

Emerging Knowledge from Sri Lankan Tamil Fiction for Sustainable Regional Development: A Study on Selected Pieces

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Abstract - Regional development requires much of pre-planning and needs to consider various factors like available natural resources and the way they could be exploited with the knowledge available and emerging to look for some new development. However, destruction of the environment and natural resources is the main danger that the modern world has to face. There is an urgent need for institutional reform within modern society to safeguard the environmental resources and to maintain the ecological balance. Environmental sociologists have different views as to which institutional traits can be held primarily responsible for the environmental crisis. Further, there are other aspects like the effects of War- bereavement, loss of habitat, displacement and exile which slows down the progress with regard to regional development of our country. The life in the latter part of the 20th Century became very much painful and suffering due to the poor economic and deteriorating political conditions that prevailed in Sri Lanka. The traditional concepts of life held by the people further aggravated the people's struggle for existence in the conflict-ridden parts of the country. The ignorance of the people and their fear psychosis led them to face more struggles to find a peaceful life. In order to understand the ground situation for planning for regional development there is a need to discuss what happened in the past especially during the war. The writers who faced the challenges have recorded their experience and the future agents could find suggestions for new development. The knowledge emerging out of the analysis of the short stories under study would be helpful to go forward towards regional development. The pieces written by Sri Lankan Tamil writers available in translation which appeared in *Lute Song and Lament*, *A Lankan Mosaic*, Tamil short stories from Sri Lanka are taken for critical analysis. This paper attempts to highlight the writers' concern about the safety of the environment and the ecological balance of natural resources which could be the base for new understanding for sustainable development.

Keywords Struggle, Challenges, Fear psychosis

I. INTRODUCTION

Regional development depends on the natural resources available in the area. Though modern society is able to utilize facilities accessed through the inventions and discoveries of science and technology the villages are lagging behind. The ecological balance is also lost due to environmental pollution. There is an urgent need for institutional reform to safeguard the environmental resources and to maintain the ecological balance. All the social reformers, writers and artistes have a duty towards creating awareness among the public to safeguard the environment and many have indicated their concern for the safety of the earth from pollution and maintenance of ecological balance through their pieces. Environmental sociologists have different views as to which institutional traits can be held primarily responsible for the environmental crisis. The capitalistic or industrial character as well as the complex, highly

administrated technological system of modern society is the cause for this depressing state of affairs. Many Marxist critics blame the social system which is based on the capitalist structure for the negative and destructive attitude of the people who do not have any concern for the safety of the Globe and its environment and the resources.

Negative impact on the regional development due to communal conflicts

This paper tries to look into four short stories namely *Gone with the soil* by Ottamavadi Arafath, *Despondency* by Al Azhoomath, *Kosalai* by Ranjukumar, and *Watering Time* by Senkai Aaliyan originally written in Tamil by Tamil and Muslim writers and translated into English by S.Sivasekaram, S.Pathmanathan and A.J.Canagaratne. They appeared in the collections titled *Lutesong and Lament* edited by Chelva Canaganayakam (2001), *A Lankan Mosaic* edited by Ashley Halpe, M.A.Nuhuman and Ranjini Obeyesekera, (2002) and *Tamil short stories from Sri Lanka* (2013) translated and edited by S.Pathmanathan. The Anthologies are represented by many Tamil and Muslim writers and the selection includes some expatriates, too. Most of the stories deal with the effects of War- bereavement, loss of habitat, displacement and exile. The writers have made it a point to record the sufferings of the people in their pieces so that there would be some awareness about the loss caused by the War. Mostly all these stories were written during a period when the country was in turmoil after the ethnic riots (1983) and the subsequent civil war which lasted till May 2009 between the armed forces and the militants belonging to the various movements which fought for the Tamil Cause.

In Sri Lanka, ethnic unity has been marred by many communal conflicts ever since Independence (1948). Subsequent political crisis such as the act of Pakistani and Indian disenfranchisement (1949), the Sinhala Only Act (1958), the Republic Constitution (1972) and the Executive Presidency (1978) contributed to the divisions and misunderstanding among the communities living in the country. The peaceful atmosphere for living in harmony in Sri Lanka was disturbed by continuous riots and discriminatory rule of successive governments. Out of this crisis emerged the Tamil youth militancy which turned out to be a force to be reckoned with.

