

IMPACT OF PROGRESS AND DEVELOPMENT: AN ENVIRONMENTAL READING OF SA. KANDASAMY'S, THE DEFIANT JUNGLE AND SARAH JOSEPH'S GIFT IN GREEN

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I would say that if the village perishes India will perish too. India will be no more India. Her own mission in the world will get lost. The revival of the village is possible only when it is no more exploited. Industrialization on a mass scale will necessarily lead to passive or active exploitation of the villagers as the problems of competition and marketing come in.

— M. K. Gandhi

The above statement of Gandhi emphasizes the role of Villages in the development of a country. But now a days the villages face a threat due to the development that comes along with of industrialization and globalization. Post colonial India witnessed several developmental projects such as dam construction, infrastructure development, founding smart cities, urbanization, establishments of industries and multinational corporate companies to achieve economic growth and to be in the league of developed nations. On the contrary, these so called developmental projects have left behind the innocent and vulnerable village people, deprived them of their native lands and impacted their life by changing them from being farmers into laborers. The ethics of these developmental measures is questioned when they exploit not only the indigenous people but also the environment which is their life force and sole means of survival. Literature plays a pivotal role in bringing these issues to the forefront for the welfare of the humanity and universe as a whole by persistently and consistently insisting on the sustainable development. Indian regional writers, especially, never have left a stone unturned in bringing out the pathos of the voiceless people. They forcefully and authentically picturize the plight of the natives in their works.. This paper focuses on the quality of life of the natives and their environs before and after the development and the issues related to environmental ethics in the novels *The Defiant Jungle* and *Gift in Green*.

Sa. Kandasamy's *Sayavanam*, originally written in Tamil was published in the year 1969, and the translation was first published in the year 2009 by Vasantha Surya. The setting of the novel is a place near Thanjavur in Tamil Nadu in 1960s, the time when industrialization was introduced. The theme is development Vs environment. Though published forty years ago, the novel deals with issues that are becoming more and more relevant and urgent in today's world. The globe faces the threat of

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global warming and climate change, as a result of man's anthropocentric attitude. Progress and development is essential for developing countries like India, but it should be at the cost of innocent lives and the environment is pathetic.

Chidambaram, earlier an NRI in Singapore, modern and egalitarian in his outlook, with little money and knowledge, returns to his native place and brings down the dense forest 'sayavanam' 'the forest that would not be felled' [2] in the pursuit of his selfish goal to establish a sugarcane industry. In the process, he ruthlessly exploits the natural environ, replaces edible crops with sugarcane and changes the work ethics of the native people. Initially, the natives were skeptical about his ways of doing things, later they accepted the same without any regret. Sivanandi Devar, a true son of the soil, uncle of Chidambaram, was against the establishment of the industry and he tries various methods to stop Sambamurthi Iyer, selling the dense forest to Chidambaram. He asserts: "This is our earth! ... Our forefathers' property! What does it matter if it bears crops or not? Should it go to anyone else, Sami?" [2]. When he comes to know that the man from Singapore belongs to his own family, his perception changes and he starts helping Chidambaram in the destruction of the forest with its entire living organisms.

The village was named after the jungle Sayavanam. It is a dense, lush green jungle such that "not one person had ever gone in there and come back whole"[2] and it is known for its dark and sweet tamarind groves . Sivanandi Devar, in charge of the grove, used to harvest tamarind every year and supply the 'puli' to the whole village. Nobody knew much about the trees, bushes and creepers of the jungle, and they at any time never ventured beyond the tamarind groves. This unspoilt natural forest was callously felled for an individual's ruthless aspiration to establish a factory. It was not an easy task for him, in the beginning to destroy the forest with an axe and after several vain attempts he decided to fire the jungle to start the work.

Gift in Green written originally in Malayalam is an eco-spiritual narrative that explicitly brings out the miseries of the people of the village Aathi and the struggles they underwent to preserve the pristine nature. Aathi is an idyllic village, surrounded by mangroves called as green bangle and back waters that nourishes and protects all life forms. The villagers lived a life of harmony with nature, till forces of modernization and commercialization disrupted their lives. Kumaran , who left Aathi for green pastures elsewhere returns to it with the intention of making money by commercializing its natural resources. Wielding the weapons of law and money he forces vulnerable farmers to sell their land for the dream of a concrete house and a high paying job. The people of Aathi have mastered the art of cultivating rice in salt water and their ancestors firmly believed that they could survive because they have water. "Life seemed to them like a deep, bottomless lagoon. They had no food, no clothes, and no shelter. But one thing they had: water. It lay full and brimming, like the miracle of miracles. Water: the unending, ever-renewing fountain-spring of life." [1].

Once the village began to 'develop' the pristine water and the pure air got polluted, and the village turned into a sewage dump. Those who protested faced hunger, police lathis, disappointment and death. Kumaran tempts the innocent people by luring them with money and they were forced to abandon their occupations of fishing and agriculture, and were turned to daily wagers. Farmers turned to laborers due to the crooked ways of consumerist for his own selfish motives. "He represents all the corporate agencies and business tycoons who become accomplices and middlemen in the process of exploitation by the global market." [Writing for the earth: An Eco critical Reading of *Gift in Green* by Sarah Joseph Dr. Milon Franz]

Dinakaran, the native of Aathi was incensed by the ways of Kumaran. Since the time Kumaran bought the lands from Ganesha Subramaniam cultivation in Aathi came to an end. Consequently, many were forced to lease their lands to outsiders for a meager income as others witnessed the atrocities helplessly. The farming lands were converted to prawn farms. Dinakaran was against the selling of lands to Kumaran and persuaded the natives to revolt against the consumerism in a peaceful way. Moreover, he sacrificed his life in his attempt to restore the unspoilt nature.

Aathi had its own life style and code of conduct, but this was breached by the horde of strangers, who thronged the temple. They trespassed on the green bangle soiling the sanctity of the forest. The tranquility of the village was disturbed by the noise of the machines in the construction site. On the whole the landscape and biodiversity was brutally exploited by Kumaran. But in the end the people of Aathi won the battle.

Progress and development is imperative as it decides the growth of the country, but sustainable development is the need of the hour if we are not to extinguish ourselves in the fire of progress. Both the novels *The Defiant Jungle* and *Gift in Green* advocate that measures for development should take into consideration the whole eco system, and that this is the only way to benefit not only the present but also the future generation.

References

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