

## An Eco-Critical Study of Selected Poems from *Green Book* by Indian Poet Gulzar

*Shreya Garg*

BA English (Hons.) – II  
St. Xavier's College, Jaipur  
gargshreya1202@gmail.com

### Abstract

The term 'Eco Poetry' was popularised by J. Scott Bryson in his books 'Eco Poetry: A Critical Introduction' (2002) and 'The West Side of Any Mountain: Place, Space, and Eco Poetry' (2005). With an eco-centric perspective, eco-poetry portrays the interconnectedness of human beings and nature, and in the process, it often delineates dwelling in a particular geographical region, presenting it as a utopia. Similarly, Greg Garrard, a renowned scholar of environmental humanities, states that "Dwelling' is not a transient state; rather, it implies the long-term imbrication of humans in a landscape of memory, ancestry, and death, of ritual, life, and work." 'Green Poems' (2014), by eminent contemporary Hindi poet, director and lyricist Sampooran Singh Kalra, better known as Gulzar, and translated into English by Pavan K. Varma, is a peerless eco-poetic voice. This collection unveils the poet's apprehensions about the future of this planet, and his thesis that nature is neither silent nor dead. The poet hears the whispers of the river in "The River," "The Aged River-1", "The Aged River-2", and "The Story of a River". He follows the trees' memorialisation and speculation in "The Forest." The proposed paper attempts to study selected poems from the aforementioned collection within an eco-critical framework, along with examining the relationship between the environment and the chosen poems. There are few voices in modern Indian English poetry or translations of Indian regional poems that convey the fear of environmental apocalypse as effectively as Gulzar.

**Keywords:** Environment, eco-poetry, nature, technology.

### Introduction

Acknowledging Gulzar's contribution to the realm of modern poetry, this research paper delves into his poignant poems. By exploring their themes, analysing the linguistic choices, and interpreting their deeper meanings, we aim to unravel the poetic techniques employed by the poet to evoke a sense of mystique and introspection. By examining the interplay between nature, human experience, and metaphysical realms, we aim to unravel the complexities of these poems and delve into their profound philosophical implications.

The present research paper examines five selected poems from Gulzar's 'Green Poems', a collection of fifty-nine poems on nature, that were originally written in Hindustani and later translated into English by Pavan K. Varma. The collection was published in 2014 as a dedication to Her Majesty the Queen Mother of Bhutan, Ashi Sangay Choden Wangchuk. Gulzar presents nature in these lyrical poems as a self-speaking topic, paying attentive homage

to the numerous facets of nature in all its multifaceted manifestations. According to Pavan K. Varma, when Gulzar writes about nature, he gives it a unique personality. True to Varma's assertion, Gulzar writes through it rather than about it, letting nature speak for itself. The poet participates in this process as an observer in its joys and travails. Additionally, according to Pavan K. Varma, for Gulzar, a river, cloud, mountain, tree, leaf, the sky, and the universe beyond, are not merely objects of observation, to be idealised or glorified; rather, these are living, animate beings with a soul, a purpose, and a will that is distinct from that of the observer. He is therefore in a conversation with them, combining humour, pathos and the transcendent spirit of nature. He also combines irony and beauty, thus fulfilling the basic definition of ecocriticism.

Since the beginning of a new century, often heralded as “the century of the environment,” a coherent and broad movement embracing literary-environmental interconnections, commonly termed “ecocriticism,” has been emerging. Environmental and population pressures inevitably and increasingly support the position that any literary criticism which purports to deal with social and physical reality will encompass ecological considerations.

Arne Naess and Vandana Shiva are well-known environmentalists from Western and Eastern cultures who advocate for the inherent value of all species and natural resources in the developing area of ecocriticism. The green poetry of Gulzar provides a poetic counterpart to the eco-critical tenets of Shiva's "earth democracy" and Naess' "deep ecology."

Many poets have written poetry about nature, but most of them seek to idealise and exalt it, unlike Gulzar, who uses metaphor to let nature speak for itself rather than only speaking about it. The following poems by Gulzar are taken from the collection: *The River*, *The Aged River-1*, *The Aged River-2*, *The Story of a River*, and *The Forest* – these will be examined through the prism of eco-critical ideas.

