

It is a truism that human beings understand their world through stories. Stories have accompanied the evolution of society in its structuration as well as in its ordering. One would not exaggerate if one says we make sense of reality by its linguistic construction. This might be seen as a linguistic turn in conceptualising reality; this has to be accepted that the imagination itself is constructed around the language or the languages we are acquainted with. Cutting across disciplines we can understand reality through literature – oral, written, historical, mythical or philosophical.

In the times we live in this very fact has led to the concept of multiple realities, even a fragmentation of reality leading to the pluralising attitude to the erstwhile essential concepts about universal themes. In our age when literature is being written not in its traditional manner but on devices having its own brains, under the huge pressures of the unstoppable force of globalising and globalised realities which in turn are at best fragmented and fragmenting. This volume is an attempt to bring in ideas primary from the world of literature, theory, philosophy, history, as well as other disciplines feeding the thoughts. Any fruitful discussion about literature right now can only take place when we can situate literature in its context of its engendering philosophy and history, myth and reality. We should also be courageous enough to imagine the world which is progressive, liberal, and fantastic with dignity and integrity of the human being at its centre. This work also tries to read, understand, analyse literature in its myriad forms in their various locations, origins and presences.

IMAGINING THE WORLD

EDITOR
VARSHA SINGH



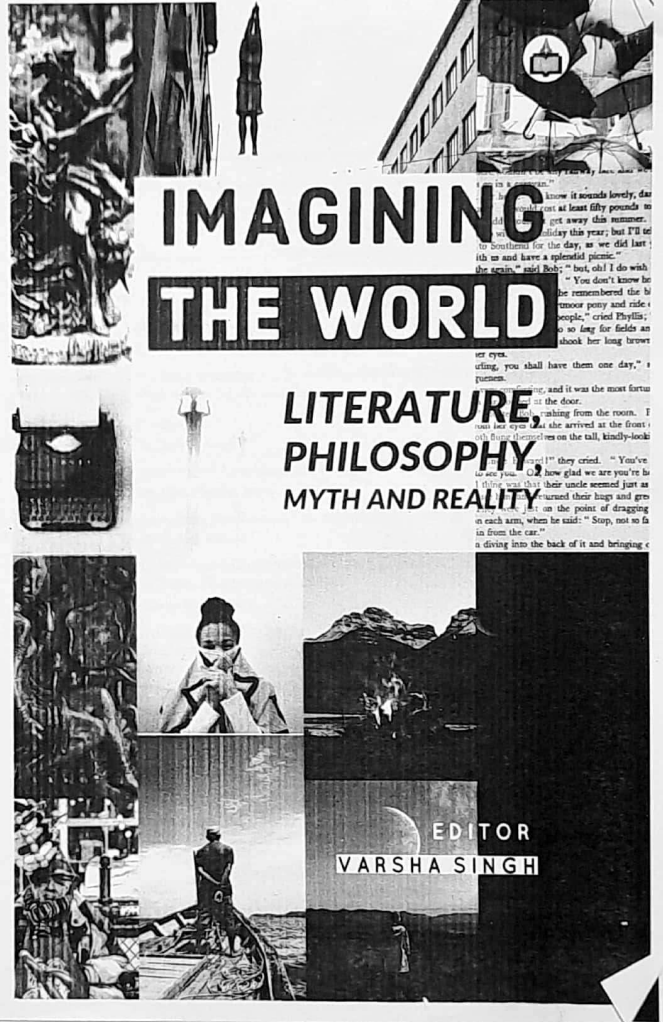
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LITERATURE, PHILOSOPHY, MYTH AND REALITY

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I am of the view that while attempting a critique of a work of literature; while conveying the facts, the dates, the relationships; one may succeed in doing something more – in conveying the glow and enthusiasm that belong to literature. At any rate, the task of every literary critic is essentially evaluation or reevaluation, as the case be; but the joy of the critical pursuit may help the student of literature get initiated to the delightful breath of life.

Frankly, I have little claims to make. Just what are my assets? I am neither an artist nor a scholar (critic) – to be fair. Yet in the last fifty years or so, English literature has been the subject of my special study. But whether this is a capital to bank upon, and I have shown any wisdom in writing this piece of “Foreword” – will be proved exclusively by the efforts put in by the editor, who was also the Organising Secretary of the Seminar. Admittedly, to select pieces within the limits of a small but readable book is a perplexing task. And at that, Varsha Singh has shown wisdom and discretion.

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**Of Deep Ecological Connections: Reading
Gulzar's *Habu Ki Aag and Other Stories*
within an Eco-critical Framework**

Dr. Basudhara Roy

Abstract

Gulzar (born Sampooran Singh Kalra) as a noted scriptwriter, brilliant filmmaker and famed lyricist, needs no introduction to the world of Indian cinema. He remains, too, one of the finest poets of our country, continuing to write in rich Hindustani, that fertile cultural and linguistic blend of Urdu and Hindi. What is lesser known about Gulzar, however, is his equally acclaimed identity as a writer of short stories for both adults and children, and apart from his countless Filmfare Awards and National Film Awards, he has also been a recipient of the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award in the year 2002 for his short story collection, *Dhwaan*. Gulzar has several books of stories for children also to his credit, of which his collection *Eka* was awarded by the National Council for Education, Research and Training. The proposed paper takes up Gulzar's translated collection *Habu Ki Aag and Other Stories* and attempts to study the four stories contained therein within an eco-critical framework. While the stories here have all been taken up from Gulzar's first collection *Raavi Paar*, and deal with questions as dissimilar from each other as the value of art is from a reflection on communal violence, the collection's thematic unity lies in the deep ecological insight that characterizes the writer's hope for a world, both ecologically integrated, and humanely inclusive.

Keywords: deep ecology, violence, communal, eco-critical, inclusive

"I wish I didn't have to write a Foreword to my stories. I have nothing to explain about a story, if it doesn't explain itself," writes Gulzar in the Foreword to his short story collection *Half a Rupee*. Modest though this observation is, its accomplishment in fiction constitutes a herculean task, and it is to Gulzar's immense credit as a storyteller that he brings it to impeccable execution. All of Gulzar's stories, one realizes, are self-explanatory. The communication here is impeded neither by the ostentation of language, nor by any deliberate posture towards the narrative art. His narratives flow easily, water-like, and read in translation, they possess a fable-like quality of timelessness. In visiting the oeuvre of Gulzar, one is surprisingly overwhelmed to find the same simplicity and lucidity marking his stories as they do his poems. A short story, as Gulzar puts it in his Foreword to his first collection *Raavi Paar*, "needs a little more narrative than a poem", but the effect of his experimentations in both genres remains largely the same – a consciousness of man's marginal existence and his human limitations within a larger, incomprehensible universe. It is the presence in the writings of Gulzar of this ambient poetics, to borrow a term from the oeuvre of Timothy Morton, that, I believe, strongly lends them to fruitful ecocritical explorations.

Ecocriticism, as an academic discipline, has now formally been on the scene for almost half a century or so. The term was first coined by William Rueckert in his 1978 essay, "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism" where he suggested how ecocriticism, in articulating the symbiotic relationship between ecology and literature, could help us understand how to "move from the community of literature to the larger biospheric community which ecology tells us (correctly, I think) we belong to even as we are destroying it?" (121) Today, ecocriticism has diversified to emerge as a blanket term involving a multiplicity of approaches such as nature writing, deep ecology, ecofeminism, the revaluation of place, environmental ethics, animal rights, bioregionalism, social ecology, political ecology, etc. While simply speaking, ecocritical practice attempts to explore the relationship between man and nature as manifested in literature, the object of its