

SURVIVAL UNDER DURESS: ANARCHIST CRITIQUE OF *THINNER THAN SKIN*

Shaista Malik^{1*}, Abdul Shakoor², Ayaz Muhammad Shah³, Wajid Riaz⁴

^{1*,2,3}Department of English, Hazara Univeristy, Mansehra, KPK, Pakistan; ⁴Department of English, The University of Lahore, Sargodha Campus, Pakistan.

Email: ^{1*}shaistamalik2010@yahoo.com, ²adshakoor@hu.edu.pk, ³ayazmshah@gmail.com, ⁴wijisami@gmail.com

Article History: Received on 21st January, 2021, Revised on 26th March 2021, Published on 29th April 2021

Abstract

Purpose of the study: This study used an Anarchist framework to prove that *Thinner than Skin* by Uzma Aslam Khan explores the causes of the peripheral communities' shared precariousness and their fight to sustain and conserve life in a world encroached upon by civilization.

Methodology: Using Anarchist's ([Manicardi, 2012](#); [Zerzan, 2006](#), [Bookchin, 2005](#)) framework that believes that this materialistic worldview can be refuted only by unveiling the oppressive conditions of our modern existence, looking for remedy of people's unbearable misery is tantamount to finding a cure for these miseries. Further, the research is qualitative and analytical in nature, using close textual analysis.

Main Findings: The paper finds that Khan highlights the precarious condition of peripheral communities residing in the Northern region of Pakistan. The analysis has proved that Khan's fiction, particularly her novel *Thinner than Skin* expresses her anarchist vision and shows her detest for modern civilization which being steeped in anthropocentric ideology subjects all forms of life to extinction

Applications of the study: The paper helps to identify in future studies that how perpherial people are kept oppressed and marginalized, and how they will be given agentic position to represent themesevels rather they are represented.

Novelty/Originality of the study: The study is about nomadic tribes, residing in the womb of Himalayan ranges are subjected to a number of problems including natural disasters such as floods and climatic shifts which causes glacial melt and threatens to drown the adjacent areas in a few decades only to satiate big businesses' thirst for profit. The state fails miserably to defend its citizens from political and economic turmoil because the state serves as handmaiden to western countries and the business interests of their business tycoons.

Keywords: Shared Precariousness, Civilization, Development, Neo-liberalism, Enforced Agriculture, Pre-civilized People.

INTRODUCTION

[Manicardi \(2012, xviii\)](#) defines civilization as A precise conception of the world based on and defends specific values. These include not only the principle of domination but also the logical-rational abstract way of thinking that leads to knowledge-as-power (culture, science, technology), a helpful world view, based on the practice of equivalent exchange and on the transformation of any existing entity into a production factor; and the notion of a centralized, bureaucratic organization of social life, founded on the irreplaceable roles of terror and the cult of future.

Anarchists ([Manicardi, 2012](#); [Manicardi, 2020](#), [Zerzan, 2006](#), [Bookchin, 2005](#), [Fischer and Herberl, 1993](#), [Sahlins, 1960](#), [Tina, 2013](#)), believe that this materialistic worldview can be refuted only by unveiling the oppressive conditions of our modern existence; looking for remedy of people's unbearable misery is tantamount to finding a cure for these miseries. They contend that the pre-civilized people were not avid of development; they used to live in close communion with nature and other humans, and they believed in a different set of values from the civilized world's perceptions. They visualized people, things and relations for their uniqueness rather than gradation of superiority or inferiority. The pre-civilized people viewed the world as a "whole" constituted by a balanced and harmonious blend of disparate entities, all inevitably necessary for the smooth working of the universe. Nature, in all its hues, including biotic entities like floras; faunae; non-biotic forms like stones; even dead substances, cooperate distinctly for a smooth and harmony of the universe. Hence, the equilibrium of the earth is influenced by the comportment of every single form of life; and the planet's invigoration owes to the participation of all those modes of existence.

[Manicardi \(2012\)](#) locates the rise of civilization in the birth of agriculture which is virtually "a declaration of war on local ecosystems". **Please provide full intext citation as per APA guidelines** He believes that civilization gave birth to the perception that nature is a functional object that can be fudged with, chastened and conquered according to the needs and desires of humans; this gave birth to the exploitation of nature in the form of agriculture. Highlighting the avaricious aspect of civilized humans' practices he points out that the exploitation of the land comes not only through harvesting; rather, farming is "forcing, pushing production through chemicals, through a human intervention aimed to have more and more". As land was subjected to its subservient role, it was forced to give more yield; for that purpose, more and more chemical fertilizers were produced and used to enrich soils artificially. [Manicardi \(2012\)](#) detects a vicious cycle involved in farming; he points out the meaninglessness of this whole exercise called farming, which consists in spraying pesticides to protect plants from unwanted germs, but the microbes grow stronger with every new pesticide. [Manicardi \(2012\)](#) points towards

the meaningless effort of civilized humans who "pollute the land to produce new chemicals to kill new diseases produced by new forms of pollution".

Environmental anarchists, particularly [Marina Fischer \(2010\)](#), consider agriculture synonymous with "terrestrial colonization". With agriculture, humans declared their hatred towards the earth and its other inhabitants and perceived themselves as masters of the planet. Consequently, nature was relegated to simply a usable tool from the reverence that it enjoyed for millions of years. Fisher believes that the secession from nomadism and hunting-gathering mode of existence fractured the pre-civilized profound relationship between humans and their surroundings; agriculture was an inauguration of irreparable alienation between humans and other forms of life. Tied to agriculture, they inevitably had to stay close to their occupied land as land only became their source of sustenance, and consequently, demographic growth was seen.

