

Embodied Landscapes and Existential Echoes: An Ecofeminist Exploration of Gulnaz Kosar's Poetry Collection, Maya

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Abstract

This article presents an ecofeminist exploration of Gulnaz Kosar's Urdu poetry collection, Maya, through the intersecting lenses of ecocriticism and existentialist feminism. Unpacking the embodied experiences of women in relation to the natural world, Kosar's poetry reveals the interconnectedness of ecological degradation, social injustice, and feminist struggles. This study examines how Maya articulates an existentialist ecofeminist perspective, reconfiguring traditional notions of nature, culture, and identity. The analysis highlights Kosar's unique poetic style and its implications for feminist environmentalism, social justice, and Urdu literature.

Key Words: Gulnaz Kosar, Urdu poetry, Ecofeminism, Ecocriticism, Existentialist feminism, Environmental humanities, Feminist literature, Intersectionality, South Asian studies.

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Introduction:

Feminism has extensively expanded its scope into various disciplines, and its critical relevance has become increasingly evident. This expansion has led to intersections with other disciplines, including race, gender, ethnicity, and ecology, giving rise to ecofeminism. Ecofeminism explores the parallel relationships between women and nature, highlighting how human actions have devastated the planet and similarly oppressed women.

This theoretical framework posits that women's experiences are intricately linked to the natural world, and the exploitation of nature mirrors the subjugation of women. Currently, ecofeminist approaches to literature are gaining traction.

“The notion that women's and environmental domination are linked has been developed in a number of ways. A perspective in which women are accredited with closer links with nature was celebrated in early ecofeminist writings, by, for example, Carolyn Merchant in the United States and Val Plumwood in Australia. These advocated ‘the feminine principle’ as an antidote to environmental destruction, through attributes, which nurture nature. This ‘essentialist’ perspective, often adopting an ideal of woman as earth mother/goddess, has, however, also discredited ecofeminism and led to disaffection among some early protagonists (see, for example, Janet Biehl). In addition to being critiqued for its essentialism, this view of ecofeminism has also been charged with elitism through its provenance in a white, middle-class, Western, milieu. However, Vandana Shiva's consistent and persuasive ‘majority world’ voice has been a counterpoint to this, and arguably, gender and environment have been articulated together more powerfully, and been more influential, in majority world settings (see, for example, Wangari Maathai in Kenya), although how this has been done has been questioned by writers such as Cecile Jackson and Melissa Leach.” (Buckingham 2015)

Shiva in *Staying Alive- Woman, Ecology and survival in the India* relates the ecofeminist theory with the focus on the political and social conditions of India and critiques with postcolonial critical lens. Development as a new project of Western patriarchy was supposed to be a post-colonial project, a choice for accepting a model of progress in which the entire world remade itself on the model of the colonizing modern West, without having to undergo the subjugation and exploitation that colonialism entailed.

The assumption was that Western-style progress was possible for all. Development, as the improved well-being of all, was thus equated with the Westernization of economic categories - of needs, of productivity, of growth. Concepts and categories about economic development and natural resource utilization that had emerged in the specific context of industrialization and capitalist growth in a center of colonial power were raised to the level of universal assumptions and applicability.

However, this ignored the entirely different context of basic needs satisfaction for the people of the newly independent Third World countries. As Rosa Luxemburg pointed out, early industrial development in Western Europe necessitated the permanent occupation of colonies by colonial powers and the destruction of the local "natural economy."

According to Luxemburg, colonialism is a constant necessary condition for capitalist growth; without colonies, capital accumulation would grind to a halt. "Development" as capital accumulation and the commercialization of the economy for the generation of "surplus" and

profits thus involved the reproduction not merely of a particular form of creation of wealth but also of the associated creation of poverty and dispossession.

A replication of economic development based on commercialization of resource use for commodity production in the newly independent countries created internal colonies. Development was thus reduced to a continuation of the process of colonization; it became an extension of the project of wealth creation in modern Western patriarchy's economic vision.

This economic vision was based on the exploitation or exclusion of women (of the West and non-West), on the exploitation and degradation of nature, and on the exploitation and erosion of other cultures. As a result, "development" could not but entail destruction for women, nature, and subjugated cultures.

