

The Complexities of Life: A Gothic Analysis of Uzma Aslam Khan's Novel *Thinner than Skin* (2012)

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Abstract This study focuses on the problems and complexities of life as depicted in the novel *Thinner than Skin* (2012) by Uzma Aslam Khan. The study uses Gothicism as a lens for analysis of the selected excerpts from the novel. It is a qualitative study that uses Close Reading as the methodology. The story is about Nadir and his friends, who come from America and visit the northern areas of Pakistan. They stay for some time in Karachi, depicting the horror on the streets. Then they move to the hilly areas of Pakistan. They observe some scenes of natural beauty over there. During this entire joyful voyage, the characters experience extremely bitter realities as well. They come to know about the hardships that the local people are going through. Deaths and killings seem to be common practices. Every individual is terrified. The oppressors doubt the local people. They are in between the terrorists and the state army, and they cannot side with anyone because the other party then treats them like their enemies. Even Gothic practices are present in everyday life. The findings of this study are that life is too hard for people in the northern areas of Pakistan, and they are facing acute problems that can be termed Gothicism.

Key Words: *Complexities, Gothicism, Terror, Contemporary Society*

Introduction

Every individual faces a harsh phase in one's life. The individuals of contemporary society experience a myriad of complexities in their daily life. From the rapid advancements in technology to the intricate socio-economic structures, the modern world presents a tapestry of challenges that contribute to the intricacies of existence (Srivastava, 2012). This study explores some key aspects of the complexities of contemporary life as depicted in the novel *Thinner than Skin* (2012) from the perspective of Gothicism (Iqbal et al., 2021; Sabir et al., 2021a; Sabir et al., 2021b).

One of the defining features of contemporary life is the pervasive influence of technology. While technological advancements have undoubtedly brought about significant conveniences and improvements in various aspects of life, they have also introduced a new set of challenges. Smartphones

and the internet constantly keep individuals connected, blurring the boundaries between work and personal life and making it increasingly difficult for them to detach and find moments of respite. The digital age has given rise to issues such as information overload, online privacy concerns, and the pressure to maintain a controlled online persona, adding layers of complexity to the way people navigate their daily lives (Ali et al., 2016; Parrillo, 2005).

Bendelow and Williams (1998) write that the nature of relationships has undergone a profound transformation in contemporary life. Contemporary life is redefining traditional structures and norms, challenging long-established notions of family, friendship, and community. The prevalence of social media and online communication has altered the dynamics of human connection, providing both opportunities for virtual intimacy and pitfalls such as online harassment and the cultivation of shallow relationships. Balancing the desire for genuine human connection with the demands of a digitized social landscape poses a unique challenge in the complexities of modern relationships (Iqbal et al., 2021; Sabir et al., 2021c; Ullah, Ali, & Khalid, 2017).

Moreover, Virupaksha, Kumar, and Nirmala (2014) maintain that the fast-paced nature of contemporary life has led to an increased emphasis on productivity and success, often at the expense of personal well-being. The pressure to excel in multiple domains - career, relationships, and personal development - can be overwhelming. The pursuit of success, driven by societal expectations and individual aspirations, can contribute to stress, burnout, and a sense of inadequacy. Striking a balance between ambition and self-care becomes a delicate act in the complexities of a world that values constant achievement (Ullah et al., 2020; Ullah et al., 2021).

Parrillo (2005) opines that in addition to the individual challenges, contemporary life also grapples with broader issues such as environmental sustainability and social justice. The consequences of rapid industrialization, consumerism, and resource exploitation are evident in the environmental crises facing the planet. Consumers, environmentalists, and activists are increasingly confronted with the ethical implications of their choices, whether in consumption habits, environmental awareness, or social activism. The complexities of contemporary life extend beyond personal struggles to encompass a collective responsibility for the well-being of the planet and its inhabitants (Ullah et al., 2021a; Stromwall & Hurdle, 2003).

