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Masculinity beyond Hegemony: Ecological Masculinity and the Ethics of Care in Sarah Joseph's *Gift in Green*

Dr Tojy Dominic
Associate Professor,
Department of English,
Government College Kattappana, Idukki,
Kerala, India.
tojydominic@yahoo.com
https://orcid.org/0009-0004-1260-5987
Dr Sonia Sebastian
Associate Professor,
Department of English,
Alphonsa College, Palai, Kottayam,
Kerala, India.
Arunraj Joseph
Assistant Professor,
Department of English,
TMJM College, Manimalakkunnu,
Ernakulam, Kerala, India.
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Abstract:

Unprecedented environmental devastation and deep-rooted social inequalities demand serious critical examinations of modern social structures. Literature, holding a mirror up to the times, truthfully captures the severity of these ecological and societal crises. The burgeoning ecological imperatives have necessitated new ways of addressing the global concern of existence and extinction. Quite often, hegemonic masculinity is cited as the primary reason for the heedless exploitation of nature and environment, as represented in the literary texts. Ecocritical readings of the literary texts offer fresh examinations of the possible alternatives to hegemonic masculinities. It is in this context that ecological masculinity becomes a significant contribution to literary criticism, demonstrating the transformative potential of masculine ecologisation. It presents a paradigm shift in the conceptual frameworks of masculinity, encouraging constructive relationships with nature and non-human beings. The ideology is rooted in profeminism, and the basic pillars are care and deep ecological consciousness. Ecological masculinity demonstrates that

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man can move away from patriarchal dominance. This paper reads the novel *Gift in Green* by Sarah Joseph through the theoretical postulations of ecological masculinity. The study interrogates the novel's representations of masculine subjectivity and environmental ethics. Dinakaran, the male protagonist, represents this new ideology. He exhibits the essential qualities of ecological masculinity, becoming a symbolic expression of its transformation from hegemony to care.

Keywords: Hegemonic masculinity, ecocriticism, ecological masculinity, care, profeminism, ecological consciousness.

Introduction

The world has been affected by an unprecedented magnitude of environmental destruction and degradation owing to corporate capitalism and hegemony. Climate change, soil depletion, water scarcity, biodiversity loss, and a host of other catastrophic predicaments have necessitated new ways of addressing the global concern of existence and extinction. Literature has been relentless in portraying the impending anthropogenic environmental disasters. Environmental degradation has emerged as a central theme in contemporary global literature, underscoring the need for systemic attitudinal shifts and practical solutions to ensure ecological survival. Focusing on the causes and consequences of environmental degradation, literary studies offer fresh examinations of the socio-political and economic implications of entrenched capitalist ideologies of the Global North, as well as the consequent environmental catastrophes and unequal distribution of wealth and services in the Global South. It accurately demonstrates how burgeoning corporatism has destroyed the sanctity of the natural environment while undermining individual dignity across lines of caste, colour, creed, and gender. Literature has thus emerged as a transformative tool in recent times. Consequently, literary criticism and theory have begun investigating the nuances of ecocritical practices.

In this precarious context, ecocriticism has emerged as a significant movement within literary studies, advocating both environmental protection and social equality. It is an umbrella term that

comprises different, but related, philosophies and theories on nature and the environment. It can simply be regarded as "the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature" (Rueckert 71) on the surface level. At the same time, it represents, on a deeper analysis, the cross-cultural character of all environmental movements and the need for amendments in our way of life to address the global environmental crisis. Hence it is rightly perceived by Pippa Marland as:

> … an umbrella term for a range of critical approaches that explore the representation in literature (and other cultural forms) of the relationship between the human and the non-human, largely from the perspective of anxieties around humanity's destructive impacts on the biosphere (Marland 846).

According to Glotfelty, it is "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centred approach to literary studies" (Glotfelty xviii).

