

Environmental Melancholia and Ecological Grief: Probing Eco-Critical Concerns in Pashto Poetry after 9/11 and War-on-Terror

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Abstract:

Pashto poetry after the 9/11 incident and subsequent War on terror represents a thematic shift in its subject matter. Since the war badly affected most regions of the country, concerns about the challenges to different aspects of life were raised by Pashto poets. A threat to harmonious coexistence and balanced life became the voice of many contemporary poets. The threats and damages to nature were highlighted and disruption in ecological lifestyle was reflected in a melancholic tone. The current study critically investigates eco-critical concerns in Pashto poetry in the aftermath of 9/11 and War-on-Terror. For this purpose, the sample is randomly selected from published works of Pashto Poetry as well as those published on online platforms such as social media. The study is descriptive in nature and the selected sample is analyzed through a close reading method. The theoretical framework is adopted from Eco-critical theorist and scholar Cheryll Glotfelty who emphasized the readers to closely investigate a particular text for the representation of natural world. Her groundbreaking book 'The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology' (1996) provides many key insights on this relationship. This study is significant in the sense that it draws attention to the ecological perils that emerged after the war and conflict in the region. The impacts of war and conflict especially in relation to nature and environment are introspectively highlighted.

Keywords:

Eco-critical; Ecological Grief; 9/11; Pashto Poetry; War-on-Terror; Environmental Melancholia.

Introduction

Pashtuns have been negatively portrayed as violent, vulgar and harsh across literary writings in different cultures. On the contrary, Pashtuns themselves have been victims of violence and barbarism for the last two decades and a half. The 9/11 incident proved a source of misery for them as the so called War-on-Terror was fought on their soil and the peace of these areas is still at stake as incidents of terror create unrest and chaos from time to time. As a result, people of this region experienced severe losses including mental, physical and economic. Psychologically, the mental imprints of those incidents are still present on the minds of those who experienced extreme hardships as a result of the imposed war. Physically, many civilians, got killed, injured and displaced from their homes, villages and cities. Economically, the businesses of people got closed and the region presented a bleak picture. Such effects found reactions in the people of the region and literary art was used as a significant tool to highlight the prevailing chaos, anger and despair. Mehsud (2014) comments on this thematic shift in Pashto literature as thus:

Pashto literature underwent a significant change after the tragic incident of 9/11. As a war was initiated on the soil of Pashtuns almost immediately after the shocking event took place. The bloodshed, bomb blasts, drone attacks and aerial firing compelled writers to forget evergreen topics of love, romance and nature. The violent circumstances that rose from the ashes of 9/11 compelled Pashto literati to write about broken families, severed limbs, war-torn infrastructure (mosques and schools) and displaced people rather than silky curls and rosy cheeks of their beloveds. This transformation can be referred to as the 'effects of 9/11 on Pashto literature'. (Mehsud, 2014, p.5).

Pashto literature also highlighted the different aspects of militancy and its possible reasons. Literary writers felt the urge to represent the new realities in new possible ways and they boldly condemned the sponsors of this war. Dinakhel (2016) comments:

During militancy in Pakistan and Afghanistan, we see various trends of thoughts and themes in the Pashto literature. Some writers and poets openly condemned militancy while others condemned it in gestures and symbols. Some poets and writers consider the world's great powers as responsible of this situation while some others consider their own people, mullah and some other elements as responsible of these things. (Dinakhel,2016, p.29).

As far as the genre of poetry is concerned, a thematic shift is found in its subject matter after the 9/11 and subsequent War-on-Terror. According to Khalil (2013), "A large portion of the Pashto lyrical poetry depicts the effects of the War on Terror." (p.42). Also, the style found a shift towards realism as poets found it more appropriate to reflect and highlight the ongoing scenario and their concerns. In the words of Zaitoon (2023),

Poets express the severe impact that war has on the lives of their family members, friends, neighbors, and fellow citizens. Poems written during and immediately after a war often explore a variety of themes. Some describe the terror of the battlefield, while others express patriotism or the distress of taking another person's life. The transition from an aesthetic observer to a war-affected person becomes increasingly apparent in poetic works as poets choose words that are associated with war rather than folklore or fairy tales. (Zaitoon, 2023, p.36).

