

## A COMPARATIVE ECO-QUEER ANALYSIS OF THE SELECTED POEMS OF ALLEN GINSBERG, THOM GUNN, AND AGHA SHAHID ALI

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### ABSTRACT

*Ginsberg is the American poet of Beat school. Agha Shahid Ali is the Indian poet who settled in America just like the British poet Thom Gunn. These three poets are famous for their sexual concerns as are dealt in their poetical works. But apart from representing the queer-sexual desire they also deal with the environmental and natural issues. This intersection between two different concerns is remarkable so far as they provide support and strength to each other. Sexual diversity and biodiversity both are vulnerable due to the dominant discourses of the world like anthropocentrism and heteronormativity. Queer Ecology or Eco-Queer approach is the field which discusses the ecocritical and queer-sexual issues for their mutual interdependence. One the one hand it tries to protect the natural world of flora and fauna and on the other the sexual minorities. The marginal, negated, ignored, suppressed, oppressed, and exploited condition of both (natural world and sexual diversities) interconnects them to resist the dominant ideological discourses. Just like the usefulness of the non-human things is considered only in the terms of their being useful to human beings similarly the usefulness of sexual intercourse is seen important only if it is reproductive. Non-reproductive sexual acts are looked down upon and are rejected by the social structures. The literary works like the poetry of these three poets resist this power politics of natural world and sexual desire and try to liberate both of them from the constraints and boundaries imposed upon them.*

**Keywords:** Ecocriticism, Queer Ecology, Nature, Sexuality, Body, Earth, Homosexuality, Heterosexuality.

## INTRODUCTION:

Ecocriticism is the emerging branch of literary criticism. It starts in the early 1990s and is continuously flourishing due to its contemporary relevance. Basically ecocriticism talks about the connection between literature and the natural environment. It starts in USA in late 1980s with William Rueckert's article "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism" appeared in 1978. Rueckert is also the first to use the term ecocriticism. Another founding figure of Ecocriticism in USA is Cheryll Glotfelty, co-editor with Harold Fromm of *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmark in Literary Ecology* (1996). In UK ecocriticism is known as Green Studies and the founding figure of this approach is Jonathan Bate with his landmark work *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (1991). Before Bate, Raymond Williams has already pointed out the importance and use of nature in literature in his work *The Country and the City* (1973).

Ecocriticism is inspired by the works of nineteenth century American writers- Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Margaret Fuller. In UK it is inspired by Romantic poets of early nineteenth century. All these writers put a lot of emphasis and focus on nature, natural scenes and landscapes. This tendency differentiates them from previous literary traditions like Neo-Classical school of poetry and the Age of Reason in UK and Puritanism and Enlightenment in America.

The main focus of ecocriticism is to study how natural world is dealt in the literary works. Physical environment does not only mean the natural landscapes, but all that is naturally given to us like body, sex, complexion, age etc. As (Kerridge, 2006) states, "Texts are evaluated in terms of their environmentally harmful or helpful effects. (2006, p. 530). Laurence Coupe, in his work, said that green theory 'debates "Nature" in order to defend nature' (Coupe, 2013, p. 155). (Garrard, 2012) describes the task of ecocriticism in these lines, "The challenge for ecocritics is to keep one eye on the ways in which 'nature' is always in some ways culturally constructed, and the other on the fact that nature really exists, both the object and, albeit distantly, the origin of our discourse" (212, p. 10).

Now in these days, ecocriticism is incorporating other theoretical areas within its range as Ecofeminism, Deconstruction Ecology, Deep Ecology, Social Ecology, Eco-Marxism, and most recent Queer Ecology. The focus of each of these sub-areas, within ecocriticism, is the study of nature in relation to the particular issues related to their previous fields. Ecofeminism explores the relationship or affinity between nature and females. Similarly Deconstruction Ecology talks about how a focus on nature can deconstruct the anthropocentric view of humanity.

The long standing debate of Queer Theory – whether the homosexuality is a cultural construction or natural? – can be discussed more comprehensively and analytically through the help of ecocriticism, by stating the fact that a lot of plants, animals, sea-creatures, birds and almost all the flowers are either homosexual, bisexual, intersexual, autosexual or hermaphrodite, "Plants and animals are hermaphroditic before they are bisexual and are bisexual before they are heterosexual." (Morton, 2010, p. 276). So if all these natural beings can be homosexual then why can't human being. In this way queer ecology provides a queer way of thinking environmentally and an ecological way of thinking queerly. It is not that we have to search how environment or nature is used in queer texts, but the very construction and manipulation of queerness and nature is the issue. Sandilands and Erickson describes the task of queer ecology as, "Queer, then, is both noun and verb in this project: ours is an ecology that may begin in the experiences and perceptions of non-heterosexual individuals and communities, but is even more importantly one that calls into question heteronormativity itself as part of its advocacy around issues of nature and environment—and vice versa." (Sandilands & Erickson, 2010, p. 5). Ecological degradation and sexual inequality are the emerging and intense issues of these days.

