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Minor Research Project

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A STUDY OF THE EVOLUTION OF LITERARY ECOLOGY IN MALAYALAM LITERATURE AND ITS IMPACT ON THE ECO-POLITICS IN KERALA WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE NOVELS *NELLU, MARAKAPPILE THEYYANGAL* AND *AATHI*.

## Executive Summary

Critiquing the explosion of theory, Aijas Ahmad rightly points out that the forms of political dissent were domesticated by excessive theory and that “displace[d] an activist culture with a textual culture”. Another critic supplements this argument:

[...] however, the terminal effects of theory and counter theory had been to bracket off physical nature as we have understood it. when linguist and social scientists argued about the trajectory of language and signs, and how we humans have evolved a parallel world of culture and its virtual dimensions, what was at stake was this physical nature (38).

This study distances itself from over theorizing. Instead, it concentrates on those aspects of praxis which have some relevance to the development of literary ecology. A study of the select novels, *Nellu, Marakkappile Theyyangal and AAathi* reveal the different features of evolution and growth of literary ecology in Malayalam literature in a representational manner.

Chapter 1 provides a brief history of eco criticism along with a theoretical overview of its impact in the present century. At the same time ecology as a branch of science is closely analyzed along with its various sub divisions. Of these Applied Ecology and Theoretical Ecology

are especially relevant here as the first one is concerned with the human activity on environment and on the survival of other species and second one tries to locate problems specific to ecology and to provide solutions. A short discussion on the several ecological issues that we face follows. Depletion of natural resources, rampant pollution, shortage of essential elements like water, global warming and climatic changes are a few to be mentioned here. Ecocriticism has received inspiration and substance from different schools of environmental philosophy in plenty. An ensuing discussion elucidates this point.

Chapter 2 is an enquiry about the factors contributed to the environment awareness in Kerala and its development. It also delineates the origin and evolution of literary ecology in Malayalam literature. A brief survey shows that the romantic era in Malayalam literature has served to form a very strong basis for the development of eco aesthetics in modern literature. Silent valley movement became instrumental in the development of ecological aesthetics in Malayalam literature. Writers and artists came forward to be the leaders of the movement along with environment activists. Malayalam poets besides being actively involved in the protest, wrote poems on ecological issues showcasing a rare mixture of scientific awareness and artistic excellence. O.N.V.Kurup, N.V.Krishna Varrier, K.Sugathakumari, Vishnunarayanan Nampoothiri, Sachidanandan, Ayyapapanikker and N.N.Kakkad were a few of them. Novelists and short story writers also supported the movement in person and in words. The following decades saw an unprecedented literary production depicting environmental issues. Collection of environmental stories and environmental novels were published. These were written both as abstract aesthetic endeavours and as specific response to specific environmental issues like Endosulphan Issue to cite an example. Many writers became active participants in peoples' uprisings against inhuman development projects and issues like mining of natural resources and waste disposal. Sarah

Joseph, Ambikasuthan Mangad, P.Surendran, Paul Sakkaria are a few of the writer-activists. Litterateurs began to personally involve in the protests and resistance movements across the length and breadth of the state also.

In chapter 3, the investigator study the three novels selected in detail to ascertain the salient features, patterns, special provisions, sensitivities etc in them. The novels are selected with an eye to the strategic positions they assume in the literary ecology of Malayalam literature by virtue of their chronology. *Nellu* was serialized in a magazine, “*Samanwayam*” in 1972. It belongs to the modern era in Malayalam literature when the conflicts and anxieties regarding the existence of man first began to formulate in society. It designate *Thirunelli* as a space of primordial sanctity raped by the greed of modern man. *Nellu* is called as the first novel in Malayalam which told us about the idyllic life of an aboriginal race in the folds of Brahmagiri and how they were exploited and oppressed by the settlers from the plain. How the geographical space belonging to a people is robbed from them both physically and culturally marks the theme of this novel. *Nellu* has not been read much from an ecocritical perspective yet. An ecofeminist reading is also highly relevant in the case of the novel. It clearly shows us how *adivasi* women are also exploited like their land. The fate of nature, it has been repeatedly observed, has been linked to the fate of women. *Nellu* becomes an important milestone in the development of literary ecology in Malayalam literature as it gives very valuable observations and insights about the interconnectedness and interdependence between man and environment mediated through the preexisting norms like, gender, class, economics and culture. The conflict between the concepts of nature and culture runs as the central strand of narration. The study locates the origin of serious ecological concerns within literature in *Nellu*.

