



Vaikom Muhammad Basheer: The true lover of nature

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Abstract

This paper deals with the dynamic bond between man and nature seen in the works of Basheer. Basheer is read in the light of the basic principles of eco-criticism. His life experiences compelled him to talk about the universal themes like nature preservation, afforestation and water conservation. Basheer gives a realistic representation of the life cycle of world. The universe itself is under a cyclic process which is extremely natural and symbiotic. No creature in the world is useless and they are striving at their level best to maintain the balance of the Eco system. Like a foreteller, Basheer remembers the rights of trees, birds and animals. It is an inheritance given by God. He made this prophecy many years before and now human beings are facing dangerous threats from Nature. Here Basheer is seen as his natural self, a man who understands the vastness of the universe and solitude as a micro particle in it, a universe in which he has to co-exist with animals, trees, rocks and birds as equal. Through his works, Basheer exalted the need of coexistence and giving equal importance to all the creatures in the world.

Keywords: vaikom muhammad basheer, nature, eco-criticism, rain, earth, symbiosis, co-existence, afforestation

Introduction

Vaikom Muhammed Basheer was the first man to talk about the 'Right' of Earth and its creatures in Malayalam Literature. He is often considered as a Saint under the Mangosteen tree. Engulfed in Hindusthani music, he was very much fond of sitting in nature's lap. Reclining in his arm chair, he used to think about the beauty of nature and its effects. Under the salubrious shades of different trees, Basheer remembered the importance of trees and its historic and ecological importance. In the story "Trees", Basheer asked so many questions related to the origin of trees. He was wondering how the trees and beautiful creations were greater than humanity. Lord Buddha sat under the Pipal tree to attain Nirvana but Basheer sat under the Mangosteen tree to praise the enchanted beauty of Nature. According to Basheer, trees are special gifts of God. Man has no right to destroy it. He remembers an incident where he was wandering in a desert where there were no trees and he felt very dried and pathetic. This kind of life experiences compelled him to talk about the universal themes like Nature preservation, afforestation and water conservation.

Basheer's *Inheritor's of Earth* and *Trees* are the great examples of modern eco-consciousness. He finished *Inheritor's of Earth* in the year 1971. Presently the modern world is seen very much engaged in the discussions related to Nature conservation. Before forty-eight years, Basheer, like a prophet, commented about the need of protecting Nature in *Inheritor's of Earth*. This book is widely recognized as a 'Bible' of Trees, Birds and Animals. In this story, he mentions wide variety of trees and their love towards human beings. The beginning scene of the story is very beautiful. Basheer gives a colourful description of his two acre land. The whole plot is full of various fruit bearing trees including mango trees, jackfruit trees, teak, mangosteen, sapodilla, cashew apple trees

etc. The big plot has an old well gives pure water which is purer than mineral water. He also rears some cows, cats and goats for his pleasure. Basheer humorously termed them as refugees.

He had been ruling the land and he had no complaints. But suddenly some intruders came in the form of butterflies, crows, squirrels, foxes, hawks and spiders. According to Basheer, they were not afraid of the government taxes or fences. At first he was very angry with them because, their intrusion was not justifiable. But later he thought about the rights of these creatures. Finally, he found answer for his own question "Why did they come here?" Like an eco-critic, Basheer justifies the presence of unwelcomed guests by calling them the true Inheritors of Earth. Once he came across a dangerous Cobra and he was dumbfounded by its appearance. His wife urged him to kill the snake because of its poisonous nature. He thought of killing the snake with a stick, but soon he changed his mind. Because snake is also an Inheritor of the Earth. Like Man, Snake is also created by God. Man has no right to kill his fellow beings. Even though it is poisonous, it also has some duties to perform. Basheer was very much fond of the heterogeneous nature of the world. He exhorted the need of co-existence. He felt very pathetic about the survival of small creatures including birds and snakes because Man has started owning the land as small strips for his pleasure. In a conversation with his wife, Basheer wanted to emphasize the concept of Ahimsa, followed by Lord Buddha and Gandhiji. He corrected his wife while she was about to kill the Cobra. Like a Romantic poet, Basheer discards the concept of Man-centered approach. God created the world to incorporate all living beings. Man is only a part of it. Nature produces innumerable fruits and flowers to satiate the hunger of its creatures. Man thinks that it is for him the

Nature exist. According to Basheer the conflict between Man and Nature is a big absurdity.

While sleeping, a mosquito came and drank blood from his arm. He was extremely patient and kind towards the mosquito. He allowed the mosquito to drink and he enjoyed the drinking procedure, it became red in colour and flew away. The whole incident elevated Basheer into the status of a Universal Man. Only a Man of Greatness could evolve such great thoughts from a small incident. His wife was not ready to accept his ideologies. She was interested in destruction and demolition. In an incident, bats caused great havoc to coconut trees. She got very angry and she even thought of killing them using a gun. At that time Basheer is seen praying to God for the well being of Bats and he requested God to forgive her. Towards the end of the story, Basheer gives a realistic representation of the life cycle of world. The universe itself is under a cyclic process which is extremely natural and symbiotic. No creature in the world is useless and they are striving at their level best to maintain the balance of the Eco system.