Different scholarly works have been produced on Pashto poetry to highlight the different perspectives that these works carry regarding the effects of war and conflict. These include; grief, mourning the loss, anger, despair, traumatic memories, condemnation of war, and overall effects of War on Pashtuns' socio-cultural norms. The current study adds to this scholarship by highlighting the effects of war and conflict on nature and environment of the different regions of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and parts of the country. The study presents a broader survey of these effects in relation to the insights taken from Eco critical theory. For this purpose, the selected lines and stanzas have been critically investigated from selected poems of different Pashto poets. The significance of this study lies in applying ecocriticism theory to Pashto poetry especially in relation to the effects of war and militancy. Pashtun poets have a great sense of preserving the nature, environment and whole biosphere along with other concerns as mentioned previously.

Research Objectives:

1. To pinpoint various types of eco-critical concerns as depicted in Pashto Poetry.

2. To find out the reasons of these ecological perils as represented in Pashto poetry.
3. To highlight the general message of these poets through a focus on Ecological issues.

Research Questions:

1. What are the various types of eco-critical concerns as depicted in Pashto Poetry?
2. What are the key reasons of these ecological perils as highlighted in Pashto poetry?
3. What is the key message of these poets through a focus on environmental and ecological issues?

Literature Review:

Ecocriticism is a critical approach to literature and culture that explores the relationships between literature and environment. "Ecocriticism is a critical and creative perspective that investigates questions that revolve around issues like the environment, planetary survival, and interactions with the more-than-human." (Borg et.al, 2024, p.1). The prominent Eco-critical scholar and critic, Glotfelty defines ecocriticism as, "Ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996, xviii). In Pashto literature, the concept of Ecocriticism has been applied to various works that illustrate the deep relationship between nature and human life. These works are:

Ullah (2019) examined the Pashto folklore genre of Tappa and found out the eco-critical themes in it. The study exhibited that Tappa brings attention to the environmental threats caused by modern life and compels human to reconnect with nature. The study highlights the significance of preserving the natural world and encourage ecological conscious in readers.

Iqbal et al. (2022) carried out an eco-critical and stylistic analysis of Ghani Khan's poetry and applied the concepts of symbiotic interconnectedness and ecological consciousness. They stated that the poetry of Ghani Khan emphasizes the bond between human and nature that promotes environmental awareness in readers.

Ahmad et al. (2023) conducted a study that investigated the environmental crisis of Swat and the preservation of the ecosystem through Pashto poetry. The study stated that the key factors contribute to environmental crises such as urbanization, industrialization, infrastructure projects and militancy that cause harm to the environment. The study further argued that the ecological system of swat is preserved by using different objects and element as symbol of beauty and love in Pashto poetry. The study concluded that Pashto poetry brings forth themes of peace, denounce unplanned development and violence and promote resilience and hope to heal damaged ecology of swat.

Similarly, Khalil and Ullah (2023) in their eco-critical study used the ecocriticism approach to analyze the eco-naming concept in Pashto language. The study illustrated that there is deep connection between Pashtuns and nature and the Pashto language have played significant contribution towards nature preservation by given human like soul to extinguished species. The study further revealed that female names are abundance in the eco-naming system than male names.

Farid (2024) in her research study analyzed Pashto proverbs related to environments from eco-critical perspective. The study revealed that the

environment friendly ideas exist in traditional folk literature and these ideas need to be brought forth for the preservation of the environment. The study further argued that there is a need of deconstruction of anthropocentric ideas and it would be reconstructed to preserve the environment.

In last, Rahman et al. (2024) carried out an eco-critical study to compare Israr Atal poem “Munafiqat” translated as “Hypocrisy” and William Wordsworth poem “The World is too Much with Us.” The study illustrated that in the poetry of both poets, nature and environment are kept at high esteem and their beauties are glorified. The study further stated that in the poetry of both poets there is a message of ecological awareness and a common message of peace and harmony in relation to nature.

The above review of existing critical scholarship indicates that there was an immense scope in conducting this study. There is a theoretical void or gap for conducting Eco critical study on Pashto poetry produced in the wake of 9/11 and subsequent War-on-Terror. By acknowledging other related works, the current study presents a critical survey of Pashto poetry in relation to war and militancy. Scholars may like to delve deep into such concerns in the poetry of a particular author and his works in future studies. Thus, the main significance of the current study is to provide a theoretical model for undertaking such studies. Moreover, the study also highlights the ecological perils and their reasons as depicted in Pashto poetry after the 9/11 incident and subsequent War-on-Terror. The study also probes the symbolic message of these poets for peace, harmony in nature, and peaceful coexistence for all other creatures in the world that is made ugly by humans’ actions especially the imposed wars.

