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INEXTRICABLE RELATION: THE INTERDEPENDENT NATURE OF HUMAN BEINGS ON
EARTH BASED ON THE NOVEL *GIFT IN GREEN* BY SARAH JOSEPH

Dr. EDISON K VERGHESE

Associate Professor and HOD

Department of English, Sree Vivekananda College, Kunnamkulam, Thrissur Dist.,

Email: edisonkverghese@gmail.com



Dr. Edison K Verghese

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ABSTRACT

Sarah Joseph is one of the most significant environmentalist writer in Malayalam Literature. Most of her works speak for the Earth. In her works, she portrays Nature as an oppressed group. She has bothered about the inter-relationship between Nature and human beings which is interlocked in the ecosystem of Earth. In her novels, she uses Indian myths to showcase how Nature suffers in the hands of man and also applies eco feminism concept which synchronize ecological issues with women problems. She has explored the relationship between human world and environment with a spirit of commitment. *Gift in Green* is considered to be one of the best eco critical novels by Sara Joseph. It is an unconventional novel about the relationship between people and the land they inhabit.

Keywords: Sarah Joseph, *Gift in Green*, Aathi, Ponmani, Dinakaran, Buddha

Lord Buddha taught that basically human nature is pure and egoless, just as the sky which is clear. Clouds come and go, but the blue sky is always there; clouds don't alter the fundamental nature of the sky. Similarly, the human mind is fundamentally pure. He teaches us that nothing exists independently. We live in a world where we interact with the other beings, Nature, and its elements. The existence of all things on earth is interdependent. Buddha believes that we are not separate from the earth, Nature and other beings - that it is ignorant for us to separate ourselves as we human beings depend on earth, air, water and other forms of life to live. Our existence depends on these things, but these things also exist because of our interconnected existence.

After his awakening, which took place as he sat outdoors underneath a tree, Buddha continued to live and meditate in forests throughout his life. He explained that he did this for his own benefit and out of compassion for future generations. Because Nature gives a tremendous support for liberation, Buddha instructed his followers to meditate in nature. Buddhists believe that a well-trained mind that is developed to its highest capacity of intuitive insight and wisdom can help to resolve environmental problems through its adherence to the Five Precepts and pursuance of the Eightfold Path to the cessation of suffering. Buddhists also believe that selflessness and kindness are essential human characteristics which are needed for a peaceful society. Humankind is facing a global environmental crisis today. Various strategies have been proposed to deal with environmental problems. While these efforts have been effective in solving some environmental problems, new problems are emerging because the roots of the environmental degradation have not been solved. Therefore, in solving these problems, special attention must be paid to the values of the spiritual world. Indeed, our spiritual relationship with the environment can play a crucial role in environmental protection. But it is

regrettable that people are turning their backs on the spiritual world as they indulge themselves in endless greed and desire for the materialistic world which invariably lead to the destruction of environment. To mitigate the adverse effects of such phenomenon, the concept of harmonious coexistence of all living things on earth needs to be reinstated in people's mind.

Buddhism is so close to nature that the religion deserves to be called a 'religion of nature.' The relationship between Buddhism and nature stems from Buddha's life and teachings. Buddha spent most of his life amidst the Natural forest and tree became the most sacred symbol of Buddhist world - the Bodhi tree. The first Buddhist communities were forest dwellers. Buddha said, "there is no spot on the ground where men had not died and therefore every part of nature will be endowed with a spirit, these will be the spirits of the trees, the mountains and the water...."

In Buddhist literature Nature was never treated as something 'outside' the human realm but rather as an extension of human world. According to Buddha, human beings should live in an appropriate environment. This environment does not mean only having a good neighbourhood, but also a 'natural' environment. Buddhist Dharma is the greatest paradigm for keeping the relationship of man with the Nature. This is difficult in practice because this balanced relationship is being broken through the consumeristic and materialistic values of modern society. "Forests are being cut down; fish and animals are almost no more to be seen in the wild. These facts are evidence of the corrupt relationship between man and the environment.