They also caused a terrible negative impact on the ecological balance and purity of the environment and further it contributes negatively for the regional development. These situations are recorded in these stories. The knowledge gained from the analysis would pave the way for finding out social reasons to look for real solutions. An analysis is made here on the four selected stories in detail for the purpose of this paper.

The dangerous forces destroying the lives of the people

Making a poignant and accurate portrayal of the last days of a father who refuses to leave his home at the critical phase of the War, Arafath raises a voice in *Gone with the soil*. The inhabitants of the area had to leave because of the movements of the militants and the security forces. The peaceful atmosphere of the village is gone. The symbolic effects of the Sodhayan Hill which stands for the stable life of the people and the Tamarind tree in front of the shop owned by the narrator's father providing shade, never bowing before wind or rain speak a lot about people's freedom. The cultural symbols like the Banyan tree that was home to the god Bhairava loses its sanctity due to the presence of the armed forces. The soil famed for the toil of the people and their generosity loses its splendour and majesty because of the forces which have the least concern for the people's pride and dignity.

"When the armed struggle was at its peak, this very hill served as the meeting place as well as the abode of the militants, and camps sprouted at its top." (p.248, Halpe, 2002)

The father of the narrator of the story was hardworking and helpful. A professional businessman with many a skill is now a bedridden feeble old man who has lost his spirit and will. If the people who work hard lost their spirit there would not be any progress and development. But the story ends with a positive note: the narrator who answers the question raised by the father about the visibility of the Hill. The author himself symbolizes the dangerous forces which destroy the lives of the people as follows:

The beautiful village became a captive of uncertainty. The people lost heart and abandoned the village and become alienated from it. White ants made a hive in the taproot of the Tamarind tree. Alien war elephants lay all over the grazing grounds and prevented us from enjoying the waters of the rushing river. They encircled the people and suddenly crushed them to death. They yelled at us and demanded that we point a finger at any frog that croaked in its own voice. Our young women suffered death by rape in the grip of the elephants. p. 248. Halpe et al, 2002.

Conflict caused by displacement

Al Azhoomath underlines the personal problem of an individual character in *Despondency* but it portrays the suffering and alienation of the plantation worker who is forced to move to the city because of the riots and other personal problems. A sense of up-rootedness is felt by the main character and, at the same time he yearns for a sense of belonging. He says: "Every village is my own" and my heart whispered, "Matale is my own town." (p.252, Halpe, 2002). The man was born in Matale but he is an estate worker's son whose forefathers were brought from India. He had lived there with his parents till he was 17 years old. Then he proceeded to Colombo. Later, he makes visits to his mother on certain occasions and during the 1958 and 1983 riots. But he makes a visit now to see the land which he is able to get on lease because of the Sirima-Shastri Pact. He shows a feeling of nostalgia while he makes a visit to his town by motorbike. Though he was born in that town it is not his own. He has expressed much feeling for the rubber and cocoa trees, hills and valleys, the tributary, the Kali temple, the dispensary and many other things and places which are very familiar to him. He tries to establish a relation with these places and objects in order to claim some rights. Even the people who were living with him during his childhood shower upon him a lot of affection. In a way, he is able to sustain the human relationships which he missed during the last several years. Having led an alienated life in the city he shows an interest in village life. However, he can't continue further. There is a conflict between his present state of life and his liking for the life of the past. There is no peace of mind for the character as he was uprooted from the village.

No concern for the damage caused to the environment

When the war between the militants and the Sri Lankan forces was at its height in the late eighties *Kosalai* was written by Ranjakumar. The plot of the story centres on the young boy who joined the militants for political reasons. He has no concern for the damage caused to the environment by his attacks but the writer has the concern for the environmental safety as he goes on depicting the plight of the mother who has to struggle for her living and to see her sons prosper in their lives. The story is based on the character Kosalai, mother of the epic hero Rama who went to the forest and had to fight the Rakshasa King of Lanka Ravana. Kosalai is

worried over Rama's departure from the Palace, their home and the writer tries to extend the name of the character that he depicts to have the same effect on the portrayal.

