



**FROM CONFRONTATION TO COOPERATION: AN ECO-CRITICAL READING OF M.C. RAJ'S
*PLANET B2: HUMAN WAR AGAINST NATURE***

Dr. Arpita Dasgupta

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Parimal Mitra Smriti Mahavidyalaya, P. O. Malbazar, Dist.
Jalpaiguri, Pin: 735221

Environmental degradation is one of the greatest concerns for humanity in the present times. Relentless exploitation of the natural resources and pollution of surroundings has profoundly affected the quality of human lives. The onward march of human civilization away from the lap of mother nature has depleted alarmingly the basic amenities of living like fresh air and water. The conscientious humanity is now underlining the pressing need for afforestation, rain water harvesting, use of solar power, recycling of natural wastes and the like to preserve our planet Earth for posterity. As a mirror of society, literature accordingly has reflected proto-environmentalist views, perhaps with urgency and a sense of desperation now like never before. Analysing the same, ecocriticism has emerged from late twentieth century onwards as a literary theory that significantly subverts human-centrism in literary texts. The term owes its origin to William Rueckert's essay 'Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism' first published in 1978, where he explains it as: "...application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature, because ecology has the greatest relevance to the present and future of the world we all live" (Glotfelty 107) This paper is ecocritical in scope as it examines M. C. Raj's engagement with environmental concerns as reflected in his novel *Planet B2: Human War against Nature* published in 2014.

Founder of Rural Education for Development Society (REDS) in Tumkur, Karnataka, committed to the uplift of the untouchables, Manickam Casimir Raj's writings are primarily devoted towards establishing the dalits as 'Adijan' i.e. the original inhabitants of the soil with their own culture and tradition that reflect a close kinship with nature. He coins the term 'Boocentrism' (*Cosmosity* 149) where Boo refers to earth and conceptualizes a theory of 'Cosmosity' which acknowledges cosmos as the ultimate reality within which all forms of existence come into being. Widening the canvas of his novels he connects the Dalits with other indigenous communities living in harmony with nature across the globe e.g., the Sami people in Norway or the Maoris in New Zealand as evident in *Yoikana* and *Blissed Out* respectively. Extolling this view in greater detail, Raj in *Planet B2: Human War Against Nature* moves from expressly dalit cause towards broader environmental concerns.

"Who knows but the world may end tonight?" says the rejected lover in Browning's poem 'The Last Ride Together'. Though uttered as a glorification of his temporary companionship with his ladylove, the destruction of the earth that is implied here is a common fear that has been haunting human beings for quite some time now as they are facing the repercussions of gross depletion of the resources of nature. The myriad speculations on the expiry date of the earth, however erroneous they may be, have only served to establish the sorry state of our planet. Conceived as a science fiction, Raj in *PlanetB2* presents a new planet where life exists in its pristine



purity amid nature's plenty. The American president Rustler typifying the arrogant, hegemonic forces that have destroyed the earth, pledges to subdue this new planet as well and acquire its natural wealth. "It will be our victory over nature. With our planned capture of Planet B2 we shall prove to the entire world and for all histories to come that Americans are the masters of the Universe and no power on earth can subdue the American spirit." (10) Best scientists of America are handpicked to construct a spacecraft significantly named BigBelly that will go to PlanetB2, and bring all data back to earth. However, bursting the balloon of Rustler's arrogance, all the spacecrafts melt before reaching PlanetB2 indicating human ephemerality before nature.

As a refreshing contrast to the androcentric thirst for governance and control, stand the eco-people whose community is matrilineal as women are believed to be naturally in tune with nature. Accordingly in this novel Carolina and Marissa are both Native Americans whose indigenous origin has inculcated in them a belief in the primacy of nature. As Carolina tells the residents of PlanetB2: "Mother Earth is a living being in the universe that concentrates energy and life, while giving shelter and life to all without asking anything in return. She is the past, present and future. This is our relationship with Mother Earth. We have lived in coexistence with her for thousands of years, with our wisdom and cosmic spirituality linked to nature." (47) It is this innate kinship with nature that allows these two women from Rustler's team of astronauts to be welcomed inside Planet B2, the abode of cosmic beings who known as Thayammas signify nature's strength and vitality. They scoff at power-hungry men's vain androcentrism that makes them "believe that with their human power they can master the cosmos. They think that nothing in the cosmos can do any harm to them. Very silly beings! They do not understand that all of them would die in a short period of time." (43) At the same time, they feel natural affinity towards other earthly beings who live simple lives in harmony with the cosmos. These simple beings primarily refer to the indigenous people, the native Americans depicted in the novel as living a community life in traditional close-knit huts which are being increasingly marginalised by the pompous, modern houses signifying the encroachment into their peaceful life by the European outsiders. While researching on Carolina, the first human being to enter Planet B2, Plumbel, the Director General of the Space Research Organization in the US meets her community, the Cheyenne tribe to find these indigenous people marginalized in their land by outsiders who have occupied the natural resources, converted the natural lakes into tourist spots, killed the animals mercilessly for leather, all the while proudly justifying their acts under the pretext of executing the 'white man's burden' (Kipling) by bringing in the light of modernity to the primitive world of the Native American tribes. "Bate's more recent book, *The Song of the Earth* (Picador, 2000), argues that colonialism and deforestation have frequently gone together." (Barry 162) This statement is exemplified in *PlanetB2* as Plumbel observes: "Each house of White Americans was almost at the center of a forest so to say. Many had told him earlier: 'You Americans do not cut your own trees. You go to South America to cut their trees for your needs. (56-57) Once the close associate of Rustler in his ambitious enterprise, Plumbel turns over a new leaf as he observes closely the indigenous people, especially Marissa communicating spontaneously with all natural beings. He becomes ashamed at having aimed his gun at the animals in the forest as Marissa finds in them her friends and siblings whom she caresses with a smiling face. Carolina fumes in anger with the Thayammas of



