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Wasted Ecologies: Anthropogenic Degradation and Vulnerable Communities in Akkineni Kutumbarao's *Softly Dies a Lake*

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Abstract: This article illuminates Akkineni Kutumbarao's eco-memoir *Softly Dies a Lake* (2016), a poignant narrative rooted in the collective memory of Lake Kolleru in the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh. This article interrogates the disposability of vast geophysical entities in the Anthropocene. Firstly, the article elucidates the intricate entanglement between the narrated wetland and dependent communities around it and how these communities become vulnerable through consumerist ideologies and unscientific developmental interventions that degrade both the ecosystem and the lives around it. Secondly, it scrutinizes the human-induced natural degradation through Rob Nixon's "slow violence", which renders certain communities as "disposable" or "expendable" echoing Zygmunt Bauman's concept of "wasted lives" as a result of socio-ecological ignorance. Thirdly, it probes how anthropogenic resource extraction and encroachments render spaces themselves disposable, manifesting India's entrenched crisis of wetland grabbing and pseudoscientific urbanization of vital water bodies. Deploying slow violence, material ecocriticism and critical waste studies as interlocking frameworks, the article uncovers the implicit discourses that obfuscate human-nature interdependence. This article urges a paradigm shift towards sustainable cohabitation that enables it to look beyond the academia. It also negotiates the sociological ramifications by critiquing the view of nature as a resource rather than a space of cohabitation.

Keywords: *Anthropocene, ecocriticism, Lake Kolleru, slow violence, wasted lives, wetland degradation, environmental justice*

Introduction

Illegal encroachment of wetlands and unscientific filling of urban water bodies have been long withstanding problems of India. Several surveys estimate that thirteen percent of Ramsar sites in India have already faced severe ecological degradation since the 2000s (1). Preserving water bodies has become a very difficult effort as India's national population graph maintains a sharp and steady rise and opportunities for livelihoods keep shrinking. The socio-political influences also cater to the encroachment and mutation of urban water bodies, while another survey estimates that forty percent of surface water in India is unfit for consumption (2). Unscientific disposal of sewage water, MSW and chemicals also contributes to such situations. In this light, Akkineni Kutumbarao's novel, originally written in Telugu as *Koletti Jadolu* (2014) and later translated into English by Vasanth Kannabrian (2020) as *Softly Dies a Lake*, is based on the life and changes of Lake Kolleru as a result of anthropocentric and capitalist interventions. The lake is originally situated in the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh. The novel itself stands as an elegy on a 'wasted' alliance between humans and nature.

Globalization and scientific progression have shaped humans as well as geological history of planet Earth. Collective scientific progression and development have ensured environmental alterations and ecological damages on a global as well as on a local scale. Changing of geological landscapes has been termed as 'terraforming' by geologists. India, plagued with deforestation, vanishing water bodies due to encroachment and political reasons, biomagnification and intoxication of urban water bodies, has been least concerned about such problems. Since the adoption of National Water Policy in 1987, Indian government started to take measure to save water bodies and regulate water pollution by taking strict countermeasures. The narrative in the novel predates these policies. The flashback, through the eyes of Srinivasa Rao, takes the readers back to the India of the 1950s, a newly independent state struggling with its political instability and turmoil. It showcases India's environmental temperament in this era, non-existent on the government's part and existent through the indigenous knowledge of environmental cohabitation. This narrative suddenly jumps to the scenario of the lake to create a temporal narrative distance between two timelines. It locates a nascent Indian society, toiling between traditional suffering and the adoption of scientific methods of livelihood. The original accounts of the Kolleru communities reveal a profound and precarious brilliance within the native population, whose survival was predicated on an intimate knowledge of environmental preservation. Long before the introduction of modern embankments or scientific flood prevention, these inhabitants practiced a form of vernacular engineering, adapting their lives to the lake's rhythmic volatility rather than attempting to conquer it. However, this symbiotic existence was punctured by the periods of acute season suffering. When the surrounding communities were plunged into a struggle for survival, that highlighted the government's systemic reluctance and indifference toward the plight of the marginalized.

The story jumps between the imagery of an environmentally enriched waterbody content with biodiversity and cohabitation, cohesion between different living and non-living elements of nature, and, also a "...filthy pond, a breeding ground for germs, a danger to the environment, a toxic net for birds." (Kutumbarao 2) The lake was brutally terraformed by fishing industries into a collection of small fish ponds. As the narrative progresses readers encounter the entangled relationship that developed around Kolleru and how it sustained an entire ecosystem including the inhabitants of Pulaparru and others migrated near the banks of the lake in search of fertile farmlands and grasslands for their cattle.