Hegemonic Masculinity and Environmental Destruction

Ecocritical readings of literature have almost invariably pointed out that masculinity plays an alarming role in the ongoing environmental crises. Hence, the role of men and masculinities in the destruction and contamination of the environment has been a key focal point of investigation over the past several decades. The connection between violence, masculinity and the degradation of the environment has been analysed by prominent ecocritical philosophers, especially ecofeminists, in recent years. Their scholarship demonstrates that the corporate, industrial and breadwinner

masculinities amplify and aggravate environmental decay and devastation by advocating corporate capitalism and vertical development. This capitalist discourse is endorsed by unfettered masculine hegemony. Thus, hegemonic masculinity has proven to be a major threat to social and gender equality, as well as to the preservation of the natural environment. It sublimates patriarchal power and dominance over women and nature and creates a myth of idealized form of masculinity. Connell defines it as "the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problems of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees, or is taken to guarantee, the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (Connell 77). The intoxicating dividends of hegemonic masculinity make men struggle to distance themselves from it and force them to embrace male dominance motives.

Ecofeminists advocate for green cultural studies to reshape the epistemological and ethical foundations of environmental studies, arguing that ecological devastation cannot be halted without dismantling the systemic oppression of women. They maintain that we cannot save the planet by continuing in the same patriarchal social order which has actually played a vital role in the destruction and degradation of the environment. Rosemary Ruether endorses this theory in her book *New Woman, New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation*:

> Women must see that there can be no liberation for them and no solution to the ecological crisis within a society whose fundamental model of relationships continues to be one of domination. They must unite the demands of the women's movement with those of the ecological movement to envision a radical reshaping of the basic socioeconomic relations and the underlying values of this [modern industrial] society (204).

Ecological Masculinity and the Ethics of Care

Ecofeminists advocate for a fundamental restructuring of the social order that guarantees gender equality and dismantles the dominance of one gender over another. As a result, taking inputs from the prominent ecofeminist ideologies and profeminist postulations, an alternative masculinity theory began to be established in the ecocritical praxis in recent decades. Being a complementary thought to ecofeminism, it has established itself as a transformative ideology for masculinity. This concept is explained by Hultman and Pulé as ecological masculinity in their treatise (51). As Bob Pease points out:

> Just as profeminist men are involved in reconstructing or exiting dominant forms of masculinity may be able to envisage new non-oppressive ways for men to relate to nature, as they discover new ways to relate to women, other men and themselves (Pease 33).

The framework of ecological masculinity has fostered discourse on constructive, life-affirming relationships between humanity and the natural environment. It examines hegemonic tendencies within masculine identities and seeks to transform them into egalitarian principles that benefit humankind and promote structural social equality. Since gender is a social construct, devoid of any inherent supremacy, hegemonic traits and malestream norms in masculinity can be amended. As Sherilyn MacGregor and Nicole Seymour explain:

> Achieving masculine status makes sense only in a social context. The top managers of the corporations pouring out greenhouse gases and poisoning river systems are not necessarily doing so from inner evil. Perhaps these men love babies and puppies and would sing in a church choir if only they could find the time. But they are working in an insane elite world that institutionalizes competitive, power-oriented masculinity, and they are doing whatever it takes. (MacGregor and Seymour 6)

Paul M Pulé, in his doctoral thesis, "A Declaration of Caring: Towards Ecological Masculinism" (2013) elaborates on the foundational principles of the new ideology. He argues that every man possesses the innate capacity for care and compassion, both for others and for the environment, and advocates the need for the deconstruction of the hegemonic structures by proposing care as the core principle. Greta Gaard, in *Toward New Ecomasculinities, Ecogenders, and Ecosexualities* (2014), explains the principles of ecopolitics and ecologised genders. She argues for this paradigm shift in social structure. She advocates for the deconstruction of the role of the 'Dominant Master Self', and argues for providing a location for even those constructed as dominant (whether via race, gender, class, sexuality, or nationality) to embrace a radically ecological vision and stand with-rather than on top of- the earth's oppressed majorities. (225).

Basic Tenets of Ecological Masculinity

Care, profeminism and a deep ecological consciousness are the major traits of ecological masculinity. All these ideological postulations stem from the foundational principle that gender- and by extension, masculinity - is a social construct situated in time and space, with possibilities for transformation. The plurality and fluidity of masculinity is also another critical aspect that demonstrates its ability to adapt and change. Thus, ecological masculinity becomes an important ecocritical perspective in literary studies, as well as in research on the psychological, ethical and symbolic interpretations of masculinity.

It is in this context that this paper examines Sarah Joseph's novel *Gift in Green* through the lens of ecological masculinity. The novel is often hailed by critics as a manifestation of ecofeminism and the battle for environmental preservation waged by the indigenous communities. Hence, most of the critical literature on the novel is grounded on ecofeminist perspectives and ecospirituality.

