



An Eco-Critical Study of Exploring Nature, Humanity, and Environmental Consciousness in A.K. Ramanujan's "A River"

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Abstract

This research paper employs an eco-critical approach to analyze the poem "A River" written by A.K. Ramanujan. By examining the intertwining relationship between nature, humanity, and environmental consciousness, this paper aims to shed light on the ecological dimensions of the poem. It speaks of the over-flowing river Vaigai in Madurai and its dry state in comparison. Drawing on eco-critical theories and concepts, such as the interconnectedness of all living beings and the representation of landscapes, this analysis delves into the poem's portrayal of nature, its impact on human experience, and the poet A.K. Ramanujan's ecological message. Through this exploration, we gain a deeper understanding of the environmental themes and their implications for our collective responsibility towards the natural world.

Keywords: Eco-Criticism, Nature, Humanity, A.K. Ramanujan, "A River".

Introduction

The poem "A River" by A.K. Ramanujan is a reflection on the nature of existence and the passing of time. The river in which the poem is set serves as a metaphor for life's cycles and the transition from birth to death. Ramanujan was an English and Kannada-writing poet, scholar, and translator from India. He was raised in Kolkata after being born in Mysore in 1929. He attended the University of Mysore while pursuing his education, and afterwards graduated with a PhD in linguistics from Indiana University, Bloomington. Ramanujan was well known for his skill in fusing traditional Indian culture with modern Western philosophy, and his work was greatly impacted by his upbringing in a bilingual and multicultural milieu. When "A River" was written in the 1960s, India was going through a lot of transformation. The nation was attempting to forge a new identity as it emerged from colonial domination. Ramanujan investigates the connections between tradition and modernity, nature and culture, and the individual and the community in his poetry, which conveys this feeling of flux and development. The speaker of the poem begins by reflecting on the river's flow, which is called both "ancient" and "young." As it travels through various climes and landscapes, the river is both constant and always changing. The river, according to the speaker, is tenacious and elusive at the same time because it forges new connections and forges new paths while still carrying the memories and customs of the past. The speaker is dragged deeper and deeper into the enigmatic river as the poem goes on. They start to understand the river as a spiritual power that unites everything, in addition to being a physical reality. The speaker experiences awe and wonders as the river takes on the meaning of the interconnectivity of all life. Finally, when the speaker bows to the river's flow, the poem comes to a close on a note of acceptance and submission. The poem urges readers to let go of the past and embrace the present to be carried by life's enduring force. In general, Ramanujan's "A River" is a deeply



spiritual and intellectual poem that displays his multifaceted worldview and his distinctive fusion of Western and Indian philosophies. It is still a potent and enduring piece of poetry that has a lasting impact on readers everywhere.

Review of Literature

Narayanan's "Riverscape: of Time and Memory in A. K. Ramanujan's Poetry" examines the theme of time and memory in Ramanujan's poems, specifically related to rivers, especially "A River" about the river Vaigai in Tamil Nadu. The article delves into how Ramanujan uses the metaphor of rivers to explore the intersection of past and present, personal and collective memory in his poems.

Kavitha's "Undiscovering the River: An Ecocritical Analysis of A. K. Ramanujan's 'A River' and 'Still Life'" takes an ecocritical approach to Ramanujan's poems and focuses on how the poet uses the river as a metaphor for the portrayal of environment. The close reading of the poems "A River" and "Still Life," in the article argues that Ramanujan's poetry is marked by an innate yearning for environmental consciousness. It also highlights the need for greater awareness for environmental concerns in the modern society.

Sekhar's "Ecocritical Perspectives in A. K. Ramanujan's Poetry" takes an ecocritical approach to Ramanujan's poetry. The article argues that Ramanujan uses natural elements such as the river, trees, and animals as symbols that portray ecological sustainability. The article also stresses the importance of Ramanujan's poetry in making readers aware of environmental issues.

