

Ecocriticism: A New Response to Kashmiri Poetry from Azad to Zareef Ahmad Zareef

Dr. Gazala Gayas

Associate Professor, A.S. College Srinagar (India)

I. INTRODUCTION

Nature and literature have always shared a close relationship as is evidenced in the works of poets and other writers down the ages in almost all the cultures of the world. The environmental devastation, global warming, depletion of ozone layer are the concern and issues of contemporary world. Literature has been mirroring the various phenomenon happening all over the world, it could not remain unaffected from these concerns of the environment. There is a shift in studying literature through an ecological perspective, and this shift is called Ecocriticism. It is an application of ecology and ecological concepts to study literature. In ecocritical texts nature features as a central character.

II. A THEORETICAL INTRODUCTION OF ECOCRITICISM

Global climate warming with its enormous effects, the destruction of the ozone layer, deforestation, and the accelerating rate of extinction of species, the loss of arable land, the reduction in groundwater levels, the threat of nuclear warfare, industrial accidents, and other devastations made are the main concerns of ecologists. All these things are happening before us, because we have become greedy of economic freedom, which means freedom of human will. So there is a need to make academic blocks which will help to bring the eco-consciousness among the people. In literature teaching and studying nature with reference to environmental issues is called Ecocriticism. It is a critical method available to critics to analyse a literary text. It is concerned with nature and ecological themes in all literatures. It is a study of human association with nature in a different perspective.

Due to man's over use or exploitation of natural resources, vast numbers of species are being annihilated. Every year 100,000 species are becoming extinct from the planet. Seven million square kilometres of forest land have vanished in last 50 years. Ecologists believe that human beings act as the most important agents in this process of destruction. Humans are actually derailing the human rationality by tampering with nature. They destroy mountains to make big highways and industries; cut forests to make big houses; fill oceans with e-waste; plant atomic projects to kill birds and animals; they conquer the spaces and disturb the ecosystem and so-on and so-forth. An unsustainable life style adopted by human beings is destroying their own existence. Cheryl Glotfelty, the first American Professor of Literature and Environment in *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996) points out that in the age of environmental crisis, literature must redraw the boundaries to remap the fast changing concepts of literary studies. She believes that environmental crisis is ignored by scholars of literature. It is man, who is responsible for the degradation of environment and thus a need, arises to give voice to such global issues. She writes in her book:

We have reached the age of environmental limits, a time when the consequences of human actions are damaging the planet's basic life support system. We are there. Either we change our ways or we face global catastrophe, destroying much beauty and exterminating countless fellow species in our headlong race to apocalypse. Many of us in colleges and universities worldwide find ourselves in a dilemma. Our temperaments and talents have deposited us in literature departments but, as environmental problems compound, work as usual seems unconsciously frivolous. If we are not part of the solution, we're part of the problem. (xviii)

The first stage of Eco-criticism revolves round the texts where nature shows its existence; where nature is a central figure. The second stage is the preservation of nature and it has always been a core concern for the men of literature. The third stage is once again existence, but now this existence demands acceptance as integral part of the universe. This theory has been further divided into different sub theories like; Social Ecology, Environmental Justice, Deep Ecology, Ecological Imperialism, Eco-Feminism, Eco-Psychology, Ecocide etc.

In this paper Kashmiri Progressive poets, Abdul Ahad Azad, Dina Nath Nadim, Mohd Amin Kamil, and Zareef Ahmad Zareef will be analysed under the ambit of Ecological Imperialism, Deep Ecology, Social Ecology, and Eco-Psychology. Poets like Lal-Ded, Noud Rouysh, Habba Khatoon, Arinmal, Rusul Mir, and others were very close to nature and visualise nature as a spiritual source. Not only that, Shiek-ul-Aalam in fifteenth Century came with an ecological wisdom when he said, "Ann poshi teli yeli wann poshi" means "food will last as

long as forests are there"(4). Kashmiri poetry existed largely speaking in oral tradition up to 1930. The new era began with Mahjoor and Abdul Ahad Azad. With them came into Kashmiri poetry a certain freshness, imagination, and a sweetness of diction.

Abdul Ahad Azad a famous Kashmiri poet was brought up in the lap of natural beauties and cannot escape its deep impact on his expression and thinking. But at the same time his land and men were exploited by the imperialistic lords. His land offers him a variety of beauty, but the pricking thorns horrified him: the miseries of men, who worked under baigaar (work without wages); the agonies of young widows, who have lost their husbands in carrying heavy loads upon dangerous cliffs of high mountains; and the cries of animals and birds hunted by the lords. In his poem "My Home Land", he portrayed the bounty that nature bestowed upon us:

What a beautiful land my country is?

