

Nature and the Sacred in the Poetry of Sohrāb Sepehrī: Possibilities for a Sustainable Relationship between Iranians and the Environment

Abdolrasol Shakeri¹, Majid Ramezani Mehrian²

Extended Abstract

Introduction

Globally, from 1750 to 2020, the concentration of carbon dioxide in the Earth's atmosphere increased from approximately 50 parts per million (ppm) to over 400 ppm. Due to dam construction and water supply for agricultural and industrial purposes, many rivers and wetlands have dried up. As a result of human activities, numerous wildlife species have either become extinct or are endangered. The amount of land utilized by humans has risen from about 10% in 1900 to more than 25%. At the national level, Iran faces multiple environmental issues. Some of the most significant environmental problems in Iran include pollution of surface and groundwater, drying up of wetlands, lakes, and rivers, depletion of groundwater resources, air pollution, loss of biodiversity, increased frequency of floods and droughts, land subsidence, soil erosion, and reduction of forest areas. The dire state of the country's environment can be assessed by examining Iran's position in the Environmental Performance Index (EPI). The EPI provides a summary of each country's environmental status derived from the analysis of 32 indicators across 11 environmental categories. In 2024, Iran ranked 113th out of 180 countries in the Environmental Performance Index.

Aim

Given the importance of environmental issues and crises in Iran, this paper aims

1. Assistant Professor of Persian Literature, The Institute for Research and Development in the Humanities (SAMT), Tehran, Iran
shakeri@samt.ac.ir

2. Environmental studies department, the Institute for Research and Development in the Humanities (SAMR)
mehrian@samt.ac.ir

How to cite this article:

Abdolrasol Shakeri, Majid Ramezani Mehrian. "The Nature and the Sacred in the Poetry of Sohrāb Sepehrī: Possibilities for a Sustainable Relationship between Iranians and the Environment". *Interdisciplinary Studies of Literature, Arts and Humanities*, 5, 2, 2025, 45-50. doi: 10.22077/islsh.2025.8750.1582



Copyright: © 2023 by the authors. Licensee Journal of *Interdisciplinary Studies of Literature, Arts & Humanities*. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

to focus on the relationship between Sohrab Sepehri's poetry and nature and the environment through an environmental critique lens. After identifying how his poetry connects with nature and the environment, we will explore the potential of his works to influence audiences regarding environmental awareness.

Theoretical Framework

Unlike environmental engineering, environmental humanities examine the natural world, environmental issues, and the meaning of "the good life" for all living beings through artistic and humanistic approaches. Environmental humanities specifically highlight human behaviors, cultural values, historical patterns, social contexts, public attitudes, political ideas, religious beliefs, spiritual dimensions, and ethical and emotional concerns. In literature, authors often create contexts for central themes by describing their environments. In "climate fiction," potential scenarios illustrating the impact of climate change on the environment are outlined, helping readers envision possible futures for the Earth. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender perspective and Marxist criticism applies class consciousness to textual analysis, ecological criticism adopts a land-centered approach to literary studies.

Discussion

In most studies conducted in the field of ecological criticism and contemporary Persian poetry, Sohrab Sepehri's work has been a focal point. A range of findings from this research includes: the influence of Hinduism and Buddhism's ethical teachings—especially "ahimsa," meaning non-violence towards living beings—on Sepehri's environmental poetry; a rejection of humanistic perspectives in his work; an interaction between culture and nature; reverence for nature; an understanding of its value and the necessity for its preservation in his poetry; personification of animals, plants, and inanimate objects; unity between humans and nature; cohabitation of natural elements; the wholeness of nature; humans as part of nature alongside other beings; governmental dominance over nature; the poet's desert climate and attention to nature; Iranian naturalism versus Western humanistic naturalism; nature as an object of worship, love, inspiration, and revelation (the sanctity of nature);

nature's superiority over modern humanity; nature as a manifestation of divinity and a medium for connection; and a preference for "postmodern" environmental ethics over modern anthropocentric views. In all these studies, the connection between nature and Sepehri's poetry has been examined within a mystical context. In Iran, the relationship between theology and the environment was introduced in the 1960s with the book "Views of Islamic Thinkers on Nature," which sought to connect Islamic tradition with nature while emphasizing spirituality's role in environmental relations. The book "Environmental Theology" is another example of such efforts.

