



World-Making through Imagination: Coleridge's Esemplastic Theory in *Bridge to Terabithia* and *Pani Mar Raha Hai*

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the constitutive role of imagination in shaping the protagonists' perception of reality in Katherine Paterson's *Bridge to Terabithia* and Amna Mufti's *Pani Mar Raha Hai*. While existing scholarship has explored these novels through theological, ecocritical, and symbolic perspectives, little attention has been paid to the ways in which imagination functions as a reality-shaping force in both texts. Drawing on Samuel Taylor Coleridge's concept of the *esemplastic* imagination as articulated in *Biographia Literaria*, this study employs a qualitative comparative textual analysis to investigate how imagination transcends its conventional role as a psychological or aesthetic faculty and actively constructs alternative modes of experiencing reality. The analysis demonstrates that imagination enables the protagonists to create symbolic worlds that provide emotional refuge, negotiate trauma, and redefine their engagement with the material world. In both novels, the boundaries between imagination and reality become increasingly permeable, allowing imagined experiences to influence characters' identities, choices, and understanding of loss. By placing an American children's novel alongside a contemporary Urdu novel, this study highlights the cross-cultural significance of Coleridge's theory and contributes to comparative literary scholarship by demonstrating that imagination operates as a constitutive force capable of reshaping lived reality rather than merely escaping from it.

Key Words: Esemplastic imagination; Samuel Taylor Coleridge; constitutive imagination; *Bridge to Terabithia*; *Pani Mar Raha Hai*; reality; comparative literature.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Imagination occupies a central position in the Romantic tradition, where it is regarded not merely as a faculty of artistic creation but as a dynamic force capable of shaping human perception and experience. From William Wordsworth to Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and from Percy Bysshe Shelley to John Keats, Romantic writers consistently foreground imagination as the foundation of poetic creativity and intellectual inquiry. For these writers, imagination enables individuals to perceive, interpret, and transform the world around them. Wordsworth, in the *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*, presents poetry as an expression of the relationship between nature and humanity, while Shelley, in *A Defence of Poetry*, describes poetry as "the expression of the imagination" and attributes to imagination a significant role in the moral and cultural development of civilization.

Among the Romantic theorists, Samuel Taylor Coleridge offers one of the most influential conceptions of imagination in *Biographia Literaria*. His notion of the esemplastic power of imagination emphasizes its ability to unify disparate experiences into a coherent whole. Rather than functioning as a passive or reproductive faculty, imagination actively creates, shapes, and reorganizes reality. In this sense, imagination possesses a constitutive power through which human beings reconstruct their understanding of the world. The imagined and the real therefore exist in a dynamic relationship in which imagination continually reshapes lived experience.

This paper explores the constitutive role of imagination in Katherine Paterson's *Bridge to Terabithia* and Amna Mufti's *Pani Mar Raha Hai*. Although these novels emerge from different cultural and literary traditions, both depict imagination as a transformative force that enables their protagonists to negotiate emotional suffering, social pressures, and existential uncertainty. In *Bridge to Terabithia*, Jess Aarons and Leslie Burke create the imaginary kingdom of Terabithia, which gradually becomes an essential space for friendship, self-discovery, and coping with loss. Similarly, in *Pani Mar Raha Hai*, dreams, visions, and imaginative perceptions profoundly influence the lives of Irfan Sahib, Israr, Madhumati, and Nazanin, shaping their understanding of reality and directing the course of their actions.

Existing scholarship has examined *Bridge to Terabithia* from perspectives such as symbolism, theology, and childhood experience, while studies on *Pani Mar Raha Hai* have primarily focused on environmental degradation and ecological criticism. However, little scholarly attention has been devoted to examining these novels comparatively through Coleridge's concept of the esemplastic imagination. This study addresses that gap by investigating how imagination functions not merely as an escape from reality but as a constitutive force that actively reshapes the protagonists' perception of the world.

Drawing upon Coleridge's theory of the esemplastic imagination, this study employs a qualitative comparative textual analysis to demonstrate that imagination constructs alternative realities which profoundly influence the protagonists' identities, emotions, and decisions. The paper argues that imagination transcends the boundaries of fantasy and becomes an active force that transforms lived reality. By bringing together an American novel and a contemporary Urdu novel, this study contributes to comparative literary scholarship by extending the application of Romantic aesthetic theory to two culturally distinct narratives and demonstrating the enduring relevance of Coleridge's theory in contemporary literary criticism.

