

ECOLOGICAL SENSIBILITY IN A.K.RAMANUJAN'S 'THE RIVER' AND 'ECOLOGY'

Madhavi M. Arekar*

ABSTRACT

This paper proposes to explore the Environmental sensibility through Indian English Poetry. Poetry, through the means of self expression, aids to comprehend how the materialistic culture has led human beings to destroy and damage Ecosystem and Natural Environment. The present paper concentrates on the poems "The River" and "Ecology" by A.K.Ramanujan to explore how an Indian English poet weaves Environmental sensibility in his poems and speaks about Environment related global concerns into Indian literary education, awareness, and life view of Philosophy. This paper will also contribute in understanding natural Environment, its numerous issues that are affecting the world today. It will also aid in understanding the interlink age that exists in a network of relationships between the Natural Environment and human beings. It will help to understand the energy dynamics and develop a culture based on the transcendent human values of Love, wonder, humility, compassion, environmental ethics, civic responsibility towards oneself and Mother Earth. Thus, developing a spiritual touch to every human activity.

Keywords : Ramanujan, environment, river, nature, ecology.

INTRODUCTION

A work of genius must have "spirit" which it gets through its content.

- Kant, Immanuel

The interaction of perception with nature and apprehension of it does create genius. This interaction takes place with the help of language. Language as a tool to communication; it communicate one's culture, identity and values to the world. Similarly it helps to understand the culture, tradition, socio-eco-political milieu as it holds a mirror to life. In India, sages like Valmiki Vyasa, Tulsidas, Kabir, have handed down to Indians a tradition of the mind, the conscious, the uniqueness of being and the relationship between man, the Supreme Being the cosmic energy and Nature (Khalakdina). Traditionally, thus, Nature was worshipped in every household of India. It is interestingly related to ritualistic pattern that use ecological symbols such as the use of fruits and earth giving products to symbolize obeisance to the god-head.

The present Research paper explores some possible opportunities to spread environmental sensibility and awareness through poems of A.K. Ramanujan. Poetry conveys knowledge- a kind of knowledge which emerges itself from the taste. Aristotle said, "Poetry is more philosophical than history, for history deals with the particular philosophy with the universal". Philosophy as a foundational discipline gives ample scope to poetry for its relation with nature. It reveals nature and provides a different ontological view for genius. The psychological empathy and re-enactment, which are fundamental tools for understanding a phenomena is provided by poetry. On this ground, the Researcher will see how Ramanujan's poems are the real enactment of environmental reality and transform reality in sensible Reality.

* Assistant Professor, (Department of English), VPM's K. G. Joshi College of Arts & N.G. Bedekar College of Commerce, Thane. Maharashtra.

Nature and love for nature was the central theme in the poems of Rabindranath Tagore, Sarojini Naidu, and Aurobindo. This centrality to nature and love provides a holistic cosmic worldview which interrelate nature with human community in a harmonious relation. However, with winds of change and advancement of science and technology, the tradition's firmly rooted belief of Indians in nature slowly got divorced. Though Nature resides in some corner of every hearth, the materialistic culture and competitive attitude and extreme change in the life styles of human beings accelerated the process of decline in the importance of Environment and its impact on sustainable human life. Thus, the Research paper also aims in restoring the awareness and sensibility about Ecology and Nature through poems of Ramanujan who advocates the presence of Nature in its various forms helps to understand the active significant role played by Nature in human life.

A. K. Ramanujan was born in Mysore, Karnataka in 1929, settled down permanently in Chicago. Though he stayed permanently in USA he never forgot his roots in Indian culture and heritage. He not only wrote poems in English and Tamil but also in Kannada. He had published 3 volumes of poems "The Striders", "Relation" and "Second Sight". "The Striders" received a certificate of commendation from the Poetry society. He also received the Gold Medal of the Tamil Writers' Associations for "The Interior Landscape." He had also been contributing articles and poems to various English and American Magazines and Journals.

Ramanujan is one of the celebrated Indo-Anglican poets. His poetry is largely autobiographical. Hindu Heritage as a theme is equally important to Ramanujan. He has appeared as a diasporic poet and his early poet is marked with nostalgia and identity crisis in the diasporic location as a displaced individual. To talk about his craftsmanship his poetry is image oriented. His images are precise, concrete, and vivid. This is evident in poems like 'Of mothers', 'Among other things', 'A River', 'Small Scale Reflection on a great House' and 'Snakes'.

