



ENCOUNTERING ETHICS, ECONOMICS AND ECOLOGY IN GIFT IN GREEN

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Abstract: This paper introduces the important concept of a biophysical perspective of human or cultural ethics, economics and ecology in the literary world. The biophysical perspective recognizes that ecological processes determine what can be done in an economy and how best to do it in another fields of studies. A biophysical perspective places the economic system into the larger system of ecological system. This changes the perception of ethical issues by identifying a larger scope of management decision. Gift in Green is the translation of Sarah Joseph's famous novel Aathi. In the novel, the author presents the conflict among ethics, economics and ecology and how marginalized men and women along with the nature become victims of the conflict.

Keywords: Economy, Globalization, Water, Ethics, Land filling etc.

Introduction

For resolving the minor and major environmental issues, the experts argue to view the problems in a broad interdisciplinary perspective to recognize the relations – the interconnected circle among ecology-economics and ethics. In the present situation the circle has been broken because of the deeds of human beings. There are many threatening environmental issues and problems which seem to be unsolved. But by keeping the interrelationship among these three E's will solve most of the major issues. Most of the attitudes and activities of the human world are against to the nature some of his optimizing principles which are against to the ethics and ecology are Maximum Profit, Terminator technology or Destruction of natural capital, Single use etc. (Adolphson 206)

The conflict in Aathi is depicted for the first time, between the people of tent and the people of Aathi. Aathi see a weapon in their life is with the people of tent. The curiosity of the children to see the gun, telescope etc leads them to the tent. Actually, Aathi never wants such weapons. No such problems were existed in Aathi. When Siddhu's play with a toy gun and its voice makes the waterfowl to scramble up in panic, Siddhu's brother Dinakaran snatches the gun from Siddhu and break it into pieces. Like Aathi love the nature, the water, forest, fish, birds and all creatures get an opportunity to be loved. But the dark spectacle and white cap (the two identifying marks of the men in the tent) restrict the views and showers of nature.

The Voice of Modernity

“Should the son of fisherman be only a fisherman? The offspring of a farmer, nothing but a farmer?”(Thampu 18). These words of Kumaran are the first sounds of modernity in Aathi. Kumaran says of decent house, cot, decent clothes, street light etc. And these things attract Aathi especially the young mind of Aathi. The ethics of the economics of Kumaran and Aathi are entirely different. Aathi needs only daily meals. But Kumaran's ambitious mind represents the business mind of the new generation. He wants more, more and more. Aathi wants to live with nature; he wants to live by the nature. Kumaran's view about water is very curious. He says to his mother. In a pot, it resembles a pot, trapped in a pond; it tamely takes on the shape of the pond. What is this water you're talking about? Does it have any identity? Will it ever be something in itself? The thought of it makes me sick” (21). Later these thoughts of Kumaran become curse to Aathi.

Kumaran was the first person in Aathi who sell his land. So Aathi knows 'Selling and Buying' for the first time through Kumaran. Aathi lives with least needs. The episode called 'Shirt' which narrates about the Dinakaran's two shirts shows the humble life style of even the youth of Aathi. Sarah Joseph playfully attached the reader to the water and nature of Aathi. Noor Muhamed and his companion girl who weep for the pathetic condition of Aathi, show how even a visitor of Aathi makes an intimacy with Aathi's nature.

The magic of Kumaran entered into Aathi with full of sounds and colourful things. His army marched on water fields and kill even young and baby oysters. And the magic show of magician who turned Aathi to a well settled township excites the young minds of Aathi. The conflict of Aathi becomes strong here. The houses without fear, without doors, without poverty etc begin to tremble even for a little sound.

Aathi as a Commodity

When Aathi's water area and land is demarked with boundaries, Aathi became a commodity. Aathi has all good qualities of a commodity. Once Shankaran, a good prawn catcher was warned by the man in black glass don't fish in the water of Aathi. He draws a



line in the water to show his boundary. Sarah Joseph narrates the words of man with black glass as “This place is mine, drawing a line on water... some changes, with fuzzy edges, were brewing...” (47).