Research Methodology and Theoretical Design:

The current study was undertaken to investigate Eco-critical concerns in Pashto poetry after the 9/11 incident and subsequent War-on-Terror. The study also intended to highlight the reasons of these ecological perils as depicted by Pashto poetry. Moreover, the ultimate message of these poets for a balanced and peaceful life was also one of the key objectives of this study.

The research design was qualitative in nature since the selected sample was critically interpreted and analyzed in the light of critical lenses adopted from ecocriticism theory. Selected sample is introspectively investigated for ecological and environmental concerns. In the view of Lester et.al, (2020),” Broadly, qualitative research is generally employed to support a researcher in generating a deep and nuanced understanding of a given phenomenon.” (p.95). A non- probability sampling method was adopted, i.e., convenience sampling. The data was chosen from published poems as well as those found on social media or other online platforms. A close reading technique as proposed by Greenham (2019) was used as the method for data analysis. According to him:

Texts are not hermetically sealed objects and are certainly not things that must be taken entirely on their own terms. Rather they provoke perhaps unintended, even adversarial questions (texts having a wider range of contexts). These might include historical readings that locate texts against their contemporary backdrops...the questions posed by feminists, psychoanalysts, Eco- critics and literary theorists of many a strife can each become new contexts for close reading. (Greenham, 2019, p. 29).

The theoretical underpinnings are drawn from eco-critical theorist Cheryll Glotfelty. In her groundbreaking book ‘The Ecocriticism Reader:

Landmarks in Literary Ecology' (1996), Glotfelty provides many key insights on the relationship between man and his nature/environment as she states,

Despite the broad scope of inquiry and disparate levels of sophistication, all ecological criticism shares the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it. Ecocriticism takes as its subject the interconnections between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artifacts of language and literature. As a critical stance, it has one foot in literature and the other on land; as a theoretical discourse, it negotiates between the human and the nonhuman. (xix).

Data Analysis and Discussion:

War and conflict always affect nature and environment in negative ways. Its catastrophes and devastation in literature has been highlighted in various scholarly works on literature as literature is the artistic, idealized and intensified picture of life. Through the critical lenses adopted from Ecocriticism, these researchers have also undertaken the quest to raise consciousness and awareness about nature, environment and biosphere. The message of an awareness and responsibility towards the environment is the prime focus of these studies.

Along with many other perspectives about the relationship between man, nature and environment, Eco-criticism offers tools to consider the impact of war on human ecology. In the words of Shoaib (2021), "Ecocriticism bases its analysis on this ideal relationship between man and nature that has been jeopardized by different factors like war, violence, industrialization and urbanization." (p.21).

The eminent ecocritical theorist and scholar, Glotfelty refers to this function in relationship to World War II and 'The Age of Depression' as, "The years of Depression and World War II turned ecology even more strongly toward public narrative... these voices reflected how much ecology had become a medicine sung by modern shamans to heal a sick world." (p.74). Thus, the current study also adds to this scholarship by contributing the voices of Pashto poets in the aftermath of Pashto poetry after 9/11 and the War-on-Terror. The analysis in the following section focuses on the reflection of different aspects of ecocritical concerns as highlighted by Pashto poets. Through a close reading technique, the researcher has analyzed these aspects in relation to the relevant theoretical and conceptual framework:

Environmental Melancholia: Mourning the Loss and Damage to Nature and Biosphere

Environmental melancholia accounts for the ways in which people experience profound loss and disruption caused by environmental issues. This loss should be addressed in a bold manner in order to play part in preserving nature and environment. This must not be left unaddressed and silenced as Glotfelty states,

We require a viable environmental ethics to confront the silence of nature in our contemporary regime of thought, for it is within this vast, eerie silence that surrounds our garrulous human subjectivity that an ethics of exploitation regarding nature has taken shape and flourished, producing the ecological crisis that now requires the search for an environmental counter ethics. (Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996, p.16).

