

Eco - Critical Strands and views in Contemporary Malayalam Poetry: A Special Reference to the poems of Murukan Kattakada

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Abstract

All discourses concerned with the term Eco criticism has ever been receptive of worldwide views, since it is inevitably allied with the sustenance of the mankind. The literary figures especially poets are the real pioneers of the campaign of Eco-protection everywhere. In Malayalam Language, it has been a process which extended nearly for half a century through a series of poets of different periods. Mr. Murukan Kattakada who represents the contemporary Malayalam poetry has been one among the strong Advocates of Nature conservation and opponent of its destruction. Poetry being a very apt medium for communicating delicate and emotional ideas, usually get attracted and attached by the public and since Mr. Murukan's poems have an added musical touch, even the less literate society could cherish them and ever kept them close to their hearts. Besides he has been singing his own verses during public meetings with all sensibilities and gets much appreciated. Many of his poems are uploaded in You-Tube also. Mr. Murukan Kattakada through many of his poems has criticized the attitude of the mankind to exploit Nature without little consideration of their own sustenance. He advises, pleads and exhorts the mankind being disguised in different identities for the environmental protection. The Research Paper is intended to have an analytical study of some of his Eco-poems in this regard.

Key words

Sensibility, environment, pollution, conservation, sustenance

Introduction

Eco protection has now been a very common term since it refers to the normal sustenance of mankind. The awareness concerned in different levels has ever included literary works which have much impact on the public. Many literary figures in Malayalam like Sugathakumari have been exhorting the people about the importance of protecting the environment with a number of

initiatives in the field. Poetry has a more emotional aspect than any other literary form and is easily digestible by even the less literate. If a slight musical tone is allocated, the appreciation level will be much increased and the poem becomes more popular. The famous Malayalam poet Murukan Kattakada is one among the pioneers. We cannot take all his poems as eco-conscious, but there are a number of his Eco poems which have strong impact on the readers also because of the special musical touch. In some of his poems like 'Thirike yathra', the poet keeps his heart so close to the soul of the Nature. The poet becomes the tongue of the voiceless Nature.

Eco-criticism in the Eco - Conscious poems of Murukan Kattakada

Thirike Yathra

The poem deals with the extreme worst status of rivers in Kerala. The poet impersonates himself and speaks as the river. The river screams and reminds the story of *Bhageerathan* who had brought the Ganges to the Earth, and requesting *Bhageerathan* to take her back to heaven. Rivers are almost died out due to the uncontrolled plundering of the greedy mankind. Since there is no one to speak for the river, the poet takes up the duty and remains as the tongue of the river.

The river complains that the people have measured her banks¹ like the *Vamana*, the incarnation of Lord *Maha Vishnu*, built fence and curtailed the freedom of the river to flow. The poet vehemently criticizes the greed of the mankind to amass money even by plundering the valuable resources on Earth. We have enough resources on Earth and if used judiciously, it will be more than enough for all. Likewise, the rivers if preserved and used properly, it can supply life giving water to everyone and keep the whole world always Green. But the uncontrolled exploitation of it beyond all limits as described in the poem could have only adverse effect.

The poet's impersonation provides him much freedom to criticize the outside world with authenticity, the impertinent behavior of people who never give any concern for river and its resources. The river remembers 'the good old days she had during when her banks had been overflowing with the purest water; in which the naughty boys had been swimming and rejoicing; the cattle had satisfied their thirst; the hardworking laborers of the fertile paddy fields find a space to get chilled'². But now, things have changed a lot. Because of the looting of sand from the rivers and throwing all the waste into it, the river has only the name. The heart of it has dried out since water left it. She regrets that she had given everything to the human beasts who had been leading quite a wild life in the primitive periods. The river gifted them with beautiful meadows to enjoy with songs of love; flowers to add beauty of Nature; nutritious food for nourishment; water for thirst and fertility; enlightened the culture towards better prospects and many other facilities to the human beings for their survival and prosperity. But, now, the time has come that where a handful of water to recite the *Gayathri Manthra* is made unavailable since they have sold the water and later even the breast milk of the mother.

