faiz's verses on dispossession to Rachel Carson's prophetic *Silent Spring* (1962/2002), literature reveals how natural disasters are always also cultural events.

Literature Review (continuous text)

Climate change is increasingly recognized not only as an environmental and scientific phenomenon but also as a narrative and cultural one. Ecocritics have long argued that literature shapes ecological awareness by mediating the relationship between humans and the natural world (Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996; Garrard, 2012). Narrative has the power to translate statistics into lived realities, transforming scientific predictions into accounts of memory, trauma, and survival. Rob Nixon's (2011) idea of *slow violence* illustrates this process, describing how environmental harm often unfolds invisibly over long periods before erupting in dramatic events such as droughts or floods. In *The Great Derangement* (2016), Amitav Ghosh condemns modern literature's reluctance to engage with climate change, contending that this silence amounts to an injustice that excludes the very communities most at risk.

To fill this gap, climate fiction—or "cli-fi"—has emerged as a growing literary response. Writers including Margaret Atwood (*The Year of the Flood*, 2009), Barbara Kingsolver (*Flight Behavior*, 2012), and Kim Stanley Robinson (*New York 2140*, 2017) reimagine climate change in ways that connect scientific fact to human vulnerability, crafting narratives of fragility, adaptation, and endurance. As Trexler (2015) notes, cli-fi is not only concerned with dystopian futures but also with exposing inequalities of resilience and risk. This narrative shift demonstrates how literature serves both as cultural critique and as a space for imagining alternative ways of responding to ecological crisis.

In Pakistan, these insights are especially relevant. The country has been consistently ranked among the most climate-vulnerable in the world, despite contributing less than 1% of global greenhouse gas emissions (Germanwatch, 2022; World Bank, 2022). Its ecological fragility is evident in recurring floods, droughts, and accelerated glacial melt (Rasul, Dahe, & Chaudhry, 2012). The devastating floods of 2010 displaced nearly 20 million people, while the 2022 floods submerged one-third of the country and affected more than 33 million, particularly devastating Sindh province (UNDP, 2023). In 2025, erratic monsoons intensified by El Niño submerged more than 1,400 villages, displaced over two million people, and killed more than 660, including over 350 within just four days of torrential rain (Reuters, 2025; People, 2025). These floods not only destroyed infrastructure but also wiped out vast tracts of farmland and livestock, crippling an agricultural sector that employs nearly 40% of Pakistan's workforce and contributes around 19% of its GDP (Pakistan Ministry of Finance, 2023).

The social consequences of these disasters have been severe. Food insecurity has worsened, rural livelihoods have collapsed, and displacement has fractured communities (FAO, 2022; Shah & Hussain, 2023). Gendered analyses highlight that women and children are disproportionately affected. During the 2022 floods, for example, 650,000 pregnant women were left without adequate healthcare (The Guardian, 2022), while unsafe conditions in relief camps exposed women to violence and exploitation (UN Women, 2022; Sultana, 2022). These accounts illustrate that climate change in Pakistan is not only an environmental crisis but also a humanitarian and social one, deeply entangled with inequality and governance challenges.

This vulnerability is inseparable from broader structures of global injustice. Industrialized nations of the Global North have historically produced the majority of carbon emissions, while nations in the Global South face the harshest consequences (Roberts & Park, 2007). Scholars such as Sultana (2022) describe this imbalance as "climate coloniality," where colonial power relations persist through unequal ecological exposure. Pakistan's plight illustrates this clearly: a country that has contributed little to the climate crisis is among the most affected. Debates at COP27 and COP28 over the Loss and Damage Fund highlight these inequalities. Although the fund was hailed as a milestone, the hesitation of wealthier nations to commit substantial resources exposes a persistent gap between recognition and responsibility (UNFCCC, 2022; Climate Action Tracker, 2023). Without structural reforms in global climate finance and governance, vulnerable nations remain trapped in cycles of devastation and inadequate recovery.