These poems portray "nature" as the self-articulating subject, which distinguishes them from other nature poetry in which nature is reduced to merely an object of observation. By presenting "Nature" as such, Gulzar encourages readers to reconsider how nature and humans interact, by instilling in them an ethical and ecological conscience through his poetry.

### **An Eco-Critical Survey of Gulzar's poetry**

There are few voices in modern Indian English poetry or translations of Indian regional poems that convey the fear of environmental apocalypse as effectively as Gulzar. His Eco Poetry tries to challenge human ascendancy on nature by developing environmental ethics and denouncing the existing discourse of anthropocentrism, by establishing this type of counter-narrative which presents the voice of nature.

In several of his writings, the setting is a jungle, and animals are the people, giving Gulzar's writing a touch of the natural world. The focus of his poetry switches from Man to Nature, with Nature acting as an observer of humankind and commenting on it. He differs from most poets in the way he allows nature to participate as the subject matter as well as an object of observation by a man. In the very initial phrases of "Green Poems," where he writes, “Some dry leaves dropped from the tree. The season was changing. But the rustle of the leaves had something more to say. I heard them. What they said was profound, to save the globe from rotting,” his concern for the environment and his attempt on being an eco-critic can be seen.

“When I pass through tree the forest it seems my ancestors are around me  
I feel I am a newborn baby  
And these tribes of trees  
Are rocking me in their arms” (Gulzar. *Green Poems*. Penguin UK, 2014.)

The setting in the poem "The Forest" is a woodland that Gulzar has revisited. The poet proclaims that he was once the forest's child who, when yet unable to walk, crawled and slithered through the trees while keeping his metaphorical roots firmly planted. The poet is sobbing while sitting under a banyan or a *bargad* tree, reflecting on how much he misses the time they spent together and illustrating how far humanity has come from our ancestors, who once held nature in such high regard.

Here, the banyan tree is alluded to be the poet's ancient ancestor, who is happy to once more have a grown man in his lap. The man notices the flower shaking and diffusing scent as well. The personified forest yells out that since you began walking, the significance of the location you most enjoyed has diminished. The man is compared by the woodlands to a solid rock mountain that has no feelings or emotions. We will eventually return to the earth from which we came, which is a universal fact that the poem finishes with.

These humanised inanimate items highlight how crucial peaceful cohabitation and life are, showing the precariousness of nature-human interaction, the resulting ecological inequality, and the disappearance of important cultural practices. The irony that people are alone even in a crowd while every element in nature remains in harmony is articulated by Gulzar in the mountain. The loneliness in the crowd shows that, although being a component of the larger ecosystem, humans don't engage with nature and have cut themselves off from it.

“In winter, when the fog settles all over his face  
And the wind flutters by wiping his countenance clean  
He wants, just once, to soar along with the breeze  
And simply vanish from the forest.” (*The River* 2014)

The aesthetic appeal further enhances "The River". The poem opens with a personification of the murmuring river. By giving the river a heart, Gulzar gives it life, and the line "Some small desires still alive in his heart" (3) supports this claim. These words from Gulzar have an elevated artistic strain. Words such as 'fog,' 'flutters,' 'breeze' and 'forest' of the second stanza spur the aesthetic resonance.

The poet keeps using his limitless imagination to conjure up amazing landscapes that have both a naturalistic and artistic appeal. He recreates the breath-taking scenery of a train crossing a body of water.

“Sometimes, when a train passes over the bridge  
The flowing river stops momentarily  
With one wish  
May be to see once again that girl's face  
Who had offered flowers and tulsī to him  
For the good husband to find.” (Gulzar. *Green Poems*. Penguin UK, 2014.)

This stanza supports Gulzar's status as a romantic poet. His imagery illustrates the influence of nature. He claims that occasionally, the train that crosses the bridge stops briefly to get a glimpse of the girl who is giving him flowers and *tulsi*. Through the river, the train passenger delivers a message to her boyfriend. Rivers are shown by Gulzar as intimidating the girl and her boyfriend. This demonstrates the poet's capacity for creativity. His imaginary notion elicits an aesthetic response and enhances the poem's setting. When he says that the river takes a picture of the girl and sends it to her partner who is gone, it is clear how imaginative he is. In his narrative poem *The Story of a River*, Gulzar introduces the protagonist as a river telling its own tale and asking a poet about a dilemma. The aim of its investigation, as is clear in the second line, is to have a period of calm or repose, which is ironically juxtaposed with a poem laying idle after being read, because the river becomes exhausted due to the constant human activity:

“Can it not be  
That someday nothing happens  
Nothing at all  
And I put my back to my bed  
And remain motionless for one evening  
Just still  
Like a poem lies inert after being read  
Unmoving, at rest?” (Gulzar. *Green Poems*. Penguin UK, 2014.)

