

# ***THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES***

## **The Deification of Land – An Ecocritical Study of Ki. Rajanarayanan’s Gopallapuram**

**Jayapragash J.**

Research Scholar, Bharathiar University, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India

**Dr. A. Subramanian**

Associate Professor, Department of English, Jeppiar Institute of Technology, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India

**Abstract:**

*One has to learn from nature, failing which he has not lived at all is the opinion of Henry David Thoreau. Nature is a projection of the inner state of human beings; it is the determinant of one's actions and sometimes it may be a controlling influence causing man to take action in some way or the other. Environment and natural settings are very intricately linked with the human consciousness and their effect on man is multidimensional. A deep study of the eco-conscious and nature-focusing literature reveals huge scope for understanding the relationship between man and nature and how a healthy relationship plays an effective role in the peaceful existence of both. This paper makes an attempt to emit light on the eco-consciousness of the people who live in an agrarian society and their efforts to maintain a perfect equilibrium with the other nonhuman elements.*

**Keywords:** Nature, environment, intricacy, consciousness, harmony

It is generally accepted that man is in some degree the product of his environment. His way of thinking can be influenced both by the predominant attitudes of his society and by the physical conditions of his surroundings. The vital impulses derived from the native soil become the source of inspiration in the writings of those who live in close communion with one's environment. Fiction derives its life from place which is the source of the author's experience and feeling. Many writers emphasise the view that there is an intimacy and depth of feeling which is possible only with a place of which you are a part.

Man has a definite pattern of existence and is unique among all creatures because he has the responsibility to show love and kindness to other creatures. Modern environmental thinking emphasizes the fact that all human beings appreciate and accept the interconnectedness of everything on the planet and each individual must develop a rapport with nature to maintain ecological balance and to have responsibility to safeguard nature. The respect for nature and an awareness of the interconnectedness of things address issues concerning landscape and environment. As human beings are a part of nature, the study of nature is the study of human beings themselves. The world is an intricate web of relations among the various parts of the world. Hence human beings must maintain a complex and intricate relationship with the surrounding natural world if they hope to survive in this world.

Ecocriticism focuses on writings that mainly deal with landscape which comprises not only the collection of physical phenomena but also the history and geography of that place. The human beings become integral to that place and they develop a sense of identity with their surroundings where everything becomes identical with the mind of man. A total understanding would be realized and felt only if we belonged to that place. When we belong to the place, the self extends itself to the environment and animates the place with life. The self identifies with what goes on outside and be part of what we know. Then the place becomes our home. The idea of place-as home helps to give a definite shape to environment.

Ecocriticism tries to create awareness in the society for humanistic understanding of our relationships with the natural world in an age of environmental pollution, damage and destruction. Ecocritics distort the notion of dominance and authority. The old hierarchies and the dialectics of nature and culture, fact and fiction, human and animal, self and other, civilized and primitive, good and evil are restructured in order to bring a unification of the dualities. The present work chosen for ecocritical analysis offers multifarious insights on the interrelationship that exists between human and nonhuman beings in Karical region and the reverence and respect people show towards their land and other nonhuman inhabitants.

The novel *Gopallapuram* centres on the Kammavars, a migrated Telugu speaking community from Andhra Pradesh and their settlement in the Southern part of Tamil Nadu. From the novel, it is very evident that the action of the plot and the settling of the

Kammavars had taken place well before the pre independence era. As the title suggests, the whole novel revolves around the village and its inhabitants who all gather at a place for the trial of a bandit who murders a pregnant woman for her ear rings, who comes to quench her thirst in a spring after having an altercation with her husband. Though this is the main plot of the novel, the author's mastery lies in the realistic depiction or portrayal of all the rustic characters with all their uniqueness and candour that constitute the village.

Ki. Ra's *Gopallapuram* merits an ecocritical analysis for the insights that offer related to nature. With the emergence of ecocriticism, his writings have gained more prominence and critical acclamations as they are environmentally conscious texts. He is one of the writers who have been most closely identified with the natural world. His writings are so simple and natural. We cannot find a speck of urban influence in his writings, because he is much preoccupied with the personal, local and national past. His originality as a novelist lies partly in the masterly use of his knowledge of the karical peasant life as he knew and experienced it in his youth. He says, 'my desire is to use the same language of my people; to think in terms of my folks... my writings should reflect the life of my people as it is led by them ... (Vijayalakshmi Rajaram 1995:85) He in fact desires to bring forth in his writings the air that his people breathe and the pleasant smell of the soil that permeates the place while walking on the dusty roads in his region. This is a clear evidence of his love for his landscape and people.

