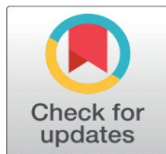
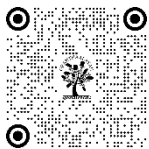


RAKSHADHIKARI BAIJU OPPU: PLAYGROUND AS A DEFENCE TO ANTHROPOCENE

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ABSTRACT

The idea of the Anthropocene has recently garnered significant interest. It denotes a time when human impact has become unparalleled, complicating our grasp of both history and the future. Numerous scholars argue that reexamining human culture is essential to comprehend the relationship between humanity and nature, as well as to assess the effects of human actions on the Earth. In this regard, the Malayalam film *Rakshadhikari Baiju Oppu*, directed by Ranjan Pramod, acts as an essential reference, shedding light on strategies to counter the prevailing Anthropocene era.

Keywords: Anthropocene, Village, Playground

1. INTRODUCTION

Kerala, with its stunning natural beauty, lush landscapes, and temperate climate, serves as an ideal setting for ecological research. The state's verdant fields, mountains, and vibrant streams enhance its charm. A notable aspect of Kerala is the deep connection between its culture and nature. With its beautiful beaches, misty hills, tropical forests, cascading waterfalls, backwaters, lakes, and hill stations, many picturesque locations in Kerala have featured in both Indian and international films. Some of these films have highlighted lesser-known areas, bringing them into the spotlight for tourists. The transformation of Keralites into global citizens has encouraged them to explore new horizons, a trend reflected in the contemporary wave of Malayalam cinema, as noted by A. Chandrasekhar in his acclaimed book, *Haritha Cinema*. Nature has transitioned from a mere backdrop in songs to a central theme in films.

Ranjan Pramod, known for his commercial successes, takes a realistic approach in *Rakshadhikari Baiju Oppu*. He has found greater success as a screenwriter than as a director, as seen in his earlier works like *Manasinakkare*, *Achuvinte Amma*, and *Ennum Eppozhum*. In this film, he showcases his screenwriting skills by crafting around a dozen memorable characters without overcrowding the narrative. While the film may appear uneventful, it is rich with stories, subplots, and meaningful satellite characters. The movie may seem simple and lagging but with precise observation we come to know that every subplot has a connection with the playground.

2. PLAYGROUND AS A METAPHOR

In *Rakshadhikari Baiju Oppu*, the playground is used as a metaphor of nature. Nature works as a magnet that brings together the inhabitants of earth and unifies them under one title. The soul of village is its playground which is peaceful,

calm and full of greenery and it also socially knit together the people of the village. The playground is not only a shelter for birds and other creatures, it also provides a haven for the people where they live as a family irrespective of religion, caste or gender. Although they are not wholly devoid of problems and worries in their lives, stepping into nature or the greens helps them to figure out their problems, as the soothing environment has in its nature to calm and redirect our senses towards an enlightened and positive approach. Nature through itself teaches how to tackle difficulties, apart having hurdles in between, the river does not stop flowing, and same as life flows surpassing the impediments in its journey.

The movie is wholly devoted to the playground and most of the scenes take place there. The villagers live in harmony with nature. There is no wall of separation between houses which shows their mixing with nature. Every house in the village is adorned with plants and trees unlike concrete gardens which are visible in cities. The playground scene unfolds the beauty of the village with magnificent portrayal of the trees and plants surrounded in the playground. The children and youngsters play cheerfully in the playground. Their lives are intermingled with nature and it is those moments which are spent in the playground that adds meaning and joy to their day. The playground is not just a spot for games, it is a thread that connects the people of the village. Every character and subplot in the movie have a connection with the playground. The eccentric character Vineeth's recovery (done by Hareesh Perumanna) was greatly influenced by the playground and club members. The playground provides a fortuity for the people to get to know each other. The playground was a landmark which endowed beautiful moments in Baiju's life. This is evident in the movie when Baiju and his childhood friend George (done by Dileesh Pothan), sits in the playground under the tree reminiscing their good old childhood days. The playground evokes nostalgia in them when they recall their old days including teenage love. In this scene we see that they have a passionate bond with nature. They grew up and tasted the joy of childhood playing in the lap of nature. Here we see how much the character George grieves for his past days in the village. Though having an opulent life in America, his heart still craves for the simple and joyous life in his village. Since George has vended his property in Kerala, Baiju enquires about his revisit in Kerala. To that George gives a poignant reply, he says: "I have three companies in America, to be frank, till this moment I thought I am content with my life, but after seeing you, I realized how wrong I was, you are lucky to have this life, to stay happy always" (*Rakshadhikari Baiju oppu*).

