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SOLASTALGIA AND THE DISRUPTION OF FAMILIAR PLACE IN PAKISTANI ENGLISH POETRY: A COMPARATIVE CLOSE READING OF RAFAT, GHOSE AND FARUQI

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Abstract

This study examines in what ways, and to what extent, selected Pakistani English poems represent the disruption of familiar place as an experience interpretable through Glenn Albrecht's concept of solastalgia, defined as distress produced by unwanted environmental change while a person remains at, or directly connected to, home. Using a qualitative interpretive design, it offers a comparative close reading of one poem each by Taufiq Rafat ("Kitchens"), Zulfikar Ghose ("Disturbed Nights") and Moeen Faruqi ("Rubbish Dump Incarnated"). Each poem is read for four components: a familiar place, attachment to it, unwanted and lasting change to it, and distress in a speaker who remains connected to it. The analysis shows that the poems separate components which solastalgia joins. Rafat's poem approaches the full conjunction, contrasting a place that gave solace with a transformed one that does not, but leaves open whether the speaker remained in the changed place, so it supports both solastalgic and nostalgic readings. Ghose's poem represents the estrangement of a home environment through recurrent intrusion, not environmental change. Faruqi's poem represents environmental degradation in detail but withholds an attached speaker, a before-and-after structure and expressed distress. The study does not claim that poems can be diagnosed or that three poems represent Pakistani English poetry.

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The term solastalgia (Albrecht 2005) was developed to describe a type of distress, which was not adequately described by existing terms: the pain of wanting to stay, because of unwelcome change in one's "home". They developed it in the context of remembering natural disasters, such as drought in rural New South Wales and open cut coal mining in the Upper Hunter Valley, and contrasted it with the nostalgia of someone separated from a loved home, according to Albrecht et al. (2007). Higginbotham et al. (2006) created a loss of solace in an Environmental Distress Scale. In the realm of literary study, the term is now applied to various forms of fiction and poetry and the

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emotional effects of landscape changes (Biswas, 2024; Wilson-Scott, 2023).

Pakistani English poetry is a prolific area in which the movement could be examined. This convention of poets constantly aims to create some sort of home base, a kitchen, garden, neighbourhood, and some depict their change. However, this type of transformation is often interpreted as nostalgia and rootedness (Mansoor, 2012) or landscape attachment (Rasheed & Aqeel, 2022). The difference between solastalgia turning is when a poem expresses a longing for a place that is left behind, versus when the poem expresses discomfort at a place that is changing around a speaker who stays, (Albrecht et al., 2007).

This study has as its one-idea-controlling concept the phenomenon of solastalgia. Familiar place is a place made familiar to and inhabited by the speaker or community of a given poem and disruption is alteration, degradation or disturbance. Only one of the three poems refers to the rural and the referent is remembered; in the other two cases the place is unknown, but only one places a rural referent on the scene and the memory of the absence of rurality is reported as a finding.

1.2 Problem Statement

Translations of Pakistani English poems in which the place is altered tend to use the term nostalgia (for instance using it by Mansoor, 2012, P. 21) or to speak of feeling attached to nature and landscape (Rasheed & Aqeel, 2022). These categories do not identify persons who have detached from a location and persons who both stay and see a changing location, but solastalgia is defined by such a distinction (Albrecht, 2005; Albrecht et al., 2007).

In this tradition, it remains unclear if the affect of altered-place poems is best characterized as nostalgia or as solastalgia or neither.

1.3 Research Question

How and to what extent do selected Pakistani English poems depict the disruption of familiar places as an experience interpretable by Albrecht's idea of solastalgia?

1.4 Research Objective

Through close-reading of one poem each by Taufiq Rafat, Zulfikar Ghose and Moeen Faruqi, to explore the changes in a familiar setting and its emotional ramifications while evaluating the extent to which these depictions fall under Albrecht's solastalgia definition.

