

A. K. Ramanujan's Poetic Landscapes: An Ecofeminist Interpretation

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Abstract: In A. K. Ramanujan's poetry, there is a strong sense of humanity, ethical values, and the relevance of life. His poems also exhibit an ecological perspective, highlighting his connection with nature. His poems not only express this human touch but also reflect an ecological perspective. One of the key aspects of his poetry is his deep connection and kinship with nature, which is evident in many of his works. Ecofeminism is explained as a philosophical and social movement. It reflects the interconnectedness of the domination on women and the destruction of the nature. It emphasizes the need to challenge patriarchal and the capitalist systems that exploit both environment and the women both. This paper aims to explore the ecofeministic approach. His love for nature is evident in his portrayal of trees, cows, insects, and hens. Memory holds a significant role in his poetic works as he captures experiences and memories. The main objective of this paper is to analyze the elements of ecofeminism in his poetry. His poems 'Chess Under Tree', 'The Black Hen', 'A River' taken to focus elements of ecofeminism.

Keywords: ecofeminism, interconnectedness, ecosystem, ecology, nature

INTRODUCTION

A.K. Ramanujan's poetry resonates with humanity, capturing the essence and relevance of life. This paper explores the elements of ecofeminism present in his poetry. Ecofeminism is said as a social and political movement that investigates the relationship between the domination of

nature and the subjugation of women. Ramanujan's love for nature is beautifully portrayed in his poems, where he assigns significance to various elements such as trees, cows, insects, and hens. Nature serves as a source of inspiration and solace for him, and he vividly captures its essence in his verses. Moreover, memory plays a vital role in his poetry, as he often draws upon personal experiences and recollections, making him a poet deeply rooted in the tapestry of his own life. Throughout his works, Ramanujan explores diverse themes, delving into the complexities of human existence and the natural world. However, the central focus of this paper remains on unraveling the elements of ecofeminism present in his poetry. By examining this perspective, we can gain a deeper understanding of Ramanujan's profound connection with nature and the profound themes he explores in his poetic creations.

The term, “ecofeminism” was coined in 1974 by the French feminist, Francoise D’Eaubonne, who inspired women to lead an ecological revolution to save the planet. The philosophy that envisaged a balanced relationship between man and woman, nature and the human beings.

“Many feminists have argued for that, as Rosemary Ruther wrote in 1975 in her book, *New Woman/New Earth*: Women must see that there can be no liberation for them and no solution to the ecological crisis within a society whose fundamental model of relationships continues to be one of domination. They must unite the demands of the women’s movement with those of the ecological movement to envision a radical reshaping of the basic socioeconomic relations and the underlying values of this [modern industrial] society.”(1)(Mellor 1997)

In his book *Ecofeminist Nature* (1997), Noel Sturgeon defines Ecofeminism as “a movement that makes connections between environmentalism and feminisms.” In her book *Ecofeminist Philosophy* (2000) Karen Warren illustrates a key insight of ecological feminism that is captured by the phrase “it’s all connected.” In more precise terms, ecofeminism stresses the depth to which human realities are embedded in ecological realities, and the fact that we are all composed of physical and conceptual connections and relationships.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative textual analysis approach to examine ecofeminist themes in A.K. Ramanujan's poetry. Three representative poems are selected: 'Chess Under Tree', 'The Black Hen', and 'A River'. The methodology involves close reading, identification of nature imagery and feminist themes, and application of ecofeminist theory. The analysis focuses on

the interconnectedness between environmental and feminist themes, exploring how Ramanujan's cultural background and personal experiences shape his ecofeminist perspective. Literary devices, recurring motifs, and the portrayal of nature are examined within the ecofeminist framework. The study synthesizes findings from textual, contextual, and theoretical analyses to draw conclusions about the significance of ecofeminist elements in Ramanujan's poetry.

DISCUSSION

Ecofeminism is a social and political movement that always explores the interconnection between the domination of mother nature and the subjugation on women. Ecofeminism mainly recognizes the gender oppression and the degradation of environment. It highlights the need for ecological sustenance and gender equality.

