



Ecocidal Impact on Human Psychology in Mirza Waheed's *The Book of Gold Leaves*

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ABSTRACT

This study aims at analyzing Mirza Waheed's *The Book of Gold Leaves* ecocritically with special focus on human psychology. The elements of ecocide and their psychological impacts on major characters are the prime focus of this study. Ecocriticism is the description of the outer world of man. This study gives a description of the outer as well as the inner world of man. It is very interesting to search for the borders created by man to save his selfhood. These are the borders of self. The study further elaborates how militarization has flustered the beauty of Kashmir. In this novel the novelist has highlighted the devastation caused by Indian military and freedom fighters on an epic scale. The objectives of this study are to explore how militarization and deforestation have become the cause of the disturbed human psyche. This study is qualitative in nature and different excerpts have been taken from the text to investigate the deterioration caused by ecocidal forces. The findings of this textual analysis are that natural destruction at the hands of men has led to the psychological retardation of Kashmiri folks. The novel can be analyzed through the lens of various critical theories such as trauma theory, deconstruction, feminism, and Marxism.

Key Words: Ecocriticism, Mirza Waheed, *The Book of Gold Leaves*

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1. Introduction

Kashmir is considered a heaven on the earth by the tourists from all over the world. It is considered a place of permanent bliss and mirth. Its natural scenery with freshwater rivers, lakes and canals add to the mesmerizing beauty of the paradise like valley. Its beautiful snowcapped mountains in winter attract the adventurers from far off places of the world. The bazaars of this valley with their souvenirs hypnotize tourists. The forests of tall pine and chinar trees attract tourists with the enchanting voice of cuckoos and common kingfishers. The beautiful landscapes, lush green grass, bleating lambs, echoing birds, majestic mountains and the mighty river Jhelum make Kashmir the most beautiful place on the earth.

Unfortunately, the military invasion by the Indian government has eclipsed the beauty of Kashmir. Army's settlement with its ammunition and smoke emitting heavy vehicles has distorted the ecosphere of the valley. The flora and fauna of the valley are facing extinction at the hands of the Indian army. Heavy deployment in the valley has debarred the locals from taking care of the valley because they are busy in their own survival. People have been disturbed psychologically by the intrusion and the valley is bruised with the bullets ridden bodies of the Kashmiris. In the forests there is a constant fight between the freedom fighters and the military. The smell of gunpowder has polluted the atmosphere. Bombardment in the forests is common without any apparent reason. All these things have badly affected different birds in the valley, and they have started leaving the forests for good.

The Book of Gold Leaves presents the devastation of ecosphere on a large scale at the hands of anti-nature forces. The constant fight between the intruders and the resisters has vandalized the natural landscape of Kashmir, and TBGL explores the intricacies created by the unending war in an impressive way. Major characters like Faiz and Roohi seem disturbed by the obliteration of ecosystem of their valley. They and other characters like Dr. Ayesha and Madam Koul all the time think to restore the natural beauty of Kashmir to its original position. The birds and animals are also the worst victims of the ecocidal forces. Land transformation and poor sanitation are adding to the destruction of the ecosphere of the valley. People are psychologically





paralyzed and are resorting to various defense mechanisms. Indian violence and the occupation of educational institutions have rent the serenity of Kashmir.

2. Literature Review

The Book of Gold Leaves is usually studied from the perspectives of militarization by many researchers. It depicts the unflinching struggle of Kashmiris to live a life of their own. Indian army's brutalities have eclipsed the paradise like beauty of the valley. People are facing a drastic threat to their lives, and they are being traumatized for the last 60 years. The novel under research has been analyzed by various researchers through the perspectives of different theories. InamulHaq and Azhar Iftikhar in their article *The Fetishization of Forbidden Land in Mirza Waheed's The Book of Gold Leaves* (2018) analyze the novel through the lens of forensic approach. They write, "A forensic analysis of *The Book of Gold Leaves* reveals that the occupiers apart from their maniac wishes for the land hold apathetic disposition towards people of the valley. Entire Kashmir community feels tremors of demonic materialization of a form of maniac fetishization. Teenage girls and older women of Kashmir are equally on the rack. Hindus and Muslims of the valley suffer alike as do their religious places; the temple and the shrine. Art and culture are subjected to a conflict of gory violence that is meted upon the people and the landscape indiscriminately. Plurality of Kashmiri society is smashed to smithereens. Artistic developments in the valley stand retarded. The novel may be viewed as positing that human sufferings, impediments to freedom of civic activities of valley's inhabitants and violence therein essentially germinate from fetishization of the land by the occupiers" (p.5). Kashmiri writer Mirza Waheed, the veteran of Indian atrocities portrays the dilapidated Kashmir in a very detailed way.