1.5 Rationale of the study

The study is justified by the problem above. It does not seek to replace nostalgic or topophilic readings but to test them against a more precise concept, which sharpens what each poem can be said to represent. Solastalgia has been applied to poetry outside South Asia (Biswas & Ryan, 2023) and to South Asian and Pakistani fiction (Bibi et al., 2025; Santra & Pradhan, 2025), so this study extends that work to a new corpus. A comparative design shows which components of the concept each poem constructs and which it omits.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Solastalgia: Origins and Definition

Albrecht (2005) coined 'solastalgia' to refer to an affliction connected to the 'loss of solace' and feelings of 'desolation' which occur when the place a person calls home is altered. Albrecht et al. (2007) associated feelings of distress to environmental changes of people living in drought areas and people living in mining areas, stating that it was exacerbated with feelings of powerlessness towards the environmental change process. Compiled from fieldwork-based studies in the Upper Hunter Valley, Higginbotham et al. (2006) recognized that solastalgia was one 'leg' of the four legs of environmental distress: hazard perception, threat appraisal, felt impact, environmental action, and proposed an adaptation of the approach to appraise distress consequent to the lived experience of the desolation of home and environment. This was thus a people-centred notion, grounded in the people who stayed in these spaces and linked to an unwanted change, which is not to change as such.

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2.2 Distinctions from Neighboring concepts

These differences from other related concepts:

Whilst nostalgia is a response to a sense of a separation from home, solastalgia is a response to a sense of a change in the place where one is (Albrecht et al., 2007). Ecological grief, which Cunsolo and Ellis (2018) defined as 'grief' in response to an experienced or anticipated ecological loss', is wider in scope, and does not restricted to the area where the person resides. Slow violence, using Nixon's (2011) words "a violence of delayed destruction" (P. 2), refers to the ongoing environmental destruction which is spread and intermittent and whose silent "victim is the poor" (P. 4). It is not a competing paradigm, it is an experience of that harm, a solastalgia named the harm as a theme of connected subject. In a scoping review, Galway et al. (2019) visualised the development of research on solastalgia, clearly presenting the need to provide the conditions associated with the concept when it is deployed in new contexts. Three are chosen as a signifier of this study: peoples attached to subject, unwanted change lasted for a long time, distressed while being connected to the place.

2.3 Place and attachment

Solastalgia presupposes a place to which a subject is attached.

Place is the undifferentiated space with which people become more familiar and more appreciative, and hence attach value, according to Tuan (1977) (P. 6), has the ability to be "unmade" if familiarization or valuation is removed. Relph (1976) gives a name to the other: placelessness, the destruction of unique places and the creation of homogenized landscapes in a lack of consideration of place. Both make sense of, but only of, a poet's place: a place known and valued by a subject which disruption can be then read as distressful.

2.4 Literary applications

Wilson-Scott (2023) explores solastalgia in 'The Town' by Shaun Prescott and the 'perforated' Australian landscape. The concept was put into practice in the study by Biswas and Ryan (2023) who work with Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner's poetry. Based on this, Biswas (2024) proposes that literary narratives have the ability to manifest the experience of solastalgia in two modes, namely the expressionistic and impressionistic modes which can be identified in the sociocultural context of the text through close reading. Santra and Pradhan (2025) discuss environmental memories, place identity and solastalgia in Arif Anwar's novel, The Storm, while Bibi et al. (2025) explore solastalgia in Munazza Yaqoob's novel titled 'A Lament for the Peach Orchard'. These studies show that close reading is a suitable method. They also put forward a caveat that a poem isn't a patient, and that a literary reading assumes a relation to place that is represented and asks: a text represents whose distress?

2.5 English poems of Pakistan and poets selected

Mansoor (2012) makes an overview of the development of Pakistani English poetry. She calls Ghose's poetry 'diasporic' (P. 20), comments on the 'ecological mimeticism' of Rafat's portrayal of village life (P. 21) and sees in 'Kitchens' a kind of 'nostalgia' for a rustic childhood kitchen (P. 21). Rasheed and Aqeel (2022) read Rafat's poetry in the light of ecopoetics and Tuanian concept of topophilia, focusing on landscapes, flora fauna, and humans and nature. I have failed to identify any scholarly work on Faruqi's poem that touches upon the theme of place/environmental representation.

