



RESEARCH PAPER**Literature as Cultural Ecology: A Cultural Ecological Reading of Iqbal's Selected Poems**

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ABSTRACT

The objective of the study is to scrutinize cultural ecological elements in Iqbal's four selected poems by incorporating Zapf's idea of *Literature as cultural ecology*. Iqbal as national poet covers the whole range of cultural, ecological themes in his poetry. Previously, his poems are analyzed by using diverse range of theories. This inquiry fills the gap by looking into Iqbal's poetry through a new perspective. As, Iqbal's poetry is relatable for every era, it is not time or space bound as it also deals with the issues of the environment which is relatively a new field of study. In the early phase of his poetry he was much inspired by romantic poets and his poems are replete with extensive natural symbols that also serve cultural implications. The study employs Zapf's triadic model of literature as cultural ecology as theoretical framework for this qualitative inquiry. The study employs textual analysis as a research method to scrutinize the themes and symbols in the poems as part of cultural ecology. According to Zapf, cultural ecology is the interconnection of "culture-critical metadiscourse" "an imaginative counter-discourse," and "reintegrative inter-discourse'." This model explores that literature as ecological system illustrates power ideologies, counter ideologies and by reconciling these opposing faculties empower the margins. The study extends the sphere of ecocriticism by applying its new paradigm to an eastern poet and also adds to the existing literature on Iqbal. For future researches, this theory can be applied to different genres of indigenous literature as there is dearth of studies in this field.

KEYWORDS Cultural Ecology, Culture-Critical Meta Discourse, Imaginative Counter-Discourse, Interconnectedness, Reintegrative Inter-Discourse

Introduction

The present study aims to critically analyze Iqbal's selected poems from the viewpoint of Zapf's theory of Literature as a cultural ecology. The study further dives into the poems of Iqbal by applying Zapf's Three Functional literary Model. A renowned Ecocritic Rueckert proclaimed "Poems are green plants among us.... help to create a self-perpetuating and evolving system" (pp.111-115). The three functions of literature that are included in Zapf's Three level Model are cultural-critical metadiscourse, imaginative counter-discourse, and reintegrative inter-discourse. By incorporating this Triadic model of literature in Iqbal's poems it critiques the hegemonic discourses. Moreover, it propounds the counter discourse by highlighting the peripheries. As a national poet of Pakistan by writing on diverse themes he underlined the dominant ideologies of his time. Rather, his poetry captures the nuances and complexities of all times.

Iqbal is the most celebrated poet of Urdu and Persian literature, besides being a great philosopher, scholar, thinker and barrister. He is the visionary and revolutionary poet who gave the plan of Pakistan, hence considered the national poet of Pakistan. His poetry has number of social, radical, spiritual and philosophical themes. His poetry illustrates implicitly or explicitly worst effects of colonization and imperialism through natural and cultural symbols. His poetry also serves as a counter discourse by demanding belonging, homeland and Identity. His pen bleeds through his poetry to instigate the Muslims. His poetry shows hope and eagerness for acquiring a separate homeland and national identity on one hand, while on the other hand, displays nostalgia for lost homeland and Muslim identity. His poetry is not only a torchlight for the Muslims of India it also stimulated them and mobilized them for achieving their identity. Although, Iqbal is the most anthologized poet of the eastern world yet, his poetry is still relatable as his poetry resonates with past, present and for future. His poetry is for every generation he himself claimed "I am the poet of tomorrow" (as cited in Jafri, 2022, p. 60). Just as Thomas Carlyle quoted "a poet is a seer" Iqbal is the top "seers of the world" who has envisioned "coming ages in a crystal-clear mirror of realities (as cited in Jafri, 2022, p.60).