The poems are selected from the poetry of the American poet Allen Ginsberg (1926-1997), British poet Thom Gunn (1929-2004), and Indian poet Agha Shahid Ali (1949-2001). Each one's poetry depicts both queerness and nature as supportive source of energy for one another. Ginsberg is one of the leading personalities of Beat Generation of American Poetry in 1950s. Throughout his life Ginsberg was active in opposing everything negative in the American society as well as in the rest of the world. That's why his poetry is rebellious, "If ever there was a poet in rebellion against his own parents it was Allen Ginsberg." (Raskin, 2004, p. 26). Thom Gunn is a poet of the Movement tradition of 1950s. He depicts the new young culture of leather-clad motor-bikers, their attitudes and passions. Later when he settled in San Francisco, he became openly a gay-poet. He talks about the fears, passions, desires, longings, threats, and dangers surrounding the homosexuals. At the same time an existential touch can also be found in his poetry. As (Corn, 2009) said, "What does seem plausible to me is that Gunn, hesitant about his sexuality and aware that homosexual encounters were criminal under British law, found in existentialism a philosophical justification for a sexual propensity already active in his psyche" (2009, p. 38). Agha Shahid Ali is well-known poet for his contribution in establishing the 'Ghazal' form in English

language. He always called himself a Kashmiri-American poet because he settled in America just like Thom Gunn. His poetry alludes to a lot of resources like European, Urdu, Arabic, and Persian literary traditions. For Ali, exile, loss, and the related yearning for home remained the primary or the only subject matter. As, “Moving from one place to another, and having born and brought up in different cultures and societies, Shahid had the impact of various cultures on his personality” (Abidi, 2013, p. 76). This loss and exile can be interpreted in a lot of ways – as it can be a literal exile from his homeland, but can also be sexual exile as he might have been facing due to his homosexuality.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:**

This research will use an intersected approach emerged from Queer Theory and Ecocriticism called Queer Ecology. It poses new questions, inquiries, and possibilities. Different concerns of the poets are taken to support one another as well as the opposing forces are viewed as one and the same in a number of ways. Anthropocentric and Heteronormative outlook of humanity is seen in terms of its dominant and exploitative nature. The negation of the recognition of the natural world of flora and fauna as a separate independent entity is linked to the negation of the recognition of non-conformist sexualities. Just as Ecofeminism tries to find out the ways through which female and nature both could be brought close to one another, Queer Ecology tries to bring together the natural diversity and sexual diversity.

### **DISCUSSION:**

Allen Ginsberg talks about a wide and diverse range of issues prevalent at that time. And homosexuality as well as environmental degradation cannot be left behind. Being a homosexual himself, he was sensitive enough towards the degradation through which all homosexuals were going through. But at the same time the destruction of the natural world of flora and fauna becomes one of the major concerns of his poetry. He not only talks about the destruction and degradation of nature but appreciates it highly along with the appreciation of homosexuality. In his poem “221 Syllables at Rocky Mountain Dharma Center” he depicts beautiful scenery of the natural world in all its colours, shades, along with the birds and flowers. This scenery makes a background for a homosexual couple. As:

A dandelion seed floats above the marsh grass with the mosquitos.  
At 4 A. M. the two middleaged men sleeping together holding hands.  
In the half-light of dawn a few birds warble under the Pleiades. (Ginsberg, 2012, p. 8)

As we know that natural scenario is being used to depict sexual or erotic images throughout literary world. But how Ginsberg differs from others is through his depiction of homosexuality in the lap of nature. The objection by cultivated and civilized world for homosexuality is done on the ground that it is unnatural and against the divine law of existence. By putting a homosexual couple in natural scenario where a heterosexual couple used to dominate the scene, Ginsberg has reversed the status quo.

In this poem sunset leads to late afternoon and further towards the night where two middle-aged men are sleeping together. It seems that the whole poem leads to the climax of sexual relation between two men. After this climax the poet turns to the morning scene where “sparrows cheap cheap cheap.” (Ginsberg, 2012, p. 8). Homosexual desire and the desire to enjoy a pleasant natural world are given an effective expression here for the sake of deriving the soothing effect which they provide. The stressful nerves of the men are soothed by enjoying a close physical intimacy as well as the peaceful moment of sunset and sun-rising.