Despite the complexities, there are also opportunities for growth, innovation, and positive change. The interconnectedness of the world allows for the sharing of knowledge and resources to address global challenges collaboratively. Advances in technology offer solutions to age-old problems and create new possibilities for communication, education, and healthcare. The evolving nature of relationships opens the door to more inclusive and diverse communities, challenging traditional norms and fostering a sense of interconnectedness (Elliott, 2021).

Shulman (2016) summarizes that life in contemporary society is rife with complexities that stem from

the intersection of technological, global, social, and personal factors. Navigating this intricate landscape requires individuals to adapt, evolve, and find a delicate balance between the demands of the modern world and the pursuit of a meaningful and fulfilling life. While challenges abound, the complexities of contemporary life also offer opportunities for growth, resilience, and positive transformation on both individual and collective levels (Shah et al., 2020).

Research Problem

This study examines the Gothic aspects present in Uzma Aslam Khan's novel, *Thinner than Skin* (2012). Gothic characteristics closely resemble the mundane aspects of human existence. Individuals often encounter challenging circumstances; however, they refrain from labeling them as Gothic. This study examines selected passages from the novel, interpreting and analyzing them from a Gothic perspective.

Research Objectives

1. To focus on Gothic elements in Uzma Aslam Khan's novel *Thinner than Skin* (2012)
2. To interpret and relate those Gothic elements to contemporary society

Research Questions

1. What Gothic elements are there in Uzma Aslam Khan's novel *Thinner than Skin* (2012)?
2. How can those Gothic elements be interpreted and related to contemporary society?

The Significance of the Study

The current study is like a vent, as it opens a way to analyze a seemingly non-Gothic novel in the light of Gothicism. The general concept of Gothic elements is full of horror, but this study analyzes day-to-day activities in the light of the selected lens. This novel is not analyzed from a Gothic perspective, so this would be a new addition to the already existing literature review about the novel *Thinner than Skin* (2012).

Literature Review

Abdul Wahab, Dr. Waheed Ahmad Khan, and Dr. Imran Ali (2021) discuss countering Western feminism in Shandana Minhas' *Tunnel Vision* and Uzma Aslam Khan's *Thinner than Skin*. They write that Pakistani female authors question Western feminist discourses' universality and portrayal of women of color. They demonstrate that women's subjugation is not uniform. Instead, Ayesha and Maryam in Kaghan Valley oppose patriarchy and keep their uniqueness (Makhdoom & Yaqoob, 2019). So Pakistani female Anglophone fiction authors set the stage for Pakistani women to mature and speak out. Thus, their female characters are unprepared to embrace patriarchal standards. They are independent and self-determining (Nazir & Abbasi, 2020, Hussaini, 2018). They go from being to doing. Both women go

from being to doing. Ayesha struggles in patriarchal culture but may reject and challenge rules. Maryam also manages her own life. She preserves her individuality in patriarchal Pakistani society. Thus, both writers discursively challenge the widely accepted belief that Western feminists must help women of color fight for their rights and freedom from male dominance (Ahmed, Khalid, & Ali, 2023). The writings show non-white women's self-reliance and ability to speak and act for them. Shandana Minhas' *Tunnel Vision* (2007) and Uzma Aslam Khan's *Thinner than Skin* (2012) contribute to the Pakistani feminist debate on women of color. This motivates Pakistani women to stand out and win their rights over time (Rakshit, Gaur, & Gairola, 2023).

Nida Nadeem, Asim Karim, and Hafiza Rashna Ashraf (2023) discuss Uzma Aslam Khan's *Thinner than Skin*'s aesthetic potential. They claim that Pakistani English fiction, like other literature, seeks to recreate human agency and predicaments in the face of hardship. Uzma Aslam Khan's works also use myth to retell history and human civilization from the past to the present (p. 141).

Kabir contends that Uzma Aslam Khan's novel, *Thinner than Skin*, employs intricate symbolic machinery based on prehistory, geography, myth, and history. Khan uses the fossil-rich northern Pakistan and the Arabian Sea coastline in the south to define Pakistan's deep geography as emotional and symbolic rerooting. This profound geography, linked to local desire and passion, provides an alternative to Islamicist self-fashioning for "true Pakistani." Rerooting is a reaction to 1947's upheavals and migrations by post-Partition Pakistani cultural innovators. It may help Partition studies explain the Pakistani relationship between memory, forgetting, and remembering (Kabir 2011).