Later Shankaran was arrested for crossing the line drawn on the water. Aathi’s people never think of a bridge in their life. The police men who came to arrest Shankaran wandered off why Aathi did not have a bridge even in this modern period? When Kumaran did pledge rolling in the Tampurans shrine, their god became a commodity. Head loads of gold were brought to cover roof, walls, steps, lamps etc of the small shrine of Thampuram. The gold remains there for several days without any care or attention, unnoticed. It says that the value of money is insignificant in Aathi. No one wants money, wealth only daily life without any tension. But the gold brings the thought of a thief and it questions the security of Aathi. The houses without doors begin to tremble.

The terrible condition of the outer world, especially the city life is narrated through the incident of Kayal. She is the victim of city life and culture. The water life of Aathi gives her a new life. The impurity of outer-world is wiped out in the water of Aathi. Gitanjali’s story narrates the same insignificance of money and power.

Career and Marriage

Shailaja is the only person who has a job in the city. She was a nursing assistant in a private hospital. The wastes of delivery, bucket full of blood, placenta, severed umbilical cords, sanitary napkins, blood-soaked rags, cotton packs all dump into a massive toilet bowl and flushes away. To her wonder, in a second, a whirl wind rises from beneath and carries it all away with a clamorous slurp, leaning behind not even a touch of moisture. But later she realized all these are gone to the offspring. Author explains:

Laden with the stench, the wind was heavy. Besides placentas and murdered fetuses, Shailaja saw, emerging from innumerable cracks and crevices, severed limbs, swabs oozing with pus, blood clots, decomposed phlegm, chemical agents, plastic bottles, bags, garbage. A terrible thirst afflicted Shailaja. Her throat was dry, her lips parched. She sweats profusely. (75)

She drops the job forever.

When she gets married to Chakkam Kandam, the same thing repeated, she could not survive in the contaminated water of Chakkam Kandam. She breaks out her life on the day of her marriage itself. She cannot tolerate any thought of dirt. She takes birth in the land of purity, pure water, ‘Aathi’. But later Aathi also changed, loses its beauty and purity. Shylaja is the ‘mind’ of Aathi, while Kunjumathu becomes body and the girl of Noor Muhammed becomes soul.

In one episode, author seeks the attention of readers to the ecological problems outside Aathi through the depiction of sand seller’s cruelty at Chettuva and the infectivity of Guruvayoor in the name of Lord Krishna. In both of these incidents business of profit brought evils to the nature, sand, river, water even god become commodity which over utilized and exploited by a certain group of people and make others victims.

Economic Evaluations

Kumaran who tends to see even a small piece of sand or a handful of water as money is always accompanied by a magician. Actually, he is the economist of the novel. He influences the ‘tender hearts’ of Aathi in his hand and play with them. All the children spellbound by the magic. They are attracted by the carts full of colourful and scented sweets which could not have any place to overturn. Aathi is surrounded with marshy land and in his magic children preferred playground instead of marsh. Through the magician, Kumaran tried to perform a safe play for the future. He knows how to conquer the present illiterate and poor old generation of Aathi with power, young generation with money and children with magic. Actually, the magician writes economic theories for future. Instead of Thampuram, a new deity whom Kumaran considered as a suitable one is placed and daily obeisance offers to him alone. This gives way to some other developments in Aathi. Aathi becomes pilgrim centre and need to be more facilitated. The ceremony of placing new deity, break up the silence of Aathi. Author says “Birds in a state of serene meditation in the trees, bushes and paddy fields shot up to the sky, terrified. The sky grew dark. The age-old silence of Aathi was isolated. The air became tense with the shrieking of birds and flailing of wings. It stirred the waters. (127)

Then Aathi is surrounded by the machines. The sounds of machines its heavy pressure on earth gave way all prawns and Karimeens to disappear from Aathi, the little mangrove trees have started dying from their roots up. The construction of bridge snatched away the livelihood of Aathi, the vegetation of Aathi, the awesome nature of Aathi. The Backwater began to disappear. “...The trucks, JCBs, drillers and tipper lorries could transport massive quantities of earth, stones, bricks, sand cement and steel...”(156). Here rises a question whether the bridge is a real need? Who wants the bridge? Bridge gives new developments to Aathi, give new chances to its tourism. Their condition of life, their thoughts and culture all will change. But who needs such change by destructing the nature and life of Aathi. Some young bloods of Aathi alongwith Kumaran only like the change. Here the ethics of



