


A Geopoetical Reading of Jalal Al-e-Ahmad's *Khasi dar Miqat*

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Abstract

Conceptualised in the 1990s by the Scottish writer, poet, tourist, and philosopher, Kenneth White, Geopoetics is a new spatial approach to literature. Contrary to Gaston Bachelard's "Poetics of Space" and Bertrand Wesphal's "Geographical Criticism," which mainly focus on places and descriptions, Geopoetics also investigates the author's critical approach towards places and the profound relationship between man and the earth. This study employs content analysis to geopoetically investigate Jalal Al-e-Ahmad's travelogue *Khasi dar Miqat*, focusing on the significance of place in travelogues and the psychological impact of the spiritual atmosphere in the land of revelation on Al-e-Ahmad. This article foregrounds the interconnectedness of place and geopoetical elements such as culture, place, poeticity, philosophy, spirituality, and emotional entanglement, all of which are elements in a geopoetical reading of travelogues. Unlike other realist authors who objectively provide detailed descriptions of locations, Al-e-Ahmad also adds a spiritual and philosophical quality to his accounts, as if his emotions were entangled with the ambiance, to critically describe places and juxtapose them with a better world.

Keywords: Jalal Al-e-Ahmad, *Khasi dar Miqat*, Place, Geopoetics, Kenneth White

Extended Abstract

1. Introduction

Conceptualised in the 1990s by the Scottish writer, poet, tourist, and philosopher, Kenneth White, Geopoetics is a new spatial approach to literature. Contrary to Gaston Bachelard's "Poetics of Space" and Bertrand

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Wesphal's "Geographical Criticism," which mainly focus on places and descriptions, Geopoetics also investigates the author's critical approach towards places and the profound relationship between man and the earth. Jalal Al-e-Ahmad's *Khasi dar Miqat* is an account of his 23-day Islamic pilgrimage. This travelogue contains daily observations and descriptions of places, alleys, and bazaars. In addition to his critical views, his spiritual turmoil stimulated by his presence in different places, which he mentions in his writings, is of importance. Focusing on Kenneth White's "Geopoetics" and underlining the importance of location in Al-e-Ahmad's travelogue, this study aims to answer the following questions: How does the author make a spiritual/emotional connection with the place and what is its role in the poetics of the travelogue? What are the implications of the geopoetical elements in this travelogue?

2. Methodology

This qualitative content analysis research employs a descriptive-analytic method to investigate the important elements in Kenneth White's theory such as emotional-spatial entanglement, poeticity, critical thinking, and descriptions in the selected work.

3. Theoretical Framework

Initiated by Kenneth White, Geopoetics is a new method which investigates place and its relation with mankind. During his travels, White was amazed by places and the emotions they aroused in people. He published an account of his travels, titled "*Le Plateau de l'Albatros: Introduction à la géopoétique*," which examines the energy of place and its effect on people's emotions. In his geopoetic manifesto, he explicitly states his dream of geo-centered literature. "Geopoétique" is the geographical/spatial intuition which reflects the human-earth connection in literary works (Italiano, 2008:4). The locus of geopoetics, White argues, is culture and because of cultural elements we can be "poet-like inhabitants of the earth" (Hashas, 2017:15). Some of the key elements of geopoetics are poetic descriptions with spatial emotion, awareness of the socio-cultural structures of the place, and the human-environment interaction (Magrane, 2021:11). Considering the fact that people mature through traveling and the real journey is the journey within, it can be argued that geopoetics is in line with spiritual and philosophical schools such as Buddhism and Mysticism (J. Assadollahi, et al, 1399 [2020]:172-174).

4. Discussion and Analysis

4.1 Philosophical Aspects and Emotional Connection with Place

Finding his brother and curiosity are Al-e-Ahmad's motivations in his journey. The spiritual ambiance of the pilgrimage affects and overwhelms him; this underscores the deep relation between man and the earth. He seeks his lost identity in special places which initiate his spiritual and intellectual changes. This journey, for the author, is marked by self-discovery.

4.2 Critical Aspect

A critical approach toward the environment is a key element in Geopoetics. From the start, nothing is hidden from Al-e-Ahmad's sharp eyes. His account includes the commotion in the city of tents, the exsanguination of sheep, the crisis in Saudi Arabia, the horrendous situation of the streets and alleys of Mecca and Medina, disgusting toilets, etc.

4.3 Poetic Aspect

From A geopoetical standpoint, presence in a special place triggers certain memories. This moment marks the fusion of literature and geography. The emotions resurface and the poeticity of the earth emerges. Al-e-Ahmad poetically describes the spiritual ambiance of the pilgrims. He likens the tents to ships, the ropes to paddles, and the sands to the sea.

5. Conclusion

This article foregrounds the interconnectedness of place and geopoetical elements such as culture, place, poeticity, philosophy, spirituality, and emotional entanglement, all of which are important features of a geopoetical reading of travelogues. Unlike other realist authors who objectively provide detailed descriptions of locations, Al-e-Ahmad also adds a spiritual and philosophical quality to his accounts, as if his emotions were entangled with the ambiance, to critically describe places and juxtapose them with a better world.

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How to cite:

Heidarim, M., & Choobine, E. 2023. "A Geopoetical Reading of Jalal Al-e-Ahmad's *Khasi dar Miqat*", *Naqd va Nazaryeh Adabi*, 15(1): 155-170. DOI:10.22124/naqd.2024.25468.2503

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