Through his dialogues we see how intimate he is with his land. He desperately wants to be with his land and playground. George and Baiju spend the whole night near the tree without noticing that the night had passed. Baiju even sleeps near the tree peacefully the whole night without any speck of fear or anxiety. They are more relaxed and comfortable in the lap of nature with trees around than being in their concrete shelters. From this scene we can grasp the verity that how much affection the Kumbalam inhabitants have for nature. The scene is packed with wistful emotions which takes the audience to a nostalgic ride.

The movie also pictures two children who are devoid of having a playground in their urban locality. Since the children are prohibited from playing cricket in their residents they come to the playground in Kumbalam to have good time. This shows the ignorance of city dwellers towards nature and environment. When people are busy with their fast life styles they pay little heed to the importance of having a playground for children at their residence. Since major chunk of our time is contributed towards mobile phones and technologies one has sparse time to have a good look around and observe ones surroundings. In contemporary world when buildings sprout out like mushrooms, trees and plants became a rare visual. As a result children lost the sense to appreciate and celebrate nature. But in Kumbalam village we have an entirely different view. Breaking age barriers, every person in the village gets accustomed to the playground and involves in games.

Nature works as a miracle in heartening an individual and helps him to rise from affliction. This can be seen in the instance of a boy who comes to the playground to bury the sorrow of his mother's death. Nature here becomes a medicine that heals the wound in his heart and uplifts him from the trench of misery. The boy gradually comes back to his old life with the help of Baiju and his friends. The playground is where love blossoms and languishes. The relationship between Manoj (done by Deepak Parambol) and Rosy (done by Anagha L K) develops and diminishes in the playground. Playground is a fount of solace which mends the broken heart. For Baiju the playground is a close friend whom he met when he was eight years of age, with whom he grew up together and still at the age of forty it still remains a part of his life. The playground is a disruption for the irritable old man whose property adjoined the ground. For each of the characters the playground seem varied. Still the playground remains as an imperative ingredient of their lives. It is a quintessence of happiness, pleasant memories and delicious moments.

The movie has attained a remarkable achievement in rendering nature in its most excellent form. The movie is awash with scenes that unveil the hidden splendour beauty of the Kumbalam village. The scenes are set in backdrops that embody the natural charm and loveliness of the village. Most scenes are outdoor shots taken mainly in playground or pond side or near well, which are rare sights in urban areas. At this century when shopping malls, parks and theatres became a spot of hangouts for youngsters, the Kumbalam inhabitants gather around a well, near a tree or a pond. This reveals the affection the villagers have towards their land and nature. Nature has a great impact in day to day life of the villagers. In today's world when people pay out most of their labours and money in wiping out natural world for building and expanding their territory, we have a group of people who give much consideration to a playground than their residence. The villagers are untouched by civilization and modernity. When city dwellers run behind fortunes and prosperity, people in kumbalam are reluctant to leave behind their birthplace for an affluent life. They are ingenuous, selfless and unambitious people with no avarice for positions and wealth. In modern life when people burn out their good young days in agitation to build secured future, Kumbalam inhabitants cherish every moment of their life unconcerned about an imminent life.

The foremost indication about the invasions of civilization can be seen in the scene with the arrival of posh black car into the playground. The people in playground watch the car with bewilderment with many questions popping up in their mind. The nature too is disturbed and traumatized with appearance of the car in the playground. Nature expresses its distress through heavy wind and clouding up of the atmosphere. The environment suddenly changes from its serene and vivid form to a violent and hazy state as if it wants to convey that something unpleasant is going to happen. The transformation of nature from cheerfulness to heaviness is a forecast that the most admired playground of the villagers will be snatched away from them. Nature is safe and sound in the hands of the villagers, the love that the villagers have for the nature and the care and trust which nature provides in return is something that every human seeks. Civilization and modernity is something that is difficult to digest for the villagers. They are content with their existing life and do not seek an enhanced life. When they get to know that a hospital will be constructed in their playground, though downhearted they accept the reality that a hospital is inevitable in their locality. With an aching heart they depart from the playground permitting the construction of the hospital. Hospital is a milestone in the path of civilization that Kumbalam village will accomplish one day. Kumbalam village may someday turn into a bustling city erasing the green that was painted before.

