



# Wilderness And Tribal Culture: Environmental Consciousness In The Movie Kantara

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Abstract: Nature and man seems to have an everlasting bond as evidenced by the Romantic and the Transcendentalist writers. Eco criticism came as an interdisciplinary study that traces this relationship. Protection of nature and the ways and means to safeguard it from external forces has been a key concern of literary works especially in the twentieth century. Indian movies also play an important role in educating people towards the atrocities done by humans in the name of progress. The Kannada movie Kantara revolves round this issue of safeguarding the forest and its indigenous tribes. There is a clash between the powerful humans on one side who are greedy about land acquisition and the government on other side which guarantees protection only when their dwelling becomes a Reserve Forest.

Keywords: Interdisciplinary, Ecocriticism, Indigenous, Land Acquisition, Reserve Forest

## **Wilderness and Tribal culture: Environmental Consciousness in ‘Kantara’**

Knowing that you lose your soil and still agreeing to part for your existence is one of the tragedies that human beings face amidst the growing technology. Robert Frost has clearly described this situation in A Roadside Stand thus:

While greedy good-doers, beneficent beasts of prey,  
Swarm over their lives enforcing benefits  
That are calculated to soothe them out of their wits,  
And by teaching them how to sleep they sleep all day,  
Destroy their sleeping at night the ancient way. (28-32)

Nature has been the source of livelihood and savour for man. Nature serves as a philosopher, guide and guardian as evidenced by the writings of Romantic and transcendentalist philosophers. Nature and man are inextricable bonds and are conjoined in such a way that one influences and safeguards the other.

Ecocriticism developed as an interdisciplinary field that traces the relationship between human beings and nature. The term has been prominent as it implies the balance between the two ideals one supporting the other. Ecocriticism has a close affinity with the science of Ecology. Based on the Oxford Learner's Dictionary Ecology is "the relation of plants and living creatures to each other and to their environment" [4]. In other words, ecology explains the interconnectedness of human beings and the natural environment. Likewise, critics show great interests between the relationship of the men and their environments and the ways this relationship illustrates in literature. First defined by Joseph W. Meeker (1997), the term literary ecology refers to "the study of biological themes and relationships which appear in literary works. It is simultaneously an attempt to discover what roles have been played by literature in the ecology of the human species" [5, p. 9]. Human beings depend on nature for such basic needs as air, food, and water as much as nature depends on them. Hence, this symbiotic relationship between man and nature, along with everything else in it, flourishes and secures when man identifies environmental issues and strives to amend them for the sake of nature. In a world of environmental crises, the only solution is to make people consciously aware of ecological predicaments. In other words, the higher people's

level of environmental awareness becomes; the less ecological crises occur. In analyzing a piece of literary work, ecocritics delve into the ways literature treats nature and are in search of answers to such questions as how nature is represented in literature regarding the physical setting of the work, how literature affects man's relationship to the natural environment or are the values inherent in that work of art consistent with ecological thoughts? Richard Kerridge (2001) claims that "ecocriticism seeks to evaluate texts and ideas in terms of their coherence and usefulness as responses to environmental crises" [6, as cited in Garrard, 2004, p. 4].

The film *Kantara* revolves around this idea of the prevailing bond between man and nature for sustaining both. Forest seems to be the last resort of the king who is in search of peace of mind and the impatient king seeks solace in nature worship which leads to the displacement of the stone god of the tribals in return for shelter. Since then prosperity and happiness dawns in the land where the tribes live with their customary practices. The family members of the lord don't like this act as they fear the land would permanently be bequeathed to the tribes. The 'Panjuruli daiva' with 'gulika' protects the tribes as a member from a specific family performs the role of god. The tribes believe in the divine incantations and solutions to problems are described by 'daivakola' or the one who performs the role of god. The festival is conducted annually to please their god and for the welfare of the tribes. They believe in the presence of their protector through the person who performs the role of God. There is a conflict between the landlord's people who are nonbelievers and the tribes who are strong believers. As the son of the landlord questioned the presence of god, the daivakola flees to the forest to escape from humiliation and disappears. The wilderness serves both as solace and a place of escape. The person who questioned the tribal beliefs and who filed a case for the eviction of tribes is shown to be dead due to some mysterious circumstances. The underlying message that god is with the poor, needy, and the righteous is substantiated by this incident. The 'panjurli daiva' and 'gulika' are shown to be the mild and ferocious aspects of god, the preserver and destroyer. The tribes worship wild boar as their god and believe that their rituals preserve the sanctity of the forest thereby gulika guards them from all atrocities.

