

Wisdom through Nature: An Ecosophical Analysis of Akhtar Mohi-u-din's Short
Story "Growth"

Dr. Gazala Gayas

Associate Professor in English

Abstract

The paper aims at discussing Akhtar Mohi-u-din as a Ecosophical fiction writer. Akhtar Mohiuddin (1928-2001) is a prolific Kashmiri fiction writer. He has something like the architectonic ability of a short story writer. Perhaps very few writers of the sub-continent have made such a momentous impact on the 20th century world literature as did Akhtar. His short story "Growth" is analysed a story in which the writer philosophizes spirituality through ecology. Ecosophy is a combination of ecology and philosophy. It is a concept of ecology where other concepts like complexity, diversity and symbiosis are used to clarify the place of our species within nature. Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess coined this term Ecosophy, which examines nature and its relationship with humans.

Key Words : Ecosophy, Ecology, Spirituality, Eco-centric, Ecological Wisdom, Philosophy, realism, Critical Realism etc.

Most of us do not hate natural world.
We are deeply moved by its beauty,
awed by its majesty and power. We
do not wantonly destroy or pollute it.
Each of us knows that we are not
separate from it. (Alan Drengson)

During the last forty years philosophers in the world have critiqued the underlying assumptions of modern philosophy in relation to natural world. Since philosophical studies in the world have ignored the natural world, and since most studies have focused on human values, therefore a need is now to focus on ecocentric values and this wisdom and need is referred as Ecosophy. Its aim is to develop an ecological wisdom in modern man. The word Ecosophy is a combination of ecology and philosophy. It is a concept of ecology where other concepts like complexity, diversity and symbiosis are used to clarify the place of our species within nature. Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess coined this term Ecosophy,

which examines nature and its relationship with humans. Naes defines Ecosophy as:

By an Ecosophy I mean a philosophy of ecological harmony or equilibrium. A philosophy as a kind of sofia or wisdom, is openly normative, it contains both norms, rules, postulates, value priority announcements and hypotheses concerning the state of affairs in our universe. Wisdom is policy wisdom, prescription, not only scientific description and prediction. The details of an Ecosophy will show many variations due to significant differences concerning not only the 'facts' pollution, resources, population, etc. But also value priorities. (5)

According to Naes humans naturally have the capacity to connect with a much larger sense of self, transcending ego, by extending our sense of identification beyond the usual narrow focus on ego, to a

wider sphere of relationships. The mission of Ecosophy is to explore a diversity of perspectives on human-Nature contexts and interrelationships.

Akhtar Mohiuddin (1928-2001) is a prolific Kashmiri fiction writer. He has something like the architectonic ability of a short story writer. Perhaps very few writers of the sub-continent have made such a momentous impact on the 20th century world literature as did Akhtar. He took a leaf out of Manto's book and immersed himself enormously in the tradition of realism. He has been able to cut a high niche with just a few masterpieces. One is reminded of Margaret Mitchell, the author of 'Gone with the Wind' and Beecher writer of 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' who immortalized themselves with just one novel. Akter Mohiuddin is one of those Kashmiri writers who didn't remain ensconced in the ivory tower and move in the glitter and glamour as so many literary celebrities do. He seems to regard social and ecological problems as closely touching the writer's sensibility and believes that a genuine writer does not remain aloof.

The fact that Akhtar painted life as it is would not be an exaggeration. He believed that great art is one in which we can hear the very heartbeat of life, and on whose lips we can see the innocent smile of a small child. His magnum opus works deal with the ordinary layman around him. They mirror the society he lived in. He was a powerful advocate of verisimilitude in his legendary masterpieces and used grand technique of 'Stream of

Consciousness' and 'Interior Monologue' in his famous work "Growth." There being no iota of doubt that Akhtar, through his

ground-breaking literary works, has made permanent imprints on the sands of time and consequently on world literature via his epoch-making works. Akhtar Mohi-uddin was honoured with many prestigious awards including Padmshri award, the fourth highest civilian award given in India. However, he renounced the Padmshri award in the wake of mass killings and uprisings of 1990s. This is the vibrant testimony of his being a true realist writer. His works throb with the life of ordinary people around him. They reflect the society in which he had his being. The works of Akhtar include collections of short stories: *Sath Sangar*, *Sonzal* and novels *Dod-Dag*, *Zu-te Zolan*, and *Jahnamuk Panun Panun Nar*. As a critical realist he portrays every single moment in life through his use humour and irony. His works depict the Ecological Imperialism in Kashmir by Dogra feudal lords. His famous novel *Zu-te-Zolan* very aptly portray the maltreatment of human resources and natural resources by then feudal lords.

The story of "Growth" is narrated by a very small weed, who finds himself hapless and lower in the order of creation. This weed sprouts in spring from mud towards some negligible corner and would stealthily bask in the available ray of sun. Akhtar like other ecologist believes that natural world is a complete world of harmony As Donald Hughes in his book *North American Indian Ecology* 1996 comments:

Human ecology, then is a rational study of how mankind interrelates with the home of human species, the earth; with its soil and mineral resources; with its water, both fresh and salt, with its air, climate and

weather; with its many living things, animals and plants, from the simplest to the most complex; and with the energy received ultimately from the sun. (3)

The weed is happy in the month of summer as it experiences some degree of growth, “not because I enjoyed basking in the sun immensely but because of the warmth exuded by other creatures around me”(69). The weed is happy as he enjoys the warmth of sun around and love from other creatures, it also is sacred of snakes, as they would clip its leaves, eradicate its roots, or snap it ruthlessly.