In South Asia, and particularly in Pakistan, literature plays an important role in showing how people understand ecological crises. It does not only describe natural events but also records how communities give them meaning. Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai's *Shah jo Risalo* unravels the image of rivers to reflect both destruction and renewal, turning floods into cultural experiences rather than just natural disasters (Memon, 2019). In a similar way, Faiz Ahmed Faiz draws on storms and floods as symbols of political struggle, dispossession, and collective resistance (Hasan, 2008). Hence, these writings remind us that environmental disasters are never only about weather; they also carry cultural depth and political significance.

Significantly, to unravel this cultural depth and political significance, Pakistani writers today continue to show how closely the environment is tied to people's lives and struggles. This connection feels even more poignant after the devastating floods of 2022 and the destructive monsoons of 2025. Uzma Aslam Khan's *Thinner Than Skin* (2012) portrays glaciers and rivers as fragile presences bound up with human pain and loss, while Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* (2009) and Sorayya Khan's *Noor* (2003) link environmental uncertainty with displacement, memory, and survival. Importantly, Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* (2017), though focuses on migration caused by conflict, also echoes the massive displacements that floods now bring in Pakistan. Beyond fiction, oral traditions and survivor testimonies give powerful insight, with flood victims describing the waters as "the river claiming back its rights" (Rahman, 2011; Memon, 2019). Together, these voices remind us that disasters are not only about destruction but also about neglect and the unequal structures of power that leave communities so vulnerable.

Building on this literary heritage, contemporary Pakistani fiction highlights the fragile relationship between environment and human survival. Uzma Aslam Khan's *Thinner Than Skin* (2012) presents glaciers and rivers as delicate, almost

wounded, parts of the landscape connected to human pain and loss. Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* (2009) and Sorayya Khan's *Noor* (2003) also link environmental uncertainty with memories of displacement and endurance. Although Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* (2017) focuses primarily on migration driven by conflict, it also reflects the mass displacements Pakistan now experiences due to recurring floods. Beyond fiction, oral traditions and survivors' testimonies offer direct insight; **indeed**, many flood victims have described the waters as "the river reclaiming its rights."(Rahman, 2011; Memon, 2019). These narratives remind us that disasters are not only about destruction and death—they also expose neglect and the deep inequalities shaping the world.

In continuity with these narratives, Pakistani literature also aligns with global works such as Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2004), Margaret Atwood's *The Year of the Flood* (2009), and Barbara Kingsolver's *Flight Behavior* (2012), situating it within a broader transnational conversation on climate change. Collectively, these texts reveal that ecological crises are not only about rivers, floods, or melting glaciers but also about culture, history, and human survival. Literature, in this sense, safeguards memory: grief is turned into testimony, despair into resistance, and memory into survival (Williams, 1989). Pakistan's recent floods make this point even clearer, reminding us that these are not distant metaphors but lived realities. They compel us to see stories of suffering and resilience as integral to the global narrative of climate change.

Trauma studies help deepen this discussion. Cathy Caruth (1996) explains trauma as an experience that returns later in memory, while LaCapra (2001) points to "structural trauma" as something that shapes collective identity. In the same way, Nixon's (2011) idea of "slow violence" shows how environmental harm builds up quietly over time until it finally overwhelms communities. In Pakistan, floods recur as cultural traumas, each monsoon reopening wounds and fears that persist across generations. Survivors describe nightmares, anxieties, and fractured identities long after the waters recede (Sultana, 2022). Thus, literature channels these experiences into cultural testimony, ensuring they are remembered rather than erased.

Despite this growing body of work, notable gaps remain. Much of the scholarship on Pakistan's climate crises focuses on empirical vulnerability assessments without integrating cultural and literary perspectives. While feminist critiques highlight women's disproportionate vulnerabilities, they remain underrepresented in ecocritical analyses. Similarly, while global climate fiction has attracted significant scholarly attention, Pakistani ecological literature remains relatively underexplored in comparative frameworks. Addressing these gaps requires an interdisciplinary approach that bridges climate science, political economy, and cultural analysis.

Taken together, these studies highlight the need to view climate change in Pakistan not only as a matter of hydrology or meteorology but as a cultural and narrative phenomenon. The floods of 2010, 2022, and 2025 underscore both the material devastation of ecological crises and the symbolic meanings they acquire in memory, literature, and testimony. By situating Pakistan's ecological fragility within broader debates on global climate justice and by foregrounding the role of narrative, literature, and cultural imagination, this research contributes to a more holistic understanding of climate change. Science provides the evidence, policy offers the tools, but literature provides the meaning—the stories that humanize catastrophe and mobilize solidarity.

