

Talking about Rivers, as flowing through English Literature

Abstract

While we see the world turning into a globalized village slowly and there are hardly any cultural differences left to talk about, proud on our technological advancements and breakthrough communication inventions, it's a pressing need to bring forth the essential values that make us human. No matter how developed a nation may become, the core values that it had possessed over centuries will guide the posterity to a better brighter future. Water is that one element which is not just necessary for living but it has great religious value and belief system of it's own, in our country. Indians have always been seeking blessings from nature in one form or other, but water definitely is the first one to serve the purpose. Indian literary perspective relies heavily on water to partake in this process by building narratives around river to spun a story or a poetry. And not just Indian literature, literature around the world runs near water, sea or an ocean.

Keywords: Indian Literature, American Literature, African Literature, Rivers, Traditional Values, Water, Sea.

Introduction

In this paper we will see how water runs deep through Indian Literature and many other countried literature, why it seems important to turn back to the sacred belief system that held our culture strongly and firmly together in dark times of history that's gone now, and that will do the same in present time where the true meaning and understanding of communication has lost it's significance in the void of immediacy. Therefore we should readily agree to the fact that writings in Indian Literature or (world literature) that deal around river(read nature) are a source for each one of us to understand the value of nature and the need to connect to it, because it will then lead to a better understanding of ourselves and will guide us in forming and maintaining relationship with others. It would help change the consciousness of people. Water is one universally and religiously accepted purifying symbol, and is the central element of human body as well so it just does not have symbolic or metaphorical value, but it is inherently linked to our daily physical growth.

Aim of the Study

This research paper provides a analytical study of several texts of English Literature, with the view of putting together the works that deal with rivers, seas and ocean. It gives a comprehensive study of works ranging from Indian literature to other world literatures.

Water isn't running just in Indian literature but writers of English literature from different countries have also linked their, important works to river and it's flow. To start off, *The Odyssey* (together with *The Iliad*, epic Greek poems attributed to Homer, c. seventh century B.C.E.) details the hero Odysseus's perilous 10-year return across the sea from Troy. Centuries later, *Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, arguably the first novel in English is about a man stranded in an island for years, which ultimately makes this works about the ever-present ocean. Likewise if we take a glance at the romantic age of the British literature, we find a literary giant who wrote an enticing story that revolved around sea and it's name is, *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, that went on to the first poetry of the *Lyrical Ballads* that he and Wordsworth jointly published that started the Romantic age. When we talk about Coleridge we need to mention his life long friend Wordsworth, who wrote his famous work Of art, namely *Tintern Abbey* that recalls his childhood days with his sister that talks about the Wye river and their adventures around it.

If we are talking about british literature, we can never forget Edmund Spenser, who was rightfully called poet's poet, who wrote the beautiful lines.. "sweet Thames run softly till I end my song" for his poem



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Prothalamion, in which he mentioned the river Thames. But these writers who wrote about rivers or seas were always not Britishers, the English translation of the French writer Jules Verne's (1828–1905) *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* had enormous popular appeal and anticipated many twentieth-century underwater technological and scientific achievements. Mississippi River and its significance is known to everyone who reads American literature and precisely William Faulkner, but the river played a vital role in Mark Twain's (1835–1910) boyhood and he laid the groundwork for what has been called the first modern American novel, on the river *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884). This classic work centered on the adventures of a boy and a runaway slave who rafted down the Mississippi. *Siddhartha* by Herman Hesse, has one very meaningful sequence of self discovery by the protagonist near the river.

Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* can never be forgotten for his lively description of his voyage down the river Congo in the work and he also mentions the river Thames in it. Peter Cary's *Oscar and Lucinda* revolves around transferring of a glass church around the world through sea, *The old man and the Sea* by Ernest Hemingway tells a tale about a fisherman and his sea adventures that went down to become the tale of never giving up and guided everyone around the world with the enthusiasm that 'a man can be destroyed but not defeated'. The greatest sea story to be ever written *Moby Dick* by Herman Melville, that talks about captain Ahab and his attempt of capturing the whale Moby Dick, all run round around river/sea or more adequately saying, around water. T. S. Eliot also talks about river Ganga in his literary masterpiece *The Wasteland*. Henry David Thoreau wrote *Walden or life in the woods* which has achieved iconic status, anticipated many major themes in contemporary American environmental writing, is written around the Walden pond.

When English literature was in its juvenile state then also some works around water were written like the anonymous, '*The Seafarer*'. This 124-line poem is often considered an elegy, since it appears to be spoken by an old sailor looking back on his life and preparing for death. He discusses the solitariness of a life on the waves, the cold, the danger, and the hardships. As such, the poem captures the bewitching fascination the sea holds for us, but also its darker, more unpredictable side. Ezra Pound produced a loose translation of the poem in the early twentieth century.

Henry Vaughan's, '*The Waterfall*' this poem, describing the natural beauty of the waterfall, is a fine demonstration of how Vaughan anticipated Romanticism by over a century. Sylvia Plath wrote a beautiful small poem called *Crossing the Water*, Philip Larkin wrote '*Water*' this unrhymed poem is from Larkin's 1964 volume *The Whitsun Weddings*. '*The Pool*'. This short five-line poem is, along with '*Oread*', Hilda Doolittle's finest achievement as an Imagist poet. The speaker of the poem comes across something in the waters of a pool and wonders what

it is. Is it her own reflection? Or another human being? Or something else?