Their forensic analysis approach in the article leads its writers to the conclusion that the land has been subverted by the interwoven fetishization. The characters in the novel emphatically love their motherland. The article has been divided into a few parts. First of all, the writers have discussed Indian army's mania for the forbidden land and its reverberation. The book pithily underscores the Indian aggression in the novel to control the valley. Mirza Waheed reveals the suffocating environment of Kashmiri people in a very detailed way. The very first piece of land which is illegally grabbed by the army is the only school of the girls and all the girls except a few





have left studying fearing to be insulted by the Indian army. The school then becomes the sole target of attack of the militants because it is now a basecamp of the Indian army. So, in both ways it is the school children who are victims of unearned suffering. People gather at shrine Khanqah-i-mualla and pray for deliverance and the shrine has become a symbol of solace for the people. In the last part of the novel massive gathering at the shrine take the form of political gathering at the death of Khan Kabir Khan.

Iram Shafi Allaie from University of Kashmir discusses the novel in her research under the title *Voicing the Agony of Kashmiris* (2016). There is a brutal war going on between Indian army and the militants on the one hand while on the other hand two lovers whose age of romance seems being disturbed by the skirmishes which have now the order of the day. The rising conflict becomes an excuse for the Indian forces to step into the valley as an illegal occupant. Indian army sets its headquarters in a school thus depriving the girls of their basic need of education. The students at this school eventually stop going to the school as the fight erupts between the army and the freedom fighters and there are lurking dangers all over valley. The researcher has discussed the character of Roohi who is the heroine of this novel in a very convincing way. Roohi is a dreamer and she always longs for true love in her life. The researcher in this article has tried to discuss the Indian army's atrocities and brutalities and their effects on the major and minor characters of the novel in a psychological way.

Javeed Ahmad Raina in his article *Post-Partition India: A Cataclysmic Post-Colonial Study of Contemporary Kashmir Condition with Reference to Book of Gold Leaves* (2018) discusses post-partition trauma from which the people of the sub-continent are suffering. The division has greatly affected the people of Kashmir, India, and Pakistan. Kashmir which was used to be a symbol of harmony among different sects and religions has now been converted into an abode of eternal conflict. Gandhi during his maiden visit to Kashmir on August 1, 1947, called it, 'a ray of hope' when there was a communal rift in all over the sub-continent. The researcher in her article has tried to explore social, religious, political and literary contours of partition on Kashmir through the post-colonial lens keeping in view Mirza Waheed's *The Book of Gold Leaves*.

The researchers and critics have discussed *The Book of Gold Leaves* from various angles but the distortion of ecosphere and its psychological impacts keeping in view of Sigmund





Freud's psychoanalysis has not been analyzed by anyone. The researcher in present study has tried to fill this gap by discussing the novel from this angle. Moreover, the ecocritical reading of the novel has not been discussed in detail before, the researcher in this research has exerted his efforts to give a detailed discussion from this point of view too.

3. Research Methodology

Ecocriticism is a critical theory which deals with the study of relationship between humans and their natural environment. The distortion of ecosphere at the hands of humans leads to an ecocidal impact on human psychology. Ecocriticism is a cry to safeguard nature in the age of industrialization and a mad race for nuclear weapons. Every stratum of the society should play their role to save the mother earth from devastation. It is the obligations of literary scholars to introduce this aspect of literary studies to make masses aware of the relationship between literature and environment.

