

Thirst and Resistance: Water Scarcity and Survival in the Marginalised Urban Spaces in Imtiaz Dharker’s “Blessing”

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Abstract

Water crisis is one of the clamant ubiquitous issues in the contemporary modish society. Climate fluctuations, Population Explosion and exorbitant elicitation of resources are resulting in paltry ingress to unsullied water for mere endurance like drinking and agricultural utilization. Water crisis thrives when the postulate for water outstrips the recurring water supply. At a mean, if the accessibility of water plummets subordinate to 1000 m³ per person, it is cognized that the peculiar territory is in water scarcity. Dwelling in unceremonious underpinnings like favela, the underprivileged downtown people were bereaved of salubrity and affordable water resources. Literature, being a compelling cannon limns the social and political reverberations of water scarcity. It flaunts the dereliction of governmental authorities and environmental transgression levied on water. This article scours into the motifs of water scarcity, recalcitrance and survival in the marginalized oppidan communities as illustrated in the Imtiaz Dharker’s poem “Blessing”. Drawing on Ecocriticism and postcolonial theory, the paper accentuates the use of ideographic and tactile language to gloss the environmental and systematic incongruities wrenching the marginalized fragments of the society. The poem “Blessing” renders water is both a nostrum of life and impugned constitutional resources. The paper assesses these renditions from the theoretical frameworks of Ecofeminist theorists like Vandana Shiva. The research paper would ante up momentarily to discern the Sustainable Development Goals 6 and Millennium Development Goals 7 to ascertain the targets tackling efficacious water usage, allaying water scarcity and sustainable water management.

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Humans' superfluous meddling in nature culminating in the disparaging turmoil between nature and living beings. The draconian mutations that befell the environment behoved humans, plants and animals to outlast. Earth's biome is unceasingly wrecked by the vicious practices of living beings, which scatter the seed for assorted ecological crises like climate barriers, shrinkage of biodiversity and evulsions of non-renewable resources. Coupled with ignominious local ecosystems, it steers to myriad dicey repercussions globally, distressing both the surviving and unborn generations. Natural catastrophes' liaison is relatively modest while juxtaposing with man-made disasters. The principal causes of ecological crises, like defilement, denuding and desertification, give rise to the declension of environmental heritage. Ecological crises are intertwined, as a crisis in a domain will induce the dangling aftershocks on others, fabricating a domino effect. The prolonged feasibility of humans' and the planet's knack to prop up life is slackening in the wake of the environmental issues, as it is acutely intermeshed with social, economic and political artefacts. If the amicable affiliation between nature and human beings is cumbersome, then the environment will be austerely blemished, mayhap culminating in irrevocable ramifications, unless it is not harangued swiftly. At this vantage point, eco-poetics rummage through the abstruse crash of human hegemony over the natural world.

Eco-poetics is an ecological nonce word that mirrors the study of poetics from an ozone-friendly perspective. The term 'Poetics' originates from the Greek word 'Poiesis', which connotes 'making'. Thus, ecopoetics is parsing not merely environmentally orientated poetry but also some non-fiction nature writings. In ecological poetry, the poetic metre would be savvied as "deferring to nature's own cadence". It is deemed a counterfeit of the song of the Mother Earth.

Jonathan Bate muses on the thrust of eco-poetics in his work *The Songs of the Earth*. He retorts that eco-poetics' language is a novel kind of artistic and aesthetic mien, "which may affect an imaginative reunification of mind and nature" (245). Bate proclaims that poetry is a corollary of culture; contrariwise, nature envisions science. Heedless of coalescing these two unambiguous fields together, there has been a mutually intrinsic relation, a rapport, and a palpable aversion between culture and nature. Among the most ecologically self-observant American poets of the twentieth century, Gary Snyder scrutinises the semblance between nature and poetry through an underlying conception called "climax" in scientific ecology.

Wendell Berry, Juliana Spahr, Robert Hass, Patricia Smith, Mary Oliver, Forrest Gander and Sumana Roy are some of the eccentric and illustrious eco-poets. In accord with their intimate reconnaissance, they lure the interdependence of nature, culture and humans' coercive behaviour. Their poems accentuate the paramount aspect that led to the climate and ecological crisis. Among these eco-

poets, a Punjabi-born poet who possesses an exceptional space in impersonating cultural conflict and displacement is Imtiaz Dharker. Her figurative and sumptuously textured poems conjure up spatial and cultural upheaval, identity crises, class conflicts and gender politics. Her poems also speculate on themes of domicile, trust and autonomy. Being a global poet, her poem adheres to people all over the world. Her writings furnish explicit and prudent counsel, scilicet, for those people who feel doomed or dubious in today's intercontinental and shrinking world.

