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A view on the condition of Indian Rivers with reference to the selected poems "A River" and "The Boat Ride along the Ganga" in connection with the project of interlinking Rivers

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Abstract

Rivers are one of the most precious gifts of the universe. It is the duty and responsibility of each one of us to protect the beauty of the rivers. Though Indians have the tradition of venerating their rivers, they never mind to pollute the river water. Every single river in India has its own share of problems due to pollution. Before undertaking the projects for interlinking of rivers in India, thought should be given to clean the rivers and free them from pollution. The present research paper attempts to portray the condition of the river Vaigai which flows towards the southern part of India and the river Ganga which flows in North India by referring the poem of A.K.Ramanujan's "A River" and the poem of Daruwalla's "Boat Ride along the Ganga". Interlinking has its own pros and cons. Polluted rivers, like the Ganga, may pollute the other rivers and spread so many diseases. Due to interlinking of rivers, there will be decrease in the amount of fresh water entering seas and this will cause a serious threat to the marine life system and will be a major ecological disaster.

Key words: *Protect, pollute, interlink, marine life, venerate*

Rivers are one of the most precious gifts of the universe. It is the duty and responsibility of each one of us to protect the beauty of the rivers. Though Indians have the tradition of venerating their rivers, they never mind to pollute the river water. Every single river in India has its own share of problems due to pollution.

In 1985, India launched the Ganga Action Plan (GAP), the largest - ever river cleanup operation in the country. The plan has been criticized for over

spending and slow progress. The GAP Phase II in 1991 included cleaning operations for the tributaries of the Ganga, i.e. the Yamuna, Gomti and the Damodar. Thus, the Yamuna Action Plan (YAP), the Gomti Action Plan and the Damodar Action Plan (DAP) were added. In 1995, the National River Conservation plan was launched. Under this, all the rivers in India were taken up for cleanup operations. But it failed to fulfill its responsibilities.

Similarly, the initial plan to interlink India's rivers came in 1858 from a British irrigation engineer, Sir Arthur Thomas Cotton. Since late last year, the scheme has been implemented by the Central government in several segments such as the Godavari-Krishna interlink in Andhra Pradesh, and the Ken-Betwa interlink in Madhya Pradesh. To interlink the rivers, projects can be implemented. Interlinking has its own pros and cons. The Indian Government has established the National Water Development Agency to study the interlinking of rivers under the Ministry of Water Resources. The project could bring prosperity in dry regions and it will control regular floods in Bihar and Assam.

The present research paper attempts to portray the condition of the river Vaigai which flows towards the southern part of India and the river Ganga which flows in North India by referring the poem of A.K.Ramanujan's "A River" and the poem of Daruwalla's "Boat Ride along the Ganga".

Attipate Krishnaswami Ramanujan (1929-1993), an academic and creative writer from India wrote in English, but he also wrote in the Indian language known as "Kannada." His poem "A River" is a realistic description of a river that flows through the city of Madurai. But now-a-days, the water flow is low.

In the poem 'A River', he reports that each summer, the city's "dries to a trickle" (5), so that many of its normally hidden imperfections and unappealing aspects are suddenly visible, such as:

*Straw and women's hair
clogging the water gates
at the rusty bars
under the bridges with patches
of repair all over them.... (8-12)*

He gives a realistic picture of the river-bed. In summer, the sand ribs are exposed. Straw and the women's hair clot the water gates. He stresses the need to repair the rusty bars of the Watergates. It depicts the polluted water of the river Vaigai.

Before undertaking the projects for interlinking of rivers in India, it should be thought how the rivers can be cleaned and how they can be freed from pollution. Due to the project, there may be loss of bio diversity to loss of flora and fauna which might hamper food cycle and food web.

Even today, the river Vaigai has been polluted by factories located on its bank. There are several classes of common water pollutants. These are disease-causing agents (pathogens), which include bacteria, viruses, protozoa and parasitic worms that enter water from domestic sewage and untreated human and animal wastes.

Another cause for water pollution is a variety of organic chemicals, which includes oil, gasoline, plastics, pesticides, cleaning solvents, detergents and many other chemicals. These are harmful to aquatic and human life forms.