Throughout the Third World, women, peasants, and tribals are struggling for liberation from "development" just as they earlier struggled for liberation from colonization. This struggle reflects the need for alternative forms of development that prioritize local needs, environmental sustainability, and social justice. (Shiva 1988)

Ecofeminism in the South Asian context, particularly in the Indo-Pak region, presents distinct nuances due to the region's unique cultural, historical, and environmental factors. Here are key aspects that differentiate ecofeminism in this context:

Distinctive features of ecofeminism in the Indo-Pak context:

1. Intersection with colonialism and post-colonialism: Ecofeminism in South Asia critiques the legacy of colonialism, which exploited natural resources and marginalized indigenous communities.
2. Intertwining of Hinduism and Islam with environmentalism: Religious beliefs and practices influence environmental perceptions and actions.
3. Agricultural and rural contexts: Ecofeminism focuses on rural women's struggles, livelihoods, and relationships with land and natural resources.
4. Water politics and scarcity: The Indo-Pak region's water disputes and scarcity shape ecofeminist discourse.
5. Impact of climate change on vulnerable communities: Ecofeminism highlights the disproportionate effects of climate change on women, especially in rural and marginalized areas.
6. Cultural narratives and mythologies: Ecofeminist perspectives draw upon local myths, folklore, and cultural narratives to reconnect humans with nature.
7. Resistance to neoliberal globalization: Ecofeminism challenges the exploitation of natural resources and displacement of communities by corporate interests.
8. Focus on sustainable livelihoods and traditional knowledge: Ecofeminism promotes indigenous practices, sustainable agriculture, and women's roles in preserving biodiversity.

‘Maya’- an existentialist ecofeminist perspective:

Gulnaz Kosar's poetry profoundly explores various feminist backgrounds and thoughts, articulating existentialist feminism and ecofeminism among other perspectives. Her unique life experiences, literary and translation exposure, having lived in Pakistan and abroad, bring a distinct diasporic voice to her work. Unlike traditional Urdu literature, Kosar's poetry avoids common themes of love and longing, instead embracing philosophical and cultural diversity.

Her imagery, symbolism, and expressions are uniquely crafted, setting her apart in Urdu feminist poetry. This study examines ecofeminist and intersectional feminist features in Kosar's work, delving into specific aspects of her poetry.

Gulnaz Kosar, a distinguished Urdu woman poet, translator, and innovative literary voice, has made significant contributions to contemporary Urdu literature. Her latest poetry collection, *Maya* (Kosar 2024) embodies a nuanced exploration of the interconnectedness of human and non-human experiences, inviting a critical examination through the lenses of ecocriticism and existentialist feminism. Through *Maya*, Kosar masterfully weaves together intricate themes that not only reflect her profound understanding of feminist and environmental discourse but also showcase her unique poetic style.

Kosar's poetry navigates the intersections of ecological degradation, social injustice, and feminist struggles, illuminating the embodied experiences of women in relation to the natural world. This article seeks to explore how *Maya* articulates an existentialist ecofeminist perspective, where the personal and planetary converge. By analyzing Kosar's work through the dual frameworks of ecocriticism and existentialist feminism, this study aims to unpack the ways in which Kosar's poetry reconfigures traditional notions of nature, culture, and identity. It will help examine the existentialist undertones that underscore Kosar's ecofeminist vision. By investigating the implications of Kosar's poetry for feminist environmentalism and social justice this study contends that Kosar's *Maya* offers a powerful ecofeminist narrative that challenges dominant discourses and invites readers to reimagine the interconnectedness of human and non-human worlds.

Here we analyze one of her poems from *Maya* to incorporate her poetic approach with ecofeminist and existentialist feminism:

”کھیل کھیل میں“

یہ جو اجلی دھوپ پہن کر گھوم رہے ہو، کب کھلنا تھی

لیکن ہم نے رات کی کالی مٹی گوندھی،

منتر پھونکا، آگ جلانی

ہنستے کھیلنے سورج کی اک شکل بنانی

بڑے جتن سے چرخہ جوڑا
کرنیں کاتیں،
جھلمل روشن دن کی یہ پوشاک بنائی
اور جو ہنسی کی جھاگ اڑائے پھرتے ہو ممکن ہی کب تھی
لیکن ہم نے۔۔ سات جنم تک
جھرنوں، بارش، جھیل، سمندر،
بادل، بجلی اور گھٹاؤں کے قدموں میں کچھ پھول بچھائے
درد کی شاخ سے ٹوٹا گریہ
بہتے وقت کی خاک پہ دھر کے
دنیا کی اس آخری حد سے دور اڑایا
ٹم ٹم کرتے تاروں کی آنکھوں میں کچھ حیرانی بھر دی
اڑتے ہوئے پنچھی کو پریم کا گیت سکھایا
تھکے تھکے لمحوں کی خاطر نیند بنائی،
ریشم سنیچ کے خواب اگایا،
ایک تمہارا جی بہلانے کی چاہت میں
دیکھو، ہم نے

(Kosar 2024, 62-63) کیسا کیسا کھیل جمایا

Ecofeminist Perspectives:

1. Interconnectedness: The poem highlights the connection between human experiences and nature, emphasizing the interconnectedness of all living beings (جڑواں [jirwaan], or entwined).
2. Embodying the Land: The speaker's actions (مٹی گوندھنا [mitti gondhna], or mixing soil, and منتر پھونکا [mantra phoonka], or chanting mantras) symbolize the embodied experiences of women.
3. Cycles of Life: The poem explores cycles of growth, decay, and renewal, echoing ecofeminist concerns with sustainability (خاک [khak], or dust/sand, and پھول [phool], or flowers).