Climate Change, Ecological Fragility, and Literary Imagination in Pakistan

"We do not inherit the Earth from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children." — Native American Proverb

Pakistan's landscape is a study in paradox. It is a land of mighty rivers, fertile plains, and towering mountains, yet it is among the most fragile in the face of climate change. According to the Global Climate Risk Index, Pakistan has consistently ranked among the ten countries most affected by climate-related disasters (Germanwatch, 2022). This is deeply ironic: the country contributes less than 1% of global greenhouse gas emissions yet bears a disproportionate share of their consequences (World Bank, 2022). Pakistan thus becomes not only an ecological hotspot but also a moral touchstone in global debates on climate justice.

The devastation of climate change in Pakistan is not a distant possibility but a lived reality. The 2010 "super floods" inundated one-fifth of the country, displaced 20 million people, and caused billions in damages (United Nations, 2010). In 2022, the disaster was even greater: one-third of the country was submerged, more than 33 million displaced, and Sindh province drowned under unprecedented rains (World Bank, 2022). UN Secretary-General António Guterres described the devastation as "climate carnage" (United Nations, 2022). Scientists warn that by 2025 erratic monsoons, accelerated glacial melt, and El Niño patterns may trigger another cycle of catastrophe (IPCC, 2023).

Agriculture, employing nearly 40% of Pakistan's labor force and contributing about 19% to GDP (Pakistan Ministry of Finance, 2023), is especially vulnerable. Floods in 2010 and 2022 destroyed millions of acres of crops, wiped out livestock, and degraded soil fertility (FAO, 2022; Shah & Hussain, 2023). Food insecurity has worsened, forcing reliance on costly imports amid global supply chain shocks. The human cost has been immense: 10 million displaced in 2010 (UNHCR, 2011) and 33 million in 2022 (World Bank, 2022). Many survivors ended up in relief camps or migrated to cities, where informal settlements swelled, poverty deepened, and cultural ties to ancestral lands were severed (Sultana, 2022).

These floods are never gender-neutral. During the 2022 disaster, nearly 650,000 pregnant women lacked access to healthcare, and many gave birth in unsafe conditions (The Guardian, 2022). Girls disproportionately dropped out of school, while women bore caregiving responsibilities in camps under conditions of violence and loss of privacy (UN Women, 2022). Feminist scholars argue that these vulnerabilities stem from structural inequalities, including limited land rights and exclusion from decision-making (Sultana, 2022). Any adaptation strategy must therefore be gender-sensitive.

By 2025, these warnings have materialized once again. Erratic monsoons, intensified by accelerated glacial melt and El Niño patterns, have battered Pakistan with unusual ferocity. More than 660 lives have been lost, including over 350 deaths in just four days of rainfall, while more than two million people have been displaced from their homes (Reuters, 2025; People, 2025). Floodwaters have submerged over 1,400 villages across Punjab and Sindh, destroying standing crops of rice, wheat, and sugarcane, and wiping out large numbers of livestock (Reuters, 2025). Literature again offers a lens: in Uzma Aslam Khan's *Thinner Than Skin* (2012), glaciers and rivers are fragile presences that mirror human vulnerability, reminding us that floods are not merely hydrological but also emotional and symbolic ruptures.

Literature shows the human side of ecological disasters, reminding us that culture helps people make sense of events that numbers or economics cannot fully explain. Ecocriticism, the study of how writing explores the bond between humans and the natural world, gives us a way to read these connections (Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996). In both Pakistani and Western texts, rivers and floods appear again and again as symbols that link natural forces with human struggle. In *Shah jo Risalo*, Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai describes rivers as both nurturing and destructive, holding meanings of survival as well as loss (Memon, 2019). Faiz Ahmed Faiz carries this further, using floods to speak of political struggle, dispossession, and the strength of resistance (Hasan, 2008). Western writers also return to these images: Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798/2003) explores the irony of water as both abundance and thirst, while T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922/2011) sets drought and flood against each other as signs of both collapse and renewal. Together, these works show how literature turns disasters into a shared language of memory and protest, creating a record that ties ecological experience with cultural imagination.