The sediment of suspended matter is another class of water pollutants. These are insoluble particles of soil and other solids that become suspended in water. This occurs when the soil is eroded from the land. High levels of soil particles suspended in water interfere with the penetration of sunlight. This reduces the photosynthetic activity of aquatic plants and algae, disrupting the ecological balance of the aquatic bodies.

Likewise the River Ganga has been polluted by improper practices on the basis of religious belief. Keki Nasserwanji Daruwalla is certainly one of the major voices in Indo-Anglian poetry. He won the Sahitya Akademi award and his verses are filled with obvious Indian elements, especially in his use of the landscapes, nature and human passions. His realistic vision of human life and his personal observation are his subjects. His personal observations are not pure facts but an amalgamation of myth and reality. His powerful and vivid imagery of nature and landscapes occupy a vital place among many other the themes bringing out the present reality of nature, and states how the modern man has manipulated it.

"Boat-Ride along the Ganga" is a poem running against the mythic characteristics of the Ganges River. For the Hindus, Ganga is a mother, divinity, life giver, and river of salvation. However, the Zoroastrian poet, Daruwalla, views it differently and states the sad reality of the river which are disease and staleness. Through the lines of the poem, he utters his embarrassment to see things in the river and its banks, while he is riding upstream on a motorboat at dusk. He expresses his indifference with the words of panda and the things which he happens to see while rowing,

*I listen avidly to his legend-talk
Striving to forget what I changed to see:
The sewer-mouth trained like a cannon
On the river's flank (10-13)*

These lines show the dirty condition of the river Ganga. It focuses on the mouth of the giant-sized sewer which spews the entire city's sewage into the river. The author is conscious about hygiene.

*It is as I feared;
hygiene is a part of my conscience and I curse it
and curse my upbringing which makes me queasy here. (14-15)*

The pandas believe that the waters are believed to dissolve all sins and pollutions. The Pandas keep talking about the merit of 'punya' which one earns, and the speaker meditates over death which is everyone's final fate. People come there to cremate believing that if the dead are cremated there, it is possible to escape the next birth and they can attain 'moksha'.

*And while the pandas calculate
the amount of merit that accrues to you
at each specific ghat you cross the pyres
bowing your head to the finality of fate.(16-19)*

According to the myth of the Ganga being a goddess who has the power to wash away all the sins and redeem mankind. The poet pictures the ugly sights which he sees on the banks of the sacred river. The strange juxtaposition of the fires of cremation and cooking fires baffles the poet. And at the same time, cooking fires

are burning side by side. The people who assist in burning the dead cook there for their livelihood.

*The concept of the goddess baffles you-
Ganga as mother, daughter, bride.
What plane of destiny have I arrived at
where corpse-fires and cooking - fires
burn side by side?.*(48-51)

A large majority of the Indian population, including those who worship the rivers, do not think twice before polluting the river. Urbanization, industrialization, various religious and social practices all contribute to river pollution in India.

There are advantages and disadvantages in interlinking rivers due to the above mentioned reasons. Polluted rivers, like the Ganga, may pollute the other rivers and spread many diseases. Due to interlinking of rivers, there will be a decrease in the amount of fresh water entering seas and this will cause a serious threat to the marine life system and will be a major ecological disaster. Due to the creation of Canals and Reservoirs, huge amount of area which is occupied by the people will be submerged leading to displacement of people and moreover government will have to spend more to rehabilitate these people. The amount required for these projects is so huge that government will have to take loans from foreign sources which would increase the burden on the government and country will fall in a debt trap.

There are concerns that the Par river water is highly contaminated with industrial pollution and that will spread to a larger area and will be ecologically devastating. Though there has not been any proper environmental impact assessment done yet, according to the National Water Development Agency, the Par-Tapi-Narmada river-link project is likely to submerge 75 tribal villages and displacing more than 14000 tribal population. Considering the past record on rehabilitation of dam-displaced population, this planned project creates serious apprehension among the affected population.

It is concluded that the rivers in India are full of chemicals and sewage and it is not logical to link the rivers. The real condition of the rivers is also well

portrayed in the two poems which make us aware to keep the environment clean before linking the rivers.

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