

The Enlivening Kolleru Lake and its Belated Awakening in Akkineni Kutumbarao's *Softly Dies a Lake*

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Abstract:

Nature is the ultimate water source, and water is the life for species' survival. When natural resources thrive beyond the vastness of necessity, humans take it for granted. Kolleru Lake was also not an exception. It was once a magnificent lake where the livelihood of an entire village depended on it. Kolleru Lake was not only a place where people grazed their cattle and caught fish from the lake. It held nature in its whole form. Kolleru Lake interblended the villagers for shared purposes. *Softly Dies a Lake*, written by Akkineni Kutumbarao, is the English translation of his Telugu novel, *Kolleti Jaadalu*. In the novel, a sexagenarian, Srinivasa Rao, revisits the village where he was born and grew up. As he re-envisioned the days lived in resilience with Kolleru Lake, self-realisation is awakened. The lively nature of integrity is evanesced from the village as the lake dies. The lake was a larger entity in itself. The paper attempts to gather the lively aspects of villagers during the resplendent Kolleru Lake as envisioned by Srinivasa Rao. The idyllic nature of Kolleru Lake succumbs to inevitable artificial annihilation.

Keywords: Lively- lake, Integrated nature, Trawl and Pasture, Ecosystem, Harmonious folk.

Kolleru Lake is the largest freshwater lake in southeast India. Over the centuries, it sustained as a lake. It is best known for its broad range of ecosystem

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services to anthropocentrism's well-being. The sustenance of the system made Kolleru Lake lively and a prosperous livelihood for the inhabitants of the environment. "Calm waters covered with flowers of many hues, a cluster of lotuses in full bloom and wild weeds and water plants like silken tassels entwined and dancing, floating and swaying in the waters, slender creepers tracing patterns in the water and countless flocks of birds chirping away, bringing the lake to life" (Kutumbarao 2).

Kolleru Lake received water from various sources, lacking a finite boundary line and a regular shoreline. This added benefit for villagers to use the land and lake as far as their comfort state allowed. It served as a buffer and a reservoir, with the reserving quantity of water. The lake was an extensive source of livelihood for the inhabitants of villages in and around the lake. The lake of his childhood was free from pollution, encroachments, exploitation and development ministrations. Lately, the water has flowed into the lake from irrigation and drainage canals. Besides, water is not from the rivers that drain into the lake.

Pulaparru was a small village from which Srinivasa Rao hails. Srinivasa Rao has an entangled memory of Kolleru Lake. Srinivasa Rao tries to regenerate himself through nature. However, it has become a bare land that has been exploited. His childhood was engulfed by an environment with affective interconnections with all the biotic and abiotic elements. An insight into the culture and way of life led by villagers is reflected in Seenu's memories. Years of visiting Kolleru Lake brought him a resuscitated rush of thoughts from the past. The past of Kolleru Lake was way beyond the imagination of Srinivasa Rao. He was affectionately addressed as 'Seenu'. The self-realisation of Seenu at the age of sixty evokes the spectacular scenic beauty of the surroundings around Kolleru Lake he experienced. The reality of the lake, as witnessed by Seenu's large eyes, held an intolerable acceptance. "Each morning, the fishermen would go out on their palm rafts and bring back the trapped fish to shore. The women of each family would then heave the heavy baskets on their heads and set off at a brisk trot, swinging their arms as they walked" (Kutumbarao 13, 14).

The village, Pulaparru, was always enthusiastic and energetic. The villagers lived in thatched huts that stood with the support of one palm trunk. Herds of

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buffaloes were grazed along the pastures. "As summer approached, the buffaloes, sheep, goats, and herds of cattle from the dryland villages came to Kolleru for pasture. However many the herds, Kolleru would draw them all into her embrace like a true mother" (Kutumbarao 10). Children ran and picked snail shells, often swimming in the creek. The village was never in an isolated state. It was integrated with nature. The villagers used the land, water, and everything relevant to the lake. Kolleru Lake was the village's lifeline. Lake unified the villagers with nature. "Kolleru had more than a hundred island villages. One of these villages was Pulaparru" (Kutumbarao 11).