Agriculture created an "artificial environment" ([Manicardi, 2012](#)) which transformed the dietary habits of its practitioners and their health. Before agriculture, people enjoyed close communion with nature, which was disturbed by the ever-growing need for a settlement. As nomadism is discrepant with land cultivation, to create more space for farming, large parcels of land were subjected to ruthless assault, which caused deforestation, which further aggravated human health. The nomads and hunter-gathers, who used to work only a few hours to satisfy their basic needs, did not work in modern factory setups; they breathed in open air and collaborated with their friends. The work of nomads was not demanding; they were engaged in a much more satisfying activity than the mechanized and alienating labour the workers experience in a modern-day working place. Their work was a way of their existence; it was not onerous or a "necessary evil" to be over with as hastily as possible. The rise of agriculture consumed their time and relations with other humans and nonhuman nature. Imposing agriculture on the nomads is strangulating them in boxed and squeezing surroundings, which continually demands their engagement despite their intense dislike for it; for them, "work took the place of life" ([Manicardi, 2012](#)).

[Manicardi \(2012\)](#) notes that the rise of agriculture adversely affected a millenary peaceful mode of existence of the pre-literate tribes; agriculture began to dis sever with the emersion of geographically stable farming. The availability of a few arable lands brought in new quarrels, which grew more intense as well as frequent with the explosion of population. The once boundless riches of the land were squeezed, which caused the depletion of the virgin land. With organized political systems emerging, the heavy burden on virgin forests further aggravated the ecological destruction as well as feuds between tribes over land and its resources. The nomads, who were free to move and enjoy the fruits of the earth and their relationship with the land, were chained to land through this shift to farming. Apart from that, the rise of agriculture nurtured violence and warfare. Communal ties were broken, and the rise of the nation-state brought a new kind of subjection to those who wield power. [Manicardi \(2012\)](#) laments that agriculture transformed the nature of relations:

Everything takes an abstract turn: a brotherhood is converted into a feeling of national unity; cooperation is now a division of social labour; mutual aid is charity. Harmony is replaced by order... while primitive people dance with the moon, expressing love for the sun, mountains and stones, civilized individuals worship ideas.

The exploitation of land and its inhabitants did not stop with "development"; rather, it became more brutal and genocidal in the age of globalization. Fast means of transportation and technological development whipped up "economic globalization" or neo-liberalism, which was "premised around the sacredness of modern science and economic prosperity with their collusion with globalization" ([Shiva, 1989](#)).

This unbridled pursuit of development yoked only by science began to prey upon those who are imperative to its working. The action of being alive and of rejoicing was surrendered to the advancement, and this project of science and expansion compromises the purity of life. ([Shiva, 1989](#))

The "Enlightenment" project backed by science and technology is saturated with darkness, suppression and destruction of life and all existence augmenting procedures. [Shiva \(1989\)](#) questions the sanctitude of science and discloses that the development brought under the aegis of "science" is "not universal categories of progress" but the particular designs of modern 'Imperialistic, Capitalism' under the garb of neo-liberalism. With the rise of civilization, technological advancement, and neo-liberalism insurgence, the havoc did to land, and multiple forms of life is unexplainable. [Zerzan \(2006\)](#) also explicitly states that with the invasion of science, the world has been hijacked by new petrochemical corporations which insist on using artificial fertilizers and other lethal chemicals like pesticides and herbicides to enhance crop yield. Apart from that, the encroachment of these agribusinesses has established an irrefutable monopoly over the seed type and breed type used by agriculturalists of particularly the poor countries. The control of these big corporations over the processes of food production, from planting and livestock administration to consumption, speaks volumes of the helplessness of the poor states who fail to protect the interests of their poor farmers.

Thinner than Skin introduces pre-literate/ pre-civilized tribes inhabiting Kagan valley at the foot of the Himalayan ranges. In this captivating fiction [Khan \(2012\)](#) explores a number of themes including identity and a need of belonging in Pakistani American young generation ([Kanwal, 2015](#)). Her other works [Trespassing \(2003\)](#), [The Geometry of God \(2008\)](#) and [The Miraculous True History of Nomi Ali \(2019\)](#), also present identical themes. However, the narrative of [Thinner than Skin \(2012\)](#) takes the readers along the beautiful valleys of northern Pakistan; the heavenly landscape of mountainous ranges, mighty glaciers, rivers and streams is the hallmark of this fiction. The Kaghan valley mainly is the major setting of the novel, with its spellbinding beauty of "mating glaciers" and "mating ice" and the queen of the mountains, "Malka Purbat". In addition to taking the readers on a beautiful tour to the mesmerizing Saiful Maluk, the novel exposes the life on the

verge of extinction. Description of the majestic power of the most feared and photographed peak in the Himalayan ranges: "The Nanga Parbat, the naked mountain", is also reminiscent of a world inhabited by nonhuman life. The love knot is tied between a young Pakistani emerging photographer who studies in America and aspires to become a world-known photographer by capturing the captivating scenery of Kaghan valley with its abutting landscape. His relationship with Farhana, the daughter of a Pakistani father and a German mother, compels him to invite her to Pakistan. During their trip to the northern areas, they encounter an unplanned meeting with a little daughter of nomads. The tragic death of the girl at the hands of this couple ignites the dormant subversive spirit in the most neglected community. Through the romantic tale of this young couple, the novel opens to the imagination of readers a world of ice mass, the old Silk Road used for trade between Pakistan and China and a unique mode of existence of nomads inhabiting these areas. The novel highlights the tales of sufferings and encroachment of Pakistani territory by China under the garb of trade. It also introduces the interlocking and intermingling interests of Pakistanis, Uzbecks, Russians, Chinese and Afghans who all interact with each other from time to time.

