

## Nature in Sohrab Sepehri's Poetry and Thought

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### Abstract

In Sepehri's view, the entire universe, even nature, is alive and active. Nature has not only physical appearance, but also spiritual essence and soul. Looking at nature monotheistically, we can even see mud and bur as containers of the truth and signs of God. Sepehri believes that nature is the embodiment of God's grace and grandeur. Hence, looking at and meditating on it, man may be led to meet God and reach spiritual worlds. In Sepehri's poetry, nature and phenomena in the universe, as well as their living, beauty, and meaningfulness, are treated as manifestations of the Truth and inspiration.

**Keywords:** Man, Faith, God, Sepehri, Nature

### Introduction:

Sohrab Sepehri, the contemporary Iranian poet and painter, is among the artists who are expert in both poetry and painting. As a thoughtful poet who spent most of his life in pondering upon different horizons and spiritual matters and studying various mystical, philosophical, and religious schools and worldviews, Sepehri has unique attitudes toward life. This view of man and the meaning of life evolves and is illuminated gradually throughout his works. It seems that he has followed human's life from the beginning to the end of its evolution and provided his audience with the most essential issues of life. Most of his poems are soliloquy and seem to be his own autobiography. Such autobiographies, however, are not like those located in anecdotes and wrapped in narratives; they are rather questions and meditations of life, human, and existence. He awakens the audience and evokes them to self-response. The next section of the present study is dedicated to Sepehri's views on man and his life, God, existence, and nature. In another section, his directions about how to achieve meaningful and transcendental life are presented. In the subsequent section of the paper, we deal with the relations of God, man, nature, and insightful view of the existence.

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**Existence, Universe, and Nature:  
All the phenomena in the universe are alive  
Mysteriousness of nature**

In Sepehri's view, the entire universe, even nature, is alive and active. Nature has not only physical appearance, but also spiritual essence and soul. "We should have faith in, let the reason alone, that the sensible material world created for us by our senses, merely exists in order to portray and maintain the spiritual world". We should believe faithfully that there is a soul, at the depth of our body, in animals, plants, rocks, in all living things and the entire universe, that wants to know itself, be aware of itself, and become solely spiritual. Since such position can only be achieved by means of the body, it creates and makes use of the body while is being trapped in the matter" (Unamuno, 1991, p. 272). In his view, all the created objects and events contain a spiritual essence and have an eternal preexistent inner reality, as well as their external appearance. In fact, the descent of things as material objects, according to this theory, is a means given for their spiritual development and growth.

*Company, we are with the eternity of flowers. (p. 167)*

*Life, flower powered by eternity. (p. 291)*

*The tree drew a sketch in eternity. (p. 165)*

In fact, this is in line with Suhrawardi's attitude who viewed worldly objects as the shadow of a higher reality. Tree has a particular status in religious and theosophical mythology. Sohrab also believes that tree is an eternal and sacred object, a point interestingly referred to by Ein-al-Ghosat Hamadani, " Now, listen carefully, '...a blessed Tree, an Olive, neither of the east nor of the west, whose oil is well-nigh luminous,' (Holy Quran, Surat al-Noor, sign35). My dear! Ignorant people of the world consider that tree an earthly one. They do not know that the tree does also exist in Paradise. O stay to see the blessed tree and recognize it as Sedrat-al-Montaha.... the origin of these all is the same. It is sometimes called "the tree", sometimes "Mount Sinai", sometimes "Olive" and sometimes "the tree growing on the Mount Sinai" (Hamadani, 1778, p. 263). Its existence adds meaning to life and is the purpose of living.

*I saw the tree was there,*

*When the tree is, one must also be,*

*One must be and trace the footsteps of the narrative to the blank text. (p. 411)*

There is a prayer called "The Tree Brother" among Avesta invocations. In Zoroaster's view, humans and trees are brothers; life of one depends on the living of the other. He thinks that cutting down the trees is a sin, an evil deed (Avesta, 2001, p. 57).

*I told them, rock is not embellishment for mountain,*

*As the metal is not an ornament for the hack.*

*There is a jewel in the palm of earth's hand,*

*By which all prophets are dazzled.*

*Pursue the jewel; take the moment to the field of prophecy. (p. 374)*

In Sohrab's view, even a stone in nature has a mystery, a jewel, in itself and is not merely created for embellishment; those who have insightful visions are astonished being encountered with the truth of such essence as an image among different signs of God. He thinks that all of the components of the universe are mysterious and have a message for

mankind. Sometime, a bird's song at night induces him to have divine conduct and step in the road of wisdom.

*Listen to the farthest bird in the world singing.*

*Night is smooth, pure, and clear.*

*Listen to the road calling your steps afar.*

*Your eyes are not adornment of night,*

*Wear your shoes and come. (p. 371)*

Wind communicates to him the message of leaving the material world.

*I hear some noises,*

*And I am the only addressee for all the winds around the world.*

*One must pass, and,*

*O constant winds,*

*, I am a passenger. (p. 320-7)*

In this worldview, no creature or event is purposeless, and the entire universe is created and directed following a mystery, based on God's intention.

**Nature: the Embodiment of God's Grace:**

*In a marsh, I saw a bit of your smile on mud,*

*I said prayers.*

*Beneath a bur, your memory was concealed,*

*I cut it, dispersed it to the entire world. (p. 257)*

Looking at nature monotheistically, we can even see mud and bur as containers of the truth and signs of God. Sepehri believes that nature is the embodiment of God's grace and grandeur. Hence, looking at and meditating on it, man may be led to meet God and reach spiritual worlds.