Kolleru as an Ecological Junction

Kolleru is the largest freshwater lake in India and one of the largest in Asia. It has a span of two hundred and sixty square miles and is located between the Krishna and Godavari districts of Andhra Pradesh. As the novel portrays the geophysical description of the lake, rivers like Budaleru, Naguluru, Akkileru, Sammiveru and some of sixty-seven canals carry freshwater to the lake and channel dirty water out of it. The dirty water from the lake flows through the Uppaleru river to the Bay of Bengal. During the Indian monsoon months of July and August, the water level of the lake rise to the highest level and from April until June the river dries up, exposing fertile agricultural lands on its basin. There were many small islands in the lake and among them, "Komatilanka, Manugulurilanka and Mothevarilanka were the islands within easy reach of the village." (Kutumbarao 6) The lake was designated a Ramsar site on the 19th of August, 2002, under the international Ramsar Treaty for wetlands. (3)

The opening pages of the novel introduce Kolleru as an ecological junction for humans, non-human lifeforms and non-living agents of the environment. Readers are struck with the past and the present geophysical conditions of the lake in the opening pages of the novel. The length and width of the project the idea that how many people were dependent on the lake for their livelihood when the government supplied water was anything but a fairytale. The accounts of the lake by Srinivasa Rao and his friend Radhakrishna, both over fifty-five years at the time of the inception of the novel, visualize the glorious past of the lake. Both of them visit their village Pulaparru and looking over the now-degraded lake opens a stream of 'eco-nostalgia' (K and Jayashree). The floodgates of their childhood memories opens around the mighty lake, as its,

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)

Kutumbarao has vividly described Kolleru's material reality in his novel. Kolleru, the narrative portrays it as a common space where symbiotic relationships among different life forms are exhibited. This depiction serves as a powerful critique of the anthropocentric view that separates nature from culture. By framing the lake as a vibrant "assemblage," the text suggests that the agency of the crane or the lotus is just as vital to the lake's ontological status as the agency of the fishermen. On several occasions, Kutumbarao has explicitly portrayed the cohabitation of elements. One portion of the novel describes,

Flocks of quacking ducks floated alongside...Cranes would alight on the buffaloes and hunt fish from there...The buffaloes were no less smart and would purposely duck into the water to wet the cranes...the moment the buffaloes ducked they would fly up and return to alight on their humps the moment they came up...Sparrows and other birds perched on their backs were chirping noisily and pecking at the ticks on their backs...Some birds sat on the buffaloes' ears cleaning them. (Kutumbarao 5-7)

All these descriptions of living and non-living cohabitating together portray how the symbiotic relationships among human, nonhuman and non-living elements form a 'mesh' and how they reap benefits from each other's company. The "mesh," as Timothy Morton might describe it, highlights the radical intimacy between species. The buffalo is not merely a beast of burden, but a mobile ecosystem; the crane is not just a predator, but a participant in a cross-species game of survival and play. When the novel makes transitions into the era of degradation, this mesh is violently unravelled.

The tragedy of Kolleru is not merely an environmental loss; it is a systematic collapse of what Jane Bennett refers to as "vital materiality." Bennett argues human and nonhuman elements are always capable of affecting the swarm of processes of which they're a part of and also immersed in that swarm and affected by it. This argument is seen throughout the closing stages of the novel. The encroachment of the powerful fishing industry represents a shift from a communal space to a privatized, toxic "resource." The lake, once a source of life, becomes a site of extraction where the water is choked by pollutants. As the lake was degraded to a collection of small ponds, a portion of the village dwellers lost their livelihood as there were no natural bounties to catch and access to the lake was restricted by the powerful fishing industry and toxic water of the lake. While some people shifted to other jobs, some left the village permanently. When the water loses its ability to sustain the fish, crane and lotus, it inevitably loses its ability to sustain the human. These instances solidify the claim that no element in nature acts alone and the claim has been repeatedly portrayed throughout the novel, proving that to wound the environment is to inevitably sever the lifelines of the community that mirrors it.

Kolleru's Nonhuman Agency

In Kutumbarao's novel, Kolleru stands not merely as a setting or backdrop of the novel rather, it acts as a material entity intertwined with accumulated narratives. Kolleru's waters, its biodiversity, chemical composition and shifting boundaries during Indian seasons carry different ecological and geological stories along with it.