Pashto Poets in the aftermath of 9/11 and war and terror have greatly mourned gradual depletion of natural beauty in a melancholic tone. Through the

use of metaphors and symbols, these poets have conveyed their concern over the deterioration of natural beauty and disruption in nature's harmony. Dr. Muhammad Israr Atal is a prominent Pashto poet of contemporary era. His poetry embodies the themes of love, peace, and national unity etc. There are also frequent references to nature and environment in this poems. His poems like; "Khudaya da ba sa Kege" translated as "Oh God! What Will Happen?" mourn the loss in a nostalgic tone:

*Somebody has set the city of flowers on fire
Somebody has blasted it by exerting power
Red Flowers of our garden has got mal de ojo
Somebody has started harvest in the spring season
That's why my heart is ruined.
O' God! What will happen?* (cited in Kauser et al,2017)

The poet refers to the city of flowers i.e., Peshawar in a nostalgic and melancholic tone. The current landscape has been depicted as a deserted and barren one as a result of the frequent bomb blasts and terror events. An overall chaos is prevailing and the poet expresses his despair and angst. He indirectly refers to the actors involved in this 'Great Game'. The repetition of 'somebody' and the contrasting images of 'flowers' and 'harvest' refer to the concerns about the prevailing situation of war and its overall impact on nature and environment.

Muneir Buner is another popular poet from Buner district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. One of the key theme in his poetry is the post-memories of the conflict in the region. His collection of poetry "Speny Speny Ma Waya" has various poems on the same theme. In one of his poems, he highlights environmental concerns as thus:

په څه خفه ئې ولې نه راجې جانانه دلته
که مینه گرانه ده خو وینه ده ارزانه دلته
هغه د غرونو په سرونو اوږې نه ورېږي
په ځائے د واورو اور بلېږي د اسمانه دلته

Translation:

*What has made you so upset,
My beloved you don't visit any more,
Love is costly here though not blood
Now, there is no more snowfall on the mountains peaks,
Instead of snowfall the fire is coming down from the sky.* (Buner, 2024,

p.40)

These lines refer to the sense of fear and terror as caused by the conflict. The poet expresses his deep concern over his beloved not showing up. However, by using the metaphor of 'blood' in the third line, the reason of this silence is revealed. The final two lines presents a contrasting visual imagery of the natural landscape. The conflict has reached everywhere and the beautiful mountains, who used to present a picture of beauty, are now the conflict zones. So, these lines too present a deep concern over the disruption in the balance and harmony of nature.

The young poet from Lower Dir, Rizwanullah Shamaal also refers to this fact in his poem as:

د زمکې سرد انساني وینو جامې واغوستې
دې فضاگانو د بارودو لبادې واغوستې
جنت جنت زمکه ئې کره ایرې ایرې خائے په خائے
ډېرو گلونو ته ئې ورته کرې لمبې خائے په خائے

Tranlation:

*The earth surface wore the blanket of human blood,
The atmosphere also wore the cloaks of gunpowder,
The heavenly earth was dusted into ashes from place to place,
Many flowers were set ablaze in certain places.*
(Shamaal, 2020, p.98)

In these lines, the poet expresses his grief and concern about the effects of war and conflict on peaceful coexistence in nature and environment. The beauty of nature is destroyed as a result of these ugly events.

Visualizing Ecological Crises through the Use of Imagery:

Imagery may be defined as the painting of a picture in the reader's mind through the use of language. It represents human experiences and thoughts in concrete, tangible, and perceptible terms. It also helps the author to convey his message in strong and clear terms. Use of imagery in the case of Pashto poetry about war and conflict helps in depicting the war driven landscape and disruption in the balance of nature.

The pre-war and after landscape of Swat has been compared by Sabir Ahmad Sabir in a nostalgic tone through the following imagery:

د غرونو په سرونو دې بنائسته شین خادر خور و
د حسن بنکلا ډک هره حجره جمات او کور و
تیارې شوې دا بارودو، رنایگانې چرته لارې
اے! سواته ستا د حسن بنکلا گانې چرته لارې

Translation:

*The mountain peaks were covered by the green blankets,
Every hujra, mosque and home presented a beautiful image,
Now, darkness has spread everywhere, the colors of life gone with the
blasts,*

Oh Swat, where did your beauties vanish? (Sabir,2021)

The poet in these lines expresses his deep concern over the environmental damage after the ongoing battle between security forces and militants. The lush green mountains have lost their colors of beauty. There was peace in every village, city and their institutions but these beautiful colors of life have vanished. The frequent bomb blasts and terror related incidents have converted the heavenly earth into a hell.

