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Beyond Humanism: Investigating Anthropocene Narratives and Posthumanism in A. K. Ramanujan's Writings

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Abstract

A.K. Ramanujan is the pioneering Indian writer who explores a unique blend of modernism and Indian tradition in his story A Flowering Tree and poems Of Mothers and Love Poems for a Wife. These are good examples of anthropomorphism, which is the common attribution in these works. These writings are the natural world reflections and the objects imbued with human emotions and behaviour. Modern man has been trying to prove his upper hand in nature, but it is impossible since man is an animal in nature, along with other fauna. Hence, this research paper explores Anthropocene narratives and posthumanism in these three works. His writings' critical examination reveals how his work challenges traditional humanist notions and offers a subtle understanding of the relationship between humans, nature, and the environment. His writing explores themes like ecological interconnectedness, non-human agency, and blurring the boundaries between human and nature. The research employs Ramanujan's writings' proximate reading of the texts; it further reveals the post-humanist dimensions within Ramanujan's writings. It underscores a deeper understanding of the enduring relevance of cross-cultural perspectives, providing a clear understanding of the contemporary debates on the ecological challenges of Anthropocene.

Key words: AK Ramanujan, writings, Anthropocene, posthumanism, examination, human, nature, environment.

Introduction

Indian English Literature has evolved consistently, adapting to the currents of the future while voicing out the contemporary issues. The philosophy of Posthumanism has significantly permeated the

literary landscape to address the social, political, technological and environmental concerns. With the concept of interconnectedness at its heart, the theory challenges man's position at the centre. It explores the co-evolution of technology, humans and non-humans to critique the anthropocentric worldview. The dynamic nature of Indian English Literature facilitated the creation of narratives that explore the reciprocal relationship between nature and humans. The superior hierarchy of the man is dismantled to examine the ecological and feminine discourses. The primary concerns are that posthuman fiction consists of universe embeddedness, identity formation, the question of non-humans on the planes, and technology's contribution to both construction and destruction.

A few writers take delight in stretching human boundaries and exploring beyond the world of man, and Amitav Ghosh is one of the best of them. From the rapid progress of man in the field of technology to unpredictability and autonomy of nature, he discusses it all. He explores the dimensions of nature that remain unconquered by human intelligence. In 2004, he published *The Hungry Tide*, which is set in the Sundarbans and seems to dismantle the hegemony of humans over environmental forces. Plants have been considered at the very margin, and portraying them as capable of violence is no less than a rebellion. The novel is Post humanist in nature since it gears the relationship between humans and the environment and transforms the passive, delicate nature into its mighty form.

Ramanujan's blissful poetic tone discusses two delicate themes of womanhood and environment to discuss their identity and vulnerability. Even his poems are a testament to his loyalty towards nature and femininity. Molly Daniels commented on the nature of Ramanujan's poems, "A.K. Ramanujan prayed for double vision and found it in the interconnectedness of vegetable and mineral, man and animal.... above all, he found life in art....and art in life" (Daniels 1995). The anthropomorphic transformation of the young girl is not just for fantasy, but it is to critique the superiority of man above all species. It is a metaphor for the ever-changing, fluid identity of the self. The complex relationship that one shares with the environment invites flourishing and destruction. The voluntary decision to turn oneself into a non-human is born out of necessity to feed her impoverished family. The act metaphorizes the selfless, sacrificial and devotional nature of nature and woman, but is also indicative of the exploitation of woman's body and consent. Commodification of the body leads to the benefit of others but at the cost of one's dignity. The tree itself has life and is a symbol of sustenance and nurture. She owns her feminine aspect by nurturing others, but it is not her true identity. This distinct identity is a sharp blow to the anthropocentric worldview. The physical harm done by the girl's sister-in-law seems irreversible, and she becomes half-human and half-tree. She turns into a "thing," and her in-betweenness indicates her Post humanist identity.

The tree and the girl become "companion species" (Haraway, 2003). Her gradual restoration is a central point in understanding the resilience of the spirit that is one with the universe. The disfigurement resulted from crossing the boundaries, but the restoration symbolizes a self-return. A folktale is a culture and fantasy repository, but it has the power to raise profound questions about the existence of humans and their relationship with their surroundings. Artificial hierarchies are often dismantled in such a narrative. "The Flowering Tree" leads to the disintegration of the ontological boundaries and the exploration of the harmonious co-evolution of man with the non-human realm. Blurring real and metaphorical instances is paramount, such as the girl turning into a tree, for it allows one to expand their thoughts and question the nature of the self.