2.6 Research Gap

Beyond the identification of solastalgia in South Asian poetry (Biswas & Ryan, 2023), and in Pakistani and South Asian fiction (Bibi et al., 2025; Santra & Pradhan, 2025), this paper aims to explore the discourse of solastalgia and its variants in the Bangladeshi children's film originating in these nations. Rafat has been read through ecopoetics and topophilia (Rasheed & Aqeel, 2022), "Kitchens" as nostalgia, as well as a diasporic Ghose (Mansoor, 2012). In the sources I consulted, I did not find a single study which uses the concept of solastalgia in relation to the English poetry of Pakistan or tests the distinction between nostalgia and solastalgia in

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the Pakistani context by analysts like Rafat, Ghose and Faruqi on the poems of altered place. The disparity is specific: in both of these poems the changing position of a speaker that is the criterion of solastalgia has not been used. So far as I can find.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Paradigm

The study adopts an interpretivist paradigm, which recognises that literary meaning is constructed through textual language, imagery, structure, and context. This paradigm is appropriate because the study examines how selected Pakistani English poems represent the relationship between familiar places, environmental change, and emotional distress. Rather than seeking objective measurement or statistical generalisation, it interprets the meanings produced by the poems and evaluates their correspondence with Glenn Albrecht's concept of solastalgia.

3.2 Research Approach

The study employs a qualitative approach to examine the representation of place disruption in poetry. Qualitative interpretation allows attention to imagery, diction, contrasts between past and present, representations of environmental disturbance, and the implied position of the speaker. The analysis uses solastalgia as its primary theoretical concept while remaining open to findings that do not correspond to its defining conditions.

3.3 Research Design

The research uses a comparative textual analysis design based on close reading. It examines three poems, one each by Taufiq Rafat, Zulfikar Ghose, and Moeen Faruqi. The comparative design enables the poems to be examined through the same analytical criteria while preserving their individual textual and thematic characteristics. The purpose is to establish how, and to what extent, each poem represents the disruption of familiar place in ways that may be interpreted through solastalgia.

3.4 Sampling Technique and Selection Criteria

The study uses purposive sampling to select three poems from an earlier seven-poem corpus. The selection is guided by the poems' relevance to representations of familiar place, environmental disturbance, and the relationship between place and the speaker.

Taufiq Rafat's "Kitchens" was selected because it contrasts a remembered place with a transformed present setting. Zulfikar Ghose's "Disturbed Nights" was retained as a boundary case because it represents disturbance within a home environment, allowing the analysis to examine whether disturbance alone satisfies the conditions of solastalgia. Moeen Faruqi's "Rubbish Dump Incarnated" was selected because it depicts environmental degradation directly within an urban setting.

Selecting one poem per poet gives each poet equal representation within the comparison and permits sustained close reading. However, the small sample does not support generalisations about the entire body of work of these poets or about Pakistani English poetry as a whole. Only Rafat's poem contains a rural referent, and this is remembered rather than presented as the speaker's current rural environment.

3.5 Analytical Framework

The analysis is guided by four components derived from Albrecht's concept of solastalgia:

Familiar place: The poem establishes a setting that is known to and valued by a speaker or community.

Attachment to place: The text indicates an emotional, experiential, or symbolic connection between a subject and the setting.

Unwanted environmental change: The place undergoes a transformation or disturbance that the poem presents as unwelcome or damaging.

Distress and continued connection: The text represents distress or a loss of solace in a subject who remains in, or continues to be directly connected to, the altered place.

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These components provide a consistent basis for assessing the extent to which each poem corresponds to solastalgia. Environmental degradation, domestic disturbance, attachment, or nostalgia alone is not treated as sufficient evidence of solastalgia.

3.6 Analytical Procedure

Each poem was read repeatedly to identify relevant textual features, including imagery, diction, contrasts between past and present, representations of place, and expressions of distress or loss. The analysis followed six steps:

1. Identify a relevant textual feature or passage.
2. Provide a brief quotation as textual evidence.
3. Interpret the language, imagery, or structure of the passage.
4. Relate the interpretation to one or more components of solastalgia.
5. Compare the finding with the corresponding representation in the other poems.
6. Explain how the finding contributes to answering the research question.

The analysis also considers three discriminators: the speaker's position in relation to the place, whether the disturbance appears lasting or episodic, and whether the text establishes an identifiable subject experiencing distress. These discriminators help distinguish solastalgia from nostalgia and from representations of environmental or domestic disturbance that lack the concept's defining conditions.