Furthermore, with the sight of Seenu, the lake was just a dry land with a filthy pond. It had become a place for the germs. The lake was exploited by people who were not concerned about its taming ability. These notions of reality were the possible ones which brought Seenu to remember the enlivening time of the lake, which contributed throughout his childhood. "As far as the eyes could see, Kolleru was full of greenery, grasses, bulrushes, fragrant flowering shrubs and a wealth of other wild green weeds and colourful flowers swaying in the breeze. Shrubs like the swallow-wort and *Jammu* grew in dense thickets filled with birds chirping" (Kutumbarao 4, 5).

The pastoral setting of Kolleru clutched its serenity. Kolleru Lake had dense plants of creepers and flowers. Ducks floated in rows along the stream of the lake. As he realised, the sway of birds with its rising chirp sound was lost in the wilderness. It was the place of numerous migratory birds. The varied coloured feathers of birds filled the sky. The presence of these birds and animals made the lake exuberant. The lake had natural bunds that resembled the boundaries of regions on the map. Apart from these, the lake had a shore and a bank. It was magnificent that carrying twenty- five boats and hundreds of palm rafts simultaneously was befitting. These aspects depict the vastness of the shore and bank encircling the lake. "Three score years ago five- year- five-year-old Serene had driven his four buffaloes to graze on this very bank along with Kishtudu, Dasu and many other boys who were more experienced at the task. Where was that lake? Whither that shore?" (Kutumbarao 1). The fodder for the cattle was gathered from Kolleru Lake. Apart

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from grazing, fishing was a predominant occupation of the villagers. The big fish were meant for men, and the small fish were for children—the men folk fish with large fish nets. The children used bait to catch the fish.

Additionally, children grazed cattle. With this effect, the liveliness is reflected in the occupation of the villagers. "By the time Seenu drove his buffaloes to the lakeshore, many people from Peddajada were already there driving their herds" (Kutumbarao 3).

The village thrived with two groups, namely the Kammas and the Vaddis. The Kammas were the farmers, while the Vaddis were the fisherfolk. Kammas cultivated the agricultural land, and Vaddis was involved in fishing and its catchment. Farmers and fishermen are naturally closer to the environment. Their primary aim was to feed themselves and earn a living by selling the rest. In addition, a migrant Muslim tailor named Phul Saibu lived among them. Sometimes, collective farming was executed during the time of overflowing. Kolleru was enormous, and several villagers were dependent on it. Fishing is the primary occupation of the Kolleru people. Fishing is a promising occupation for villagers with a higher source of income. Kolleru Lake, with its immensity, supported duckery as an earlier important means of livelihood. The men took the privilege of fishing in the palm rafts. Subsequently, women folk sold the fish caught in baskets along the streets. "Kolleru surrounded the villages on three sides, and a small irrigation canal ran beside the path. After passing the village, the canal flowed into Kolleru" (Kutumbarao 11, 12).

Rangayya, Seenu's father, believed in altruism. Anyone he meets or greets is addressed as "our" people. This is a symbiotic representation of the people of Pulaparru and how they treated and embraced people from other regions. They considered themselves to be one between nature and the environment. Without it, nothing revolved around them. "There was nothing in nature that was not "ours" to him" (Kutumbarao 28). The people had their harvest sacked up, and paddy was the yield. They had their agricultural land around Kolleru Lake. Irrigation happened at appropriate intervals of the year. Agriculture, however, happened on a finite scale.

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"When Seenugadu saw them, that was it- he and Pottodu would promptly climb up on top of those sacks and then slide down" (Kutumbarao 117).

The presence of Phul Saibu is an incredible existence that affirms communal harmony. He was a tailor who lived with his wife. They did not have children of their own. In this situation, the couple extended excessive generosity to adopt a woman named Lakshmi and her two children, who needed shelter and basic amenities. Understanding this, his wife sheltered them. Phul Saibu assured Lakshmi, "If she found nothing, then Kolleru was always there" (Kutumbarao 138). These words uttered by Phul Saibu evinced the greatness of the people of Pulaparru. They are propitious strangers compatible with each other in their sustenance and livelihood. "Though he was a Saibu, he spoke more clearly than anyone in the village" (Kutumbarao 139).

