



Contextualizing Islamic Ecology: Representation of Environmental Crisis in Post-9/11 Pakistani Fiction

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Abstract

The US-led War on Afghanistan in the wake of 9/11 has led to far-reaching repercussions for the climate of the region, affecting weather patterns, bird migration routes, human and animal health, water resources and food production. Literary and non-literary discourses have responded significantly to this crisis. But there is need to contextualize Islamic injunctions and principles on the protection of physical and living environment. This article addresses this gap by using Islamic ecology lenses to analyse the representation of environmental crises in a selection of post-9/11 Pakistani novels in English. Attending to the fictional representations of environmental deterioration in Feryal Ali Gauhar's No Space for Further Burials (2007) and Nadeem Aslam's The Wasted Vigil (2008), the article highlights the need to integrate Islamic discourse on ecology in the current environmental epistemology to counter the escalating environmental crises. The research problematizes the nexus of militarism and neo-colonial capitalistic agenda that, in collusion with the existing social dualisms, aims at wresting the natural resources of the third world countries, pushing them into environmental precarity. It is argued that an ethic based on greater ecological inclusion can be generated from the environmental parameters provided by Islam, the major religion in the area under discussion.

Keywords: Islamic ecology, environment, post-9/11 fiction, Afghanistan, Nadeem Aslam, Feryal Gauhar.



Introduction

In our current world with escalating environmental crises epitomized by global warming, deforestation, species extinction and the neoliberal growth of industries and corporate businesses, the importance of discourses on environmental awareness and protection can hardly be undervalued. There is a need to confront and analyse the environmental disasters perpetrated by our political, social and economic choices. This dismal environmental condition also calls for new ways of understanding our ecological condition. There is a growing need to incorporate religious teachings on the utilization and protection of natural environment into the mainstream ecological discourse. Muslim ecologist Seyyed Hossein Nasr links “environmental degradation to spiritual and moral crises of the modern world”¹ Islam, with more than one billion followers, can play a key role in bolstering awareness about man’s duties to all forms of life. Islamic view of nature and environment is holistic and inclusive. All components of living and physical environment have their due place and importance in the world. In the chapter Ar-Rahman the holy Quran asserts:

And the earth has He spread out for all living beings, with fruit thereon, and palm trees with sheathed clusters [of dates], and grain growing tall on its stalks, and sweet-smelling plants. Which, then, of your Sustainer’s powers can you disavow?²

Bennison (2003) points out that Islam teaches “an ingrained environmental ethic of stewardship and a way of life for Muslims that are rooted firmly in seeking harmony with the environment”.³ Moreover, the traditions and practices the Prophet of Islam (ﷺ) and his fellows are prescriptive of a set of actions and behaviours that are ecologically inclusive and protective of all forms of non-human life. Hamed (1993) contends that Islam “provides specific laws and standards governing the use and allocation of resources including land, water, animals, minerals, and manpower”.⁴ As Islam is a global religion today, principles and injunctions offered by Islamic Shariah need to be taken into consideration to find new ways of preserving our ecosystem from ecocidal forces.

Traditionally, the literature from the Muslim world has helped “propagate the most profound teachings about the spiritual significance of nature”.⁵ However, the Islamic discourse on the protection of physical and living environment is an under-explored area especially in literary studies. This research positions itself in this lacuna and tries to integrate Islamic perspectives on the value and conservation of environment in the war zones like Afghanistan. For the sake of specificity, the research limits itself to the analysis of two novels that have been written in response to the US invasion of Afghanistan in the aftermath of 9/11 attacks. Both novels,

directly or by implication, make visible the traditional ecology of Afghanistan prior to invasions by Britain, Russia and the USA. They point out how the human relationship with the living and physical environment held a religious and spiritual significance informed by Islamic values. This relationship of interdependence has been disrupted by the multiple invasions of the land. Situating the environment as a central thematic concern, the essay explores the dynamics of environmental degradation through an analysis of the following phenomena: the traditional landscape of Afghanistan, the impact of bombing and landmines on the topography, imminent extinction of wildlife, environmental threats to the migratory birds, and shortage of food resources.

