

Seeking Environmental Awareness in Postmodern Fiction: An Eco-critical Study of Sarah Joseph's *Gift in Green*

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Abstract: - Nature and Literature are closely connected. Ecocritical is an essential area of literary and cultural analysis and it also examines the close relationship between nature and literature from a variety of angles. Now a days, the villages face a threat due to development that comes along with industrialization and globalization. After independence, India witnessed several development projects such as dam construction, infrastructures development, founding cities, urbanization and multinational corporate companies to achieve economic growth and to be in the league of developed nations. The ethics of these developmental measures is questioned when they exploit nothing only the indigenous people but also the environment which is their life force and sole means of survival. The aim of this paper is to study the impact of progress and development on the environment in Sarah Joseph's *Gift in Green* which has been translated by Valson Thampu. This paper also aims to comprehend the wider significance of this literature in fostering environmental consciousness among the current generation.

Keywords: - Nature, Eco-criticism, Human & Nature relationship, Literature, Environmental Awareness.

INTRODUCTION

Eco-criticism is branch of literary criticism that shows how literature examines the idea of interaction between humans and non-human creation in the environment. Eco-critics read a literary genre from a biocentric standpoint. To save the world from disasters of environmental imbalance, there is a need to have an eco-conscious attitude towards every aspect of life. It's a category of literary criticism that is gaining popularity as an interdisciplinary study of literature and the environment around the world. It examines

mankind's attitude towards nature through the observation of subjects such as science, literature, anthropology, sociology and psychology among others. The concept of Eco-poetics, environmental literary criticism, ecological feminism(eco-feminism) and green culture are some of the more common names for this relatively new discipline. Eco-criticism is the study of literature and art through the lens of ecology & its concepts presently in this area has become an important area in the present critical discourses. Due to the over exploitation of the natural resources, human beings are facing environmental and ecological problems. Hence, ecocriticism is also one of the ways chosen by humanist to fight for protection of nature and thereby peaceful survival of the creatures in environment.

The progress that comes along with industrialization and globalisation has put communities in danger today. Post-colonial India witnessed several developmental projects. Instead, these "developmental" initiatives have abandoned the defenceless and vulnerable villagers, stripped them of their homesteads, and altered their way of life by turning them from farmers to labourers.

I would say that if the village perishes, India will perish too. India will be no more India. Her own mission in the world will get lost. The revival of the village is possible only when it is no more exploited. Industrialization on a mess scale will necessarily lead to passive or active exploitation of the village as the problems of competition and marketing come in.

--- M.K. Gandhi

The above statement of Gandhi emphasizes the role of villages in the development of a country. Literature

plays a pivotal role in bringing these issues to the forefront for the welfare of the humanity and universe as a whole by persistently and consistently insisting on the sustainable development. Indian regional writers, especially, never have left a stone unturned in bringing out the pathos of the voiceless people. This paper focuses on the quality of life of natives and their environs before and after the development and the issues related to environmental ethics in the novel *Gift in Green* by Sarah Joseph.

Sarah Joseph (born 1946) one of the leading feminists in India, is a novelist, short story writer and feminist activist from Kerala. She has won many awards including Kendra Sahitya Award and Vayalar Award. She is actively participating in feminist movement in Kerala. Being a feminist, she in her works makes awareness about ecology and the importance of nature. Her collection of short stories '*Paapathara*' is considered milestone in feminist writing in Malayalam. She has published a trilogy of novels which include *Alahayude Penmakkal*, *Mattathi & Othappu*. She is the founder of 'Manushi'- an organization of thinking women. '*Gift in Green*' was First originally published in Malayalam in 2011 titled as 'Aathi'. It was translated into English by Dr. Valson Thampu.

The title *Gift in Green* denotes the nature. The plot of the novel deals how Aathi, a village is polluted by the people and how the nature reacts to it. The author has knitted various stories from different religions to emphasize the significance of the nature in the life of an individual. The methodology of this project is to showcase and analyse the domination of 'better sex' towards the 'fairer sex'. The central character Kumaran, a greedy man, who has run away from the village returns to village only to destroy it in name of modernization. At last, nature which is polluted to the core exhibits its aggression as a flood and purifies itself. The theme has global relevance all over the world since atrocities against women and nature are carried out regularly.

