

The Eco-critical analysis of the character NANJI in the novel The Scent of Pepper

S.B DURGA
II M.A ENGLISH
URUMU DHANALAKSHMI COLLEGE
TRICHY -620002

ABSTRACT

The Scent of Pepper by Kavery Nambisan through ecocritical lens and also examine the interconnectedness of the characters with nature in the novel. Nambisan is gifted with a keen sense of perception and an eye for detail that does not miss the shape and contour of the coffee leaves or the slope of the mountain or the various domestic tasks that make the novel an interesting read. She bravely attempts to project her characters made of eccentric personalities, quirky tastes, lofty ambitions and aspirations to create a niche for themselves but indicates a victory for the characters who remain true and faithful to nature and their roots.. The reader can visualize the picturesque surroundings of the Coorg region filled with cloud kissing mountains and the magnificent flora and fauna. Even the British citizens who have visited the place fall in love with the tranquil and peaceful atmosphere of Coorg and often reluctant to leave the place. The novel develops in a linear fashion from the time Nanji is married into the big landowning family headed by the ageing patriarch Rao Bahadur and grows old enough to see her succeeding generation amidst developments in Coorg, British imperialism, the rise of patriotism among the people of Coorg. Nambisan pens the novels with interesting anecdotes about the Kodagu tribes, their customs and cultural practices, She writes with amusement at the blind adoration for the British culture by the Kodavas and the extent of Anglicizing their life in terms of names, lifestyle, food habits, and customs.

Post-colonial literature often involves writings that deal with issues of de-colonization or the political and cultural independence of people formerly subjugated to colonial rule.

Ecocriticism that came into being in the 1990's as an important critical school discussing and evaluating the relationship between environment and literature. The movement received a stimulating response with the unstinted efforts of Glotfelty in her landmark book "The Ecocriticism Reader Landmarks in Literary Ecology." Glotfelty succinctly enumerates why reading nature oriented literature is extremely vital and how nature literature and writers writing with a strong preference for nature as a foreground are helpful in understanding the environmental threats and degradation facing mankind across the globe.

Kavery Nambisan is a gifted writer bringing alive the mountainous majesty of the district of Coorg. Nambisan is a renowned Indian writer and she has written six novels so far namely The Truth about Bharath (Almost) (1992), Mango Coloured Fish and many more. She is a physician by profession and she serves the poor and needy. She says that she has been influenced greatly by Mahatma Gandhi and Henry David. This study aims at an analysis of Kavery Nambisan's novel, The Scent of Pepper so as to bring out her relationship between nature and the characters inhabiting the novel.

As one reads her novels namely The Hills of Angheri and The Scent of Pepper, the reader is immediately reminded of the writer's sense of place that gives a strong identity to the novels similar to Wordsworth's Lake District. Nambisan's novel the Scent of Pepper is a haunting tale of a family belonging to the Kaleyanda clan inhabiting much of the novel and the characters. It is a moving saga of the life and times of Nanji, the central character around whom the novel centres. For the first time, the small ethnic minority, the Coorgis, enter Indian English fiction in her second novel, The Scent of Pepper. The characters in the novel are very real as the author has picked up real life stories from Coorg which she heard from her grandmother. The distinctive culture and religious practices of the people of Coorg are faithfully presented by the novelist by tracing the fortunes of Nanji, who enters the Kaleyanda clan as a young bride. Baliyanna, a veterinary doctor and a wealthy land owner belongs to Kaleyanda family. He marries the child

widow Nanji who has married at the age of thirteen and became a widow at fourteen. The thin-

faced girl of seventeen year old in a white sari has captured Baliyanna's interest and his heart.

Nanji lives through both happy and unpleasant times to witness many events unfold before her but

take charge of each responsibility as a natural course of events. Nanji knows only thing that is to

work and keep on working and does not discharge her duties even growing old. Nambisan projects

Nanji as a strong character completely in charge of her internal and external environments that is

she is connected to her home and the coffee estates owned by the family. Nanji never felt the need

to leave Coorg unlike other characters who seem to leave Coorg and live in different Indian

towns. The home and the coffee estates seem to instil in her a sense of peace and calm.

Nanji drowns her sorrows and pleasures in her work and looks at work not as mundane task but as

an irredeemable object of life

. Nanji gives birth to thirteen children in the course of the novel but finally lives with Subbu who

is born with a pair of deformed legs but becomes perfect at the age of seven. Nanji's children die

due to unforeseen events in the novel but she seems to be unmoved by these calamities and takes

the personal tragedies in her stride unlike Baliyanna who agonizes over each death in the family.

