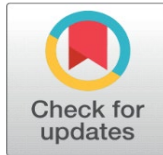
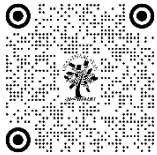


THE ROOT OF THE TONGUE: NATURE THE PRIME ENOUNCER IN MANOJ KUROOR'S NILAM POOTHU MALARNNA NAAL

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DOI
[10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i6.2024.3120](https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i6.2024.3120)

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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ABSTRACT

Throughout human history, linguectomy is rampant everywhere. Hegemonic powers repress the tongues of the subjugated communities through multiple processes of silencing/ standardization. Nature and human language hold an intrinsic mutual tie. Manoj Kuroor's novel Nilam Poothu Malarnna Naal is a brilliant attempt at recapturing the lost rapport with nature through reclaiming the cadences of the spoken language of the people. He narrates the story of the Panar community and their struggles in maintaining their native tongue and culture. The novel simultaneously resists linguicides and ecocides.

Keywords: Linguectomy, Sangam Culture, Chronotopes, Enunciation, Tinais, Simulation, Lingua Communis

1. INTRODUCTION

I have crossed an ocean
I have lost my tongue
From the root of the
Old
A new one has sprung

Grace Nichols

What Grace Nichols wrote about the loss of the tongue consequent to the deporting of the blacks from Africa to the Caribbean islands in the context of colonialism is relevant to all historical contexts. And this linguectomy is the most unnatural of all anthropocentric phenomena. The language of a community is intrinsically connected to the Nature which

How to cite this article (APA): Siby, N. (2024). The Root of the Tongue: Nature the Prime Enouncer in Manoj Kuroor's Nilam Poothu Malarnna Naal. *ShodhKosh: Journal of Visual and Performing Arts*, 5(6), 2521-2524. doi: 10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i6.2024.3120

they dwell in. As the bond with Nature loosens, languages become more rigid, law-bound and "refined". The rhythm of Nature fails to announce its presence in such "civilized" language forms. Recapturing the naturalness of language is a mode of getting closer to the true spirit of Nature. This realization is the key motivation for Manoj Kuroor behind the creation of his first novel *Nilam Poothu Malaranna Naal*. Eschewing any ornamental stylization and Sanskritization from the language, Kuroor tries to tell the story of the undivided Tamizhakam in the basic spoken language which prevailed here before the intrusion of Brahminism into it.

2. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Sangam Culture is the platform for the novel to weave its narrative. The history of the Southern states of India starts predominantly from the Sangam Era. It was a unique and distinguished period etched in the annals of history, an epoch which witnessed several fearsome fights, tussles of war and the dethronement of mighty potentates. It was a period which was distinct with highly flourished academies of poets, scholars and valuable literary works. Manoj Kuroor sets his novel in this historic domain. In her review of the novel in *The Hindu*, Meena T Pillai says:

A tale of one land as it tumbles down from Vengadamala (Tirupati Hills) to Kumarimunambu (Cape Comorin). A tale wherein seventeen centuries slip by to unfold an age when history was young, passions were raw and languages were nascent.... In a rare instance of artistic ingenuity, the story of a land's literary traditions is made to blend beautifully with the origins of its language. Thus it is as much a history of Malayalam language and its oft forgotten Dravidian roots as it is a chronicle of a bygone era of Sangam literature. (no pagination)

3. CHARACTERISTICS

Panars or the wandering bards had done a great service to the world as their words threw light on the major facades of the royal arena. They praised the rulers for their valorous deeds and thus earned their daily bread. But their life remained dark in the corridors of history. Kuroor's intention is to convert their life as the fulcrum of narration.

The novel consists of three parts each with three different narrators—Kolumban, the Father Panan, his elder daughter Chirutha and absconding son Mayilan. An age when "Moovarachans" (Three Emperors)—Cheras, Cholas and Pandyas—ruled, the ordinary people's lives were in dismay. The novel begins with a journey for subsistence across lands by a group of Panar and Koothar. They meet other groups like Kuravar, Aynar, Umayanar and so on. Their aim is to meet some powerful rulers and attain livelihood by praising them. To find out Kolumban's missing son is the concealed intention behind the journey. While they are performing songs and dances before Paari of Parambumala, some traitors kill Paari and in the resultant commotion Kolumban dies. It is later revealed that, though not deliberately, it was Mayilan who killed his father. Cheera gets into a divine frenzy and strikes Mayilan. Mayilan repents on his former misdeeds and sails away on a ship. But the sad memories haunt him always. Famous poets like Paranan, Kapilar and Avvaiyar appear in the novel as characters. *Nilam Poothu Malaranna Naal* is a novel that complementarily fuses together the unheard legends of the chronotopes of Nature and the human being.