3.7 Interpretive Rigour and Scope

To maintain interpretive rigour, claims are grounded in identifiable textual evidence, and the distinction between textual observation and the researcher's interpretation is maintained. The same analytical components are applied to all three poems, including the boundary case that may not fulfil the conditions of solastalgia. Interpretations that contradict the proposed framework or reveal missing components are retained rather than excluded.

The study is limited to three purposively selected poems and therefore offers a focused comparative interpretation rather than a comprehensive account of Pakistani English poetry. Its findings concern the representation of solastalgia in the selected texts, not the psychological diagnosis of poets or speakers.

Data Analysis

Every poem is discussed with reference to the elements outlined in the Research Paradigm section. Order is arranged by descending order of match of the degree of correspondence found (Rafat- Faruqi).

4.1 Rafat's "Kitchens"

4.1.1 Place and attachment

The first line of the poem is in the conditional collective past tense, "Kitchens were places we grew up in" (Rafat, 1985, Line 1). The kitchens "attracted us" (Line 2), and it's constructed with sensory detail: "High-roofed spacious," and "the pungency of smoke spices" Llines 2-3). The body and the seasons bring a movement toward the place: "From December beds we hurried to the cheer/ of wood-fire above which sang black kettles" (lines 4–5). The lift of the kettles that "sang" (Tuan, 1977, P. 6) denotes the body as the utilising resource to make the place known. Time is also a place of leisure in the kitchen, where the family 'dawdled over last night's curry; and where there are 'everlasting bowls of tea' (Lines 6-8) and a place of community speech: 'Discussion centred'... 'births deaths marriages / crops' (Lines 9-10). The movement of the poem, "Crops", is the only rural signifier, assuming the home space is connected to the agricultural experience. Mansoor (2012, P. 21) refers to Rafat's approach to village life as 'ecological mimeticism'. The words manifested through the accumulation of particulars and what the place gave: "Mother presided contributing only her presence, / busy ladling ladling noise was warmth" (Lines 10–11).

4.1.2 Change

This poem is hinged around a deictic marker: "Now in these cramped spaces there is / no time for talk" (Lines 12–13). Now, these make the speaker strictly live in the new space he/she is talking; these are the most pertinent with respect to the discriminator of position. The bright new name is the "stainless homogeneity" that "winks back at our sneers" (Lines 13-15); chairs are

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"insular," "do not encourage intimacy like slats." It is recorded as a loss of qualities, such as texture, sociability, sensory richness, and not of an object. The final lines of the poem explicitly say what's been replaced: "chromium and formica / have taken place of the textured homeliness of plaster / teak" (Lines 18-20). "Stainless homogeneity" is similar, albeit in my interpretation, to Relph's (1976) standardised landscapes.

4.1.3 Grief and Distress

The speaker's stance towards the new setting is conveyed through refusal: "we would not dream / of coming to this place to savour our triumph / or unburden our griefs" (Lines 16-18). People lose the joys and sorrows, which were the special gifts of the new kitchen, it could be understood as the loss of solace the earlier kitchen provided (Albrecht, 2005). The finish-system "everything is clean as a hospital" in Line 20 makes the setting seem more like a place of institution, comfort has been replaced by sterility. The attitude is also scornful: the new surfaces "wink back at our sneers" (Lines 13-14) and the plural pronoun "our" implies that the speaker(s) are engaging in a "civic duty" exchange of sneering with the room as well. The poem is thus not so much a lament as a rejection.

4.1.4 Correspondence and Divergence

The suitability of new place in the poem is similar to solastalgia with the loss in the capacity of the previous place of comfort or solace being the change, and that change being permanent. There are 3 restrictions to the lettering. First, the change is domestic and material, between wood-fire and the materials of chromium and formica, not a landscape change, so the extension of the concept with solastalgia is from landscape to the built home environment. An extension would seem appropriate in that it is a move concerned with the home environment as a whole (Higginbotham et al., 2006), but it is still an extension. Secondly, the poem doesn't say the house moved to a new kitchen, or whether or not the old kitchen was altered in any way. "Have replaced" (Line 19) suggests a displacement of one set of materials by another, but the plural kitchens and coming to this place (Line 17) do not indicate whether the speakers' own childhood kitchen is the one that is changed. If they did move, it's closer to nostalgia, like Mansoor (2012, P. 21) reads it; but if the kitchen was refitted, it's closer to solastalgia.