Zapf has explored the idea of "literature as cultural ecology". As a growing field of studies, it analyses the relationship of human environment and culture. Zapf himself mentions in the introduction of his book that it is a new theoretical framework emerged from the field of ecocriticism and popularizing in Europe German speaking countries. Now, it is an emerging field in the English-speaking countries (Zapf, 2016, p. 3). His theory focuses on how cultural practices, traditions and beliefs interact with the environment. Zapf has propounded the idea that literature is a part of ecology as well as of culture. He has developed the idea of Triadic Model of Literature in his third part of the book and the present study focuses on this triadic model as can be utilized for looking at Iqbal's poems from a new perspective. The three-part model includes Cultural-Critical Metadiscourse, imaginative counter-discourse, and reintegrative inter-discourse. Cultural-Critical Metadiscourse underscores how the dominant ideologies are reflected in the text. Imaginative counter-discourse accentuates the opposite discourse by featuring marginalized and repressed identities. And reintegrative inter-discourse is a method of reconciling the conflicts, different ideologies, tensions and creating a balance in antagonistic elements through text.

Literature Review

Literature has always reflected the connection between Human and nature in diverse ways from the time of Man's expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Ecocriticism as a new literary trend analyses human manipulation of nature and scrutinizes how cultural production forms our perception of this relationship. Through literature, we can ponder on our duties towards the environment and the evolving human-nature dynamic. This section analyses the existing literature on Iqbal as well as on Ecocriticism.

Iqbal's poetry has attracted a voluminous amount of interpretations as a great poet of East. Such interpretations and studies have analyzed many different viewpoints. Few critics have analyzed his poems from romantic perspectives. Ramli (2011) in her article titled *Straying Imagination, Righteous Intuition": The English Romantic Movement and The Islamic Philosophy of Muhammad Iqbal (1873-1938)* asserts that very few studies are found that focuses on parallels between English romantic poets and Iqbal's early poems. Ghulam Rassol Malik book on *The English Romantics and Muhammad Iqbal* is the only work that is written on the similarities between the romantic's philosophies and Iqbal's

philosophy. Malik's book draws comparison of common themes between them notably spirituality, individual and society, concept of rebellion and aesthetics. There are abundance of references and reflections on both the philosophies, the only thing lacking is the role of imagination both the philosophies in the book (as cite in Ramli, 2011, p. 2) according to Ramli there are similarities between Iqbal and English romantic theory of nature and imagination. However, Iqbal's imagination didn't drive him towards pantheism like romantic poets rather his imagination is rooted in the love of Allah (pp.1-8).

Hamid encapsulates in his article *Nature in the Poetry of Hopkins and Iqbal: An Analysis* (2022) that both Iqbal and Hopkins as religious poets, from different time and region praised the God for creating a wonderful world. Both the poets are influenced and inspired by the nature. Iqbal was inspired by romantic poets like Coleridge and Wordsworth since childhood. He used to read their poetry and claimed in one of his diaries *Stray Reflections* entry number 36 that Wordsworth saved him from atheism (as cited in Hamid, 2022, p. 32). Both Iqbal and Hopkins presented the creative power of God by pondering over natural objects in their poetry. Hopkins poetry is replete with natural images, he is so obsessed with nature that he even perceives nature the manifestation of Christ. Both Hopkins and Iqbal are in favor of subordinating as well as protecting the natural environment for the sake of humankind (pp.30-35).

Özdemir in his article *Muhammad Iqbal and Environmental Ethics* (2017) highlights the relationship of Iqbal and the environment. The author says that today's world is facing many environmental problems which were highlighted by different critics since 1960. Many attributed this crisis to western world hence many tried to find solutions in the wisdom of the East. As this growing problem is not only affecting any particular area rather it is affecting people globally. Moreover, the environmental threat is for everyone irrespective of their religion. In this regard this study proposes that eastern societies should revive their culture and offer insightful solutions to these problems. The author mainly focuses on the ideas and concerns of Iqbal on nature and its importance for man. The author mentions various instances where Iqbal's poetry reveals that man is the part of the universe and to reach his ultimate height of humanity he must observe and preserve nature. The author mentions many instances from Iqbal's philosophy that resonates with the Holy verses of Quran and teaches the importance of natural world.

