

Ecocritical Reading of Some Kashmiri Poems

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Abstract:

The most important problem that world face today is the environment issue and its consequences on human existence. Barry Commoner's first law of ecology is "everything is connected to everything else". In Raymond Dussmann's words "it is the business of those who direct the activities that will shape tomorrow's world to think beyond today's wellbeing and provide for tomorrow". Literature as a part of culture and history has always played a great role in showing the relationship between nature and humans. Poets have been writing since decades about nature and have made the natural flora and fauna their spirit. Today literary people can help in developing ecological visions which can be translated into social, economic and individual programs of action. William Rueckert believes "a poem is a stored energy, a formal turbulence, a living thing, a swirl in the flow". This paper will be an attempt to highlight the ecological condition of Kashmir and how Kashmiri poets have celebrated and mourned the presence and loss of natural resources. Attention will be drawn to some poems written by Kashmiri writers from an ecological point of view and how environmental concerns are embodied in poetic works of these Kashmiri writers. How their writings figure out our relationship to the earth? Kashmir is often described as "paradise on earth" but even in this part of world environmental conditions are not in its natural order and question arises. Is the land bountifully supplied with nature turning into lost paradise? Poets can play a significant role, by reading, teaching and critical discourse of eco-poetry the power and energy stored in poetry can flow through human community and individuals can turn words into actions by creating ecological visions and as the writer says poetry can become "the place where we can save the earth". By discerning local features of the global crises that ties together local and global concerns the paper exemplifies that human culture is connected to the physical world affecting it and affected by it.

Keywords: Ecocritical, Kashmiri poems, local features, global crises.

Introduction

The most pressing need of today's world is to keep our environment safe. Eco-imbalance is not specific (one nation, one place or one city) problem. It is a global phenomenon. Today we live in a world of climate change, extinction of species, deforestation, chronic drought, floods, polluted rivers industrial pollution and many more lethal activities. The paper will attempt to focus at local dimensions of the problem in Kashmir valley. Establishing harmony with nature is the major goal of mankind. The question is how one can contribute to environmental restoration, within our capacity. The answer lies in recognizing that current environmental problems are largely a by-product of culture. As historian Donald Worster explains, "We are facing a global crisis today, not because of how ecosystems function but rather because of how our ethical systems function. Getting through the crisis requires understanding our impact on nature as precisely as possible, but even more, it requires understanding those ethical systems and using that understanding to reform them. Historians, along with literary scholars, anthropologists, and philosophers, cannot do the reforming, of course, but they can help with the understanding". (Worster. 1993:27) Sciences may observe change but they are ill equipped to motivate humans to change direction. Literature can play a dominant role by developing ecological visions which can be translated into social, economic and individual programmes of action that can result in future change at personal as well as institutional level. Cheryll Glotfelty believed "nature and culture do not exclude each other but be entangled with each other in multiple ways." (Glotfelty.1996:37) Nature poetry in the words of Abraham is "as old as recorded literature". William Reuekett coined a word eco-criticism "critical writing which explore due relation between literature biological and physical environment conducted with an acute awareness of the devastation being wrought on that environment by human activities." Reuekett's case for environmental action through literary study and writing is based on the study of poetry. He declared "we must formulate an ecological poetics "and transfer to poetry the language of ecology by describing the energy cycle emanating from poetry in the manner of ecological energy transfer system." If poets are suns, then poems are green plants among us for they clearly arrest energy on its path to entropy and in so doing, not only raise matter from lower to higher order, but to create a self perpetuating and evolving system." To better understand his vision of this poetry/nature connection he writes "to charge the classroom with ecological purpose one has to begin to think of it in symbiotic terms as a cooperative arrangement which makes it possible to release the stream of energy

which flows out of the poet and into the poem, out of the poem and into the readers, out of the readers and into the classroom and then back into the readers and out of classroom with them, and finally back into the larger community in a never ending circuit of life” (Rueckert.1978:114) Following Reuekett’s call for poetry in order to raise political or social consciousness about environmental issues much Eco poetry argues that in order to preserve the wellbeing of humans we must preserve the health of the earth. The prevailing theme is that changes in human perception or behaviour are necessary to mitigate environmental damage. The sages and seers of Kashmir knew the concept of interrelatedness of all life and harmony in nature. Rabindarnath Tagore believed Kashmir was cradle for poetry. Seers like Lalded, Nund rishi and poets Mehjoor Nadim, Azad, Shafi Souq among many others have defined these ideas in what is now called Kashmiriyat the philosophy of living of Kashmiri people. The eco-critical imagination informing this poetry is two pronged a celebration of flora and fauna of the region and combative engagement with institutional powers responsible for destroying the rich environment. Selected poems of some ancient and contemporary poets have been analysed to maintain an eccentric perspective and recognise the interdependent nature of the world. In the paper possible existing translations from Kashmiri to English has been used.