4.2 Ghose' "Disturbed Nights"

4.2.1 Place, attachment and initial distance of the disaster

In the poem's opening, Disaster is placed at a distance. The siren is sounded first by the speaker as it is "some emergency across the valley" (Ghose, n.d., Stanza 1), and the speaker imagines a Jeep with young boys who have "lost control", and another car "down the crowded main road" (Ghose, n.d., Stanza 8). These are 'the morning-paper headlines / telling of a night's disasters' (Stanza 1) 'as one pours skimmed milk in a measured portion of granola. What we can see, then, is how disaster is constituted as a known entity through the newspaper and is thereby absorbed into some sort of home routine; and how home is defined as a site of newspaper consumption. The care of the property is evidence of attachment. The speaker is situated "behind a photinia hedge I'd trimmed a month before, furtively and suspiciously protective" (Stanza 3), and the hedge itself is a boundary operated by the speaker. The presence of the UPS man, and granola, implies a suburban environment, but no locality is specified.

4.2.2 Intrusion and estrangement

The siren is "very loud now" (Stanza 2), the neighbourhood dogs "begin to howl," the elm is "lit up by approaching headlights" and the whole front yard is "illuminated" (Stanza 2). The speaker's response is embodied as he covers his eyes with a hand because of "alternate red and blue flashes" (Stanza 2). "the front of my house a stage where electricians tested a lighting effect before a performance" (Stanza 4) makes the speaker the once and new spectator and familiar home a theatre. Domestic analogies upset: like late dinner guests, the paramedics come to the neighbour's door, and like a man who wheels a big package to the door, the stretcher is wheeled. The poem's familiar language renders the

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familiar place strange by likening itself to an emergency. Stanza 5 depicts the paramedics as having a "studied slowness," reminds one of "country tax appraisers" and sums up the emergency as an "assessment of value."

4.2.3 Recurrence and position

The poem used repetition: 'first time it came' (Stanza 3) and 'this second time' (Stanza 5) to different neighbours' houses. The last stanza sets the speaker on a threshold. He says 'I should go in' but remain 'outside', taking up a stand behind the 'photinia hedge' and the poem concludes: 'But it's a long, tense wait. Once, a sign of protective care, the hedged space is now a space of watching.

4.2.4 Correspondence and divergence

The poem depicts alienation of a familiar environment, or solastalgia (Albrecht, 2005) the central experience of solastalgia. It also has a passing-in-of-solace element, as the home in the poem can't resume its role as a haven while speaker waits outside. The letters do, however, have a few drawbacks. Firstly, it is not an environmental change. It is a recurring type of intrusion by those who are neighbours due to their medical emergencies, and the poem doesn't depict any change in the place, its deterioration, or its loss. Second, this is not a rural area. Third, the predominant affect is vigilance and suspense ("long, tense wait") and not loss. The poem is therefore best viewed as a limiting case, in the sense that in order to experience solastalgia, not only does a person need to have something that is a home place, but it must also undergo unwanted and lasting environmental change (Albrecht et al., 2007). Though Ghose's work has been called diasporic by Mansoor (2012, P. 20) the text itself doesn't go to length to describe anything with regards to displacement.

4.3 The intersection of rubbish dump and human: "Rubbish Dump Incarnated" by Faruqi

4.3.1 Place

The poem builds a garbage landfill with its sensory detail: the unmistakable aroma of mango skins (Faruqi, n.d., Line 3), bread bags with moulded crumbs (Line 9), and rotting bananas, lettuce, / entrails of sacrificed sheep (Lines 20–21). The wrappers are 'from the lived lives of the city,' and make up 'a diary of eating and excreting' (Line 8). The setting is richly described but also city dwelling and nothing indicates it is a home of a Speaker.