1.1. Theoretical Framework



The present study is grounded in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's theory of the *esemplastic* imagination, as articulated in *Biographia Literaria*. Coleridge conceives imagination not as a passive faculty of reproduction but as an active and creative power capable of unifying diverse experiences into meaningful forms. The term *esemplastic*, derived from the Greek meaning "to shape into one," signifies imagination's constitutive ability to synthesize, transform, and recreate reality. Rather than merely reflecting the external world, imagination actively participates in the construction of human experience by reshaping perceptions of reality. It is this constitutive function of imagination that provides the principal theoretical lens for the present comparative analysis of *Bridge to Terabithia* and *Pani Mar Raha Hai*.

Northrop Frye, in his influential essay "Myth, Fiction and Displacement," further elucidates Coleridge's concept by emphasizing the structural and creative dimensions of imagination. According to Frye, the *esemplastic* faculty is not confined to aesthetic expression; rather, it organizes images, symbols, and narrative patterns into coherent imaginative structures that enable literature to construct alternative realities. Imagination therefore possesses a generative function through which literary texts produce meanings that transcend ordinary empirical experience (Frye 597). This perspective provides an important foundation for understanding how the protagonists in both novels construct symbolic worlds that reshape their engagement with reality.

Forest Pyle extends Coleridge's formulation by arguing that imagination also possesses institutional and material significance. In *The Ideology of Imagination: Subject and Society in the Discourse of Romanticism*, Pyle contends that imagination operates not only as a philosophical concept but also as a force capable of producing social, political, and cultural meanings. He describes imagination as an "instituting" idea that actively generates the structures through which individuals interpret and organize their experiences. Consequently, imagination becomes a constitutive power that influences both individual consciousness and collective reality rather than remaining confined to the realm of abstract thought (Pyle 28). This perspective reinforces the argument that the imaginative worlds created by the protagonists are not detached fantasies but meaningful realities that shape their identities, emotions, and actions.

Lucy Newlyn likewise highlights Coleridge's rejection of the empiricist tradition represented by thinkers such as David Hartley and Joseph Priestley. As Newlyn observes, Coleridge rejects the assumption that knowledge originates solely from sensory experience. Instead, he argues that the mind actively organizes and interprets experience through the creative operation of imagination. Reality, therefore, is not simply received by the senses but is continually mediated through imaginative consciousness (Newlyn 66). This understanding strengthens the present study's argument that imagination functions as a transformative force rather than a passive reflection of external reality.

Jennifer Ford further contributes to this theoretical discussion by examining Coleridge's understanding of dreams and poetic creativity. In *Coleridge on Dreaming: Romanticism, Dreams and the Medical Imagination*, Ford demonstrates that Coleridge viewed dreams and imagination as closely interconnected forms of creative consciousness. Dreams become imaginative spaces through which hidden truths, emotions, and possibilities emerge, thereby extending imagination beyond waking perception (Ford 3). This perspective is particularly relevant to *Pani Mar Raha Hai*, where dreams and visionary experiences significantly influence the protagonists' understanding of themselves and their world.

Drawing upon these theoretical perspectives, the present study argues that imagination functions as a constitutive and reality-shaping force in both *Bridge to Terabithia* and *Pani Mar*





Raha Hai. Through Coleridge's concept of the esemplastic imagination and its subsequent interpretations by Frye, Pyle, Newlyn, and Ford, the paper demonstrates that imagination is not merely an escape from reality but an active process through which reality is interpreted, reconstructed, and transformed. This theoretical framework therefore provides the conceptual basis for examining how the protagonists in both novels negotiate trauma, identity, memory, and lived experience through the creative power of imagination.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of imagination has remained a central concern in Romantic literary criticism and continues to attract considerable scholarly attention in contemporary literary studies. Among the Romantic theorists, Samuel Taylor Coleridge's theory of the esemplastic imagination, presented in *Biographia Literaria*, has been widely recognized as one of the most influential formulations of imagination as a creative and constitutive faculty. Coleridge argues that imagination does not merely reproduce external reality; rather, it actively shapes, unifies, and transforms human experience. Building upon Coleridge's ideas, Northrop Frye (1961), in *Myth, Fiction and Displacement*, interprets imagination as the structural principle through which literature constructs symbolic realities instead of simply reflecting the external world.