Ever since the birth of literature, writers and scholars have been describing the importance of Nature through their writings. And from the age of modernism, we can also see various literatures that warn man to recognize the environmental problems created by him. In fact they pointed out the real man-made issues of Nature and its dangerous consequences. There are many novels and writings from various writers belonging to chosen ecological themes like David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*, Jon McGregor's *If Nobody speak of Remarkable Things*. Even among Indian literature, we can also see the works of Amitav Ghosh's *Hungry Tide*, Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a sieve*, Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* etc.

Sarah Joseph is one of the most significant writers of Malayalam Literature. Most of her works are speak for the Earth. In her works, she portrays Nature in the oppressed group. She has bothered about the inter-relationship between Nature and human beings which is interlocked in the ecosystem of Earth. In her novels, she uses Indian myths to showcase how Nature suffers in the hands of man and also applies eco feminism concept which synchronize ecological issues with women problems. She has explored the relationship between human world and environment with a spirit of commitment. She herself states that "My environment activism stems from my intuition of the umbilical cord that connects human being with the earth."(GG)

Gift in Green is considered to be one of the best eco critical novels by Sara Joseph. It is an unconventional novel about the relationship between people and the land they inhabit. In this novel, Sara Joseph created the world of common people. They respect their land and worship it through their cultural practices. But the arrival of some upper class wealthy people altered the life of common people and their sacred environment. Upper class people have used to oppress the real owners of the land for fulfilling their greedy needs. Here the novel *Gift in Green* can be analysed in subaltern perspective which centered on rural aesthetics and folklore myths and exhibited how they value their environment and protect their land.

The novel *Gift in Green* shows some teachings of Buddhism on Nature. Here the novelist portrays some direct interconnections between humans and Nature especially subaltern and Nature. We can clearly identify that the oppressed and uneducated people valued their environment than educated one. Their nourished culture glorifies the Nature. They keep following the rules and regulations for the preservation of Nature made by their ancestors. These principles are almost related to the teachings of Eco Buddhism. According to David.R. Loy, "Eco dharma is the term combines the teaching of Buddhism and related spiritual traditions (dharma) with ecology or ecological concerns. A bit more specifically, Eco dharma can be understood as a new development in contemporary Buddhism, in response to the ecological crisis that now threatened civilization as we know it, and perhaps even enriched by our understanding of the field of ecology."

When we analyze the novel *Gift in Green*, we clearly recognize that characters in the novel followed some rules and rituals which are explicitly similar as the principles or the components of Eco dharma. All we know that after Buddha left home, he meditate in Nature, awakened under the bodhi vriksha and mostly lived and taught in the Natural world. Similarly the characters in the novel lived in a natural world and they realise the importance of perpetuation of earth. Here in this novel, Sarah Joseph created a village called Aathi which is an island surrounded by water. The people of Aathi considered their land as a sacred one. Most of them are working class people like farmers and fishermen.

The novel opens up various possibilities of life practices based on mutual love and care, respecting mother earth. In Aathi, selling and buying land strictly limited to the inmates of the place. The inhabitants are not allowed greedy developers to their land. They can only earn three hundred rupees per day, which means their per capita income is too small. However they don't try to earn more money by exploiting their land. They don't wish to get any beneficiaries through looting or exploiting their land. They are satisfied with the life that they attained through their hard work. They only ingest what they gained from their sweat. They are indigent and uneducated but their practical knowledge regarding their land is remarkable. Here in this novel, the story gets twisted with the arrival of Kumaran, who left Aathi for his better life but came back after thirty six years to transform Aathi into a city for huge profit. The political conflicts of Aathi begin thus.

Developments are essential for the growth of nations. But these developments should bring better living conditions for the people of the same. It should be Eco friendly. In the age of modernization, most of the developments are against the functions of Nature. In the novel, Sarah tells us that the development of Aathi doesn't bring any profit to the people. As the novel progresses, we can see that the right of occupancy of the land reached in the hands of upper class money grubbers. They hollowly create some developments by exploiting the Nature. They utilize the Nature of Aathi for getting satisfaction for their greed. Under these circumstances people of Aathi face threats of pollution, disaster, displacement etc. Finally the working class people who lived in there came in front of the conflicts and started to raise their voice for their habitat. The natives collectively fought against the destruction of Nature. It is because of that they value their culture and identity which are rooted in the land they inhabit. Characters like Ponmani and Dinakaran started their revolt against the greedy developers. Finally Dinakaran gave his last breath for the liberation of his land. Ponmani, his friend, fought against the invaders with rage. He violently fought by destroying the bridge built by them. The bridge connected Aathi to the outside selfish world. Here this paper focused on two important theories that are Subalternism and Eco Buddhism and how these theories are mutually shared by their principles.

