



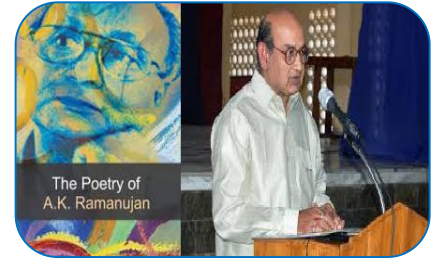
REPRESENTATION OF RIVER BY A K RAMANUJAN AND AJU MUKHOPADHYAY

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ABSTRACT :

Attipate Krishnaswami Ramanujan and Aju Mukhopadhyay are two of the leading Indian poets writing in English. They belong to different periods of time. However, they both have written pomes on river like many other poets writing in English. The present paper aims to discuss the delineation of river by both these poets, and then compare and contrast them. The paper also proposes to highlight Indian ethos in them by studying both the literal and implied meanings in them and bring out the contribution of the poets to Indian Writing in English and our understanding of human life. The paper hypothesises that the poems on river by both the writers under study definitely enrich our understanding of human life, in particular and life on the earth, in general.



KEYWORDS : river, life, suffering, water, floods.

INTRODUCTION TO THE POETS:

Attipate Krishnaswami Ramanujan popularly known as A. K. Ramanujan was born on 16 March 1929 in Mysore and died on 13 July 1993 in the city of Chicago in America. He was a polyglot; he had mastery over five languages, viz. English, Kannada, Tamil, Telugu, and Sanskrit. He carried out academic research in all these five languages. As far as literature is concerned he preferred English and Kannada. Though he tried his hands at many genres, he is remembered today for his poetry. Sahitya Akademi Award, the second highest literary honour in India, was given him posthumously for his collection of poems *Selected Poems*. He was also honoured with *Padma Shri*. His poem under study gives the realistic representation of a river that flows through the beautiful South Indian city of Madhurai; he was a realistic at the time when many other Indian poets were not realistic in the treatment of their subjects.

The other poet whose poem has been chosen for the present study is Aju Mukhopadhyay. He writes in English and Bangla. He is a poet, critic, essayist, and biographer. However, it is his poetry that has brought him honour and awards like Excellence in World Poetry Award, 2009 by the International Poets Academy. Many of his poems have been anthologized. In short, he is rapidly rising as one of the important Indian poets in the present times. He has written two poems on river so far; they are *A River*, and *Teesta the name of a river*. However, the present study has chosen the former and left the latter for the study sometimes in future.

A K RAMANUJAN'S POEM RIVER:

Attipate Krishnaswami Ramanujan realistically represents the river that flows through Madhurai in this poem. He delineates the river realistically – both in its ugly and beautiful form. At the very outset he

briefly describes the city of Madurai famous for temples like 2500 year old Meenakshi Amman Temple and the poets. A K Ramanujan sarcastically writes that these poets write only about cities and temples, but human life implying that they are not interested in the depiction of human reality in their poems. Unlike them, the poet prefers to write about the life of the common man and give voice to their problems through his poetry rather than writing about non-human entities. Therefore, he describes, unlike other poets of his city, the river Vaigai that flows through Madurai and its effects on surrounding human life, especially when it is flooded. It looks different during different season – beautiful during monsoon and ugly during summer. The river is worth writing a poem on only during rainy season for other poets who like to write only beautiful things. However, A K Ramanujan writes about both the forms of the river; in fact he writes about human life depended on the river and affected by it in all seasons. He thus describes Vaigai during summer:

evey 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 above description of the river presents its ugly form during summer when it dries to a trickle with sand on its both sides making it look like the ribs of a person who has been starving for days together. 'Straw and women's hair clogging the watergates at the rusty bars under the bridges with patches of repair all over them' makes it look uglier. The river is the lifeline of the city; people depend on it for many things – it provides drinking water for humans, animals, and other living beings; humans and animals bathe in it, people wash their clothes here, etc. Hence, women's hair are blocking the water of the river which has become just a trickle in the summer at the rusty pillars of the bridge on the river. The wet and dry stones in the river which have become bare are compared with 'sleepy crocodiles' and 'water-buffaloes lounging in the sun'. Here, the poet makes an apt use of simile to present the realistic image of Vaigai River in summer. It also indicates his deep roots in Indian culture. He knows Indian society inside out. He knows the importance of rivers in Indian culture; in fact humans settled on the banks of rivers since ancient times. These deep roots of him in Indian ethos enable him to give the realistic representation of River Vaigai as well as the life of the people of the ancient city Madurai depending on it. However, realistic depiction of the river the human life dependent on it is not the aim of the poet. His aim is to criticize those of his contemporary poets who ignored human suffering and wrote only on beautiful things – real or imaginary. He gives the caustic comments on such poets in the latter half of the poem.