Imtiaz Dharker, a globally acclaimed poet, artist, and documentary filmmaker, occupies a distinctive place in contemporary literature for her exploration of identity, displacement, gender, and cultural intersections. Born in Punjab and raised in Glasgow, her work reflects a confluence of multiple cultural experiences, which profoundly shape her poetic voice. Dharker's poetry often engages with socio-political realities, particularly focusing on marginalized communities, women's experiences, and urban struggles.

Imtiaz Dharker's poems have been incorporated in the UK curriculum. Besides being a poet, artist and documentary filmmaker, she perceived herself as a Scottish Calvinist Muslim. Her poetry is rooted in the concatenation of three cultures. She assimilates the varied cultures shrewdly. Her perspicacious vision heightens our vassalage owing to the virility and androcentric society. She hitched an Indian, Anil Dharker, and following her marriage, she relocated to India. Being her country of origin, she gazes upon the protean culture in Indian society. She also mulls over the tenuous existence of marginalised urban settlements minutely in the slums of Mumbai. The sundry culture acquaintances sculpt her poetry and drawings. Indubitably, her poems are always a morale proponent to women as she upholds women to amplify their voice against muffling intolerances and annihilating sanctions.

Dharker's acclaimed poetry collections are *Purdah and Other Poems* (1989), *Postcards from God* (1999), *I Speak for the Devil*, *Terrorists at My Table* (2009) and *Leaving Footprints* (2009). Her poetry emulates a peculiar, idiosyncratic facet of "transmediality" and "transculturality". She flaunts women's experiences with sweeping realism in a naive and adroit way. Despite this, she stretched her endorsement against a progressively more belligerent and male-chauvinistic society. Bruce King, in his work *New Women Poets*, has fairly presented her as "someone who knows her own mind rather than someone full of doubt and liberal ironies" (321).

Dharker's celebrated poem "Blessing" foregrounds the acute crisis of water scarcity in impoverished urban spaces, particularly in slums like Dharavi in Mumbai, where access to basic resources remains deeply unequal. The present article seeks to examine how Dharker employs vivid imagery, sound patterns, and symbolic language to depict water not merely as a physical necessity but as a site of power, inequality, and spiritual significance. By situating the poem within the framework of eco-poetics and eco-social criticism, the study highlights the intersection of

environmental degradation and social exclusion, emphasizing how ecological crises disproportionately affect vulnerable populations, especially women and children. The article scours the poem “Blessing”, which underscores the water crisis and its jolt on vulnerable communities, particularly womenfolk.

The poem “Blessing” is a haunting poem whirled around water scarcity, deprivation of humans’ bare necessities and sheer abundance owing to urban hardships and climate crisis in the third-world countries. Imitiaz Dharker says, “The skin cracks like a pod; there never is enough water” (1-2). The opening line itself solidifies an austere tone, reiterating how the skin of the urban people ruptured due to an unprecedented drought and dehydration. The word “pod” betokens an ecological dimension bridging the anguish of humans with environmental crises like water scarcity. Like the parched Earth, the lips of the urban communities are chapped as they are unable to quench their thirst. The repercussions of water scarcity are encumbered by Vandhana Shiva in her work *Water Wars*. She claims that, ‘When water disappears, there is no alternative. For Third World women, water scarcity means travelling longer distances in search of water. For peasants, it means starvation and destitution as drought wipes out their crops. For children, it means dehydration and death’ (15).

The present tense ‘is’ in the second line pores over the uninterrupted and unfluctuating chronic water scarcity. It unveils how a scrupulous community is shunned on account of systematic hierarchy. The systemic social stratification is affirmed by Pramod K. Nayar in his work *Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory*. He proposes that “eco-socialism suggests that the difference in the distribution of wealth is at the base of such an experience of environments. Social exclusion leads to environmental exclusion, where the poorer classes do not have the same access to clean air or water” (337). The phrase ‘never enough water’ is not simply about the physical thirst and impoverishment, but the lingering prejudice prevails in society.