Conclusion

In response to the current state of environmental issues and crises in the country, it is possible to leverage the rich culture of Iranian poetry and literature to enhance public awareness about environmental conditions, increase environmental sensitivity, strengthen conservation culture, and improve environmental ethics.

References

- Block, S., Emerson, J. W., Esty, D. C., de Sherbinin, A., & Wendling, Z. A. (2024). Environmental Performance Index. New Haven, CT: Yale Center for Environmental Law & Policy. Retrieved from epi.yale.edu.
- Buell, L. (2001). *Writing for an endangered world: Literature, culture, and environment in the US and beyond*: Harvard University Press.
- Cai, Y., Zhang, P., Wang, Q., Wu, Y., Ding, Y., Nabi, M., . . . Wang, H. (2023). How does water diversion affect land use change and ecosystem service: A case study of Baiyangdian wetland, China. *Journal of Environmental Management*, 344, 118558.
- Clark, T. (2019). *The value of ecocriticism*. Cambridge University Press.
- Dabirnia, M. (2021). A Comparative Study of the Representation Human/Nature Relationship in Selected Poems from Robert Frost and Sohrab Sepehri From an Ecocriticism Perspective. *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, 12(6), 87-94.

- Dastgheib, Abdolāli (1371). *Gerāyesh-haye motazād dar adabiyāt-e mo'aser-e Iran*. Tehran: Entesharat-e Khonyagar.
- Davary, B. (2022). *Ecotheology and Love: The Converging Poetics of Sohrab Sepehri and James Baldwin*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Dickens, C. (1387). *Ruzkār-e Sakht* (H. A'rābī, Trans.). *Mo'asseseh-ye Enteshārāt-e Negāh*.
- Dickens, C. (1854). *Hard Times: For These Times*: Tauchnitz.
- Dickens, C. (1872). *Dombey and Son*: J.R. Osgood and Company.
- Emmett, R. S., & Nye, D. E. (2017). *The Environmental Humanities: A Critical Introduction*: MIT Press.
- Fiedorczuk, J., & Beltran, G. (2015). *Ecopoetics. An Ecological "Defense of Poetry"*. In: *Muzeum Historii Polskiego Ruchu Ludowego. Biblioteka Iberyjska*.
- Ghosh, A. (2018). *The great derangement: Climate change and the unthinkable*: Penguin UK.
- Glottfelty, C. (1996). *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. U of Georgia P.
- Griffiths, T. (2007). *The humanities and an environmentally sustainable Australia*. *Australian Humanities Review*, 43(December).
- Hubbell, J. A., & Ryan, J. C. (2021). *Introduction to the environmental humanities*: Routledge.
- IPCC. (2020). *Climate change and land. Special Report. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)*. Retrieved from (Cambridge University Press, UK, 2020), p. 540.
- Koubijeko, Vera (1364). *Adabiyat-e novin-e Iran az Mashroutiyat ta Enqelab-e Islami. Gerdavāri va tarjome-ye Yaqoub Azhand*. Tehran: Entesharat-e Amir Kabir.
- Lintsen, H. (2021). *The Anthropocene and the Humanities: From Climate Change to a New Age of Sustainability by Carolyn Merchant. Technology and Culture*, 62(2), 604-606.

