



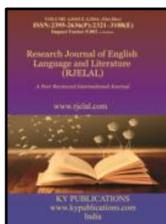
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## REPRESENTATION OF ECOLOGICAL IMPERIALISM AND SOCIAL-ECOLOGY IN THE POETRY OF KASHMIRI POET, GHULAM AHMAD MAHJOOR

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### ABSTRACT

Ecological Imperialism concerns the devastating and adverse effects of imperialism on the colonized ecologies apart from the devastating effects on colonized communities. The term Ecological Imperialism was coined by Alfred Crosby. Deane Curtin, an American Environmentalist defines it as, "the connection, in theory and practice of race, and the environment so that the oppression of one is connected to and supported by, the oppression of the other" (4). In short it is a sociological phenomenon dealing with environmentally discriminatory treatment of socially marginalized or economically disadvantaged people. Kashmir for a long period was colonized by the outsiders. They devastated its lands and the ecosphere, Mahjoor is a poet who raises his voice against this oppression and occupation.

Social Ecology is a critic theory and was founded by Murray Bookchin. It locates the roots of the ecological crisis firmly in relation of hierarchy and domination among people. It believes that the environmental and social problems are interlinked. Social Ecologists opine that social, political, economic decisions made by humans affect our interaction with the environment. They believe that environmental problems are not caused by anthropocentric attitudes alone, but follow from systems of domination or exploitation of humans by other humans' gradually replaced by human love.

Key Words: Ecocriticism, Ecological Imperialism, Social-Ecology, Nature, Environment, Oppression, Political, Colonization, Occupation, Kashmir, Kashmiri, Divine, Mysticism, Lyricism, etc.

### Introduction

In Kashmiri literature, human love started with a new age of lyricism. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century Kashmiri literature moved into age of lyricism, where in Mysticism was the dominant feature of Kashmiri poetry. The divine love is the whole theme of mystic poetry. In 1819, the Kashmir valley passed from the control of Durani Empire of Afghanistan and four centuries of Muslim rule under the Mughal and Afghan, to the conquering armies of Sikhs under Ranjit Singh of Lahore. The Sikh governors turned out to be hard task masters, and Sikh rule was

generally considered oppressive. Furthermore, continued tyranny under Afghan and Sikh rule led to wide spread frustration, from which only mystical poetry derived any substance. Literally stagnation thus went in hand with political humiliation as result of continued rule by outsiders.

Certain floods, fire, famines also agonized the Kashmiri during the later part of nineteenth century. In this background it was difficult for the leadership of freedom movement to make people conscious of their plight, spread the waves of consciousness among them and induce them to fight

against their oppressors with valour and self respect. Thus there was a genuine and definite need for a heart pricking and thought provoking message which could become the clarion call pulling nation out of debris of inferiority complex. A common Kashmiri was more often influenced by the so called mystic pattern of poetry which had contributed to a pessimistic approach to life. The literate Kashmiri was averse to his cultural heritage, including his language and literature.

#### **About the Poet**

Mahjoor's sweet, soft and lofty voice gave an awakening to every Kashmiri, whether literate or illiterate. His thought provoking poems made Kashmir's feel proud of its origin, national identity and inherent capacities bestowed upon him by nature. Thus a sense of respect and love for the homeland was cultivated. Mahjoor with his sweet, chaste and melodious lyrics pulled out a common Kashmiri from morass of self denial in which illiterate and self styled mystic poets had thrown them. T.N. Kaul says in *Poems of Mahjoor* that:

In the late thirties, Mahjoor emerged from the "Gul - o- bubil" Phase and focused his attention on social and political affairs. Superstition poverty, economic exploitation and political Subjugation has left mass dazed. They have to be freed from these shackles. Meanwhile Kashmir had begun to feel the impact of freedom movement in India. A struggle had begun under the aegis of the National Conference for freedom from the Maharaja's tyrannical rule. Mahjoor was attracted to the movement and thus began what usually called the second phase of his literary career. (26)

As a result of this consciousness, Mahjoor's poetry turned into a cheerful clarion call for national and cultural abjectness. The poem "Come o Gardner" expresses such emotions which became the defacto national anthem of Kashmiri freedom movement. This extraordinary and obvious change in Mahjoor's thought did not come about all of a sudden. Mahjoor was quite conscious of what he was doing. He himself invited his reader's attention to this significant development in his creative process. All the eminent literary scholars like Jaya Kaul, T.N.