The poem describes the river as an infant beginning to walk while allowing the bank to support its "arms." Gulzar purposefully utilises the image of a baby to highlight the anthropocentric perspective of mankind, an attitude that views humans as primary and nature as secondary. To convey the river's impression of floating, Gulzar shows the river as a “self”. He shows graphic examples of how people treat rivers with the utmost disrespect:

“Every day my two banks hold me by my arms  
And make me walk a given path;  
And, every day, on my back, I carry  
Boats full of people to the other side.” (Gulzar. *Green Poems*. Penguin UK, 2014.)

Gulzar suggests respecting not only other living things but also natural environments, like rivers and wetlands. He paints a picture of teenagers who keep and update a journal, chronicling daily events:

“Every day, like adolescent children,  
The waves write something on my chest.”

The title of Gulzar's collection is “Green Poems.” According to Jacob Olesen, "green" often denotes "both a riveting and relaxing effect" in literature, and signifies feelings of rejuvenation. On the other hand, it is also connected to fatigue and guilt. According to him, "green is used to

represent nature, harmony, freshness, fertility, as well as ambition, greed, and jealousy" in poetry. The conflicting connotations of the colour "green" are incorporated in Gulzar's green poems. On the one hand, he uses the word "green" to convey how rich nature is, and on the other, he uses it to represent how men's ambition and greed cause nature to be destroyed and lose its value. These green-related metaphorical meanings are deeply ingrained in Gulzar's poetry, which is why they are referred to as "Green Poems."

### **Conclusion**

Environmentalists are conventionally seen as the defenders of nature. However, nature protection and conservation are not just the responsibility of environmentalists. Everyone has a responsibility to work towards redefining nature's value.

Many artists emphasise the value of nature and the interaction between man and nature in their artistic creations. The creation of artistic works can undoubtedly aid in the development of an ethical, eco-centric consciousness, even though they cannot inherently assist environmental conservation and protection. People may be intrigued to realise the effects of human activity on nature by reading a literary work like a poem. For romantic poets like Wordsworth, Keats, and Shelley, nature poetry has served as a celebration or source of joy as an antidote to the busy pace of city life. Gulzar has continued this tradition in the present day.

Human society depends on nature to such an extent that if it is destroyed, in the name of technological advancements or other profit pursuits, human beings will suffer and perish. Today, protecting nature and conserving natural resources has inevitably grown into a worldwide issue that needs to be addressed with a more positive perspective on the natural world. Gulzar's poetry on the environment helps readers to understand the value of using more proactive and effective methods to preserve and conserve natural resources.

To Gulzar, nature is a self-speaking animate subject and a poetic persona who, instead of being observed, is an observer of the human world and their countless careless mistakes. Gulzar's extensive use of personification in his green poems displays his eco-poetic consciousness, and provides an extraordinary, unusual perspective on nature to aid in the conservation and preservation of the current deteriorating condition of our planet.

Gulzar's poetry addresses many ways to treat nature and illustrates environmental problems around eco-criticism. These poems are considered environmental literature as nature is their primary inspiration, where environmental issues are addressed through literary elements such as metaphor, personification, imagery, etc. That several of the poems discuss nature as an observer of man demonstrates how Ecocriticism's primary goal, to shift focus from man to environment, is achieved. Poets like Gulzar are needed today, who view global warming as a major environmental issue and want their readers' aids in saving our lovely planet.

In his "Green Poems" (2014), Gulzar depicts nature as a self-articulating subject to promote ecological awareness for sustainability, at a time when people carelessly destroy nature in the name of modernisation, due to avarice. By fostering a sense of interdependence between people and the natural world, and putting a focus on bio-centric ethics, the poet produces eco-poetic consciousness. Applying the pertinent eco-critical principles of Arne Naess' "Deep Ecology" and Vandana Shiva's "Earth Democracy," this research paper aimed to support Gulzar's representation of nature in the chosen poems to subtly underscore the effects of anthropocentrism and to show his deep ecological thoughts.

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