Recent fiction extends these traditions by situating human experiences within the fragile landscapes of ecological change, a theme that has become even more urgent in the aftermath of Pakistan's devastating floods of 2022 and the destructive monsoons of 2025. Uzma Aslam Khan's *Thinner Than Skin* (2012) presents glaciers and rivers as precarious presences, deeply intertwined with both personal and collective trauma. Likewise, Sorayya Khan's *Noor* (2003) and Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* (2009) weave environmental catastrophe together with political violence, displacement, and survival. Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* (2017), though primarily focused on conflict-driven migration, inevitably resonates with the plight of climate refugees whose realities have become starkly visible during Pakistan's recurring floods.

Across the world, writers are turning climate upheaval into story. Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2004) and *The Great Derangement* (2016), Margaret Atwood's *The Year of the Flood* (2009), and Barbara Kingsolver's *Flight Behavior* (2012) are key examples in what many now call climate fiction, or "cli-fi." Together, these works place Pakistan's literary responses in a wider conversation, linking local experiences of flooding and ecological breakdown to global narratives of environmental crisis and human resilience.

Like in Pakistan, such disasters leave deep cultural wounds. Survivors speak of recurring nightmares, heightened anxiety when it rains, and a feeling of betrayal by nature—echoing Cathy Caruth's (1996) idea of trauma as a "belated return." Dominick LaCapra's (2001) notion of "structural trauma" helps explain how catastrophes such as floods—much like Partition before them—become repeated ruptures in a nation's identity. Rob Nixon's (2011) concept of "slow violence" further shows how environmental damage builds quietly over time and then erupts in overwhelming catastrophe. Oral testimonies and poetry often capture this with stark clarity, describing floods as moments when "the river reclaimed its rights" (Memon, 2019). These voices remind us that natural disasters are never only physical events; they are also acts of interpretation, layered with memory, meaning, and cultural resonance.

The imagination of humanity must also contend with justice. Climate change is, for Farhana Sultana (2022), climate coloniality — the Global South feels the brunt of crises and woes perpetrated by the Global North. Pakistan has been hit again and again by climate disasters, making it a clear example of global inequality: "we did not do this, but we pay the penalty" (UNFCCC, 2022). This reality led to a historic step at COP27 with the creation of a Loss and Damage Fund, and the issue remained on the table at COP28 (UNFCCC, 2023). These agreements frame reparations not as charity but as moral duties tied to historical responsibility.

Pakistan's ecological fragility must be understood on two levels: through the scientific language of rainfall, glacial melt, and displacement, and through the cultural language of poetry, memory, and metaphor. Fighting climate change is not just about building dams, embankments, or developing new crops. It also needs cultural awareness that preserves memory, gives voice to the marginalized, and calls for climate justice based on global responsibility (Nixon, 2011; UNFCCC, 2022).

Pakistan's story is both a tragedy and a warning, showing that climate change strikes hardest where people are least prepared (Hasan, 2008; Memon, 2019). Yet fragility does not always mean collapse; it can also open the way for transformation (Caruth, 1996; LaCapra, 2001). For Pakistan, true preparedness must join weakness with strength, justice with imagination. Floods are not only disasters but also stories of survival and resistance—as literature reminds us (Shamsie, 2009; Khan, 2012). To face the climate crisis, we need both political will and creative vision. The waters may rise, but the stories must rise with them, carrying the voices of the vulnerable so they are not silenced but heard, guiding us toward a fairer and more humane future.

Global Climate Justice: Politics of Responsibility

Pakistan's ecological fragility cannot be understood in isolation; it is embedded within the wider global politics of climate change. At its core lies a paradox: those nations least responsible for greenhouse gas emissions, often in the Global South, are suffering the most severe consequences. Industrialized countries in the Global North have historically contributed the bulk of carbon emissions. According to Ritchie and Roser (2020), the United States and Europe alone account for nearly half of cumulative global CO_2 emissions since the Industrial Revolution, while South Asia contributes only a fraction. Yet it is in countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Mozambique where climate change manifests most devastatingly, through floods, droughts, cyclones, and heatwaves. This asymmetry underscores what scholars call *climate injustice* (Roberts & Park, 2007): the unequal distribution of responsibility and vulnerability.