EKOLOJİSİ (2013) explores in his article titled *Ancient Greek Tragedy and the Ecology of Culture*, ancient Greek Tragedy through the theoretical perspective of "Literature as Cultural Ecology" presented by Hubert Zapf (p.1). The paper underlines functions of literature within the cultural and ecological paradigms. Zapf approach draws connections between literature, culture, and society. The author used Zapf's triadic function model which comprises of cultural-critical metadiscoursal, creative counter-discourse and reintegrative inter-discourse (p.4). The author scrutinizes ancient Greek Tragedy's encounters of cultural norms, offering different viewpoints, and resolving opposing elements in the texts. By investigating the historical and ecological relevance of Greek plays, the study challenges the notion that natural environment and culture are contrasting forces (p.2). The study proposes that nature and culture are complimentary units by considering catharsis as a practice of emotional purification and cultural critique (p.12). The author offers a thorough investigation of Ancient Greek tragedy and instigates readers to reconsider the complex levels of meaning presented in these works.

Mülazımoğlu's article *Literature as cultural ecology: a cultural ecological study on Emerson and Whitman* expresses the relationship of nature and culture in the poetry of Emerson and Whitman using the theoretical lens of Hubert Zapf. It discovers how literature reveals the interrelations among nature, culture, and society during the American Renaissance. Transcendentalism a reflection of romantic movement highlighted the connectedness of culture, human and God (p.1). Zapf's triadic model of cultural ecology is presented, highlighting the transformative part of literature within social systems (p.9). The thematic concerns of nature, solidarity, spirituality, and diversity established in the works of Emerson and Whitman highlights the impact of the Romantic movement on the American Renaissance (p.2). The article underlines the importance of nature as a source of inspiration and the critique of industrialization in their poetry by examining the cultural ecology principles of Zapf (p.3). The author examines the interconnectedness of culture and nature by analyzing Whitman's poem *The splendid Silent Sun* and Emerson's *Hamatreya* by illustrating Zapf's triadic model.

Meklash in his article "A Cultural Ecological Reading of Human-Nature Interconnectivity in Mahmoud Darwish's "The Second Olive Tree" proposes the idea of cultural ecology by rejecting the idea of biocentrism and anthropocentrism. He propounded the idea of correlation between them rather than preferring the one over the other. He uses the idea of Zapf in his paper to find interconnectedness of opposing forces of mind and matter, nature and culture etc. by critically evaluating the Darwish's poem "The Second Olive Tree". He used this theory of coexistence of nature, society and culture as a tool to revive or reinvent the cultural ideologies. As a national poet of Palestine Darwish's poetry speaks for the peripheries and Zapf's three level model aptly serves this purpose.

Iqbal is extensively anthologized poet and philosopher in the fields of literature, philosophy, Law etc. His poetry is now not only for local audiences rather for global audiences. His is renowned in world literature. His poetic works are researched from several theoretical perspectives. Different scholars have worked on different paradigms of Iqbal's poetry for instance postcolonialism, existentialism, nationalism and mysticism to name the few. Yet, there is still room for further research on his poetry. As a national poet of Pakistan his poetry is replete with national images. He is not only the poet for youth but also for children as he has composed many insightful poems for children. But the present study fills the existing gap of literature by looking into Iqbal's selective poems from Zapf cultural ecological perspective. Moreover, ecocultural theoretical framework compliments the field of ecocriticism and environmentalism as a new strand.

Material and Methods

The study tends to explore Iqbal's selective poems from the Stance of Zapf theory of cultural ecology. The study is qualitative in nature and textual analysis have been conducted as a method of analyses. The theory cultural ecology was propounded by the German critic Herbert Zapf in his book *Literature as Cultural Ecology: Sustainable Texts* (2016) borrowing the concepts from cultural studies and ecocriticism. Zapf has formulated a new approach for critically evaluating literature, ecology and culture in this book. Zapf asserts that cultural ecology talks about interaction and interconnectedness "between culture and nature, without reducing one to the other (p.3)". He rejects the idea of absolute anthropocentrism and ecocentrism and considers literary texts as a source of deconstructing cultural and environmental thoughts. Zapf is of the view that if in biology sustainability is considered being flourishing and creative "then the cultural ecosystem of literature" performs a parallel purpose "of sustainable productivity within cultural discourses" (p.4). Zapf stresses literature's concern in making the society aware

of the relationship of ecology and culture. His approach's fundamental presumption is that imaginative literature addresses the underlying relationship between culture and nature in especially complex, thoughtful, and radical methods, and it generates an "ecological" perspective of "discourse" exactly on the basis of its "semantic openness, imaginative intensity, and aesthetic complexity" (p.4) Zapf discusses diverse philosophical theories and schools for creating a basis for his theory of cultural ecology. Zapf mentions Bateson's concept of the "ecology of mind" "the considered culture and mind as dynamic processes based on the interconnectedness of mind and culture (p.78). This paradigm creates a two-fold structure of cohesion and distinction between mind and life, nature and culture, that recent cultural ecology shapes as framework (p.78).

