

Ecocriticism and Urdu Poetry

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Ecocriticism is a recent phenomenon. It is an interdisciplinary mode of thinking which studies environmental issues and literature. As per its popular definition, it is the study of relationship between literature and physical environment. (1) Though it takes an earth centered approach to literature, it is a rather political and cultural discourse. It focuses upon the representation of nature in literature and investigates the change in the concept of wilderness. It also tries to find out the possible relation between environment and history, philosophy, psychology, ethics and religion. In Richard Kerridge's words:

Ecocriticism seeks to evaluate texts and ideas in terms of their coherence and usefulness as responses to environmental crisis. (2)

In this short paper I plan to attempt a rereading of Urdu Poetry from ecocritical perspective.

Nature has always been an inseparable source of poetic expression. Like all other languages Urdu poetry has also represented nature from multiple perspectives. It has praised the beauty of nature in the finest possible way, it has

also lamented upon the human helplessness at the calamities and disastrous acts of nature. Nature has been a source of solace as well as of wisdom of life. Moreover, it is perpetually considered as a connecting link between Man and God. The first Urdu poet who took poetry out of the courts and palaces and made it a voice of the commons is Nazeer Akbarabadi. In his poems we find the description of seasons like autumn, spring, and rain. Like the English romantics, he makes use of a simple diction. He is 'a man speaking to men', in the true sense of the phrase. His poems give us a real picture of Indian villages, festivals, rituals, and values. He has written poems on almost all aspects of nature. But, it must be admitted that his poetry does not isolate man and nature. On the contrary, nature is a guiding force to correct human action.

Sab pe karam aise karo jaise ke phal daar darakht

Koi patthar se mare bhi to phal deta hai(3)

The major shift in Urdu poetry came with Maulana Altaf Hussain Hali's *Muqaddama*. Hali's *Muqaddama* did what Wordsworth's Preface had done in

English. Hali formulated theory of new poetry in Urdu. He opposed the traditional diction and subjects. Among his nature poems *Barkha Rut* deserves special mention. He made poetry a means of social awareness and patriotism. Similar was the line of Akbar Ilahbadi, Pandit Brij Narayan Chakbast and Allama Iqbal. Iqbal exploited nature for more philosophical purposes. His poem *Parindey ki Fariyad* is actually his cry for India's freedom. The poem begins with a reference to the garden.

*Aata hai yaad mujhko, Guzra hua zamana
Wo baagh ki bahare, Wo Sab ka
chehchahana
Lagti hai chot dil par, Aata hai yaad jis
dam
Shabnam ke ansuo par, Kaliyo ka
Muskurana (4)*

The poet becomes a bird in a cage and remembers his free life. He gives a description of the garden and various activities in it. He laments over the loss of it. Towards the climax, nature goes in the background and political message becomes more powerful.

After Iqbal, there was a complete romantic revival. Hafeez Jalindhari, Josh Malihabadi, Akhtar Sheerani, Israr Ul Haq Majaz and Saghar Nizami are the prominent romantic poets in Urdu. Each

one of them had a different shade of nature. For Hafeez, it was a source of strenghtness and beauty. For Josh, it was an overflow of situational and temporal emotions. For Akhtar, the central figure in nature was women but for Majaz nature did not appear attractive. His association with the Progressive Movement did not allow him to rest in the laps of nature . Similar was the case with Sahir Ludhianwi who says:

*Mai shayar hun Mujhe phitrat ke nazaro se
ulfat hai
Mera dil dushman e naghma sarai ho nahi
sakta ...
Magar jab mai dekhta hun bhook ke mare
kisaano ko
Tadapti naazneeno ko sisakte naujawano
ko
To dil Tabye nishato bazme ishrat la nahi
sakta
Mai chahun bhi to khwab aawar tarane ga
nahi sakta (5)*

Thus, with the changing times, the role and status of nature in Urdu poetry has kept changing.

The second aspect that I would like to touch upon is the relation between nature and religion. For Nazeer Akbarabadi, nature was a reflection of God. His poem, *Khuda ka Jalwa* can be put forward as an instance. Like the

mystics or Sufis, he sees a glimpse of the creator in all his creations – flowers, fruits, trees, stars, the moon and the sun. For Josh Malihabadi, nature was a gift of God for Man. God has created all the things for the welfare of mankind. Josh has attempted a poetic translation of the Quranic chapter ‘Surah Raheman’ which enlists the blessings of God and asks men not to forget them.