Nature's Power Dynamics in Ramanujan's *Chess Under Trees*"

Ramanujan's poem "Chess Under Trees" portrays the eco-feministic elements in the following lines:

"The mountain skies
were preoccupied by dynasties
of the mountain-pine" (*Collected Poems*, 27)

These lines evoke a sense of nature and depict its close relationship to the power dynamics that relates to the eco-feminist perspective. Through an ecofeministic lens 'the mountain skies' and "mountain-pine" portrays the connection between natural world and femininity. Here ecofeminism recognizes the parallel between the dominance and the exploitation of nature and the subjugation of women. "Ecofeminism sees women as being naturally closer to nature, making them more caring about the environment. Some link this to biology, while others cite culture and history. Vandana Shiva stresses redefining productivity. Women work to protect nature, challenge social norms, and create better roles, jobs, and policies for a sustainable future." (Anjum Dr. Tasneem p. 2)

The mention of the "dynasties" in relation with the mountain-pine suggests a critique of hierarchical power structures. The critiques of ecofeminism that tells about patriarchal systems

that prioritize with dominance, exploitation and the controlling over both the mother nature and women. (The idea of the “mountain-pine” represents a dynasty can be interpreted as a subversion of these dominant power dynamics). Referring to the mountain pine trees as dynasties portrays a sense of reverence and respect for nature. Ecofeminism here advocates for recognition and appreciation the essential value of nature beyond its instrumental use challenging the objectification and misuse of natural resources. The title of the poem itself suggests that (Chess Under Trees) nature can inspire and guide human endeavors. Ecofeminists aim to protect nature while also addressing social issues like gender, race, and poverty. It is believed by the ecofeminists that the oppression of women, children, marginalized groups, and the environment are connected and should be fought together. The term "ecofeminism" became well-known through protests against environmental harm. (Dr. Tialila p. 4)

By stating that the mountain skies were preoccupied by the dynasties of the mountain pine here the poet want to tell the attributes human-like qualities to the natural world. Presenting nature is the most common aspect of the ecofeminist literature. It challenges the notion of the domination of human world over the natural world and emphasizes the essential value of non-human entities. “Feminism is the movement that advocates the rights for women whereas ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the environment. The distinction between ecocriticism and ecofeminism can be outlined through Estok clear observations: that the two approaches “complement each other and [work] toward defining more fully what each approach envisions” (Estok). The ecological calamity on earth are directly provoked by the human beings disregarding the rights of the other components of nature. Hence, Estok argues that “in ecofeminism, nature is the central category of analysis” (Estok). Feminism involves patriarchal existence, in contrary, ecofeminism, the patriarchy dominates the environment and also women. He also points out that “[...] the hatred of women and the hatred of nature are intimately connected and mutually reinforcing” (Estok). His observation recognizes the interconnection between the oppression of human and nonhuman nature.” (Swati Choudhary p. 2)

Sanjit Chakraborty in his research paper titled “FEMINISM: CONFRONTING A CONTRADICTION” explores that in a patriarchal society women are always seen in a role of caregiver, marked by attentiveness and compassion, Care is always viewed as something happen between two people: the caregiver and the one who is being cared for. In this reference,

this dynamic creates an imbalance. The person who is being cared for or receiving care is a man, who is placed at higher and more dominant position. This reflects that men always deserve care from women. This idea has been widely accepted in society and it has normalized that attentiveness and compassion are inherent, almost biological traits of women.(4) (Chakraborty, 2017)

Nature and Feminine Symbolism in *The Black Hen*"

Ecofeminism recognizes that both the mother nature and the women have historically been marginalized and exploited by the patriarchal system. Ecofeminism seeks to challenge these systems and promote a more sustainable world. Ramanujan's poem titled "The Black Hen" can be explored with certain elements that might be interpreted through an ecofeminist lens.