Eco-criticism also called ecological feminism (ecofeminism), branch of feminism that examines the connections between women and nature. Ecofeminist critics view that literacy text as a manifestation of established relations between women and nature. The distinct culture and society as patriarchal and exploitative. The term, ecofeminism was coined by Francois d' Eaubonne in 1974 in her book '*Le Feminise Ou La Mort*'. In 1978, Susan Griffin's

'Women and Nature: The Roaring Inside her' poetically acquainted others with the idea.

The crux of ecology claims that nature is meant for all living creatures. Failing from the above said statement, humans collapse it by acting against the will of nature for his selfishness. Nature, as a mother gives its best to humans but they are failed to satisfy with it. Their greed generates ill to nature. Their attitude towards nature is getting worse than ever. Sarah Joseph, observer of society shows the worst attitude of humans against nature in the novel, *Gift in Green*. She expresses it as,

It was a little toy gun that emitted small, red spurts of potash. Even so, what a lot of noise it made! At the very first burst, scores of waterfowl scrambled up in panic, taking to their wings. What a sight it made! Dinakaran snatched the gun from Siddhu, broke it into pieces and hurled it into water. 'Aren't you ashamed to scare them like this?' he admonished Siddhu.

(*Gift in Green*, p.6)

Human thinks that the nature never takes avenge against their ill-treatment. They fail to open the eyes of truth that nature observes everything and it will take avenge when they destroy it.

Aathi is a serene village that abound in water bodies, mangroves, birds and butterflies. Kunjimathu was a beautiful young girl in her sweet sixteen who embraced Aathi as her breath. She was the beloved of a youth named Kumaran who was resentful with the mundane village life. He sold off his properties and went to Kunjimathu's house one night. He took her virginity and promised to return when he discovered his fortune. After some time, Kunjimathu realized that she was deceived by Kumaran. She experienced the pain of deception and vowed that there would be no other man in her life.

Kumaran returns to Aathi after thirty-five years marked the downfall of nature. He planned to transform Aathi into a modern village accessible to latest technologies and infrastructure. Gradually, the village turned into two extremes between those who support and discard modernity. Aathi which was once known for its crystal-clear water was now filled with sewage and pathogens. When things began to go out of control, Kunjimathu lost her patience. She pledged that until and unless Aathi was regained, she would not quit her fast unto death. In the end, the government authorities accepted the people's claim to be property of Aathi. In the other case, taking advantage of her

blind love, he possessed her virginity. As he did to Aathi, Kumaran acquired dominance over Kunjimathu's body. Both nature and woman become the mute victims of male supremacy. The close tie between women and nature is closely depicted in the words of the omniscient narrator.

To be a man, one must have a body made firm by working hard on the land, tilling and sowing. To know the mind of a woman, he has to know, first the mind of land. (Gift in Green, p.20)

Ecofeminism has two major divisions like cultural ecofeminism and radical ecofeminism. The former one suggests that nature and women are one and the same as they are sharing some activities E.G., procreation-creation. The latter deals with the concept that both women and nature are destroyed continuously by men and modernization. The radical feminists strongly attack men for their ill-treatment towards nature and women.

ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS IN GIFT IN GREEN

Award winning Malayali author, Sarah Joseph's *Gift in Green* is one of the most perceptive accounts of contemporary issues linking environment and progress. The idyllic community of Aathi is a "green bangle" that protects and enhances the environment for both human and animal life. Sarah's plot rides through the landscape of Aathi which makes good sense from a holistic perspective. We can see that when Kumaran's greedy actions completely destroyed Aathi, the people of Aathi began to protest and resist with help from the nearby village. The story of Aathi ends with the promise of rebirth. An unprecedented environmental concern is being shared by the people now a days. *Gift in Green* assumes a particular significance in the context of rising global culture.

CONCLUSION

Eco-literature or environmental literature is essentially concerned with environmental issues and themes which explores human's association with the nature. Progress and development are imperative as it decides the growth of the country, but sustainable development is the need of the hour if we are not to extinguish ourselves in the fire of progress. *Gift in Green*

advocates that measures for development should take into consideration the whole eco-system.

In this era of environmental disaster, man's anthropocentric behaviour towards non-human beings and nature causes irreversible damages which result in disharmony in the entire ecosphere and the ecosystem of the earth. The changes that occur to nature closely effect the people of Aathi in the novel. An eco-critical reading of the novel reveals the significance of these issues and thus contributes to create environmental awareness in a very perceptive way.

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