*Phul me khushbu bhari jangal ki booti me
dawa
Bahr se moti nikale saaf roshan
khushnuma
Aag se shola nikala abr se aabe safa
Kis se ho sakta hai uski bakhshisho ka
haqq ada
Kab tak aakhir apne rab ki nemate
jhutlaye ga (6)*

Now let's turn to the contemporary environmental crisis and the responses from Urdu poetry. Nida Fazli is a well known lyricist. He has received critical acclaim as well. To him the cause of environmental degradation is man's detachment from the religion and his inability to see and recognize what Nazir had recognized. In his poem *Inteqam*, i.e. revenge, God tells men:

*Roz mai chand ban ke aata hu
Din me Suraj sa jagmagata hu*

*Khankhanata hu maa ke gehno me
Hansta rehta hu chup ke behno me
Mai hi mazdoor ke paseene me
Mai hi barsaat ke mahine me
Masjido mandiro ki duniya me
Mujhko pehchante nahi hai jab
Mai zameeno ko beziya kar ke
Aasmano me laut jata hu
Mai khuda ban ke qaher dhata hu (7)*

In his poem, *Muaheda* i.e. contract Nida Fazli paints a picture of the loss of biodiversity. It seems that as there is a lack of contact between human being the treaty between the earth and the sky has been broken.

*Kati phati hai dhartiya
Dhuwa dhuwa fizaye hai ...
Wo jangalo ke chaukidar
Janwar chale gaye
Sambhalte the mausamo ko
Jo shajar chale gaye
Udas ghonsle hai
In ke nagme gar chale gaye
Samandaro ki wusato ko
Pi rahi hai bastiya ...
Muaheda zameen ka jo falak se tha nahi
raha
Dilo kea aas paas tha jo raasta nahi raha
Kisika ab kisi se koi rabeta nahi raha (8)*

Another reason for the crisis is man's excessive greed. Zafar gorakhpuri is

another contemporary Urdu poet who begins his prayer by making a confession. He admits that God has given men what they need yet their selfishness and greed has ruined all the things. Men have lost the peace within and the peace around them. The world which was once beautiful has now become ugly and disturbing. Now it is full of scars. The poet says that the impurities imposed on the environment have not come from any industry. These are the impurities of men's soul. It is the pollution of men's character.

Kharashe daag ghabbe

Isey kuchla hai jee bhar ke hawass ne

Aadmi ki rooh ka mail

Kirdaar ki aaludgi ...

Wo aalam hai ke ghinn aaye (9)

One of the popular sub categories of ecocriticism is eco-feminism. It tries to find out the parallels between nature and women. It considers the two as 'sisters' based on the idea of shared oppression and exploitation by man. I am aware of the fact that ecofeminism and Urdu poetry cannot be discussed here at length because of the limitations of time and the scope of the paper. I just want to put forward two quotations from Urdu poetry and bring to your notice the shared oppression. Parveen Shaker is an oft quoted poet in Urdu. Talking about infertility, she says that society generally blames a tree to be

fruitless without considering the factors like water, seasons, etc.

*Pani dekha na hawa dekhi na mausam
dekha*

*Be samar hone ka ilzaam shajar par rakha
(10)*

The same happens with women. The second instance is from Kishwar Naheed who finds a similarity between the life of a woman and that of the grass. Both share a common place and status. Both lay at men's feet. If they try to come up men have special machines to cut them and make them soft and beautiful.

Ghans bhi mujh jaisi hai

Paun tale bich kar hi

Zindagi ki murad pati hai

Zara sar uthane ke Qabil hui to

Kantne wali machine usey makhmal

banana ka sauda liye

Hamwar karti rehti hai

Aurat ko bhi hamwar karne ke liye

Tum kaise kaise jatan karte ho (11)

Let's return to the environmental crisis. No doubt, there is degradation of environment and man's greed is responsible for it. But a serious question needs to be pondered upon. Is environmental crisis an equally shared problem? Or is it the responsibility of the developing nations alone to carry the burden of the sins of the developed ones? Are we becoming a victim of the political

and economic motives of the developed nations? Do they want to stop us from becoming a super power by fabricating the monster of environmental mega hazards? In this context, Kishwar Naheed warns the leaders of the cold that is western countries.

Mera mulk garm hai

*Mujhe apne garm mulk se nafrat karna
mat sikhao*

Mujhe is ke dariyao se pyaas bujhane do...

*Mujhe is ki dhool ko pahenne aur musafato
ko odhne do (12)*

Now it's up to us whether we love the heat and dust of our land or scorn it under the burden of some borrowed theories.

References:

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