

Ramo Folktales: An Ecocritical Study**Ms. Nasi Koje**

Ph. D. Scholar

&

Dr. K. C. Mishra

Associate Professor

Dept. of English, RGU Arunachal Pradesh

ABSTRACT

The rationale behind this study is an attempt to analyse the eco-critical elements in the collected Ramo folktales by the scholar. The paper will explore the role of the human relationship with the physical environment through the theoretical perspective of Ecocriticism. The Ramos are people of significant moral aspiration who live their lives in close association with nature and non-human creatures. They considered natural objects as a means of inspiration. Nature plays a great motivation in their thought and imagination. The folktales of the Ramo community is called Nitin. Most of the Ramo folktales are associated with Abotani who is considered as the first human and the grandfather of Ramo world. He especially continued to inspire the researcher throughout writing this article because nature and creatures continued to be a significant theme in the Ramo folktales. For example, Abotani's association with pigeon, monkey, tiger, and salt. The protagonist in the Ramo folktales is deeply associated with nature and creatures which arises through most of the folktales. The characters of the folktales show their deep interdependent with nature. Ramo folktales show man's place on the earth. The study embraces that Ramo folktales possess the elements of Ecocriticism, as it emerges from the selected folktales examined here.

Keywords: *Ramos, Folktales, Ecocriticism, Human-Nature Relationship, Human and Animal Relationship.*

Introduction:

This paper seeks to analyse the Eco-critical elements inscribed in Ramo folktales. The attempt is to mark the core values and beliefs preserved in the Ramo folktales exploring human's associations with nature and creatures. The analysis of Ramo folktales through ecocriticism perspective is done to introduce the readers to their environment and familiarise them with nature. Ramo folktales deal with human-nature interaction. They emphasise Ramos association with nature. The readers, while reading Ramo folktales, can internalise excellent and positive behaviours towards nature and refrain from harmful behaviour. Based on the Ramo cultural context, an eco-critical study of the selected Ramo folktales, namely *Abotani's Tears Given by Ngudo-Gapo*, *Abotani and Monkey*, *Abotani's Discovery of Salt*, *Abotani and Abing Taki*, are investigated.

Cheryll Glotfelty, in his book *The Ecocriticism Readers* (1996) claimed that:

... Ecocriticism expands the notion of "the world" to include the entire ecosphere. If we agree with Barry Commoner's first law of ecology, everything is connected to everything else; we must conclude that literature does not float above the material world in some aesthetic ether, but, rather plays an immensely complex, global system, in which energy, matter, and ideas, interact (Glotfelty 19).

In this context, the folktale *Abotani's Tears Given by Ngudo-Gapo* exemplifies the human being's association with nature and creatures.

Abotani's Tears Given by Ngudo-Gapo

Once upon a time, there were two beautiful birds called Ngudo and Gapo. These birds used to make noise during sunrise and sunset. However, one day their babies were killed by the heat of the sun. Ngudo and Gapo were very shocked. They started crying kak-kak ssss koho-koho. Abotani heard that sound and said, "Oh! Your voice is melodious". This made Ngudo and Gapo very angry and insulted. They cursed Abotani. "We reward you pain and sorrow". Their curse had its effect on him. It is believed that till today human experience sorrow. Human tears and the incidents of death of babies is connected with the curse of pigeons. Due to sadness, the pigeons decided not to maintain and rebuild their nest again. Therefore, the pigeons started laying eggs

on branches. They do not use leaves and grass for their nest. Since then, Ngudo and Gapo sing during sunrise and sunset in the memories of their lost babies (Collected by Nasi Koje).

Moral and Analysis: This folktale teaches not to laugh at other people without genuine reason because they might be cursed with the same conditions.

Eco-critical Analysis: The folktale *Abotani's Tears Given by Ngudo-Gapo*, mirror the presence of eco-critical elements and encourage the need to treat the other non-human creatures with kindness and not to forget the lesson learned from the pigeon. It shows the moral ethics of the Ramo society in which elders and wise men often advocate young one not to mock at others without any reason referring to the experience of Abotani. The idea of sharing emotions through tears, curse, mocking, hatred, and insult between Pigeon and Abotani is very much eco-critical because they are human-like expression and uncommon in the present world. In today's world, people will not believe if anyone claimed that bird had cursed him or her as in the world of technology, birds are considered as human instrument except for the bird lovers.

William Howarth, in his essay *Some Principles of Ecocriticism*, says that "Nature and culture frequently intermingle like the soil and water in the flowing river" (quoted in Glotfelty and Fromm 23). In this context, *Abotani and Monkey* narrate that Ramo culture and creative skills were inculcated from animals.