"It must come as leaves
to a tree
or not at all
yet it comes sometimes
as the black hen
with the red round eye" (*Collected Poems, 195*)

Here the poet portrays the imagery of a black hen with a red round eye. The black hen can be interpreted as a symbol of the mother nature or the earth which have feminine qualities associated with fertility, nurturing and life-giving. Nature is always feminized and associated with women's bodies in ecofeminism and the oppression of women is linked to the exploitation of natural world. The depiction of the black hen could be interpreted as highlighting the link between women and the natural world. To demonstrate how women and nature are interconnected in the Indian context, **Shiva (1988, p. 37)** describes women as an inseparable part of nature, both in their imagination and in their everyday lives. She states that "Nature is symbolized as the embodiment of the feminine principle on one level, and she is nurtured by the feminine on another level in order to produce life and offer sustenance." In general, since its coinage in 1974, there has been an intensive reflection on the numerous bio-anthropological and socio-cultural connections between women and nature. (Gebreyohannes and David)

Through these lines the poet want to tell that non-human creatures also possess their own unique qualities and they also deserve respect and regard. Ecofeminism promotes the recognition of non-human agency and advocates for a shift away from anthropocentrism, value the voices and experiences of non-human beings.

Patil Sangita Sharnappa in her research paper titled “Reconstructing ecofeminism: A study of Kamala Markandaya’s *Nectar in a Sieve*” explores that ecofeminism, a concept that developed in the West, explores the connection between women and nature. It combines feminist and ecological ideas, that aim to address issues related to both women and the environment. Ecofeminism combines feminist and ecological thoughts, which raises the question of why women and nature are connected or linked. (Sharnappa)

Patriarchal Oppression

Ecofeminism recognizes the interconnectedness of various forms of oppression and advocates for the equal rights and liberation of women and nature. Ecofeminists argue that the exploitation of nature and the oppression of women are closely linked. They challenge traditional patriarchal views and offer a feminist approach to environmental issues. They also highlight the deep bond between humans and the earth, noting that the word "human" comes from "humas," meaning soil or earth. But the patriarchal system presumes, wrongly, that “one can lord over others without ultimately debasing oneself, that one can pollute, exploit or dump others, including human and non-human others, without also ultimately polluting, exploiting, or objectifying oneself” (Caputi 2007: 25) Ecofeminism expands the ecocritical theory by stating that “nature and gender issues are closely interwoven and the same strategies of domination are used in the feminization of women and nature” (Hubben 2013: 2). (Vijayaraj bhuvaneswari p. 4)

“on the embroidery
stitch by stitch
dropped and found again
and when it’s all there
the black hen stares

with its round red eye

and you're afraid" (*Collected Poems 195*)

The act of embroidery and stitch by stitch with these two phrases the poet represents a connection to the traditional female handicrafts, which have been devalued and associated with women's labor. This reflects as a metaphor for the marginalized and undervalued position of women within the society and their relationship to the natural environment. This also emphasizes the connection between women's artistic and domestic practices and the natural world. Further poet tells 'dropped and found again', this phrase suggested the cycle of destruction and renewal. It also emphasizes the interconnectedness and resilience of both women and the environment. Mahasweta Devi's short story *Witch* presents a critical engagement with mainstream ecoeminist ideas of Ruether (1975, p. 195), "patriarchal self-deception about the origin of consciousness ends logically in the destruction of the earth". Mahasweta Devi's *Witch* supports gender non-discrimination and shows the deep connection between women and nature. She presents tribal women as unique individuals, highlighting their struggles. Through Somri's suffering, she exposes society's greed and patriarchy, emphasizing that humanity can survive only by respecting and protecting nature, not exploiting it. (Arun and Subbiah)

The image of the black hen staring with its round red eyes reflects the sense of fear and scaring. It can be seen as a metaphor for the patriarchal system and capitalized system that treat both women and nature as object of control. It represents the oppressive gaze which women and the environment often face. 'and you're afraid' this conveys a sense of fear or apprehension. In an ecofeminist context it reflects the concern about the destructive impact of patriarchal system on women and the environment. Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* portrays women, especially Rukmani, as protectors of nature, while men exploit it for personal gain. The novel emphasizes the need for balance and sustainability, promoting ecofeminist values that encourage a world where humans live in harmony with nature instead of destroying it for profit. (Tiwari and Wani p. 4)

"An Ecocritical Reading of Markandaya's 'Nectar in a Sieve'," **Rebecca Barb** explores the novel through an environmental perspective. While many scholars have analyzed the book using feminist, post-colonial, or Marxist approaches, Barb focuses on how the environment shapes the characters' lives. The story is set in an agricultural world where the characters

depend on the land to survive. The family in the novel faces various environmental challenges, such as heavy rains and droughts, highlighting the harsh realities of their connection to nature.(6) (Barb)

Nature and Women's Marginalization

Ramanujan's poem "A River" also contains certain elements of ecofeminism. This poem draws attention to the parallel mistreatment and exploitation of both women and nature as well.

