

An Eco-critical Probe of A.K Ramanujan's *A River*, William Cowper's *The Poplar Field* and Philip Larkin's *Going, Going*.

Revathy S Mohan
Scholar
Kerala University
India

Abstract-

With the advent of technical innovations and globalization, human life has become the smoothest but for that nature has been exploited in a deplorable manner. Striving in an age where all non-human life forms are considered as something to be plundered limitlessly for our coveted desires, it is necessary to draw the presentation of non-human life in three contrasting poems.

This will enable a person to identify the disparate ways in which nature is presented in literature. Eco-criticism is simply defined as the interrelation between nature and literature. The term 'Eco' is derived from 'oikos' which means 'home' or 'house' and in eco-criticism, home means environment. Eco-criticism or environmental literary criticism tries to view literature within an ecological vision. Lawrence Buell suggests from criteria for evaluating a text as embodying an environmental consciousness in his seminal work, "*The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, the Formation of American Culture*". It includes -

- whether the non-human nature is a mere framing device or a facade.
- environment is a process, not a static condition.
- human interest is not the legitimate interest.
- the text shows humans as accountable to nature. (qtd. in Nayar, 252)

These three poems image how people uses, saves, ignores and upbraids nature. These three poems presents nature in entirely contrasting manner. '*A River*' portrays the river as destructive and violent, a complete anthropocentric approach in which our misdeeds are carefully kept in oblivion. Cowper's '*The Poplar Field*', had an instrumental attitude towards nature ie, nature is meant for well-equipped, extravagant life of human beings. The exemplary eco-centric, bio-centric approach has been depicted by Larkin in "*Going, Going*" in which green world is presented as the master and that we are depended on it for our survival and existence. So we are supposed to preserve nature. In this poem, there was no holier-than-thou halo or dimension was given for human world. Larkin harshly castigates the humans for destroying the natural world to fulfill our momentous pleasures and self-obsessed life.

Key Words

Eco-centric, anthropocentric, utilitarian, instrumental, bio-centric, egoistical sensibility.

With the advent of technical innovations and globalization, human life has become the smoothest but for that nature has been exploited in a deplorable manner. Striving in an age where all non-human life forms are considered as something to be plundered limitlessly for our coveted desires, it is necessary to draw the presentation of non-human life in three contrasting poems. This will enable a person to identify the disparate ways in which nature is presented in literature. Eco-criticism is simply defined as the interrelation between nature and literature.

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- the text shows humans as accountable to nature.(Nayar, 252)

These three poems image how people uses, saves, ignores and upbraids nature. A.K.Ramanujan is a multi-faceted talent who is a poet, scholar, cultural critic, translator and folklorist. 'A River' appeared in Ramanujan's first volume of poems titled " *The Striders*". Environmentalism should be a property of text is the claim of eco-critics but in 'A River', Vaigai, lifeline of Madhurai is portrayed as a brute force which exterminates everything that comes its way. The poet unhesitatingly berates the river or presents the river in a grey shade for disrupting the life of human beings.

Ramanujan says that " every summer a river dries to a trickle" but he seems unconcerned about this arid condition of river and the man-made reasons behind this. The poet never rise the question, "Why this plight occurs?". The poem goes on describing the dried river explicitly as " baring the sand-ribs, straw and women's hair, clogging the water gates 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".

When the river dries in summer, it exposes the real face of human beings whose filthy deeds converts the pure water resource a pigsty inundated with variegated pollutants and debris. The developments to smoothen the human life (bridges) is a barrier for the normalcy of river's existence. But in the poem, the ill-mannered human beings are never castigated. It's the river who is the culprit or villain.

"The poets sang only of the floods", because the deluged river provides umpteen topics for portrayal and to enrich their songs, unlike the barren river. The native poets romanticise the river only during the flood times. During flood people blabber on-

"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 Brinda, as usual.(qtd. in Ramanujan, 94)

This narration reflects the anthropocentric nature of human folk who keeps on complaining about the loss its suffer due to the outpouring river whereas the stark reality is adeptly concealed. No one attempts to explain the reasons behind these disasters. It occurs as a repercussion of our self-centered action, our hail for progression. The vivid description that enlists the loss depicts the river as a furious, malevolent force with destructible nature. The cows are named and domesticised that the people doesn't sympathise the death of cows but instead the loss of their survival, their livelihood. Materialistic observation is predominant and everything is gauged by placing our interests are privileged.