Kaul, Taing, Naji Munawar and Shafi Shauq agree that we owe a debt to Mahjoor for keeping alive Kashmiri poetry. Being a very prominent and one the most popular lyric poets of the first half of the twentieth century. Mahjoor has been drawing attention of both Kashmiri and non-Kashmiri scholars.

One finds his poetry being translated into various languages such as Urdu, Hindi and English. Mahjoor has been translated into Urdu by Sultan Haq Shaheedi published under the title of *Kuliyaat-i-Mahjoor* (2009), and some of the poems of Mahjoor have been translated into Hindi by Dr. Ratan Lal Shant which are included in the anthology entitled *Ujal Raaj Marg* (2005). However, the first attempt at translating Mahjoor into English is found referred by Taing, "Pandit Neranjan translated into English Mahjoor's *Jung-e-German* as early as around 1915" (7). Another statement about Mahjoor's renderings in English is made by Azad, according to whom Professor Davinder Sethyarthi (a disciple of Rabibder Nath Tagore) got Mahjoor's popular lyric "Poshe Mate Janano" translated into English by a scholar knowing both English and Kashmiri and managed to publish that Kashmiri poem and its English translation along with his introductory remarks in a well known journal of the time, namely, *Modern Review* in 1934.

#### **Representation of Ecological-Imperialism and Social Ecology**

Theme of Mahjoor's nazms is Mother Nature, people and their plight. From this section of poems there is a message of Mahjoor to his people. The theme presented usually is the throbs of the ordinary man bent under social and political injustice. In the first nazm, "Our Country is a Garden" he makes his fellow Kashmir's aware of their status and place in which they live. He portrays the valley as a garden and then very proudly describes its beauty and gives a message to Kashmiri's to love his "darling sweet garden." Mahjoor also emphasizes to preserve the beautiful valley full of natural landscapes. The message to common Kashmiri is that he should not only save his fellow-men from the tyranny of feudal lords but also save the mother land from external intrusion: The bulbul whispers to the flowers

Our country is charming garden  
Hyacinth tells the violet to shed  
Woodland isolation and come to the  
garden  
A marble wall of snow clad mountains  
Surrounds our land, with lakes in the  
middle. (1-6)

Through this poem, Mahjoor dreams of a state biophilic mutuality towards all living things which would lead to the establishment of environmental justice. The concept behind the term "Environmental Justice" is that all people regardless of their race, colour, nation or origin are able to enjoy the equally high levels of environmental protection.

The next poem in this collection is "Arise o Gardener." After describing the valley as a garden in the first poem, now the poet makes them aware of their actions, urging them to work out of their own salvation and be ready to face hardships that might befall them, "Arise o Gardener! And usher / The glory of a new spring / Create conditions for bulbuls to" (1-3). The poet addresses bulbul that nobody is going to free it from the cages of poverty, tyranny and injustice. Thus a sense of love and respect for homeland is to be cultivated. A sense of self respect among the fellow Kashmiri's is created through this melodious song. A prayer is also made to unite all Kashmir's so that they can live in harmony and peace:

Who will free you o bulbul  
While you bewail in the cage  
With your own hands work out  
Your own salvation...  
Litterateurs of Iran will bow  
To you in reverence if you  
Create o poet with powers of  
Magical narration like Ghani. (5-13)

Mahjoor believes in freedom of thought and action. It is man who can change his society and condition. This poem he addresses to the youth of Kashmir. Not only they have to free themselves from the clutches of poverty and slavery but also they have to sensitize themselves and produce a great literature and great poets like Ghani Kashmiri. The poet here addresses his countrymen to preserve this land of great beauty and live a free and harmonious life in the company of nature. Mahjoor's poems make

readers to take the review of Imperialism in Kashmir. During the Imperial rule, a range of economic, social, physical, intellectual, political, and environmental subjectivations were enforced upon native Kashmiri, which resulted in famines, draughts, floods and human deaths. The Imperialism in Kashmir resulted in the transformation of society from agriculturalist to feudalism. After the first Anglo-Sikh war in 1846, under the term of the Treaty of Amritsar, the British government sold Kashmir to Maharaja Gulab Singh. Considering Kashmir as his property, the Maharaja levied tax on everything even air and water.