While the children return with their buffaloes from Komatilanka Island, they 'frantically' pull off leeches from the buffaloes and form their own bodies and they apply mud on their wounds to heal the blood flow. The lake sustains all kinds of life forms around and within it. The fertile lands on the banks of the lake grew excellent crops and the lake's oxygen and plankton-rich water harboured several species of freshwater fish. People from the Vaddiraja community caught fish in the lake and Kammadora community farmed on the banks. The elders designated fishing areas of the lake so that overfishing doesn't harm the aquatic balance and it showcases the indigenous knowledge of sustainable fishing in practice within native communities, that too without any prior knowledge of scientific sustainable fishing. Kolleru redefines agency as distributed across human and nonhuman actants, it explicitly rejects the human exceptionalism and anthropocentric discourses.

In the novel, human and nonhuman elements coexist in this symbiotic system, and, "while the smallest or simplest body or bit may indeed express a vital impetus, conatus or clinamen, an actant never really acts alone. Its efficacy or agency always depends on the collaboration, cooperation, or interactive interference of many bodies and forces (Bennett 21)." The lake does not gain its agency by acting alone, rather its agency emerges from a milieu of intra-acting elements of nature. The lake is sustained through symbiotic intra-actions as a "thing-power" (Bennett). Acting as an ecological junction for humans, animals, plants, shrubs, the lake fosters vibrant ecology. Seenu's childhood rituals, herding buffaloes, slathering leech bites with lake slush highlight human-nature sensorial entanglements. These entanglements are magnified by the occasional feasts where the fish caught from the lake becomes a staple for the people of Pulaparru.

Kutumbarao has also asserted Kolleru's nurturing agency through the personification of this geophysical body. Its "calm waters covered with flowers of many hues...and countless flocks of birds chirping away, bringing the lake to life." (Kutumbarao 2) While the lake is just the remnant of its past, earlier it used to be "swollen with the pride of a pregnant woman..." nurturing and harbouring different sorts of elements. Every element inside or outside of Kolleru acts in harmony and actively takes part in the emergence of its collective agency.

Kolleru has also been depicted as playing both the preserver and the destroyer of the lives of the shoreline communities. The incidents of occasional floods also assert Kolleru's violent non-human agency as it washes away agricultural lands, cattle and houses, often causing deaths among the communities. A major event in this novel is an account of an unseasonal storm in the Bay of Bengal

that had become a cyclone and struck Andhra Pradesh. People in the surrounding villages of Kolleru face severe loss of property and harvest. All the rivers and channels siphoned rainwater into the lake, subsequently, the water level arose flooding the lake's bed. Homes were flooded, and people somehow collected essential things and ran away from the flood and took refuge in the Kaikaluru. They faced more damage as the flood didn't recede for four days. It also brings death and decay to these lives, making these lives more vulnerable than ever. "The flood brought not only water but all kinds of rubbish as well. Now and then swollen human corpses, carcasses of cattle chickens and pigs were washed in." (Kutumbarao 51) People of Pulaparru can be seen taking refuge in the elevated houses as the flood water has invaded everyone's household, "some stubborn people who thought that the flood would go down in a couple of days just picked up their bundles and came to the front yards of Kakayya and Veerabhadram" (Kutumbarao 48). Common ignorance and intelligence about the nature of the lake vary among different groups in the village of Pulaparru. Yet, these instances of common suffering portray Kolleru's role as a unifying agent, despite the collective suffering, people from different castes and communities come together to share their mutual pain.

Kolleru also asserts its resistive and retaliatory agency when it is exploited with the introduction of the Blue Revolution of India which emerged after the 1950s, matching the narrated timeline of the narrative. Kolleru also suffered from this, as severe consequences, its water was contaminated, it was shrunk into small fishponds and it was mentioned in the opening pages of the novel. Prior to this nationwide trend, Kolleru used to ravage crops during seasonal floods, provoking innovations like bunds and collective labour among the communities, "Children of my womb this is not how you should live. You can tear me, crush me, hunt my fish and take the gems in my belly, she challenged and provoked them" (Kutumbarao 173). This anthropomorphic monologue of the lake portrays the lake's role as a mother teaching her children to adapt new survival methods in the face of hostile situations.