The detailed description of pregnant woman and her unborn, identical twins, christened domestic cows, village houses and so on imbibes the reader with an image of river as a ferocious force. There is no

mention of famine, flood and waste mismanagement as manmade disasters (which they really are) but are presented as natural hazards. Here lies the irony!

In this poem, the non-human world is presented subordinate to the human world. The typical anthropocentric environmental view which considers nature as a granted source to be looted for our limitless desires has been celebrated in "A River". As Ramachandra Guha suggests that our (third world nations) modernity and ecological models are absorbed from the west, which reprimands nature boundlessly. This aspect is exemplified in "A River", where the river is depicted as wild and primitive.

Renowned transitional poet, William Cowper romanticised the poplar trees in his oft-quoted poem "The Poplar Field". The poem commences in a pensive tone, "The Poplars are felled". The poet repents the irreplaceable loss of poplar trees only because these trees were the real solace for his agonised soul. Throughout the poem, the poet possess a utilitarian attitude towards nature, ie, nature is our personal property.

He laments for the loss of his personal benefits which he receives from the poplar trees and not the deracination of poplar trees. He is worried about his sole self and its griefs. The shade, whispering sound of cool colonnade, winds and songs, ouse on the bosom which receives the trees images are counted by the poet. He bids adieu to his gains and aids. The tree was his shade once and now a seat, his favourite field was marred.

" The black-bird has fled to another field
Where the hazels afford him a screen from the heat
And the scene where his melody charmed me before
Resounds with his sweet- flowing ditty no more"

(qtd. in McRay,24)

The trees act as a solace for the poet which succours and appeases the poet. The tree and its related environs charmed and enchanted him. The tree was a dream, an enjoyment for the poet, which was a sight to engage him. Here the loss of poplar trees adversely affects the poet because it was his placating vision. The poet laments the deforestation only because it has a nightmarish influence on him. He reveres the poplar trees as a necessity in his life. Thus the poet adheres to a utilitarian attitude that the nature should be conserved, only to improve our life. The poem exhibits a mild man-centric perception but nature is not presented as barbaric and destructive.

Egoistical sensibility of human beings are displayed in this poem,ie; everything is meant to smoothen and mollify our life. The romantic notion of nature is a metaphor for the self and not a tribute to the biotic world. Here, the existence of poplar trees is essential as it comforts and consoles the poet.

The movement poet, Philip Larkin, blatantly criticized the human-centric, covetous world in his poem "Going,Going". As the title suggests, something is retreating or vanishing gradually. What is it? The poet voices the diminishing greenery, trees and nature. The poet always felt that the nature will last his time. But the sight of ruthless development, pollution and deforestation, he realizes that the green world will vanish in the nearest future

He reprimands the flawed life of ill- natured human beings."Split level shopping", "bleak high risers", "chuck filth in the sea", M1 Cafe, more houses, more parking, more caravan site, more pay on the business page and so on were the striking images the poet used to describe the slump of humanbeings. We are running desirously behind profit, tourism and materialistic pleasures. The poet described the tourist spots as the "First slum of Europe". He suggests that our relation to nature should be an emotional one and not an intellectual-rational one.

Larkin anticipates the disappearance of shadows, meadows, lanes in the immediate future and what remains will be "concrete and tyres".The desire and greed have superseded our emotions and we strives for materialistic accomplishments. The human world is artificial and corrupted. The poet delineates the real

barbaric nature of humans who are self-centered and ambitious. The non-human world is subjected to human control.

These three poems presents nature in entirely contrasting manner.' *A River*' portrays the river as destructive and violent, a complete anthropocentric approach in which our misdeeds are carefully kept in oblivion. Cowper's *The Poplar Field*', had an instrumental attitude towards nature ie; nature is meant for well-equipped, extravagant life of human beings. The exemplary eco-centric, bio-centric approach has been depicted by Larkin in "*Going,Going*", in which green world is presented as the master and that we are depended on it for our survival and existence. So we are supposed to preserve nature. In this poem, there was no holier- than-thou halo dimension was given for human world. Larkin harshly castigates the humans for destroying the natural world to fulfill our momentous pleasures and self-obsessed life.

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