My heart blossoms in its environment

Both my body and soul crave to be sacrificed,

For every road and highway leading to this happy land.(1-4)

Azad makes his fellow countrymen conscious of the attractive environment in which he has taken birth and has grown up. His streams which offered a clean mirror to princess and princesses, caused devastation to local peasantry. Azad wanted to induce love of land to common Kashmiri. Through this poem Azad, describes the condition of the people in Kashmir. The tyrants are depriving poor man from their basic rights. They occupy the

lands, which actually belong to the men of the valley. Thus the poet echoes the philosophy of Ecological Imperialism, and Social ecology which believes in an egalitarian society based on mutual aid, caring and maintaining values.

His another poem “River”, Azad, stands as much for the human race as it does for the totality of creation. The true man, the real being would not deceive, would not lie but only love:

I enjoy to strike my head

Against iron walls and granite hills

To collect once again

My scattered being To scatter once again my integral identity.(1-4)

In this poem Azad explicitly conveyed the practical philosophy of universalism. He pleads for universal brotherhood and love for humanity, thus promotes the philosophy of Deep Ecology. Deep Ecologists believe that, a society where there is peace and harmony is an ideal society. A society where weak are oppressed and nature is exploited is an ecologically backward society. According to Social Ecologists, the root causes of environmental problems are such as trade for profit, industrial expansion, and the identification of progress with corporate self-interest.

Dina Nath Nadim, a Kashmiri poet born in 1916, is also a poet of Eco-Consciousness. Nadim is disturbed by the new world, new order and new thinking which is outcome of new capitalist society and urbanisation. Nadim’s consciousness about such transformations seems to resemble the thoughts of deep ecologist George Session, who in his “Introduction” to *Deep Ecology for Twentieth Century* views, “to be fully human we must protect and nurture our wilderness, which involves bioregional living, intimate contact with wild animals and plants in ecosystem, animistic perceptions, and primal nature rituals”(6). Nadim could see the wilderness and natural beauty of Kashmir to be destroyed by machines and industries. Another concern of Nadim was that the modern world might destroy nature, and therefore natural world would be neglected. Deep Ecology entails a commitment to respect the intrinsic values of richness and diversity. This in turn, leads to criticize industrial culture, whose development models construe the Earth, only as a raw material to be used to satisfy consumption and production. In his poem, “Determination” he says:

Can I find rest when my forests are ablaze?

Can I live in peace when every flower mourns?

Have I the time to wait for lazy deliberations?

I am the lighted torch, and firebrand dreads not fire?

That is why my blood is red and warm(11-15)

In the poem, “I will Not Sing Today” Nadim, uses similes and metaphors to describe the new world of machines and money. Man’s technological progress is going to spoil the valley of Kashmir. He compares the

new world with cold autumnal wind, which has destroyed every flower of the garden. He is sure that the times are near when the meadows of Kashmir will be replaced by concrete buildings. Nature to him dearer than anything else. He cannot see cutting of trees as he believes that they are alive and part of mother earth. He is not only conscious of its effect on ecosystem, but his concern is his love for the nature:

The stream's song

The Koel's plaint

Have dried up in their hearts

And the wild mynah is tongue- tied with fear

I will not sing today(19-23)

The poet feared that the times are not very far when machines are going to destroy the gardens into shambles. When a single tree is cut down, or mynah is killed, its impact is felt on every system that the tree supports and the mynah lives. Human indulgence in the foolish and irrational act of chopping down trees and killing animals leads to destruction and threat to the ecological equilibrium.

The environmental implications of war focus on modernization of warfare and its effect on the environment. A nation's survival depends on resources from the environment. Nadim could imagine what war can do to Mother Nature. Nations fight to occupy other nations, their waters, flora fauna, minerals, animals, and so on. Due to man's conflict within societies, Nadim predicts a war. Various Indo-Pak wars have destroyed the fauna and flora of Nadim's mother land i.e. Kashmir valley.

Mohammad Amin Kamil, born in 1924 at Srinagar has written great poetry in Kashmiri. As poet and philosopher, was also given Sahitya Akademi Award for his collection of poems Lava ta Prava (dew and light). He believes in equality of all in the ecosystem and thus places nature as a part of the world. He does not present himself as a dominant figure, but a small part in this big universe. Like a Ecosophie, he believes in philosophy of ecological harmony or equilibrium. His poem "Life and Death" seems to be a description of a real event. The theme that Kamil, emphasizes is that everything has its own position in the universe and nothing is superior:

I said to the lapping mountain stream

I'd like to ask- perhaps you know

Have you found the truth of life and death

A rising wave said "I am the river's voice"

But I cant stay I have a long way to go(1-5)

The green grass, chirping of birds, azure green waters all are living in harmony with each other, and they teach man a lesson of ambiance and peace. Kamil believes that nature soothes the burdened souls, cures every pang and woe, which is a great concern and concept in Eco-Psychology also. According to Arne Naess, a Deep Ecologist, humans naturally have the capacity to connect with a much larger self, transcending ego, by extending our sense of identification beyond the the natural focus on ego, to a wider sphere of relationships”(5). Kamil very philosophically defines life through the mouth of a rising wave. In the next stanza he asks spring breeze:

Stay a moment, sweet one listen to me

Tell me something about life and death

“Hold off! Don’t pull my robe”, he said

I have to go to fill earth’s lap with flowers(5-9)

He thus concludes the poem giving it a philosophical and spiritual touch. Every creature in this world experiences life and death. This life and death is a type of evolution of universe. This process of evolution completes our quest of growth and love. Deep ecology is rooted in a perception of reality that goes beyond the scientific framework to an initiative awareness of oneness of all life.