Ghanekar's "Myths of Materiality: A. K. Ramanujan's 'A River' and 'Looking for a Cousin on a Swing'" analyzes the poems "A River" and "Looking for a Cousin on a Swing" and explore how his poetry subverts traditional myths and narratives into poetic themes. The article highlights the importance of the river as a symbol that represents both life and death.

Sridhar's "On the Ecological Significance of A. K. Ramanujan's 'A River'" examines the eco-critical elements in the poem "A River." The article portrays that Ramanujan's poem can be read as a warning bell against the rude exploitation of nature. It can be a suitable one to show the present debris made by man. The article concludes that Ramanujan's poetry is highly relevant to the current environmental problems.

Krishna's "The Poetics of Water in A. K. Ramanujan's 'A River'" delves into the symbolic importance of water. The article analyzes Ramanujan's use of water imagery in "A River" and highlights its connection to themes of time, memory, loss and cultural identity.

Viswanathan's "A Rereading of A. K. Ramanujan's A River" examines "A River" in the context of Nature's significance. The article argues that the poem can be interpreted as a commentary on the human condition and its relationship to nature.

Chandra's "'Breaking and Entering': A. K. Ramanujan's Articulation of Ecstasy in 'A River'" analyzes the poem "A River" in terms of its relation to the concept of natural aesthetics in literature. The article examines how the poet uses language and imagery to evoke a sense of intense emotion, feeling, aesthetic sense and transcendence in the minds of the reader.

Sujatha's "The Poetics of Cultures: A Critical Study of A. K. Ramanujan's Poetry" takes a much broader perspective on Ramanujan's poetry. It examines its connection to Indian cultural traditions, sites and heritage. The article argues that Ramanujan's poetry reflects the complex coordination between multiple cultural influences and offers a unique perspective on cultural identity that gives the sense of nativity with nature.

The review of literature proves that the inner core of A. K. Ramanujan's Poem "A River" has deep influence of nature and his view points on nature. It could be a suitable



theme to write at the present state of ecological imbalance, climate change and green house problems. Hence, an eco-critical analysis would be a suitable one for getting the eco based ideas in the poem.

Origins of Eco-Criticism

Eco-criticism is an interdisciplinary approach that examines the relationship between literature and the natural environment. It emerged in the late 20th century as a response to growing environmental concerns and a desire to understand the ecological dimensions of literary texts. Eco-criticism draws on theories and methodologies from fields such as literary studies, ecology, environmental philosophy, and cultural studies. The key ideas in eco-criticism include the interconnection between humans and the natural world, the representation of nature in literature, the examination of environmental crises, and the exploration of ecological ethics and responsibility.

Eco-Critical Analysis and Literary Works

The eco-critical analysis involves examining literary works through an environmental lens. It seeks to understand how nature is portrayed, how human-nature relationships are depicted, and what environmental messages or themes are conveyed in the text. The eco-critical approach to "A River" allows for a deeper understanding of how the poem represents nature, explores human-nature relationships, and addresses environmental concerns. It helps uncover the ecological dimensions of the text and highlights the significance of environmental consciousness in Ramanujan's work.

Depiction of the Natural Landscape

In "A River," Ramanujan portrays the river as a living entity with agency and presence. The river is characterized by its continuous flow and its ability to shape the landscape. It is depicted as a powerful force that moves through various terrains, reflecting the dynamism and vitality of nature. Ramanujan vividly describes the natural landscape surrounding the river, incorporating sensory details that evoke the reader's imagination. He captures the beauty and diversity of the natural world, from the "stone and water" to the "leaves and birds." The Flora and fauna in the poem serve as symbols of the interconnectedness of all living beings. Ramanujan employs the imagery of trees, flowers, birds, and fish to illustrate the rich biodiversity and fragile balance of the ecosystem. The poem also acknowledges the influence of weather and seasonal changes on the river and its surroundings. Ramanujan highlights the cyclical nature of the environment, emphasizing how the river's character and appearance are shaped by the changing seasons.