[Khan \(2012\)](#) laments that such a paradisiacal beauty and pristine nature is being ravished by "the politics of war, trade and tourism" ([Makhdoom and Yaqoob, 2019](#)) that disrupts the immaculate beauty located in the regions in the womb of Himalayan ranges. The civilization imperils the existence of pre-civilized cultures expressed by nomads and nonhuman nature as depicted by mountains, rivers, animals etc. The displacement of nomads from their choicest land is equivalent to expanding the "actual poverty by expansion" targeted at removing culturally comprehended poorness. The novel highlights the influence of mighty commercialized business tycoons who have deprived the nomads of their conventional grazing land. This forced them to move to fragile uplands for subsistence on the one hand and spoiled the ecosystem on the other. It also let their cattle die of starvation ([Kohn, 2013, 258](#)). The nomads portrayed in the novel refuse to adopt agriculture be an undeclared war against the ecosystem. The freedom of nomads is curtailed by coercing them to adopt farming and agriculture. The cardinal vision of these people is supplanted by "the ideology of the market" ([Manicardi, 2012](#)); the nature that was a source of reverence is reduced to an object to be exploited. With agriculture, humans became "power generators"; and every inch of the land is used to satisfy "the supremacist human's needs" ([Manicardi, 2012](#)).

Research Objectives:

1. To explore Uzma Aslam Khan's *Thinner than skin* to show elements of civilization.
2. To explore Uzma Aslam Khan's *Thinner than skin*, replicating anarchist philosophy.
3. To show the representation of peripheral communities in *Thinner than skin* in the light of an anarchist framework.

Significance of the research

The significance relies on the objectives and purpose of the study is to use the Anarchist framework to prove that *Thinner than Skin* (2012) by Uzma Aslam Khan is an exploration of the causes of the peripheral communities' shared precariousness and their fight to sustain and conserve life in a world encroached by civilization. The research from the same perspective will help us understand the phenomenon of anarchism and how marginalized people are being treated in a different social context.

METHODOLOGY

Using the Anarchist ([Manicardi, 2012et.al](#)) framework that believes that this materialistic worldview can be refuted only by unveiling the oppressive conditions of our modern existence, looking for a remedy for people's unbearable misery is equivalent to finding a cure for these miseries. They contend that the pre-civilized people were not avid of development; they used to live in close communion with nature and other humans, and they believed in a different set of values from the civilized world's perceptions. They visualized people, things and relations for their uniqueness rather than gradation of superiority or inferiority. Further, the research is qualitative, analytical, and exploratory in nature, using close textual analysis. Literature research is slightly different from other fields as the study focuses on the text that is only read, and chunks are chosen to explain the theory and inter-textual references. The selected book plays a role as a primary source, and data for analysis is selected from the primary sources. In contrast, different references are secondary sources used to endorse the researcher's standpoint.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The story of *Thinner than Skin* (2012) revolves around Maryam's family, which is emblematic of a pre-civilized way of life. The novel substantiates Dr Tania's contention that "culturally perceived poverty" is distinct from "real material poverty". Subsistence economies of the native population gratify the basic requirements through self-reliance. The nomads depicted in the novel are not poor as they do not suffer the dearth of their fundamental needs, yet the ideology of progress soaked in the market rhetoric pronounces their poverty because their self-reliance forbids them from overwhelming participation in the market economy. Irfan and other city dwellers conceive Maryam's family as poor because they eat a herbal diet found in the valley rather than factory-produced and circulated food articles. The "mud and stone houses" they reside in are self-built with the help of their kins and do not contribute economically in big corporations producing cement and fancy tiles and ceramics; their poverty is calculated through their "handmade garments" woven from raw fibre gained through organic processes rather than synthetics substance produced in garment factories. Their subsistence, although

considered a "low-quality life", is far healthier and superior to the commercially driven existence of the city dwellers. Their organic food produced and consumed locally by them is preferable nutritionally to the more expensive but toxic processed food produced in chemical plants; their self-built houses are in complete conformity with the harsh weather and local ecology. Organic fibres worn by them are not only affordable, but they are also better suited to the harsh and icy weather of the climate of Gilgit. The nomadic community depicted in the novel does not manifest "conspicuous consumption" by consuming "non-vital articles"; far from the requirements of high energy sources, they are often what Marshal Schlins has called "the original affluent societies."

Under the garb of "development" and "progress", these free-living tribes are forced to adopt agriculture, as Suleman laments, the loss of older ways of life. Suleman, Maryam's husband, voices concern for their precarious status; he bemoans that they have been turned into "slaves" after the "free grazing lands are turned into state farms" (Khan, 2012, 245). He reminisces over the days when they "were free to graze in the hills around Saiful Muluk", but now their freedom has been usurped, and they are not safe anywhere as anyone can "rob [their] cattle, even [their] children" (Khan, 2012, 245). Suleman attributes this helplessness to the dearth of leadership in their tribe; he surmises that they have lost the spirit for the fight against intruders. Because of this lack of appropriate leadership, they are subjected to inexorable violence; many members of their tribe were "tricked into buying plots of land" (Khan, 2012, 251). With this imposition, they had to give up their "free grazing rights and had to abide strictly by the dictates of the state officials regarding "what to plant, and when". They were ordered to plant "the same cash crops, year after year" that definitely harmed the land. The nomads knew that the state authorities were insensitive to the needs of the humans as well as land and they "never smelled the seasons (Khan, 2012, 251).