Uzma Aslam also mixes traditional and postmodern styles. Her newest novel, *The Miraculous True History of Nomi Ali*, describes the 18th century colonial dominance as disregarded in postwar historiography by focusing on the Andaman Islands. It's important to understand postcolonial historical fiction and its (re) dependence on history, truth, and power, especially in relation to fact and fiction aesthetics. The islands' wildlife and vegetation, the individuals' mythology, and their sympathetic social interactions across ethnic and religious lines allow some creative reconstruction of the period. Lyricism appears to have artistic merit in many fictions. In one of the most lyrical novels of his time, Nadeem Aslam uses pictures and words to evoke terror, love, aggression, and religious beliefs (Wahab, Ahmad, & Ali, 2021).

Vachhani (2018) examined the politics of writing differently for teaching, research, and organization discourses. It also showed the importance of exposing masculinity in writing and speech. It has also examined suppressed and concealed possibilities and offered opportunities for language-based emotional feminist politics. According to Zeiny (2019), women need a new vocabulary to communicate their feelings and worries since a male-dominated language is inadequate. It would again make relevant concepts linguistically focused, mute, or dominant in language and social meaning. The only way to end male oppression is to create a phallus-free language. Éavan Boland's *In Her Own Image* (1980) explores the horrific interiority, dangerous misunderstanding, and backward psychological growth of a woman who strangles her child, highlighting l'écriture feminism. This poem unveils its ancestry and gives

feminist art, particularly aesthetics, greater strength, and modest rights. *In Her Own Image* (1980) represents the beginning of Boland's concentrated and careful experiment with l'écriture feminine, writing based on important female knowledge and talents (Randolph, 1991). According to Randolph (1991), Boland's poetry highlights undervalued aspects of women's lives by revealing public opinion that her society and culture have disregarded.

Research Methodology

This is a qualitative study that focuses on abstract ideas and does not deal with quantitative items. It focuses on specific characters and events that have elements of Gothicism. The method of Close Reading is used for the selection and interpretation of the textual references from the novel *Thinner than Skin* (2012).

Theoretical Framework

While *Thinner than Skin* (2012) by Uzma Aslam Khan is not a traditional Gothic novel, it does contain elements that align with the Gothic tradition to some extent. Here are the elements that bear semblance to Gothic themes in the novel:

1. **Juxtaposition of Beauty and Horror:** Gothic literature contrasts beauty with horror.
2. **Themes of Death and Decay:** Gothic literature explores gloomy themes like mortality, loss, and decay.
3. **Conflict with Society:** The narrative involves conflicts with societal norms and expectations, a theme present in Gothic tales of societal rebellion.
4. **Haunted Characters:** The novel's characters struggle with internal demons and traumas, like Gothic characters.
5. **Atmospheric Descriptions:** The author employs detailed and atmospheric descriptions that contribute to a sense of foreboding and tension.
6. **Eerie Atmosphere:** The novel's tension and suspense make readers uneasy.
7. **Psychological Depth:** The novel explores the characters' psychological moods and internal battles, akin to the development of Gothic characters.
8. **Romantic Elements:** Gothic novels generally include love relationships with darker undertones.
9. **Gothic Architecture:** While not dominant, descriptions of particular locales may inspire a feeling of Gothic architecture or decrepit buildings.

In *Thinner than Skin*, these characteristics are subtle, and the story focuses on topical and socio-political concerns. These features complicate the story and may evoke Gothic overtones.

Textual Analysis:

This part includes the textual references from the novel *Thinner than Skin* (2012). The selected

references are analyzed from a Gothic perspective. As the selected novel is not a purely Gothic novel, there are still many elements that can be termed as Gothic. Following is the analysis of these elements:

I. Juxtaposition of Beauty and Horror:

The author juxtaposes moments of beauty with elements of horror, creating a sense of contrast often seen in Gothic literature. The author places two opposite things together. Nadir, the major character in the novel, sees a black and white Hyundai drive up. "Check it," called a man from inside the Hyundai, before it had even screeched to a stop. "Be careful; he might be carrying explosives," said a man from inside the Hyundai. Did I hear them correctly? I began to laugh (p. 285). He does not know what will happen to him, so he was satisfied at the beginning, but in a few seconds, he was handcuffed.