Sarah Joseph portrays subaltern people as the well wishers and custodians of environment. These oppressed people only concern about the existence of Nature and Natural resources. Their conservation of Nature has done through various cultural practices that shared and transmitted from generations to generations. So here we can see subaltern customs are more related to the theory of Eco Buddhism. They are the real followers of Eco Buddhism. They always fought against the greedy people for their existence and for safeguarding their surroundings.

Eco Buddhism is relatively a new term. Our world consist more than four thousand religions. Religions are always standing for the welfare of human beings and that teaches the importance of coexistence. Earth can only exist through coexistence. Human beings should realize the significance of Nature. Without Nature man is nothing. Buddhism is one of the major religions in the world which indoctrinates how to respect nature and how to live simply as you can. Most Buddhist people need to live simply and respect the cycle and balance in Nature. People were not anxious about global environmental change at the time of Buddha. So he did not give any specific teaching on this subject. But he realizes what will happen in the future. He showed through his entire life cycle that how to behave towards the universe. Eco-dharma can be understood as a new development in contemporary Buddhism in response to the ecological crisis that now threatens civilization as we know it.

Buddha taught that respect for the Natural world is essential for our life. By simple way of living, one can achieve harmony with other creatures and learn to appreciate the interconnectedness of all the lives around the world. This simplicity of life develops openness to our environment and relates the world with awareness and

responsive perception. It enables us to enjoy the surroundings without any manipulation. Nature is not independent and unchanging. Neither we are. Change is the true essence of nature. Buddha taught us to live simply to cherish tranquility to appreciate the natural cycle of life. Buddhist teachers and masters have constantly reminded to the world that the importance of living in tune with nature, to respect all life, to make time for meditation practice, to live simply and use nature as a spiritual force. Buddha stressed the four boundless qualities; Loving kindness, Compassion, Sympathetic joy (delight in the well-being of others) and equanimity (stability). Buddha used examples from Nature to teach. In his stories, plants and animal world are treated as a part of our inheritance. It has been argued that Buddhism serves primarily as a salvational purpose. Buddhism emphasizes the importance of human harmonious co-existence with the Nature. It also emphasizes compassion, respect for all living creatures and harmony between living things sharing planet. All of the above demonstrates that Lord Buddha had a vision for environmental protection and conservation as he taught his followers to love and respect Nature.

There are many elements of Buddhist doctrine which promote respectfulness and conservation of Nature. Buddhism tries to preserve life in different degrees which still has influence in rural areas and determines the vision of the people. The rural people come forward to practice the ideology of Buddhism. They know the necessity for the preservation of Nature.

The novel *Gift in Green* presents us this kind of awareness for the environmental issues. Here this novel tells us that the improper consumerism of Nature leads to a great disaster. Ordinary people lost their land because of the greediness of rich people. The novel clearly explains how common people preserve their land. Their culture and legacy are always rooted in Nature. Their principles are flexible for the survival of Nature which is similar to the principles and teachings of Lord Buddha. The relationship between man and Nature are not just interdependent but interrelated also. There is a general belief that the ethnic groups are not civilized. They are not aware of the developments outside their world. But the truth is that they are living in a self-sustainable life style that helps them to avoid depending on outside sources.