Similarly, Forest Pyle (1995), in *The Ideology of Imagination: Subject and Society in the Discourse of Romanticism*, extends Coleridge's concept by arguing that imagination functions as an "instituting" force capable of shaping philosophical, social, and political consciousness. Jennifer Ford (1998) further explores the relationship between dreams and poetic imagination, demonstrating that Coleridge regarded dreams as an extension of creative consciousness, while Lucy Newlyn (2002) emphasizes that Coleridge rejects the empiricist view of the mind as merely receptive and instead presents imagination as an active faculty that organizes and transforms experience. Collectively, these studies establish imagination as a dynamic and constitutive force rather than a passive faculty of perception. Critical scholarship on Katherine Paterson's *Bridge to Terabithia* has predominantly examined the novel through the interrelated themes of childhood, fantasy, grief, trauma, symbolism, and spiritual development.

James Washick (1999) explores the theological dimensions of the novel by comparing it with C. S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia*, arguing that Paterson employs Christian symbolism to portray death, hope, and spiritual transcendence. Expanding this perspective, Trudelle Thomas (2011) interprets the novel as a narrative of children's spiritual and emotional growth, suggesting that friendship and imagination enable the protagonists to negotiate fear, loss, and maturity.

From a semiotic perspective, Taufiqi Galih Utomo (2013) examines the symbolic significance of the broken tree, river, and bridge, arguing that these recurring images represent transition, separation, and the movement from innocence to maturity. While these studies successfully illuminate the symbolic and theological dimensions of the novel, they remain primarily concerned with religious and semiotic interpretations.

More recent scholarship has increasingly focused on the psychological and developmental aspects of *Bridge to Terabithia*. Studies examining childhood bereavement and trauma argue that the imaginary kingdom of Terabithia functions as a therapeutic space where Jess Aarons gradually processes grief and reconstructs his emotional identity following Leslie Burke's death. Recent critics have also interpreted Terabithia as a liminal or threshold space that facilitates the protagonists' transition from childhood innocence to emotional maturity through imagination, friendship, and loss. These studies demonstrate that imagination plays a significant role in psychological healing and identity formation; however, they largely interpret imagination as a





coping mechanism or symbolic construct rather than as a constitutive force that actively reshapes reality through Coleridge's theory of the esemplastic imagination.

Research on Amna Mufti's *Pani Mar Raha Hai* has primarily developed within the field of ecocriticism. Muhammad Burhan Hassan and Ammara Liaqat (2023) argue that the novel foregrounds environmental degradation, water scarcity, and the exploitation of natural resources while exposing the ecological consequences of anthropocentric attitudes toward nature. Their study establishes the novel as an important contribution to Pakistani environmental literature by demonstrating how ecological crises shape both individual lives and collective consciousness. Recent scholarship has further examined South Asian environmental fiction through the concepts of ecological imagination, environmental catastrophe, and apocalyptic narratives, arguing that literary imagination frequently serves as a medium for representing ecological anxieties and humanity's uncertain future. Nevertheless, these studies primarily privilege environmental concerns and rarely examine how imagination itself reshapes the protagonists' perception of reality and influences their lived experiences.

From a comparative perspective, scholarship on *Bridge to Terabithia* and *Pani Mar Raha Hai* remains remarkably limited. Existing studies generally examine the two novels independently and within separate critical traditions. Research on Paterson's novel concentrates on childhood, fantasy, grief, symbolism, theology, and psychological development, whereas criticism on Mufti's novel remains largely confined to ecocritical and environmental interpretations. Consequently, there has been little attempt to examine both novels through a common theoretical framework grounded in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's concept of the esemplastic imagination. Moreover, existing scholarship rarely investigates imagination as a constitutive force capable of transforming perception, identity, and lived reality across different cultural contexts.