Quite often, manhood is read as demonstration of hegemony and dominance by the readers as well as the critics of the novel. However, there is a dearth of scholarship on the manifestations of ecological masculinity as demonstrated by some of the male characters in the novel, especially Dinakaran, the male protagonist. Several other male characters also enact nurturing, non-dominant forms of masculinity in the novel. This study, drawing inspiration from the theoretical postulations of ecological masculinity, attempts to analyses how the male characters, such as Dinakaran, Ponmani, and Noor Muhammed, express care-oriented, non-authoritative forms of masculinity as resistance to the invasion of neocolonial, capitalist forces. Since the scope of this paper is limited, this study focuses solely on the character of Dinakaran for its academic inquiry into ecological masculinity, even though the other mentioned male characters also represent alternative masculinities.

Gift in Green and the Ethics of Ecological Masculinity

Sarah Joseph is one of the most acclaimed women writers of the age with national and international recognition for her novels as well as for her staunch feminist and environmental activism. Her celebrated novel *Gift in Green* (2011) portrays the battle of the local community of Aathi against the intrusion of the corporate mafia and the large-scale ecological devastation under the guise of progress and development. The novel was published simultaneously in Malayalam and English under the titles *Aathi* and *Gift in Green,* respectively. The English translation was rendered by Rev. Dr. Valson Thampu. While Joseph uses a regional dialect and local Malayalam terminology for the flora and fauna of Aathi, along with indigenous terms for traditional farming techniques, Thampu has crafted a lyrical, stylistic equivalent in his translation, often retaining Malayalam words with ecological connections. He has succeeded in translating the backwater environment as a living character in the novel with the rare quality of dynamic prose rhythms.

The novel is set in a serene and beautiful place named Aathi, 'a green bangle', a land of pristine purity symbolising the primordial elegance of the earth. Even though it is a fictional paradise with lagoons on all four sides, with crystal-clear water and an abundance of fish, prawns, and mussels, Sarah Joseph herself asserts that Aathi is not an imaginary world, but can be seen and experienced in many places on earth. She says that Aathi "is neither a Utopia nor an escapist world of make-believe. Even today you can find Aathi-like places of primaeval purity. Like the last of the trees, like the last of the residual streams, a few minds, a few slivers of the earth's surface. Still hold their own" (Joseph interviews I).

The land is incredibly fertile that the villagers reap more than sufficient grain for the entire year. Sarah Joseph presents Aathi as a paragon of immaculate purity, an 'unravished beauty of peacefulness' set against the ravaged and devastated outside world. However, with the return of her spoilt child, Kumaran, Aathi's peace becomes disturbed, and ultimately, the serene and beautiful ecosystem is demolished by the ruthless activities of this neocolonial capitalist. Kumaran represents hegemonic masculinity to the core of his character as he colludes with other corporate entities to turn Aathi into a toxic dumping yard. He represents the greed of the neoliberal era which despises the land and water of Aathi: "Water-life? Kumaran despised water. The thing had no form or shape. In a pot it resembles a pot. Trapped in a pond, it tamely takes on the shape of the pond. What is the water you're talking about? Does it have any identity? Will it ever be something in itself? The thought of it makes me sick" (Joseph 21). Through his manipulations, the pristine purity of the land is demolished, the water is contaminated, the birds and animals are slaughtered, and the traditional ways of farming and fishing are destroyed.

The local community is lured by Kumaran's persuasions. As a result, several young people are tempted to leave the village thinking that they will secure a more prosperous life in the cities.

“Dinakaran knew only too well that the plight of Aathi was not an emotive issue for the young men in the west.” (Joseph 289) They have all decided to surrender the title deeds of their land to Kumaran for an 'astronomical price' of one lakh rupees per cent of land. The suffering caused by poverty and hopelessness has made them vulnerable, and they are no longer able to resist the temptation of securing greater prosperity and luxurious living conditions in the cities.

