

Pari, Pegan and Athigan (The Seven Great Patrons) as Deep Ecologists

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Abstract

This paper attempts to study Pari, Pegan, Athigan, the seven chieftains or patrons as deep ecologists. Pari, Pegan, Athigan were the chieftains who ruled some parts of Tamilnadu in Sangam Age. Mentions of their generosity can be found in all sangam literary texts, the paper studies the work called Sirupanartupadai, one of the idylls in Ten Idylls (Pathupattu). Ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and ecology. It analyzes literary texts to find out the representation of nature in it. This paper studies the chieftains' acts of benevolence as Deep Ecologist acts, based on the principle of Deep Ecology by Arne Naess who is one of the major proponents of philosophical Deep Ecology movement. It results in finding the deep ecologist ideas behind those chieftains' acts of generosity, which have been considered mere acts of kindness rather than an attempt to safeguard nature. The study could bring the light of how the Tamil culture and literature promoted nature conservation, which can be used to educate today's naturally degenerating world about their mindless acts.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, Paari, Pegan, Athigan, Deep Ecology, Tamil Sangam Literature, Nature Conservation.

Introduction

Tamil Sangam age is the age of naturalistic poetry, the poets of that time wrote about the nature which they have been a part of, most of the poems are about their relationship with the natural world. Sirupanartupadai is the part of Ten Idylls (Pathupattu) which is one of the sangam literary texts. It contains the references of the seven great patrons of Tamil Literature are Pegan, Paari, Kari, Aay, Athiyaman, Nalli and Oari while comparing them to the generosity of Nalliyakodan in giving monetary help to the bards (Chellaih 1). In addition to that, these chieftains are mentioned in a variety of other sangam texts like Purananuru in Ettuthogai. The concentration of this paper is on Paari, Pegan and Athigan from the Seven great patrons and to analyze them through the lens of Ecocriticism. Their fame resides upon the generosity of them alone, but this paper attempts to study them as Deep Ecologists, who value, safeguard and conserve nature. Ecocriticism means the study of the relationship between literature and the environment. It investigates literary texts to find out the representation of nature and ecocentric ideas present in it. Deep Ecology is an environmental philosophical idea created by Arne Naess which believes that every entity of nature has its innate value. Arne Naess with George Sessions devised some eight basic

points that must be followed by the supporters of Deep Ecology, which will be the parameters of this particular study. Let's evaluate the benevolence acts of Pari, Pagan and Adhigan in terms of Deep Ecology philosophy.

In Sirupānātruppadaī, Nallur Nathathanar writes about the bravery and greatness of Nalliyakodan. In this poem, a bard after receiving prizes from Nalliyakodan, explains the generosity of him to another bard by comparing Nalliyakodan's generosity with seven patrons or chieftains. He describes Pari the chieftain of Parambu mountain, the landscape of Pari's region and how he gave his golden chariot to a Mullai vine or creeper which obstructed his way.

There's Pari, mountain chief of Parampu,
On whose slopes shining white rills leap,
That gave away his chariot fine to prop
A tiny-blossomed mullai plant that stood
In the Pathway ... (Chellai, lines 117-121)

The Mullai flower belongs to the Jasmine family and its botanical name is *Jasminum Auriculatum* vahl. This flower is mostly seen in Madurai, Coimbatore and Dindugal area of Tamilnadu and other places in India. Mullai flower has a special place in the culture of Tamilnadu. It is used for the sacred offerings in Hindu religious ceremonies which have a good fragrance. The first most point in the eight basic points of Deep Ecology by Arne Naess and George Sessions states, "The well-being and flourishing of human and non-human life on Earth have value in themselves. These values are independent of the usefulness of the non-human world for human purposes" (Naess 68). In consideration to the above principle, Pari knew about the mullai flower's fragrance and its cultural value being a ruler of that region, which underlines he is aware of the flower's usefulness to the human community. But he understands that Mullai vine has life and function in nature. So, to make it grow luxuriant, Paari offers his golden chariot. Thus, it is clear that Paari understands that nature has inherent value rather than acting as a mere commodity for humans, which makes him a deep ecologist.