The poem “A Supermarket in California” is addressed to two famous poets Walt Whitman and Garcia Lorca. The surprising thing to note is that both these poets were homosexual and the addresser, most probably Ginsberg himself, is also a homosexual. So does not he try to create a canon of homosexual poetry by referring to other poets like himself? Is not it the case that Ginsberg is trying to naturalize poetry with a different orientation where males are following males? Where men are pursuing one another? Where homosexual poets are leading as well as following one another? As the poet said, “I wandered in and out of the brilliant stacks of cans following you, and / followed in my imagination by the store detective.” (Ginsberg, 2012, p. 10).

Ginsberg is looking for inspiration from Whitman and Lorca and in the very beginning of the poem we see that he is equating Whitman with “the full moon”. So thinking about Whitman and looking at the full moon, both the activities have become one or intensify one another. Further the poet speaks about his hunger and fatigue. And this hunger and fatigue can be literal as well as metaphorical. Literally the persona is hungry that’s why he

is roaming around the fruit market but the metaphorical implication of the hunger and fatigue cannot be left behind because it is here where the crux of the whole argument lies. The “hungry fatigue” can be for anything from physical to metaphysical, biological to spiritual, carnal to divine. And does not the poet correlate both the forms of “hungry fatigue”? Or maybe the fatigue has occurred while trying to fulfill the hunger.

Further the scene of the supermarket is strange. Rather than having the heterosexual families at the shops, Ginsberg is saying that aisles are full of husbands without wives and children. And wives are in the forms of “avocadoes”; and babies are disguised in the forms of “tomatoes”. What does all this imply? Fruits are no more fruits alone; they have become humans. Or maybe the consumption of one is equated with that of another. Here Lorca is looking for the “watermelon” and Whitman for the “pork meat” and “bananas”. Now these natural things (fruits) are filled with symbolic significance. Although these symbols can be interpreted in any way, here we can draw them for the cause of homosexuality and the significance of natural treasures for human life. To live without the grace of nature is impossible hence the dependency of human beings on nature can be seen in this poem.

But why does the poet talk about male customers roaming here and there in the supermarket? Have they really come to buy something or to do something else? Is not it a chase for the desired lover? Is not it a pretense to go and look for someone whom you wish to get? So does not this whole supermarket become an area which is supposed to be crowded by heterosexual couples, but now invaded by homosexuals? Does not it imply the sexual politics of space which is resisted by non-normative sexual minorities? As the poet said, “Will we walk all night through solitary streets? The trees add shade to / shade, lights out in the houses, we’ll both be lonely.” (Ginsberg, 2012, p. 10).

As the poet moves towards the end of the poem, he evokes Whitman by calling out their desire to get back “the lost America of love” (Ginsberg, 2012, p. 10). Here the poet gives voice to the materialistic development of America with particular reference to the automobiles. But he wants to leave them behind and to go “to our silent cottage” (Ginsberg, 2012, p. 10) along with Whitman. Now does not all this mean that the poet is giving voice to the frustration caused by the materialistic development of America where he himself wants to recede back to the world of flora and fauna? Further the poet distances himself from Whitman and asks him “what Americas did you have” (Ginsberg, 2012, p. 10) at the time when he was alive and denied his soul to be taken away by “Charon” on the river Lethe, by passing which human souls forget all worldly matters of their lives? Does this mean that Whitman does not want to leave the world? But Whitman left the boat because it was going to move on the “black waters” of the river, and he stood on the “smoking bank”; may be which is a reference to the degrading and deteriorating condition of all natural scenarios or scenes from land to ocean, hillsides to plains, deserts to rivers etc.

In this way the whole poem seems to give voice to certain issues including the nature, nature degradation, human dependency on nature, homosexual love, and to the canon of homosexual poetry. This combination of one sort of challenge (natural degradation) of modern society to another (the deteriorated condition of homosexual) is remarkable feature of this poem.

Another of his poem, which would be quite significant here, is “Sphincter”. What Ginsberg is doing here is putting his focus upon his body, or say, upon the body of a homosexual person. In her famous essay “The Laugh of the Medusa” Helen Cixous said, “More body, hence more writing” (Showalter, 1981, p. 187). What she means to say is that if a female writer wants to differentiate herself from male writers, she must put her attention, in her work, upon her body before anything else. Similarly Elaine Showalter said, “Feminist criticism written in the biological perspective generally stresses the importance of the body as a source of imagery” (1981, p. 188).