Prior to the encroachment of agri-businesses, their needs were fulfilled sufficiently, and their poverty began with the destruction of their mode of existence; the enforced agriculture compelled them to use the earth as "an object". The novel shows that the penetration of big corporations and multinational agribusinesses penetrate this area in the pretence of "benevolence"; this benevolence has legitimated the march of development ahead in the form of "enforced agriculture" as a poverty alleviation design. The enforced agriculture destroys not only the wholeness and their sustainable mode of life; it rather generates conditions for "real material poverty" by usurping the source of their basic needs. Cash crop production drives the land and water resources away from the community's needs and boots out a substantially large number of people from their claim to food. This relentless process of industrialized farming replicates the hunger of the marginalized communities which cannot afford processed foods. Barnett (1981), in his book *The Lean Year*, explicates the reason for the increasing poverty as the market principles do not help the poor people because "the profit flows to corporations that have no interest in feeding the hungry people with no money (Barnett, 1981) or they are least bothered about the need of the land and the species threatened by extinction. The result is scarcity which is "no longer cultural and relative: it is absolute" (Barnett, 1981, 11), and it imperils their very survival, and the same has been pronounced by Jahanara (2016).

The developmental project launched by advanced capitalist countries in the name of neo-liberalism is seen with suspicion by Khan (2012), who exposes the exploitative politics hidden behind the "sacredness of development"; she refutes it because it expunges every possibility of peripheral communities' survival. The nomads are, in Esteva's (1987) words, "tired of development; they just want to live" (258). The shift from a communal way of life to a mercenary and exploitative one resulted from colonization. Maryam's mother's lamentation points towards that mercenary way of life; she explains to Maryam that "timber and thatching grass had been free" (Khan, 2012). The forest department used to cooperate with them and would carry away the left stuff every season after the tribes disassembled their hovels, steered their cattle for the upland, and returned their wood every autumn when the nomads returned.

Maryam's mother bemoans at the marginalization and dehumanization of nomads who are treated as nothing better than dirt; they are not only deprived of their freedom and tethered to the sedentary mode of life but are perceived as lesser than humans because of their reliance on a subsistence economy. She attributes the destruction to the "Angrez" (Khan, 2012), who "invented the whole business, the whole revenue-generating forest policy that bound the herders". The British penetration into Indo-Pak unsettled not only the communal way of life; rather, it introduced a mercenary mode of thinking. They compelled them to "pay a grazing fee and tree cutting fee" (Khan, 2012). She reminisces that they freely grazed their cattle in the upland, and the local community used to be cooperative with them; they allowed them to use their fields for camping during their periodic migration. This cooperation was mutually beneficial as the nomads' cattle left "piles of fresh, steaming dung", which served as "free manure" for the land.

The change from the nomadic mode of existence to a mercenary began in Maryam's mother's days. With the passage of time these communities were considered "no better than the opal that lived in buffalo dung" (Khan, 2012). Her mother would grieve that the nomads are harassed by the state organs. The state dictates them regarding their choices and preferences. Obligated to the developed countries for economic aid, the states of weaker countries pave the way for foreign investment in these countries; consequently the states force the herders to purchase "small plots of land from a State that told them what to plant and when" (Khan, 2012); thereby the state usurps their autonomy altogether, leaving them at the mercy of agri-businesses for whom profit maximization is the vital driving force behind every transaction. The decision regarding which crops to be planted is all made by the state. Irrespective of the need of the land or the ecological hazards, the nomads are pressured to grow the "same cash crops, year after year" (Khan, 2012). Maryam is certain that they are forced to plant these crops for the people "who took away their grazing rights" (Khan, 2012).

The exploitation and harassment of the nomads started years ago. The forest inspector, who himself is a corrupt officer chases the nomads of their place and threatens them with many kinds of punishment. The inspector overruled their grazing permit and declared that it was fake; he blamed them for forging a fake grazing permit. On being shown the state stamp he contemptuously declared, "This? No, your stamp must look like this" (Khan, 2012). And he took from his pocket a piece of paper, the likes of which he had never seen before. They were fined a month's worth of milk; furthermore they were forced to accept the state program. He tore up their grazing permit and commanded them to "Learn to farm" (Khan, 2012). The herders depend upon the communal land for their goats and sheep's grazing, but the forest department imposes undue limitations on them and subjects them to further problems. The livestock these herders depend on throughout the treacherous weather cannot get enough feed and are exposed to starvation.

These gipsies face another setback at the hands of the state and its policy of appeasing the rich countries to draw foreign investment in farming. The state imposes "Australian sheep" on the herders in the name of efficiency and production of meat and milk yield; the "Australian sheep" which is rooted in "market-oriented policies" of the western countries, further becomes the cause of the extinction of the innate sheep of the region which is acclimatized to survive in the cold region of Northern areas of Pakistan. The "developmental policies" of the state are not helpful in alleviating the poverty of the herders as the foreign sheep, though better in terms of productivity, are not fit for the severe weather conditions and, resultantly, are unable to survive. Ghafoor deplores the state for its negligence of its own citizens only to appease the foreign investors, "Look what they do to us here. Killing our sheep, fencing the land, looting our forests, insulting our women, they know nothing of us, the way we work the land." (Khan, 2012)

The nomads' tribe could not resist the state's manipulation and gave in, which infuriated Maryam. The victimization of the nomads can be gauged from the fact that they "tore down the old, old trees and poisoned the Gujjar dogs and fenced off the land and charged the moon for two stems of ginger and claimed a killer was hiding in their midst" (Khan, 2012). The looting and plundering of their personal belongings and incessant threats from the state functionaries make Maryam feel a "fight erupting through her pores".