The observational concreteness of social reality with its substantial essence is the sign of Ramanujan's poetry. The role of poet is highly debatable issue in academics but the central remark can be A poet acts as the antenna of the society, his poetry establishes relationship so as to sustain society."

(Terblanche) This can be evidently studied in Ramanujan's poetry. He has revealed himself as a poet of substance and hence one more perspective to his poems i.e. environmental sensibility and awareness which this research paper attempts through his poems 'A River' and 'Ecology.'

'A River' is one of his well known poems. It refers to the ancient city of Madurai, a city of great learning and culture in ancient India. In this poem, we see the diverse thought process in relation to different cultures. The culture, which provides a worldview where one, tries to bring out beauty in suffering because they suffer at the sight of every troubled creature because they feel oneness with it. Whereas the others advocates logical scientific rational through process and are more concern in depicting the things as they are.

We can see this distinction through the poems 'The River', which emphasis on environmental issues of floods.

“...a river dries to a trickle
Is the sand
Baring the sand ribs
Straw and women's hair
Toggling the water gates
At the rusty bars
Under the bridges with patches
Of repairs all over them
The wet stones glistening.... (Ramanujan)

Madurai is a city a temples, place of great learning for arts and culture. It is also a city of poets. Here poet wrote about how in every summer, a river that flow through Madurai is narrow stream through the water gates as piles straw and women's hair obstruct its flow. When there is swelling in human body, it causes pus or water the body has to throw away the excess water. Similarly, the river throw out the excess water, it gets flooded washing away everything that's meaningful for humans. The bridges over this river are marked with several repairs patches which reflects the damage which is caused to Mother Earth due to urban construction activities. Through this stanza, the Diaspora poet-speaker has made us aware of ill-effects of littering especially of plastic that many a time chokes the drainage system (pipes), railway tracks in cities and cause inconvenience to our own lives.

Economic, Spatial progress is necessary but not at the cost of Nature. Concretization and construction activity has not only led to eroding of soil but is has also obstructed outlet of water in cities. Just like the river in the poem gets flooded.

The poets only sang of the floods....

...
Hewasthereforaday
Whentheyhadt hefloods
Peopleeverywheretalked
Oftheinchesrising....(Ramanujan)

These lines explain to us that a visitor once happened to spend one day in Madurai and could experience the imminent flood. The water level was rising speedily and washed away the village homes, one pregnant woman and a couple of cows almost every year. These experiences are routine in our society.

Mumbai 2005 deluge is an apt example to explain the destruction and damage caused to life and property due to flooding of Mithi river and cloud burst over Mumbai. Ironically Mumbaikars except some few geographers, environmentalist and social workers were oblivious of the fact that a river named Mithi exists in Mumbai. And nature has its own way to making its presence and power felt. Years and years of dirt and garbage piled up illegal and wide spread construction of mangroves, dumping of poisonous hazardous plastic, destruction of mangroves which is rich in flora and fauna, haphazard construction of skyscrapers has caused a heavy toll on lives on thousands of people. Flooding of Mithi and cloud burst completely washed away innumerable lives.

The very recent Flash floods at Uttarakhand(Kedarnath and Badrinath)have taken the lives and livelihood of more than ten thousands of people. All the symbols of our so called 'progress' of man's triumph over Nature highways, cars, buildings on mountain top ledges were completely destroyed with one wave of River Ganga. The illusion was shattered and the truth of Nature's power was laid bare.

Nature is a teacher and preacher too. It's like a living entity. It reacts with the same force of us causing damage to it. "Nature as self is known as 'Deep Ecology'. It is nothing but extended self of nature. The point of view here is 'to harm nature is to harm ourselves', (Das).

With the Himalayan tsunami one should understand singing Ganga's glories or taking a dip in her does not render us immune to Laws of Nature. That which we sow, so shall we reap. If we sow illegal construction, deceptive politics, consumerism, we shall reap fruits of destruction & devastation.

In the poem, 'A River' we read that this situation of flood occurs every year. To cite an example here in India we often get to read in newspaper about rivers getting flooded in Orissa, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh. This happen cause there is no ecological balance maintained and no active responsibility by humans.

Nature will never give any reason for its fury. Floods, storms, earthquake, volcanoes are the natural disasters. With floods, there is loss of lives and property, storms wipes away agricultural fields. But earthquakes and volcanoes cause irreparable damages.