The present study seeks to address this scholarly gap by undertaking a comparative textual analysis of *Bridge to Terabithia* and *Pani Mar Raha Hai* through Coleridge's theory of the esemplastic imagination. Rather than treating imagination merely as fantasy, symbolism, or psychological escape, this study argues that imagination functions as a constitutive and reality-shaping force that actively reconstructs the protagonists' identities, emotions, memories, and understanding of the world. By bringing together an American children's novel and a contemporary Urdu novel, the study extends the application of Romantic aesthetic theory to cross-cultural literary analysis and contributes a new comparative perspective to the growing body of scholarship on imagination and reality.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative comparative textual approach to examine the reality-shaping function of imagination in Katherine Paterson's *Bridge to Terabithia* and Amna Mufti's *Pani Mar Raha Hai*. The research is interpretive in nature and is grounded in close readings of the selected primary texts. The analysis focuses on narrative episodes, characterization, symbolism, and dialogue that illustrate how imagination transcends mere fantasy and actively reshapes the protagonists' perceptions and experiences of reality.

The theoretical framework of the study is primarily informed by Samuel Taylor Coleridge's concept of the **esemplastic imagination** as articulated in *Biographia Literaria*. Coleridge's understanding of imagination as a constitutive and unifying force provides the principal analytical lens through which the selected texts are examined. To strengthen the theoretical discussion, the study also draws upon the critical insights of Northrop Frye, Forest Pyle, Jennifer Ford, and Lucy





Newlyn, whose works elaborate the creative, constitutive, and material dimensions of Romantic imagination.

Using a comparative approach, the research identifies thematic and conceptual parallels between the two novels while remaining attentive to their distinct cultural and literary contexts. Rather than comparing plot structures alone, the study investigates how imagination functions as an active force that constructs alternative realities, mediates trauma and emotional experience, and ultimately influences the protagonists' decisions and understanding of the world. Relevant passages from both novels are subjected to detailed textual interpretation and are analyzed alongside Romantic literary thought to demonstrate the continuity of Coleridge's theory beyond its historical context.

The study relies exclusively on secondary sources such as scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and critical essays to contextualize the theoretical framework and support textual interpretations. Through this qualitative comparative methodology, the research demonstrates that imagination in both novels operates not merely as an escape from reality but as a constitutive force that reshapes lived experience, thereby reinforcing the central argument of the study.

4. ANALYSIS

4.1. Imagination as the Construction of an Alternative Reality in *Bridge to Terabithia*

To begin with, imagination enables the protagonists of Katherine Paterson's *Bridge to Terabithia* to bring purpose and momentum to lives constrained by drudgery. Jesse Aarons and Leslie Burke, along with May Belle, spend time in a nearby clearing to gain a sense of autonomy from an adult world that restricts them through school life at Lark Creek Elementary and the chore-driven routines of daily life. Driven by a youthful desire to explore their potential and escape the monotony of routine, Jesse and Leslie allow their imaginations to flourish. They create a quasi-magical world in which imagination not only gives them a kingdom of their own but also enables them to undertake imaginary quests and battle monsters in defence of that kingdom:

Her words stirred inside of him. He'd like to be a ruler of something.
Even something that wasn't real. 'OK', he said. 'Where could we have it?'
'Over there in the woods where nobody would come and mess it up.' (Paterson 53)

In the film *Bridge to Terabithia*, based on the same novel, the dialogue helps explain why the children create the imaginary realm of Terabithia. Their stated purpose is to have fun—an experience largely unavailable in a real world governed by adult rules and conventions (18:39 – 23:06). To inhabit and enjoy this imaginary world, Leslie and Jesse give free rein to their imaginations and begin constructing their 'imaginary' and 'unreal' kingdom. Leslie even gives this magical realm a sublime name inspired by other tales, such as those of

Narnia, "'I know'- she was getting excited- 'it could be a magic country like Narnia, and the only way you can get in is by swinging across on this enchanted rope.' 'Come on,' she said. 'Let's find a place to build our castle stronghold' " (Paterson 54). Leslie's imaginative creation of the castles and kingdom of Terabithia resonates with Samuel Taylor Coleridge's construction of imaginary realms in "Kubla Khan," where he similarly expresses a yearning for stately and princely grandeur through imagined domes and palaces.