Perceiving the caution in the air, her family realizes that the world had rolled wavering in the months between their departure to the lake and their return to the lowlands. They were threatened by unknown men in "tanks and spies in plainclothes". These unknown menacing appearances appeared at their door and placed a long list of demands in front of the nomads. The tribes were forced to placate them with the sugar, and yogurt that they preserved for their children or guests. They blackmailed them by accusing them of sheltering a terrorist in their house. The belligerence of the state functionaries is seen through their "ripping through their homes, kicking pots and dishes and goats and children" (Khan, 2012). Knowing very well the abject situation of Maryam and her family, they threaten her by inquiring about her only son left. She tries hard to hide her son from their unwanted gaze and "offers them more sugar, more yoghurts and more bread" (Khan, 2012). Worried for her son, her sorrow and lamentation at the death of her daughter turns "to fear for her remaining children, her remaining land, and also, for that palpitation in her chest" (Khan, 2012). The perpetual fear engenders the betrayal against nomadism in their children. Their exploitation and dehumanization have forced the new generation to think otherwise. The enthralling policies of civilization cook up a conspiracy against nomadism as life become unbearable for them, so her son thinks of betraying her family's desires and opts for a state job rather than starve. The incessant humiliation of the tribe forces the child to think of renouncing nomadism. The nomads, helpless and marginalized communities, did not know resistance, so they were easily manipulated by the state and its functionaries. When her husband, who vowed never to become sedentary, berated the betrayal over dinner one day, her son, who was only six years old, said he would rather be a forest inspector than a herder" (Khan, 2012). Her son notices that movement was free for everyone except the herders; he realizes that they all "exist without permit" to move "And now, with all the other kinds of men moving into her valley without a permit", but their movement was restricted.

The deprivation of grazing rights brings another economic blow to the herders. The grazing pastures have been the only source of their sustenance; the tenuous and dwindling natural resources of the valley as well as the imposed restrictions of the forest department have displaced many other members of nomadic tribe. The threatening starvation motivates Maryam's brothers to migrate to big cities with industrial hubs; her brothers face another kind of exploitation in these big cities. She grunted lamentation over their fate; they worked for a contractor who "pocketed their sweat" without giving them the benefits of capitalism. They all reckon quite rightly that their existence is jeopardized not by nature but by civilization.

Khan's (2012) cosmopolitan fiction engages with issues of not only the nomads from Pakistan, rather, she explicitly states the abject status of nomads of central Asia. Through the character of Ghafoor, Khan (2012) "envisions and intertwines the local with the global trade and travels across borders and geographical landscapes of the neighbouring borders that are politically complex as well as culturally intertwined" (Makhdoom and Yaqoob, 2019). The abject misery of the nomads, the assault on their liberty and violence of the states against them is the focus of Ghafoor who is "the traveller, the trader, the garlic breather and honey carrier" (Khan, 2012). Characteristically, he is "a higher highland Gujjar, unhemmed in by the lowlands where she was stuck with legends" (Khan, 2012). He is Maryam's "window on the outside world" and she "saw through him". Being "the tunnel in the mountain, the break in the hill, the hand in the hollow... Ghafoor was the door to the other world, the world outside the mountains" (Khan, 2012). He highlights the shared precariousness of these people living in various parts of Asia. Finding similarities that exist between Turkish nomads of the steppe and his own tribe, he

states that they all lived according to the cycles of nature and drove their herds from one pasture to the next, so a field was never overgrazed. She believes:

It was here the land spoke to him most, in a region that lay high in the north of what was now Kazakhstan, though to the nomads with whom he was to spend the next three summers, all of Central Asia was one land, divided not into states but into mountain and steppe, desert and oasis. The steppe nomads made him feel he was looking back in time-his time. He found that the Turkic nomads shared an uncanny likeness to his own community (Khan, 2012).

Ghafoor finds out that all these nomads loved horses and showed uncanny cordial reception to their guests, and above all, an intimate understanding of "the primacy of movement". Their love for nature is noticed by Ghafoor who comments that the hierarchical relation that exists between the civilized people does not exist in the nomadic tribes. Noticing their reverence for nature he comments that they "did not fell the trees which gave them life" (Khan, 2012). He is elated at the similarity of their festivals; their music inspires him and he is glad to have his flute. The Turkish nomads love to sing folk songs which they "sang as much as they prayed, and talked twice as much" (Khan, 2012). Having learned their shared stories and folktales with them as well as they had common enemies. Having known the miserable existence and their resistance against that he understands their precarity well. Ghafoor, Maryam's old acquaintance, is a true nomad. Unable to withhold his aversion for the state and its activities, he indulges in subversive activities. Emblematic of nomadism, he is "a free man" who "did as he wished" and who "wished to unlock his fingers together" (Khan, 2012). Learning Maryam's family dehumanization and marginalization, he ignites the fire of resistance in her. Having known other people and their protest, he excites her to be free. He advises her to, "live up to your name, Maryam Zamani. Do not try to walk around this stone, or walk across it. You will only hurt more. It is an obstacle. It has to be removed" (Khan, 2012). Ghafoor is pained over the isolation of his tribe in Pakistan and points out the state's failure to protect its citizens from injustices. He informs her:

Look what was happening in the South, in Baluchistan, with Pakistan selling its coast to China, throwing people off their own land or giving it to America and look at the north, where China built a road straight through the heart of the Karakoram Ranges just to reach the coast it had already robbed! (207). We need three things to be free. Mountain for security and glaciers; rivers, for drinking and irrigation; farmlands, for food and money but these all three are being compromised by the government and citizens feel scared and agitated. (Khan, 2012)

Telling about the other tormented and exploited communities of nomads of central Asia who have profound reverence for human and nonhuman forms of life, Ghafoor comments:

They ride under the open skies... these men and women of the steppe. Just as we do. And, like us, they are not foolish enough to point at the sun or the moon or the stars. They do not point at what gives them life. They only point at what takes away" (Khan, 2012).