Slow and Invisible Death of the Lake

As the narrative opens with the present scenario of Kolleru, the initial reaction of Srinivasa Rao and Radhakrishna's upon watching over the lake projects a wasted waterscape. The term 'waste' itself is an ambiguous term as often waste can be reused and repurposed in different sociocultural contexts. As per the narrative in the novel, here, the 'waste' can be applied to the present condition of the lake that remains unusable for a significant number of people who used to depend on the lake to sustain their livelihood. The lake is wasted for these groups, but it has also been repurposed by the adjacent fishing industry.

Through the accounts of Srinivasa Rao, the lake has slowly been pushed to death over the last six decades. Once a vast expanse of water that could "swallow the sun and moon" (Kutumbarao 2) has been shrunk into a small collection of commercial fishing ponds. The idea of collective farming was

implemented as a pilot project by Madhu, who was the most learned youth of the village at the time when Srinivara Rao was a teenager. Madhu was determined to uplift his village from the misery and give the poor villagers an economic independence based on modern techniques of pisciculture and agriculture. The first year of such farming turned in a grand success as both the Kammadora and Vaddiraja communities reaped their part of this collective farming. But things took a dark turn after the first year of success. When Srinivasa Rao curiously asked about the following years of collective farming as he was sent to his relative's house for study, a village elder Krishnabava, replied,

The collective farming went well for five or six years. Then the trouble started. As soon as everyone began to have some money each one thought he was a hero. These people began to say, why should the Vaddis have the fish in the Chinnagundam? The Vaddis said, not just the Chinnagundam but even the fish in the creeks you have made to let water into the fields belong to us. There was no one to moderate and settle matters. People like Madhu Annayya had left by then to look for jobs," and "...There were parties and groups and difference among the people. (Kutumbarao 189-190)

Through this account, it can easily be understood that capitalist aspiration played a crucial role in the death of the lake. In the later part of the novel, it is noticeable that the Vaddis flourished because of their profit from the fish ponds and they have also put in a petition for an airport as the fish is getting spoiled in the lorries. It signifies how ecological abundance remains vulnerable to capitalist exploitation. While the presence of biodiversity narrates the ecological health of the lake, its absence signifies ecological degradation. Their disappearance itself is a story told by the lake through the agency of absence and ecological silence.

Another striking aspect of the novel is the jump in the timeline and the sudden discovery of the lake's present condition by two childhood friends evoking suspicion about such changes that were unheard of by them. The reasons behind the absence of the news of such a monstrous water body being drastically altered by anthropocentric interventions in post-independence India can be assessed only through examining the socio-political and socio-cultural environment of that period.

Firstly, the lake was being altered slowly after the initial years of collective farming, individual and collective monetary aspirations of the Vaddiraja community started the mechanization of commercial fishing in the lake. Gradually the lake was turned into small pockets of water bodies for different species of freshwater fish. The entire process spanned over almost six decades with slow progress. Rob Nixon has termed such instances as "slow violence" as these mode of operations or degradation of the native environment take place over a long span of time, often remaining invisible to the "scopic regime" (Metz) of the general populace. The progression of such events remains so slow that the habitual vision of the spectator fails to recognize such alterations in the environment. The violence

“occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence that is delayed and the destruction that is dispersed across time and space, as attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all.” (Nixon 2) As violence is generally conceived as instantaneous and immediate in nature, “spectacular in space, and as erupting into instant sensational visibility.” (Nixon 2) The degradation of Kolleru was “neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales.” (Nixon 2) To render the long-spanned ecological degradation visible, Kutumbarao has intentionally employed the narrative distance of six decades. The sudden contrast between two different timelines makes the alteration explicitly visible. This has been thematically implied through Srinavasa Rao’s childhood memory of Kolleru and the present-day condition of the lake. Terraformation of the lake happened outside the “scopic regime” (Metz) of Srinivasa Rao and of the readers too. But the narrative difference of two timelines and Kolleru’s depiction at two different temporal locations helps its readers to weave the aftermath of the events.

Secondly, the slow death of the lake was enabled by other subsidiary factors, the Blue Revolution and the absence of private mass media in the following decades after independence. The Blue Revolution was initiated in India in the 1980s. It was heavily concentrated on sustainable fishing practices and it transformed India into the world’s second-largest fish producer. Yet some key challenges persisted regarding overfishing, water pollution and habitat degradation, which remain evident in *Softly Dies a Lake*.