Environmental outlook of Kashmir Valley and its poetic expression.

The 17th century Mughal emperor Jehangir commented on Kashmir “If there is a paradise on earth it is this, it is this “but the paradise is at the crossroads of an environmental crises. Located in 32^o N latitude and 72^o to 80^o east longitude, Kashmir has an area of 2222236sq Km including 78932sq km Pakistan occupied and 5180 sqkm with china. Kashmir forms part of western Himalayas. The valley area is 150km long and 42km wide. According to a legend Kashmir valley was originally a lake known as “Satisar” the lake of goddess Durga in which resided a demon who caused distress to people they requested kashap rishi to save them. The sage cut the deep gorge in the west and drained the lake eventually killing the demon. Later the descendents of kashap rishi inhabited the valley hence named Kashmir. The myth was retold in various ways in hindu, Buddhist and Islamic eras of kashmiri history though the story gradually changed with each retelling, the belief that life came out of water remained The 12th century poet Kalhana titled his work Rajatarangini or “The river of Kings “. Poetry was the medium of history and water the metaphor. It tells us “that during the reign of Avantivarman (855AD-833AD), one Surya engineered alterations in course of rivers to control frequent floods” and “made the streams of Indus and Jhelum flow

according to his will, like a snake charmer his snakes “River was serpent that Kashmiri man had finally managed to master or so he believed .which shows his desire to bend nature to his will.

The Kashmiri poets seek to draw our attention to the importance of harmonious nature and fate of humans and nonhumans in the face of degradation and its negative consequences in the region. Sheikh Nur-ud-din, a famous saint-poet, also known as Nund Rishi and popularly called Sheikh-ul-Alam supreme spiritual poet of 15th century Kashmir was a visionary with a profound insight about the environment he lived in. He in his “shrukhs” (philosophical poems) presented vivid imagery gleaned from day-to-day observations and experiences. He exhorted people to cultivate self-discipline and piety, he says “By bathing the mind will not be cleansed. The fish and the otter never ascend the bank” In the times when bounty of nature would have seemed limitless and inexhaustible, he said “food will thrive only till the wood survive “. This saying is ingrained in Kashmiri culture and has guided Kashmiri attitude towards nature. The spiritual experience and the close knowledge of his society put forth in almost a colloquial language has made him an abiding influence on all Kashmiri people. He believed humans can purify themselves by being in communion with nature.

Living in backwoods I made my body tremble in

Fear

First I made a cave

After removing inner impurities, I made Him reveal

Himself

I turned the cave into my grave

With saffron and camphor I purified my body

My desire for good things I put to sleep in

cave. (Malik.2007:45)

What Sheikh-ul-Alam emphasized upon was that people needed to cultivate good hearts and always be ready to help others. He was, in addition to a mystic, a great humanist.

Through his poems, he left larger than life lessons to be learnt for all generations to come. For him, nothing could equate the spirit of goodness. Sheikh-ul-Alam constantly reinforced the doctrine of truthfulness, honesty and righteousness. In order to receive supreme bliss, it was important to cultivate purity and he used imagery from nature to preach higher truths of life. He says in a poem:

Will diamonds be found in marshy lands?

Will birds chirp when caught in meshes?

Will the narcissus bloom in the midst of a desert?

Will pearls be available in glassware stalls? (Amin.1964: 37)

Lalleshwari locally known as Lal ded a 14th century poet in her mystic musings used nature imagery. She established the “Vaakh” a four-line quatrain (thematically complete and independent in itself sententious gnomic verse, mystical or didactic).

With a rope of untwisted thread I tow my boat,

Would God hear my prayer and bring me safe across!

Like water in cups of unbaked clay I waste away,

And long to reach my home! . (Malik .2007:60)

In her verses Lal Ded tells us how on her spiritual path she had to undergo all the painful processes that anyone seeking the ultimate truth undergoes all through his/her spiritual journey. This experience she has expressed by means of a powerful image, presenting a person towing a boat with an unspun thread or someone trying in vain to hold water in unbaked clay.

She writes “In mud lotus bloomed for me” through spiritual effort one has to realize blooming of flower upon dirty ground covered with mud and dirt. In a poem she says

I cut my way through the six Forests,

And light shone forth from the Awakened Moon.

I controlled the vital airs and prakriti frozen

Then I parched my heart in the fire of love

And thus came to Shanker, the Supreme Self. (Kaul .1968: 30)

One has to struggle hard in order to realise the higher self within and then to immerse in lake of immortality that is absorption in the divine. To recognise oneself implies the recognition of nature.