Peter Barry in his book *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory* (1995) quotes Cherry Glotfelty's definition of ecocriticism as ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Peter further writes that ecocriticism and green studies both are the same terms. Both terms are used for a critical approach that began in America in the late 1980s. Glotfelty is its acknowledged founder in America. Ecocriticism is the study of literature and environment from an interdisciplinary point of view where all sciences come together to analyze the environment and brainstorm possible solutions for the correction of the contemporary environmental situation. Ecocriticism studies the relationship of humans with nature in literature. How individuals in society behave and react in relation to nature and ecological aspects is the main concern of ecocriticism.

This article is an attempt to study and explore ecological aspects and their psychological impacts on the environment of the valley and different characters. Exploring and investigating the psychology of humans is one of the most discussed topics of today's literary texts. The researcher has applied the theories of eco-criticism and psychoanalysis of Sigmund Freud on *The Book of Gold Leaves* to explore the psychological effects of ecocidal forces on the people of Kashmir.

4. Thesis Statement

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Even a cursory scan over the novel creates an impression that this text is quite a suitable candidate for the application of ecocriticism and defense mechanism of psychoanalysis. The ecocidal forces have done the damage. The people have psychologically been disturbed by instability and the annihilation of ecosphere.

5. Research Questions

- i. How has Kashmir's ecosphere been disturbed by the ecocidal forces in *The Book of Gold Leaves*?
- ii. What are the psychological impacts of distortion on the major characters of the novel?

6. Data Analysis

Kashmir is a heaven for tourists with natural beauty and peace. The readers find themselves to be physically present in the valley while reading this novel. The Book of Gold Leaves can be studied as a tourist guide as it gives a very comprehensive detail of the natural resources and scenes of the valley in such a way that after studying it the reader can find it easy enough to have a tour of the valley without any human guide. The book kindles various senses of the readers through vivid description of nature and peaceful environment. But the writer seems to be well acquainted with the forces of change like a typical artist. The tranquility of Roohi's house is annihilated when the fight erupts between army and freedom fighters. This violence directly affects the psychological condition of Roohi. She finds herself desecrated and dejected. She is mentally upset because her longing for a true love is eclipsed by the violence. The destruction of ecosphere by the hostile forces has bruised her thinking. The romance for which she has often wished seems to be shattered by the violence around her. This violence has traumatized her physically and mentally.

Fresh water bodies are a central part in the maintenance of ecosystem. Kashmir is famous for its natural lakes, ponds, rivers, and canals. They add to the majestic beauty of Kashmir and are a source of livelihood for the people of Kashmir because they - lakes, rivers canal, etc, - abound in fish throughout the year. Moreover, the tourists love boating in them, and the poor boatmen earn their bread through these rides. "A vast array of freshwater bodies such as lakes, ponds, wetlands, springs, streams and rivers. These varied freshwater ecosystems are of great aesthetic,





cultural, socioeconomic and ecological value besides playing an important role in the conservation of genetic resources of both plants and animals” (Jeelani, p. 261). Mir Zafar Ali terms the crystal-clear water of these lakes and rivers “the nector of paradise” (p.128).

Unfortunately, the ecosphere of the fresh natural water resources has greatly been disturbed by the pollution and their decreasing size. The water is constantly being contaminated and polluted by various pollutants such as: human wastes, animal dung, dead bodies and salinity. Lack of maintenance and neglect has added more this contamination. The aquatic life has also been disturbed due to this pollution and it has almost reached its extinction. Dal lake is in great existential danger, and it can be seen as a criterion of checking the environmental corrosion. In her article entitled War in Kashmir and its Effect on the Environment (1998), Jennifer Crook reveals: “Major lakes and rivers in Kashmir are spreading many diseases due to poor maintenance, disregard and toxic waste. Dal Lake...housing hundreds of floating house boats and home for vast reserves of aquatic life is rapidly shrinking in size. Compared to 15 years ago, the changes which have taken place in the Dal Lake are shocking and drastic in proportion.... a new vegetation in the form of a mysterious red weed seen on the periphery of the lake is an indicator of serious degree of pollution.” (p.34).