"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." (*Collected Poems* 38)

The description of the exploitation of the environment is implied in the line the river drying up to a trickle in summer. The river is a natural resource and it's a vital source of life and sustenance and this is reduced due to a mere trickle human actions. This leads to the

environmental degradation. Ecofeminism connects gender and environmental issues, seeing women and nature as similarly treated—both face oppression and inequality. It's not just a women's movement, but it highlights how the same mindset that allows racial oppression also leads to environmental harm. Ecofeminism promotes awareness and action for both gender equality and nature protection.(Zhang p. 1)

The description of “straw and women's hair” blocking the Watergates suggest that women are directly affected by the environmental degradation. It implies a deep connection between the exploitation of the mother nature , the environment and the suppression of women. This also signifies that women bear the consequences, the effects when the environment is damaged or depleted.

In these lines the bridges and the Watergates can be seen as a symbol of human control over nature. The ‘rusty bars’ and ‘patches of repair’ represents a neglect or lack of proper care, proper maintenance of these structures. This can be interpreted as disrespect for women's rights and disregard for the wellbeing of the environment. The bridges that are meant to connect people became the symbols of separation and disrepair. This also reflects a disconnection between human beings and the environment as well as the marginalization of women's voices and experiences. “Ecofeminism began in the West in the late 1970s and early 1980s, influenced by peace, feminist, and environmental movements. The term was first used by French writer Françoise d'Eaubonne in 1974 and later expanded by Ynestra King. It became a movement in 1980 with a conference in Massachusetts, USA.” (Spretnak 1990). (Manisha Rao p. 2)

Further the imagery of ‘wet stones glistening like sleepy crocodiles’ and ‘dry ones shaven water-buffaloes lounging in the sun’ represents a sense of imbalance. The contrast has been represented between wet and dry stones which depicts the fluctuating state of the river and the environment. Similarly the stones are compared to crocodiles and water buffaloes convey a feeling of stillness and confinement. These images are interpreted as metaphor for the suppression and oppression of women who are confined within social expectations and norms. All these lines emphasize the similar patterns of exploitation and injustice experience by both women and nature. “Ecofeminism gained global attention after women protested the Three Mile Island nuclear accident in the U.S. in 1979. Though the incident had minimal impact, it sparked an anti-nuclear movement. Ecofeminism promotes caring for nature but is often

questioned due to regional and social differences. Its non-aggressive approach limits its recognition as an ideology.” (Boro Jyoti Prasad & Robidas Mina p. 1) “Ecofeminism has faced criticism, even from feminists, due to its strong link between women and nature. Some argue it is "essentialist," meaning it assumes all women share the same traits across cultures and history. While some feminists reject this idea, others still support it in certain ecofeminist views.” Boro Jyoti Prasad & Robidas Mina p. 6)

Floods and Femininity

The elements of ecofeminism in the poem “a River” are evident and obvious. Through the portrayal of the river’s depletion, pollution, neglect and the comparison made between the exploitation of women and that of the environment. The poet’s focus on the floods and their consequences are reflected for the need for environmental protection. The measures of the damage symbolizes by the poet for the objectification of both women and nature.

“The poets sang only of the floods.

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.” (*Collected Poems* 38)

Through these lines several other aspects can also be analyzed with an ecofeminist lens that highlights the connection between women, nature and the patriarchal structures.

In above lines the mention of the floods and the poet specifically focus on the rising water levels, through this he is trying to draw the attention towards the destructive power of nature. The floods symbolize the overwhelming force of the environment that is often associated with masculinity and dominance. It can be seen as allegory for patriarchal systems that seek to dominate and control both women and nature. The focus of the floods and the consequences of the floods bring forth reflects the destructive power of nature. "Tagore depicts the story of man's destruction of Mother Earth in the following words, "when man became a city dweller, he lost his affection for the forest- his first friend who brought him hospitality from the heaven. He ruthlessly attacked the woodlands to indiscriminately build a brick dwelling. The Green-Forest-Goddess came with blessings and bounties. But by ignoring her man invited doom on civilization" (author's translation). Thus, we witness Tagore to brand nature and forests as feminine entities, a convention common among Cultural Ecofeminists." (page 2) (Lahiri Dr. Hiranya p. 2)