Another great writer of Modern times is D. H. Lawrence, who wrote '*Autumn Rain*'. This delicate poem, whose short lines and short stanzas suggest the droplets of falling rain, was first published in 1917, and the casualties of the First World War may be hinted at by Lawrence's 'dead / men that are slain'. The harvest time and Christian redemption are united under the rain falling from heaven. John Masefield wrote '*Sea-Fever*' one of the most famous sea poems in English literature, '*Sea-Fever*' was published in 1902 in Masefield's collection *Salt-Water Ballads*, when the poet was in his mid-twenties. Emily Dickinson's '*My River Runs to Thee*' is a short poem, even by Dickinson's brief, telegrammatic standards, but as with so many of Dickinson's poems, it carries an arresting opening line, and reminds us that the river and the sea are endlessly linked in one great cycle. Robert Louis Stevenson wrote '*Looking-Glass River*' collection of poems for younger readers including this lovely poem about gazing into the reflective waters of the river. Jean Rhys wrote *Wide Saragasso Sea*, it is a feminist and anti-colonial response to Charlotte Brontë's novel *Jane Eyre*, describing the background to Mr Rochester's marriage from the point-of-view of his mad wife Antoinette Cosway, a Creole heiress. The title of the novel refers to the Sargasso Sea, a vast area of the northern Atlantic Ocean.

RK Narayan's stories from the fictional town of Malgudi situated along the banks of the river Sarayu can never be forgotten but when we do a re-reading of Indian texts, we should depart from the conceptualization and look for the image of river and story it is trying to depict amidst the ever going chaos of characters and their lives. We will try to unveil the spiritual value the image of river underlies in itself to be applied in our lives.

When we do a close reading of *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960) by Raja Rao, we come to know that it is a journey, a spiritual journey of Rama to discover his inner self, true self, apparently intellectual discovery of his spiritual truth. And throughout his journey the image of water and his relationship with river is very significant. The many rivers that runs through the novel are a natural witness to self discovery he does. And lastly all these river lead to river Ganga, besides which he finds peace and feels a strong communion with the environment. The protagonist Rama here not just feels a connection to Indian rivers but during the course of novel when he goes to Europe he comes across rivers like the Rhone, the Seine and the Thames and he is seeing trying to detect through them his Indian soul.

The Inheritance of Loss (2006) by Anita Desai, is a novel that through landscapes and river together, drives a story that has spiritual reflection and restoration. The novel is set in the Garden of Eden: Darjeeling, a region in West Bengal. The protagonist is an old grandfather of Sai who is a recluse retired judge, who has just bought Cho Oyu. He bought this home he has been living by getting attracted to the scenic beauty of the area. This

narrative is a search of identity through spiritual settlement. This house represents a retreat from society. The whole setting is ideal for self reflection which is surrounded by both picturesque and the sublime. This sacred and natural setting has a beautiful description of river also, which is the river Teesta. The environment is filled with the enchanting atmosphere the river creates around the house and Sai's can relate the desires of her grandfather to the environment. One another important character of the novel is Biju, who is an illegal Indian immigrant in New York and he encounters with the river Hudson which matches his emotional unsettlement loneliness and sadness.

The Hungry Tide by Amitav Ghosh is one such work that is read and known by all not only in India but in foreign countries as well, the happenings in this work of his do not take place near any river as the previous works we discussed but happen in the easternmost region of India basically in the Bay of Bengal, the tiny islands that form the Sundarbans is the focal point of the story and survival on those islands is of prime concern for the inhabitants. The story is about Piyali Roy, a marine biologist, Fokir, the young and illiterate fisherman and Kanai Dutta a businessman from Delhi. Their revolves around the island encompassing these three and the Bay of Bengal.

The Ocean of Churn a book by Sanjeev Sanyal is no novel, it's a coastal history of India and how the Indian Ocean affected and shaped thousand of lives. It focuses on the fact that numerous books may have been written on Indian history but none described the Indian coastline appropriately, so he explained the formation of Indian ocean to the formation of modern day Mumbai.

The Golden Boat: River poems, edited by K Sachidanandan, is a poetry collection of forty-nine river poems. The anthology opens with a hymn to water from Rigveda and the collection gets its name from a poetry by Rabindra Nath Tagore. The collection has poems from Mamang Dai to Amrita Pritam, all about rivers. It also has poems from different languages celebrating the diverse beauty of rivers in India.

Another important work on river and river life is by Rambharos Jha, an artist who grew up watching Madhubani art form in Bihar, and he dedicated his creativity and imagination to create a graphic novel by the name *Waterlife*, which uses hues of blue orange and green. It was called one of the most beautiful of our times.

A river called Titash by Adwaita Mallabaman is considered a modern classic of Bengali literature and is about a fishing village that has been devastated by modernization, which is situated on the banks of river Titash. Another work about river is *The River of Stories* Orijit Sen, published in 1994, it is the first graphic novel of India which talks about the birth of the river Narmada and then on the construction of dam on it. *City of Water*

by Anantida Sengupta is a debut collection of poetry which seems to be obsessed with water and talks about sea and rains. This collection won her Muse India Young Writer award too.

Conclusion

In Indian literary context the poetics of river is definitely linked deeply to the sacred and religious Indian traditional value system. And when we talk about World literature, these rivers and sea provide a vast range of landscape to tell a better story. And these works not only enlighten our countrymen to reconsider our beliefs but act as a gateway for foreign readers to understand better the other cultures of the world and it can rightly be concluded that since the infusion of English in Indian education system, it has only enriched us and provided our writers with a language that gave them a much wider range of prospects and tell the world through our writings how we consider nature it's elements and most importantly rivers, a potential source that can give life and guide men in their expedition on finding themselves.

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