This global injustice was brought into sharp relief during Pakistan's 2022 floods. With one-third of the country submerged and 33 million displaced, the disaster was widely recognized as a climate catastrophe driven by global warming (World Bank, 2022). United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres described Pakistan as being "doubly victimized—first by climate chaos and then by an inadequate global response" (United Nations, 2022). This statement highlights the gap between rhetoric and responsibility: while industrialized nations acknowledge the severity of climate change, financial commitments to aid vulnerable countries have consistently fallen short. The failure of wealthier nations to meet the $100 billion annual climate finance pledge, first promised in 2009, exemplifies this persistent neglect (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change [UNFCCC], 2022).

The breakthrough at **COP27 in Sharm el-Sheikh (2022)** was therefore historic. After decades of resistance, industrialized nations agreed to establish a **Loss and Damage Fund**—a mechanism designed to provide financial support to countries disproportionately affected by climate disasters (UNFCCC, 2022). Pakistan, as chair of the G77+China negotiating bloc, played a pivotal role in this achievement, leveraging the visibility of its floods to demand justice. Yet optimism was tempered by practical challenges: questions remain over who will contribute, how much funding will be mobilized, and how distribution will be ensured equitably. The subsequent **COP28 negotiations in Dubai (2023)** sought to operationalize the fund, but progress was uneven, with many pledges vague and amounts far below the scale of loss (Climate Action Tracker, 2023). For Pakistan, the debate is not about charity but about historical accountability. As Sultana (2022) argues, climate change must be understood as "climate coloniality"—a continuation of global inequalities where the South suffers for the North's prosperity.

The discourse of **"climate refugees"** intensifies these concerns. The 2022 Pakistan floods displaced 33 million people, many of whom remain in camps or precarious urban settlements (UNHCR, 2022). Yet under international law, "refugee" status does not extend to those fleeing climate disasters, leaving millions without protection (Biermann & Boas, 2010). This absence reveals another layer of global injustice: climate migrants are invisible within existing humanitarian frameworks. Literature, however, often anticipates what law ignores. Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* (2017), though not explicitly about climate displacement, resonates with this phenomenon. Its portrayal of sudden migration

through "doors" mirrors the shock of environmental dislocation, where communities are uprooted overnight. Similarly, Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2004), set in the Sundarbans, dramatizes the precariousness of tidal communities—a mirror to Pakistan's Indus delta.

Climate change is, above all, a geopolitical issue. Climate change deepens global inequality, forcing us to rethink migration, borders, and sovereignty. In the United States, Hurricane Katrina (2005) showed that even wealthy nations are not immune when inequality collides with disaster. The worst devastation fell on predominantly African American neighborhoods in New Orleans, exposing how vulnerability was racialized (Dyson, 2006). By contrast, Cyclone Idai (2019), which displaced hundreds of thousands across Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and Malawi, drew far less international attention (World Food Programme, 2019). Such comparisons reveal a hierarchy of suffering: disasters in the Global North dominate headlines, while those in the Global South often fade quickly from global memory. Pakistan's floods, too, briefly captured international concern, only to disappear from discourse even as millions remained homeless. This selective empathy underscores the geopolitical dimension of climate change — it is not only about emissions or adaptation, but about whose lives are made visible and grieved, and whose are ignored.

Global climate justice, then, cannot be separated from Pakistan's ecological vulnerability. Its floods are not isolated tragedies but part of a broader struggle in which the Global South demands both recognition and reparations against what Sultana (2022) calls *climate coloniality*. At its core, climate change is not just environmental — it is political, humanitarian, and cultural, touching every aspect of survival, memory, and meaning.

Resistance, Resilience, and Literary Imagination

Even in the middle of destruction and global neglect, stories of courage and resilience emerge. In Pakistan, extreme weather brings not only suffering but also innovation and survival. When government institutions fail to act, it is ordinary people who step in. Organizations such as the Edhi Foundation, HANDS, and the Rural Support Programmes deliver food, medical support, and shelter during floods, showing that true resilience is rooted in communities. Acts of care and solidarity remind us that resistance is more than politics—it is also cultural. Literature captures this same spirit, turning loss into stories of hope and perseverance. Women in flood camps have opened makeshift schools so children can continue learning (UN Women, 2022), while farmers have introduced flood-resistant rice and built raised homes to adapt to changing conditions (Shah & Hussain, 2023). These efforts prove that resilience grows from the ground up rather than being imposed from above.