Analysis

Aslam and Gauhar offer a response to America's War on Terror in Afghanistan in the aftermath of 9/11 and the ensuing environmental crises. *The Wasted Vigil* (2008) by Nadeem Aslam uses the setting of post 9/11 war-torn Afghanistan "in a house located in the shadow of Tora Bora"⁶ in the aftermath of the Russian and American invasions of the country. Five people of different nationalities gather at an English doctor's house in Usha, a small war-ravaged town. The house serves as "a microcosm of contemporary Afghanistan, a time/space compression of the various geopolitical forces at work which threaten from without".⁷ It looks at the havoc wreaked on Afghanistan by war and conflict from different perspectives: Afghan, Russian and American, male and female, and child and grown-up. It navigates the history of Afghanistan from its pre-war days to its dismal and ruined present. It spans almost three decades of the war-ravaged country. Feryal Gauhar's *No Space for Further Burials* (2007) also seeks "to highlight the impact on Afghanistan of the 2001 World Trade Tower attacks and subsequent 'war on terror' rhetoric".⁸ It focuses on the lives of a group of common people who are imprisoned in a dilapidated building and cannot go outside due to the relentless war and destruction taking place in the country. The story is narrated from the perspective of the American medical technician in Afghanistan who is captured by some local warlords. Attention is brought to the environmental hazards caused by the ruthless bombing on Afghanistan. The asylum, with its receding space and increasing stench, stands for the land of Afghanistan which has been rendered uninhabitable due to unspeakable war crimes. Gauhar takes ecological perspective to critique the American invasion of Afghanistan and its continuous presence there. The war on Afghanistan is a war on the environment of the world. The war is evidence to the fact how the self-proclaimed guardians of the world violate the laws about the protection of environment and different types of plant and animal life. Both novels

extensively deal with the impacts of the Afghan war on the natural scenery, ecological balance, creatural life and the psychological condition of the people.

Pre-invasion Environment

As the present of Afghanistan offers a devastated and ravished landscape, the past is constructed through memory, historical discourse and artistic representation in order to imagine an anteriority of the present ecological crises. An ample representation is given to the pre-war Afghanistan with all its natural beauty and abundance. Both novels present a balanced and harmonious symbiosis, symbolizing love and harmony, and amiable relationship among the Afghan people, all embedded in ecological values propounded by Islam. Lara in *The Wasted Vigil* travels to the land that “Alexander the Great had passed through on his unicorn, an area of fabled orchards and thick mulberry forests, of pomegranates that appear in the border decorations of Persian manuscripts written one thousand years ago”.⁹ Furthermore, Aslam brings into focus the centrality of the land through many embedded narratives in the novel. In Marcus’ house, Lara finds many books nailed to the ceiling with the purpose of being protected from being taken and burnt by Taliban. When Lara opens one of the books fallen from the ceiling, it reads: “Tell the earth-thieves/ To plant no more orchards of death/ Beneath this star of ours/Or the fruit will eat them up”.¹⁰ There are also some references to Virgil’s Aeneas and the War of Troy. David Town opens a book in Marcus’ library which is about Aeneas’ escape from Troy with his father on his shoulders and his son walking with home. To Marcus, Afghanistan also seems to be a Troy which is burning due to the lust of the invaders and infidelity of its own inhabitants. When Nabi Khan’s house is targeted by a missile attack, “everything and everyone inside a hundred-yard radius was charred”.¹¹ The paintings on the walls in Marcus’ house construct the identity of Afghanistan as an idyllic place whose beauty has been ravished by wars and conflicts.