Kumaran thus becomes an ideological construct of hegemonic masculinity and capitalist manipulation. He represents the burgeoning exploitation of nature and the environment under the pretext of progress and development. He was “the first in Aathi to sell his land and leave. He was also the first to abandon his father and mother to till the land of a stranger and eat the bread it brought forth.” (Joseph 22) He symbolises the exploitative ideology that endorses capital accumulation over community life and environmental preservation. Yet, all his actions are executed in the guise of making Aathi into a paradise. He laments that:

> I have done great things in so many places, but nothing for my native place… The ferry bank lies still in the same pitiable state it was when I left. Everywhere, the same drabness, the same destitution, and even the same dullness on every face. How awful! (Joseph 40)

Kumaran views Aathi as a stagnant space, entirely devoid of material progress. He measures his native village through the lens of capitalist hegemony, neglecting the ecological integrity, community life and indigenous existence. He proclaims that urban prosperity and material advancement are essential for transforming Aathi from a primitive village into a beautiful city. His rhetoric makes a huge impact on the minds of the youth. He asks,

> I ask you the same question I asked thirty-six years ago. What do you hope to gain by staying planted in water three hundred and sixty-five days of the year? A little rice, fish, oysters. How long will that do for you? Come and meet me with your answers"
>
> The young people of Aathi were greatly excited. Nobody had ever spoken to them like this. Kumaran had extended a helping hand to rescue them from the mud and marsh of Aathi. (Joseph 42-43)

Kumaran's promise of modernity and progress to the youth of Aathi entices them into his ideals of capitalist consumerism, replacing the traditional eco-centric masculinity. He proposes to clad the shrine of Thampuran with gold to show the natives that he wants to construct a better temple and to establish that he stands for their progress. The youth, under the leadership of Ambu, falls prey to his treachery. Ambu argues, "I hope you know why is that Kumarettan is keen to clad the shrine with gold. He wants to make Aathi's Thampuran world famous. For that, the shrine needs to be upgraded." (Joseph 111) Rather than performing an act of reverence, he replaces the primaeval, ecospiritual deity of Aathi with gold, turning it into a product of modernity and capitalism.

However, others, led by Dinakaran and Kunjimathu, are fighting against these atrocities and trying to regain the purity of their homeland. While Kumaran represents hegemonic masculinity, Dinakaran becomes the epitome of ecological masculinity in the fight for environmental protection. He knows the infinite value of the fields, the lagoons and the lakes. He considers human intervention upon nature and the environment a crime against earth as well as against posterity. The text presents Dinakaran as the "wisest man in Aathi" because of his deep ecological consciousness. "Quiet by nature, he was niggardly with words" (Joseph 4), who cherishes the ethics of caring, compassion and nonviolence, the primary requisites of ecological masculinity.

Aathi's history and fate are intertwined with the life and fate of Dinakaran. Hence, the analysis of his character is attempted in the light of ecological masculinity. Dinakaran is close to nature and empathetic towards fellow beings. He exhibits deep ecological consciousness and emotional attachment to all the greenery of his homeland.

Deep Ecological Consciousness

Deep ecology advocates restoring the intrinsic value of the environment by recognizing and fostering the interdependent relationships among all living and non-living entities. Michael Zimmerman speaks about the necessity of this deep ecological consciousness for the survival of the planet in his famous article 'Rethinking the Heidegger-deep Ecology Relationship' (1993):

> Deep ecologists maintain that… humanity must move to a new understanding of what humanity and nature are, an understanding that is ecocentric, nonanthropocentric, and non-dualistic. Emphasising the need for an ontological shift differentiates deep ecologists from ethicists who seek to extend moral considerability to nonhuman beings. (Zimmerman 198).

Dinakaran emerges as the representative of this philosophy throughout the course of the novel. He recognizes the fundamental reality of human existence on Earth. He declares, "Our truth, dear children, is our primaeval oneness with this earth, this water, this forest, these birds and these fish" (Joseph 242). This idea of oneness with Earth is a fundamental principle of ecological masculinity. Hultman and Pulé express it: "After all, beyond the realm of ideas, Earth is not simply something out there to be cared for, but is always and already part of us as well" (Hultman and Pulé 223). It is essential to nurture and propagate this oneness with the universe, as opposed to the commodification of Earth that is characteristic of hegemonic masculinity. Dinakaran steadfastly resists this hegemony exerted by Kumaran and his collaborators, demonstrating great composure

and expresses a psycho-spiritual interconnectedness with everything in nature. He respects the land, loves the waters of Aathi, and fights for the survival of its birds and fish because he knows that reconnecting with nature is the only solution to the environmental catastrophe looming over Aathi. For Dinakaran it is an inquiry into the truth of existence, an inward journey to find out the life-force of Aathi:

> In working with the earth, what Dinakaran had sought was the truth. Earth, water, sunlight and sweat made the seed sprout. A seed entrusted to the earth sprouted. That truth was simple enough. The farmer anchored his life on that truth and made it yield a hundredfold harvest. All that Dinakaran ever wanted, and all that he ever knew, was to be a farmer. (Joseph 200).