Kashmiri's were subjected to forced labour resulting in untold miseries. Their only source of solace was the world of nature. Animals were killed to make shawls for queens and princesses. Saffron was exported to other countries; cutting of trees was a common practice of Maharaja's. Herbs and rare plants were exported to the Western countries. Hunting of wild animals for pleasure was a great loss to the ecosystem. Ecological Imperialism concerns the devastating effects of imperialism on the colonized ecologies apart from the devastating effect on colonized communities. Kashmiri's resist but they were helpless in front of Maharajas. De Loughrey and Hanley in Introduction: Towards an Aesthetics of Earth" says:

If there is anything that radically distinguishes the imagination of anti-Imperialism. It is primacy of the geographical in it. Imperialism after all is an act of geographical violence through which virtually every space in the world is explored, charted, and finally brought under control. For the native, the history of colonial servitude is inaugurated by the loss of locality to the outsider, its geographical identity must thereafter be searched for and somehow restored. (3)

The poems of Mahjoor show that the beautiful land of Kashmir blooms only with distress and pathos. "Arise o Gardener" is one of the most popular poems of Mahjoor. The subject of poem is a period which describes the condition of the valley before the independence. Commenting on the poem Mohd. Yosuf Teing says, "this whole poem is an outcome of

an intense national feelings" (7). In the poem, "Our Garden" the poet addresses the youth to leave frivolous activity and to join revolutionary movement and bring it to free women and children from slavery and live a dignified life. Mere involvement in ones day to day life is not going to help to improve the condition of suppression, "O man! Merely looking at the flowers / Will be of no avail. Involve yourself / with your garden whose keeper" (3-8). A new fervor and intense radicalism gripped a new generation of poets who looked at new horizons and sincerely believed that they were the makers of a new reality. But in the end the poet is hopeful that the dark days go away and the sun will shine again. T.N. Kaul comments on Mahjoor's sensitive behaviour as:

Mahjoor had high expectations from the popular government not for himself but for the poor, backward and the downtrodden, but within a few years he got somewhat disillusioned. He was unhappy at the fact that the fruits of freedom and progress had gone to chosen few and not percolated to the grassroots even the mother earth suffered due to the vested interest of politicians. (29)

Mahjoor in his famous poem writes about women and their status in Kashmiri society. He not only sings of poverty, slavery and freedom, he also writes about the condition of women in Kashmiri society. In his poem, "An Unwanted Women's Tale", he describes all the stages of women from her birth to death and how she is treated in Kashmiri society. She is born uninvited and then not given any skill or education to grow. She is ready for marriage but nobody asks her consent. She is a queen like Habba Khatoon and a great philosopher mystic like Lal Ded, but still a victim of patriarchal system. Mahjoor compares woman with Mother Nature. Her presence is the sign of creation in this world. Like Mother Nature, she is humble and soothing. Through his poem Mahjoor advocates Ecological Justice. The concept of Ecological Justice is to eradicate all forms of social injustice against women and Nature and children:

Uninvited and unsung I came  
To this world. My near and dear on

Felt unhappy. Why I was born  
Without any purpose...  
Without ascertaining my views  
My parents gave me in marriage  
to a stranger. Not minding  
The injustice. I accepted the fate.  
Like the blossomed bough, I gave  
Birth to both flowers and thorns  
The roses decreased and thistles  
Multiplied, putting me to shame (4-16)

Mahjoor's poem "Emancipated Bird" is an example of a preacher, who preaches a sense of self respect and dignity to his fellow men. He gives the example of nature to his countrymen. Birds, flowers, bulbuls feel elated when they move freely in the lap of nature. The world of nature is the best example of an ordered and free life. Thus the poet wants his people to follow nature and create a free and harmonious atmosphere in their society, "Oh bulbul ! be proud of freedom / Bid good bye to the cage and / Come out fondle and flowers" (3-5). Mahjoor tries to revive a sense of self respect among Kashmiri's through his poetry. He is against industrial revolution like other English romantics. He believes in a simple life in the lap of nature, free from tyranny and inequality.