Ki.Ra. displays his understanding of the ecosystem in his novels. His writings are a constant plea for the development of agriculture and the ethical responsibility of the people to preserve and conserve natural resources. Nature exists in his works and life primarily as a source of vitality and succour. His writings reveal a reverence for nature and sensitivity that concerns not only with the living creatures but for the land itself. In most of his writings nature plays a pivotal role not only as a theme but as a chief character. His works centre on the interaction between nature and human society. His characters can never be isolated from their background or environment. They are so intertwined with the environment in which they live. His presentation of interdependence and the mutual relationship between man and nature, man and other non-human things is unparalleled.

His attitude towards nature has resulted from his physical observation and the intimate relationship he has had with the people and his environment. His writings reveal equality both within the human community and between man and other forms of life. He firmly believes that nonhumans in nature should be respected and loved like friends and brothers. Equality characterizes the relationship between human and non-human members of nature.

He is well aware of the fact that the nexus between the human and the non-human worlds is a primitive one. Ever since man came into existence, he developed a kinship with the plants, animals, trees, rivers, mountains and valleys. Hence, man's association with the nonhuman world in the past is revealed to be harmonious and interdependent. His characters are delineated in such a way that they live in close communion with nature. This is well substantiated by the author when the woman who has been murdered for her ear rings recognizes the presence of water on hearing the screeching of parrots.

... she walked down the Mangamma Road. The season being a blistering summer, after walking a few miles, her throat became dried up and her clothes were drenched with sweat. Thirsty and loneliness were depressing. She held the end of her sari tight between her teeth. This was making her mouth parched as well.

As she walked along, suddenly she stopped, hearing parrots screeching. There must be a water body close by, she thought. ... In just a while, there were signs of the presence of water. The lane ran along the spring. She walked up to it. There was a never drying spring. The water from it tasted like tender coconut: nature's gift to any passerby. (*Gopallapuram*: 5)

The interrelationship existing between biophysical and socio-cultural dimensions of life is a subject pursued with immense interest by contemporary socio-ecologists and anthropologists. It is widely recognized that the ecological infrastructure i.e. soil, water, flora, fauna etc., exert a considerable influence on what is called culture. Man and region are not separate, but mutually interdependent entities and there is a constant process and give and take between the land and the various organisms. This is well enunciated on Chapter 18 of the novel when the whole village put their concerted effort to rescue a pregnant cow that gets stuck in a muddy pond on the other side of the area where the villagers usually fetch water. On seeing the cow's belly, it is recognized that it is about to give birth probably in a day or two. The young men have entered into the muddy pond to drag the cow alive to the bank; but it has been a great challenge for them because the cow seems to have wandered and grazed all alone without the sight and touch of human beings since its birth. Knowing the difficulties of noosing the nostrils of the cow on the shore, the youth try to do it in the swampy pond itself. The curious people on the shore shout at the young men to be careful about piercing the nostrils without disturbing the stomach of the cow as they are very anxious about the calf in its stomach. All the onlookers of this scene say in chorus- "Slow! Slow! There's a calf inside its stomach. We want them both alive." (*Gopallapuram*: 74)

Though there is selfishness in their act of saving the life of the cow with the calf for its milk etc., it also signifies their love for the animal. It is vividly expressed in when Mangaiathaar Ammal says Govindappa that their village has been named 'Gopalla' because of the cow and its calf. Since the arrival of these two the number of cows in the village has multiplied.

Ki.Ra's efforts in awakening eco-consciousness in people through his writings deserve a thorough examination. This novel is an exemplary substantiation of his intense love of the earth. Through his characters, he projects himself as an environmentalist and constantly pleads for the conservation and preservation of forests and its allied sources. He firmly believes that nature is to be revered as God. It is sacred because man entirely depends on it and because of this everything is sanctified.

