
AN OIKOCRITICAL STUDY OF GEORGE K. MATTHEW'S *THE WIND AND THE RAIN*

J EDWIN MOSES, DR. SURESH FREDERICK

Abstract: Ecocriticism as a critical tool has gained prominence today in the light of environmental concerns. It expands the notion of the social world to include the whole ecosystem by emphasizing the interaction between human and non-human life forms. Cheryll Glotfelty, one of the pioneers in the field has defined ecocriticism as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment”. The Indian version of Ecocriticism known as Oikopoetics or Oikocriticism derived from native Tamil Literature, was developed by Dr. Nirmal Selvamony. Selvamony speaks of Oikos (Tamil equivalent to tinai) where the sacred, the humans, nature and culture stand in an integrated relationship. Oikopoetics as an indigenous critical tool is shaping as a new social order under the bedrock of tinai, a kind of social order bound to a specific natural environment. Dr. George K. Matthew (1930-2011), a retired Professor of Madras Christian College wrote his first novel *The Wind and the Rain* giving an evocative description of nature, cultural and social elements of Kerala. The love story revolves around Roy and Maya in the backdrop of beautiful rivers, majestic mountains, mysterious forests, wonderful trees and lovable animals. The elephant named Balan and the elephant girl Rani played an important role in the climax of the events. Balan and Rani share a kin relationship. The treatment of the non-human life forms gives enough scope to study the story in an oikocritical perspective. This paper will bring out the nexus between the human and the non-human world through Oikocritical perspective.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, tinai, Hierarchic Oikos, Integrative Oikos, Anarchic Oikos, Kinship, Oikocriticism, society, social order.

Introduction: Ecocriticism as a critical tool has gained prominence today in the light of environmental concerns. It expands the notion of the social world to include the whole ecosystem by emphasizing the interaction between human and non-human life forms. Cheryll Glotfelty, one of the pioneers in the field has defined ecocriticism as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment”(Barry 239). The Indian version of Ecocriticism known as Oikopoetics or Oikocriticism derived from native Tamil Literature, was developed by Dr. Nirmal Selvamony. Selvamony speaks of Oikos (Tamil equivalent to tinai) where the sacred, the humans, nature and culture stand in an integrated relationship. According to the Greeks Oikos means a house or family. Oikopoetics as an indigenous critical tool is shaping as a new social order under the bedrock of tinai, a kind of social order bound to a specific natural environment. There are three types of Oikos namely the Integrative Oikos, Hierarchic Oikos and Anarchic Oikos which will be explained later.

Dr. George K. Matthew (1930-2011), a retired Professor of Madras Christian College has written his first novel *The Wind and the Rain* giving an evocative description of nature, cultural and social elements of

Kerala. The love story revolves around Roy and Maya in the backdrop of beautiful rivers, majestic mountains, mysterious forests, wonderful trees and lovable animals. Their love blooms in the presence of pristine nature and Maya spreads her magic of love not only to Roy but also to the non-human world around. The elephant named Balan and the elephant girl Rani played an important role in the climax of the events. The boorish Narayan tries to force his claims on Rani and her elephant. Balan and Rani share a kin relationship. The treatment of the non-human life forms gives scope to study the story in an oikocritical perspective. Suresh Frederick avers, “Ecocriticism gives human beings a better understanding of nature” (Selvamony135). This paper will bring out the nexus between the human and the non-human world through Oikocritical perspective.

Integrative Oikos: The oikos forms an integrative society where the sacred, nature, culture and the humans are bound in a kin-like relationship. Black Elk, the chieftain of an American tribe summed up this intricate bonding as “the two-legged and four-legged lived like kith and kin”(Frederick 1). Rani and Balan were always spotted together in the locality. Balan was her only companion in the world. She felt terribly sad and dejected when Balan was away

roaming in the village. He damaged the crops but Rani assured compensation for the farmers. She called him “*Chetta*” meaning brother. She felt such an intuitive and emotional bond with Balan. She cannot bear the separation as her whole life revolves around Balan. “He feels orphaned and he’s looking for me!...Rani screamed at her loudest “*Chetta!*” And again “*Chetta*” (WR 251). The bond between human and non-human is brought out in an emotional manner. They share a kin relationship.