The nomads of Uzbek, Uyghur, Kaghan valley all have "shred precariousness to tell". The Uzbek nomad tells the story of state injustices; he narrates the excruciating tale of how Uzbek army barricaded all paths to Babar Square" and having thus trapped the families of nomads they barraged their families with the latest state artillery. The Uzbek nomad still cannot forget the harrowing sounds of "whit whit whit of steel blades over [their] heads". The terrorizing tales of incessant shooting and the helplessness of the abject tribes haunt them. The horrible crimes of the state against the nomads are conspicuous through genocidal murder of not only their adult people, but children. The tribes were persecuted and their younger generation is murdered with impunity; the tribes later discovered innumerable graves, "Fresh ones. Thousands of them...even children" (Khan, 2012).

Likewise Kashgari nomads were persecuted; they had been displaced perforce at the dictates of the state which wanted to establish Kashgar as a fortified place. Not content with that, the Chinese state put many of these nomads at terrorist list and persecuted. China proved to be an example and it incited many other states to administer ruthless violence against the nomads. For their subversive activities against state injustices, Uyghuri nomads are handed over by Pakistani state to America which imprisons them in the world most dreaded detention camp "Guantanamo Bay" (Khan, 2012). The long narratives of state injustices did not finish even as the night trails off.

ECOCIDE

Khan's critique of the anthropocentric attitude of humans comes through her sensitivity towards annihilation of nonhuman form of life in all her novels but civilization's assault against nonhuman life and human's relationship with nature comes conspicuously through this *Thinner than Skin* (2012) particularly. Here the "development" so lauded by civilized world is seen as strangulating earth fast; it is polluting the very air of the biosphere, denuding its forests and annihilating life that depends upon these forests and waters. Forests in the northern areas of Pakistan are known as the filters of its climate and are bestowed with unprecedented vegetational wealth, are flattened and annihilated to make space for arcades in a consumer oriented market economy as well as prepare land for agriculture. Khan (2012) laments that "the Eastern Himalayas are receding"; she sees the "Glacial growth and decline as equal indicators of global warming" (Khan, 2012). Farhana, the Pakistani American notices this annihilation of life and compares the rate of growth in the Western Himalayas to that of the Southern cascades and surmises that "the jinn's wrath melted the snow". She equates the "jinn" of the folktales with global warming.

In *Thinner than Skin*, [Khan \(2012\)](#) presents a horrific world dominated by civilization; it is a world where the unparalleled diversity of species within mountainous ranges is disrupted, thus subjecting biodiversity to a rapid extinction. Destruction of biodiversity in the valley of Kaghan entails desertification and desiccation of rural areas, rich and bio-diverse forests. Also, by ill use of land the festivity of fragile soils is destroyed which is the primary cause of millions of human and animal deaths in the ranges. Depletion of land, pollution of water and destruction of forests is disrupting the valley's existence and its sustenance system; and all this annihilation is occurring for the sake of advancement. Khan questions the efficacy of such development which is grounded on violence; she identifies the "so-called development" as suffused with violence which only strengthens other sources of exploitation such as capitalism, ecocide and patriarchy.

The knowledge of the place and all its inhabitants, the winds and moon is transferred from generation to generation in thousands of years by nomads; they have a profound relation with land and its biotic community. They never believed that earth could be manipulated and exploitable object. They conceived nature as a "kin, a blooded all-important estate that words like citizens can never attain" ([Bookchin, 2005](#)). They rather detested the "antagonistic" and "hierarchical" relation between humans and nonhumans. These people were dismayed by the wind, and the unusual movement of birds and animals. Far aloof to the technological advancement, they were dictated by the immutable laws of nature and are dismayed at the fragile condition of their animals.

Maryam is horrified to see her cattle on the verge of death; there were only a few horses left, a mare and her filly. She recalls the plenitude and opulence of her father's days when they brought rare breeds of horses all the way from Fargana Valley; she wails over the irreparable loss of all those breeds. Maryam's concern for the rare breed of animals being subjected to extinction is seen in her comment:

Everything was wrong this year. The animals were meant to graze high in the summer pastures, not down here in the plains. The lowland forests would be overgrazed, with no time to regenerate through the rainy season. And the rain was coming. They could sense it. The nomads followed the natural cycle of seasons. ([Khan, 2012](#)).

The horses still alive suffer from various problems and are on the verge of extinction. Natasha, Kiran's mare, is taken care of by Kiran, who used to accompany her to water; the gradual weakening condition of the mare makes her wonder if she would survive through the coming winter. The state's insensitivity towards animals and their needs is explicit in the deteriorating health condition of these animals. Kiran's mare Namasha is very sensitive to the climate change they are forced to breathe in; she whinnied sick of low land grub. Desirous of the pure and cool air of the mountains and its sweetened grass, Namasha refuses to eat anything lesser than the crunch of snowmelt on her tongue. The animals have started feeling the putrid and rotten atmosphere around them and showed their distress towards it.

[Khan \(2010\)](#) attributes this rottenness and putridity to deforestation in the region, and again [Khan \(2006\)](#) endorses the same stance in her interview. The fields are stinking because of the floods of last year. Land destruction owes to the tremendously fast disappearing trees because "the inspector grew fat each time the forest was torn down" ([Khan, 2012](#)). The corrupt forest officer, though, is complicit in the deforestation of the region, but he blames the herders for this loss and stifles them with unbearable penalties from time to time; they are dictated to "pay the fine of four thousand rupees, as well as a weekly supply of milk, curd, butter and ghee for an infinite period" ([Khan, 2012](#)). The winter is hard for animals in Kaghan valley. "They had grown lean. The buffalo, especially; each hip had too many angles". Suleman tries their best to revive the animals' spirits by purchasing supplementary feed for them, but the subsidiary food does not rejuvenate their spirit. He is afraid that once these breeds are lost, he will not be able to buy new ones. The desperate gait of the worsening condition of animals shouts about the impending danger.