We can say the same about homoerotic creative writing. And the model of this is in front of us. Ginsberg is doing none other than using a queer body as a source of imagery for putting forth the cause of queerness. Although the bodily functions are quite same as far as defecation is concerned but Ginsberg is not talking about this function of sphincter. Rather he is concerned with its receptive function for a homosexual male. Defecation or excretion has not much to do with sphincter as far as this poem is concerned; rather reception becomes its main function in this poem which also hints towards the passive sexuality of the persona of the poet. As the poet said:

active, eager, receptive to phallus  
 coke bottle, candle, carrot  
 banana & fingers – (Ginsberg, 2012, p. 63)

What can be more natural than one’s body? And what can be more natural than the bodily function? One way of

interpreting the poem can be seen as depicting the naturalness of homosexual body. But the condition here is not only to see how the body works for a homosexual person but how he/she can subvert its usual function for his/her personal choices. Discharging function is turned upside down by putting it in contrast to the receptive function. Putting something out is replaced by taking something in. And that ‘something’ can be anything from real phallus to artificial substitutes of phallus like “coke bottle”, “candle”, “carrot”, “banana” or “fingers”. And why would a person take an artificial substitute? The answer can be that when open expression of one’s deviant sexual orientation is prohibited there is no other way except to have substitute ways of gratification.

Has not Ginsberg put something quite natural in contrast to entirely unnatural objects to which his sphincter can be receptive? This natural/unnatural binary is working quite effectively in this poem, but there are other binary positions as well about which Ginsberg is conscious as young/old, defecation/reception, healthy/unhealthy, active/passive, and most important among all - heterosexuality/homosexuality.

Further we can see Ginsberg’s concern for and attention upon the hovering danger which is usually called ‘gay plague’ or AIDS. Apart from the opposition to sexual diversity on the part of the rest of the society, there are other oppositions as well which might have less to do with social norms, morals, ethics, and values. These dangers are in the form of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. As Ginsberg said:

Now AIDS makes it shy, but still  
eager to serve –  
out with the dumps, in with the condom’d  
orgasmic friend – (Ginsberg, 2012, p. 63)

Just as the heterosexual community has found out the ways to counter this danger so have the homosexuals as well. So the way to make love is as much open for homosexuals as it is for heterosexual. At least Ginsberg hopes well for all homosexual people along with himself. This concern for the well-being of others with special focus upon one’s sexual orientation is the strength of this poem.

Similarly Thom Gunn’s poetry can give us an effective idea about a poet’s concern for various issues of the modern world ranging from his/her personal to the impersonal matters and subjective to objective. As can be seen in his poem “Tamer and Hawk”. The persona of the poem is the hawk and it is expressing its views to the tamer. Now the question is how far the exact point of view of the hawk is presented. Whether the hawk itself speaks really or whether the voice is given by some intermediate sort of thing? Or whether the poet himself is speaking on behalf of the hawk? Of course all this is true to some extent. The poet is speaking on behalf of the hawk as well as the voice is given to it by the poet. As far the point of view is concerned it becomes a little complex and contradictory. The usual relationship between a bird or an animal and its tamer is given an expression with all its variations. The hawk thought that once it was really tough and quick in its movements. But the long stay with the tamer has taught it to be gentle. Although the bird wants to show its fidelity to the tamer by responding quickly to his commands but the hawk is helpless because it has lost its toughness and quickness. As:

I thought I was so tough,  
But gentled at your hands,  
Cannot be quick enough  
To fly for you and show  
That when I go I go  
At your commands. (Gunn, 1979, p. 10)

The process of gentlization/training has deprived the hawk of its natural qualities. In an indirect way the bird is feeling nostalgic about his lost attributes. And human intervention in such cases is given an expression in this poem where the bird is speaking in the first person and is giving its point of view by exposing the intricacies of the relationship between a tamer and his pets. Further the bird says that even while flying in the far sky it does not feel free; rather the so-called love or affection of the tamer haunts it there and calls it back. As is said, “Even in flight above / I am no longer free: / You sealed me with your love,” (Gunn, 1979, p. 10).

And the love of the tamer has made the bird blind to other birds or other beings like itself. The habit of getting the commands of the tamer for all the time has become an obsession with the bird and now it cannot live without those words of the tamer which has covered his head like a hood. This total surrender / subjugation on the part of the bird is crucial in looking at the process of deprivation of the freedom of natural beings by human

intervention. The hawk recalls its former state of living when it was free from any obligation to a tamer, when it was independent from any fear of human authority. It said, "As formerly, I wheel / I hover and I twist," (Gunn, 1979, p. 10). But the hawk no longer is free; it cannot do those free flights any more. Then what can it do now? Or what does it want now? Just a feeling that how the catcher/hunter and the caught/prey used to feel at the time of hunting. The bird wants to have such feelings by sitting upon the wrist of the tamer. This nostalgic feeling for a past where there was no authority or dominance or control is what the bird wants to get back. Another important thing to note about the bird recalling the hunting scene is that the hawk is considered to be one of the best hunters or birds of prey, but now it itself has become the prey to or for the tamer.