Maya and Roy exchanged views about the snake in the fields. Roy expressed his fear for the snake. One of the greatest fear of humans is snake. They harm it aggressively by fear as humans are conditioned to believe through evolution and education that snakes are dangerous and to be killed. Maya understood the role of snake in maintaining the ecological balance as it checks the population of mice, rats, bandicoots which spoil the fields. She sees the snake as a friend. “Actually the snake is a friend...The impression most people have of a snake is that it is sneaky and wicked”(WR 11-12). Maya’s attitude integrates the snake and humans together.

Hierarchic Oikos: The oikos is based on a political relationship where the society is organized in a hierarchic relationship with the sacred at the top followed by humans and nature at the last in the order. Humans are superior to nature. Selvamony avers “In the hierarchic or political tinai the members stand in a hierarchic relationship with the sacred at the top, the humans in the middle and nature at the bottom”(Frederick 4). Narayan, Rani’s cousin treats Balan in a ruthless manner. He shows his dominance over the elephant and considers himself superior than the animal. Narayan is a selfish man who forces his claims on the elephant. “He was such a rough and abusive fellow, such a law unto himself, and so ruthless in his treatment of Balan...” (WR 155). Balan feels insecure in the presence of Narayan as “Balan detests the man whenever Narayan is around, Balan becomes stiff and unresponsive drawing in his head

and trunk”(WR 155). He treats the elephant like a slave to work for him. The anthropocentric attitude of the boorish Narayan towards the elephant shows how humans subjugate nature.

Anarchic Oikos: The human and non-human life forms were looked upon based on their utility value. Selvamony says “It helped accumulate knowledge about the sacred, nature and man and also in working out strategies to exploit these to human advantage”(Frederick 5). The sacred is useful for some purposes, humans are seen as resources and nature was subjected and segregated based on its usefulness to society. Maya and Roy spent most of their time in pristine nature. Roy looked upon the elements of nature as a threat to the coconut fields. The squirrel eats the tender coconut nuts which angers Roy to a great extent and he says “We’ve got to catch and kill it. It was your sympathy for it the last time that saved its life”(WR 72). He does not mind to kill the squirrel for his economic and physical benefits. He does not want to share the coconut with the squirrel and acts selfishly. He cares for his pet dog and loves the company of Balan which is useful to him but the squirrel harms the coconut and does not benefit him. Nature is treated based on its usefulness to society.

Roy was hunting ducks to satisfy his hunger. Birds were looked as food for the society and they do not exist independently unless for the humans. There is Anarchic oikos. “Roy had gone duck hunting but he had never regarded these birds as fellow creatures with as much a right to life”(WR 98). Maya influenced Roy towards an ecocentric way of life. Roy began to see the non-human life forms as fellow creatures thereby forming an integrative oikos.

Thus in the novel, one can see shades of integrative oikos, hierarchic oikos and anarchic oikos but predominantly it stresses on an integrative society. In this world of predominantly anarchic spirit humans should strive for an integrative world giving way to a new social order, which is the need of the hour to maintain ecological balance.

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J. Edwin Moses/Research Scholar/Department of English/Bishop Heber College/Autonomous/
Tiruchirappalli- 620 017/j.edimos@gmail.com/9003037972 / 9444600351/Address for Correspondence
3/1, Nylon Nagar/Pasumalai/Madurai 625004/

Dr. Suresh Frederick/Dean/ IQAC/Associate Professor & UG Head/Department Of English/
Bishop Heber College/Tiruchirappalli-17/Sfheber@Gmail.Com