In his poem, "New Kashmir" Mahjoor cheers up the freedom fighter with a message of hope and promise of prosperous future, "Lending ear to what tomorrow brings/Will make you self-conscious / A new world shall arise from vacuum" (3-5). After reading this poem one finds that Mahjoor's emphasis has shifted from ethereal subject to man. The poem opens with hope and common man's plea for freedom. Yearning for a better future is beautifully presented through metaphors and images taken from Mother Nature. Through this poem Mahjoor shakes the poor and downtrodden out of their centuries old slumber and inspires them to fight for their rights T.N. Kaul says that:

Mahjoor carved out a unique and lasting place for himself in Kashmiri literature. He was the poet of the people in the sense of the term and his memory will always provide joy and succor to his countrymen. He has left behind a treasure for them to draw upon in times of sorrow or difficulty. As he grew in years he became more responsive to the

need for inculcating higher values and touched even the most delicate aspects of life with vision and clarity. To achieve his end he effected a salutary change in his style for producing long didactic and meaningful poems in contrast to the short and light strains of his earlier career. (30)

In the poem "The Other World", Mahjoor tries to answer the questions about the other world i.e. the world of machines bombs and weapons is a darker world, more scary and fearful, "Does the world too have roses/Iris, narcissuses and gardens? / Does the bulbul pine for the rose" (2-4). The poet addresses the poppy flower to articulate his fears and asks about the scar on its back. The poet is disappointed that the people of Kashmir wanted a change and were very eager to welcome the modern world of thought and technology. The poem is a true description of the world of injustice and inequality. He depicts a society where men are busy in producing bombs and weapons to kill innocent women and children, where landlords and serfs are busy exploiting poor people:

Injury to your delicate heart?  
Is that world also beset with  
Injustice and lawlessness  
Does man too produce  
Weapons to annihilate man  
Do they also use bombs to kill  
Innocent women and children. (9-15)

Through this poem Mahjoor 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 social ecology which believes in an egalitarian society based on mutual aid, caring and maintaining values.

Mahjoor's every poem depicts freedom from tyranny, feudalism, and havocs of new industry, and technology in the contemporary world. The last few poems depict his hopelessness that was created by politicians by partition of Kashmir. The communal riots and consequent untold human sufferings that accompanied partition touched Mahjoor deeply. "Freedom and Partition" one of his poems, where he cries in pain, "Alas! Freedom brought in its wake, nothing but a long/ shadows of

anarchy, poverty, deprivation, divided households and /snatched the natural beauty of valley from us"(6-8). Due the conflict of partition, the lands the geographies were divided and people were displaced from their mother land. It caused many war in Kashmir. It is poem on patriotic and political subjects that won him the title of 'Shayer-i-Kashmir' or 'The Poet of Kashmir'. This poem according to Mahjoor himself was composed at the time of Partition. The poem is satirical composition singing with the tongue in cheek praises of freedom of the Indian sub-continent from foreign rule. However, the poet expresses in disguise and ironic manner the painful disillusionment which the poet experienced in the face of various unexpected and ugly happenings that comes as a result of partition:

God be thanked that freedom  
Has dawned after centuries  
And our homes and hearths  
Feel its sparkling impact...  
Freedom rains benevolence and  
Prosperity on the West,  
But on our land it makes  
Only a hollow thunder. (1-8)