The hawk further tells about its fears and about the sort of relationship it has with the tamer. The bird calls the tamer "half civilize" which probably means the half-civilizedness of the rest of humanity which has turned out to be more brutal and uncivilized than the other living beings from animals to birds and sea-creatures. So where does the civilizedness of human beings lie when they are exploiting other living beings without thinking about their freedom, their rights to live? The bird said, "You but half civilize, / Taming me in this way." (Gunn, 1979, p. 10).

And the fear to lose its attributes or qualities provided by nature to human beings or to the tamer specifically, the bird said that it agrees to lose its eyes to the tamer provided that the ultimate result would be that the tamer himself would become a prey for the hawk. Now how would it work? Hawks are well-known for their sharp eyesight. The tamer wants to use this for his purposes somehow. But the hawk turns out to be more efficient, more self-dependent than the tamer. That's why it does not need the help of human beings in hunting for itself. But on the other hand the tamer needs a hawk for hunting or for searching something or other.

This far the environmental concern of the poet is depicted in this poem where he is concerned about the growing intervention and dominance of human being in the world of flora and fauna, which is not innocent in any way and is full of all the politics of oppressor and oppressed, master and slave, colonizer and colonized, us and other, subject and object, bourgeois and proletariat. Such power structures, when manipulated in natural scenarios, start exposing the politics of binaries through which one side is always getting exploited by the other. So the poem becomes a cry in opposition to such exploitation of flora and fauna.

But what about the symbolic meaning of all the imagery, symbols and metaphors used in the poem? Is the poem as straightforward as it appears? Does not it contain any other meaning? What about the gendered and sexual roles attributed to the tamer and the hawk? And what about their relationship? Is it so innocent and practical a relationship? Of course these issues cannot be ignored. The sexuality and the gender of both the tamer and the hawk is not specified anywhere in the poem. Why so? Why did not the poet specify it? Was he up to something? Taking into consideration the silence of the poet about the gender and sexuality of the tamer and the hawk, we can say that the poet has deliberately left it open and unspecified. May be the relationship between the tamer and the hawk is not acceptable if they both are symbolizing two male characters. This homoerotic love between both turns the poem in other ways where the heterosexuality and homosexuality are the grounds of contest or struggle, not only that of anthropocentrism and ecocentrism. In this sort of reading the toughness and quickness of the hawk turns out to be the obsession of a homosexual person with the toughness and quickness of others like him or her; which has been molded into gentleness by a true friend or lover as by the tamer in this case. The hawk is bound to his love when he utters, "You sealed me with your love, / I am blind to other birds –" (Gunn, 1979, p. 10).

Now what does all this mean? Does not it express a very fine and clear picture of love-affair between two out of the way living beings? Does not it express the so-called unnatural love affair? And think about the total surrender of its body by the hawk for the sake of the tamer. The bird loses its body, its natural qualities in order to get the tamer, that's why it sings: "I lose to keep, and chose / Tamer as prey" (Gunn, 1979, p. 10).

This expression of love where one of the two beings engaged in affair is trying to negate his individuality and accept everything wholeheartedly as provided by the other. The sacrifice of one's self in order to achieve something greater in love, some state where the difference between the self and the other is reduced to minimum is given a fine expression in this poem. In that the poem becomes an instance of gay or queer poetry. As Clive Wilmer notes about the poem, with specific attention upon its homoerotic sensations, "I doubt if many readers in 1954 realized that this was a poem of gay love, but most of us, I suspect, sensed something irregular in it. The irregularity would have focused itself in the poem's sadomasochistic implications" (Clive, 2009, p. 65).

Another of Gunn's poem where we can observe his concern for nature or the environment and for masculinity or male subject in isolation is "To a Friend in Time of Trouble". The scene of the poem is a rural space much away from the chaos of urban areas. The character of the poem wakes up in the morning as the poem starts and comes out of his cabin which he has built in that isolated area for himself. As the person comes out of his cabin he starts observing, rather enjoying the pleasant scene of morning in the lap of nature. As the poet said, "And

pause, your senses reaching out anxiously, / Tentatively, toward scrub and giant tree:” (Gunn, 1992, p. 4). This giving of the self or the personal energy for some cause (here we can assume the cause to be a sensitivity or concern for the nature) is instructed or taught to the man by his dog. As dogs are considered to be one of the most faithful animals to human beings and they are well-known for their services. The dog is sitting beside him and is following each of his movement attentively just as the man himself is following or observing trees and scrub. In this way, the beginning of the poem gives us an expression of the close connection or relationship of a person with flora (as the scrub and trees) and fauna (animals as the dog). As:

A giving of the self instructed by  
The dog who settles near you with a sigh  
And seeks you in your movements, following each. (Gunn, 1992, p. 4)