Another poet describes the scenery after the conflict deserts the landscape. The smoke after the blasts and bombing has covered the whole atmosphere and the environment is disturbed by the sounds of blasts and bullets. The natural beauty has been destroyed.

په سازش مو تباہ شوم گلستان دے
د بارودو په لوگو کنبې پت اسمان دے

پہ دغہ اور کنبی د سرتورو خوبندو کوکے خبڑی
چی رایاد شی نن می ہم د زرہ نہ سړیکے خبڑی

Translation:

*The destruction of my beautiful homeland is pre-planned,
The sky is covered by the smoke of dynamite,
In the midst of these shatters the screams of sisters are heard while
heads uncovered,*

Oh! With the memory of that scene, the pain in my heart revives.

The above lines depict the imagery of the nature after the prevailing conflict. The second line uses visual imagery as the smoke of dynamite has covered the whole sky. The third line uses auditory imagery as the tattering and pattering of guns disturbs the harmony of nature and environment. The resultant fear and chaos is the screams and cries of women as they are terrified. So overall, a disruption and disturbance is created.

Similarly, Shabab Ranayzay compares the changing landscape of Pashawar after the bombs and terror incidents as,

*Who has showered this city of flowers with fire and iron;
and the crying people and their screaming rip my heart into pieces.*
(cited in Khalil, 2012)

This couplet presents the contrasting visual images of flowers, fire, and iron. Similarly, the auditory imagery of screaming people is also presented. The imagery of warfare technology has destroyed the peaceful environment of the city. The beauty and calmness of nature has been severely disturbed by the same conflict with the resultant chaos and fear.

Similar imagery is presented by Dr. Muhammad Israr Atal is one of his poem as thus:

بوي پکنبی اتله د بارودو دے
هر خوا شین لوگے پہ پینور کنبی دے

Translation:

Oh Atal! There is a smell of gunpowder
Green smoke has filled the atmosphere of Peshawar.
(Atal, 2019, p.96).

In these lines the poet presents olfactory imagery. The prevailing smell of gunpowder can be felt in the atmosphere. Similarly, the visual imagery of green smoke is presenting an ugly image as it is related to bomb blasts.

Ecological Grief: Threat and Damage to the Biosphere:

Cunsolo and Ellis (2018) define ecological grief as “the grief felt in relation to experienced or anticipated ecological losses, including the loss of species, ecosystems and meaningful landscapes due to acute or chronic environmental change” (p. 275). According to Glotfelty, “Attending to ecological knowledge means metaphorically relearning “the language of birds”- the passions, pains, and cryptic intents of the other biological communities that surround us and silently interpenetrate our existence.” (p.25). As per this statement, ecocriticism is concerned also with the lives and rights of animals and birds. For harmony in nature, these aspects of environment must be taken into consideration. She further asserts that:

This is no more absurd, of course, than the idea that man does not have the right to do anything he wants with nature. The idea that

nature should also be protected by human laws, that trees (dolphins and whales, hawks and whooping cranes) should have lawyers to articulate and defend their rights is one of the most marvelous and characteristic parts of the ecological vision. (Glotfelty, p.108).

The famous Pashto poet Rahmat Shah Sayal frequently refers to the impact of war on biosphere in his poem 'Peace and War':

امن د غرونو د تازه هوا د لپې دعا
جنگ د هر غر د هرې سروې صنوبر قاتل دے
.....
امن د خدائے د تمامی مخلوق د ژوند ضمانت
جنگ د انسان د کائنات او بحر و بر قاتل دے
.....
امن د هر زنده سر ساه ده او د سر سيورے دے
جنگ د هر قسم زنده سر د ساه او سر قاتل دے
امن مرغی په نغمو راولي د خيال په نغمو
جنگ د مرغو د چغېدو او شور و شر قاتل دے

Translation:

*Peace is the prayer of the fresh air of mountains,
War is the assassin of every cypress and pine,*

....

*Peace is the guarantee of the lives of all creatures,
War is the assassin of humans, universe, land and water,*

....

*Peace is the guarantee of the soul and life of everyone,
War is the assassin of the soul and life of every creature,
Peace leads to the resumption of melodious songs of birds,
War is the enemy of the chirping and chattering of birds.*

(Sayal,2013, p.160-163)

The binaries of peace and war convey the message of harmony in the biosphere. Peace is not essential only for the lives of human beings but all the living creatures on this earth. Through the use of this extended metaphor, the poet conveys his message of peace in an impactful way.