On another occasion, Nadir, Farhana, and other friends are on a visit to a lake. They are enjoying the cold weather and clean water of the lake, but they face a play of death. They cannot comprehend at all what has happened to their company, as Nadir says, "I have no recollection of what I did. None. Not until I heard Kiran hit something—perhaps her hips. And then she was in the lake" (p. 102). The characters face a dilemma when they are at the peak of their enjoyment.

2. Themes of Death and Decay:

The novel explores dark themes such as mortality, loss, and decay, aligning with Gothic literature's fascination with the macabre. In the novel, prior to the earthquake, there were other instances of fatalities, and it remains uncertain if the goddess had any involvement in them as well. Law enforcement officers fatally assaulted a shopkeeper for refusing to disclose his true identity. The information he concealed was his true identity. The police said that there was a lack of documentary evidence to support the accusation. Who was the individual in question? In which state did he vow loyalty? He lacked any documents to vouch for his identity or provide evidence in his favor. Authorities conducted a round-up, where they required all individuals in the valley, including those who were sedentary, nomadic, and everything in-between, to provide their identification documents (p. 297).

Nadir narrates that an explosive device exploded at a hotel today, killing one foreigner and seven Pakistanis. We considered whether it would be more beneficial to sail west across the Atlantic instead of heading north towards the Alps. "You are not the intended recipient" (p. 27). I remarked, and Farhana complained about my lack of sensitivity. "Compassionate?" Seven indigenous people and one non-native die. Again, we compared one life to seven and its significance to its unimportance.

On one hand, havoc was being caused by other human fellows; on the other, Mother Nature was also not silent as the Gilgit River flooded a mosque, stealing twelve worshipers, including three children. The third kid died, and two were missing. Along with floods, raids occur. Since their arrest three days ago, the visually handicapped and physically challenged folks have not spoken. Focusing on one tragedy in Pakistan was difficult (p. 231).

The novel narrates that a few boys were missing from their homes. During the search, “they found one of the missing boys in his family’s waterhole. The rain filled the hole, and he rose to the top, and his bloated limbs nearly spilled over the edge of the trough (p. 258). Mango peels and goat entrails buoyed him in the slime-gilded lake. Eritrichium petals covered his hair. Crow murder is in the skies. On the ground, there were too many men and women to allow Maryam to pass. She had the boy’s tiny life in her flesh within minutes, while her eyes relayed what others saw. Hands scorched, buttocks sliced, limbs and legs fractured, and part of his skull crumpled like a horse-stamped aluminum can. The waterhole received a discharge from this wound that was neither goat blood nor bile. His necklace, a gift from an affluent cousin, looked to have choked him. They did not find any other boys. Their mothers wailed the loudest. A mother whose child was pulled from the waterhole did not weep. She was slapped to quiet her god-cursing. This quiet lasted her whole life (pp. 258–259).

There seems to be no peace at all, as one problem is followed by another grave one. They forced me to open the bomb. It was not mithai, or fruit (p. 287). Irfan didn’t place it there. The first time I got lost on the mountain, I dropped my pack. The escort located and returned both me and the pack. Before leaving, he questioned where the second box was. The thin guy was approaching, saying that he would shoot me before I could open it. This puzzled me. I assumed he wanted me to open it. His rifle butt smacked my cheek before I understood. I heard cracks. I fell sideways. After two more guys joined him, it dawned on him that none were in uniform. This puzzled me too. Thwack! This time, a melon-sized fist thwacked into my stomach (p. 287). A melon-sized fist pushed away (p. 287).

They treated Nadir in an inhumane way. He says that he got a kick in the teeth after what felt like a long time. Lying in a curled position on the ground, I endured further blows. Uncertain of the duration, I saw the sun desiccating the blood in my mouth, causing me distress. A solitary ache can be localized, tended to, and consoled while the whole body experiences pain. By moistening my lips with saliva, I inadvertently reopened the scabs at the edges, causing them to tear. I persevered. I moisten my lips without any movement. I am capable of doing so (p. 289).