Dharker claims, “Imagine the drip of it, the small splash, the echo in a tiny mug, the voice of a kindly god” (3-6). Dharker associates even the smallest sounds like ‘drip’, ‘splash’ and ‘echo’ with the divine presence of God. It draws attention to how at the times of scarcity, even a single drop is sanctified. The people collected the water in a tiny mug. The mug brings out the class inequality and poverty, as tiny metallic cups are habitually used in underprivileged areas. It also pokes around in the spiritual reverence of water. Here water is exemplified not only as indispensable but also as marvellous and miraculous. She sketches that, when the municipal pipe rages, there is an unanticipated rush of fortune. The saying ‘rush of fortune’ symbolises how water becomes a literal blessing. The bursts of municipal pipe focus on the shattered infrastructure on account of outrageous usage and erroneous maintenance. Water is epitomised as ‘silver crashes’. Dharker emulates water to a precious metal, silver, spotlighting its valuable esteem. The verse ‘The flow has found a roar of tongues’ hints at both the voice of water and the voices of the voiceless rural people scurrying in a tumultuous gaiety and anguish to obtain the treasureable

miracle.

“From the huts, a congregation: every man, woman, child for streets around butts in, with pots, brass, copper, aluminium, plastic buckets, frantic hands” (10-16). The people cluster from adjacent slums, deliriously fetching multifarious vessels to accrue the water. Again, Dharker employs the word ‘congregation’ to bind water with consecration. The portraiture of buckets made up of diverse materials like brass, aluminium, copper and plastic implies the socio-economic heterogeneity of poverty. The terms ‘butts in’ and ‘frantic hands’ visualise a grasp of emergency and turmoil to evince a prevailing jumble for mere survival. Dharker did not ham it up as jubilation owing to joy but as a jostle of duress driven by resource paucity. “And naked children screaming in the liquid sun, their highlights polished to perfection, flashing light, as the blessing sings over their small bones.” The phrase “liquid sun” outlines not only the oestrus initiated by the sun but also the shimmering water and its life-giving warmth. The yelling of an unclad infant is a *primaevae* backlash in virtue of nescience and a reckless situation. They envisage water as their felicity and empyrean boon from God. The title of the poem “Blessing” is glazed in that moment. The small bones of the children advert the childhood vulnerability due to squalor.

Imtiaz Dharker, through this poem “Blessing”, subsumes the ghastly truth of water scarcity and marginalised urban indigenous’ vehement perseverance to survive. Supported by the use of fecund acoustic conceit and figurative language, she divulges water scarcity as a moot basis that modifies the struggles of assailable community members, eminently women and children, who manoeuvre the overlapping constraints of dearth, sovereignty and climate-goaded ricketiness. This poem outstrips mere adversity, and they become acts of beholding and repugnance hostile to strenuous systems that repudiate gateways to life’s most minimalistic necessity. The reader is obligated to acknowledge water not only as something that is necessary for survival, but also as a fervently diplomatic, didactic, and upright progeny that is requesting mandatory indemnity. In the context of a world that is being gradually reshaped by the climate crisis, the voices that are rebutted in the poem “Blessing” prompt us to consider the importance of conserving water equity in order to facilitate mulishness and rectitude in third-world countries such as India.

“Blessing” by Imtiaz Dharker is a powerful reflection on how delicate the human life is against the background of environmental deprivation. It embodies the contradiction of the Global South: the living conditions of abject poverty and unbelievable endurance. There is no pity demanded in the poem; the roar of tongues and the screaming children are full of life and life. However, it demands justice. By means of vivid imagery (the broken pod, the silver crash, the tiny bones) Dharker turns an abstract statistic of the lack of water into a concrete, physical experience. She makes the reader reckon with his/her privilege. To the objects of the poem, it is the voice of God. The scenes in the poem are becoming more and more ordinary as climate change gains momentum and urbanization gains more and more strength. The poem is a monument of the resistance of the marginalized, and it does not necessarily involve political or organized struggle, but rather in the desperate, wild,

and joyful collection of water in order to live to see another day. It is an eco-poetic clarion call, warning us that the right to water is the right to life and until the right to water is guaranteed to the small bones of the slums, even the global promise of development has become a broken pipe, spitting promises into the dust.

Both Sustainable Development Goals 6 and Millennium Development Goals 7 allege that both women and children are unduly stricken by sparse water supply and perilous conditions. The paper also puts emphasis on the exclusive access and governmental deserted issues pronto fixed on these two goals for amended water governance and amplification of communal water resources. The poem "Blessing" traverses the global languages of the SDGs and MDGs with personal, everyday scoops in Dharavi, Mumbai. Aside from assessing the poem, the paper escalates both development goals' agendas by making the instance for ecumenical, balanced and eco-friendly access to water. Imitiaz Dharker spurs lawmakers, educationists and the extensive audience to witness the suppleness and recalcitrance of marginalised communities behind every drop, championing espousal for clean and pristine water as a privilege and obligation for all.

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