Thirdly, the absence of news channels also rendered it invisible to the Indian populace. The narrative starts in the 1950s when All India Radio had the monopoly on news broadcasting and focused on major events and infotainment on popular demand. Doordarshan, a government-funded new television channel was founded in 1959 in Delhi and it broadcasted timely news bulletins and also entertainment on popular demand. Television was still considered a fancy and the population was used to listening to radios. All these factors enabled the slow death of the lake, hidden from everyone’s eye its ecology was degraded to the lowest.

Kolleru as a Geophysical Waste

Waste has always been associated multiple ambiguous meanings. Waste always is spatio-temporally, socio-culturally conditioned by agentic forces. Waste exists only within human-made systems as the universe doesn’t have any inherent place for waste. The universe is always a continuum of energy-matter exchange. Humanity’s urge to order things has always given birth to systems of different kinds, and elements from these systems have always been discarded to sustain and keep the system in harmony. Mary Dougals, in her seminal book *Purity and Danger* has argued these discards as “matter out of place.” If any element doesn’t comply with relevancy to its system, it is rendered as waste.

Waste remains as a concept not restricted only to physical bodies, it has also been used as a metaphorical term, to signify certain irrelevancy. In the case of Kolleru, the lake itself arises as a wasted geophysical body for the people of the Pulaparru as they can neither use its water for their cattle, nor catch fish in the lake due to extensive terraformation of the lake. Exploitation of natural resources originated in the colonial era, when the ecological abundance of newly discovered lands was exploited without any limitation or consideration of future consequences on the native population. The native population was rendered as disposable as they were out of the social systems of the colonizers and considered not worthy enough to be saved. The novel critiques the colonial idea of a “wasteland”, a colonial-era classification where any land not producing taxable revenue was considered a “wasteland”. Any virgin land was considered as wasteland and it was common practice to exploit the natural resources of the place. The development of the aquaculture industries in the lake is a modern rendition of this colonial-era idea. The capitalist system, by labelling the lake as “underutilized” justifies the destruction the ecology. Some of the Vaddis using this logic and political backing started exploiting the lake as they wished. Other were marginalized in this socio-political discourse of a developing nation.

It is also notable that the lake had a natural water flow; by constructing the fish ponds inside the lake bed, the lake was made a private property, which hindered the natural water cycle. Radhakrishna laments,

As soon as the government realised that there was unlimited wealth in Kolleru it placed it in the hands of greedy people. They occupied Kolleru. Knowing nothing we tried collective farming in Kolleru and we succeeded. If the Government so desired it could have developed Kolleru so well. Preserving Kolleru as it is could still have improved the lives of the farmers and the fisher folk. But no, they were not interested In Kolleru. Only in money! Money! Money! (Kutumbarao 195-196)

The lake was leased out to the wealthy and powerful industrialists who changed the pristine nature of it. As a result of this industrialization, it eventually became a toxic archive, anything that entered the lake stayed inside. The ‘soft death’ mentioned in the title of the novel signifies the circulatory system being choked by human interventions. The lake symbolically becomes a sink where the residues of the developments ultimately find their resting place. Toxins and waste from industries, chemicals from aquaculture and pesticides from the farmlands settle down in it.

Pulaparru, the village itself, is anything but separated from Kolleru. It also bears the scars of development. While the lake gradually changes its shape and nature, the village remains stagnant in time. With no grasslands and for their cattle and less fish in the toxic water of the lake, the people of the village also faced significant alteration in the socio-cultural domain. Most of them leave the village

at a very young age for study while a group of Vaddi fishermen lost their livelihood due to the lake's degradation. Material interpretation of the narrative indicates that human body is coextensive with the environment. When the lake is polluted, bioaccumulation of toxic chemicals in the lake's water multiplies its effects and the contamination moves through human bodies, displaying "unpredictable and unwanted action" of chemical agents crossing human-nonhuman boundaries. The "transcorporeal" (Alaimo) movements of drinking water renders the marginalized communities in the village vulnerable to chemically borne diseases.

The erosion of indigenous culture among the people of Pulaparru remains a focal point of the novel. The wasted ecology of the lake radically changed their food habits and their livelihood. The Kammadoras or the people who farmed on the banks of the lake, were out of their occupation due to the lack of freshwater and forced encroachment of their fertile agricultural lands. A handful of Vaddis enjoyed the profit at the expense of others. The poor villagers who couldn't keep up with the industrialization were soon rendered as "wasted" or "redundant human beings" (Bauman). The lake and the village of Pulaparru both eventually become wastelands in the imagination of a developing nation.