Moreover, the protagonists' innocent imagination becomes intertwined with the material quality of Leslie's imaginative vision. Through dreams and imaginative acts, she assumes the power to establish the foundations of the unreal kingdom of Terabithia. Leslie and Jesse also demonstrate a strong commitment to their imaginative world. Although Terabithia is a construct of their minds, they treat it as they would any





real kingdom or realm. Just as a kingdom may be attacked by its enemies, Terabithia is threatened by monsters. By defending their imaginary kingdom, Leslie and Jesse blur the boundary between imagination and reality, subjecting the former to the same pressures that confront and shape the latter:

“Conquering the hostile savages on our northern border,” she answered. “But the lines of communication have been broken, and thus we do not have tidings of our beloved homeland for many a full moon”. How was that for regular queen talk? Jess wished he could match it” (Paterson 97).

A sense of innocence pervades this imaginative world, even when the kingdom of Terabithia appears to be surrounded by monsters. The episode illustrates how Leslie and Jesse’s imagination constructs a seemingly material world within the unreal and enables them to devise ways of sustaining it.

A moment then arrives when Leslie becomes completely engrossed in the ‘imaginary’ and ‘unreal’ world of Terabithia, which she and Jesse have materially fashioned in their minds. She begins to envision Terabithia as a kingdom requiring genuine protection from its enemies, as though it contains real inhabitants. Nevertheless, this refuge provides Jesse and Leslie with comfort and escape through imagination. In *The Ideology of Imagination: Subject and Society in the Discourse of Romanticism*, Forest Pyle characterizes such dreams and imaginative acts as attempts to escape worldliness, creating a rift that Romantic imagination can ameliorate (141).

Leslie subsequently extends the boundaries of her imagination in *Bridge to Terabithia*. For Leslie, the line between imagination and reality begins to blur. Terabithia, initially a kingdom of refuge, assumes increasingly realistic proportions, suggesting that reality itself can be displaced or altered by material Romantic imagination:

Leslie lifted her arms and face up toward the dark green canopy. "O Spirits of the grove," she began solemnly. "We are come on behalf of our beloved kingdom which lies even now under the spell of some evil, unknown force. Give us, we beseech thee, wisdom to discern this evil, and power to overcome it.. All he could think of was dry clothes and a cup of hot coffee and maybe just plunking down in front of the TV for a couple of hours. He was obviously not worthy to be king of Terabithia. Whoever heard of a king who was scared of tall trees and a little bit of water? (127)

This condition, in which a dream-driven imaginary world seeks to become reality, also appears in Romantic writing. Lord Byron gives voice to similar sentiments in his poem “The Dream”:

Our life is twofold; sleep hath its own world
A boundary between the things misnamed
Death and existence: Sleep hath its own world,
And a wide realm of wide reality
(Lines 1- 4)

In these lines, the imaginary world of dreams initially appears distinct from reality, yet it also possesses the power to blur the boundary between dream and reality. In this way, imagination alters and displaces reality. Leslie Burke undergoes a comparable experience in *Bridge to Terabithia*. She becomes so engrossed in the sublime and innocent imaginative world that she overlooks the possibility that imagination’s material tendencies may also alter her reality, which they ultimately do. While acting within this imaginary realm, she attempts to cross the creek on the rope, falls into the river, strikes her head on a stone, and dies.

A similar expression of disbelief appears in Jesse Aarons’s reaction, as he has come to treat imagination as reality. He finds it difficult to comprehend Leslie Burke’s death. Constitutive imagination



has also become reality for Aarons, and his response supports the assertion that the boundary between reality and imagination has been blurred (Pyle 141). Thus, when he is informed of Leslie's death, disbelief emerges as his most natural reaction. Similar expressions of disbelief appear in Romantic poetry concerned with coping with death. Dreams and imagination frequently serve as mechanisms for coping with the loss of friends and loved ones. In his poem, "THERE WAS A BOY" Wordsworth explores comparable emotions and responses, which Jesse also experiences while remembering Leslie:

THERE was a Boy; ye knew him well, ye Cliffs
This boy was taken from his mates, and Died
In childhood, ere he was full twelve years Old
Pre-eminent in beauty is the vale
Where he was born and bred: the churchyard hangs
Upon a slope above the village-school;
And through that churchyard when my way has led
On summer-evenings, I believe that there
A long half-hour together I have stood
Mute- looking at the grave in which he lies! (Lines 1, 26-34)

In these lines, Wordsworth, in a characteristically Romantic manner, offers a sublime remembrance of the child whose death he mourns. The loss is remembered and mourned through imagination. Jesse Aarons similarly relies on imagination to mourn and remember his dear friend Leslie Burke:

It was Leslie who had taken him from the cow pasture into Terabithia and turned him into a king.
He had thought that was it. Wasn't king the best you could be? Now it occurred to him that perhaps
Terabithia was like a castle where you came to be knighted. (174)

The use of imagination to mourn and remember loss also appears in William Blake's "The Land of Dreams". Like Jesse, Blake's speaker continues to find his mother in the comforting world of dreams: Thus, imagination is not merely active in *Bridge to Terabithia*; through its material tendency, it creates a space separate and distinct from reality. This imaginative space then assumes the proportions of reality by displacing and altering it. Through the constitutive and material power of imagination, Jesse Aarons and Leslie Burke create an alternative world, yet they are subsequently compelled to confront the ways in which imagination alters reality. Ultimately, imagination remains their primary medium of expression: Leslie follows the course determined by her imaginative world, while Jesse mourns her through that same imaginative medium.

Thus, the symbolic value of Terabithia extends beyond childhood play. Within this imaginative realm, Jess and Leslie confront imaginary enemies, undertake heroic quests, and redefine themselves as capable and courageous individuals. These experiences do not alter the physical world; instead, they reshape the protagonists' perceptions of themselves and their surroundings. Consequently, imagination functions as a psychological and emotional resource that equips them to confront real-world difficulties with greater resilience and confidence.

The distinction between imagination and material reality becomes particularly significant following Leslie's death. Her death results from the physical failure of the rope and the dangerous conditions created by the flooded creek, not from the imaginative world of Terabithia itself. However, imagination remains central to Jess's process of grief and recovery. The symbolic meaning attached to Terabithia enables him to preserve Leslie's memory, reinterpret his loss, and develop emotional maturity. In this respect, imagination does not replace or supersede material reality; rather, it mediates the protagonist's understanding of traumatic experience and facilitates personal transformation.





The film adaptation reinforces this interpretation by presenting Terabithia as a space through which the children seek freedom, creativity, and companionship unavailable within the routines of everyday life. Their imaginative world is therefore not merely an escape from reality but a symbolic framework that allows them to understand and respond to reality in more meaningful ways. Both the novel and the film suggest that imagination possesses transformative psychological and social effects while remaining grounded in the material conditions of the characters' lives. Accordingly, *Bridge to Terabithia* demonstrates that imagination shapes perception, identity, and emotional resilience rather than literally altering physical reality.

4.2. Imagination, Dreams, and the Interpretation of Reality in *Pani Mar Raha Hai*

Similarly, in Amna Mufti's *Pani Mar Raha Hai*, imagination functions not as a force that replaces material reality but as a cognitive and symbolic mechanism through which the characters interpret and respond to their lived experiences. Unlike *Bridge to Terabithia*, where imagination emerges through the creation of an alternative world, Mufti presents imagination primarily through dreams, memories, and symbolic consciousness. These imaginative experiences influence the characters' perceptions, emotional responses, and subsequent decisions while remaining firmly grounded in the material realities of their social and environmental conditions.

The significance of imagination is established early in the novel through Israr's dream, which introduces a series of unsettling premonitions about the future. The dream does not literally determine subsequent events; rather, it shapes Israr's understanding of reality by heightening his awareness of uncertainty, loss, and impending crisis. As the narrative unfolds, the dream acquires symbolic significance because it frames the protagonist's interpretation of later experiences and influences the way he responds to them. The forebodings embedded within the dream therefore function as a narrative device that connects the characters' inner psychological world with the external realities they confront.

