

Pathetic fallacy in C. Rajagopalachari's *The Tree Speaks*: An Ecological Reading

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Abstract

Environmental issues and concerns have been emerging since late nineties but not yet achieved its purpose. Hence enumerable writers, social activists, botanists and theorists imbued the environmental crisis through various forms to safeguard the nature for future generation as well as its importance. The world of literature throngs with works beauty and power of nature. However the concern for ecology and the continuous misuses of our environmental poses on humanity have only recently caught the attention of the writers. It is this sense of concern and itself reflection in literature that have given rise to branch of literary theory called Eco-criticism. It has got few epistemological theoretical fields of studies, which critically approach a work. In which anthropomorphism is one such field which apparently influenced by post-structuralism that strongly connected with *Pathetic fallacy* introduced by **John Ruskin** which evolved in the fall of eighteenth century, the prime idea of these two isms is, criticizing attribution of human characteristics to the non-living and living objects in the field of Eco-criticism. This theoretical study persistently makes the scathing comments on human assumptions. Though it has got its root in deeply in classical age and romantic age but the fundamental ideas differ from the each other in dealing the nature in the field of nature and environmental studies. Therefore a reader can find how *The Tree Speaks* re-interpreted in line with anthropomorphism and pathetic fallacy in this article.

Keywords: Eco-criticism, Anthropomorphism, Pathetic fallacy, unanimated and animated objects and Post-structuralism.

About the environmental issues many books have recently been published such as *Teaching Environmental Literature: Materials, Method, and Resource* edited by **Frederick O. Waage** which includes course descriptions from nineteen various scholars and sought to promote “a greater presence of environmental concern and awareness in literary discipline.” Indeed in the course of time conferences and awareness sessions had been conducted on environmental writings, perhaps most conspicuously in 1991 **Harold Fromm** influential essay entitled *Eco-criticism: The Greeting of Literary Studies* had been published, subsequently in 1992 American

Literature Symposium chaired by **Glen Love**, entitled *American Nature Writing: New Contexts, New Approaches* same year at the annual meeting of WLA (**Western Literature Association**) and an **Association for the study of Literature and Environment** (ASLE) supported the exchange of the ideas and information concerning the relationship between human beings and natural world to stimulate the natural writing, traditional, scholarly approaches to environmental literature. So, few theoretical writers firmly argue that attributing human characteristics is completely against to nature in the field of eco-criticism.

Hence in this sense of concern **Patricia Ganea**, a psychologist at Toronto University, said attributing human-like intentions and beliefs is a “very natural way to explain certain animal behaviors” and can be useful in generating empathy for mistreated animals. But she adds there is a downside. “Anthropomorphism can lead to an inaccurate understanding of biological processes in the natural world,” she said. “It can also lead to inappropriate behaviors towards wild animals, such as trying to adopt a wild animal as a ‘pet’ or misinterpreting the actions of a wild animal.” Similarly the researcher made an attempt to understand and re-interpret the text in line with Patricia view.

C. Rajagopalachari’s short prose piece named *The Tree Speaks* explicitly tells about the loss of the best practices of our culture that we cherished in yester years and the cutting down of a tree upsets the biological cycles as we all know. The author even in those days, was concerned about the likely ecological imbalance caused by man’s indiscriminate cutting down of trees. This piece has been copiously packed with superstitious beliefs and ecological awareness besides the writer himself is one of the main characters who narrates in first person point view. This prose begins main character. Colonel Ray Johnson was a member of the I.M.S., short for the Indian Medical Service; which was organized originally as a military-medical arm of the British regime but which settled down as District Medical and Sanitary Officers throughout India. Some of them were very good in their work and exceedingly devoted to their calling. Some were just proud officials. Ray Johnson was posted as District Medical Officer in Salem when C.R was there. He was a very amiable person, though he did not become particularly famous for his medical work.

The doctor had a habit of talking to the trees on the roadside as he took his walk in the evenings. He would bend *intimately and kiss the trees and whisper to them kind words*. This was odd but very beautiful to see. One would not like to disturb him by letting him see *he was watched in this process of love*. If one stood at a distance and watched it was indeed a beautiful thing to see in this haughty world. (TS-2)

Despite of all a deep concern towards nature and unconditional love of nature towards humanity, if you read this prose as an anthropomorphist, any, reader will condemn the writers' stupidity towards nature. It's very apparent that the writer communicating ideas as if the tree is human being and involved himself in the process of love making. Eco-critics stand completely against this kind attributing qualities of human beings, they, instead, want us i.e. readers treat nature as nature because eco-theoreticians are scared of inaccurate understanding of biological processes by naming and treating as fellow beings.

Subsequently... was a sad day for Col. Johnson. One of his *tree friends had been felled and lay* on the ground stretched out at full length, like a *wounded giant*. "They have killed my tall, *beautiful girl*," the doctor said to me.... (ST-2)

The writer persistently is comparing nature with (*friend, wounded giant and beautiful girl*) animated objects. Tree was being cut down because the tree was unfortunately too near the new District Board office building and the engineers advised against letting this tree put out its roots and breaks up the foundations. The writer continues to have a conversation with Col., and his feelings made a deep impression on writer. They begin to talk about the tree:

...Was each branch a separate life and the tree an uprooted *family* or was it even bigger than that, each flower having its *own soul*, the whole *tree being a great city*? I was immersed in such stupid thoughts when I heard, or thought I heard, the *soft tunes of a flute*. The sound ceased when I began to think about it. (TS-2)

Again writer starts, abusing the nature comparing nature with *great city*, it's suffering with *soft tunes of a flute* and tree is being compared with *family*, these comparison will wrongly communicate the inner nature of trees, though the writer wants to save the tree but eco-critics exhorts the writers and readers to treat nature as it is, not with living objects. Then the writer brings out the superstitious belief that the tree is having conversation with Col. when he Col.is at sleep and added to this writer constantly shares bizarre ideas of attributing human feelings to non-living things.

"Here I am, *killed, murdered*. I want you to take up my cause. My brother, the doctor, is not able to do anything because he is a Government servant. But you are free, you are a lawyer. They paid treble coolie rates to coax the men who at first refused to cut me down. The silver pieces *seduced the good men*.... (TS-3)

The writers again relates that tree is talking to the person as if a human being, says that the tree is killed like a human. Then the writer went a extend of comparing nature with god... his wife used to come and put sandal paste and kumkum on my trunk and utter prayers that her son

might be cured....(ST-3), he is tirelessly sharing that how nature is misunderstood as “god, friend, girl, family and wife”. Therefore the recent theoretical study eco-criticism question writers and readers not to attributing the human nature to the unanimated objects. Though the writer relentlessly arguing for nature and its real nature of nature but when this piece is understood in line with eco-criticism all the fundamental assumptions are questioned besides they stand completely against this kind of delineating the subjects, this what, are promulgating in the eco-critical discourses above and beyond several epistemological symposiums and powwows are being conducted so to stop, misinterpretations of writers and alert replaceable damage done to nature by human beings in this short prose.

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