The disruption in ecology due to war is prevalent in the following couplet where the poet also refers to the threats to the survival of birds and symbolically extinction of their species:

*A grave silence has spread across my land,
The nightingales pipe not their notes.*

(Naaz,2020, cited in Ahmad et al., 2021)

The prevailing war and conflict has also silenced the birds and they are in no mood to sing the melodious songs. May be these birds have also migrated and their species vanished.

Aziz Manerwal also refers to the brutal treatment of living things in war times in his poem 'My Brothers' as he states:

څنگه چپ شم هم پښتون هم مسلمان يم
مومنان او افغانان وژلے کبړي
زمونږ زمکه او اسمان وژلے کبړي
زمونږ غرونو کښې مارغان وژلے کبړي

Translation:

*How can I remain silent being a Muslim and Pashtun?
In this war, Muslims and Afghans are being killed,
Our earth and sky being destroyed,
The birds in our mountains killed.*
(Manerwal, 2009, p.21).

These lines condemn the ongoing war where not only human beings are killed but also components of our biosphere and earth. Special reference is made to the birds which are killed or frightened due to the ugly war. Similar reference is made by Dr. Sahib Shah Sabir in his poem which goes like this:

د مرغو شور پۀ کومه لار مرغی پۀ کومه لارې؟
بڼونه ختم شو سحر خفه هوا خفه دي
.....
دا د ازار پۀ ډېرۍ وختل ازار به مومي
چا چې نن جنگ وکړو، دا خلق به سبا خفه وي

Translation:

Where did the birds and their chattering vanish?
The groves are destroyed, thus the dawn and air are upset,
.....
They cursed others so they themselves will be cursed,
Those who are involved in war today will regret it tomorrow.
(Sabir, 2020, p.146).

These lines reveal that when there is war and conflict, there is no peace. Again a reference is made to the effects of war on the lives of the birds. They are not seen any more nor noises can be heard. In the second line nature has been personified and reference is made to the destruction of the groves which provided these birds shelter. Also, the air and dawn also miss their non-existence as they have been destroyed perhaps in conflict.

Disruption in the Harmonious Coexistence and Balanced Life:

According to Glotfelty, "But nature per se is not the only focus of Eco critical studies of representation. Other topics include the frontier, animals, cities, specific geographical regions, rivers, mountains, deserts, technology, and garbage." (p. xxiii) Pashto poets have expressed their views regarding disruption in nature's harmony in tragic ways. Along with a melancholic tone, one also find a sense of aggression and anger over the loss of the beauty of nature. Ali Akbar Siyal is one of such poets who has been condemning war in various collections of his poetry such as 'Pa Jung De Or Olagee' (To hell with war), Da Parharoonah bah Gandal Ghawarree (These Wounds need to be Healed Up), Zamung pa Kalee Ke Shar Ma jurrawa wai (Don't Create Disturbance in our Village), 'Pa guldaru de Warawal Orunah' (Raining bombs on floral valleys) etc. His poetry emphasizes peace in the Pashtun regions. The

following lines from his poem ‘Sitamgara’ translated as ‘Tyrant’ contain a strong message to stop damaging the ecosystem and environment:

ستمگره د سيندونو ازار مء اخله
ستمگره دا اوبء د خدائے نعمت دے
ستمگره سوات دې سم راته دوزخ ڪرو
ستمگره سوات پء دې دنيا جنت دے

Translation:

*Oh cruel! Don't spoil the seas and water,
Oh Cruel, Water is the blessing of God.
Oh Tyrant! You turned Swat into a Hell,
Oh Tyrant! Swat is Heaven on this earth.
(Sial,2019).*

In these lines, the poet directly addresses all those people who are involved in the war on this soil. The poet calls them as ‘cruel’ or ‘tyrant’ who have no mercy over nature and environment. Places of natural beauty like Swat were turned to ugliness.