Parmanand 17th century poet mystical poet in his most remarkable poem” Karmabhoomikayi” makes effective use of rural and farming imagery to communicate deep mystical insights.

Fertilize the field of action with righteousness.

The seeds of contentment yields the crop of bliss. . (Malik .2007:72)

M.H.Abrams explains “an individual confronts a natural scene and makes it abide his question ,and the interchange between his mind and nature constitutes the entire poem, which usually poses and resolves a spiritual crises” (Abrams .1971:92)

Ghulam Ahmed Mehjoor a 19th century poet through his lyrical poetry and ghazals expresses his love for his beautiful nation. In his poem “Our country is garden” he celebrates beauty of valley. The poem is delightful portrayal of nature in abundance.

The bulbul whispers to the flowers.

Our country is a charming garden

A marble wall of snow clad mountain

Surround our land ,with lakes in the middle

Flowers in myriad hues adorn garlands

Hills ,dales ,woods and streambeds

The spring has spread out velvet in

Gulmarg, Nilanag and two patheries

Bathe in sind water ,mediate

Mansbal and see God on Harmukh

Our country is a charming garden (Kaul. 1998:123)

Mehjoor's love and concern for his nation earned him the title "Wordsworth of Kashmir" by the Nobel Laureate Rabindernath Tagore. It is his attachment to his local environment which gives novelty and freshness his poetry. Mahjoor in his poem "Arise O gardener" urged people to action, to work out their own salvation and be ready to face hardships that might befall them expressing such emotions the poem became the defacto national anthem of the Kashmir freedom movement.

Arise, O Gardner! And usher in

The glory of a new spring.

Create conditions for "bulbul" to

Hover over full-blown roses.

Dew bemoans the garden's desolation.

Harassed roses have torn their garments.

Infuse new life into flowers and "bulbuls"

Who will free you, O "bulbul"

While you bewail in the cage?

With your own hands,

work out Your own salvation.

In the garden many birds sing

But their notes are varied.

May God harmonize these

Into one effective melody. (Kaul. 1998:125)

His contribution in simplifying the poetic language into simple syntax made him as the poet of Kashmir, he loved the majestic mountains of the land, he also cared for the flora and fauna.

Come to the garden early,

and mark Who helps keep flowers in trim,

And makes them - bloom

ere break of dawn (Kaul.1998: 42)

After describing his valley as a garden now the poet makes his fellow Kashmiris aware of their duties, he addresses his people to get united and be saviours of their motherland. Mehjoor used ecology of the region to give patriotic feeling to Kashmiris .Delineation of nature in its virgin flavour was forte of of the poet .How beautifully he identified nature with love and beauty is illustrated in the lines.

Nature has thrown open her lovely

Book In the flower –beds

And each leaf has writ large

On it the message of beauty (Kaul. 1998:21)

In the poem poet shows us how nature has created harmonious existence and by co-existing with nature he can decipher sense of wonder mystifying the overall entity of nature.

Kashmir has a proud privilege of being a place where saffron grows and saffron flower is famous for its fine flavour and colour. Flower of saffron is symbol of freshness and purity. Appreciating the beauty of saffron flower poet provides us with ardent colour and all-embracing freshness of saffron flower Mahjoor wrote

O saffron flower! Sitting in silent meditation

And radiating the fire of youth

Many a famed beauty swoons

Seeing your amazing, flaming form.(Raina .1989: 98)

The saffron cultivation is under threat from last few years the production is gradually decreasing due to uncertain climatic conditions and insufficient irrigation facilities.

The lives of people of Kashmir valley are intricately connected with water bodies as they have been closed to them from times immemorial. Valley is surrounded by number of water bodies each one of them having unique topography and significance. Which are not found anywhere in the world. There are wetlands like floating gardens which are special to Kashmir. Dal lake is life line of inhabitants of valley. Lake has been the centre of Kashmiri civilization since the times of king Ashoka in 250B.C and is believed to be 50,000yrs old. Measuring about 4 miles by 2½, lies close to Srinagar, and is perhaps one of the most beautiful spots in the world. The mountain ridges which are reflected in its waters, as in a mirror, are grand and varied, the trees and vegetation on the shores of the Dal being of exquisite beauty.” Resembling with the ‘chinampas’ of old Mexico, the floating gardens of the Dal lake find an appreciation by the Lawrence who describes the making of the floating gardens as “The rádh, or floating gardens, are made of long strips of the lake reed, with a breadth of about six feet. These strips can be towed from place to place and are moored at the four corners by poles driven into the lake bed. When the rádh is sufficiently strong to bear the weight of a man heaps of weed and mud are extracted from the lake by poles, and these heaps are formed into cones and placed at intervals on the rádh.” (Lawrence, 1895:21) Poet Mahjoor celebrates the beauty of Dal in his poems and shows how close to the lives of Kashmiri people Dal has been. In his poem ‘Rose of Nishat garden” personifying the rose as his beloved he celebrates the beauty of both nature and his beloved. The poem gives us sufficient vision to understand climate in Kashmir.