This deep ecological consciousness is essential to address global social and environmental problems to resist the neoliberal, capitalist intrusions on environment and social well-being. It can counter the havoc wrought by the ruthless invasions of the corporate industrialists and 'developers'. This consciousness acts as a critical counter force against the capitalist forces that threaten the ecological integrity and community well-being worldwide. Dinakaran holds a deep ecological understanding; he stands not only for the present generation of Aathi, but also maintains that nature must be protected and preserved for the future generations, challenging the hegemonic dominance of mankind upon nature.

He expresses profound self-awareness in times of crisis and shows sincere compassion to all around him, whether human or non-human. He recognizes that Earth belongs to all forms of life, upholding a biocentric equality wherein non-human entities hold as much right to exist as humans. He fights not only for the people of Aathi, but also for its water, its fish, and its birds. He reminds us that humanity must move in the direction of an ecocentric, non-anthropocentric world view with

identification with all forms of life on Earth. This deep ecological consciousness reflects the philosophy of Arne Næss, which asserts that all living things have intrinsic value irrespective of their usefulness to human beings. Naess argues that, "the value of non-human life forms is independent of the usefulness these may have for narrow human purposes." (Næss 29) An ecologically sensitive person is always compassionate toward all living beings on Earth, and expresses care for every animate and inanimate entity in the universe. Dinakaran embodies this spirit of compassion and care, rejects every kind of dominance, and presents an alternative masculinity for hegemony.

Care and Profeminism in Dinakaran

Ecological masculinity is a shift from dominance to care, a transformation from hegemony to equality, and an attitudinal change in the treatment of the environment. It starts from the foundational awareness that "masculinity is a set of constantly changing meanings, which are constructed through relationships with us, with others, and with our world" (Kimmel 5). These relationships are grounded in mutual respect, care, and equality within the social structure. Dinakaran is presented as a symbolic manifestation of this philosophy. He extends care to all individuals around him, transcending distinctions of gender, class, or other social hierarchies. He is compassionate and non-violent even when he is confronted with violence and intimidation. This ideal of non-violence is an essential feature of changing norms of masculinity because it instigates a paradigm shift from the 'all-powerful, all-knowing, and violent man' toward a manhood characterised by deep compassion for others and the environment. He never resorts to anger and violence and advocates that everything can be resolved through non-violent ways. Thus, Dinakaran moves away from the dividends of patriarchy, creating a cultural shift from dominance to care and compassion.

Dinakaran is inherently non-hegemonic as he treats everyone with equal care, love, and compassion; he holds deep respect for womanhood and clearly understands how the gendered power relations favour the men in society even through domestic labour and religious practices. Hence, he never allows his mother to wash his clothes even though she is willing and happy to do it for him. Dinakaran washes his clothes and instructs Siddhu to do the same. When Siddhu feels that it should be washed by his mother, Dinakaran rebukes him. "So? Mother washes her own clothes. She doesn't expect you to do it for her. It was not mother but you who dirtied your shirt. The filth we create; we must clean up ourselves" (Joseph 29). In fact, Dinakaran performs an educational inculcation in the line of profeminism by which patriarchal assumptions and malestream norms are transformed. Domestic labour such as cooking, washing clothes, and sweeping are frequently considered as 'unmanly' in the patriarchal social order. Strikingly, both men and women perpetuate this division of labour because of the existing social norms. As Connell puts it in the foreword to *Men and Nature* (2017), "One of the most powerful social structures is the gendered order- the social arrangements that construct masculinities and femininities, and produce gendered divisions of labor, wealth and power." (I). It is through these gendered social structures that patriarchy instills the ideologies of manhood and womanhood which shall be followed by everyone in the society so that they may be treated 'normal'. All other social behavioural patterns are discarded as 'deviant' and 'abnormal', highlighting the need to adhere to the normative practices of patriarchy. Dinakaran is breaking these barriers of gender inequality and proclaims the establishment of a new model of masculinity.