Just as the senses of the dog are following the activities or the movements of the person, the senses of the person are following the ongoing phenomenon of nature such as the blowing of the wind, the ferns getting flight through the air, and the soil on which all the flora or plants grow. In this calm, quiet and peaceful morning in a rural or natural place, far away from the turmoil of urban areas, the person first enjoys the quietness but then hears a cry, a shriek. A “wide-winged” bird of prey was snatching and carrying its hunt and probably the cries would be uttered by the prey. Now the focus is turned upon the bird of prey, upon its easiness in hunting and flying. Soon the cries of the hunted bird ceases and the bird of the prey start taking its food. The scene of ripping apart the body of the hunted bird might be seen as a cruel act but the poet convinces us that it is not so. Actually all this is a part of nature where there are birds and animals of prey and they hunt other birds and animals, all this is part of the food chain. As the poet said:

It is not cruel, it is not human, though  
You cringe who would not feel surprised to find  
Such lacerations made by mind on mind. (Gunn, 1992, p. 4)

After all this morning enjoyment the person starts his work i.e. “haul large stones uphill” (Gunn, 1992, p. 5). He intends to make a wall of these stones, a wall which will save the soil and the plants which grow in that soil, from getting eroded during the heavy rain. It is a hard work, but it gives a chance to get rid of the bitter memories of the city life which might be much more troublesome. This comparison of life in the city and the rural areas is a remarkable point to note about this poem. Even though the life is not easy in rural areas or in the world of flora and fauna, but there is much to enjoy about, much to get relief from, and much to appreciate. As we can see in these lines:

Hard work and tiring, but the exercise  
Opens the blood to air and simplifies  
The memory of your trouble in the city. (Gunn, 1992, p. 5)

Further the poet puts his focus upon the personality of the character or upon his body with all its masculinity and vigour. The appreciation of the physical strength of the person in the poem is not as naïve as it may seem. Here lies something more serious and grave about the perspective of the poet. The attraction for the charm of the body, for its strength and masculinity can be depicted as an instance of the gayness of the persona, or as an example of the homoerotic elements of Gunn’s poetry. The attraction for hardness, for sheer physicality and masculinity is important for such an interpretation. The tired body of the person gets relief from lying in the grass or under the shades of trees. This healing of one’s weakness by the regenerative powers of nature, a weakness caused by hard work or by other causes including the damage done by urbanization or material development, is what the poem can be interpreted to put forth. The poet said:

A handsome grey-haired, grey-eyed man, tight knit;  
Each muscle clenching as you call on it  
From the charmed empire of your middle age. (Gunn, 1992, p. 5)

Now what does all this mean, all this about the close observation of a male by another male? Does not it give us a chance to see or look at the sexual orientation of either the poet or the person who is residing lonely in an area

away from others? And if not homoerotic or homosexual, does not the person is engaged in a sort of autoerotic activity where he is conscious about the strength, masculinity, and vigour of his physique. All these questions can be answered in affirmative to much positive extent.

Further in his poem “The Differences” Gunn is doing much more than just putting his attention upon nature and sexuality simultaneously. He is alluding to a lot of infamous things of the world or society from homosexuality to drug addiction as well as to other homoerotic poets just as Ginsberg has done. At the beginning of the poem he alludes to famous lesbian poet and theorist Adrienne Rich whose poetry the person, in the poem, is reciting on “Cole and Haight” the infamous streets of San Francisco due to their connection to the drug culture of 1960s. Is not the poet making a connection between homosexuality and drug addiction? Of course he is doing so. The depression of deviant sexuality is soothed by drugs, that’s why the 1960s famous for sexual and drug addicts. And then the poet moves on to describe the person with such vividness as can be seen in these lines:

Reciting Adrienne Rich on Cole and Haight,  
Your blond hair bouncing like a corner boy’s,  
You walked with sturdy almost swaggering gait,  
The short man’s, looking upward with such poise, (Gunn, 1992, p. 9)

The poet is appreciating the body of the person – his “blond hair”, “swaggering gait” and is looking in awe at him. This attention or concentration upon someone is a feature which occurs time and again in Gunn’s poetry, and most of the time the person used to be a male, rather an ideal male with much physical strength and charming personality. But here the person is depicted to be delicate and intellectual type, that’s why he is reading poetry. Further the poet compares the person to a storm-trooper who is known for his physical strength and courage. The obsession of the poet with such attraction for male human bodies can be described as an example of homoeroticism. But the poet’s concern is not for sheer physicality, neither for sheer intellectuality. What he is trying to do is to incorporate both the qualities in one person, hence to make an ideal man who can pass all the tests from physical strength to intellectual superiority. That’s why he said, “..... To me / Conscience and courage stood fleshed out in you.” (Gunn, 1992, p. 9). The courage of a storm-trooper and the intellect of a poet both are present in that person. So in a way the poet is idealizing him to be perfect in both the terms – physical and intellectual.