The river suspects, during the forthcoming centuries, she will have her name in the history books only. Everywhere in the river, the dry sand has burnt to cinder in the scorching sun. The river is now waiting for a resurrection from the current status, like *Ahalya* in *Ramayana*, who had awaited a thousand years as a stone for the footsteps of *Lord Rama* touch her. She remembers the hard work of *Bhageerathan* to bring her to earth. She likes this earth very much. Still she requests him to take her back to heaven for another later occasion if some others want her to come to earth again. The poet's heart-rending words exactly represent those of the river.

Kozhiyunna Ilakal Paranjathu [means, what the shedding leaves told]

The poem shares the beauty of Nature and at the same time points out the futility of the life on contemporary earth. The leaves are being shed down from the trees. They remember the beautiful days gone; playing with little wind with tickling talks;³ lovable mornings; frisking Dragon fly; disheveled brawl of the drums with the quarreling tempests; beautiful dress as gift of the grandpa, the evening Sun; the soft lull and kiss of the cool breeze in the moonlit nights and so on. The natural beauty experienced thence is lost forever. The shedding leaves fall down to sleep permanently as mere waste, without any thirst towards anything, palpitations or any dews of liveliness.

The liveliness and death of the leaves clearly compares the current and previous status of the greenery on Earth. The poet throws light quite indirectly on the imminent tragic future of Nature. Earlier there was fertility in terms of diverse plants and trees and a corresponding Ecology thereby when comparing with the present situation. Earlier, all the festive attractions like, beautiful evenings, mornings, dreamy nights, dewy chill, music of the cuckoos, sparkling starry nights etc., and everything has now become mere dreams. 'This day, we have become mere dry leaves losing the greenish color and liveliness.' Though the incidents one by one are directly affected the shed leaves which lose everything they had in this world, it is a slight melancholic lament on the loss of beauty of Nature. The comparison between the fertile past and futile future becomes quite applicable for the past and present status of contemporary Nature.

Unarthu pattu [means, awakening Song]

In *Unarthu pattu*, the poet exhorts everyone listen to the awakening song which depicts another comparison between past and the present. The poem also is a severe criticism on the imminent drastic situation of the shattered Nature. The poet begins with a call of the morning which has been drowsy since night, reciting the rich history of Nature. 'The *Manjadi hill* [small hill with plants have small and beautiful red seeds, used by children to play] is not there now. The only thing left there is a train of machines [which have washed away the natural hill]⁴ Hence 'the

disheveled river, the lover of the hill cries with turbulent muddy water and sings the death song before the dead body’.

The poet narrates one after another, the cruelty of men to Nature. ‘The trees on which the mating of sparrow-hawks had taken place are cut down; the meadows with beautiful flowers and the bamboo forest which had given birth to innumerable sweet musical flutes are now burnt to ashes; The deep trenches in the river you have sunken are found as wounded faces of sand; the byways are pressed by the vehicles filled with the penetrated ‘Mother hill’; The taste of tender coconut has changed to scummy palpitations of colors and those of blood; the verges of the paddy fields on which you had searched for *Kayonni*, (a medical plant) are now separated with heavy walls; the paddy fields are filled with huge mansions; the grandma who had lulled you to sleep last night reciting stories from the Ramayana, has been drooping in a corner of a sanatorium; The festivity of the festivals in *Kavu*, [miniature version of a temple, situated amidst a shrubbery] has given way to fashion shows’ Hence poet exhorts to ‘wake up at least to know that the scarcity of everything is the beginning of paucity of everything.’⁵

The poet depicts the thorough changes as happened to the normal village life with the total destruction of Nature. The virginity of the natural life setting is totally perished and replaced by the artificial facilities. Hence the poet laments on the death of the natural beauty saying that the period with smell of the cloves have gone. The poem makes a rough criticism on the indiscretion of men in utilizing the natural resources without the least concern for the future.

Oru Karshakante Athmahathyakurippu [death-note of a farmer]

The poem deals with a death note telling another pathetic story of a farmer who committed suicide because of the absolute loss on agriculture. The farmer asks the death to take the elements of his life one by one. He says that ‘it is not mere a paddy field, but my heart.’⁶ He pleads death ‘to prick his heart and liver thenceforward; the source of tears, not the river has been wilted; the Yamuna of life is withered; thenceforward take my *santhi* [peace] too; no array of birds to pick the paddy rays; no rough rhythms to keep them out; the lips of *Cherumi* [the lady laborer] who plants the paddy plants is withered of the redness of the rhythmic folk songs; the plough is left beside the skirt of the field like a scarecrow; thenceforward take my songs;