The weed becomes intoxicated in the company of his friends and foes. It feels a change in his being. It would like to see cows dozing off behind the dunghills, cutworms drilling the earth, and ants engrossed on the blades of turf. The weed would feel a pain sometimes, a sweet pain for no reason. And this pain instead of dampening it, it would brighten it up raise its spirits. As it says:

I would feel liberated in that ecstatic state of intoxication. Some sort of hope would be born somewhere and I would experience an inkling that something very sweet and pleasant would happen to me now, right now. Then I would feel that the mud wall and the cow exist because of me. I would feel that the blowing of air and the onset of warmth are the manifestations of my own process of growing.(69)

Akhtar very philosophically defines the process of growth. It is not an individual phenomenon, but a process of growth in general in the world of Nature. It is in the

sweet and melodious dream that the leaves of weed would grow thick and broad. It is a change, a universal phenomenon. This happy dream would help it grow strong and all of a sudden a small colourless flower grows on its head. It would on top of the world with the flower stuck to its temple. Now, the weed welcomes every breeze with its flower as a prosperous host receives its guest. Akhtar becomes more philosophical in describing the metamorphosis in the Natural world which teaches humans to live in harmony with it. He very aptly describes the state of transformation which the weed experiences. As Leibniz, an eco-philosopher says, “reality cannot be found except in one single source, because of the interconnection of all things with one another”(4).

Akhtar takes us to feel and observe the process of growth of a weed. It would like to eternalize this ecstatic moment. It became totally independent of colours of sun and craves to die in the state of communion. And after the union, it would bury itself in the earth to preserve its roots so that in the next summer it might regain this moment. After its rebirth in the summer it is happy to see the trees basking in the golden sun in full bloom. Every creature is busy in its process of growth but the weed is waiting for a fly to come and rest on its flower and in this way it would achieve the acme of its being. It has spread the webs of desire around it. Suddenly a golden winged sweet smelling bee brought sunshine with her. She came and stood erect on her own delicate balance and then sat on the flower of the weed:

For a while or so or more, I don't know whether she touched me

something happened. Whatever happened, happened at once. It was ephemeral like lightening. This was the miracle. It awakened my fortune. I had never experienced what I was experiencing now. In a moment I had become what I had not even imagined to be. I had absorbed a profusion of scent in every vein and fiber of my being. The bee's golden-winged breeze had becalmed the varied mixture of the fountain of my being. She had carved out her abode within me in a manner that God does in the soul of a believer.(71)

Akhtar thus concludes the story by giving it a philosophical and spiritual touch. Every creature in this universe experiences a growth. Thus this growth is a process of change, metamorphosis which

completes our quest of growth and love. As Fritjof Capra says:

Deep Ecology is rooted in a perception of reality that goes beyond the scientific framework to an intuitive awareness of the oneness of all life, the interdependence of its multiple manifestations and its cycles of change and transformation. When the concept of human spirit is understood in this sense, its mode of consciousness in which the individual feels connected to cosmos as a whole, it becomes clear that ecological awareness is truly spiritual.(8)

Thus Akhtar like an Eco Sophie believes that the whole universe is a process of spiritual growth and every creature experiences this growth to achieve that union with the ultimate soul.

Works Cited and Books Consulted

1. Attfield, R. "Western Traditions and Environmental Ethics." *Environmental Philosophy*. Eds. Robert Elliot, and Arran Gare. London: Open UP, 1983. Print.
2. Boarschers, W. H. *Ecofacts and Ecofiction*. Lo Bramwell, A. *Ecology in 20th Century: A History*. London: Yale UP, 1989. Print.
3. Branch, Michael P., and Scott Slovic, eds. *The ISLE Reader: Ecocriticism, 1993-2003*. New York: U of Georgia P, 2003. Print.
4. Brewer, K. *The Science of Ecology*. London: Saunders College P, 1994. Print.
5. Brooks, P. *Speaking for Nature: How Literary Naturalists from Henry Thoreau to Rachel Carson have Shaped America*. San Francisco: Sierra .1998.Print.
6. Mohi-ud-din, Akhtar. *Sath Sangar* Musanif, Srinagar, 1955. Print
7. ---. *Dod-Dag*. Musanif, Srinagar. 1955-56. Print
8. ---. *Slav-Amr*. Musanif, Srinagar. 1971. Print
9. ---. *Sonzal*. Musanif, Srinagar. 1958. Print
10. ---. *Sadaqat Pravne Khatir*. Cultural Academy Srinagar. 1974. P rint
11. ---. *Gaad Hanzin (Original Tikjay ShivShankar 'Chemmen')*. Sahitya Academy. 1986. Print
12. ---. *71979 te Baaqi Afsane*. Book Bank Srinagar, 2000. Print
13. ---. *Jahnamuk Panun Panun Naar*. Book Bank, Srinagar. 2002. Print
14. ---. *Zaat Butraat*. Print

15. ---. *A Fresh Approach to the History of Kashmir*. Book Bank, Srinagar. 1998. Print.
16. ---. *Ellem-t-Adab*. Srinagar: Kashmir University, 1993. Print.
17. Mohi-ud-din, Akhtar, Kamil Amin and Koul Jiya Lal. *Son Adab*. Cultural Academy, Srinagar. 1959. Print
18. Naes, A. *Ecology Community and Lifestyle: Outline of an Ecosophy*. Trans. D. Rothenberg, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989. Print.
19. Tobias, Michael, ed. *Deep Ecology*. San Diego: Avant Books, 1984. Print