The next stanza is about the interplay of two bodies engaged in physical or carnal love. Both are trying to soothe one another sexually and physically. Here the celebration of physical love, of close bodily contact and the exuberance caused by it is described with all its smells, playfulness, charms, and reliefs. The body becomes the imagery from where the homoeroticism starts and through which it can be achieved and explained. But one must not think that the homosexual love is deviant in the sense that it is concerned with physical or sexual satisfaction. Look at the dealing of the poet with the duality of love – physical and spiritual, carnal and divine. Although it puts forth a contradiction because in the rest of the stanza the poet is describing love in all its profane, carnal and physical garb but quite suddenly he turns to the divine, spiritual and metaphysical form of love. By putting aside these contradictions and by connecting then with one another for the sake of reinforcing the impetus of love, the poem gives us a glance over both forms of love. The poet said, “My love not flesh but in the mind beneath.” (Gunn, 1992, p. 9).

Just as at the beginning of the poem the poet has alluded to a homoerotic poet (Adrienne Rich), now he is quoting famous Italian poet Guido Cavalcanti. This tendency of referring to other poets of the same perspective or tradition is a feature by which the poets not only assert their use of some different issues as justifiable but also about how others have done that before them. As Briar Teare said, “Historically, gay writers have read each other’s works not only for aesthetic kinship but also in search of identity and community models, to see how others like themselves have fashioned their lives and relationships” (Teare, 2009, p. 190).

The poetry of this poet gives a spiritual experience of love, a divine and metaphysical state of love. And rather than being an outer phenomenon it is an inner experience having its origin and existence in the deep core of one’s mind and soul. But all this is opaque to the poet when he said, “It is opaque.” (Gunn, 1992, p. 9). What the poet knows and have some experience of is carnal form of love that’s why every other form of love is opaque for him. In the next stanza he again turns to describe physical relationship with his lover. As he said:

We lay at ease, an arm loose round a waist,  
Or side by side and touching at the hips,  
As if we were two trees, bough grazing bough,  
The twigs being the toes or fingertips. (Gunn, 1992, p. 10)

The stanza is remarkable when analyzed by taking into account the depiction of sexuality and the natural imagery which is selected to present and express it. Look at the use of interconnected boughs of two trees, which are used to symbolize the interconnected bodies engaged in physical love. Further again the poet recalls a past experience when he and his lover were lying in their bed at the time of a January night. Although they both were distinct from one another as well as from others; but they shared something between both of themselves and the rest of the humanity. They both might share their sexual orientation with one another and the instinct to love with the rest of the humanity. In that night of rain and coldness (another natural phenomenon) they both enjoyed physical intimacy but they also got some sort of revelation, some clarity at that time. What clarity that can be? May be about the true relationship in which they are engaged, may be the dedication for one another. And this dedication is as much natural as heterosexual one.

The interplay of two concerns – the concern for nature and for homosexuality – can be derived from the poetry of Thom Gunn as effectively as any other theme ranging from existential concern to identity formation or assertion.

Agha Shahid Ali's poems are remarkable for their concern for the Kashmiri landscape as well as for the sexuality of the poet himself. This can be seen in the poem "A Monsoon Note on Old Age" in his collection *The Half-Inch Himalayas* (1987). The old age has yet to come but the concern of the poet for the growth and what it will bring can be seen in this poem. Along with the old age the death comes near day by day. The poet is writing it in the present moment thinking about a time fifty years later when he would be old. This shift from present to future, youth to old age is the main feature of the poem. Next concern is that of the body. Body is used as a source of imagery just like Ginsberg and Gunn. But the same body is aware of some absence, ". . . . . , my skin / shriveled, a tired eunuch, aware / only of an absence," (Ali, 2009, p. 46).

Now the thing to note about is why the poet calls himself a eunuch. And what is the meaning of the shriveling of the skin? Does it mean that the body/skin shriveled during the growth or was it born in that way? And what about the absence? Has this absence to do something with the shriveled skin or with the withering body? Of course, much can be said. May be the poet saw his homosexuality or his deviant sexuality as that of a eunuch's. This identification with the eunuch gives a chance to talk about the different forms of sexuality. And the absence could be the absence of so-called nature sexuality, or that of a stable gender/sex. The instability of gender as well as sexual orientation is a condition which confronts the poet here. The instability of sexuality and gender is a phenomenon with which the poem concerned effectively.