Existentialist Undertones:

1. Creation and Transformation: The speaker's actions suggest a desire to shape reality, reflecting existentialist concerns with freedom and self-creation (کھیل کھیل میں [khail khail mein], or in play).
2. Emotional Journey: The poem explores the speaker's emotional landscape, underscoring existentialist themes of individual experience and subjective truth (درد کی شاخ [dard ki shakh], or branch of pain).
3. Love and Connection: The speaker's desire to delight the beloved (تمہارا جی بہلانے کی چاہت [tamhara ji behlane ki chahat]) highlights existentialist concerns with interpersonal connections.

Intersectional Feminism:

1. Gendered Experiences: The speaker's actions and emotions reflect gendered dimensions of existence, highlighting women's unique struggles (رات کی کالی مٹی [rat ki kali mitti], or black soil of night).
2. Cultural Context: The poem's imagery and symbolism draw upon cultural norms and expectations (جھرنوں [jhrnon], or streams, and بادل [badal], or clouds).

Close Reading:

Stanza 1:

کھیل کھیل میں یہ جو اجلی دھوپ پہن کر گھوم رہے ہو"

[khail khail mein yeh jo ajli dhup pehn kar ghoom rahe ho]"

(In play, you roam under the brightening sun)

- The poem begins with an invitation to explore the speaker's inner world.

Stanza 2:

کب کھلنا تھی لیکن ہم نے رات کی کالی مٹی گوندھی"

[kab khilna thi lekin hum ne rat ki kali mitti gondhi]"

(When were you to blossom, but we mixed the black soil of night)

- The speaker reflects on the process of creation, transformation, and growth.

Stanza 3:

سات جنم تک جھرنوں، بارش، جھیل، سمندر، بادل، بجلی اور گھٹاؤں کے قدموں میں کچھ پھول بچھائے"

[sat janam tak jhrnon, barish, jheel, samandar, badal, bijli aur ghataon ke qadmon mein kuch
phool bachhay]"

(For seven lifetimes, we spread flowers in the footsteps of streams, rain, lakes, oceans, clouds, lightning, and fog)

- The speaker emphasizes the interconnectedness of human and natural worlds.

Imagery and Symbolism:



1. Sun (اجلی دھوپ [ajli dhup]): Symbolizes life, energy, and transformation.
2. Soil (مٹی [mitti]): Represents the earthy, natural world.
3. Flowers (پھول [phool]): Embody growth, beauty, and resilience.

Poetic Devices:

1. Metaphor: Comparing life to a game (کھیل کھیل میں [khail khail mein]).
2. Personification: Attributing human qualities to nature (e.g., "دھوپ پہن کر گھوم رہے ہو" [dhup pehn kar ghoom rahe ho]).
3. Repetition: Emphasizing key themes and ideas.

The poem "Khail Khail Mein" by Gulnaz Kosar resonates profoundly with the themes explored in this article, particularly the intersections of ecofeminism, existentialism, and intersectional feminism. The poem's emphasis on interconnectedness, cycles of life, and embodied experiences echoes the ecofeminist concerns discussed earlier. Moreover, the speaker's emotional journey and desire for love and connection underscore the existentialist themes of individual experience and subjective truth. The poem's use of natural imagery and symbolism, such as soil, flowers, and water, reinforces the ecofeminist perspective on the interconnectedness of human and non-human worlds.

The analysis of "Khail Khail Mein" demonstrates how Gulnaz Kosar's poetry embodies the complex intersections of ecofeminism, existentialism, and intersectional feminism. By exploring the poem's themes and imagery, we see how Kosar's work contributes to a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of human experiences and the natural world. This article has shown that Kosar's poetry collection, *Maya*, offers a unique lens through which to examine the ecofeminist and existentialist concerns relevant to the Indo-Pak region. Ultimately, this analysis highlights the significance of Kosar's poetry in illuminating the intricate web of relationships between humans, nature, and culture, underscoring the imperative for a more inclusive and sustainable worldview.

Conclusion

This article has explored the intersections of ecofeminism, existentialism, and intersectional feminism in Gulnaz Kosar's Urdu poetry collection, *Maya*. Through a close reading of "Khail Khail Mein," we have perceived how Kosar's poetry embodies the complex relationships between human experiences, nature, and culture. The analysis validates the relevance of ecofeminist and existentialist perspectives in understanding the Indo-Pak region's unique cultural, historical, and environmental context. Kosar's poetry offers a powerful voice for reimagining a more sustainable and inclusive future, underscoring the imperative for interdisciplinary approaches to literary analysis and environmental thought.

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