

# ECOPSYCHOLOGY IN KALKI'S *PONNIYIN SELVAN*

S.Priya<sup>1\*</sup>, Dr.R.Mercy Latha<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, Reg.No. 19122234012004, PG & Research Department of English, V.O.Chidambaram College, Thoothukkudi – 8 (Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu – 627 012)

<sup>2</sup>Research Supervisor & Associate Professor in English, PG & Research Department of English, V.O.Chidambaram College, Thoothukkudi – 8, (Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu – 627 012)

**\*Corresponding Author: S.Priya**

\*Research Scholar, Reg.No. 19122234012004, PG & Research Department of English, V.O.Chidambaram College, Thoothukkudi – 8 (Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu – 627 012)

## Abstract

Introduction of cognitive approaches to emotion into ecocritical analysis is a noteworthy recent development in literary researches. One among the interdisciplinary approaches that can be used and linked to literature is ecopsychology. To provide a better understanding and creating awareness about the natural environment, an interdisciplinary approach combining psychology and ecology is being done on literature nowadays. Ecopsychology focuses on the emotional bonding between humans and nature. This research article explores human's emotional bonding with water, one of the natural elements using the ecopsychological approach in the novel *Ponniyin Selvan*

**Key terms:** emotion, ecopsychology, nature, relationship

Literary studies and literary researches have become highly interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary in order to provide solutions to increasing complications in the society. Associating literature with multidisciplinary sciences results in providing relevant answers to social entity issues. Introduction of cognitive approaches to emotion into ecocritical analysis is a noteworthy recent development in literary researches. One among the interdisciplinary approaches that can be used and linked to literature is ecopsychology. To provide a better understanding and creating awareness about the natural environment, an interdisciplinary approach combining psychology and ecology is being done on literature nowadays. Ecopsychology focuses on the emotional bonding between humans and nature. In *Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, Healing the Mind*, Robert Greenway wrote: "Ecopsychology is a search for language to describe the human-nature relationship. It is a tool for understanding the relationship, for diagnosing what is wrong with that relationship, and for suggesting paths to healing" (1). An ecopsychological approach describes humans' interactions with the natural world and the reciprocal emotional attachment too. Humankind's reverence for nature brings out a positive and conducive environment to live in. It is of no doubt that an ecopsychological approach to literary texts improves and sorts out ways to develop the emotional connection between the human world and natural world thereby assisting people with sustainable lifestyles shunning problems of alienation from nature. In *The Ecopsychology Newsletter* (1994), Roszak defines ecopsychology as: "1. The emerging synthesis of ecology and psychology. 2. The skillful application of ecological insights to the practice of psychotherapy. 3. The discovery of our emotional bond with the planet. 4. Defining 'sanity' as if the whole world mattered" (8). He suggests that people naturally belong to the world and this sense of belonging empowers them to move through times of crisis. The approach can be processed through examining author's creative process, exploring the literary text and discovering the readers' reception of ecopsychology. Written by Kalki in five parts and translated by C.V.Karthik Narayanan, the novel *Ponniyin Selvan* garners critical acclaim for its vivid narration, emotional portrayal, picturesque description, tightly woven plot and its depiction of the power struggle and intrigues of the Chozha empire. The novel *Ponniyin Selvan* beautifully expresses the emotional bonding between the characters and water with its uniqueness. The research article is an exploration of the force of the water bodies and the characters' emotional encounter of them.

Ecopsychology states that the relationship between human beings and nature is always reciprocal. It is substantiated well in the novel through the hero Arulmozhiarman. Water serves as a lifesaving force to the titular hero Arulmozhiarman in every instance, be it river or ocean. The novel and the hero get their title after an incident which highlights the lifesaving efforts of the river Ponni or Kaveri. Arulmozhi, in his early age when tries to rescue the flowers in the floods of Kaveri, falls down and the people search for the baby. Nowhere is he found and at that time:

A little distance away, a young woman stood in the middle of the river, holding the child aloft in both hands. Her body was submerged in the water up to her waist ... they all came to the conclusion that it was the Goddess Kaveri who had rescued Arulmozhi. Arrangements were made to perform a puja to the river Ponni every year to mark the day. And from that day, the child, already dear to everybody in the palace, their "Selvan", became "Ponniyin Selvan", dear to the river Ponni. (CY 79-80)

The river Kaveri, evokes a positive emotion in the minds of the people by saving the Prince and the people in turn celebrates its love. Thus what is given to nature will return or vice versa. Water and its force is the most dramatic

element creating waves of emotions and which is richly documented in the literary texts from the ancient time and beyond. The author takes the readers to the ocean along with Vandiyathevan to hear, feel and see what the hero faces in the mid of a cyclonic ocean with natural elements in a fit of rage. The relationship between divine nature and human gets highlighted with the titular hero's multiple experiences with water. Water determines his entire life that he is rescued by the mother nature every time. In the second part of the novel, **The Cyclone**, the protagonists, while get trapped in the ferocious cyclone, express their deep emotion. And Samudrarajan has heard the prayers perhaps, that both Vandiyathevan and Arulmozhiarman are rescued by Poonguzhali at last from the fierce force of water: "I have my boat, and strength in my arms. The ocean is immense. Samudrarajan! You'll never forsake your dear daughter, will you? You'll never prove that sweet name, "Samudra Kumari" that the Prince gave me, untrue" (CY 324). These words ascertain the emotional bonding between ocean and Poonkuzhali.

The Prince Arulmozhiarman never turns back. He doesn't worry about the deep river and dampened banks. Water, to him has always been a guardian angel and the author never fails to convey this message to the readers wherever the situation arises: Anyway, if any of them was too deep, the Prince was not worried - he had never been afraid of water. "Didn't the river Ponni care more for him than his own mother did? Wouldn't Mother Kaveri who had saved him from drowning when he was a child, continue to protect him now?" (PS 103). As he says, the Prince not only arrives safely but rescues Vanathi and Poonkuzhali from the forceful Kaveri floods. While Vanathi explains the Prince about how they are caught in the floods, his affectionate words about Kaveri to Vanathi confirms the overwhelming love people have towards water in whatever forms – sea or river, though fearful and deadly at times:

"On our way, the Ilaya Piratti and I stopped at the josier's house. At that time the Kaveri burst its banks and swept the josier's house away. Prince! They say Mother Kaveri saved you once when you were a child. I know how deeply you love this river, the Ponni. But it's frightening to think of the misery it's brought the people and animals in the country. Sometimes I'm even tempted to call Mother Kaveri cruel." "Vanathi! Don't find fault with Mother Kaveri. She has such deep affection for our Chozha country. When that affection brims over, she breaks her banks and overflows. People who do not realise that blame her, the mother. Why, they even find fault with Samudrarajan, accuse him of invading the coast. But Poonkuzhali will never blame him," said the Prince. "Forgive me! I won't find fault with Mother Kaveri. It was while your older sister and I were at the josier's house that Mother Kaveri's affection overflowed. (PS 131)

The study rightly presents the force of water through sea and river and the emotions of the people. An ecopsychological approach illustrates the fact that water represents a great challenge that people can never live without it though threatening at times. The study analyzes that though the nature's fury is felt every now and then, the people never fail to hail its glory. The author validates the statement throughout the novel. The author's emotional bonding with water is felt throughout the novel.

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