The protagonist Siva, son of fled daivakola takes a different course of action and is shown initially as a hedonist, haunted by wild dreams of his father's daivakola instigating him to do something for the tribals. Siva knows the whereabouts of valuable trees in the forest and is in charge of felling trees for the financial gain of the landlord, Devendra or Lord's descendant. The tribes wage war against the government to curb their action of making their place a reserve forest, as they believed that Devendra, a renowned person, protects them as promised by their ancestors.

The tribes' feeling of insecurity strengthens as their daivakola performer Guruva, cousin of Siva is murdered. Later they came to know about the cruelty of their saviour that he was annexing all the property and he is behind the murder of Guruva. Devendra leases an attack on the tribes to exterminate the species. The government officials seem to side with tribes teaching them the benefit of making it a reserve forest whereby they could claim their property and would be safeguarded by the government.

Amid all these incidents Siva is repeatedly haunted by varaha or boar image whenever he is on mission in the forest. Even on the night of Guruva's death, he wakes to the loud cry of daivakola. It is during the attack between the protagonist and antagonist that Siva gets the godly powers and he behaves like a Gulika daivakola killing the opposite party thereby restoring peace to the tribes Siva becomes a performer of daivakola and serves as a source of strength and security to the tribes.

The wilderness image runs parallel to the greedy landlord who tactfully uses its resources that too by employing Siva and his friends to cut trees. The story raises the question of the security of the indigenous tribes who are forced to accept either the government's verdict or the landlord's autocratic nature.

The ultimate motive of the movie seems to be clogging in the idea of where the tribes belong to or in other sense they are devoid of their identity and lose their dwelling or have to live in the restrictions imposed by the government. The only way by which they could preserve their culture is by catering to the demands of the government as their lord protector, the landlord has turned hostile.

The environment plays a significant role in creating an atmosphere of suspense and terror as the Varaha image seems to haunt Siva. Indeed the same wild boar is hunted and conceived by the people so there is both an act of worship and killing at the same time. The forest with all its resources provides shelter and necessary timber for the tribals. Though the police officials restrict them from cutting branches as they belong to reserve forest still they consider it a privilege to use the resources of the forest. There is a clash between the innocent tribals and the greedy lords as the former restores tradition and the latter tries to curb their existence. The only solution to man's greed lies in nature, nature bestows everything to man but when its balance is disrupted, man is bound to accept the consequence. The ferocious part of nature is reincarnated in the form of gulika and as it enters shiva's body, he behaves in a mad frenzy grabs the power of god to conquer the enemy creating violent bloodshed and thereby emerges successful. Initially, Shiva was very reluctant to take up the role of god performer but through this incident, the tribes could very well understand who should protect the clan as god manifested power on shiva. Environmental consciousness refers to the awareness and concern for the environment and the impact of mortal activities on it. All living things are interconnected and this balance

sustains our well being.it is the awareness that nature should be sustained and kept in balance that forms the main theme of the movie.

‘Kantara’ stresses the importance of all aspects of life whether tribals or the lord's people and the need to protect nature is one of the prominent topics of discussion in the present scenario. Development should not create imbalance in nature and if there is a destruction of values, nature has the power to restore the balance.

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