“Freshwater pond, a reservoir created by the abundance of the lake, which fed the Nallah Mar canal that traipsed through the city. In fact, this is what remains of the canal, a strangulated cripple of that waterway, a sickly reminder of what will, over a generation or two, become a legend, a story the young may or may not believe” (p.83). The novelist has used Faiz and Roohi as his mouthpieces and through their comments he is feeling sorry for the bad quality of water of Dal Lake. Roohi feels heartbroken at the pollution and defilement of fresh water of Dal Lake by the inhabitants and the tourists alike.

Waheed also highlights the hypocrisy of the elite class, that spend extravagantly on useless luxuries but when a poet Ayesha Azad asks them to spend some money on the cleanliness of the canal, the elite class complains about the lack of funds. Despite so many lakes, ponds, and a river the city has not a single pipeline of clean water. Contaminated and stinking water becomes the cause of the outbreak of many diseases such as diarrhea, hepatitis, gastroenteritis, cholera etc. The lifeline of Kashmir is river Jhelum. Faiz and Roohi have Wordsworthian love for the river.





Faiz often goes there for swimming because it soothes him. Roohi has special attachment with the river because it was there that she saw Faiz for the first-time swimming in the river. She is especially upbeat about planning a future with Faiz:

The river is also a symbol of smooth flow of life. It holds the city's cultural and religious diversity like a thread. But this cultural harmony is in threat due to the violence in the valley. The smooth flow of life symbolized by the river has been disturbed; there are so many other smooth flows of life in the novel which have been disturbed by the violence and destruction. Education is one of them. Indian army opens its camp under sumitkumar in a girl's high school. Further, the smooth flow of love finds certain impediments with the abductions and killings of innocent girls and boys of the valley. In the same way, spiritual life is also disturbed with the killing of Faiz's father at a Kanqah. All such happenings are psychologically affecting almost all the characters of the novel specially its Hero and Heroine. Consciously they want to enjoy their romantic life, but violence and bloodshed everywhere are there in their sub-conscious, disturbing and impeding their way to a successful life of conjugal life.

Modernization and urbanization have also played a vital role in distorting the ecosphere of Kashmir. They are destroying the green fields and hills of the valley. Environmental changes taking place in Kashmir are mainly due to land transformation. Man is encroaching upon nature. God made beauty of nature that is being disturbed by man. In *The Book of Gold Leaves*, Farhat walks on a road which in past was used to be a canal. The canal is the means of cool breeze, fresh water, fish, and water for irrigation. Faiz visualizes the days he spent on the bank of the canal with his family enjoying picnics.

The poor boatmen are seeking solace at the shrine of Hazratbal. They cannot show their disgust at the implacability of their economic condition. They have tried to be introvert by sitting at the shrine. Another implication which can be derived from this point is that the poor people of Kashmir are the true depiction of subaltern who cannot speak against the injustices of Indian army. The poor Kashmiris are the metaphors of subalterns who are voiceless to condemn the brutality of colonial Indian army. They have rather taken it for granted to be the eternal victim of his persecution. They are being exploited by the encroachers for their vested interests and material gains. The long occupation with all its trials and tribulations has inoculated them with





the feeling of patience and forbearance because they are left with no choice but to bear this victimization. They have a developed psyche to displace their anger to a different object which is weaker than the army. \

Waheed narrates the pitiable condition of birds in a very depressing way. The birds have been deprived a life of freedom. They live at shrines, mosques, temples, lakes and rivers. Swarms of birds are seen at these places because these places either defy the advancement of ecocidal values or perhaps these are the neglected places. Some of the birds have made their nests in the woodwork of old bridges. The courtyards are always full of food and the birds always eat to their fill. The Hindu temples are packed with the birds like sparrows, mynah birds, pigeons and white-chested kingfishers. But after an unbridled violence in the valley the birds have come under serious threat to the extent of extinction. Heavy explosives and other means of exploitations are threatening the existence of the birds. The Book of Gold Leaves highlights a marked changed even in the behavior of the birds due to the poisonous smell of explosives in the air. The birds “stopped the racket they’d started soon after the rocket blew a cloud of concrete dust into the air. They have not stayed to compete with the rat-a-tat of the machine gun” (p. 85) all living organisms in their habitat play an instrumental role in maintaining the ecological balance and human existence. The militarization of the area has caused a massive threat to the extent of extermination of the various species. Greed of the soldiers and carelessness of the local people are also among the many causes of the disappearance of animals. When Roohi takes a swim at river Jhelum she remembers the time when deer could thrive at the marshy area of river Jhelum undisturbed. But war, urbanization and militarization have left these animals on the brink of extinction. A famous Kashmiri cartoonist and novelist in his novel has Hangul deer as a central character in his novel Munnu: A Boy from Kashmir (2015). This novel highlights the effects of violence on animals especially on Hangul deer.