Zapf after making a background for his theory provided a "Triadic Functional Model of Literature" that explains three interrelated functions in literary texts. These functions are culture-critical metadiscourse, an imaginative counter-discourse, and a reintegrative interdiscourse (p.96).

The first model culture-critical metadiscourse highlights or criticizes the dominant ideologies prevailing in the society through text. He gave examples from various works, for instance he mentions Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlett Letter* that satirizes the underlying puritan ideologies of American society that alienates the protagonist (p.105). Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* narrates the story where different social elements of US at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century are used as the space of culture – critical metadiscourse and the source of the existential crises, as well as the impetus for protagonist Edna to rebel. The long-term influence of the rigid and Calvinist rearing by her father is one of the features of self-speculation; the impersonal regulations of novel stock market finances are governing the isolated life of her husband Léonce Pontellier; the restricted and self-sufficient code of agreements of Creole society in which Edna does not fit; and the preventive social rules that control her actions.

The gender function of the Victorian age—all these factors play their part in building up a sense of prison being the first thing that the protagonist feels in the story (105). The Imaginative counter-discourse can be considered as a reaction towards the culture-critical metadiscourse putting importance on the underprivileged community of the society, that are the outsiders of the society in order to criticize them. This imaginative counter-discourse in texts is frequently correlated with the visuals of "nature, the body, the unconscious, dreams, flux, change, contact, openness, vision, magic, multiformity, and biophilic vigor" (p.109). In Kate Chopin's book *The Awakening*, Edna's inner withdrawal from social norms is stressed by use of music and art she describes the sea or the "wild" nature, bringing back the unity of culture and ecology as a source of emancipation (p.112). The last model the reintegrative interdiscursive allows for the reorganization and reformulation of the previously established discourses and possibly, to introduce the change to the text or to the reader. Zapf in his argument insists that literature plays an essential ecological role, as it gives an insight into the connection between civilization and nature. According to her, literature transcends the postcolonial concept of culture and knowledge.

Results and Discussion

The study focuses on the Zapf's Triadic Functional Model of Literature as presented in Iqbal's selected poems. The four selected poems are *The Bird's Complaint*, *Sympathy*, *The Painful Wail* and *A Mountain and a Squirrel*. This model is based on cultural-critical metadiscourse, imaginative counter-discourse, and reintegrative inter-discourse.

Zapf talks about the interconnectedness of literary theory, culture and nature. According to him literature, culture and nature are related to one and other as culture evolves itself in accordance with nature. It relates to the ecological foundation of “the living interconnectedness of all life and reality” (p. 89). And at the same time another important factor in ecological paradigm is the acknowledgement of the “difference and diversity” of the numerous methods of “knowledge that have evolved in cultural history” p.(89). Literature provides cultural knowledge that has developed with the evolution of culture as “fictional” and “discursive” and the imaginative texts reflect those essential magnitudes of humanity within culture and environmental relationship (p. 89). Zapf proclaimed that “literature can itself be described as the symbolic medium of a particularly powerful form of cultural ecology (p.89). He further claimed about the nature and culture relationship “literature acts like an ecological force within the larger system of cultural discourses” (p.90). Zapf is of the view that since romantic period literature has developed a power to voice the marginalized figures in the dominant ideologies for instance the world was dominated by anthropocentrism and non-human life was rejected or not represented. As literature is a cultural medium and culture and nature are interconnected, hence literature is a part of ecology. After prosing his literary theory as a cultural ecology Zapf has given his three-level model of literature that includes cultural-critical metadiscourse, imaginative counter-discourse, and reintegrative inter-discourse. These levels are used to analyze the poems of Iqbal.