Apart from ecocide, civilization insists upon segregation of humans from nonhuman world. People in the civilized world close their eyes toward the actual cause of problem which is segregation of humans from nature. Civilization according to [Manicardi \(2012\)](#) 'rests on the principle of separation between humans and nature'. He further comments that the understanding and a strong cordial bond between nature and humans have been severed by civilization. [Manicardi \(2012\)](#) argues that:

An increasingly militarized domination of the world will not be sufficient to reassure us; a stricter and more formal order will not be sufficient to restore a peaceful existence in this environment. Instead, the more austere and universal this order becomes, the more we will be exposed to new disasters that we will keep calling 'natural', denying our responsibility as exterminators of the balance in our ecosystem. The devastation carried out by civilization against our planet with increasingly sophisticated and invasive means will not be limited by new safety rules, more sophisticated devices or seismic upgrades. (xxiii)

The novel shows this as a result of this separation and interference with nature and its processes; nature turns against humans. Cloaked by the dominant ideology called anthropocentrism, we are further estranging ourselves from the heart. Instead of understanding our responsibility, we blame nature for this hostility; to control the problems created by civilization, we try to inflict an inexorable schematic order on nature, thus furthering estrangement.

Maryam's relationship with plants speaks of her intimate relationship with the nonhuman world. Maryam knew not only the names of a variety of plants found in her proximity, she rather knew their characteristics:

She could name each shadow. Diar, bhentri, Chalai. There were also shadows closer to earth, plants whose rhizomes and leaves cured ailments from insomnia to gonorrhoea and even cancer. She recited these names too-asmani booti, birmi, and Muther. She rubbed the soil between her fingers, her eyes keen, searching for the ginger beloved to the animals" ([Khan, 2012](#)).

Civilization garbed as "development" has been questioned by Khan; Kiran's death by Farhana is symptomatic of the advanced countries' unwanted intrusion in the matters of poorer countries. Kiran "the child of gypsies" has been coaxed by the couple despite her unwillingness to be taken for the ride; resigned to her fate "she sat hunkered in the boat as if in a cage" ([Khan, 2012](#)). Water was a solid barrier for her; it assumed the shape of a mountain pass that she could not get across. There were no pine trees to lead the way, no goat bells to chase in the lake. The desperation and helplessness of Kiran are ignored by the couple, whereas her mother, Maryam, feels her discomfort instinctively. Maryam had desperately watched her daughter being pulled away and carried off by strangers. While sitting by the open hearth in her small hut, Maryam could hear her daughter's agonized heartbeats. In the face of foreigners' intrusion, Maryam was as helpless as her small daughter. Far away from Kiran, she could do nothing and finally, "she could neither see nor hear bangles" of Kiran. In that heavy moment, "her heart had already begun to stop" ([Khan, 2012](#)). The heavy body of her dead daughter called her, and that weight had permanently lodged itself in her chest. She aligned Kiran in her arms till the cold chin of one pressed into the warm curve of the other and broken knees bunched against a heart that had stopped ([Khan, 2012, 129](#)).

Kiran's death breaks Maryam. Maryam, who was as erect as pine trees, fell to her knees and screamed into the dirt. "Nanga Parbat kept watch while Malika Parbat admired her reflection" ([Khan, 2012](#)). Her collapse has been noticed by Irfan who knows that the proud gypsy woman has finally crumbled because of the unwanted intrusion. Her slim erect body "shook in spasms as she lifted fistfuls of sand and tossed them into her hair and slammed her fists, broken nails digging through the bowls of the world" ([Khan, 2012](#)). Not only the Americans but also the naked mountain has been witness to her unbearable loss. After her daughter's death, the mighty mountain observes:

Her heart had not merely broken or even grown cold. It had simply stopped. It was dead weight that only grew heavier as she moved closer to Kiran lying there in the sand, unmoving, without shedding blood, without a trail of shiny guts, without even a droopy fly. She had pleaded with her husband. ([Khan, 2012](#))

Having already exploited the nomads' "hospitality enough" ([Khan, 2012](#)), Farhana returns to America. Maryam, who had tried to forget about Ghafoor and tried to find solace in her husband, recalls Ghafoor and his subversive thoughts. The unbearable pain of Kiran's loss proves too much for her, and she intends to "carry this spiralling flame into the cool cover of her highland shrine, deep in the Karakoram's womb" ([Khan, 2012](#)). Her wrath is far worse than the jagged spear of Naked Mountain. Knowing well that her "wrath was specially reserved for those who broke the line" ([Khan, 2012](#)) she moves briskly towards the hidden cave to meet Ghafoor.

It was this idea of "culturally conceived notion of poverty" that Irfan and other city dwellers conceive the nomads as needy people; Irfan's benevolent effort of bringing clean water to these and neighbouring areas is questionable and after Kiran's death he feels the needling impact of his question that if "for thousands of years people had survived, with varying degrees of success, by building irrigation channels from glacial melt, despite their poverty and isolation, did they need a man from the city bringing them pipes and taps?" ([Khan, 2012](#)). Irfan's question makes him conscious of the imperceptible line between "helping and hurting" ([Khan, 2012](#)). He also realizes that Kiran's death has not been registered by the people of Kaghan and the Americans have been spared because the "herders are disliked" in the valley. ...they were considered outcasts" ([Khan, 2012](#)). Had they been considered equal citizens, the Americans could not have escaped the murder of Kiran and would have been justly punished for the crime.