‘Karkidaka kootangal meyunna madavakal

Vayalchippy chithram varaykum chathuppukal

Manathukannikal marasameyyunna

Manasarassam jalacheppukal.....’⁷

The poet continues with the narration of loss of the natural vegetation in all respects as a sign of the fertile old days with a nostalgic feeling. 'The natural meadows mowed by the cattle; oyster filled marshlands; natural ponds in which the beautiful maidens had swum; meditating white herons; shy pewits; the beauty of abundance and prosperity have gone afar; take my conscience thenceforward; I stand in courtyard without the haystack, thenceforward take my last movement[breath] too.'⁸

In all the contexts the poet has mentioned, tint a strand of melancholy is overwhelming on the absolute devastation of natural vegetation due to the over exploiting mind set of the mankind. The farmer commits suicide because he has nothing left to work and thereby live on. Since the suicide of farmers all over contemporary India due to the similar situations is very common, the criticism of the poet is worth to be mentioned. The basic resource of India, while being agriculture, any destruction of the natural resources will naturally and severely affect it. The poem thus paves way to deep thoughts on total havoc of Nature. As in many occasions, the poet stands in place of the farmer and Nature.

Pak [malice]

Paka is yet another critical view of the poet on environmental destruction. The poet says, 'The greed of us increased and the rivers became black; treachery of us increased and the hills became white; we cut and wrapped the black sand from the shores, kissed by the frequent waves; the Earth has malice towards us along with, the hills, rivers and even the day which engulfed the poisonous smoke.'⁹

The poet envisages the crucial and the worst situation of environmental pollution in the lines that continue. 'The children with swollen bellies who lost the conscience, drinking the chemically polluted water; white Lillies blackened like night; *Gulmohar* trees [a kind of tree with beautiful red flowers which when shed, beautifies the path beneath] drying without any disease.'

The poet draws our attention to blackened sky with black, thick and curly poisonous smoke. 'See the flowers, they are blackened; Jasmine and *Thechi* flowers have eaten up the poison; smell the wind, it smells sulfurous; feel the evening sun, the back will be scorching by the stinging 'fire-snake'; feel the rain, the death will be dropping as atom stroke; Taste the salt, feel the souring salt taste of tears of the sea.'¹⁰ The poet repeats about the malice of the Earth, rivers, hills and even the poisoned day, towards the mankind. The birth of man has become a calm interval between the two storms; the malice of Nature is still fuming, foaming as a restless, sobbing wave moving ashore.

Nashtapedal [losing]

A nostalgic sharing of the childhood days of the poet here shares the loss of the natural settings of the Nature also. Poet remembers the boyhood days when he ‘shared his dreams with the small jack fruit tree, and then with the green parrot;’¹¹ the sweet and soft childhood still keeps its greenish beauty; expressing ‘gratitude to the grandma mango tree for the shade offered yet, before cutting it down and is going to be a memory hereafter; ‘oh, grandma mango tree, forgive us in cutting you down, till sprouting again from the seed, growing as plant and reach again the status of a mango tree’; The poet then invites our attention to the destruction of forests by the greedy people.

Kattala kamanakal kadu theendi

Eriiyunna theejwala pidayunna kadinte

Karalu vevichu pakuthu thinneedave

Vathmeeka mounam muricharuthu cholluvan

*Areyo kathirippanente kadakam ...*¹²

[While the wild desires (of the greedy) entered the forest and burnt it to have a feast of its liver, my forest has been waiting for someone to come out of the silence and say ‘No’ to them.]

Kathirippu [Waiting]

The poem contains certain strands of the poet’s love for Nature and the ardent desire to protect it. The deep love towards Nature makes the poet mention the elements of Nature in almost all of his poems even quite unknowingly. The poem *Kathirippu* is an example for the same. Here no criticism may be found, but the similes he used are mostly representing Nature. This is evident in his many other poems also. For instance, the poet calls his ‘word as summer drops’, ‘the shadow that falls beside the narrow way’, ‘gate is patted by the breeze’¹³ etc. In short, almost all poems of Mr. Murukan Kattakada have some close links with the better sustenance of Nature and its preservation. The social responsibility of a poet if there is any, has been strictly followed by the poet in all his works.

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