AK Ramanujan (1929-1993) is the most influential Indian writer. His writing belongs to the modernist post-independence phase. He is a bilingual writer who writes in Kannada and English. His *Selected Poems* (1976) is a poetry volume released by Oxford University Press in 1976. He was elected a fellow of the American Academy of Fine Arts and Sciences. His poetry is marked with command and authenticity. He neither indulges in mere philosophical presentations nor takes part in sociopolitical notions. An unusual life reality is visible in his art. With his literature, he stood as a hyphen between Indo-American and joined the east and the west. His collections include *The Stories* (1966), *Relations*

(1971) and *Second Sight* (1987). His writings illustrate an expanding horizon with an increasing self-understanding. He is popular for his translations of literature and Tamil and Kannada classics. These reflect literary beauty and elegance of originality (Anandita, 2012, p 245).

The following research questions and the method helped in writing this research paper.

Throughout the research paper, the question is how Ramanujan's stories and poetry reflect and change traditional humanist notions of human-nature relations. How does his work contribute to a post humanist understanding of the world, and what implications does this have for our relationship with the environment? Regarding the research method, the research paper has been adopted and written based on the close reading of Ramanujan's select works, situated within the posthumanism theoretical framework, ecocriticism and Anthropocene studies.

AK Ramanujan's writing has several distinctive features, such as

- Rooted realism with Indian sensibility
- Striking and concrete imagery
- Family and Relationships exploration
- Myth and tradition are used with modernist techniques
- Irony and a detached observation
- Identity, alienation and belonging
- Conventional and unpretentious language

These are a few of Ramanujan's unique writing features.

Ramanujan's poetry rises from realistic life, often from the Indian heritage and his personal experience (Das, 2002). He uses simple and direct language often wrapped in vernacular expressions and imagery from his South Indian inheritance. His writings are fruitful in creating a sense of immediacy and authenticity. He is recognised as a poet of striking concrete imagery with a specific object. He often employs sensory details to evoke the Indian life-rawness and moves to idealized depictions. The imagery in his writings is paradoxical, juxtaposing contrasting elements for deeper meaning creation.

AK Ramanujan's poetry often has family and relationships as the central theme. He often explores familial bonds with nostalgia, irony, humour and undercoated sadness. His writings are woven with recollections of personal feelings. He weaves Hindu mythology, classical Tamil poetry, and Kannada folklore skilfully into his verses. Though he has a modern sensibility in employing free verse, he avoids traditional punctuation and adds to a sense of immediacy. His approach to the tradition is a re-evaluation. His writings depict a clever Indian society traditions and customs observation. He presents as a detached observer and exhibits an insular narrative degree.

Since Ramanujan is a bilingual writer from India in the USA, he often explores cultural hybridity, alienation and identity search as themes in his writings. His writing a few times caught between these worlds. His writing style is conventional, direct and avoids ornate expressions and complex metaphors.

Ramanujan's poetry is imbued with a significant humanism. It manifests in several ways, such as focusing on human experiences and emotions, empathy and understanding, valuing the ordinary and the individual, exploring identity and belongingness, and irony as a tool for human insight grounded in cultural context and universal appeal. His poetry delves into knotted human relationships, particularly familial bonds, with a keen eye for love shade, loss and shared complex histories. Realism, poor romanticization, and everyday experiences are the centre of attraction. Sometimes, besides the

detached observational stance, his poetry reveals an underlying empathy for the human condition. Vulnerability and contradictions in inherent life invite readers to the context.

Ramanujan frequently invents poetic significance in the monotonous life and ordinary people's experiences. He tries to highlight the insignificance and suggests a fundamental respect for human existence. As a bilingual and bicultural writer, he wrestles with identity, alienation, and the search for belongingness, which are the themes. This exploration echoes with a broad concern for self-understanding. Irony employs a different tool to explore human insight to deliver a sophisticated judgment on his writing. It invites superficial reflections on the human condition with fine humour. His writings are intertwined with Indian heritage, human experiences and emotions. His literature portrays cultural boundaries and has a universal appeal (Das, 2002). His exploration of family and relationships resonates in different societies.

Anthropocene is a geological era characterized by a significant human impact on the Earth's ecosystem (Wikipedia, 2025). Its significant feature is that human activity becomes a dominant planetary force, influencing climate, biodiversity and physical landscapes. Its fundamental designation as a geological era is still debated. The concept is widely used in scientific and social discourses to describe the current era. Human inducement is its prime feature.

AK Ramanujan explicitly did not use the word *Anthropocene* in his writings since the word came into prominence during the 2000s, and by then, he had passed away. Several themes in his works echo with the Anthropocene as a core concern. The themes revealed by it are human impact on nature, traditional harmony loss, irony, human behaviour observation, cultural context, environmental change and implicit ecological concerns. The poem *A River* poignantly portrays human negligence towards nature. Ramanujan contrasts the idealized river portrayal in traditional poetry with the distinct reality of a river in Madurai. It dries up in summer. It is the scene of life and death due to human encroachment and the natural forces. The poem rightly focuses on the consequences of human activities in nature and their effect on the environment.