Human Perception of Nature

Ramanujan explores the human perception of nature in "A River". He highlights the awe-inspiring beauty of the natural world and suggests that humans often fail to fully appreciate or understand its significance. The poem suggests that nature has a profound impact on human experience. The river is depicted as a source of solace and inspiration,

Exploitation versus Harmony

Ramanujan reflects on the contrasting approaches of exploitation and harmony towards the environment. Humans, as portrayed in the poem, have the potential to exploit nature for their own needs or coexist harmoniously with it. The poem hints at the destructive consequences of exploitation through imagery such as "The factory hoots, the mournful flute" (Ramanujan, line 6). This industrial presence signifies the negative impact of human activities on the river and the surrounding ecosystem. Further, Ramanujan presents an alternative approach to harmony by emphasizing the river's intrinsic beauty and the need for humans to appreciate and protect it. The river's significance lies in its ability to sustain life



and inspire awe, calling for a more considerate and responsible human-nature relationship.

Ecological Responsibility

“A River” highlights the importance of environmental responsibility and stewardship towards the environment. Ramanujan suggests that humans have to care for and protect nature rather than exploit it. The poem encourages a sense of stewardship through the portrayal of the river as a living entity deserving of respect. The river's continuous flow and its power to shape the landscape serve as reminders of its intrinsic value and the need for human guardianship. By emphasizing the interconnection between humans and nature, Ramanujan implies that responsible actions towards the environment are essential for the well-being of both parties. This echoes the principles of ecological responsibility, urging individuals to act as caretakers of the natural world.

Ecopoetics and Poetic Language

The poem employs poetic language that enhances its ecopoetic qualities. Ramanujan's vivid imagery and descriptive language create an immersive experience, allowing readers to connect with the natural world and contemplate their ecological surroundings. The poet utilizes metaphors and personification to animate the river and the natural landscape. This figurative language not only deepens the reader's engagement but also reinforces the idea that nature is a living entity deserving of empathy and care.

Ecological Theme

The poem conveys several ecological themes and messages. It raises awareness about the vulnerability of the environment, the consequences of human actions, and the urgent need for sustainable practices. The poem prompts reflection on the interconnectedness of all living beings and emphasizes the importance of preserving biodiversity. Through its portrayal of flora, fauna, and natural cycles, the poem conveys a message of ecological balance and the delicate harmony that sustains life. Ramanujan's poem subtly represents an environmental crisis through its depictions of industrialization and exploitation. The presence of the factory symbolizes the degradation of the river and the surrounding ecosystem. This representation underscores the urgency of addressing environmental issues and seeking sustainable alternatives. “A River” serves as a call for environmental awareness and action. Ramanujan's portrayal of the river's beauty and its vital role in sustaining life

Environmental and Ecocentric Ethics

The poem projects a powerful environmental message that critiques the exploitation of nature and calls for a more harmonious human-nature relationship. Ramanujan presents the destructive consequences of human activities on the river and its ecosystem, evoking a sense of urgency to address environmental issues. The poem encourages readers to reflect upon their role in the degradation of the natural world and prompts a shift towards responsible and sustainable actions. “A River” has profound implications for ecocentric ethics, which prioritize the intrinsic value of the environment and advocate for its protection. The poem portrays nature as a living entity deserving of respect and stewardship. It invites readers to adopt an ecocentric perspective, recognizing the interconnectedness of all living beings and the importance of preserving biodiversity. By emphasizing the need for ecological responsibility, the poem aligns with ecocentric ethics, urging individuals to prioritize the well-being of the environment over human-centred interests.

Literature and Environmental Advocacy

“A River” exemplifies the role of literature in environmental advocacy. Through its vivid descriptions, evocative imagery, and emotional impact, the poem raises environmental consciousness and prompts readers to reevaluate their relationship with nature. Literature has



the power to inspire empathy, provoke critical thinking, and mobilize action. By incorporating environmental themes and messages, literary works like “A River” contribute to shaping public discourse, fostering a deeper understanding of ecological issues, and encouraging positive environmental change.