The balanced ecosystem of Kolleru Lake becomes highly complex with anthropogenic influences. Over the years, the water from Kolleru was contaminated by industrial effluents, pesticides and inorganic compounds. The potential obliteration of the ecosystem is innate in infrastructure development, urban expansion and mass production. The deterioration in the ecological system of Kolleru Lake is caused by anthropogenic causes, namely population explosion, improper usage of land, increased gentrification, and urbanisation. Land use changes of urban sprawl outwit the sustainable demographic changes on the catchment of Kolleru Lake. Inadvertently, villagers had peripheral knowledge about its negative impacts on the environment.

The progress of the village is co-related with the utilisation of water resources. This devastation of Kolleru Lake threatens the livelihood of villagers living in and around the lake. This leads to hydrological changes, leading to the depravity of balanced ecological practices. Possession of land creates disharmony among the settlers. Lake restoration is guaranteed with the removal of possible encroachments on the lake. The staring sight of Seenu as the novel moves on is apparent to show that these changes are irreparable damages.

Mainly, it is conspicuous that urbanised development has put forth infinitesimal ideation to sustain natural resources. Of course, the overflowing of

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Kolleru Lake destroyed the livelihood of the villagers of Pulaparru. However, the people stood in solidarity and guarded the land and the lake. "When the Kolleru was in flood, the villagers would build a dam and secure it and guard it day and night" (Kutumbarao 12). The aforementioned sustenance among their community stabilised the existence of villagers. For a common cause, they considered themselves the same. Even when the village was affected by flooding, people had higher adaptability towards weather changes and lived in an integrated form with the environment. They hardly had any intention to dodge the village. This intensified range of sustenance kept the village and Kolleru Lake vivacious.

The presence of Seenu after decades throws a spotlight on the depletion of ecological merits and conventional solutions derived from the lake, which led to the exploitation of Kolleru Lake, is discernible. Eventually, the ecological characteristics of wetlands are destroyed in over advantageously. In order to possess a balanced ecosystem, knowledge about ecological understanding is highly demandable. In the case of Kolleru, information was barely shared and acknowledged.

The village, which had lived and experienced an ideal state of living, namely communal harmony and nature integrated with human beings with lively scenic beauty, finally had fallen to shattered pieces of glass. All of this was attained in the presence of Kolleru Lake. The lake lost its precious state with anthropocentrism, which focused on exploiting and expanding assistance without precautions knowledge. The climate change intensified weather complications. Eventually, the physical environment collapses with a disruption in ecological processes. As an effect, the water in Kolleru Lake had reflux levels and a lower water retention capacity. Seenu's imperturbable glance at the lake over the years propels him to take further measures to restore the lake. Lake restoration attests to be a time-consuming process. However, Lake restoration revolves around ecological aspects and the advantages of the lake to humans.

The land became tattered strips and became unfit for cultivation: Kolleru, the old landscape, gave the villagers pure bliss of joy. The saddening part of Srinivasa Rao's poised moment is that Kolleru is not tangible enough to witness. The proper and fundamental structure of Kolleru exists in one's memories. Seenu's tactile

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experience of the past prevails with an agony of the present and the dubiousness of the future. This puts forth Seenu's yearning to rejuvenate the lost place, land, and environment. The remarkable attribute of the people of Kolleru was the sense of oneness. This forced the community to stay strong all these years.

Human society hardly spares time to realise the mistakes; instead, it tries to mend the ways. The people of Pulaparru are dependent on nature for everything. Kolleru flourished in its simple rural life. The lake dried up due to excessive aquaculture and pollution. Kolleru was home to diverse species such as pelicans, blackbirds, snakebirds, cranes, storks, hawks, herons, mynas, cuckoos, black bald hens, spotted-beak ducks, etc. The detailed account of Kolleru from Seenu's memories depicts the complete dependence of villagers on nature. Kolleru took care of everyone in an idealistic co-existence of beings. Most out left the village with their ers and Kolleru lakLake their own. Those elders are the ones to face the harsh consequences and are the minimalist contributors to degradation. However, Seenu was among the youngsters who left the village for a better future.

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