Dinakaran further disrupts the patriarchal tradition of storytelling in Aathi, a cultural domain from which women have historically been excluded. He understands the folly in the tradition and brings Gitanjali to the shore to deliver one of the greatest stories that Aathi has ever heard. He asks the

pertinent question to the people of Aathi, “Why not? Dinakaran and Ponmani asked. What should matter is not whether the story teller is a man or a woman, but whether the story is meaningful or not” (Joseph 63).

Dinakaran’s reverence for womanhood is defined by profound respect and deep emotional sensitivity. His respect for Kunjimathu and his affection for Shailaja, Gitanjali, and Kayal are rooted in the spirit of ecological masculinity, replacing male dominance over women and nature with a model of mutual care and reverence. When he witnesses the women of Aathi breaking the walls of the shrine, Dinakaran approaches Kunjimathu and calls her ‘Kunjimathu Amme’. He feels a deep love for her that ‘it seemed to Dinakaran then, smelt of breast milk’ (Joseph 119). It is significant that Dinakaran exhibits respect and compassion, notable qualities of ecological masculinity, toward everyone, especially toward women.

For Dinakaran, the women of Aathi are his compatriots in the battle against the invasion of capitalist intruders. The women, led by Kunjimathu, occupy the central space of the narrative as they resolutely defend their ancestral land. When the women realize that Thampuran’s shrine has become a space for capitalist invasion and an instrument to divide the people of Aathi, they decide, under Kunjimathu’s leadership, to dismantle the shrine itself. For the menfolk, it becomes an act of irreverence but for the women it is an act of regaining the dignity of their Thampuran. Kunjimathu reminds Dinakaran:

> Who can destroy this darkness, Dinakara? Or set up a shrine for it? The only problem is that this structure stands here… How does it matter that it stands or does not? Who can defile or fight over the shrine in our hearts? … Don’t fight and kill each other in the name of Thmapuran Dinakara. If darkness is our deity, where and how will you build a shrine for what fills the universe and has no beginning or end? (Joseph 119)

Dinakaran and his companions explicitly affirm the women's struggle, recognizing their resistance to capitalist encroachment as essential to Aathi's ecological survival. The profeminist attitude of ecological masculinity is revealed through Dinakaran's endorsement of Kunjimathu's resolute resistance against Kumaran. It is to be noted that almost everyone, including Devaki and Karthiayani, the bosom friends of Kunjimathu, is pessimistic about the outcome of Kunjimathu's protest. It is Dinakaran's unwavering support that reinvigorates the women's morale, restoring their faith in the efficacy of collective resistance. In fact, ecological masculinity allies with ecofeminism in the battle for environmental protection. Furthermore, it acknowledges the positive contributions of the feminist scholarship in establishing an egalitarian social structure.

This shift from malestream norms is crucial for cultivating an egalitarian society and establishing the ideals of gender equality and environmental ethics. We must end the patriarchal suppression of women, men, and non-human entities which in turn facilitates the betterment of our environment. In this sense, ecological masculinity can be considered very much in tune with ecofeminism. This ecological framework offers a paradigm shift from the hegemonic traditions of patriarchy to a new philosophy of life based on principles of equality, care, and empathy, demonstrating deeper and broader care for all living beings and the environment that we live in. In this regard, ecological masculinity aligns with the principles of ecofeminism and deep ecology. Richard Twine explains the benefits of this profeminist masculinity in his article, "Masculinity, Nature, Ecofeminism" *(*2001). He says:

> To give an example, a male involved in the environmental movement cares for things so that they no longer are 'things'. In other words, he begins to reverse the conceptual death of nature which constructs trees and/or nonhuman animals as objectified resources. He is impelled to care, to think emotionally about his relationship to nature. In doing so, he can

> be said to be also at least partly practising something counter to hegemonic masculinity. He begins to break the link of interdependency that exists between hegemonic masculinity and those discourses which resource, objectify and expel nature. (2).

This profeminist ideology is advocated by Dinakaran throughout the text as he tries to subvert the dominant tendencies of the patriarchal social structure prevalent even in a pristine society like Aathi. Dinakaran becomes an epitome of ecological masculinity in every respect, exhibiting all the major traits of the philosophy throughout his life. He fights against the onslaught of capitalism and the hegemony of patriarchy till his last breath. He wages relentless battles against the environmental destruction wreaked upon Aathi. The ecological masculinity embodied by Dinakaran is a cultural philosophy of human coexistence with non-human entities and the environment which in turn sustains humanity. It is a resisting force against the neocolonial, capitalist greed for exploitation and profit envisioned in the pervasive practices of the multinational corporate giants. This masculine ecologisation subverts the dominant traits of patriarchy as it is pro-environmental and profeminist in spirit.