Nadir says that “I was not pleading for life but for a more predictable death. This seemed reasonable. A quick death had been the promise. I would open the lid, be torn to pieces, and not feel a thing. It was reasonable” (p. 290). It was uncertain what form of death was two inches from my nose. This was absurd. This was treachery. You promised! Keep your damned promise, sick bastards!” Who would do this? Who would deceive a dying man? Who would do this? What if the explosion happened while I kicked and raged? Was it my goal? Imagine my expression! My mouth was bleeding, and my eyes were shut. What a monster! No, I wanted dignity. I liked closing my lips around a large spoon. I liked hands folded, eyes closed but not clenched, and lips loose. This could not be denied to me. I controlled this. I could die by holding my breath. It would take longer than a bomb, but it may work. I dragged my ribs to my chin, and they shouted, but not me. They were in my mouth.

After a few days, an explosion occurred at a hotel earlier today, resulting in the deaths of one foreign

individual and seven Pakistani individuals. After departing from the cabin, I promptly returned upon hearing the following: Reports indicate that the perpetrator transported the bomb in a container similar to previous devices used throughout the summer. The dead individuals included the perpetrator of the bombing. According to witnesses, he had already come to Gilgit a few days before, suffering from a fractured leg. The assault remains unattributed since no organization has claimed responsibility (p. 291). The bomb occurred when many youngsters were at the motel. Six people died, including the American. Three cops, three women, and two children sustained injuries. One youngster died from her wounds on the way to the hospital. The American's family received an alert (p. 292).

They alleged that everyone in uniform and a plainclothes spy other convoys carried food and blankets for the astonished survivors, who peered beyond the cameras into the thick dust of their old lives. They declared Balakot lost. Maryam has never heard or breathed such fear or death. The goddess had finally wreaked havoc on their valley, burying more men, women, and children than Maryam had ever seen (p. 296).

Before the earthquake, there had been other fatalities, and who knows whether the goddess was involved? Police beat the shopkeeper to death for hiding information. He concealed his identity. The police said no documentation proved it. Who was he? His loyalty was to which state? He had no documents to defend. Authorities rounded up all valley residents - sedentary, nomadic, and otherwise - and asked them to present their IDs (p. 297).

I never made a bad choice, despite the murders and kidnappings here. Latinos, including one who followed me farther into the desert, mistook me for Latino more than Arab. I'd mistake him for Punjabi somewhere (p. 12).

The novel narrates that there are many deadly incidents, like;

This year, death had again showed himself in the sun. Their first morning on the move, soon after they unloaded their bags off the animals and while the rest of the dera was pitching the tents, Maryam's eldest brother-in-law stretched his arms and simply fell, right there in the middle of his flock, at Kiran's feet. Kiran waited a long time before delivering the news: Barobai was dead. It was part of life. The endless roaming, loading, unloading. The bodies that folded, the spirits that fled, when you traveled by caravan, in groups of families bound together by the intimacies of gaiety and grief. Even Barobai's death became occasion for renewal (p. 113).

Nadir mentioned the Andijan Massacre two months previously. Police opened fire on a gathering of men, women, and children protesting the arrest of many businesspeople in Babar Square. This plaza was where their ancestors battled Russian soldiers. They would not accept a president who acted like a 21st century monarch. Over 10,000 individuals supported the inmates. Uzbek armored personnel carriers and tanks blocked all roads to Babar Square. "Then everyone began to panic" (p. 126), claimed the

Uzbek. We heard the sound of steel blades above our heads. Just as I glanced up, the gunshots started. It was 1898 again, except they fired from the skies. We discovered burials later.