Aathi encountered with the economical ethics and ecology becomes a victim. Money is the base of new development; water-life is the base of Aathi. Then one could see a drastic change in Aathi. The land-filling of Ganesh Subramaniam's three acres land, resulted an end to the cultivation. Hunger began to do its rounds among the households of Aathi. Instead of cultivating their paddy fields, they are forced to lease them out to outsiders who turn them into prawn farms. The economic system of Aathi is broke up. Kumaran's special instructions give work to the people of Aathi. He fills the land by using the helpless people of Aathi. The poverty changed the ethics of the people. They begin to lease their land, become workers of Kumaran, they use the bridge etc.

Concept of Maximum Profit and Single Use

Komban Joy who took land from Kunjimathu for lease poured Endosulfan to catch even the last bit of fish from the farm before the contract expired. The day before Kappu- Kalaku, they find a lot of dead fish, waterfowl, etc. They experience a new agriculture method which does not spare even a baby prawn. While describing the agriculture method of Aathi, Author says, "whole the women of Aathi collecting oysters or prawns they used to pick out the little ones gingerly and let them out of their nets." Exploitation of nature for getting maximum profit can be seen. Aathi also has been changed. The people are ready to sell their property. Most of the young blood begins to hate Aathi to get new betterment of life. To Kumaran, Aathi is a precious raw material to get money. Dinakaran says "For him (Kumaran). Aathi no longer means rice, grain or fish. It means only money, money, money. But money is not like seeds that sprout when sown. It increases only when invested. Multiplies only when manipulated. That is not fishing. Its like a book keeping: nothing more than entries of profit and loss. (198)

Thus Aathi, a land of water, becomes an account book of Kumaran. He makes more and more profit from Aathi. Aathi's agriculture becomes business. The water assumes a new dirty face, which is strange to Aathi. Kumaran burns Green Bangle, the pride of Aathi to gain more. First, he makes it as a tourist place. Many outsiders come and enjoy its beauty and resulted many ecological problems. Then he burned it out. "Gigantic tongue of flame leapt high enough to lick the sky, water boiled, burred, groaned gurgled. The green crabs and frogs, trying to scurry to safely were charred to death" (212). Then Kumaran buried Green Bangle for new constructions. Globalization begins to eat Aathi with its possible speed. It opens Aathi's door to the world, break up the secrecy and purity of Aathi. Aathi becomes a woman who was brutally raped. And the helpless people witness the inhuman action. The brutal appetite kills children of Aathi. The epidemics spread out in the area from the condemned water take away the little life of nineteen children.

Unnimenon is the first young blood who sells his land to Kumaran and come to live in the flat which is built by Kumaran for those who give up dirty Aathi. The strange and grave silence of the place compels them to return to Aathi itself. And this tempts others to rethink of their decision to sell their land. But all of them, already has given the documents of their property to the people in the tent and advanced an amount of one lakh. Later all their documents burned away.

Kumaran decided to make Aathi a waste land. Cooperate with government and political men he welcomes all wastes from different parts of the city to Aathi. And most part of Aathi is filled with the chemical and non-chemical wastes. Meanwhile, Kunjimathuamma and her companions try to regain the remaining parts of Aathi and makes their land ready for Pokali farming. They decided to don't leave Aathi forever. They again returned to their water-life. But Dinakaran has to sacrifice his life for this change. A silent and violent conflict between money power and ethics give Aathi a new face. Aathi becomes a small place which resists the new developed and globalised economic thoughts. The novel ends with the partial victory of ethics and ecology over money.

Aathi is not a fiction. It's the life of the most parts of the Kerala, especially the water areas. It represents many ecological problems in a universal sense. The economics, ethics and ecology encountered several times in the history of Kerala and economics proclaimed its victory over ethics and ecology. And many poor people becomes victims of drilling, land filling, big projects, wastes etc. The JCB's, tippers, huge machines violate the human justice basic needs, rights of many for profit of some. Aathi is also marked as a fictionalized reality in the history of literature.

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