Conclusion

The striking present-day visuals of Kolleru evoke melancholy in the minds of the readers. A loss of a pristine waterbody is also a loss of an entire ecosystem. Life on the Earth started in the waters of the primitive oceans. Since then, water has been the lifeline for all living life forms. Water is an essential element for the foundation of life on the Earth. Water forms a complex intra-species and inter-species web; the web is interactive and remains in flux. However, this flux is not merely biological, it is deeply political. When the "web" is commodified, the ontological security of the species within it, including humans, is forfeited to the logic of capitalism. Through *Sofily Dies a Lake*, Kolleru's fictional wasting aligns empirically as the 2001 IRS imagery shows pond invasion. This visual evidence serves as a forensic indictment of anthropocentric greed, where the fluid boundaries of a shared space were carved into rigid, private enclosures. The government-initiated Operation Kolleru in 2004, which had razed 20,000 structures to reclaim the water surface (Kolli et al.) (Mehrotra) (Mehrotra). Yet, the pollution persists as eutrophication and the presence of heavy metals in the lake's water render the fish inedible. The failure of Operation Kolleru to "reset" the space illustrates that ecological restoration cannot be achieved through sheer structural demolition alone, the "ghosts" of heavy metals and chemical runoff remain as metabolic residue of industrial violence. It portrays the violation of the natural complexity of geophysical water bodies that takes lengthy monetary efforts to restore the balance.

That evening they looked at the Kolleru that had vanished and thinking of the enormity of the natural bounty that was destroyed with it forever they all grieved. They realised their

wrong but realised it too late. Looking at the dry, barren lifeless Kolleru one last time and thinking of the Kolleru of their childhood they set off for their homes. (Kutumbarao 196-197)

The distress caused by environmental change also portrays that the characters do not just mourn a view, they mourn a lost mode of being. The novel vividly reminds its readers of the Aral Sea in the heart of Central Asia. Once it was stretched to the borders of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. The Aral Sea has been rapidly drying since the 1960s, its main feeder river the Amu Dar'ya was reverted towards the Caspian Sea by the USSR for its cotton industry, the surface area was decreased by 88% and water volume by 92%, and salinity increased by 20-fold. The parallels between the Soviet engineering of the Aral Sea and the local mismanagement of Kolleru are staggering as both prioritize short-term monocultural output, over long-term sustainability. Thousands of people from fishing communities abandoned their homes, large vessels can be seen in the seabed today, big ports where once the catches were unloaded, their remains can be found with broken walls and rusted machinery. These abandoned ports and towns seem like post-apocalyptic remnants of a lost world. The rusted hulls of ships in a desert are the skeletal remains of a broken contract between humanity and the hydrosphere. Julian Caldecott in his book *Water: Life in Every Drop* has described the Aral Sea as “one of the most spectacular ecological disasters of the Twentieth Century” (Caldecott 141). Strikingly, Kutumbarao has also mentioned present-day Kolleru as, “a beautiful and sweet memory and a tragedy” (Kutumbarao 197) shows how these two wasted water bodies are temporally connected with each other.

The United Nations General Assembly in 2015 formulated 17 SDGs, or Sustainable Development Goals as part of the Post-2015 Development Agenda, SDG 12 is about responsible consumption and production, that is to ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns. SDG 14 is about conserving and sustainably using the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development (4). While these global frameworks provide a linguistic scaffolding for change, *Softly Dies a Lake* suggests that without a fundamental shift in general “eco-consciousness,” such goals remain mere bureaucratic rhetoric. Unregulated aquaculture and overfishing for more profit break down the ecology of a water body like Kolleru, degrading it to mere fish ponds has brought ecological disasters in the area as well as in the lives of the people surrounding it. The narrative demands more than just efficiency; it calls for a recognition of the lake as a living subject with its own right to exist. The novel can be considered as a perfect example of what an ecological disaster can do to every living and non-living organism, sustainable cohabitation, mutual sharing of the biosphere, and acknowledging climate change both as an individual and as a collective issue can prove to be helpful for developing a bright sustainable future. Ultimately, Kutumbarao's work acts as a literary “Ramsar site,” preserving the memory of what was lost to ensure that the “wasting” of Kolleru serves as a global warning against the hubris of environmental mastery.

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