The novel depicts that as China strengthened its Kashgar development strategy, more local Kashgaris were expelled. China convinced the international community to add additional Uyghur groups to the terrorist list. Pakistan gave America Uyghurs at Guantanamo Bay. The two men discussed injustice long after the sun had set on Babar's horse monument. Finally, the Uzbek said, "We thought we were free, but now our president works against us. Jail the powerful, shoot the weak!" The Uyghur turned to Ghafoor, making him question if this afternoon had been choreographed. "Your country does the same. Why does it befriend China? Why does it let China develop roads and ports in its own country? Will it make guys like you rich? The vodka Ghafoor drank had prevented him from eating. He had no idea how to convey that he had not felt like he had a country in a long time. The last time may have been before he developed cheek hair. Once, he attempted to fight for this land that was never his in hopes of earning it, but his own people told him to leave. The natives are much more concerned about their future, as the novel writes.

"We herders have a very different fate," the Uyghur added, ordering chai. We may dress better than others who spend their lives searching for a field, but we will always wander. Will we? Even when we must stay." He spoke the final words with the pipe between his teeth (p. 127).

I. Conflict with Society:

The narrative involves conflicts with societal norms and expectations, a theme present in Gothic tales of societal rebellion. The novel presents that in the streets of Karachi, youth disappearances dominated the conversation. It was almost everything except the troops on the ground and the drones in the air, which you can't destroy. You can't kill an army (p. 25).

The novel discusses regional tension. It talks about the local and foreign handlers who are active participants and motivators of terrorism. Yuldashev serves as the Uzbek instructor for Baitullah Mehsud, the leader of Waziristan. Before this summer, there was a short cessation of hostilities between Mehsud and the Pakistan Army. After the truce ended, Yuldashev resumed supplying Mehsud with Uzbek bodyguards who had acquired vast combat expertise from decades of fighting against the Soviets in Afghanistan. The explosions in our city did not engage our attention as much as Yuldashev and Central Asia did. No one has identified the individual responsible for the hotel bombing. We had already come to terms with the idea that we would never get information about it. In contrast, Yuldashev exhibited a notable degree of organization and enjoyed widespread recognition. As an example, he had gathered a military contingent to exact revenge for the American attack on the Shahi Kot Valley in Afghanistan in 2002. The event was well organized. Pakistan expends vast sums of money, obliterating what it previously invested millions of dollars in constructing (p. 28).

Nadir was attacked, and he was bleeding. He was unaware of the cause of his injury. He states, "I pressed

my stomach, and my fingers came away sticky. I was bleeding. I did not put the jacket back on, but I did remove my wallet and keys. I held the jacket out to him as I crept away (p. 58).

I. Haunted Characters:

Characters in the novel grapple with personal demons and traumas, resembling the haunted individuals often found in Gothic stories. The novel mentions an individual who was a threat to everyone's life. Due to his terrorist activities, there was a constant threat to everyone's life.

Further turmoil arises in Waziristan as the Pakistan Army intensifies its pursuit of Baitullah Mehsud and his associates from Uzbekistan and China, resulting in escalating violence. Many people were skeptical of attributing the drone strikes solely to Pakistan, as it was widely believed that other actors were involved. Irfan criticized the drones as being inept, questioning their claimed precision by pointing out the increasing brutality of warfare. Additionally, he shared other articles highlighting the flaws in their alleged accuracy. As if I had a desire to peruse them (p. 90).

There is a mention of a supernatural character, which is a key feature of Gothicism. The novel describes that "there was a Jinn here too. She could feel it. The Prince Saiful Maluk, the Princess Badar Jamal, Malika Parbat, Nanga Parbat, and the Jinn" (p. 70).

2. Atmospheric Descriptions:

The author employs detailed and atmospheric descriptions that contribute to a sense of foreboding and tension. When Nadir and his friends reach Pakistan, they are told that "it's not safe. He wouldn't hear otherwise. Telling an immigrant, the country he left is not as he imagines is like telling a father the daughter who grew up is not as he imagines" (p. 92). They were deeply saddened by the news, as they desired to explore the country but were prohibited from doing so.