Gauhar also constructs an image of the lost natural beauty and a variety of life in Afghanistan through the eyes of different characters. Noor Kaka, an old man in the compound who survives after remaining buried in the rubble for a few days, stands for the lost past of Afghanistan. As the starving characters gather in the kitchen, Noor Kaka tells them the story of the idyllic past of his country which has been ravished by frequent invasions and many decades of war in Afghanistan. He relates the details of his journey with his father to the summer palace of the Afghan king. He reminisces:

The hills circling the city were covered with vineyards and orchards.
There were many trees in the valley—pine and almond, mulberry
and peach. And everywhere there was the fragrance of wild grass

and lavender, making my head light and my heart even lighter. There were brooks and springs everywhere. We could hear their music even before we came across them, quenching our thirst with the sweet, clean water.¹²

The above lines describe the purity of the natural elements and resources which have been contaminated by ecocidal human actions especially by the Russian and American invasions. For the hungry and half-dead inmates of the inferno-like asylum, the above description offers a peep into the paradise-like past which they have left behind. The picture found by the narrator in the office of the asylum also serves to emphasize the beautiful past of the country. In the picture are a man and a woman. In the background, he can see a lake full of water. He can imagine the scent of the woods and the sound of the crackling leaves.¹³ Both descriptions celebrate the natural beauty and abundance that the Afghan people once enjoyed. But the unending violence has changed this abundance into scarcity and even extinction.

Medicinal Value

The healing power of nature is also emphasized in the novels. The people's knowledge of the medicinal values of nature is informed by Islamic values. In *No Space for Further Burials*, Hayat and her late husband Haji Allam were experts in healing with herbs. Hayat belongs to a family of healers in Japan. She unsuccessfully tried to cure her late husband who succumbed to his disease. She tries to cure the sick girl in the asylum with different herbs. She tells the inmates that the lone tree in the compound "has medicine in its leaves and in its skin".¹⁴ In *The Wasted Vigil*, Doctor Marcus Caldwell, who came to Afghanistan from England many decades ago, has done an extensive research on many Afghan herbs, fruits and plants to discover their medicinal qualities. Marcus makes different medicines out of the herbs which can cure different diseases. He has also set up a factory where he extracts essence of different flowers and plants, and prepares many kinds of perfumes from them. He makes soul-curing perfumes from different natural ingredients. Looking at the bruises of Lara, Marcus wishes to treat her with pomegranates "as their liquid is a great antiseptic".¹⁵ When Lara comes to Marcus' house and falls ill out of exhaustion of her long journey, Marcus makes an ointment from various plants for her bruised neck. Marcus tells Casa that the beauty of "the rose is considered a medicine".¹⁶ He further tells her that the very act of looking at the rose can have a therapeutic effect on the eyes. It is as if he tries to cure the whole nation of their wounds and of the smell of blood and rotten bodies.

Plundering Natural Resources

A basic ingredient of Islamic ecology is the observance of ethical limits in exploiting natural resources. Islam allows its followers to make use of natural resources but forbids them to cross limits. Gauhar and Aslam point out that the motives of the war in Afghanistan are not only political but also economic and neo-colonial. Klein (2007) argues that “now wars and disasters are so fully privatized, that they are themselves the new market: there is no need to wait until after the war for the boom – the medium is the message”.¹⁷ International powers like Britain, USSR and the USA have used Afghanistan as a stage of action for their vested interests. In the current world, “[t]imber, oil and gems have been the most frequently targeted resources”.¹⁸ Abundance of mineral wealth has actually proved a resource curse for Afghanistan. Despite all its mineral richness, most of its inhabitants are forced to live below the poverty line. Aslam points out that the Afghan lapis lazuli “was always desired by the world, brushed by Cleopatra onto her eyelids, employed by Michelangelo to paint the blues on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel”.¹⁹ Being rich in minerals and gemstones, and a gateway for the oil rich Central Asian states, Afghanistan has lured many world powers and neoliberal organizations into the country. David, an American who works for CIA, actually came to the area in quest for gems which are famous all over the world. He has travelled across Afghanistan “as a dealer in precious stones bringing him to the amber mines of Kandahar, taking him to Badakhshan for the rubies that Marco Polo had written of in his *Description of the World*. The war-financing emeralds of the Panjshir Valley”.²⁰ David represents the US quest for natural resources in Afghanistan. He also stands for the neoliberal organizations like World Bank and IMF that exploit the natural resources of the Third World countries by providing aid and loans for reconstruction after wars and natural calamities. Russia and America fund and arm their stooges in Afghanistan and Pakistan in order to ensure control on the natural resources of the region. They do not care for the loss of human life and the destruction of the environment. David tells Lara that CIA knew in advance that the Soviet planes were going to bomb an Afghan refugee camp in Peshawar, but they did not do anything to stop it. He says that they “were letting those men, women and children die to expose the brutality of the Soviets. We were saving the future generations of Afghanistan and the world from Communism”.²¹