In addition to managing her home and the outside environment, Nanji keeps an eye on her children

and attends to their caretaking with the same efficiency of managing her household .Nambisan has

carved Nanji's character as someone entrenched deeply to her domestic environment without

unsettling her during Baliyanna's brief friendship with Clara Fox, the wife of the Rupert Fox. She

constantly longs for the company of Baliyanna and invites him on one pretext or the other. The

death of her husband estranges Clara from the family and she leaves Coorg for England.

Nambisan populates the novels with interesting anecdotes about the Kodagu tribes, their customs

and cultures, the mixing of the Western and the local culture and its effects on the people of Coorg

and who are out of tune with nature and bore the devastating effects of nature's fury through

drought, flood and poor coffee yield. She writes with amusement at the blind adoration for the

British culture by the Kodavas and the extent of Anglicizing their life in terms of names, lifestyle,

food habits, customs and dress and the cultivation of the gardens.

Amidst all the developments in the novel, Nambisan has portrayed the character of Nanji that remains true to her craft and draws the reader like a magnet to her strength, integrity and the practical approach to her life. Nanji's character truly reflects the basic premise of ecocriticism as the interconnectedness between nature and culture and also the connection between the physical world and human nature. Nanji remains an ardent follower of the soil and cherishes and nurtures it with her love and affection. Nambisan's craft displays strong ecocritical strains as she is familiar with the environment of Coorg that is lovingly captured in Nanji's internal and mutual co-existing relationship with nature. The reader can visualize the picturesque surroundings of the Coorg region inundated with lofty mountains, magnificent flora and fauna that can preserve and destroy the wealth of the region if spurned by the local inhabitants. The British inhabiting the place fall in love with the tranquil and peaceful place of Coorg and are often reluctant to leave the place.

The Scent of Pepper is very much a novel about Nanji as much as it about nature of the place. Nambisan nativity and interconnectedness to the Coorgi environment translates effectively into the shaping Nanji as she is always seen working the pliant soil with her hands and making it as worthy as possible. Nanji comes across with a body and soul enmeshed with nature and her environment and nobody can separate the two.

Kavery Nambisan creates a wonderful working relationship and interconnections that are steeped in domestic realism in the novel through Nanji. Nanji is most comfortable when she is working in the paddy fields along with other women labourers. In a sense, Nambisan has extensively discussed about the region of Coorg and the Coorgi way of life through Nanji, she doesn't seem to indulge in feminine pleasures of knitting, sewing or tending to the garden unlike other women. On the contrary she carelessly throws the seeds in her backyard and allows a plethora of plants to survive unlike the neat patches of landscape adorning many Coorgi homes. When her daughter-in-law Mallyge is busy decorating the house with her sewing creations, Nanji frowns over the delicate temperament and disposition of Mallyge and begins to doubt her capacity and efficiency to run a

household. Nambisan applauds the sturdy physical of the Coorgi women to withstand failure, hardships and their capacity to outlive their husbands and Nanji is no exception to the rule. As observed in the novel after Baliyanna's lack of interest to live and genetic disposition to depression culminating in his death, Nanji continues with her chores with determination and ensures the family is well attended to. Indeed, Nanji outlives her husband, her deceased children and remains a ageing figure in the novel. The only person that remains to take care of her is her sixth son Subbu.

Subbu like Nanji is not exactly a man of the soil but returns to Coorg after his stint in the army. Subbu is happy to see the beautiful relationship between his daughter and mother with love and affection. Subbu gradually begins to love the land and supervises the plantation and agricultural tasks. He observes with disdain the manner in which Coorg becomes modernised with the advent of the British planters, people getting commercialised with every appliance present in their household.

The extent of the commercial development in Coorg is witnessed when Thimmu, Subbu's son starts razing trees for timber amidst the protests and helplessness of Subbu. He dreams that the strong trees of Coorg are mourning and walking to him for help bleeding profusely. Nambisan deftly creates a poignant scene that is representative of modern India where the environment and nature is constantly stripped to support man's development and nourishment. "People talked of loving trees but cut them down without any regret, as if the money got in exchange could replace the loss. Trees were being chopped down and flung in a mountainous heap." (The Scent of Pepper 262)

Kavery Nambisan's novel *The Scent of Pepper* gives out a strong message as to be an individual truly connected to one's own environment and nature like Nanji analysed through ecocriticism is similar to the definition of ecology as oikos and kritis. In fact Nanji is the supreme embodiment of the notion of oikos as the widest home and kritis as the best house judge and keeper of the house in order.