The writing *Small-Scale Reflections on a Great House* reads as lamenting the shift from a closer, nature-integrated past to a modern one. Urbanization brought the present, where the natural spaces have been replaced with human construction. This mirrors a key feature of the Anthropocene, such as human activities' large-scale transformation of natural landscapes. It is rightly portrayed in the story *A Flowering Tree*. Ramanujan's ironic feature extends how humans interact with their environment. At the same time, it is completely unfocused on ecological destruction. His detached observation reveals human self-interest, which contributes to the environmental issue. It is rightly expressed in the story *A Flowering Tree*.

The elder sister turns into a flowering tree in front of their house several times, and even after marrying the prince also retakes the human form. Here, the human relationship between nature and humans is respectful. However, when she turned into a flowering tree in the presence of her sister-in-law, human greed caused irreparable damage to the plant. The human negligence and human ill treatment of nature are rightly portrayed in the story. As a result, there was a split in the king's family. His family is happy again when they know that they did to the elder sister, who is the embodiment or symbol of nature.

Ramanujan's engagement with Indian culture and tradition provides a lens through which to view the impact of modernization and development on the environment in the Indian cultural context (JETIR, 2025). His work wholeheartedly raises questions about the environmental cost due to societal changes. In the poem *Ecology* he explores the complex relationship between humans and his mother character and nature through the lens of the mother and son and the mother's interaction with nature. His mother's intangible attachment to nature depicts the personal discomfort in the son's life. It is

purely contemporary and a running commentary on the value of nature beyond immediate human needs (Ramanujan, 1981, pp. 68-69).

The day after the first rain, for years, I would home in a rage, for I could see from a mile away our three Red Champak Trees had done it again, ... (Ecology, 1981). The poem depicts the negative consequences of the Red Champak trees on the family. Looking at the line of the poem,

... had burst into flower and given Mother her first blinding migraine of the season with their street-long heavy-hung yellow pollen fog of a fragrance no wind could sift, no door could shut out from our black... (Ecology, 1981). The natural ecosystem has been introduced, and it is the mirror image of the broader Anthropocene and the interconnectedness of humans with the ecosystem. It highlights the complex web of relations.

Ramanujan's writings indirectly address the Anthropocene as a scientific concept. His sensitive human-nature relationship representation, the human actions' impact on the environment and the changing Indian cultural landscapes provides literary insight. These are aligned with the critical concern of this proposal. His works serve as a reminder of the tangled connections between human lives and the natural world.

Posthumanism is a philosophical and cultural movement (Ihab Hassan, 1977). It questions the traditional humanistic view of humans as the centre of the universe. Human performance has unique rationality, autonomy and inherent superiority over other forms of life and technology (Wikipedia, 2025; Oxford Bibliographies, 2023).

Posthumanism questions anthropocentrism and explores the human interconnectedness with non-human entities, including animals, plants and technology (Oxford Bibliography, 2023). It often visualizes a future where the boundaries between human, animal, and machine become increasingly blurred, challenging traditional identity notions, subjectivity, and embodiment (Wikipedia, 2025). Whereas Ramanujan indirectly engages with posthumanism. A few of his works resonate post humanist sensibilities by blurring human-nature boundaries, challenging anthropocentrism, exploring transformation and hybridity, interconnectedness and questioning human universals.

Ramanujan's short story *A Flowering Tree* marvellously exemplifies the blurred boundaries between human and nature. The elder sister, the female protagonist, transforms into a beautiful flowering tree and back into a human, challenging the unbreakable separation between the human and the botanical world. However, he aligns these two with his post humanist ideas. In the poem *A River* he critiques a purely human-centric view of nature. It is a beautiful poem highlighting the river's indifference to human suffering and how human actions impact it. The poem rightly questions human dominance over nature. Again, in the short story *A Flowering Tree*, a human transformation is linked with post humanist explorations of hybridity and the potential for humans to evolve or merge with other forms. The story explores a traditional human radical alteration of form and identity.

Ramanujan focuses on family relationships. His significant portrayal of human interactions often implicates an in-depth interconnectedness between individuals. It emphasizes relationship and extends beyond the human to encompass the broader environment. His voice and presentation are folkloristic in his writings. It highlights the human experience, diversity, and knowledge system, unconditionally challenging the universal human nature notion. It is the belief held by traditional humanism. His writings echo non-standard and local dialect. It is essential to note that these are interpretations through a post humanist lens applied to his existing work. He unintentionally wrote a post humanist framework. His literary explorations of fluid identities, human-nature relationships, and the complexities of being human in a diverse world offer rich ground for dialogue with post humanist notions.

