

Cosmogenic Elements (Earth, Air, Water & Fire) In Zahida Zaidi's Poetic Collection: *Beyond Words*

- Amodini Sreedharan

Abstract: A definition that emphasizes what makes a poem/poet extraordinary might be: word, sound, image, or something beyond these, because poetry is language that always means more. It at various levels opens new meanings, levels, dimensions, connections or resonance. Zahida Zaidi's poetic collection *Beyond Words* is studied here. She has used cosmogenic elements in her collection. The focus here is to prove the centrality of ecoweb formed by these cosmogony elements. In her poem she learns the balance from nature and as her location on earth she finds the intimate relation with it which finally leads her to find the extension of 'self' through creativity. It may be also confluence of earth, water, air, fire in the formation of her poetic oeuvre.

Keywords: Ecofeminism, Gender and Nature, Ecofeminist Spirituality.

'*Beyond Words*' is one of the two collections of poems written by Zahida Zaidi..The significance of the title forced to identity the meaning of what is 'beyond words'? Is it something pictographic, spiritual or musical? OR is it something which cannot be completely or authentically communicated through words. It may be something which author experienced when connected intuitively with higher self or cosmos. Poems have a specific quality i.e. rhythm and rhyme which makes it different from other genres of literature. The meaning of a poem can be conveyed through their sound too which sense sometime more than literal. Essentially, poetry or poem is a medium or language that potentially opens new meanings, levels, dimensions, connections or resonance. Simultaneously, the question of poetic voice also offers a special invitation that who has created it? To be very concise Zahida Zaidi served Aligarh Muslim University belonged to Aligarh. She did her English Tripos and subsequently awarded M.A. degree from Cambridge(U.K.) She has also been a Fellow of the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Simla, during 1972-73. she has also translated about a dozen masterpieces of modern western dramas in Urdu, including, the plays of Chekhov, Pirandello, Sartre, Beckett, and Ionesco Pinter & Manuel de Pedrolo. She has also published verse translations of several modern poets, including Montale, Lorca & Neruda. She also directed and produced a large number of plays including masterpiece of Shakespeare, Shaw, Chekhov, Beckett Ionesco, Pirandello and Williams. The focus here is on one of two collections of poems i.e. '*Beyond Words*'. It has seventeen poems in it. As the reader turns the first leaf of the book

s/he finds the collection was dedicated to Sibnarayan Ray. In her discussion she herself confessed that “*Beyond Words*” saw the light of publication only because of the motivation of her dear friend Ray. While discussing poems she confessed he was her good friend but could not understand her Urdu poems. So, she painstakingly translated a few of her best 'Urdu' poems in English. Throughout her life she remained single and was engaged in literary activities till the end. She left this world in January 2011. But the striking feature was that while discussing the dedication of the volume for a friend she hinted to understand it as soul's song irrespective of gender. In a way she insisted about feelings which were 'beyond words' and not see the matrix of relation with Ray. Further, the individual titles of the collection accelerated the curiosity. To name a few 'wind', 'storm', 'creation', 'the second invitation of the sea', memories are ocean' etc.

Piece of literature demands the participation of the reader to get all the meaning out of it and that too is not easy but a challenge in itself. The paper endeavors to prove the centrality of the ecoweb formed by earth, water, air and fire. The outstanding role of the four elements leads to the literary evolution of Zaidi's poetic collection. It is correct when Patrick D. Murphy states that, “the four elements can be understood as both an ancient and contemporary way of thinking about the material world.....”(71). The first thing resonates while going through the titles were words like 'earth', 'sea', 'wind', storm etc. As a student of literature it was easy to understand that she choose 'cosmogenic' elements more in her collection. So, the paper zeroes in the dealing with these elements i.e., earth, wind, water (sea) and fire too. It is very essential to mention that she does have have a shade 'Ecofeminist Spirituality' though it was never an environmental concern but an important strand of ecofeminism which retrieves older myths and religious beliefs in which nature is admired. The more one reads her small poems it reveals her range of using these elements in her poem. The perfect balance of 'air', 'water', earth along with fire, rocks make one feel that she presents poetic verbalization of elemental reality. There is no link of her work with any particular place or homeland of which she is nostalgic about. It is vital to remember that these elements not only sustain life on earth but are also symbols of creation too. The poetic penetration/intermingling present twofold approach adopted in this respect: Nature element as text or poetic verbalization of elements and the text as nature i.e. the adaptation of elemental symbology as a resource for the characterization of words. To begin the interplay of her feeling with first element is 'air', Zahida Zaidi herself confessed that she has 'trans-created' few Urdu poems; and *Wind* is trans-creation of her *Aiy Hawa*. While discussing the poem with her she recited it loudly and also gave the liberty to perceive as wanted rather than focusing on its Urdu version. The poem is working at two levels; first at symbolic level 'wind' which signifies motion and there is no stillness in it. It is in motion always the form may change. Secondly at personal level the poetic sensibility of the author is ruffled by 'wind' which is also full time in motion. At this level 'wind' may be extension of 'self' or reconciliation of literary consciousness. Like 'wind'