The story has the following to record in relation to damages caused by the explosions of mines to the environment.

The village womenfolk told Amma that the boys were using the fields, the palmyra groves and the uplands-so familiar to Amma-for training in exploding bombs.

Could Seelan be one of them, she thought greatly alarmed. But not even a dog had told Amma that Seelan had been seen. (p.100, Kanagamayakam, 2001).

The destruction of the jungle and the wild life

A herd of deer comprises as the main characters in the short story, *Watering Time* written by Senkai Aaliyan. The herd of deer lives and moves around the jungle looking for water and is terrified by the violent activities of the humans with their bombs and shells terrifying the animals around. With a single plot of the animals' suffering the writer exposes the atrocities of the humans in the name of fighting for their own rights without having any concern for the rights of the poor animals. Thus the ecological balance is disturbed. The writer powerfully expresses the feelings with the following lines.

The peace of the jungle was disturbed by the strange sound emanating softly some distance away. Kalaiyan, which was grazing the grass that had turned brown because of the continuing drought, lifted its head majestically. It pricked up its ears and turned in the direction from which the sound came.

The writer depicts how the wild life is threatened and destroyed by the atrocities of the humans through their heartless minds.

You can't approach Kunchukulum for water. The human beings won't spare us. The animal taking a sip will fall a prey to their hunger. They are heartless. Their crude guns and traps have taken a heavy toll of wild life.

The portrayal is done throughout the piece how the environment is polluted by the explosion of bombs and thus the expected regional development is disturbed by the continuous attacks made by the war mongers.

Yet another day passed. The animals camped but could not find a drop of water. Kalaiyan's herd could not endure the thirst. The sun was going to the west. The sound of exploding bombs rent the air. The bombers dropped bombs on the village and the jungle. The people wailed. Houses were razed to the ground. Human flesh was strewn on the streets. The survival instinct got the better of the villagers. They were leaving with whatever belongings they could lay hands on.(p. 106,Pathmanathan, 2013)

Thus, the destruction of the jungle and the wild life by the human beings disturbs the ecological balance of the world. The peaceful atmosphere is also broken.

The environment too is polluted by the bombs and the gases they emit. The writer has ingeniously moulded the characters and the plot in order to reveal the atrocities of humanity in general and the war-lovers in particular. In this manner, he contributes his part to make some awareness among the people how war would disturb the regional development. Therefore, it is

highlighted that the social and cultural factors contribute much to develop the region and the writers would be supplying their intellectual output to put the things in order.

II. CONCLUSION

The pieces become literary evidences in exposing human suffering through the issues discussed and the indirect impact due to the pollution of the environment and the loss of ecological balance. The ignorance of the people and their fear psychosis led them to face more struggles in their efforts to find a peaceful life. This state of affairs would not provide the necessary atmosphere for the expected regional development. Further, humans are trapped by life itself like the old man in *Gone with the soil*, and the man in the story *Despondency*. All the characters seem to be captives of many social agents which have no social commitment. Their struggle for a better life is to be taken care of by the so-called forces in the future. The mother in *Kosala* suffers for the son's misconduct which is created by the social agents which move in the background. The animal character in *Watering time* too struggles due to the inhumane activities of the humans. All these institutions have not got any dedication towards the society and the environment and are not worried over the loss of ecological balance. More than the scientists and the researchers in this field it is the writers' duty to make awareness among the public through their writing about what we have to do with our mother nature. With the resources in the region the development can be taken forward. But the ignorance of our people with regard to human relations with the political and social agents functioning behind the scene has to be taken into consideration. The socio cultural aspects would definitely help us to identify the causes for the loss of life and destruction. If the writers' thoughts are taken care of – that is the emerging knowledge from the writers- the expected regional development would see the daylight. The stories taken for analysis suggest that the prime concern of the humanity should be towards the safety of our earth and that concern would only provide the required atmosphere and mood for future plans for regional development. There should be peace and harmony and the negative and dangerous elements should have been identified and avoided or neutralized for the sake of progress to be achieved in the country economically and socially.

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