The poets only sang of the floods.
 He was there for a day
 When they had the floods.
 The poet goes to Vaigai river only in monsoon season when it is flooded for:
 He said:
 the river has water enough
 to be poetic
 about only once a year

He does not go to the river during summer when it looks ugly to him because he loves and writes on only beautiful things. According to him only beautiful things can be the subject of poetry or worth writing

poems on. There is no place in his scheme of things for the fact that even ugliness is a part and parcel of life. He is indifferent towards this fact and the suffering of humans and other living beings. It becomes clear from the following lines:

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.

Neither the old poets nor the new ones have concern for suffering – of humans, let alone of all living beings. For them suffering is not a topic worth writing a poem on. According to them, the river in the floods will obviously cause loss of life and material things; there is nothing to write about it. One such a new poet says:

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 twins

These lines imply that for both the old and new poets it is natural that a river in floods will cause the loss of life and material things by carrying away ‘three village houses, a couple of cows’ and a ‘pregnant woman’. According to them it is not worth taking note of, let alone writing a poem on; they care for only the beautiful form of the river in floods. It shows their indifference towards human suffering. They live in their own imaginary world, in a ivory tower completely cut off from life and reality. Hence, A K Ramanujan, who believes in art for life’s sake, obliquely criticizes them in the poem.

Aju Mukhopadhyay’s poem *A River*:

Aju Mukhopadhyay’s poem *A River* is a beautiful poem of two stanzas wherein he personifies a river. The poet depicts different forms a rivers takes in its journey in the first stanza and in the second the poem takes a philosophical turn making a comment on life. The following lines of the first stanza depict various forms the river takes in the course of its journey from its birth to its end.

Like a brook sneaking through the rocks unseen
Like a stream flowing through the meadows green
Roaring like an Amazon furioso
Flooding like a Hwang-Ho
Meandering through innumerable towns and cities

A river is just a trickle at its birth place and then it gradually increases in its size as it moves towards the sea or ocean. As it flows forth a trickle becomes a brook, and then a stream. It meanders through rocks, meadows, forests, valleys, villages, towns, and cities. It is gentle at some places, while furious like the Amazon River at some others; it is sometimes even destructive like the Hwang-Ho River, which is also known as the Yellow River. Here the poet intends to convey to the readers that like Lord Shiva a river both nourishes as well as destroys. It nourishes the life and fields on its banks that runs many a mile. It also causes great loss of life and material when it is flooded. It is both life-giver and life-taker.

Regardless of the numerous struggles the river is engaged daily, it has been flowing forth 'leaving on both the shores, friends and enemies' for thousands of years. The environmental crusaders and the ones who pollute the river can be taken as its friends and enemies respectively. It enjoys all sorts of experiences. It says:

Nothing is hackneyed, nothing is old
 Each experience is precious gold.
 Each dawn, each sunset is a marvel
 Though each day begins with a tantalizing tale.
 Sorrow and joy, shame and fame
 Each is a different game.
 Bitter and sweet, passionate, ignorant
 I have enjoyed every moment.

The attitude of the river is exemplary; it teaches us how we should face life, what should be our attitude towards the world and things in it. We need to live in now and here to savour every moment of life which is not 'hackneyed' or 'old', but 'precious gold'. Everything in this world is a wonder, we just need to have an eye for it to experience. It does not mean that life is only full of joy and wonder. In fact, life is made of contradictory things; it is a mixture of 'sorrow and joy, shame and fame'. It is both 'bitter and sweet'. However, we need to experience both with the same poise and peace of mind. Like the river, we need to enjoy every moment for we get life only once; we need to drink the cup of life to its brim.

The last stanza gives a philosophical turn to the poem. The stanza reads:
 Forever afloat moving beyond the sea
 Forever towards the glowing infinity.

The journey of the river does not end when it meets the sea, but continues even after it – it keeps flowing 'towards the glowing infinity'. It suggests that life does not end with one's death, but there is life even after death; death is not the end, but the beginning of infinite life.

Thus two meanings or themes run parallel in the poem – one literal and the other implied. On its surface, the poem is about a river. On the deeper implied level, it is about human and his/her life. The poet seems to convey to the readers that we should strike balance between the present life on the earth and the eternal life after death; we need to prepare for the both, but should enjoy every bit of the present life of which we are certain. It all shows the influence of Indian philosophy on the poet.

CONCLUSION:

Thus the two Indian poets writing in English A K Ramanujan and Aju Mukhopadhyay present two images of river as they wrote with different purpose or intention in their minds. The former wrote the poem to criticize those poets who lived in an ivory tower and wrote only on imaginary and beautiful things neglecting the ugly fact, the suffering of living beings, while the latter wrote the poem to comment on human life and the need to have the right attitude towards it which would enable us to enjoy the present to the fullest without forgetting the certainty of death and afterlife. Whatever the differences, one thing is

certain that the poems on river by both the poets have made a great contribution to Indian Writing in English as well as to our understanding of human life.

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