Here in this novel, Sarah Joseph created a village called Aathi which is enriched with the love of common people. Even though they are illiterate, they have deep knowledge regarding their environment. Their entire life style is related with the land of Aathi. Aathi is an island surrounded by water. The people who lived in there are always engaged in many kind of works associated with their environment. Most of the men are fishermen. They earn a minimum income from the water, but they satisfied with that, because they are conserving Nature for the next day. Hence the people of Aathi and the entire ecology mutually co-exist. The village itself is a source of survival for number of living and nonliving and it also provides accommodation for those who seek shelter in her. The village of Aathi describes it as: "Water! Wherever they looked, water was all they found. Swimming and walking, they reached this place. The trees here knew no taboos or untouchability. The birds parroted no religious bigotry. The trees, the birds, the fish, the earth, the water – all beckoned them: 'come, come'" (page no:44)

Through this narration the writer tries to convey that, there are no boundaries between Nature and humans. Nature considers every creature as her child. The ancestors of the present generation in Aathi faced lot of discriminations and disrespect from the side of aristocratic people. Consequently they escaped from that place and reached in the pure land called Aathi. The novel depicts the life of Subaltern classes: Their lament to the intolerable life, their oppression by upper class, their struggles and their final recapturing of life in Aathi. Through this novel, Sarah tries to point out that class conflicts are general in every society. Those who possess money and power are always neglected down trodden people in every part. They ruined the life of common people for their benefits. Sarah reflects this truth by this novel. But she also creates a notion that the fortitude of subaltern can overcome all these limitations and there by their problems. She asserts that they are capable of making their own history over the aristocrat. Here she depicts the victory of lower class as the victory of Nature.

"Their mothers told them their history. Their ancestors were despised and ill-treated people. Whatever they did was an offence; touching, speaking, eating anything, going to sleep for a moment, falling ill even

once..... For such crimes they were kicked: kicked in the chest, in the pit of their stomach, on the back. They had no right to resist the ill treatment. They were not even free to cry. Terrified they fled in the dead of night. In the course of their desperate flight, running for dear life, a handful of people reached this place.....they had no food, no clothes, 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." (Joseph, 44)

These lines indicate that Nature always stands for the life of oppressed and it gives shelter for moulding a new life. Here the land of Aathi gives a new life for the underrated people where they mutually shared the resources of it. In their land, they mould out the principles of coexistence. They were very much aware about their future in Aathi. Hence they utilize the resources only for their needs not for the greed. This concept of coexistence with nature can be seen in the teachings of Lord Buddha. In his lifetime, He preached that monks and nuns should not disrupt the established habitat of any other creature, nor kill other living creature, for example when building new quarters. Here in the novel Sarah attempts to prove the significance of ecological balance. She makes an effort to maintain that balance. So therefore she depicts characters who are always conscious of their ecological balance. They live in Nature with caution. These kinds of cautions were similar with the teachings of Buddha on environmental protection. Buddha set rules for the protection of 'Panja Bhoothas' (earth, water, fire, air and space). Comparably, the heroes of the novel like Dinakaran and Ponmani raised their voice for their water and forest they inhabit. They reflect the same mentality of Buddha.

Dinakaran said, "Prakasha, we are not here for a trial of strength. It is not as if you don't know what will happen if the forest is burned. You also know that we will all perish if the water and the marsh are buried under the earth you are out to dump on them. To betray Aathi- betraying your own mother could not be worse – you have gathered a suckling band of unsuspecting children who don't know their right hand from their left. That's how smart you are. But, for as long as we are alive and have breath, we won't let the work progress even an inch. You'd do well to know that." (Page no: 215)

This sentence plainly shows that how Dinakaran treat his environment. How much he concerns Nature. He considers his land as his mother. That is the reason why he conducts a protest against the people who are associated with the process of Industrialisation in Aathi. Dinakaran and Ponmani always believed in the principles of coexistence. Not only them, but also the people who followed the traditional way of life in Aathi, also believed in the principles of coexistence. Some youngsters in Aathi wish for a luxury life. So they are uncomfortable in their prescriptive life. This discomfort was easily exploited by the industrialists. But Dinakaran and other people who love Aathi strongly stand with the land. So we can see that the ideologies of these characters are similar as the ideologies of Buddha. Buddhism has an intimate association with the concept of peace. In its long history, there is no evidence of violence, killing or religious hatred. Buddhism wields only one sword, the sword of wisdom and recognizes only one enemy: ignorance.