The treatment of language is the distinguishing hallmark of this novel. Through ages Malayalam has assimilated Sanskrit phonemes into its linguistic structure. In order to be loyal to the time he is dealing with, the author filters away all such sounds and keeps the purity of the original language. All aspirated consonants (atikhara and ghosha), voiced consonants (mridu) and fricatives like sa, sha etc. find no place in the linguistic enunciation of Kuroor. Sticking onto the Dravidian alphabet is indeed a great challenge and the author has accomplished it successfully. Meena T Pillai comments:

Romancing with the Tamizh roots of Malayalam language and literature, the novel gently reminds one of the need to go beyond Sanskritising trends across ages that sought to sever the Dravidian roots of the language. As the organic connections between land, language and lives unfold, the narrative begins to pulsate with an energy that is both mythical and metaphysical (no pagination)

Nature is the throbbing heart of the novel which pumps blood to the whole narrative structure. "The nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history" (Buell 7). Throughout the narration different "Tinais" subtly function as influential presences in the story. The roots of our language are deeply entrenched in Nature. Figurality is the primary differentia of language. In this novel if we consider the figures of speech the characters use to denote their own conditions, they are all borrowed from Nature. For instance, Kolumban uses the analogy of moss, "Parinjupoya verukalormichal

payalukalkku ozhukanavilla”(15) (Strands of moss will not be able to flow if they remember their lost roots) as a justification for leaving the homeland and setting out on a voyage in search of a better life. “Nammalum ee paravakale poleyanu. Alle acha?” (46). (We are like these birds. Aren’t we, Father?) Kolumban’s younger daughter Cheera, while travelling from one land to another without having special bond to any, equates them to the birds who have no specific land of their own. Similarly there are many occasions when, trying to define themselves, the characters analogize themselves with the wilderness and untamed natural phenomena. Co-existence with Nature is the reason behind this type of linguistic simulation.

Eric Katz cites Andrew Brennan’s view of ecological humanism as “the recognition that all human life is lived within some natural context and that it is in terms of that context that the identities of very different human lives are forged” (Katz 23). The influential effect exerted by Nature on the identity formation of humans is being discussed here. The essence of the Tinai concept is the same. That is, human mood is inextricably intertwined with the ethos of Nature. It is explained as the linkage of muthal porul (the place and the time) with the uriporul (mental states). Manoj Karoor elaborates this in *Nilam Poothu Malarnna Naal*. Mayilan, the aspiring and opportunist character’s mindset in Palai nilam (arid land) is extremely different from what it is in Neythal (coastal region). He is a ruthless and brutal character in Palai. Even though no total erasure of his cruel traits happens in neythal the romantic and soft sentiments which were dormant inside him attain some sort of fostering here. “The language we use determines how we think about the world, and how we think our beliefs and values determines how we act” (Scott Slovic 23). Slovic suggests while discussing the close link between word and the world. Kolumban’s language is idyllic and his actions are rooted in Nature. The music in his mind gets reflected in all his actions. Mayilan’s language is uncouth and his actions germinate from avarice. He has no commitment towards Nature or fellow beings. Chirutha stands in the midway. She is a true blend of idealism and pragmatism. Her language reflects this. We get a clear testimony for Slovic’s proposition on scrutinizing these characters.

Cheera, the younger daughter of Kolumban, is in perfect communion with Nature. For her, Nature is like a real friend. The variegated patterns in the sky and the pictures drawn by the crabs take her to cloud nine. She is very curious to know the wonders of Nature. The novel is woven round a myth signifying the camaraderie between Nature and the human. The issue is regarding the “ownership” of Nature. Nannan, the king of Ezhimala, killed a small girl for eating a mango fruit that came floating down the river because the mango orchard belonged to him. The girl underwent apotheosis and is now placed in a shrine where it is always raining. Cheera seems to Mayilan as the reincarnation of the slaughtered girl.

4. OBSERVATIONS

By recapturing the pristine beauty of Nature and language, *Nilam Poothu Malarnna Naal* hails the harmony of existence. Artificial infiltrations into the lingua communis and gluttonous encroachments into Nature are both perilous for the existents. If we must sing a paean for survival, we must retrieve the “Yaazhu” (the musical instrument of the Panar, one of which they fondly call Mallika) and beat it in tune with the cadence of the cosmos.

5. SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Only one text has been selected as a sample for the analysis of the representation of suppressed voices in fiction. Further studies can be conducted in a variety of genres.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am indebted to the library of St. Thomas College, Pala for the reference books.

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