This symbolic role of imagination extends beyond Israr to other characters, including Irfan Sahib, Madhumati, and Nazanin. Their memories, dreams, and imaginative reflections become means of negotiating personal anxieties, fractured relationships, and environmental decline. Rather than escaping reality, these imaginative experiences enable the characters to assign meaning to complex social and emotional circumstances. Consequently, *Pani Mar Raha Hai* portrays imagination as a constitutive force that mediates human experience and shapes individual and collective responses to reality without suggesting that it literally transforms the material world.

He kept imagining this dream repetitively. The first night, the second night, third night and when for nine straight night he kept envisioning the same dream, he got startled and he started restudying the irrigation system of Indus. He read voraciously on the subject and then one day, tendered his resignation. (Mufti 89)

The sequence of events in the protagonists' lives begins with the dream envisioned by Irfan Sahib. The dream anticipates material devastation unless corrective action is taken. It prompts Irfan Sahib to pursue a particular course that not only changes his own life but also unexpectedly subjects Madhumati, Israr, and Nazanin to a series of events. Imagination similarly assumes material form in Romantic poetry, particularly in Coleridge's work. In his poem, "DAY-DREAM" Coleridge expresses the material power of imagination. Coleridge's poem presents imagination as possessing material power. During sleep, imagination can create images, envision vast fountains, and transform a lover's lap into a pillow. In a similar manner, Irfan Sahib's imagination begins to construct a situation that alters the course of events in *Pani Mar Raha Hai*. Through imagination, this envisioned reality comes to assume greater significance than material reality itself. Irfan Sahib, Madhumati, Israr, and Nazanin remain perched on a mound like anchorites awaiting doomsday, in accordance with eschatological belief. The rushing waters never arrive, while dams continue to be built throughout the novel in an anthropocentric manner. By the end, Irfan Sahib realizes that their constitutive imagination has displaced reality and altered the course of their lives.



Israr's confession further illustrates that imagination in *Pani Mar Raha Hai* functions as a means of interpreting experience rather than replacing material reality. Reflecting on the consequences of the relationships among the characters, Israr acknowledges that their perceptions of love, desire, and morality were shaped as much by their imagination and internalized social norms as by external reality. He admits:

"Those birds, that moon, those glistening eyes and all that we saw there, was a construct of our imagination... Our thinking and social norms were so overbearing that we made hotchpotch out of it." (Mufti 177)

This confession does not suggest that the natural world or the events themselves were imaginary. Instead, Israr recognizes that the symbolic meanings attached to these experiences were constructed through the interplay of imagination, memory, and social expectations. The imagery of the birds, the moon, and Nazanin's eyes reflects the characters' emotional and psychological investment in their relationship, while the concluding statement reveals their awareness that rigid social conventions distorted their understanding of natural human desires. Imagination therefore mediates their interpretation of reality, enabling them to assign meaning to their experiences while simultaneously exposing the tension between individual emotions and collective moral codes.

Moreover, Israr's reflection demonstrates that the novel presents imagination as a constitutive force in the formation of personal consciousness rather than as a power that supersedes the material world. His realization marks a moment of self-awareness in which he distinguishes between lived experience and the symbolic narratives imposed by memory, desire, and social ideology. Consequently, *Pani Mar Raha Hai* portrays imagination as shaping perception, identity, and moral understanding, while remaining firmly grounded in the material realities of the characters' lives.

Toward the end of the novel, the protagonists realize that their material imagination has come to define their actual circumstances. These imagined situations compel them to alter reality and spend much of their lives within boundaries shaped by such imagination. Throughout the narrative, the protagonists place complete faith in extraordinary events, including goats devouring human flesh, mice chasing snakes, showers of fish, and supernatural creatures such as mermaids. By the conclusion, however, they remorsefully acknowledge that these phenomena were conjured through the material power of imagination and had altered the courses of their lives. Imagination therefore exerts a compelling influence on the protagonists. Oscar Wilde attributes a similar power to imagination in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* when he states, "There is something terribly logical in the imagination" (222). Likewise, in the film *Kamli*, Hina uses imagination to create her lover in the form of Amaltas, drawing upon the mythical tale of 'Harmala and Amaltas' (24:34- 26:31). She allows this imaginary construct to displace and alter her reality, ultimately drowning when she can no longer cope with the reality already transformed by her imagination (2:01:48 – 2:08:27).