Then that happened, as they expected. There was a bomb blast. Frahnana was worried about Nadir. She messaged him. Have you received information about the explosion? In response, I would send a message saying, remain calm and composed. Everything will be fine. Her focus shifted towards Pakistan's volatile border regions, and our discussions increasingly revolved around al-Qaeda strongholds, suicide bombers, and radical extremists. She concluded that Pakistan was a location where women were unable to endure. I inquired about her perception of the state of 85 million Pakistani women—were they in a state of survival or not? Nevertheless, the incessant texting continued. Does it exceed the amount from the previous year?

Nadir is connected to the internet. Yahoo reported that the terror danger level was classified as red. I received a communication from Irfan with a visual representation of a Predator unmanned aerial vehicle equipped with Hellfire missiles, specifically referred to as a Medium Altitude Long Endurance (MALE) aircraft, mid-altitude, long duration. I carefully examined the photograph. The drone has a white

coloration and a slender physique. It had a resemblance to a capsule that I once pushed into my rectum during childhood to treat a case of worms (p. 72).

I perceived the sound of the ring emanating from inside my pocket. It was a message from Farhana. Fourteen individuals lost their lives at a mosque. What is the reason for having a mosque, Nadir? I responded by suggesting to inquire from a divine being. I powered down my mobile device. I powered off my PC (p. 94). I had no answer to her query.

A minor character, Barobai, passed away in the novel. The overall condition of that society was so gloomy that death was a common occurrence. Death was a common occurrence in that society, happening with alarming frequency. It was an integral aspect of existence. The physical forms that were bent, the souls that departed, while you journeyed in a caravan, accompanied by clusters of kinship, united by the close bonds of joy and sorrow (p. 113).

3. Eerie Atmosphere:

The novel maintains an overall eerie atmosphere, where tension and suspense contribute to the reader's sense of unease. Everyone was suspected, as the military convoys were looking for a killer (p. 114). Everyone was afraid of the possible consequences if one was caught by the military (p. 116).

According to reports, as the novel explains, an explosion occurred at the Balakot police station, resulting in the unfortunate loss of four policemen's lives, while four others were injured, and the remaining officers were understandably angered by the incident. She considered that last detail to be unnecessary. They forcefully struck the stove and the bed, causing the woman sitting on them to become disheveled with her unbraided hair, resulting in Jumanah bursting into tears. They broke the teacups. "We are determined to locate him!" they proclaimed. Younis was physically guided by the ear and forcefully pulled and shaken (p. 183).

4. Psychological Depth:

Characters' psychological states and internal struggles are explored, adding a psychological dimension akin to Gothic character development. Nadir says that it was reasonable to be pessimistic. We received news while checking out of our motel. A Mansehra policeman received a box of holy dates from a date tree near the Kaaba in Mecca one hour after the army conducted a missile attack in Waziristan yesterday. When he removed the box lid, the firing pin ripped him and three others apart. A second crude Soviet-era explosive exploded at a Balakot police post south of the cemetery within minutes. No one inquired whether it protested the missile attack. The bombs had succeeded even as military convoys moved into the valley, deepening the darkness. Intelligence would have more motivation to be here, militants would have more influence, and valley residents would have less. He does not need to conceal. The shapeshifter Fareebi was freed.

Pakistan authorized an American drone to shoot a MALE missile from one of its airfields, where affluent Arabs had recently been allowed to launch their falcons on endangered Houbara bustards. The thirty individuals killed included three children (p. 175).

They wanted to recruit; their sons were not safe. They waged a Sunni jihad against non-Muslims and all allies of the infidel, including anyone linked to the government. "They say Americans are killing Muslims in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Palestine, and Iraq. "Who do we cooperate with? The government or the militants?" "Both." "Then they will both be watching us. And they will both strike at us" (p. 222). This was the tension they were having—that they could not take either side in the ongoing war. Compelled by the circumstances, many active participants were forced to leave their own country. For them, "a life of exile is worse than death. You will forever be alone" (p. 281). This caused them to remain just spectators and then mourn their bruised destiny.

During the bomb blast, Farhana was on her way home to her father. This implies that Wes was dead. What could I hope for? The explosion occurred in Gilgit, so they were returning south without searching for me. I abandoned him, and he abandoned me, but I never took his Zulekha. Would I have wanted to see him if he searched for me? Was Farhana with him when he opened the box? Had they seen the package in my rucksack and laughed, then sat down to share whatever they found? They would have identified gender (p. 292).