The economic aspect of war relates not only to the invading forces but also to the local supporters, perpetrators and beneficiaries of the war. In *The Wasted Vigil*, the pro-US Gul Rasool and the pro-Russia Nabi Khan are the two major warlords who have reaped the benefits of the on-going war. David, the CIA agent in Pakistan and Afghanistan, discovers where the two warlords have been “made

rich by the hundreds of millions of dollars pouring into the jihad”.²² In contrast to the loss of human lives, it is not easy to emphasize the environmental consequences of war at the time it takes place. It may take many years for the physical and psychological impacts of the environmental change caused by war to emerge.

Deforestation

Islamic concept of ecology emphasizes the protection of trees even during the war times. *The Wasted Vigil* evokes the religious discourse of Islam to strengthen the claim of the centrality of nature and environment. In Islamic discourse “the relationship between humans and nature is one of use as well as contemplation, worship, appreciation of beauty, moral responsibility toward protection, prohibition of destruction and revival”.²³ Islam forbids Muslims from harming trees and animals even in case of war. The characters also refer to “Islam and its love for flowers”.²⁴ The Prophet of Islam (ﷺ) asked his followers “not to do anything untoward in the vicinity of orchards, as that would offend the angels who are appointed by Allah to protect fruit trees, keeping foraging creatures at bay”.²⁵ But the madness of war makes the people blind to their religious obligations. Some people from a mosque in Peshawar axe down a banyan and peepal tree sacred to the Hindu minority living in the city.²⁶ Gauhar and Aslam bring into spotlight the fact that the war in Afghanistan has aggravated ecological crises by exacerbating deforestation. Along with the portrayal of the lost beauty of the land, a realistic picture of the present condition of the landscape is provided by both novelists. The war has destroyed all the idyllic beauty of the country. Many forested areas and farmlands have been damaged through an encounter with the modern warfare in the shape of Daisy cutter and other heavy weaponry. In *The Wasted Vigil*, David sees on his way to Usha that one third of “an orchard has been felled and the flowering trees arranged in a barricade, a giant white garland in front of which the men stand with their weapons”.²⁷ Gauhar too offers an insight into an alarming decrease in the volume of forests in Afghanistan. The compound in *No Space for Further Burials*, which symbolizes the whole country, has only one tree left in its courtyard. The reduction in the number of trees means a reduction in food sources for human beings and animals. Against the ecological principles provided by Islam, or any religion for that matter, the forests are brutalized as a war tactic. Bulbul tells the American inmate of the intensity of winter because trees “had been felled by the government which said that the rebels hid in these trees which gave us fruit and shade in the summer and warmth in the winter”.²⁸ Hence, a violation of the Islamic ecological principles through an instrumentalization of forests has aggravated the environmental crisis.