Zareef Ahmad Zareef, a poet, writer, activist and environmentalist, known for his satirical poetry. He has been working for the preservation of the environment, culture and heritage of his land. His book, *Khabr Togma Wanun* (2007) is a satire on contemporary Kashmiri society. He criticizes present government for ignoring environmental issues in Kashmir like deforestation, urbanisation, and encroachment of water bodies especially, lakes (Wular and Dal). In this book he calls Centaur hotel a “boil on Dal’s beautiful face” (3). In his Satirical poem “Taaran Garee(Trickery) he says:

Today people sow rice in Wular Lake

Anchar, Dal: their share too they take

For land filling Jhelum, our work voluntary

Trickery Trickery

Forests are being looted by foresters

Officers bolster them as partners

For Taking twigs tinder, take into custody.(8-14)

The selfish man has grown rice in world famous Wular Lake. In the next stanza the poet uses the phrase “land-filling,” of water bodies. Man is looting jungles and filling water bodies for his selfish interest. The poem is reaction against deforestation and illegal occupation of water bodies. The poet raises a voice against deforestation and filling of water bodies which clearly highlights his deep ecological concerns and sympathy

for these in culpable trees. When a single tree is cut down, not only a single tree is lost, but its impact is felt on every system that the tree supports. Human indulgence in the foolish and irrational act of chopping down trees, and occupying illegally water bodies leads to destruction and threat to the ecological equilibrium. In his another poem "Saillab Nama"(Great floods) he says:

How the floods devastated our valley

It took away everything with it

When man occupied the lakes and rivers bodies

Water had to enter our houses(1-4)

Ecocide commonly referred to as ecological disaster is a major concern of Ecocriticism. The term was coined by Arthur W. Galston in 1970. Ecocritics believe human beings are much more responsible for the destruction of nature. As such the primary concern of Ecocritics is to save Mother Earth. All the nature writers and Ecocritics stand firmly against ecocide. Polly Higgins, a legal scholar and international environmentalist in her book, *Eradicating Ecocide* (2010), defines Ecocide as, "the extensive destruction, damage to or loss of ecosystem(s) of a given territory, whether by human agency or by other causes, to such an extent that the peaceful enjoyment by the inhabitants of that territory has been severely diminished" (63). She views ecocide as a potential fifth crime, after genocide, the crime of aggression, crimes against humanity, and grave war crimes. This poem is a good example of Ecocide. The floods of 2014, devastated whole Kashmir valley. Paddy fields, orchids, animals, and humans were destroyed by this great flood. According to Zareef we humans are responsible for such devastation. Our selfish desires had annoyed the whole ecosystem, and in turn nature has to show its existence.

III.CONCLUSION

The research paper analyzes Kashmiri Progressive poets by claiming them eco-conscious. All the poets have been able to project through their respective poems that man and nature are inseparable. The poets characterize nature in a cleaner and more defined way and bring forth the fact that earth is alive and humans definitely need to change their anthropocentric view to eco-centric one. The research thus arrives at the conclusion that there is a need to preserve nature as humans are primarily members of the natural world. There is need to love nature in its all attires, that is the only way to live a peaceful and healthy life. Above all, the study reveals that the poems selected for the research work present their ecological wisdom.

WORKS CITED AND CONSULTED

- [1]. Aafaqi, Asad-ullah. *Aiyena-i-Haq: Kulliyat-i-Shaikul Aalam*. Srinagar: Gulshan Publications, 2008. Print.
- [2]. Azad, Abdul Ahad. *Kashmiri Zuban Aur Shairi*. Srinagar: The Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture, and Languages, 1959. Print.
- [3]. .Branch, Michael P., and Scott Slovic, eds. *The ISLE Reader: Ecocriticism, 1993-2003*. New York: U of Georgia P, 2003. Print.

[4]. Pepper, D. *Ecosocialism: From Deep Ecology to Social Justice*. London: Routledge, 1993. Print..

[5]. Tobias, Michael, ed. *Deep Ecology*. San Diego: Avant Books, 1984. Print.

[6]. Zareef, Ahmad Zareef, *Khabar Togma Vanun*. Srinagar : Gulshan Publications, 2007. Print.

[7]. . . . *Taren Gari*. Srinagar: Gulshan Publications, 2012, Print.