O,rose of Nishat Garden!

Come ,play the coquette.

Come laughing and let your

Snow-white teeth shed pearls .

Cross the Dal in a boat

And enjoy yourself in Nishat

And Shalimar gardens .They are

As beautiful as my two eyes (Kaul. 1998:58)

The two eyes referred to here may mean two famous springs in the foot of the mountain bordering the Dal lake –Cheshma Shahi and Cheshma Shibli. Cheshma meaning both 'eyes' and 'springs'.

Today the general cry of local people of Kashmir is “Dal is Dying”. At present Dal covers 21.1km² and has maximum depth 5.4m and a shore line of 15.4km of the total area only about 11.4km² is open water rest is under floating gardens. The major direct impact on lakes and wetlands of Kashmir has been the creation of these floating gardens they have not only reduced the water area but also modified the hydrology, the water flow pattern alters the environment. Stagnant areas cause water quality deterioration. These gardens are being used for cultivation variety of vegetables are grown on them. The women sell these vegetables in small country boats to local markets located within lake itself. Dina Nath Nadim in his poem “The song of boat women from lake” shows nature's exuberance, he represents how nature, humans and culture are related. In Kashmiri society their habitat, economy and society have incredible links with nature. Colourful imagery is created of mundane objects. Pictorial description of vegetable Vendor attracts attention and provides the vivid image of Kashmiri women selling vegetables on boat.

I got these Crisp and fresh from
the Dal
Hay valay, come and buy! hay valay,
come and buy!
These are tiny eggplants, and these
are round gourds.
Hay valay, come and buy!
Hay valay, come and buy!
These are peppers, and these are
brinjals.
The brinjals are like pitchers of wine
banging their heads in this boat of
mine,
Hay valay, come and buy!
Hay valay, come and buy!

The crisp bundles of radishes
are glittering in the shade
of weeds, the red marsh turnip
is blushing like a blushing beauty,
as it the dawn has blossomed into
flowers.

Hay valay, come and buy!

hay valay, come and buy! (33)

Once known as paradise on earth is facing numerous environmental problems every year tree cover is lost Chinars are being chopped in 1970 Kashmir had 35000chinar trees but today we have only 7000 trees. The destruction of significant areas of forest has degraded environment of Kashmir. In September 2014, the valley suffered disastrous floods nearly 277 people died. Mehjoor in his poem “childhood” records his grief over deforestation. The poet wants us to recognize that cutting down of trees is most land used problem Twelve hecters of forest are cleared annually at this rate all moist tropical forest would be lost by the year 2050.Rueckert says “the idea that nature should also be protected by human laws, the trees should have lawyers to articulate and defend their right is one of the most marvellous and characteristic part of ecological vision.” .(Rueckert,1996:105)

Spare ,ye wood cutter, ,the

Lofty pine Tree,rooted firm

In the river banks virgin

Verdure, in that forest (Kaul. 1998:22)

In the poem “Lotus in the Lake”Mehjoor sheds light on climate changes and its irredeemable repercussions. Suffering from seasonal changes and its repercussions. Suffering from seasonal changes bird songs have turned into tumult and the incessant buzzing of bees show that the slightest damage of the most trivial creatures of the ecosystem has drastic consequences on whole ecology that cannot be easily controlled or tamed can never retain its formal natural state. The poem demonstrates bitter realism which is meant to alert readers into quick reaction for saving all vulnerable creatures. The natural world is perceived as articulate, a sonorous reminder of negations between the human and non human world. This is in contrast to the belief where nature is thought to be silent. The spring too starts late than

usual the details succeed at making his reader sense more insecure making their wellbeing threatened.

Birds of the garden are nowadays

Rising a new kind of tumult.