Planet B2 at human atrocity against nature: “The aggression towards Mother Earth and the repeated assaults and violations against our soil, air, forests, rivers, lakes, biodiversity, animals, plants and the cosmos are assaults against us” (48) while Marissa explains to Pumbel the indigenous approach to nature: “Almost all members of my community grew up with animals and plants as part of the family, part of the community. We have been part of the universe in which they live. It is they who accept us as part of their family. We have never tried to establish our superiority over them. The land, the forests, the rivers, the oceans, the mountains, everything on this universe belongs to them. We own none of them. In our community we consider that we belong to land and all that lives in it.” (74)

The invincibility of PlanetB2 that is established in the novel through Rustler’s failed attempts at invasion brings to light the contrasting environmental hazards humanity is facing on earth. Global warming, a matter of grave concern for humanity is alluded to as the space scientist Joshua Bucket admits to Rustler: “our machines cannot make an outreach beyond a certain point in space. It is that geospatial point where all the global warming energies that we emit accumulate. These are heat waves. These waves have formed a thick layer preventing our machines from capturing waves that take their origin from PlanetB2. It is our own making.” (208) Even if some specially designed, heat resistant spacecrafts manage to pass through this layer caused by global warming, it is impossible to cross the next hurdle and enter PlanetB2. While the harmful chemicals released by human activities are thinning the ozone layer, making earthly beings dangerously exposed to the harmful ultraviolet rays of the sun, the cosmic beings in PlanetB2 perfectly in tune with their environment have the purely intact ‘liquid zone’ “an area in space that was composed of the intensity of positive waves produced in the bodies of cosmic beings” (160) which melts all the spacecrafts sent by US to encroach into their peaceful, harmonious existence. Desiring to make holes in the liquid zone and eliminate all cosmic beings the vainly egoist Rustler hurls his stockpile of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons at PlanetB2 which disturbs only the people on earth who condemn Rustler’s violence against cosmos. PlanetB2 remains unaffected but the humanity on earth become divided into two broad groups: the Earth Alliance comprising those nations who endorse Rustler’s dream of hegemonizing the cosmos and the Cosmic Alliance of the people with good sense who are opposed to the same. Having failed in his attempt to decimate PlanetB2 Rustler’s fury is directed towards his critics in the Cosmic Alliance. Earth comes to be torn apart by the horribly destructive nuclear war that ensues and eventually consumes all. While the warring forces are wiped out, Mother Earth carefully preserves her indigenous children who continue to live their simple lives in peace and harmony with cosmos. The androcentric forces being eliminated the protective cover of the liquid zone is no longer necessary and thus begins to dissipate enabling free and uninhibited interaction between like-minded beings in PlanetB2 and Mother Earth. In the garb of science fiction, the author addresses in this book environmental issues that need serious consideration for a better morrow.

“For the ecocritic, nature really exists, out there beyond ourselves, not needing to be ironised as a concept by enclosure within knowing inverted commas, but actually present as an entity which affects us, and which we can affect, perhaps fatally, if we mistreat it.” (Barry 163) Peter Barry’s statements seem echoed by Raj in his



novel: “Nature has its own designs against human pride. It does not react to every step that human beings take, positive or negative. It acts. In this case it acted. PlanetB2 acted.” (159) Such lines establish nature as a living presence, in fact, the title character, the unconquerable protagonist who controls the action throughout. PlanetB2 is the personification of all lifegiving forces in nature which are found deeply embedded in the indigenous people who have a matrilineal society and worship Earth as their mother. As Carolina and Marissa mingle with the Thayammas, i.e., the cosmic beings in PlanetB2, the indigenous communities led by female chieftains like Carolina’s mother Elle survive in the war blasted earth, the novel strikes a death knell to all androcentric thoughts and activities. PlanetB2 is a utopia, a wistful longing for the once clean, green earth. Negating all hegemonic, ultimately self-destructive forces, it asserts a culture that has an indigenous flavour and offers an escape from the repercussions of reckless andro-centrism into a peaceful integration with Mother Nature.

Works Cited

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