The movie emphasises the need for having a playground for children. In every aspect civilization and development is prestige to a locale but, development wiping out nature and green will certainly prove hazardous. The scene which shows the razing of trees in the playground induces pain and loss in ones heart. Civilization which gives trivial attention to nature and tradition will land man into an unhealthy condition. Man who buries his head into mobile phones and advocates about the adversity of global warming does not have time to plant a tree in his residence. When every requirement of man is easily feasible with the touch of a finger he forgets labour and drudgery. Today when the world waits for us in our fingertips, we disregard our past tradition and customs. The movie shows a scene in which Baiju talks about instant coconut powder which is put on the market to sell. With this we get to know that Kerala, land of kera (coconut) has reached in a pitiable state where one has to buy coconut powder from market when it was accessible in ample amount before.

Kerala has now turned out into a state, where people are getting more self conscious by abandoning mental jobs for status-oriented ones outside. Keralites now more like to say they are doctors or engineers that would give them pride and dignity in society. The new generation are reluctant to follow the path of their ancestors. In the movie Baiju in his speech openly says that parents nowadays want their children to pursue medicine and engineering, if that is to happen buildings and hospitals should come up our villages and towns. For upcoming of buildings we have to give up our cherished nature, mountains, forests and rivers which ones filled our veins with pride. Change is the law of nature. It is necessary to adapt if a society is to keep pace with the ever- changing world but, when this change comes at the cost of the culture, the society instead of progressing moves backwards. Our culture along with nature is being threatened by the present era of modernisation. Kerala was a state which cultivated its own culture through ages and welcomed other cultures too. With the emergence of modernism almost all the activities have been motivated towards materialisation and marketing. We realised the potentialities of modernism. It brought about innumerable opportunities and scopes for expansion. Keralites always lived in harmony with nature. The green paddy field, rivers and ponds were part of their lives. Ruralism was the symbol of fellowship among keralites. The behaviour, thoughts and speech of keralites were discrete which made them stand apart from others. But today keralites run behind western culture and this resulted in

a rapid change which even questioned our identity. When we go after western culture, westerners come to Kerala to study our rich culture and tradition with admiration.

Development is destroying nature day by day. In the name of development man is destroying the web of life that is supporting him. It would never be possible for man to live without nature because he is part of nature's ecosystem. When we are busy developing technologies and science to make our life better, we do not fail to think that it can ruin everything that surrounds us in the near future. Our distancing from nature began several years ago with advancement in agriculture and social order; it is the age of industry to which we owe our modern regard for nature. The growth of cities allowed for a separation between people and nature and our obsession with convenience and efficiency beckoned a new perspective on the environment. With technological advancement, nature became something we were no longer apart of, and entirely subject to, but something that we could control and profit off of. The growth of industry enabled humans to truly dominate the landscape and disrupt the natural systems that have been in place for billions of years.

As we have removed ourselves further and further from nature, we have developed a willing ignorance of our role and relationship within it. With the growth of cities and trade we have moved from a subsistent, sustainable economy to one of greed and exploitation. Humans have always had an impact on the environment, but with the age of industry that impact has been ultra-magnified. The influence of anthropogenic factors is now intruded into every aspect of environment. Nature is not simply a warehouse of resources to serve human needs. Rather, it is a highly integrated, interdependent functioning system upon which all life forms, including the soil, water, plants, animals, and humans depend for survival. It is important to treat nature with love, care and respect because the failure of the system would ultimately threaten the subsistence of human beings.