Due to modernization and globalization there is a rapid environmental disaster caused due to deforestation, mining, expansion of urban areas etc. Through such poems we can by to understand the cultural development that has led to present global ecological crises.

Education and Nature are interrelated. We, human acquire knowledge through various experiences of natures. "Even just a passive observation of nature gives knowledge. The sea, sand, mountains, rivers, plants, animals, climate, temperature and seasons influence the character and thinking of a person."(Alex).

The ancient Indian literature and philosophy, the Greek studies and other were ecological in nature. Tribals and natives of various regions in India believe in harmony between man and nature, they believe that earth itself as a living organism is capable of experiencing pain and pleasure. The destruction of Nature is evil, oppression of mother earth is sinful and hence we have to maintain the environment properly as Nature is a sacred goddess.

"Deep Ecology,... is radial version of environmentalism, conceived in the early 1970s by the Norwegain philosopher, Arne Naess and developed in the 1980s and US environmentalists Bill Devall and George Sessions. Deep Ecologists reject merely technological and managerial solution, because there constitute yet another form of human dominance. Instead, Deep Ecologists advocate bio centric view, which recognizes there non human world as having value independently of its usefulness to human beings, who have no right to destroy it except to meet vital needs" (Waugh) Now these views of Deep Ecologists and our tribals from various regions of India is clearly reflected in A. K. Ramanujan's 'Ecology'.

“wet as the cold pack on her head
Would not let us cut down
A flowering tree. . . .”(Ramanujan)

This poem speaks about the old traditional view towards Nature. The three red champak trees in front of the speaker's house burst into flower and spread the fragrance everywhere in the house; this brings migraine attaché to the speaker's mother. And at once the speaker suggests cutting down the trees. However the mother tells the family not to do so as she has developed a very loving bond with the trees. She is ready to have cold pack on her head but is not ready to cut the trees.

This poem deals with the problem of environmental pollution. There are innumerable species of plants, trees and animals on this earth, some of them are beneficial and useful to mankind but some are not. Things which seem to be un-useful at times also have something positive in them.

“The day after the first rain,
For years I would come home
In a range,
For I could see from a mile away
Out there Red Champak trees
Had done it again,
Had burst into flower and given Mother
Her first blinding migraine
Of the season”(Ramanujan)

These three 'red champak trees' begin to flower after the first monsoon. The strong fragrance brings migraine attacks to the speaker's mother but she does not agree to do away with the trees as she has developed a kind of associational intimacy with them here we can learn that our basic ethos has taught us to live in harmony with nature ; in a relationship of mutual dependence.

“to give her gods and her daughters
And daughter's daughters basketfuls
Of annual flower”(Ramanujan)

The mother in the poem further says that her daughters and daughters' daughter would get the basketful of annual flower from those trees so she is ready to ignore her personal in conveniences, keeping in view the larger interest of humanity.

This kind of intense and personal commitment should be shown by every individual towards nature and environment rather those suggesting quick fix solutions that we give (like cutting down the trees suggested by the speakers in the poem) without taking into account the future implication and consequences on generations to come.

Deep Ecological sense of self needs to be practiced which requires further maturity and growth an identification which includes both human and non human

world. "If this kind of attitude is allowed to grow in practice, the world will never face the problem of ecological imbalance". (Singh) . In the poem 'Ecology' we can see two perfectly opposite view points. The poet speaker is a perfect example of modernity which is ever ready with instance selfish without giving any thought to the future implications whereas the mother represents traditional view of "Return to Nature" life. She belongs to the Indian ethos and culture whereas every aspect of Nature is often worshiped even poisonous snake is considered as god and worshipped in many parts of India.

But the technological advancement and stand for material prosperity changes life styles believe in the throwing away, discarding cutting it off anything and everything that comes in the way of happiness and prosperity.

However one must remember, 'No one is saved until we are all saved', where the phrase 'one' includes not only... an individual human, but all humans, whales, grizzly bears, whole rain forest ecosystems, mountains and rivers, the funnies microbes in the soil, and so one." (Sessions).

Thus in face of human violence perpetrated on Nature, Environment learning through such poems highlights the importance of environment in Literature as well as the relationship between Literature and Nature.

Hence the analysis of such Indian English poems in the literary analysis favours the understanding of environmental conditions and issues and expresses a firm faith in an inseparable bond between human and non-human world. Literature through such poems can have an impact in raising the environmental sensibility and consciousness of society which in turn will definitely impact the future of mankind on earth.

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