4.3.2 Attachment and Speaker

There is no speaker in the first person, and only one reference to the plural "our lives" (Line. 28). Its dependent beings are birds and young children who collect solid waste as said in the poem by speaker "young feet that scavenge / paper, iron, aluminium" (lines 11-12), and "cows and crows" (Line 25). Their dependence is evoked by action and expectation (their expectation is that "blue plastic will become treasure'; 1–2) and not conveyed through some overt expression of feeling. This is understandable by children being included as part of the scavengers, a theme that is stated, by Nixon (2011 P.4) the idea is that the poorest people are the main victims of environmental damage.

4.3.3 Change and time

There is no 'Before' or 'After' structure to the poem. It has words of the present and the future: "will be sold" (Line 14) and "The heavens will be pleased" (Line 22) and so the loss is the location, not something which has taken place on a once-different location. It is so reframed in religious vocabulary with terms such as "incarnation" (Line 15), "transmigrating souls" (Line 23) and "consumed souls" (Line 6). The dump can be interpreted as a transformation in which consumption is rebirth.

4.3.4 Affect

Distress is withheld. The tone is ironically wonder or satirizing: "the wrappers are 'yellows and reds here / new to the universe' (Lines 17-18); the emptiness is 'saffron' (Line 4); the cow and the crows are 'happy' (Line 27). This could be compassionate, ironic or indicting, but it's unclear. Nor does the poem imply that the cows

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"grazing" (Line 26) on a dump are displaced pastoral images.

4.3.5 Correspondence and divergence

The poem depicts environmental degradation, there is no place that is otherwise and there is no person distressed who is attached to the place. Best appreciated as a poem of degradation in the absence of solastalgic construction, a second boundary case to add to Ghose's first.

4.4 Comparative analysis

There were four emergent patterns from the readings that were not predetermined. First of all, the poems divide elements that Albrecht's vision brings together. Only 'Kitchens' features attachment and lasting change, loss of solace and even then the change is domestic, the speaker is in an ambiguous state. Correspondence with solastalgia thus requires the conjunction of components (Albrecht et al., 2007), and a poem can correspond to (epitomize) one or two without corresponding to the experience named by solastalgia.

Secondly, the poems vary in terms of fixing the speakers' position. The "Kitchens" relies on a split of past and present and a deictic "now", and "Disturbed Nights" is bound to the speaker's physical "now" - the hedge - and to the split of house and street; "Rubbish Dump Incarnated" is speaker-less. This is relevant to the availability of a nostalgic reading (Mansoor, 2012) versus a solastalgic reading of the state of being, as solastalgia requires one to be 'there' (Albrecht et al., 2007).

Thirdly, there is different formulation of affect: refusal in Rafat, suspense in Ghose and none in Faruqi. These withheld feelings have, therefore, been handled as textual facts in this study, whereas in impressionistic modes as described by Biswas (2024), it is treated as a figment of imagination.

Fourthly, rural place is introduced as a backdrop, as recollected place in "Kitchens." Another observation is vis-a-vis voice: In Faruqi's poem, it is the people most affected by the degraded conditions that are not given voice: a literary reading must then address this question: Who does a poem represent when no one gives voice to those that are most affected by degraded conditions?

Conclusion

This study examined, rather than assumed, if there are signs of disrupted place in Pakistani English poems that are associated with solastalgia. There is partial correspondence between three poems. However, Rafat's "Kitchens" works as a form of solastalgia; it can also be read as nostalgia, if a certain detail in the text is absent. Estrangement of a home environment with recurrent intrusion without environmental change is being seen in Ghose's "Disturbed Nights". Faruqi's "Rubbish Dump Incarnated" serves as an example of environmental degradation, but with no speaker or expressed concern. It's a modest contribution because it is a text-bound use of Albrecht's distinction and a method that sees non-correspondence as a finding with regard to poems primarily read as nostalgic or topophilic.

Future Recommendations

Future research could apply the framework to the poems that are chosen systematically for the rural setting, which include poets who are writing in the rural setting (within Pakistan) as well as those from the diaspora (Mansoor, 2012, P. 20). Research could delve into if poems about the most vulnerable to those degraded environments provide the best starting point for reading via slow violence (Nixon, 2011). This research gap can be tested by a systematic search in a database and through other readers showing how far the interpretations rely on the one reader.

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