Landmines as Eco-destructive Agents

Earth is the centre of ecological ideals provided by Islam. It is the giver of life and source of nourishment for all forms of life. In the chapter “Abasa” of the holy Quran, Allah asserts the role of earth as a carrier of divine blessings:

Let man, then, consider [the sources of] his food: (25) [how it is] that We pour down water, pouring it down abundantly; (26) and then We cleave the earth [with new growth], cleaving it asunder, (27) and thereupon We cause grain to grow out of it, (28) and vines and edible plants, (29) and olive trees and date-palms, (30) and gardens dense with foliage, (31) and fruits and herbage, (32) for you and for your animals to enjoy.²⁹

Time and again, the holy Quran advises human beings not to make mischief on earth. Landmines used in war violate the sanctity of the earth as mother and giver of life. Landmines in Afghanistan have proved to be “the worst environmental nightmare that has been created as a result of constant war. The presence of more than ten million land mines in the country makes it the world’s most deadly mine field”.³⁰ A huge number of human and animal lives have been lost to the landmines spread by Russia and America in different parts of the country. Besides, landmines aggravate environmental deterioration through an irreparable loss to topography, wildlife and forests, and by limiting human access to the natural resources.

Gauhar and Aslam spotlight the catastrophic effect of landmines on the natural landscape of Afghanistan and its biodiversity. The land of gems and trade has been rimmed and internally laced with landmines wreaking havoc on the landscape of the country. In *The Wasted Vigil*, people like Marcus would not consider it surprising “if the trees and vines of Afghanistan suspended their growth one day, fearful that if their roots were to lengthen they might come into contact with a landmine buried near by”.³¹ David cannot forget the discourse of violence inscribed on the Afghan landscape through landmines. He remembers how he accompanied the Afghan rebels to plant “landmines along roads frequented by Soviet tanks, the explosion a few hours later tearing the turret off a T72 and hurling it and the gun several yards away”.³² The thought of the landmines and the fear of losing her legs force Lara to stay inside. She feels terrified to recall that seeing “single shoes being sold in Afghanistan’s shops”.³³ Casa remembers seeing “a mine detonating in a grove of pomegranate trees with such force that the skin of every fruit on every branch had cracked, the red seed spilling out”.³⁴ He is terrified of this phenomenon as he feels the same terror return “whenever he is in an area not yet swept for landmines- wanting always to pull his shadows close to him, thinking the weight of it is enough to set off whatever death-dealing device is hidden there”.³⁵ The “mine-laden cities and countryside”³⁶ and many unexploded cluster bombs lying in

the fields are always a source of threat for Bihzad's sister who runs away from her home.³⁷

Water and Food Scarcity

A tradition of the Prophet of Islam (ﷺ) forbids his followers from “three actions that are cursed; defecating in water sources, along the road, and under a shady tree”.³⁸ Against the backdrop of the decreasing reservoirs, water has assumed great political and economic significance. The two novels underscore the scarcity and contamination of water caused by conflict. About “27 to 36 % of total irrigation system in Afghanistan directly were destroyed by civil war and lack of proper water management during recent three decades”.³⁹ Nadeem Aslam points out how the madness of war has polluted the aquatic atmosphere of the country. The water of the land is “purest”⁴⁰, but the naturalness of water is symbolically spoiled when countless bottles of mineral water carried in a helicopter fall into the lake near Marcus' house. This scene has another symbolic significance as it stands for the American intrusion into and violation of the natural purity and beauty of Afghanistan. Further, it is indicative of the neoliberal commercialization of water that is detrimental to the traditional water culture of Afghanistan with its dependence on lakes and ponds. The lake also stands for the very few remaining resources of water in Afghanistan. At certain times of the day, many hornets come to the lake near Marcus' house to drink water as very few such reservoirs of fresh and unpolluted water are left in the surroundings.