Once known as Paradise on earth, home to vast wildlife reserves including some species so rare they existed only in Kashmir, are now quickly falling victim to the desolation which has encompassed much of this piece of land. Rare species like the snow Leopard frequently hunted by military forces of both India and Pakistan has now almost become extinct. Kashmiri stag or Hangul is now only spotted in the northern regions of Kashmir. The list is unending. Every year hundreds of people are killed on borders, thousands of paddy fields are destroyed by the bombs and guns. Mahjoor had a very keen observation and could feel the consequences of partition on both human world as well as on the world of nature. Another poem by Mahjoor is "Kashmir's Plaint" is an example of social ecology and Environmental Justice. The poet says that the valley is offering its beauty full of oriels, bulbuls, and waterfalls which comfort sad hearts, but unfortunately aliens come to regain their health but the poor Kashmiri die of thirst and hunger. The poor are naked and making food for the rich. "my naked children grow food for all and sundry / the big fish

beg for help from the small fry" (16-17). The aliens take the wealth of the valley in exchange of tea and snuff. The wealth of the valley is its forests, herbs, waters, minerals and animals. Jess Hosier in his essay "What is Ecological Imperialism" states that:

Ecological Imperialism is a policy of extending a countries power/ influence through colonization, use of military force or other means. Ecological Imperialism is where plants, animals and diseases are introduced (can be accidental or deliberate), the introduction of these things leads to shift in the ecology of colonized area, which in turn, makes it extremely easy for another country to take control of the area. (1)

Even today when the rest of the world is seeking a solution to such Imperialism, in Kashmir lambs and kids are being killed in their wombs to make "Shahtoos", a very delicate and expensive shawl, and a special hat called "Karakulle."

Mahjoor's last few poems reflect wit and sarcasm, the social and economic evils, legal chicanery, pettifoggers, deceit and sophistry. He also has a dig at the intelligentsia who sided with the oppressors. Whatever he wrote, it provided an eloquent testimony for portraying his valley's natural beauty. The poem "Lotus in the Lake" is a poem of great distress, where Mahjoor feels upset after the freedom. The condition of common people is the same. The rich are exploiting the poor and destroying nature and its wealth. But the poet feels that there will be a change. He has hope that the new generation may change the fate of Kashmiri people. The poet here resonates Allama Iqbal when he writes:

the eagle does not aim at low  
habitations it fly very high  
looks for its livelihood amid  
equally high hills and mountains  
the hill steam roars like a lion  
as it descends into the valley  
the tumult and hullabaloo  
are not to be found at the source. (17-24)

The poet believes in a true revolution that can change the life of people in the valley. Even in his poem "True Revolution" he stresses on a change

and this change is must, "the time for begging and pleading / is past. A new age has dawned / henceforth he will success, who flexes his strength" (12-14). The last lines of the poem is addressed to an enemy, to leave the valley, "o enemy of the nation/ don't stand on my way / our channel is flowing and I will irrigate the garden" (36-38). Both the poems present Mahjoor as a revolutionary poet. Through his poems he spreads a message to his people, to live a simple and dignified life where people are free and nature bestows its blessings on them.

Mahjoor through his nazms believes a society where there is peace and happiness and free from ecological imperialism. Both the poets feel an urge to change the sad situation, and shatter the mental, political, and economic manacles of the time and society. Mahjoor wants to jolt the country men from age old slumber of tyranny to put an end to centuries old Ecological Imperialism. Mahjoor is upset with modern man's belief in capitalism and industrialization. After independence from Imperialism, he is upset with the notion of new world, which according to him is a horrible world of bombs and weapons. Ecologists also believe a society where there is peace and harmony. A society where weak are oppressed and nature is exploited is an ecologically backward society. As Murray Bookchin states:

The notion that man must dominate nature emerges directly from the domination of man by man. This centuries old tendency finds its most exacerbating developments in modern capitalism. Owing to its inherently competitive nature, bourgeois society not only pits human's against each other. It also pits the mass of humanity against the natural world, just as men are converted into commodities, so every aspect of nature is converted into commodity. (65)

After analyzing the poems of Mahjoor it is evident that the poet has hope for a new and peaceful world where man and nature can live in a complete harmony. Social ecologists study the relationship of humans with their natural and social environments. They use nature as a mechanism to find purpose and meaning in the life. Mahjoor believes that human

beings are supposed to initiate a change and this change is amounted to a new view of nature. The interconnectedness of nature and man is essentially one entity and cannot be appreciated separately. To Mahjoor nature and one's self are essentially the same concept. His poetry in a way is a message to modern man to stop destroying other fellow beings, and preserve nature and live a happy life.

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