Nathathanar while listing out the patrons mentions Pegan as a first patron in Sirupānātruppadaī. He says that Pegan is the king or the lord of mountains where the rain never fails to stop. Pegan gives his blanket to a peacock by thinking that it is shivering in rain. "There's Pagan, ruler of the mountain tracts, / ... That gave away his cloak to a peacock wet / That wandered on the wooded slopes of hills" (Chellai, lines 112-115). Some poets call Pegan as Pegan of Pothini range which means he is the chieftain of Pothini mountain range. Palani in today's Tamilnadu is called Pothini in Pegan's time. Palani is the bio-region which consists of tremendous rare and endangered species. It is a part of Western Ghats of India and twenty fifth biodiversity hotspot of the world. And there are lots of peacocks found in that area. Peacock or peafowl is the national bird of India, and there is a legal protection act called Section 51 (1-A) of schedule of the Wild Life protection act passed in 1972 to protect the peacocks from hunting and to safeguard the special species (Kaushik). There can be a denotative meaning behind Pegan's act of giving the blanket to a peacock. If we consider that blanket as an analogy which indicates protection, it represents that Pegan wants to protect peacocks. Andre and George's third basic point states, "Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs" (Andre 68). Pegan might have thought of safeguarding the beautiful creature from poaching or hunting, that he is the deep ecologist who is against reducing the non-human lives for human greediness.

Athigan is also listed among the seven great patrons by Nathathanar. He has other names such as Athigan, Athiyaman Neduman Anji, Athigaiman and Anji. He is the great king and a beloved friend of Avvaiyar, the most prominent Tamil poet. He gifted a gooseberry fruit which has immortal powers to Avvaiyar rather than eating it himself.

.. There's Athikan

Who weilds in battle the long and flashing spear
That has a frightful look, who has an army great
Like the sounding sea, and who a present made
To Auvai once of sweet ambrosial fruits
Of the nelli tree that grows on mountain slopes
Where grow sweet smelling flowers(Chellaih, lines 117-121)

Botanical name of Indian gooseberry is *phyllanthusemblica*. This fruit is rich in Vitamin C and widely known for its anti-aging benefits. It is well known that this fruit repairs and enhances the health of skin, hair and vision and makes human beings always young(Shoemaker). This is what may be the poem refers that the gooseberry fruit providing agelessness and immortality. Being a King, Athiyaman might have eaten it to live long and strengthen his kingdom. But he didn't possess that kind of greed and generously gifted it to Avvaiyar, a poet. He wanted to immortalize his language and literature. But there is another reason that he knows how to live in accordance with nature. Andre's eighth point states "The ideological change will be mainly that of appreciating life quality rather than adhering to an increasingly higher standard of living" (Andre 68). He eliminated his greed and fantasy, but understood life is more important than lavish living or long useless years of living. Co-existing and balanced living means living by knowing and understanding the value of nature around which makes him a deep ecologist.

By scrutinizing this three patron's kindness, it is understood how greatly they valued nature, how they understood all living beings have innate value and how human's exploitation of nature should be avoided. All these years, the seven great patrons are celebrated only for their generosity and philanthropic activities. Through this paper, seven great patrons and their idea of nature's value are revisited. Moreover, this is what ecocriticism is all about, revisiting the past text to study how nature is represented and dealt with. Now, we get to know the eco-centric attitude of patrons and it rejuvenates their importance and how they must be celebrated more than ever. Tamil culture encourages and enhances the way of living in accordance with nature and promotes balanced living. By viewing these patrons as deep ecologists, the Tamil culture of living in accordance with nature gets more evident which may encourage the current generation to be conscious over the environment and promote conservation of nature.

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