Further the poet gives allusion to the prison, the boundaries as are put around such deviant persons. This exclusion or isolation is depicted in the poem from the beginning to the end. All the experiences are faced by the persona in isolation or single-handedly. The shuffling of the stars can be seen as the efforts of the poet to change the existing situation of oppressed and oppressor. His efforts are to rescue himself or the eunuch from a hetero-patriarchal boundary and have liberation. All the events of the poem have taken place in night to which the poet alludes time and again. This night-time rescue plan, from the prison of socio-cultural restrictions over homosexuality, is the remarkable feature of the poem. And the poet is not talking about the present time, but a future (fifty years later). May be at that time sexual diversity would be accepted without any hesitation or reluctance. And then the poet addressed to someone (may be to his lover) by saying:

. . . . . the night regains  
its textures of rain. I overexpose  
your photograph, dusting  
death's far-off country. (Ali, 2009, p. 46)

All this is given voice through the persona of a eunuch-like person who is afraid of his shriveled skin or perverse body. In a world which is highly obsessed with homophobia the voice of a eunuch or that of a queer is not easy to rise. To be without an accepted gender in a hetero-patriarchal world is to be deviant, perverse and subversive. The poet's effort to bring the subversive body in the center is notable.

In "Beyond the Ash Rains" from *A Nostalgist's Map of America* (1991) Ali tries to trace the movement of his persona, along with his friend, from desert to canyon then to the red rocks. Actually what he is trying to do is locating the roots of the persona and his companion. A perpetual movement from one place to another in the search of an ideal place or space for the habitation of these two or more persons is depicted in this poem. The desert does not acknowledge them to be the natives or the inhabitants of the tribe residing there once. As in these lines:

When the desert refused my history,  
 refused to acknowledge that I lived  
 there, with you, among a vanished tribe, (Ali, 2009, p. 110)

But the companion of the poet, by parting the rain, beckons him to join him and then went away to the canyons. In the “red rocks”, where he is residing the persona felt uncomfortable due to the nomadic ways of life of his companion. Whereas the companion of the poet is efficient in his nomadic ways of walking through the rain without getting damp, the poet was unable to do so. So he gets wet and feels cold, but the friend lights the fire. Here the poet said:

. . . . . You showed me the relics  
 of our former life, proof that we’d at last  
 found each other, but in your arms I felt  
 singled out for loss. . . . . (Ali, 2009, p. 110)

This close intimacy, between two persons (probably two males), shows the homoerotic nature of Ali’s poetry. And the scene is an isolated, alienated area away from the chaotic life of cities. In the grand canyon of red rocks the poet and his companion are feeling secure from the harshness or strong opposition from the rest of the society or the world. What they were searching is not only a secure place but a secure bonding and relationship as well. But even in that faraway place the poet is not feeling secure. He wants to go somewhere “where no one has been / and no one will be...” (Ali, 2009, p. 110). So they both started their journey, holding one another’s hands, and this bond gave them strength and energy to face the hardships on the way in the search of that ideal place. The companion of the poet tries to console him by saying or assuring him that from now onwards he would never let him feel despaired or exiled. The arms of the lover become a secure abode, with all its warmth and strength.

Whereas the poet has tried to depict a lost unity, harmony, and wholeness with natural world (desert, canyon, red rocks) or a bioregion, at the same time it also can be seen as the historical investigation of the traces of the existence of homoerotic desire in human beings. That’s why the poet, time and again, tells that first the desert and then the canyon refused to acknowledge him or people like him. This concern of the poet for the historical presence of queers and their presence everywhere from desert to mountains is significant as far the precarious condition of a minority is concerned, especially that minority which is considered to be unnatural, dangerous, deviant, perverse, and subversive.

**CONCLUSION :**

An eco-queer analysis of the poems of Ginsberg, Gunn, and Ali reveals the hidden meaning of the use of nature in order to depict homosexual desire. Homosexuality is greened by depicting its existence in nature. And by doing so the compulsory discourses of patriarchy and heterosexuality or hetero-normativity are challenged. Because these discourses rest upon the idea that whatever is done is done in order to get some output of those acts. Similarly sexuality is well to do if it is useful in producing or reproducing something which may be useful for the society. Non-reproductive sexualities are negated, criminalized and condemned. Ginsberg, Gunn, and Ali are doing none other than erasing such negative connotations from the homosexual nature. Their poems have liberated sexual diversities from the moors of patriarchal and heterosexual social structures. The beauty of these poems lies in the remarkable thing that these poets have used the very concept of nature through which hetero-normative discourse used to naturalize one form of sexuality (heterosexuality) and denaturalize the other (homosexuality). This idea of un/naturalness of sexual and gendered identities is much complex as Judith Butler elaborated how both (gender and sex) are cultural constructs (Butler, 1990).

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