The poet emphasizes the precise number of cobbled steps and the impact on the bathing places reflects tendency of the society to quantify, to measure the natural phenomena and this is just a disrespect and disregard to the deeper ecological significance. Ecofeminism emphasizes the nature as a living entity and stresses the need for its preservation and protection. It also reflects the tendency to view them merely as responses to be exploited and measured for their utility rather than value their intrinsic worth.

By referencing three village homes, a pregnant woman and two cows named Gopi and Brinda the poet portrays the interconnectedness between the fate of women and animals. Similarities in the exploitation and subjugation faced by both women and animals are acknowledged in ecofeminism that recognizing the shared vulnerability they face within this patriarchal systems. The poet draws reader's attention by including the pregnant woman and the cows in the list of losses. He represents the sufferings and displacement of both human and non-human beings and highlights the importance of pity, compassion and caring for all life forms whether they are humans or non-humans.

Furthermore, the cows are addressing by the name 'Gopi and Brinda' adds a personal and individual dimension in their existence. Animals are given name that represents humanity and it challenges the objectification of animals as mere commodities. In many traditional societies cows are associated with femininity and fertility that represents the interconnectedness of

woman, nature and life-giving forces. The poet calls the cows as Gopi and Brinda, he is naming them that connects the plight of these animals with the broader theme of ecofeminism. This aligns with ecofeminist perspective which acknowledges the intrinsic worth and rights of all forms of life.

The poet's focus on the floods, the complex details of the natural environment, the weakness of human and non-human lives and the naming of the cows, all these aspects contribute to the ecofeminist perspective. These elements emphasize the interconnectedness of gender and environmental issues, shedding light on the need to address both forms of oppression to get a more sustainable world.

Devajit Mohajan and Haradhan Kumar Mohajan in their research paper titled "Feminism and Feminist Grounded Theory: A Comprehensive Research Analysis" highlights about Feminist Grounded Theory (FGT). "It is an updated version of the original grounded theory by Glaser and Strauss that focus on women's welfare, especially in male-dominated societies. Some fields like nursing, home economics, and nutrition, where women are the majority, making FGT especially useful there. In the 21st century, FGT is effective and valuable for research. Historically, women's voices were often overlooked in areas like academics and policymaking, but now feminist research is growing, highlighting women's rights and ensuring their perspectives are recognized and considered." (Mohajan and Mohajan)

"Emily Dickinson implies that people frequently miss the simple beauty of nature, which she likens to heaven in its harmony and magnificence. Though not an ecofeminist by intent, her views on nature reflect ecofeminist ideas. She sees nature as both a mother and a teacher, urging readers to appreciate its beauty. While concerned about the strained relationship between humans and nature, Dickinson remains hopeful that humans can learn to understand and connect with it." (Mageed, 2017)

Overall these lines represent a sense of loss. Tragedy and suppression of the women's experiences. The imagery and the symbolism in the poem invite readers to reflect on the interconnectedness between the exploitation of women and the degradation of the environment. The whole poem captures the essence of ecofeminism.

CONCLUSION

The essence of ecofeminism is highlighted by the interdependence and parallel struggles between women and natural world. Here the paper emphasizes the need for acknowledging and appreciating the roles of women and nature in creating a more equitable and sustainable world. Above mentioned elements collectively suggest a connection between nature, women and their shared experiences of oppression, exploitation and vulnerability. Here it captures the essence of ecofeminist thought by highlighting the need for recognizing and challenging the interconnected systems of domination that harm both women and the environment. Boro Jyoti Prasad & Robidas Mina quotes “Mary Stange who referred to herself as an ecofeminist, in her books, ‘*Woman the Hunter*’ and ‘*Gun Women*’, posit that women are natural hunters, therefore in a predatory relationship with animals. Strange suggests that the linkages between woman and other animals sometimes made by ecofeminists could justify continued essentialism and, therefore, continued domination of both women and other animals. Thus she claims that the woman-animal connection should be reevaluated.”

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