Abotani and Monkey

In ancient time, the Monkeys were considered to be more intelligent and superior than Abotani. Because the Monkeys had bows, arrows, swords, darts and knives. They were skilled at shooting, hitting, cutting, and jumping. Abotani felt inferior before them. He was jealous of monkey's advancements. Abotani thought of an idea day and night to destroy the pride of Monkeys. One day when the Monkeys were swimming, keeping their weapons on the river bank; Abotani walked behind the Monkeys, loosen the threads of the bows and tied them across each other. Later the Monkeys started pushing, pulling and jerking each other because the threads were tied hard. Gradually, the angry Monkeys started to fight among themselves and threw the weapons. In this way, the Monkeys lost the skills of shooting. However, the Monkeys continued to damage the crop fields of Abotani, which were the means of survival. So Abotani determined to destroy the dynasty of the Monkeys. One day Abotani dressed himself up in red costume, coloured red on his face, legs, hands, and roamed around the monkey's world. By looking at Abotani in a new

form, the Monkeys also desire to have the same look. The greedy and curious Monkeys requested him to help them for the transformation. Abotani accepted to help them, but in a condition that the Monkeys have to follow specific rules. Abotani advised the Monkeys to collect a load of dry firewood and gather them near the huge tree trunk. The Monkeys happily followed the advice of Abotani and quickly loaded firewood on the spot.

Then Abotani advised all the monkeys to go inside the empty trunk. The excited Monkeys with an ambition to have the right colour and beauty rushed into the tree trunk. When all the Monkeys went inside the empty trunk, Abotani slowly closed the entrance of the trunk with dry firewood. Abotani advised, when they turned red, utter the words, “Oh! Abotani, we turned red”. The Monkeys were still so happy and prolong to follow his advice. After that, Abotani set the dry wood on fire and deadly fire gutted down the Monkeys. The monkeys cried the words, “Abotani we turned red” loudly. However, Abotani continued to blow the fire till all Monkeys became silent. After setting off the fire, Abotani brought out the dead bodies of monkeys counting one by one. Later one injured young female monkey jumped out. She was alive amongst the dead bodies of other monkeys. She ran away into the forest and climbed into the top of the tree. It is believed that from the very day the monkey’s face turns black, it’s bottom red and lived on trees forever. Abotani could not destroy the empire of the monkeys. That is why the monkeys still exist on the earth (Collected by Nasi Koje).

Moral: The above folktale imparts children not to imitate others and be happy with whatever one has.

Eco-critical Analysis: The folktale reflects how some skills and culture had been influenced and learned from the Monkeys. The tale Eco critically shows that Monkeys were more intelligent than men, and Abotani learned through their advancement yet ungrateful. For example, human beings inherited their ability of swimming, jumping, cutting, shooting, and hitting from the Monkeys. The ideas of using bows, arrows, knives, and machete have been inculcated from the Monkeys. The above folktale shows the relationship between human and animal. Thus, it picturises the relationship between human and creature and displays how nature has been playing an essential role in shaping human life and advancing the culture.

Historian Donald Worster studies; “The reciprocal relationships between humans and land, considering nature not just as the stage upon which the human story is acted out, but as an

actor in the drama. They trace the connections among environmental conditions, economic modes of production, and cultural ideas through time” (Glotfelty 11). In this context, the folktale *Abotani’s Discovery of Salt* revealed that nature had been the hero in the form of salt.

Abotani’s Discovery of Salt

Once upon a time, Abotani was chasing an unknown animal in the forest. On the way, he met two Tibetan ladies who gave him a piece of rock salt. When he returned home, he found his younger brother Abotaro growing weaker every passing day. He gave him a piece of rock salt, which Abotaro chewed after three days, and became healthy. So Abotaro always questioned him about the origin of salt. However, Abotani never revealed him. In this way, many days passed. One day Abotaro was missing from the house. Abotani looked for him everywhere but could not find. Abotani walked towards the forest, where he met two Tibetan ladies. Abotani was surprised to see Abotaro who had already become the master of the house. Abotani asked him to return home, but Abotaro refused. He settled there forever. From this very day, Abotani began to pursue business with Tibet and salt was used for cooking purposes. After some decades Abotani and Abotaro developed their scripts. Abotaro’s script was written on stones and became permanent. Abotani’s scripts were written on animal skins and were eaten up by his pet dog. Moreover, before teaching his children, Abotani passed away. So, the children of Abotani could not have a script of their own till today (Collected by Nasi Koje).

Moral: This tale educates about the origin of salt. It also informs us about the reason behind the lack of Ramo script.

Eco-critical Analysis: It has been analysed that nature has the protagonist in the form of salt and Abotani’s source of business initiation with the Tibet. He discovered salt from two Tibetan ladies with an exchange of woods and leaves displays how nature always impact the human. Abotaro settled at Tibet because he recovered from the sickness after having the salt. The notion of Abotaro’s scripts being written on the stone is another eco-critical element.

Timothy Morton claimed, “There is no outside of the system of life-forms. It states that everything on this earth is connected. Things are made up of other things. Things come from other things” (LeMenager, Shewry et al. 26). In this context, the folktale *Abotani and Abing Taki* present the influences of nature in their life and how things are linked to each other.