her creative soul irrespective of gender bias blows soothes and touches all the 'animate' and 'inanimate' objects of the planet earth equally. The first part of the poem is as follows:

wind – oh restless wind/ that miraculously stirred/
every chord of my being / is this the awakening/
of a new born passion (B.Words: p. 14)

Second part is talking about own 'memories'. The word 'courtyard' seems symbolic to her covert self i.e. pains of a smooth exterior. One can, and the first person account 'I' in the poem also projects that it may be her own painful experiences and finally the last few lines asks:

will you then reveal to me/ the secrets of being
or merely pass by, indifferently/ lengthening the distances
between you and me... (B.Words: p.14)

Here, the poet and reader both can swiftly, understands the 'action', 'reaction'. The 'wind' is in action form and the 'reaction' to it is the "collection of all wounded thoughts" and the cycle continues. When action of "hidden wounds" started in reaction the poetic sensibility came into action. Further which transformed her thoughts into poems? It ruffles the higher self of psyche too and she asks:

...on the current of your waves/ will you then reveal to me
the secret of being. (B.Words: p.14)

There is another poem namely "*The wind blows hard*" also talks of air element. One feels of her airy phase that describes that Zaidi liberates her form everything and earthy bounds to accomplish poetic freedom that may allow her to ascend her to realm of transcendentalism. This is to say the air element symbolizes the new poetic phase of "upward movement". So, the scientific law of "cause and effect" "action and reaction" surfaces and how all these cosmic elements inspires her or one can say the cosmic elements are like 'muse/s' for poetic self. Her soul pushes towards process of creativity.

Oceans of nearness/ flaming streams of touch
sparks of storms/ illumin'd waterfalls
...../ the point of union gather
in the scar of words/ the wind blows hard. (B.Words: p.10)

The poet here unlike Shelley's 'Ode to the West Wind' doesn't speak of geolocation, season or qualities of wind. Instead how the action of the wind leads to poets' own reaction to it i.e. creativity. Prof. Zahida Zaidi during her discourse on the topic of 'creativity' openly confesses that process of writing is not so easy. She says it is blessing of omnipotent and one has to hone the skill. This very thought is subtly weaved in the poem 'storm'. 'Storm' brings destructive image on human psyche. But the opening lines bring out the positive aspects of 'Storm':

and then the storm came/ thund'ring–dancing–singing
on the barbat* of waves (B.Words: p.10)

The dancing, singing image on the tune of *barbat* shows the positive side of storm. Storm is shown stronger than poet's own self. But it puts forth a streak of gender binary too. As we see in poem:

soft fingers of the storm in my hair/ salt kisses on my lips
 my nude body wrap'd/ in melodious waves/a flood of light in my
 bosom/a flood of song in the blood stream/a flood of liquid fire
 all around/ and so the storm came (B.Words: p.11)