5. Romantic Elements:

The novel incorporates romantic relationships, often intertwined with darker themes, as is common in Gothic literature. There is terror and death everywhere in the novel. However, there is deep love between Nadir, Farhana, and a few other characters. Nadir never missed a chance to get closer to Farhana. He says, "I tasted her breath with the roof of my mouth. Perhaps he'd been older than the cabin was" (p. 19).

He further states what's suffering like? I wondered often. The pain of losing Farhana, the girl, or one's reputation? Nearly naked, Farhana lay on the bed and faced away from the door. She wasn't breathing. She committed suicide! Rushing, I advanced. She lifted her left foot to relieve a right calf mosquito bite irritation. The gesture enraged me. I thought she was dead when she was only resting. What if someone else entered the cabin? Thus began a massive outburst of wrath, draining our bodies as we tried to contain it. My knowledge of the event's beginnings is limited. The speaker, their comments, and their sequence are unknown. However, I remember seeing her reclining and how, despite my indignation, her legs evoked a joyful, exceptionally joyful memory - when did anger become infused with sweetness? - and I suddenly said, "And do you genuinely desire me to articulate this?" Are you asking me to say it? "I am expected to remain silent while you have the freedom to drool over me whenever you please!" (p. 147)

He was close to Farhana and used to call her by different titles. When he called her Salty, "Farhana made a face. (I once told her in Pakistan that a sexy woman is considered numkeen (salty) (p. 89). But it was

for a few moments, and then everything got normal. “I’m late for work,” she said, reaching for her purse. In my ear, she whispered, “Love you.” It was the most affection she’d displayed toward me in front of her father (p. 89).

6. Gothic Architecture:

While not prominent, descriptions of certain settings may evoke a sense of Gothic architecture or dilapidated structures. The novel has too many descriptions of such structures. Farhana peered into the lake between the mountains until her sight acclimated to the image emerging from the water. It showed a guy with his back to her. Maryam could see the mountain confining him, but not him. She recognized every hue and shape of this valley, but not the mountain he lay on. What is his purpose here at the foot of the two mountains, at the bottom of the lovers’ lake? The highlands belonged to those who had been here for so many summers and understood how the Queen and Nude acted in private (p. 5).

Upon reentering the cabin to assess my craftsmanship, I saw that all the photographs appeared in a uniform white color. Bewildered, I meticulously verified the configurations, the battery, and the illumination. Upon deciding to make a second attempt, I discovered that my guest had disappeared. The experience was wonderful. Undoubtedly, the reason for this was the high altitude, boasting five mountain summits over 8,000 meters and fifty peaks surpassing 7,000 meters. However, this would only leave an impression on someone who values factual information. On our first night in this location along the historic Silk Path, we realized that this path had never really been a route for us or anybody else, whether human, equine, or insect (p. 11).

The novel writes that the glaciers in the eastern Himalayas are receding. “Some say the Alps will be ice-free by 2100. Greenland’s glaciers are melting so fast that they could sink southern California and Bangladesh. But in parts of Pakistan, glaciers could be expanding” (p. 42).

Conclusion

This study reveals that there are numerous elements of Gothicism in the novel *Thinner than Skin* (2012) by Uzma Aslam Khan. It narrates that the people in the novel live a horrible life. They are facing a lot of problems and complexities. Terror and death are common practices in the plot of the novel. Different national and international factors are involved in deteriorating the peaceful environment of society. There are beautiful and eye-catching descriptions of the villages, mountains, rivers, and Karachi city. However, terror and uncertainty prevail there, and there is a mournful atmosphere overall.

The analysis section answers the research question that there are numerous Gothic elements in the novel. Furthermore, the novel depicts real-life events and accidents. Deaths still occur on the streets of Karachi. The conflict in Waziristan is still alive. The Chinese have subdued the Uyghur land and people to date. It seems that this novel presents a daily report like a newspaper. To sum up, this novel is a genuine depiction of the complex life of contemporary society in general and Pakistani society in particular.

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