Throughout its history, Buddhism had a profound impact on environment. Their suggestions or guidelines are for the conservation of Nature. Similarly the people of Aathi made some rules and regulations for the protection of their surroundings. The story nights in Aathi had a great intention for the well-being of its occupants. In Aathi, people should get a specific place for hearing stories. The story tellers put their bundles and take a dip in the cool water of Aathi. After Emerging from the water, they would clad themselves in white dress. The karanavar of Aathi would then lead the story teller into the boat and make him sit on the prow. This is a year old custom of Aathi. So here they conduct a social association between people. Most of the stories would convey the theme of coexistence. Actually they have practiced the morals that acquired from the story nights throughout their life. Through these nights, they can teach upcoming generations to value the importance of environmental protection. From these customs, we can clear that people of Aathi followed the principles of Ecodharma.

In this novel, Sarah has created strong women characters who raise their voice against the exploitation of Nature. Such characters are Kunjimathu and Shailaja. Kunjimathu is a very bold woman always stands for her Nature. She was abused by Kumaran in her adulthood. Then Kumaran leaves her and escapes from the land. But she will not ready to quit her life. She took up the responsibility of Kumaran's parents after he leaves them. She

helps Kumaran's mother in household affairs and took Kumaran's father to ayurveda physician. She dug basins around the coconut trees, bathed the buffaloes, sowed bean seeds, worked in the paddy fields and in the prawn farm. She forgot her pain through dissolving in Nature. It is true that Nature has always a supreme power to bring back new life to its creatures. When we enter into the depth of Nature, it would erase human miseries. This is very evident through the character of Kunjimathu. She evicted all her miseries into the root of Nature.

The novel has presented another character called Shailaja who also has an unconditional bond with the Nature. She has come back to her home after her marriage. The reason of her return was related with the Nature. She is from the land of clear and pure water. But after her marriage, she has sent to a land called Chakkam Kandam which covered with waste and dirty surroundings. That is intolerable for her. She loved her husband and family members. But she came back to her home only because of that perished environment. In her views, homeland must be pure. She came from such a land that is Aathi. But after the comeback of Kumaran, the land of Aathi became more and more disgusting than that of Chakkam Kandam. So here in the novel, we could see that many characters including Dinakaran, Ponmani, Kunjimathu, and Shailaja courageously came in front to lead the protest for the conservation of Aathi. Shailaja poured kerosene on her head as a part of protest. She was even ready to renounce her life for Aathi.

The novel *Gift in Green* actually gives a good message to the modern world. It is very relevant to the present time situations, because the people of modern world are less aware of the conservation of Nature. Today all of us are shrinking into ourselves. We became selfish and greedy there by lost our unity and integrity in the mother planet. We exploited Nature to that extend that the earth started to respond in the forms of disasters like flood, earthquake, drought etc. Everywhere, the major victims are middle class or lower-class people while the upper class enjoys more privilege. This reality is distinctly explained through this novel. But here Sarah gives a positive remark for the struggles of subaltern in protecting their environment. They are well aware about the truth that they would become the first victims of manmade calamities. So therefore, they consider their fellow creature as equal as them in Aathi. And they try to teach their children the importance of coexistence. When we read the novel *Gift in Green*, we understand that the lower-class people are more concerned about their surroundings. They try to protect their land, soil, air and water. They allow other creatures to live. This is what Lord Buddha tried to clarify through his teachings. The functioning of Earth is rooted in this theory of mutual correlation. This is what Buddha showed to the universe through his life. Here the writer has created a land called Aathi where the people have followed the theory of correlation. They have fought against the people who try to destroy this. Finally, they attain victory over them.

Through this novel, Sarah Joseph wished for a world which is furnished with harmony and peace. It is not easy to construct a world with complete coherence. For that, all creatures should keep their responsibility towards the Nature and should understand their role to manage it. This is also advocated in the doctrines of Buddhism. Buddhists were believed that the Suffering is the common problem of everyone. But when we transmitted our sufferings to the Nature, we can easily escape from the terrains of materialistic world. So, Buddha teaches people to love Nature and to use natural resources in a moderate way. Through this research paper we could understand that the downtrodden people (Subaltern) are the great followers of Eco-dharma. They promoted the ideology for the welfare of Nature. Sarah Joseph strongly proclaimed the concept of Buddhism by this novel. She wished for a world of harmony with companionship. So therefore, she wanted to give a warning to the modern world through her work. For that she has selected the doctrines of Buddhism on the preservation of Nature. Buddhism is a way of life more than that of a religion.

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