- Mīrzāzādeh Fūmashī, B. (1388). Akhlāq-e Zīst-muhītī yā Insān-mavhorī: Būm-naqd-e Taqbīqī bā Negaḥī be Sepandar va Emerson. *Adabiyāt-e Taqbīqī*, 8(1), 46-63.
- Moḥaqqiq Dāmād, S. M. (1393). *Elahiyāt-e Muḥīt-zīst. Mo'asseseh-ye Pazhooheshī-ye Hekmat va Falsafeh-ye Irān*.
- Moṣṭafā'ī, S., 'Ālīzād, I. (1399). Rabṭe-ye Insān va Ṭabī'at dar Andīsheh va Sher-e Mo'āṣer: Moṭāle'eh-ye Taqbīqī-Jām'e-shenākhtī Sher-e Sohrāb Sepandar va Maḥdī Akhvān-thālith. *Majalleh-ye Jām'e-shenāsī-ye Irān*, 21(1), 95-121.
- Nakha'ī, H., Shabānzādeh, M. (1398). Barrāsī-ye Negaḥ-e 'Irfānī be Ṭabī'at dar Sher-e Sohrāb Sepandar. *Dofasl-nāmeḥ-ye Adyān va 'Irfān-e Taqbīqī*, 3(5), 1-24.
- Naṣr, S. H. (1343). *Nazar-e Motafakkirān-e Islāmī dar Bārē-ye Ṭabī'at* (2nd ed.). Ketābfurūshī Dehkhodā, Chāpkhāneh-ye Ofset-e Marvī.
- Naṣr, S. H. (1387). *Insān va Ṭabī'at*. (A. Govāhi, Trans.). Daftar-e Nashr-e Farhang-e Eslāmī.
- Navābī, M. (1346). *Manzūmeh-ye Derakht-e Āsūrīg. Bonyād-e Farhang-e Irān*.
- Neyāzī, N. (1399). Rabṭe-ye Sākhtārshikanān-e Farhang va Ṭabī'at: Naqdī Būmgarā bar Chand Sarudeh az Sohrāb Sepandar. *Adabiyāt-e Pārsi-ye Mo'āṣer*, 10(1), 401-422
- Nye, D. E., Rugg, L., Flemming, J., & Emmett, R. (2013). The emergence of the environmental humanities.
- Pārsāpūr, Z., Fotūhī, F. (1392). Ta'sīr-pazīrī-ye Sohrāb Sepandar az 'Irfān-e Sharq dar Ḥawze-ye Akhlāq-e Zīst-muhītī. *Adabiyāt-e Pārsi-ye Mo'āṣer*, 3(4), 19-27. Research Institute of Humanities and Cultural Studies.
- Pereira, H. M., Martins, I. S., Rosa, I. M., Kim, H., Leadley, P., Popp, A., . . . Arneth, A. (2024). Global trends and scenarios for terrestrial biodiversity and ecosystem services from 1900 to 2050. *Science*, 384(6694), 458-465.
- Scranton, R. (2015). *Learning to Die in the Anthropocene: Reflections on the End of a Civilization*: City Lights Publishers.

Sepehrī, Sohrāb (1389). *Hasht Ketāb*. Isfahān: Entesharat-e Goftemān-e Andishe-ye Mo'aser.

Shāmīsā, S. (1391). *Sabk-shenāsī-ye Sher*. Nashr-e Mitrā.

Shelley, P. B., & Brett-Smith, H. (1910). *A defence of poetry*: Thomas B. Mosher.

Tāvūsī, S. (1400). *Andūh-e Khāk: Muḥīt-zīst dar Sher-e Mo'āṣer-e Irān*. Aftābgardān.

Torres-Romero, E. J., Nijman, V., Fernández, D., & Eppley, T. M. (2023). Human-modified landscapes driving the global primate extinction crisis. *Global Change Biology*, 29(20), 5775-5787.

Troster, L. (2013). What is eco-theology?. *CrossCurrents*, 63(4), 380-385.

Tsing, A. L. (2015). *The mushroom at the end of the world: On the possibility of life in capitalist ruins*: Princeton University Press.