Literature as cultural-critical metadiscourse in Iqbal's selected poems

Iqbal's first poem that is analyzed using this model is *The Bird's Complaint*. Primarily the poem is about sad caged bird who is displaced from his homeland and yearns for returning his home. But, on a deeper side, the bird signifies the Muslims of India at the time of Iqbal. He says:

I am constantly reminded of the bygone times

Those garden's springs, those chorus of chimes

Gone are the freedoms of our own nests

Where we could come and go at our own pleasure (Iqbal, p. 22).

According to Zapf first Triadic Functional Model of Literature which is culture-critical metadiscourse the poem highlights the underlying themes of oppression, domination, slavery and violation of human as well as animal rights. The bird on the literal level and Muslims on the symbolic level are stripped of their individual and national identity. Being nostalgic the bird creates a vivid imagery of his lovely home as a garden like the garden of Eden. The memories of his bygone days with his friends and family are source of pleasure for him in the dejected time of exile. Zapf argued that in this level of a culture-critical metadiscourse, literature reacts “to hegemonic discursive regimes” by revealing “traumatizing effects of dominant civilizational reality-systems” that imposed and strengthened by those “discursive regimes” (Iqbal, p.104). According to this level the poem highlights the dominance of colonial powers of Britain on India. Iqbal's poem as a part of the literature is serving as ecological force for highlighting the oppression of human as well as of a bird who is the part of the culture. The caged bird can be interpreted as an ecological and cultural symbol that implies the peripheral entities of nature and colonized subjects. In another poem *Sympathy*, Iqbal presents a dialogue or conversation between nightingale and glow-worm. Through, the conversation of these two animals Iqbal implicitly explains the hidden ideology of

inequality and class system prevailing in his society. The nightingale is dreary after day's work because she is unable to find a way in darkness but the little insect glowworm offers to help her. Though on the surface level it only gives the message of sympathy and help yet if one reads carefully it highlights the classes of bourgeoisie and proletariat in Iqbal's time so, this poem also becomes an object of culture-critical metadiscourse.

Another famous poem of *A Mountain and a Squirrel* also sheds light on the unequal binary relationship of the have and have-nots. The mountain is shown as proud on his mighty stature and undermines the entity of the little squirrel. He says to the poor squirrel:

"Commit suicide if you have self-respect"

You are insignificant, still so arrogant, how strange! (p. 16).

The mountain here represents the dominance or hegemonic discourse that represses the poor or helpless people. Here, the poet uses ecological symbols of mountain and squirrel to underline the role of the imaginative text as cultural and ecological. This poem also denotes the unfair power relations that functions as culture critical metadiscourse. Iqbal's another poem "*The Painful Wail*" employs natural imagery and symbols to convey the tussle between harmony and order. It highlights the conflicts among Muslim groups and individual which will bring their downfall. Iqbal says that he is in deep grief over the separation of Muslims. He uses the symbol of "garden" to signify unity and harmony among the people but symbolizes brotherhood with "breeze" in the garden. He is concerned that there will be no breeze in the garden anymore, which signify enmity among Muslims.

Literature as imaginative counter-discourse in Iqbal's selected poems

Culture critical metadiscourse emphasized the oppression, marginalization, dysfunctional relationships in the text yet on the other hand the text also produces response to these aspects and formulate a counter-discourse. Zapf is of the view that this counter-discourse forefront and "semiotically empowers the culturally excluded and marginalized as a source of imaginative energy" (p.108). It counters the oppression, repression and destruction, imprisonment, crises in an "alternative world" that is the world of the literature as is evident from Iqbal's selected poems.

In Iqbal's first selected poem *The Bird's Complaint*, the title itself is reflective of counter-discourse as he is complaining of his pathetic situation. This bird who is the marginal representation of nature in the anthropocentric world is complaining about his deprived rights of freedom. As an ecological symbol, he is in chains and considered insignificant in the cosmos centered by human. On the other hand, the bird as the cultural symbol of colonized Muslim of the subcontinent is complaining and addressing the maltreatment of the imperial powers. He first addresses the listener to realize his pain than he addresses his tyrant oppressor to free him. He implies: "O the one who confined me make me free/ A silent prisoner I am, earn my blessings free" (p.22). The second selected poem *Sympathy* presents the idea of equality by challenging the concept of high status and low status. In the poem, though the glow worm is a little being, yet he tries to help the nightingale which shows that the poor or low status people are as important for society as the rich or high-status people. Though, nightingale and glow worm are animals yet they are from different species of animals as nightingale is a bird while glow-worm is an insect But they both are significant and have their own place in the ecology, in the similar manner rich or poor both are important for the progress of the society. There are