In *Rakshadhikari Baiju Oppu*, we can see the beginning of transformation of ingenuous and innocent village into a developed town. Kumbalam village which is far away from the urban commotion is not left alone by the modernisation. Building of hospital by demolishing the playground is not a positive commence of civilization. Children these days are removed from playing games in the open fields. They are always locked up for studies and they live inside the cyber world. Children from cities are more accustomed to modern gadgets than with the world outside. They are deprived of a childhood that is lost inside the walls of their flats. Elimination of playgrounds makes the situation even worse. For a healthy and fit life children needs to carry out physical activities. Children who grow up involving in games are less subjected to disease so this denies the need for a hospital. By constructing hospital in playground children are denied their right to play and then they fall prey to the same hospital. In this way there is a double benefit for the hospital. *Rakshadhikari Baiju Oppu* is a movie that inspires children to play and live freely without being anxious about future.

In the climax of the movie Baiju writes a request letter to the minister which brings meaning to the whole plot. The letter is something that motivates any individual to think over and rectify their mistakes. It pushes our thoughts into the matter which we consider trivial and inspires us to take constructive step to solve the problem. It touches our heart and shapes our views regarding the worth of having a playground in our locality. Busy with their lives adults sometimes fail to realize that their children are in the most valuable stage of their life. The letter Baiju writes brings this into light. As it reads let cities develop and basic necessities in villages improve but we should not forget to leave a small plot of land for children to stir their friendships, enjoy the breeze and involve in games. We are not going to reach anywhere with expanding roads and bridges without fulfilling the simple need of the children (*Rakshadhikari Baiju oppu*). Baiju through his letter opens our eye to the very fact that while we are busy constructing flats and villas, expanding cities by wiping out villages we fail to consider our children or more clearly we forget them.

The movie also illustrates the warmth of a harmonious relation that the children of the village have towards nature. Children are more bonded with nature than the elders. They are more relaxed and joyful when spending time in the playground. It helps them to come up for air and provides recreation. The playground also provides a platform for the children for social interaction. Children of the Kumbalam village grow up living through the spirit and essence of nature. Nature freshens their mind and soul and cherishes hope and confidence in them. Retreating from the world of books they learn greater lessons from exploring the outer world. In a scene in the movie, Baiju asks a bookworm boy to lift his head and have a look around a bit than forever glaring into the words. The movie endorses the need of having leisure time without hampering the significance of studies. The children of Kumbalam village take along studies with games. The highlights the significant influence of nature in children's life. It promotes them to attune their lives with nature and travel through its path of ecstasy and pleasure. Children can get to know more about the meaning of life and existence through exploring and delving into nature. Nature can teach patience and endurance that to be followed in their lives.

In the movie nature is shown in a way that creates a strapping relation between human life and environment. Nature with its innocents and care draws the villagers to it. The people in one way or other rely on nature for their needs. Here nature becomes a best friend who calms and consoles them in time of agony, nature is also a mother who protects and loves them for what they are and witnesses the good and bad moments of their lives. The people of the Kumbalam village may not be highly educated or civilised but they are well aware about the value and significance of nature. They are well acquainted with nature and know how to protect it from downfall. They are born into the caring hands of nature and grew up knowing nature and its deep meanings. They appreciate and comprehend the changes of nature. There is a scene in the movie in which the elders converse about the changing climates. The calm environment suddenly changes into blustery weather as they had predicted. This scene reveals the depth of understanding the people have about nature. The people of the village know the core of the nature and understand its change and state.

3. CONCLUSION

Rakshadhikari Baiju Oppu is something that is more beautiful which makes any city dweller yearn for an uncomplicated, peaceful life like Kumbalam inhabitants. This makes one realise that money and wealth fails in bringing all the happiness and joy we need in life. Life becomes meaningful only when we live and cherish every beautiful moments of our life. Possessing wealth and fortune and lacking happiness does not make a man lucky. Luckiest is the one who can sleep peacefully and happily without anxiety and tensions.

The film has so many rewarding moments in it. There is a potent idea conveyed in the movie without being preachy or judgemental. The final sequence of the protagonist's request letter with his signature asking where children will play makes us also think about the concrete jungle that we are surrounding ourselves with. The characters are relatable which adds the realistic quality of the movie. The movie never feels like a film, it is lives of a small village of Kerala portrayed without adding anything to it. The movie takes us into the journey in train of nostalgia with many feel good elements. Along being simple the movie also unfolds a message which touches deep in our heart that opens our eyes. The movie enables one to sympathise with nature and awakes his consciousness that he too is part of nature and it is his responsibility to care for it.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None

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None

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