Is it due to our ill luck or the

Inexperience of our leaders

Bees should have by now been off

To gather the harvest of pollen,

But they are still buzzing in

Hives despite the onset of spring (Kaul. 1998:159)

This idea is reiterated by Neil Astley contends “eco-poetry takes on distinctly contemporary issues recognizing the interdependence of all life on earth, the wilderness and the otherness of nature, and the irresponsibility of our attempts to tune and plunder nature. Eco-poems dramatize the dangers and poverty of a modern world perilously cut off from nature and ruled by self-interest” (Astley.2007:15)

Srinagar today is facing one of the highest black carbon pollutions. The snowfall period has shifted from dec-jan to feb –march. It has been predicted “The annual temperature is projected to increase from $0.9\pm 0.6^{\circ}\text{C}$ to $2.6\pm 0.7^{\circ}\text{C}$ in the 2030s. The net increase in temperature ranges from 1.7°C to 2.2°C with respect to the 1970s. Seasonal air temperatures also show a rise in all seasons. The annual rainfall in the Himalayan region is likely to vary between 1268 ± 225.2 and 1604 ± 175.2 mm in 2030s. The projected precipitation is likely to increase by 5% to 13% in 2030s with respect to 1970s” The need of the hour is to show a collaborative environmental dedication on every front. In the valley environmental problems have been traced to the partitioning of Indian subcontinent into India and Pakistan in 1947. Jennifer Crook wrote that the deployment of Indian and Pakistani armies in Kashmir led to large scale poaching of rare species “ At first, the soldiers were killing the animals for food but when the poorly paid soldiers realised how valuable the animal furs and skins were in the international markets, they started to slaughter the Kashmiri animals with much greater zeal,” wrote Crook. “The consequence has been that some of the rare species like the Snow

Leopard, Flying Squirrel and Long Tailed Himalayan Marmot have been pushed to being on the verge of extinction.” Armed conflict returned to Kashmir every year hundreds of people are killed on borders, thousands of paddy fields are destroyed by bombs and guns, forests are getting denuded which has made kashmiri stag (hangul)snow bear and musk deer extinct. In Kashmir for shahtoosh in spite of being banned Chiru goats(antelope) are killed for the fur to be collected, and it takes around 4 chiru to make a single shawl. A karakulle cap is made from the fur of aborted lamb fetuses.

A contemporary poet Mohammad Yousaf Khan in his poem “The drum of doom” expresses concern about his eco-system of his place and shows tension is evident in his poem and he draws our attention to the fact that by destroying environment we are destroying ourselves .

Dark Clouds have tarred the sky black

Let a few spots of sunlight tickle in

Shadows of gloom darken the plain

Let there be cool greenery here and there

The drums of doom resound day and night

....

As to who has darkened the firmament

You will know if you prod the brain

Flowers yearn to hear the fairy song

Who blooded the heart of blossom

If the world endures, so shall we

Smoke and noise engulf us in a fatal embrace

O!for nature’s peace and a soundless calm

The world could be musical cradle

If we but play in it like innocent toddlers

Ah, the flower is wounded ,nearly dead

Once again ,let the boats glide on the jehlum

Let the wular heave in sunset gleam

The Shalimar is unwantonly turbulent

The dal heart broken ,the naseem silenced (Bhat.2005:155)

A change is required it is the moral responsibility to leave future generations a liveable world Mehjoor in his poem “A new world order “epitomises the dream of a happy world order living in communion with nature. He wants to escape the old order and creates the establishment of an ideal world ordered Kashmir.

I crave for a new rose

Nightingale ,new garden

I seek a new earth ,new sky

A new sun new dusk

In short a new just world (Kaul. 1998:132)

In his poem “New Kashmir” Mehjoor expresses his message of hope and promise of utopian world where

Mountains shall deliver jewels their peaks

Emit gold and sky rain pearls

Emeralds shall grow out of Dal

Pearls float in wular’s face. (Kaul. 1998:137)

Umberto Eco’s assertion that “the act of reading is a productive part of the artistic event artwork does not stop at the work of the artist but continues into the work of the readers and communities”. Readers’ engagement with literature fulfils a regenerative role within culture literary language has special properties that can influence the human sense of nature. (Eco. 1989:59)

Conclusions

Literature raises questions and leaves us in a space of productive movement towards a future, positioning us on the brink of change not mired in fixed outcomes and the past. In this paper we have looked at how writers and readers can incorporate a green consciousness into their meaning making process –the idea that the environment can be a part of our imaginings, our imagination needs to undertake a process of regeneration ,as well as our modes of creative writing and then we have to implement these changes into a lived experience. Through the analysis we can arrive at the conclusion that our thoughts, writings and surroundings are all closely interwoven and impact upon one another. Writing is not static but insists on the participation of the reader. Literary works both presage and transform future visions. It is an organic and changing process that reveals and opens up alternatives and possibilities. After all, Poetry is not simply an artefact of entertainment or an act of cultural mimesis but can bring about actual changes, philosophically, creatively and practically.

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