Spirituality and ecology have been presented as a concomitant to each other in the novel. The shrine is at the bank of river Jhelum. The devotees with spiritual rituals derive their inspiration from natural surroundings. The clean fresh water of the river purges the devotees of their physical rubbish because after performing their ablutions they enter the holy shrine thinking them to be neat and clean. So, the water of the river stands for the purification, the purification





from all the worldly materiality. However, the region is suffering from the worst ecological change. The change in attitudes of people has aggravated the situation. Spirituality is no more to be seen in them, they are less interested in spiritual purification and more interested in material gains. It is partly due to the onslaught of violence and partly due to the capitalistic approach on part of those who own the major chunk of the resources.

The ecological distortion has badly affected the psychological life of the Kashmiris and they are left with no choice but to displace their anxiety, frustration and tension to either fighting or by visiting the shrines of saints. Love affairs between Roohi and Faiz, has also not met its happy end because the army's brutalities and the distortion of ecosphere have disturbed the both very much. The age of love and enjoyment is spent in fighting and retaliation. The days of enjoyment have turned into days of sorrows and sufferings. Spring does not seem look more like a blossoming season due to the destruction of ecosphere. Natural serenity has been filled with the ominous smell of gun powder.

7. Conclusion

After a deep analysis of the novel, it is evident that struggle between Indian army and freedom fighters to grab the land for their vested interests has disturbed the ecosphere of Kashmir. It has also affected the psyche of the common Kashmiris. Nature has a soothing impact on human beings as it consoles them in the time of distress. Mirza Waheed presents a photographic verisimilitude of war-torn area of Kashmir valley. He impersonates the Indian maniac fetishization into a physically apprehended phenomenon. The materialization of their mania necessarily ends up as deprivation of the people. Almost all the facets of human life seem disturbed by the ecocidal forces. Education is the key component in achieving self-confidence and actualization. Militarization has badly affected the eco-system of Kashmir. People are deprived of their basic human right of getting education in their residing locality. Schools have been transformed into military camps. Religion is a thing which works like oxygen for the people but the prolonged fight between different forces has posed a serious threat to different religious practices as the people cannot perform them with religious zeal and zest. The river near a shrine is polluted which symbolizes spiritual ruination at the hands of different forces. Ecosphere has





been epically disturbed by the pseudo forces that have come under the slogan of educating the people of Kashmir and to preserve the natural beauty of the valley.

Deforestation has a bad impact on the flora and fauna of the valley. Birds add to the natural beauty of Kashmir and their chirping in the forests produces a composed symphony of sweetness to mesmerize the tourists. The never-ending fight and the cutting of trees have made it a hell for the birds to live a life of their own. The novelist has described the devastation in such a way as has not been discussed before by any Kashmiri novelist. The destruction of ecosphere has barred tourists from enjoying the scenic beauty of Kashmir. The beautiful resorts of Pir Mahal and Mughal Gardens have been converted into a no-go area by the military. The air is filled with the smell of gunpowder and this has created a bad impact on the respiratory system of the people. Culture is also facing an existential threat because the on-going fight has impeded the people of different religions in celebrating their cultural rituals. The economy is also suffering from the distortion of ecosphere because most of the Kashmiris fish on river Jhelum to earn their livelihood but due to the pollution the river lacks in fish. The artists like Faiz who is a professional artist of papier-mache, are driven to join militants in their fight against Indian military. To recapitulate, the novel highlights the devastating impacts of ecocidal forces on the ecosphere and the people of the valley. The valley has been turned into a place of ecocide from paradise.

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