CONCLUSION

By using an Anarchist lens, the paper concludes that Khan highlights the precarious condition of peripheral communities residing in the Northern region of Pakistan. The analysis has proved that Khan's fiction, particularly her novel *Thinner than Skin* (2012), expresses her anarchist vision and shows her detest for modern civilization, which is steeped in anthropocentric ideology that subjects all forms of life to extinction. The nomadic tribes residing in the womb of Himalayan ranges are subjected to a number of problems, including natural disasters such as floods and climatic shifts, which cause glacial melt and threaten to drown the adjacent areas in a few decades only to satiate big businesses' thirst for profit. The state fails miserably to defend its citizens from political and economic turmoil because the state serves as a handmaiden to western countries and the business interests of their business tycoons. The herders are being compromised when the communal land is handed over to the agribusinesses, which forces the herders to adopt certain breeds of livestock as well as seed type which does not suit the breeders and subject them to starvation. Deforestation and desertification resulting from the ruthless attitude of business tycoons and timber mafias worsen herders' conditions and violate the biodiversity residing in these areas. Khan pleads to save biodiversity from the cruel assault of civilization garbed as "development" and "progress" in her novel.

LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

The current research is delimited to [Uzma Alsam Khan's Thinner than skin \(2012\)](#) which has been explored from an anarchist point of view, focusing on civilization aspects and how peripheral communities are being treated. Religious

issues and sectarianism are restricted to some premises not part of the research above the said context in the Pakistani community when conducting research.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the current study outcomes, the anarchist lens, as used in the paper, concludes that Khan highlights the precarious condition of peripheral communities residing in the Northern region of Pakistan, which can also be employed in the same context in any literary piece of work.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Ms. Shaista Malik wrote the analysis after reading the primary text.

Mr. Abdul Shakoor worked on the introductory section.

Mr. Ayaz Muhammad Shah worked on secondary sources

Mr. Wajid Riaz worked on the references list, proofread the script, and corresponded with the journal.

REFERENCES

1. Bookchin, M. (2005). *Ecology of Freedom: The Emergence and Dissolution of Anarchy*. AK Press.
2. Esteva, G. (1987). Regenerating People's Space in S.N. Mendlowitz and R. BJ "Walker Towards a Just World Peace, Perspectives from Social Movements". Butterworths and Committee for a Just World Peace. <https://doi.org/10.1177/030437548701200106>
3. Fischer-Kowalski, M., & Haberl, H. (1993). Metabolism and Colonization: Modes of Production and the Physical Exchange between Societies and Nature. *Innovation in Social Science Research*, 6(4) (Schriftenreihe Ökologie, Band 32. Wien/Austria; Interuniversitäres Institut für Interdisziplinäre Forschung und Fortbildung; Abteilung Soziale Ökologie) (1993), pp. 4–5. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13511610.1993.9968370>
4. Fischer-Kowalski, M., & Haberl, H. (1997). Metabolism and Colonization: Modes of Production and the Physical Exchange between Societies and Nature, in Marina Fischer Kowalski et al. eds, *Gesellschaftlicher Stoffwechsel Und Kolonisierung Von Natur: Ein Versuch in Sozialer Ökologie*. Amsterdam: G+B Verlag Fakultas.
5. Fischer-Kowalski., et al. (2010). *Sociometabolic regimes in indigenous communities and the crucial role of working time: A comparison of case studies*. Vienna: Institute of Social Ecology
6. Jahanara, A. K. (2016) Deep Topographies in the fiction of Uzma Aslam Khan. *A Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 47(2), 173-185. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2011.557191>
7. Khan, U, A. (2003). *Trespassing*. Delhi: Penguin.
8. Khan, U, A. (2006). Interview with Ahmed Hussain. *The Daily Star*, 29 Dec. 23 Dec. 2010. <http://www.theailestar.net/magazine/2006/12/05/interview.htm>
9. Khan, U, A. (2008). *The Geometry of God*. New Delhi: Fourth Estate.
10. Khan, U, A. (2010). About Uzma Aslam Khan. 23 Dec. 2010. <http://www.clockrootbooks.com/clockrootwriters/uzma.html>
11. Khan, U, A. (2012). *Thinner than Skin*. New Delhi: Fourth Estate.
12. Kohn, E. (2013). *How forests think: Toward an anthropology beyond the human*. Berkeley: University of California Press. <https://doi.org/10.1525/california/9780520276109.001.0001>
13. Khan, U, A. (2019). *The Miraculous True History of Nomi Ali*. Lahore: Ilqa Publisher.
14. Kanwal, A. (2015). Rethinking Identities in Contemporary Pakistani Fiction: Beyond 9/11. UK. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137478443>
15. Makhdoom and Yaqoob. (2019). The Landscape of Vertical Wilderness: Environmentalism and a Sense of Place in Uzma Aslam Khan's Novel *Thinner than Skin*. *KJLR*, 22(2), 173-184.
16. Manicardi, E. (2012). *Free From Civilization: Notes Toward a Radical Critique of Civilization's Foundations: Domination, Culture, Fear, Economics, Technology*. Green Anarchy Press.
17. Manicardi, E. (2020). *Rete, oppio dei popoli: Internet, social media, tecno-cultura: la morsa digitale della civiltà*. Italy: Kindle Edition.
18. Barnet. R. J. (1981). *The Lean Years*. London: Abacus.
19. Sahlin, M. (1960). *Evolution and Culture*. Elman Services. <https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.8980>
20. Shiva, V. (1989). *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development*. Zed Books.
21. Tina, R. C. (2013). *The Wealth of Poverty: Capitalizing the Opportunities of Poverty for the Kingdom of God*. Outskirts Press, 2013.
22. Zerzan, J. (2006). *Elements of Refusal*. CAL Press.