One of the form of air is storm. Which may be conceptualized as male and when creative soul was a female? When 'storm' came gushing it seemed as lover's union which filled the heart of poet with hidden treasures of 'sea' i.e. her poetic/creative thoughts. Finally quenches the thirst of poet's dry soul. Here these elements work as pagans believed because the pagan believes the basic four elements are earth, water, air (wind and spirit) and fire. The first two i.e. earth and water are 'passive feminine' and the air and fire are 'active masculine'. So, element of air i.e. storm is implied as a 'male' and her creativity as 'female' and the union led to bliss by poetic accomplishment. The next in the collection is '*The memories are ocean*', which depicts loneliness and nostalgia. Loneliness seemed wide and unending. But her only, savior in the vast ocean of loneliness is 'word boat' she believes as Noah's Ark in which she too will be saved and taken to the realm saving creation. The element echoes the theory of Empedocles, the Greek Philosopher, scientist and healer. His theory propounds that all matter is composed of four elements earth, fire, air, water. One can conceptualize that poems like 'storm', 'wind that blows hard', synchronizes with air element. 'Air' is symbolizing her 'thoughts' 'ideas' 'views' or 'vision of life'. Hence like air has outwardly approach so is her thoughts reaching out for the audience in the form of poems. In the same manner next dominating element in her poetry is 'water'. One of the most appealing poems is '*The second invitation of the sea*' Prof. Zahida Zaidi personally declares it as one of her favorite poem. In her discussion she said that sea' has deeper connotations and many things might be in subconscious while writing it but it may reflect in ones reaction and words. It totally depends on the perception of the reader.

the sea ---the sea/ the deep flaming dancing sea all around me
 coursing through my veins/ rushing through my lips
 a flood of liquid moments creating melodies..(B.Words: p.13)

In 'Cosmic Plan' water has 'inward and downward' movement. In other words the observation of 'sea' is analogical. Further, the water element could be interpreted as something abstract functioning within oneself and 'water' represents emotions too. Again 'inward' movement had in turn able to create melodies i.e. poems are an outward production/reaction. Incidentally her pains were blessed with the 'creative spirit'. She wants to be wide and without boundaries like 'sea'. Her poem *Creation* exemplifies this notion;

a letter, imprisoned/ in the vast blue expanses
 a syllable, twinkling/ in the circle of silence
 a sound, asleep on the mountain peak (B.Words: p.13)

One peculiar feature of her poems is there is no mention of 'fire' directly. At the same time she talks of the fire within. Fire too has outwardly reaching effect and in poems it is analogical to the 'desire' passions, wishes dreams of human beings. One of her poem is entitled '*Beyond*

Words' correspondingly to the name of collection has autobiographical shade where poet is in inexplicable situation. In this poem she uses the element of 'fire' which seems fierce, strong and destructive. Conversely the poet beautifully uses the element of 'fire' which brings out from within the pearls of Wisdom.

Now, after analyzing complete volume the most vital 'earth' element came into light. It reveals the complete poetic persona of Prof. Zahida, Zaidi, she carefully uses the 'earth' element through '*Rocks*' poem. Certainly rocks are part of 'earth' element. It reveals different shades of poem. Rocks symbolizes the various forms of 'being nothingness'. She professes that 'rocks' uncared, uncarved, unpolished, big and small but have their own beauty. Rock symbolizes 'patience' 'perseverance'. They inspire poet to believe in the 'ism' of 'stoicism'. Poem talks about different phases of Time/Life i.e. a day, sobbing evening (might be loneliness) dark night etc.

rocks-rocks-rocks/ crystallized forms of being and nothingness –
the evening bathed in fragrant dew/ examines her form in the
mirror of rays / a self enclosed world of loveliness-silent-serious-
suffering rocks/ a heavy weight on the breast... (B.Words:p.25)

On the other hand when poem ends it talks of vast experience or duality of life itself. Of being there and of nothingness which is equally accepted by rock. In this poem Zaidi identifies herself with rock taking everything in her side day/night, sadness/happiness, creativity/non creativity, silence/words, doubt/guilt etc. "A poet of genius," writes Bachelard, "invokes metaphors of all the elements" (*El aire*: 166) Prof. Zahida Zaidi's poem repudiates the philosophical strain and calls for a fusion of mind and heart. Her text inaugurates a series of stunning inversions, whose implication widens as not specifically a feminist voice but a human speaking about the process of literary creation, loneliness, stoicism, patience, and challenges of existing structure of world that is 'imbalance'. Zahida Zaidi's verses shapes elements of earth, fire, water and air. One can observe and enjoy the dynamic interconnections of language, self and nature. While widening its inference by using these four roots by analogy of own i.e. thoughts (air) fire (inner desire) water (emotions) Earth (sensitivity/self) come to terms with tension arising from different dualities at the core of her poetry. No doubt they are interesting implications which may carve new paths for further discussion in ecopoetic studies.

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