*As you get to the tree,*

*Stay and look.*

*Looking takes you to the heaven. (Sepehri, 2011, p. 100)*

*One must get at the sight of the tree and God. (p. 434)*

In his view, the tree reflects God and looking at its life will take man to meet God.

*Once man was a member of a bough's relatives,*

*Once in the shadow of the cognition leaf,*

*On the large eyelid of enunciation,*

*One was becoming unconscious in a sweet dream,*

*Watching the light of a star,*

*Man's blood was steeped in golden bars of intuition. (p. 431)*

He causes us to remember that once human beings were closer to nature and in harmony with it, looking at stars, man was filled with lots of divine intuitions. Even a mountain, when watched lucidly, reflects the existence of God.

*It was a prosperous night,*

*The river was moving toward distant areas from beneath the poplars.*

*The valley in the moonlight,*

*The mountain so full of light,  
That God was seen. (pp. 333-4)*

**Nature Glorifies God:**

Sepehri believes that nature glorifies God. However, as Rumi says, only trustworthy ears can hear that glorification:

*We are receptive, discerning, alert,  
But to you, untrustworthy, we remain silent. (Rumi, 1997, p. 387)*

*You! Who deserve culmination,  
Your song on the mount and a plant murmurs prayers,  
I am accompanied with the crock of darkness and pouring of the eternal mystery. (p. 264)  
Winds are calling for prayer,  
Waves are attending the prayer,  
And grasses are beginning their prayers.*

Sepehri considers nature and the entire universe an altar, a shrine; with which mankind must be in harmony and together they must say prayers.

*I say prayers at a spring,  
I fall prostrate on light before God,  
Prairie is my prayer place,  
I say my prayers when  
Wind calls for prayer atop of the altar of cedar.  
I say my prayers after grasses begin theirs,  
When waves attend the prayers. (pp. 272-3)*

**All phenomena are elegant and meaningful:**

In Sepehri's viewpoint, all phenomena, even supposedly ugly ones, are at the zenith of elegance and meaningfulness. Many elements of nature which seem to be worthless, have a particular valuable status in the universe, as in their absence, the whole universe appears to be imperfect.

*We should be alert,  
If there was no worm,  
A lack in the world was felt.  
And if there was no tree worm,  
Rule of trees was damaged.  
And if death did not exist,  
Our hand would seek for something instead.  
A gap was found in seas,  
Before coral came to exist.  
And we should not want,  
The leopard to leave the world. (p. 294)*

Everything is created purposefully, based on wisdom, a goal. Nothing is created in vane and if something did not exist, life would be deficient.

*I don't know why  
Nobody cages vultures.*

*What does clover lack  
Compared to red tulips? (p. 291)*

"For Sepehri, nature was a sacred notion and natural objects, whether animate or inanimate, were equally precious to him. For him, a piece of stone was not less valuable than a tree; a tiny insect was not less worthwhile than a giant mature man. It should be mentioned that, however, Sepehri viewed the world theosophically and philosophically" (Ashuri, 1992, p. 34).

In his opinion, the reality of objects and God's grace are covered by the material appearance, but images of God's grace and signs of His existence could be clearly seen through looking carefully at and meditating on nature. Death is another event or subject to which Sepehri refers as an inevitable part of the life, the beginning of vigilance and flourishing.

*We are blossoms of a dream,  
Shall we flourish?  
Yes, yes! Someday in the valley of death. (pp. 229-230)*

In religious scriptures and theosophical thoughts, man is well advised to constantly remember the death so as to avoid ignorance. "In Buddhism, cogitation on death is essential to achieve immortality. A wayfarer of God's way can repeat the term 'DEATH' over and over in his mind and concentrate on it during his meditations. Such meditations would gradually overcome the ignorance causing one to deny the death" (Childster, 2001, p. 186).

#### **Conclusion:**

In Sepehri's viewpoint, the universe has not descended to a material desert; human is not solely material and has a soul who descended to substance after he had left God. This descent follows a purpose which is his evolution and trial during his worldly life. He is not created fruitlessly based on no purpose; he is created to become a perfect man adhering to God's spirit, return to God, and be immersed in His mercy. Man is not created to be castigated and troubled in the Hell; every suffering and trouble affecting him during his life is a means of becoming vigilant in his passage toward evolution. It is the existence of God that makes human's life meaningful. To approach God and capture his representatives is the soul of the universe and, the meaning of man's life is to realize the relation which he has with God. Meanwhile, notions such as reclusion and invocation, purification of the inside, contentment, constant entreaty, considering oneself as passenger in this world, and, especially, faith and avoiding philosophical questioning, are among the tools helping mankind obtain the true meaning of his life. As well as human beings, the whole universe and nature are alive, perceptive, and representatives of God's Spirit. Natural elements are preexistent and eternal; human can achieve intuitions being immersed in and cogitating on them. The entire universe is elegant and at the acme of meaningfulness, nothing is ugly, even supposedly awful ones. The universe is mysterious and has an inside other than its appearance. No phenomenon or event is accidental, fruitless, or absurd. Contrastingly, everything is created purposefully with a Divine intention; the whole system of the universe has been created rationally. Therefore, every single component of the universe or nature has its own particular value. No one is superior to others. In Sepehri's view, the worldly life, or as he calls it, "the green opportunity of

living", is a finite period of time bestowed to man in order for him to evolve perfectly. This world is passage toward a higher more perfect life which has no trouble in it. And the death is not the end of life, but the beginning of vigilance and flourishing.

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