Moreover, the realm of violence is extended to the waterscapes. The Russian soldiers wash their bloodied tanks in the river after using them to crush the Afghan prisoners.⁴¹ The teachers in Usha suspected of being communists are savagely massacred along with their families, and their bodies are thrown into the lake.⁴² Benedict remembers a scene of the rape and the killing of an Afghan girl in the river. The soldiers “held her underwater and then let her float away. Her bangles could not be heard as she struggled inside the liquid, and the river had also silenced the sound of the gun”.⁴³ In *No Space for Further Burials*, the water of the well in the courtyard is reddened with the blood of the men killed by the soldiers.⁴⁴ There is not enough water for drinking and washing for the inmates. This dearth of food resources offers a stark contrast to the amplitude of food resources enjoyed by the Afghans in the decades prior to war. Noor Kaka provides a description of the abundance of fish in the Afghan waters:

I was hungry, so my father stopped beside a river and fished for me. Fish were abundant in these waters, as much as ducks and birds which inhabited the sky as if it was a home to all flying creatures. My father told me there were almost fifty kinds of birds in this area, from the large red duck to kujeer.... There were many birds

there, my sons—there was the kubke e duree, a bird somewhat smaller than a turkey.⁴⁵

But now these sources of life and amplitude have been contaminated. The river space is filled with dead bodies which result from the reign of terror unleashed by war and looting. The bandits kill some inmates of the compound and dump their bodies into the well, polluting the water.

Animal Protection

Islam emphasizes “the proper treatment of the animals” and “extending and expressing our kindness to them”.⁴⁶ (Ozdemir 2003:22). Animal life is given a significant representation by both Gauhar and Aslam to show the fragility of the Afghan ecosystem in the face of the madness of war. Many species of animals face threat of extinction as a result of the endless conflict. Forests and the natural habitats of animals have also been destroyed by the wars. Joshua Frank talks of the extinction of birds and animals in the war-wrecked land:

...the toll the Afghanistan war is having on the environment should also force nature lovers into the streets in protest. Natural habitat in Afghanistan has endured decades of struggle, and the War on Terror has only escalated the destruction. The lands most afflicted by warfare are home to critters that most Westerners only have a chance to observe behind cages in our city zoos.⁴⁷

The novels under discussion underscore the frequent brutalization of animals along with human beings in the Afghan war. Animals are killed by the warring factions for the purpose of eating and sport. They are turned into the instruments of war as David remembers the time when from the forest around the al-Qaeda camp, “he would capture jackals and yellow-gazed lynx and hare, and bring them to the camp laboratory where they died strange deaths in gas chambers”.⁴⁸ There are the militants who “slit the throats of sheep and horses”⁴⁹ for training purposes. The bombs, missiles, landmines and hunting in the vulnerable Afghan land have killed countless treasured animals, some of which are on the verge of extinction. Gauhar shows that in an attack on Sabir’s village, many of the animals are killed or snatched by the rebels. When Sabir finds no other animal in his village house, he loves to hear the barking of a dog. Sabir recalls that the dog “was barking, letting me know that all was not lost”.⁵⁰ It is the symbol of hope and life for Waris. Driven mad by hunger, the dog kills the mule in the shed of the building. The carcass of the mule killed by Sabir’s hungry dog highlights the painful fact how the whole land is under the attack of the neo-colonial predators that are hungry for power and resources.

Closely related to the sufferings of animals is the plight of the birds in the war-afflicted Afghanistan. Thousands of birds migrate from Siberia to Afghanistan, Pakistan and Kashmir. But the number of these birds has drastically reduced as the

aerial space of Afghanistan is full of lethal gases killing many birds or forcing them to change their migration routes. Most of the birds have “died or flown away or migrated to the south in search of food and warmth”.⁵¹ The migratory Siberian birds have abandoned their traditional path as a result of smoke and blasts in the Afghan air. Zameen once told David about “the demoiselle cranes that landed on the lake beside her house in Usha, on their migration to and from Siberia each year”.⁵² Hearing the noise of the cranes near the lake, Marcus reacts in a nostalgic tone that these birds have been passing through the country “for millions of years, but the war in Afghanistan—all that flying metal in the air, the bullets and planes—and then the war in Chechnya, has meant that they get lost easily, trying to change their paths”.⁵³ Aslam compares the trajectory of these Russian birds with that of the Russian soldiers. The birds come to Afghanistan to find means of survival while the Russian soldiers come to the country to destroy the same means of survival not only for the birds but for human beings as well. Ivanchikova (2017) comments on the representation of the plight of the Siberian birds in *The Wasted Vigil*:

Connecting Siberia and India, the cranes’ migration calls for a peaceful Afghanistan—a land that serves as a connecting node, a locum of respite and nourishment during the arduous journey across the Himalayas. Stored in the birds’ muscle memory, genes, and brains, this deep species memory—threatened by aerial warfare—once again reveals the scalar consequences of individual actions. David, who has been fueling the fire of the Soviet-Afghan War, is cast as accountable not only for human but also for these nonhuman casualties, his legacy extending into the deep future opened up via this nonhuman witness.⁵⁴

The grim picture offered by the above lines foreshadows a future in which no birds from Siberia might be flying to the Afghan environs.

Many birds are killed as a result of the poisoned food sources and the reduction of habitation sites. In *The Wasted Vigil*, the author brings into focus the discourse of birds as their behaviour undergoes a transformation as a result of the unending war imposed on their natural habitats. They are forced to build their nests in enclosed places because their external habitats have been destroyed by bombing. In the ear of the giant sculpture of the Buddha, Casa discovers the nest of a bird that “must have found its way into the factory through one of the many broken windows”⁵⁵ to find a place of shelter away from the madness of the war. Now, Marcus sees very few birds in and around his house as once he “thought of capturing a bulbul that had flown into the house. In the end he knew he could never eat anything he had heard sing”.⁵⁶ Just moments before blasting a bomb, Bihzad hears “the loud chatter of birds coming to him from the fronds”.⁵⁷ But after the explosion, no sound of birds is heard. This incident highlights the life of birds in Afghanistan before and after the war. The topiary birds and animals made by

Marcus substitute for the real birds and animals destroyed by war and bombing. After a long “war and absence they outgrew their shapes, though Marcus brought some of them back when the war with the Soviet Union was over”.⁵⁸ The following narration in *The Wasted Vigil* contrasts the Islamic ecology with the current US role in the degradation of environment.

When Nimrod built a pyre to burn Allah’s prophet Ibrahim, the hoopoe carried water in its beak and released it onto the flames from above. An onlooker, some Dick Cheney of his time, asked the hoopoe whether it thought the two drops of water would put out the mighty blaze. “I don’t know,” replied the bird. “All I know is that when Allah makes a list of those who built this fire and those who tried to put it out, I want my name to be in the second column.”⁵⁹

The reference from Islamic tradition seeks to show a close relationship between birds and the environment. It also highlights the point how birds play the role of saviours. The pyre is also suggestive of the post-9/11 Afghanistan. The reference to Dick Cheney, the US vice president at the time of American invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, implies how all the stakeholders in the Afghan war have been silent onlookers to its destruction. The reference to the bird implies the role of a writer as the one who tries his/her best to extinguish the fire of hatred and destruction.

Conclusion

This article has used the Islamic ecological lenses to study and explicate the representation of environmental crisis of the war zone of Afghanistan in selected post-9/11 Pakistani novels in English. The research argues that Islam as a body of knowledge and a set of ethical behaviours offers viable solutions to the worsening environmental crises. Given the environmental degradation perpetrated by the armed conflict, the world in general and the Muslims in particular need to find a panacea in the soul-healing relationship with their natural environment. Nature imagined through the eyes of the characters takes the readers back to the traditional environmental balance of the days before the militarization of the land. Further, it is contended that the set of ecological principles offered by Islam may be used to complement the contemporary literary concepts like ecocriticism and deep ecology. Islamic ecology lays emphasis on a strong bonding between human beings and other forms of life. Unless the proximity between them is comprehended, the ecological balance cannot be restored. Gauhar and Aslam underscore the importance of traditional beliefs and practices that bolster people’s attachment to their natural environment. The characters conceive of their physical and living environment and themselves as intertwined entities. This carefully balanced holism

precludes fragmentation and reductive treatment of nature, and subordinates human will to the ecological balance as prescribed by Islamic environmentalism.

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