A Stanza Wise analysis of the Poem

"A River" is a powerful eco-critical analysis of the environmental degradation caused by human activities. The poet's use of vivid imagery and poetic language draws attention to the pressing environmental issues that plague our world. It highlights the need for greater empathy and compassion towards both, the environment and its victims.

**In Madurai,
city of temples and poets,
who sang of cities and temples,
every summer
a river dries to a trickle
in the sand,
baring the sand ribs,
straw and women's hair
clogging the Watergates
at the rusty bars
under the bridges with patches
of repair all over them
the wet stones glistening like sleepy
crocodiles, the dry ones
shaven water-buffaloes lounging in the sun
The poets only sang of the floods. (L 1-16)**

The poem "A River" by A.K. Ramanujan presents an eco-critical analysis of the impact of human activities on a river. The first stanza sets the context of Madurai, a city of temples and poets who sang of cities and temples. However, the river in Madurai dries up to a trickle in summer, exposing sand ribs, straw, and women's hair clogging the watergates. The rusty bars under the bridges are patched all over them. The wet stones glisten like sleepy crocodiles, while the dry ones look like shaven water-buffaloes lounging in the sun. The poet presents a vivid picture of how human activities have made the river suffer, reducing it to a barren sight. The riverside is littered with waste, and the watergates are clogged, indicating a lack of care for the environment.

**He was there for a day
when they had the floods.
People everywhere talked
of the inches rising,
of the precise number of cobbled steps
run over by the water, rising
on the bathing places,
and the way it carried off three village houses,
one pregnant woman
and a couple of cows
named Gopi and Brinda as usual. (L 17-26)**

In the second stanza, the poet presents the perspective of people during the floods. People discussed in detail every inch of the rising water, the precise number of cobbled steps



overrun by the water, and how it carried off three village houses, one pregnant woman, and a couple of cows named Gopi and Brinda. However, no one spoke in verse about the drowned pregnant woman, who may have been expecting identical twins with no moles on their bodies and different coloured diapers to tell them apart. The poet points out the ignorance of people during the floods, where they are only concerned with material things that affect them, forgetting the significance of human lives that are lost.

**The new poets still quoted
the old poets, but no one spoke
in verse
of the pregnant woman
drowned, with perhaps twins in her,
kicking at blank walls
even before birth.**

**He said:
the river has water enough
to be poetic
about only once a year
and then
it carries away
in the first half-hour
three village houses,
a couple of cows
named Gopi and Brinda
and one pregnant woman
expecting identical twins
with no moles on their bodies,
with different coloured diapers
to tell them apart. (L 18-48)**

The final stanza reminds the readers that the river is poetic enough that only once a year when it floods. However, during this time, it carries away human lives and destroys the environment. The poet highlights the tragedy of the river, which is appreciated for its beauty only when it is dangerous. The poem portrays a harsh reality of how human actions have desecrated the river, making it a threat to human life. The poet concludes the poem with a powerful statement that questions the need for a poem when the reality of the river is more critical, and the loss of human life is evident.

Conclusion

The poem “A River” serves as a poignant eco-critical text that reflects on the exploitation vs. harmony in human-nature relationships, emphasizes ecological responsibility and stewardship, and calls for environmental awareness and action. Through its environmental message, the poem prompts critique, reflection, and introspection, challenging readers to reassess their impact on the environment. An eco-critical analysis of “A River” reveals its multifaceted representation of nature, human-nature relationships, and environmental consciousness. The poem portrays nature as a living entity, emphasizes the interconnectedness of all life forms, and highlights the consequences of human actions on the environment. It calls for a shift towards ecocentric ethics, advocating for a harmonious coexistence between humans and nature. “A River” underscores the significance of environmental consciousness in the modern world. It serves as a reminder of the urgent need



to address environmental issues, promote sustainable practices, and foster a sense of ecological responsibility. The poem encourages individuals to develop a deeper connection with nature, cultivate empathy for the environment, and take proactive steps towards a more sustainable and harmonious future.

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