When the migrants reached the Gopalla Village after many days of arduous journey, the place where they live now, was once upon a time a thicket, fully surrounded by cacti and bushy plants. They had battled hard to destroy this in order to make this land suitable for cultivation. With the instruments they had, they struggled a lot to cut the thorny bushes down, so some suggested to destroy it by fire but the idea was not advocated by everyone because most of them had the same feeling that 'it's easy to destroy wilderness but it's not possible to create one when needed'. After realising that their attempts of making an arable land would be futile if they kept on cutting down the bushes, so they decided to destroy it by fire. Before it was done, they looked for an auspicious day. They really worried about the consequences of destroying nature. Just a moment before it was lit the old grandmother in a loud voice said, "Oh' the angels of the forest, woodland deities, you must protect us from the repercussions for the deadly act of ours." (Gopallapuram : 78)

To make atonement for this deed, the whole village decided that each family would plant a tree to register their presence. The environmental consciousness of the village is also reflected when they dig wells and canals to harvest water for the cattle to drink and their planting of trees along the canal to strengthen the walls.

Ki.Ra's love for flora is reflected through the character Manjayya in this novel. His nick name is Doctor Manjayya.

He always goes in search of herbs. He is very much familiar with all the trees and plants that grow in the village. There is no leaf left unidentified by him. He noses around for a new tree bark, flower, fruit or leaf. He can predict the ailments that would follow that year by the plants that have flourished. He says that each herb has to be plucked on a specific day and at a particular time". He further says that there are certain herbs to be plucked from a certain direction. Even some sacred words are to be chanted while plucking it. (Gopallapuram: 93)

The above is a clear manifestation of the author's love and reverence for flora and fauna.

Towards the end of this novel the author reiterates the fact that anthropocentric thinking has alienated humans from their natural environment and caused them to exploit it. As the families in the Gopalla Village increases in its number, the exploitation of nature is rampant. In the beginning it is shown in the novel that the villagers live as joint families. As time passes large joint families become rare and cousins take their share and move out. Individual demands and aggrandizement of wealth lead to more exploitation of nature. This results in the felling of trees and the destruction of wilderness to expand the size of their land. The selfishness and avarice may disturb the whole ecosystem – all the other inhabitants on the earth. This in turn affects human kind adversely. This is clearly exemplified through the arrival of the Whites to the village who actually come to plunder the villagers of their wealth and hard labour and the famine caused by the locusts.

Thus, the novel expresses bio-centric equality that means all things in the biosphere have an equal right to live and blossom and to reach their own individual unfold. As a deep ecologist, Ki.Ra. recognizes the intrinsic values in nature. He believes that within the biological community, the non human and the human are not only dependent but equal as well. His admiration and reverence for all the living creatures and his warning to people that what will happen if nature is exploited and disturbed too much are manifested in the novel.

Writing about nature in Ki.Ra.'s opinion is not to give a false impression of understanding the subtle meanings of various elements of nature through words but it is a demonstration of intense feelings that man has towards nature. To revere or love nature is to view nature realistically in all its forms. In all his writings his characters demonstrate a sense of kinship and the intimacy with their environment. He has a strong conviction that all objects and phenomenon of nature with which man is surrounded are animate and divine. His writings reveal the intricate relationship that man has with his surroundings and also emphasizes on the significance of maintaining an ecological balance with the surroundings and how it disrupts the life of both human and nonhuman things on this planet if one thing tries to detach with the other.

## References

- i. Barry, Peter. "Ecocriticism." In *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*, edited by Peter Barry, 239-261. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009.
- ii. Bate, Jonathan. *The Song of the Earth*. London, Basingstoke & Oxford: Picador, 2000.
- iii. Panchangam K. *Ki.Rajanarayananin Punai Kathaigalum Iyarkkai Ezhuthuthalum*. ( Ki.Rajanarayanan's Fiction and Nature Writing), Annam Publications, 2012.
- iv. Rajanarayanan Ki. *Gopallapuram*. Translated by Pritham K. Chakravarthy, Penguin Books India, 2011.
- v. Vijayalakshmi Rajaram, *Vattara Ilakkiyamum Ki.Rajanarayananum*. Agaram Publications, 1995.