Ecological masculinity upholds reverence for Mother Earth which is an integral component of environmental preservation. Consequently, this pro-feminist ethics dismantles established social hierarchies, instilling equality and empathy in place of entrenched patriarchal hegemony. As a nonviolent way of life, this philosophy instills a deep culture of respect and stewardship for the land in present and future generations. Dinakaran's life becomes a magnificent example of this maxim. Even when his compatriots like Ponmani and Velaydhettan are enraged for physical battle against Kumaran, it is Dinakaran who holds them back, advocating the importance of non-violence in the struggle. He controls Ponmani every time he becomes incensed and violent because Dinakaran has the innate wisdom that violence will not end a conflict rather it will aggravate the

situation: “I will kill them’ Ponmani grunted. That is the problem with you. Impetuous. The need of the hour is to understand the situation and plan our moves wisely. Dinakaran said, patting him on the back” (Joseph 104). His non-violence is deeply rooted in his staunch belief in the power of law. He advises Ponmani that, “We can seek a legal remedy, if it comes to that… we can pay him back in the same legal coin that he tosses at us. No force in the world can stand in our way.” (Joseph 123)

But Dinakaran is not complacent or moving away from the fight for Aathi’s survival; rather, he exhorts people to stay united against the unlawful neoliberal invasion. “About one thing we must be firmly resolved: whether or not we are allowed to have it on lease, we should not allow Kumaran to level and landfill that land” (Joseph 106). It is an exhortation for ecological justice because he knows well that “if Ganesha Subramaniyam’s property is landfilled, have no doubt, the whole of Aathi will go under water, sooner or later” (Joseph 106). However, he never resorts to violence and conscientiously follows the Gandhian ideal of nonviolence and truth even though his own comrades at times raise serious concerns over Dinakaran’s attitude.

In his attempt to save his people from catastrophe, Dinakaran sacrifices his own life, transcends his mortality, and attains the sublimity of Aathi’s Thampuran himself. The history of Aathi originates with the arrival of Thampuran—the primeval deity whose presence serves as the fundamental driving force behind the community’s collective way of life. Thampuran represents the eco-spiritual tradition of Aathi, connecting communal faith and land stewardship. It is his shrine that has given them all the harvest they reaped. Thampuran has been the source of all their prosperity and progress. In the narrative’s climax, Dinakaran’s self-sacrifice redefines Aathi’s history, elevating him from a defender of the land to its living mythic protector. His death saves Aathi from annihilation. It frees them from the clutches of the capitalist intruders:

> The water held him up in arms of sorrow so that the earth- awesome in what she endures- and every form of life upon her, and the perennial azure sky above, might see him.
>
> "Mother … come and see"
>
> On the boundless waters, on the green mat of billion leaves felled by the storm, the son lay rocking in his cradle of waves. A rainbow unfurled itself over him, bright and steady.
>
> Thampuran's trees hailed him, showering their treasure of yellow flowers.
>
> The orange wind brought him like a gift wrapped in green satin and laid him at Ponmani's feet. (Joseph 347)

The life of Dinakaran is inextricably intertwined with the destiny of his motherland. As he rises to the dignity of a savior and proves himself to be so through his death and the salvation of Aathi, the reader is persuaded to reflect upon the traits of ecological masculinity exhibited by Dinakaran. However, at the same time, his sacrifice cannot be regarded as an example of the traditional, dominant, or heroic masculinity. Heroic masculinity often is rooted on physical prowess, dominance over others, and aggressive posture. It often demonstrates the desire to defeat and conquer. But Dinakaran does not embody the traits of this hegemonic masculinity as he symbolises the ethics of care and compassion instead of dominance. He is an organically evolved hero who never compromises the ethics of environmental protection for any material gain. Thus, he becomes a true representative of all the ordinary people fighting against the encroachments of corporations and industrialists under the pretext of development. Hence, *Gift in Green* can be read as a testimony to ecological masculinity, which chronicles the struggles of the local people against the heedless conquest of capitalism and consumerism.

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