Ultimately, *Pani Mar Raha Hai* depicts imagination projecting its material tendencies and thereby altering reality for the protagonists. It consequently becomes difficult for them to distinguish between imagination and reality, as the former assumes an increasingly dominant position over the latter. By contrast, *Pani Mar Raha Hai* explores imagination through dreams, symbolic visions, and ecological consciousness. The protagonists' dreams do not physically alter external reality or predict events with certainty. Instead, they provide interpretive frameworks through which environmental degradation, social disintegration, and personal responsibility acquire deeper significance. The imaginative experiences depicted in the novel encourage reflection, influence ethical decisions, and shape the characters' understanding of ecological crisis. Consequently, imagination functions as a creative mode of interpreting reality rather than replacing it.

Viewed through Samuel Taylor Coleridge's theory of the esemplastic imagination, both novels illustrate the mind's ability to synthesize fragmented experiences into coherent and meaningful forms. In





Bridge to Terabithia, imagination transforms an ordinary forest into a symbolic kingdom that nurtures emotional growth and artistic creativity. In *Pani Mar Raha Hai*, dreams and visionary experiences unite memory, environmental awareness, and moral reflection into a comprehensive understanding of lived reality. Although the narrative strategies differ, both novels demonstrate that imagination actively organizes human experience and enables individuals to discover meaning within suffering, uncertainty, and change.

The comparative findings also reveal important differences in the operation of imagination. Paterson emphasizes childhood creativity, friendship, and personal healing, illustrating how imaginative play strengthens resilience in the face of loss. Mufti, on the other hand, foregrounds ecological anxiety and collective responsibility, demonstrating how imagination encourages ethical engagement with environmental and social realities. These differences reflect the distinct historical and cultural contexts of the two novels while simultaneously confirming the enduring relevance of Coleridge's theory across diverse literary traditions.

Overall, the findings support the central argument of this study that imagination is neither a passive faculty nor a simple form of escapism. Instead, it functions as a constitutive force that reconstructs perception, identity, memory, and emotional understanding. While imagination does not physically transform external reality, it profoundly influences how reality is experienced, interpreted, and remembered. By bringing together an American children's novel and a contemporary Urdu novel, this comparative analysis demonstrates the continuing applicability of Coleridge's concept of the *esemplastic* imagination to cross-cultural literary criticism and highlights the enduring relationship between imagination and the construction of meaningful human experience.

5. CONCLUSION

The comparative analysis of *Bridge to Terabithia* by Katherine Paterson and *Pani Mar Raha Hai* by Amna Mufti demonstrates that imagination performs a constitutive role in shaping the protagonists' understanding of themselves and the world they inhabit. Rather than functioning as a force that literally replaces or supersedes material reality, imagination operates as a symbolic and interpretive mechanism through which the characters negotiate emotional conflict, social constraints, and personal loss. In both novels, imagination enables the protagonists to construct meaningful frameworks that help them interpret their experiences and respond to the challenges of their lived realities.

In *Bridge to Terabithia*, the imaginative creation of Terabithia provides Jess and Leslie with a symbolic space for developing confidence, creativity, and emotional resilience. Following Leslie's death, this imaginative world continues to influence Jess's understanding of grief and personal growth without altering the material circumstances surrounding the tragedy. Similarly, in *Pani Mar Raha Hai*, dreams, memories, and symbolic reflections shape the perceptions and decisions of characters such as Israr, Irfan Sahib, Madhumati, and Nazanin. Their imaginative experiences do not replace reality; instead, they mediate the ways in which reality is understood, remembered, and emotionally experienced.

The study therefore argues that imagination possesses constitutive and transformative significance because it reshapes perception, identity, and meaning-making rather than the physical world itself. By comparing the two novels, this research demonstrates that imagination functions as a powerful narrative and psychological resource through which individuals negotiate complex social, emotional, and cultural realities. Consequently, both texts affirm that while material conditions remain unchanged, imagination profoundly influences how those conditions are interpreted and lived, thereby underscoring its central role in human experience.

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