This resilience also takes the form of political activism. Young climate activists in Pakistan, especially those linked with Fridays for Future, use social media and street demonstrations to push leaders at home and abroad to take responsibility. Their actions connect Pakistan to a global youth movement, alongside figures like Greta Thunberg in Sweden and Vanessa Nakate in Uganda. Together, these young voices show that climate change is not just a scientific or political issue—it is a generational struggle, and the youth are determined to be heard.

Literature plays a parallel role in this resistance. Eco-poetry and climate fiction ("cli-fi") articulate what scientific reports cannot: the emotional, cultural, and moral dimensions of ecological collapse. In Pakistan, Uzma Aslam Khan's *Thinner Than Skin* (2012) captures the fragility of glaciers and rivers, blurring ecological change with human trauma. Kamila Shamsie's works often explore shifting geographies of catastrophe, while Mohsin Hamid highlights the dislocations of migration. Contemporary poets, writing in Urdu, Sindhi, and English, echo Faiz's revolutionary spirit, framing floods not only as destruction but as metaphors of renewal and collective struggle (Hasan, 2008). Globally, Margaret Atwood's *The Year of the Flood* (2009) and Barbara Kingsolver's *Flight Behavior* (2012) dramatize ecological crisis, demonstrating how narrative imagination turns despair into agency.

In Pakistan, hope emerges as both a political stance and a literary expression. As Raymond Williams (1989) explains, hope is a "resource of resistance," allowing communities to imagine alternative futures even in times of crisis. For survivors of recurring floods, storytelling itself becomes a form of survival: oral histories preserve collective memory, novels give voice to displacement, and poetry affirms that dignity can endure despite devastation (Memon, 2019; Hasan, 2008). In this way, literature and activism intersect to sustain a humanitarian imagination that resists silence and erasure.

The experience of floods in Pakistan demonstrates not only vulnerability but also resilience. These disasters expose global inequalities in climate responsibility (UNFCCC, 2022; UNFCCC, 2023), while also inspiring local strategies of adaptation and care. They reveal failures of governance but simultaneously spark acts of solidarity at the community level (Shah & Hussain, 2023). In this process, trauma becomes testimony and despair is reshaped into defiance. Through

the interplay of politics, culture, and imagination, Pakistan's ecological crisis is redefined as more than a national tragedy; it becomes part of a wider global narrative of justice, resilience, and survival.

Conclusion

Pakistan's climate disasters must be situated within the broader framework of global inequality rather than treated as isolated national crises. The floods of 2010, 2022, and 2025 illustrate how the economic prosperity of the Global North—built on centuries of fossil fuel reliance—has disproportionately burdened the Global South with the most severe ecological consequences. Pakistan exemplifies what Sultana (2022) identifies as *climate coloniality*, where historical power asymmetries persist through unequal exposure to environmental risk and loss. This inequity was made visible in the debates surrounding the Loss and Damage Fund at COP27 and COP28, where recognition of harm repeatedly collided with reluctance to accept financial and political responsibility (UNFCCC, 2022; UNFCCC, 2023).

As this article has demonstrated, the significance of these disasters extends beyond scientific measurement to encompass cultural memory and literary imagination. Poetry, fiction, and oral testimony transform environmental catastrophe into testimony, grief into resistance, and survival into solidarity (Memon, 2019; Hasan, 2008). Pakistan's experience therefore operates not only as an index of ecological fragility but also as a demand for climate justice, resilience, and a more humane global future. While the establishment of the Loss and Damage Fund was hailed as a diplomatic milestone, the continued unwillingness of industrialized nations to allocate sufficient resources underscores the enduring gap between acknowledgment and accountability (UNFCCC, 2022; Climate Action Tracker, 2023).Without meaningful reforms in global finance and climate governance, Pakistan and other vulnerable nations will remain trapped in cycles of devastation and incomplete recovery.