no inherent hierarchies between them. As the glow-worm says: "With my heart and soul ready to help I am/Though only an insignificant insect I am" (p.16). As The third selected poem *A Mountain and a Squirrel* also embodies counter-discourse as it records the response of the squirrel against the humiliation of the mountain, she asserts in these lines: "Hold your tongue!/These are immature thoughts; expel them from your heart!/I do not care if I am not large like you!" (p.16). Squirrel though small is bravely encountering the grand mountain. She rejects the idea of large or small and says all are made by God and are equally important. Iqbal in this poem is using natural objects as animated characters that reflect his wisdom and intellect through the natural imagery. This natural imagery is replete with hidden meanings as discourse and counter-discourse. The mountain and squirrel represent the binaries and hierarchies made by men among their kind as well as among humans and nature. Through the image of squirrel Iqbal challenges the hierarchy of rich and poor. In the poem, *The Painful Wail* Iqbal encounter disunity and separation among Muslims by using the natural symbol of "Ganges "he purifies or cleanse himself and his nation from disunity and discomfort. After taking bath in Ganges one becomes pure, so this river in Hindu mythology signifies transformative power. Iqbal is using this imagery of river ganga to transform his grief and restlessness into comfort.

Literature Reintegrative inter-discourse in Iqbal's poems

This model seeks to reconcile and regenerate the opposing forces like mind and body, nature and culture, personal and private self. The alternative world of fictional text proposes answers to these antagonistic forces by its transformative power. As Zapf says it "contributes to the constant renewal of the cultural center from its margins" (p.114). He further says that in this model the conflicting ideas or discourses are brought together "even if it results in failure and catastrophe on the plot level, often appears as a moment of regeneration" (p.114). Although, at the end of the poem *The bird's complaint*, the bird was not released yet by revolting against the cruelty of his tyrant, he gave message of revolution to the margins. So, that the margins and center come into terms with each other. The bird directly addresses the reader "O listener" to make them realize his pain. The overall poem is a call for a harmonious society and culture where there is no slavery, injustice, violence, imprisonment and sadness and that can only be achieved by creating a balance between environment and culture. The poem *sympathy* as an object of reintegrative inter-discourses overall, gives the message of interrelation of different classes of society on one side, and on the other side the co-existence of natural elements. The poem ends on the positive note of adding value to others as Iqbal says: "good in the world only those are/Ready to be useful to others who are?" (Iqbal 19). The poem *A Mountain and a Squirrel* is a perfect example of breaking prevailing hierarchies by interrelating small and large things as equally crucial part of culture and ecology as Iqbal concludes the poem as "Nothing is useless in this world/Nothing is bad in God's creation" (Iqbal 16). The title of the poem *The painful wail* is self-explanatory as it is the lamentation of the poet on the chaotic situation of the society. At the end of the poem he uses the symbol of "fire" and garden side by side that the fire has burnt the garden. He is saying with the sigh of exclamation "Alas" that the fire has burnt their garden and he is pouring his heart out as a response to awaken the ignorant Muslims. In this poem Iqbal has used opposing words to make his stance of unity verses disunity among Muslims. He uses natural words like grain and barn, speech and silence, fire and garden, waves and shore to highlight the theme of loss of unity and brotherhood in society so, in this way one can assume that ecology and culture are correlated.

Conclusion

The present study answers the question of cultural ecology into the Iqbal's four selected poems. The study proposes the connection between the two binary oppositions of culture and ecology through analyzing four diverse poems of Iqbal from the theory of Zapf. These poems reveal Iqbal's frequent use of natural or environmental symbols, themes and imagery to underline the ideologies and hierarchies prevalent in the culture. Zapf's three function model of literature through an emerging trend in ecocriticism serves analyzing Iqbal's poems in a different way. Iqbal's poetry as an imaginative literature creates harmony in an alternative world to give a model for real world. Iqbal's poems through Zapf's model serve as an empowering discourse to the marginal figures.

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