The following lines from Muneer Bunerri convey a deep sense of despair and alienation due to the prevailing war and conflict:

د باران شپه راته راياده شوله
يوه حادثه راته راياده شوله
چا وې نن بيا پء پېښور ڪنڀي دهماڪه شوې ده
چا وې نن بيا پء ښائستونو باندي اور پورې دے
چا وې نن بيا پء سرو گلونو باندي اور پورې دے
د ڊبره درده مي سلگي وږي وږي وکړي
دومره بي وسه وم چي ځان ته مي ښڀري وکړي
بس دے روزگار پرېږده دا ښار پرېږده حالات ښه نه دي
ما درله خپل گاونډ ڪنڀي خپل کلي ڪنڀي کور نيولے

Translation:

*That rainy night revived in my mind,
The night of an incident,
Someone told that there has been a bomb blast in Peshawar,
He said that the beauty of the city was set ablaze,
The red flowers set on fire,
Due to grief I sobbed that night,
In a state of helplessness, I cursed myself...
Oh! Enough! Stop the daily toil, leave the city,
The deteriorating situation does not suit you,
I have hired a new home for you in my neighborhood.
(Bunerri, 2023).*

The sense of anger and despair prevails in the above lines. The beautiful city of flowers has daily news of bomb blasts and terror incidents. No one is in the mood to live a peaceful life rather they are compelled to leave the city for some peaceful life.

Another poet refers to this environmental collapse and disruption as thus:

دلته د ژوند د بهارونو لمن اور اخیستے
زمونږ د خاورې د گلونو لمن اور اخیستے
منگي شول مات د چينو شنه شنه چنارونه وسول
ملگرو بيا د گودرونو لمن اور اخیستے

Translation:

*Here the Springs of life have caught fire,
And the flowers of our land too,
The pitchers got broken,
The green maples set ablaze,
Friends, once more the fords too have caught fire.*
(Nusrat,2020)

In these lines, the poet mourns the loss of different cultural aspects of Pashtuns and symbols of the beauty of nature and environment.

However, in the wake of such destruction, violence, and disruption in nature's harmony, some Pashto poets have shown their resilience and hope as the following lines from Dr. Israr Atal's poem reveal:

تہ مې پۀ غرونو کښې نښتر سبزه بارود خوروه
ما دې د ښار پۀ هره لاره کښې چينار وکرل

Translation:

*You set fire to the pines and spread gunpowder in mountains,
I planted maples in every path of your city.*
(Atal, 2019, p.17).

These lines show the poet's determination and courage for preserving the nature and environment in the midst of chaos and disasters as caused by war and conflict.

Findings and Conclusion:

This research study was mainly intended to find out Eco critical concerns in Pashto poetry about war and conflict i.e, Pashto poetry after the 9/11 and War-On-Terror. By using theoretical underpinnings from Cheryll Glotfelty as mainly stated in her seminal book 'The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology' (1996), the analysis revealed that environment and nature have been key concerns of Pashto poets during and after the 9/11 incident and War-on-Terror. In the light of the key objectives and research question, this research study has made the following findings through literary evidence and theoretical reasoning:

1. Pashto poets have expressed their deep concerns about the effects of war on environment and nature. Through the use of imagery, metaphors and binary oppositions, these poets have expressed their great sorrow over the loss of the beauty of nature and disruption in the peaceful environment. In their tone, one finds a sense of ecological grief and environmental melancholia.

2. Along with expressing their grief over nature and environment in the wake of war, these poets have indirectly referred to the reasons of these ecological perils. The key reason is obviously the war against terror but many people have been raising concerns over the discriminatory treatment as these wars were always fought in the regions of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. So, poets using the indefinite pronouns “Somebody” or “Someone” refers to those people who used these opportunities for their own ends and played the role of sponsors.
3. Pashto poets have depicted nature and environment in their poetry in order to highlight the importance of a peaceful coexistence. References to the components of nature, wildlife, birds and other living creatures highlights the importance of a harmonious and balanced life.

To conclude, Pashto poetry after the 9/11 and subsequent War-on-terror highlights the importance of nature and environment in many ways. On the one hand, these poets highlight the vibrant beauties of nature such as the green mountains, red flowers, snow peaked mountains, and the melodious songs of birds. But on the other hand, disruption in nature’s harmony is reflected in a nostalgic and melancholic tone as the war and conflict disturbs the peace and harmony of nature. The earlier imagery is replaced by a disruptive and disturbing one carrying the images of blood, noises of guns, smoke of dynamites and quietness from birds and animals. The close reading of these poems revealed that poets in these poems express their deeper concern and grief on the prevailing damage to nature and environment and urge for peace and harmony. The beauty and harmony will not survive if certain forces whether internal or external continue to destabilize the peace of the region. Thus, we find a tone of environmental melancholia and ecological grief in the poetry of these poets.

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