Yet, beyond policy and economics, literature and cultural imagination remind us why these crises matter. Amitav Ghosh, in *The Great Derangement* (2016), argues that the failure to narrate climate change is itself a form of injustice, silencing those most affected. In Pakistan, poetry, oral traditions, and fiction ensure that floods are remembered not only as disasters but as narratives of loss, endurance, and protest. To conclude, responding to climate change requires more than infrastructure and aid; it demands solidarity, justice, and stories that refuse to let the vulnerable be forgotten. Only when political will and literary imagination come together can we envision a future that is not only sustainable but also just.

At the same time, Pakistan's floods illuminate the human dimensions of climate change in ways that statistics alone cannot capture. Survivors' testimonies, oral histories, and novels transform numbers into narratives of memory, trauma, and resilience. Cathy Caruth's (1996) idea of trauma as a belated experience is particularly resonant here: each monsoon returns like an aftershock, reopening wounds of loss that never fully close. The floods of 2010 and 2022 displaced tens of millions, but the catastrophe of 2025 has driven the point home even more forcefully. In that year, erratic monsoons intensified by glacial melt and El Niño submerged more than 1,400 villages, displaced over two million people, and claimed more than 660 lives—including over 350 in just four days of relentless rain (Reuters, 2025; People, 2025). Croplands were washed away, livestock perished, and communities once again faced the impossible task of rebuilding lives from ruins. For many, especially women and children, the suffering was compounded by unsafe conditions in camps, lack of healthcare, and heightened risks of violence (UN Women, 2022; The Guardian, 2022).

Literature provides a bridge between these lived realities and broader cultural understanding. From Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai's verses where rivers embody both destruction and renewal, to Faiz Ahmed Faiz's imagery of storms as metaphors of upheaval, Pakistani literature has long placed ecological fragility in a cultural and political frame (Hasan, 2008; Memon, 2019). Contemporary fiction carries this further: Uzma Aslam Khan's *Thinner Than Skin* (2012) entwines glaciers and human vulnerability, while Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* (2017) captures the displacements that echo climate refugee crises. When paired with global texts such as Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2004), Atwood's *The Year of the Flood* (2009), and Kingsolver's *Flight Behavior* (2012), these works form a transnational archive of climate testimony, where Pakistan's local tragedies speak to global futures. In this sense, literature does not simply reflect disaster—it resists forgetting, ensuring that the voices of the displaced are remembered.

The humanitarian imagination that arises from Pakistan's floods is therefore twofold. First, it demands justice: recognition that climate change is not an equalizer but a magnifier of inequality. The invisibility of Global South disasters in much of the world's media, the inadequate financing of recovery efforts, and the reluctance of industrialized nations to fully fund the Loss and Damage mechanism illustrate a global order marked by disparity (Biermann & Boas, 2010; Roberts & Park, 2007; UNFCCC, 2022; Climate Action Tracker, 2023). Second, it affirms resilience and hope. Communities in Pakistan have shown extraordinary adaptability, from grassroots NGOs restoring livelihoods to activists

calling for accountability. Literature and cultural memory sustain this resilience, turning grief into testimony, despair into resistance, and loss into a shared story of survival (Williams, 1989).

Ultimately, Pakistan's ecological fragility should not be read as a singular national tragedy but as a warning to the world. It demonstrates what unchecked warming means for human societies, but it also offers lessons in resilience and imagination. Addressing climate change requires more than embankments, finance, or technology. It calls for a holistic response that integrates vulnerability assessments, just governance, and cultural imagination. Science provides the evidence, policy offers the tools, but literature supplies the meaning—the narratives that humanize catastrophe and mobilize solidarity.

The rising waters of Pakistan's floods, whether in 2010, 2022, or the devastation of 2025, are more than destructive forces. They are texts to be read, testimonies to be honored, and metaphors to be understood. They remind us that climate change is not only about melting glaciers or erratic monsoons but about disrupted lives, fractured identities, and stories that must be told. To meet this challenge, the global community must move beyond mere survival toward justice, and beyond despair toward imagination. Only then can the voices of the vulnerable be amplified rather than drowned, shaping a future where resilience is not imposed by necessity but nurtured through solidarity, justice, and hope.

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