When we look at the Anthropocene narrative and postmodernism in his works, it is revealed that he did not write these works intentionally to reflect these notions. These are all unintentional, because he never directly deals with these concepts, but his short story *A Flowering Tree*, and the poems *Of Mothers, Among Other Things*, and *Love Poems for a Wife* offer a fertile ground to explore these themes.

The short story *A Flowering Tree* vibrates with a post humanist idea throughout it. The elder sister's transferable identity and transformation are the post humanist idea; the changing ability to transcend the fixed boundaries of human and plant life, challenging anthropocentric notions of human uniqueness and superiority. The story focuses on the thin layer between different forms of aligning with post humanist critiques of rigid ontological categories. It tries to decentre purely human experience, granting agency and transformative potential to the non-human world.

The story is not an exact, large-scale, explicit portrayal of ecological change. It can be interpreted within the Anthropocene context by considering the human desire to control and utilize nature. The prince demands that her sister-in-law transform into a flowering tree for her and her friends' pleasure. It reflects a human-centric view of nature as a resource to be exploited. The consequential exploitation and the subsequent events are seen as allegorical warnings about the potential repercussions of a purely instrumental relationship with nature, which is a key concern in Anthropocene discourse.

In the same way, the poem of *Mother Among Other Things* seems to have clearly changing domestic landscapes. Cleverly, it hits at environmental shifts that impact human experience (Das, 2002). It anchors personal memory within a specific natural context, suggesting an awareness of the interplay between human and environment. It is a central tenet of Anthropocene narratives. The mother's aging is also juxtaposed with the enduring presence of natural elements, prompting reflection on the human temporal scales. It focuses on the family's interconnectedness and the mother's enduring presence, even in memory. Her saree had turned, Kohinoor brown, which can be linked to post humanist ideas of extended cognition and how individuals are shaped by their relationships and environments. The mother's influence transcends her physical presence, suggesting a blurring of individual boundaries and continuing her being within the familial environmental context.

Love Poems for Wife focuses on interpersonal relationships. The sequence of poems occasionally touches upon the natural world as a backdrop for human emotions. These fleeting references remind us human experience is always situated within a broader ecological context. It is a fundamental understanding in the Anthropocene. It also hints at the transient nature of human life against a more enduring natural world backdrop. It explores human relationships' complexities and often messy realities, moves beyond idealized notions of love and marriage. This unflinching human interaction portrayal with its vulnerabilities and imperfections aligns with posthumanism's move away from idealized, rationalistic views of the human subject. It suggests a blurring of the individual self within the relationship intimacy, resonating with post humanist interconnectedness ideas and the decentring of the autonomous individual.

In conclusion, while A.K. Ramanujan's writings predate the widespread adoption of "Anthropocene" and "posthumanism" as critical terms, his nuanced explorations of human-nature relationships, fluid identities, and the complexities of human existence offer valuable literary insights into the concerns that underpin these contemporary perspectives. His works invite us to reconsider the boundaries between human and non-human, and to reflect on the intricate ways human lives are intertwined with the environment.

Concluding the preceding drafts provides the following key insights regarding A.K. Ramanujan's works. His work, often employing irony and detachment, exhibits a fundamental humanism through its focus on relatable human experiences, particularly familial relationships and

emotions. He values the ordinary, portrays individuals with empathy, and explores universal themes of identity and belonging, all while grounded in his specific cultural context.

Although Ramanujan predates the term's widespread use, his writings contain elements that resonate with Anthropocene narratives. His poem "A River" critiques human impact on nature, while other works subtly depict the interplay between human lives and changing environments. *A Flowering Tree* can be interpreted as an allegory for the consequences of a purely exploitative relationship with nature. His work implicitly raises questions about human actions and societal shifts regarding the environment.

Ramanujan's writings, particularly *A Flowering Tree*, offer vivid insights into post humanist themes. Its central transformation challenges anthropocentric boundaries between human and non-human, emphasizing instable identities and interconnectedness. His works, more particularly, question fixed notions of human nature and explore the blurring of individual selves within relationships and environments. While not solely engaging with post humanist theory, these literary explorations align with its central points need to consider.

Examination of Ramanujan's writings reflects the interconnected themes. The humanistic focus provides a foundation for understanding human interactions with each other and the environment. The Anthropocene lens highlights the impact of human actions on the natural world, which implicitly challenges anthropocentric views. Posthumanism further expands this critique by questioning the very definition of the human and exploring the potential for transcending traditional boundaries between humans and other entities, as seen in the transformative elements of *A Flowering Tree*.

Despite being written before the formalization of the Anthropocene and the full development of post humanist thought, A.K. Ramanujan's insightful and nuanced portrayals of human experience and the human relationship with the world remain relevant for contemporary discussions surrounding these critical perspectives. His work serves as a reminder of the complex and evolving connections between humanity and the broader world.

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