Like a foreteller, Basheer remembers the rights of trees, birds and animals. Bats have the right on coconut trees, snakes have the right to dwell in holes, frogs have the right to swim in the ponds. It is an inheritance given by God. He made this prophecy many years before and now human beings are facing dangerous threats from Nature. Even frogs are considered as endangered species. Droughts and climatic changes affect everybody. Lack of Rain causes serious attacks to agriculture. Irregular seasons produce irresistible diseases and the whole ecosystem is damaged. The Green Earth has turned out to be a not so safe place for the creatures to exist. (Demolition and Devastation of 'kavukal' (Groves) in the modern era, the Earth has been witnessing hazards of climate change and global warming). Discussions on protecting groves are very relevant and great debates are going on everywhere. In Kerala, before the advent of Aryans 'kavukal' were considered Divine. Dieties and Goddesses were reverently treated and worshipped in Groves. But Aryan domination destroyed the Buddha-Dravidian, Eco friendly culture. Recent studies have proved that the Herbal plants in the Groves can resist New Generation Environmental strokes. No contemporaries of Basheer have written about the destruction of kavukal and peaceful chants of Dravida's and Buddha's. Basheer is very much interested in talking about the beauty and vastness of nature. Images of the vastness of the desert, groves, mountains and the flood of moonlight are the interesting topics for him. There are beautiful passages in *Mathilukal* related to the wonder and awe with which he looked at nature:

I remembered that beautiful evening. A tiny hamlet. After that, miles and miles of undulating desert, rising swirls of sand, the departing day spread out on the vast expanse of the horizon. I think I must have walked almost a mile. All around me, like a silky carpet, the desert. I was all alone, at the Centre of the universe. In the sky, a clear full moon. I thought I could just reach out and touch it. (Basheer, 64)

Basheer's main characters have exhibited extreme love and concern to nature and fellow-beings. In *Pattumma's Goat*, the speaker shows great amount of care and patience to the goat

which eats his books:

Once, when I was lounging in a canvas chair, I heard the sound of someone in my room, tearing paper. I looked in through the small door. That goat was standing on my bed eating a book. On top of a trunk there was one copy each of the new edition of two books, childhood friend and sounds. There it was, making a meal of childhood friends. Hold it down with its two front feet, it was taking two or three pages at a time with its tongue and eating them. Well let it eat! It's a fine goat....And there is still Sounds left. Will it have the nerve to eat that, too? (Basheer, 44)

The descriptions in the prose poems in *Anarghanimisham* are also painted by a magical vision: "The garden, the moonlight spreading over it like the departing breath, was ebbing, like before, into a formless dream."

Here Basheer is seen as his natural self, a man who understands the vastness of the Universe and solitude as a micro particle in it, a universe in which he has to co-exist with animals, trees, rocks and birds as equal. In his magical world, animals and birds, like human beings appear as real life characters. In the story "*kothukine kollamo?*" (Should Mosquitoes be killed?) He explains to his wife why he did not squash a mosquito that bit him: Aren't my days numbered? So why not donate some blood. Perhaps God might have asked it to have a taste of my blood! In *Ormayude Arakal* he remembers an incident from his childhood. It was a time of floods, the rising water had brought insects into the house, one of them was a scorpion. Basheer's father tried to kill it, but his mother refuted him. To her, the scorpion too was one of Allah's creatures. She put it gently in a pot and sent it away in the stream of water.

Pathumma's Goat ends with the idea that the universe is a large joint family consisting of millions including humans. The noted phrase *Bhoomiyude Avakaashikal* (The Inheritors of the Earth) used over and over again in the debates on environment and ecology in Malayalam is Basheer's coinage. Basheer spoke about the mangosteen as if it were one of his most intimate friends. It has become one of the most beautiful images in Indian literature-an alter-ego for the author in the Indian psyche. For the evolving discipline of eco-criticism, many of Basheer's works would be key texts.

Conclusion

According to Basheer, every Tree has a beautiful story, never ending stories of bliss, peace and tranquility. Trees bear leaves, flowers and fruits to cleanse the wounded hearts. The connection between Man and Nature is fantabulous. Trees and plants never interrupt the smooth existence of the human beings. It is Man who interrupts nature. Planting a tree is a holy act, it is somewhat like worshipping God. In order to exist in the world, human beings should plant more trees and should nurture it. Caring for a plant is a lifelong process like worshipping God, (because plants and trees brings uncountable blessings of God). Watering plants is just like giving water to a thirsty animal or a bird. While touching a tree the writer feels like touching a man or woman. Trees radiate infinite love and they are much more powerful than

human beings. After continuous hours of meditation under the Pipal Tree, Shakyamuni became Lord Buddha and he got enlightenment. It was from this shade, Buddhism started spreading all over the world. Huge Buddhist temples were erected and soon after Buddha became Lord. From olden days, human beings started worshipping trees. They were in total synchronization with nature. Later they thought of conquering nature. so they invented axe. According to Basheer, the invention of Axe accentuated the destruction of trees. In *Trees* like a prophet, Basheer criticizes the religious lunatics who destroyed groves for the sake of spreading Religion. He sensitizes the upcoming threats of environmental problems in the story. Nowadays, the whole world is seen getting involved in the discussions related to the problems caused by deforestation and climate change. The issues related to Global warming have become much more serious. Basheer had a great sense of deep ecology. He had a genuine concern about the future of the world. Through his works Basheer exalted the need of coexistence and giving equal importance to all creatures in the world. In his works, goats, squirrels, cats, snakes, dogs, bats and hens are described as if they are human beings. He speaks to them as he speaks to his family members.

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