*Marakkappile Theyyangal* is the first novel of Ambikasuthan Mangad who is well known for his ecological stories and novelettes. The novel tells the story of a sea shore that has been vandalized by the dragon waves of the tsunami of globalisation. Written in 1999, this is one of the first literary works and undoubtedly the first novel in Malayalam that explore the advent of globalisation as an economic force that redraws the existing conceptualizations regarding development. As it has been discussed elsewhere in this dissertation, the alienation of nature from culture or the premises of human life has made nature susceptible to exploitation. Modern science and the whole wealth of knowledge it has produced could not desist human beings from perpetuating a mechanical, Eurocentric perspective of nature. This has certainly submerged the alter visions all over other parts of the world which perceived nature as an integral part of human environment. *Marakkappile Theyyangal* goes along that path to highlight the fall of man. It upholds a unique spiritual vision not as a solution to this ridden, materialistic, utilitarian world view, but as a means for a reorientation towards an alternative paradigm of development and progress.

*Aathi* published in 2011 is, as already seen, a social document of a very committed environment campaign in Kerala. This is something new in the history of Malayalam novels. Sarahh Joseph says in this regard:

While *Gift in Green (Aathi)* was on the anvil, several of its characters kept visiting me, providing invaluable help with research and documentation in the form of records, newspaper clippings, and real life events. They sustained me by sharing frequent and prolonged reading sessions and through marathon phone calls. (352).

*Aathi* can be rightly designated as a narrative of resistance in which the instances of tension between the imperial culture and modern protest are faithfully recorded by means of carefully created sub texts and narrative elements depicting the capitalist, consumerist and neoliberal cultural values. It has become a narrative of the resistance of a people engaged in a losing battle against the juggernauts of ‘development,’ facing hunger, disappointment and death. Thus *Aathi* well deserves a reference in the historic array of resistance narratives. In this context we can also read in *Aathi* the possibility of a liminal space in the bicultural society resisting acculturation.

By way of concluding this enquiry by presenting the findings, it may be primarily observed that Malayalam literature has acquired the inner strength to carry very momentous and critical investigations and experiments in the evolving genre of eco writing. A brief survey of Malayalam literature has established that the ecological consciousness was an important element in Malayalam literature of all ages. This has provided a strong base for the origin and development of ecocriticism. An analytical review points out the different stages in the development of literary ecology and highlights the common features as well as defining distinctions of the three novels chosen for study.

These novels along with other works have been significant in effecting a paradigm shift in the sensibility of the reading public. The ecological aesthetics in Malayalam has its origin in active campaigns for protection of environment and natural resources. The silent valley movement and consequent Chaliyar protection movement have already been discussed in this paper. Late capitalism and its imperial designs have precipitated environment crises in the third world countries since then. Excessive pollution, accumulation and unscientific disposal methods of waste of all kinds, scarcity of drinking water, illegal mining of sand, clay and other resources,

depletion of biodiversity, destruction of habitats of wildlife, deterioration in the quality of water, deforestation, destruction of mangrove forests, hills and wet lands, illegal quarrying, indiscriminate agricultural practices, excessive and unregulated use of insecticide and unscientific land use policy measures and rampant encroachment have incited public unrests and campaigns. People have become more and more aware of their right to pure air, water and resources. They rightly ascertain that the prevalent mode of development make their lives quite impossible and perilous. This kind of public awareness was developed simultaneous with a change in the sensibility of the cultural practice of the language.

Eco aesthetics has also made significant contribution to the praxis by means of supporting the protection movements all over the state. Many of the writers themselves were on the forefront of several of these struggles. Our authors, Sarahh Joseph and Ambikasuthan Mangad were involved in organizing campaigns against different development projects and had to face the heat of law and order systems. Cases were registered against them. Indeed this is different from the cultural precedence of the bygone era when writers believed that their responsibility begins and ends on the paper.

Ecocriticism and eco aesthetics of our time has substantially advanced from the initial tenets. Innovative and open approaches are muted. All kinds of environments are deemed as valuable and are worth protected stripped of any romantic value attached traditionally. Nevertheless ecocriticism in our society has great tasks remain to be achieved. One thing is to detach itself from the patriarchal, utilitarian and anthropocentric western world order and second one is to strive for an ecoaesthetics that sees nature not as an object to be acted upon, a back drop to human culture, but as a fundamental and integral part of life.