Abotani and Abinig Taki

Once upon a time, there were two brothers Abotani and Abing Taki. They were born from the same womb of mother earth. Both brothers became a well-known hunter. They used to hunt animals together with their weapons. After many years Abing Taki started consuming raw flesh of animals in the forest itself. He stopped bringing meat of animals at home. One day Abotani asked him, “why are you not eating cooked meat? Why have you stopped bringing your hunted animals at home?”. Abing Taki replied, “I appreciate raw meat more than cooked meat”. Forest is a more suitable place for him to live. When Abotani heard these words, he became sorrowful, because they were going to be separated. Abing Taki requested Abotani to cover his body with grasses and bushes in the forest. After three days, remove the covered grass and bushes from his body. Abotani fulfilled his request and went back to home. After three days, Abotani visited the same place and removed the covered grass and bushes. Abotani was shocked and scared of Abing Taki because he had transformed into a tiger. He had hair on his body and head of a Tiger. Abing Taki requested Abotani not to tell anybody about his transformation into a Tiger. “If you tell anyone about this incident, I will kill you”. Abotani promised, “I will never tell anyone till my death”. In this way, Abotani and Abing Taki promised each other to keep the incident a secret. Thousands of years later, when Abotani became very old, he was sitting close to the fire and doing cane works with a knife. He told the secret behind his separation with his elder Abing Taki to his son. The story was never-ending, and during the narration, Abotani’s knife fell under the house through the wide gaps of the bamboo floor of his house. Abotani told his son to get his knife, but the son could not find his knife.

At last, Abotani came outside of his house searching his fallen knife. Abing Taki attacked him from the neck and killed him as he had broken the promise made before (Collected by Nasi Koje).

Moral: This tale educates about the importance of a promise.

Eco-critical Analysis: According to the analysis, it introduced the primitive aspects of the relationship between human and non-human creatures. For example, the two brothers Abotani and Abing Taki, are measured as the son of mother earth. Their love for hunting, dependence on raw flesh, and being around the forest. The transformation of Abing Taki into Tiger is another aspect of the power of nature. Primitive Ramo cultural practice of using Tiger tooth as an agent

of the supernatural power to swear, accompanied by chants of the priest has been inculcated from nature and creature. Even today, many traditional Ramos use Tiger jaw as an agent to curse, punishment and promises accompanied by prayers of the priest.

Conclusion:

Therefore, in conclusion, it has been explored through Ramo folktales that the existence of eco-critical elements is very much evident. The features and narration of Ramo folktales reflect that their ecological environment traditionally and culturally influences them. Their bonding is as primitive as the existence of natural environment since generation. Through the analysis of the folktales, one can say that the people of Ramo and their culture and society, have been highly influenced by the natural environment around them. This evidence is visible through Abotani's relationship with nature and creatures reflected in the above folktales. Ramo people always believed in the spiritual power of nature. This aspect shows the eco-critical aspect of Ramo life. Documenting the folktales would help the Ramo community to save their identity, culture, connect with the natural environment.

The Ramos have their own rules and beliefs, which indicate eco-critical elements through their bonding between man and nature. The above Ramo folktales revealed that since the ancient period, man has not only dependent on nature but also exploited it. Man's existence differs on his attitudes with the rest of the creation. Man feels that he is superior to everything that dwells on this earth. Therefore, Ecocriticism provides human a better understanding of nature and creatures. However, the Ecocriticism helps man to understand that nature-creatures are co-inhabitants and not a secondary object of the mother earth. Every man on this planet learns knowledge through different experiences of nature-creatures. Even just a lifeless observation of nature furnishes knowledge. The sea, stone, sand, mountains, plants, animals, climate, temperature, weather and seasons inspire the personality and thinking of a person because these inactive entities and creatures possess language. Nature influences the human and encourages them to live in sync with the environment.

Works Cited

Ahi Berat, Dilara Yaya, et.al. "The Concepts of Environment in Folktales from Different Cultures: Analysis of Content and Visuals". *International Electronic Journal of Environmental Education*, 2014, Print.

Adugna, Belay Ashenafi, "Exploring Environmental Discourses in Oral Literature: Eco critical Analysis of Oromo proverbs". *Journal of Language and Culture*, 2014.

Dhasmana, M.M. *The Ramos of Arunachal*. Concept Publishing Company, 1979. Print.

Glotfelty, Cheryll and Harold Fromm, *The Ecocriticism Readers*. Athens, London: University of Georgia Press, 1996. Print.

Howarth, William, *Principles of Ecocriticism*. Athens, London: The University of Georgia Press, 1996. Print.

LeMenager, Stephanie, Teresa Shewry, et.al. *Environmental Criticism for the Twenty-First Century*, New York, London: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2011. Print.

Field Work:

Koje, Maling. Field work 10th Jan 2016.

Koje, Tako. Field work 15th Jan 2016.

Yabu, Taya. Field work 17th Jan 2017.

Koje, Pordung. Field work 13th July 2017.

Puchung, Tabi. Field work. 16th July 2018.

Pupor, Tame. Field work. 2nd August 2018