

ISSN 2347 - 503X

Research Chronicler

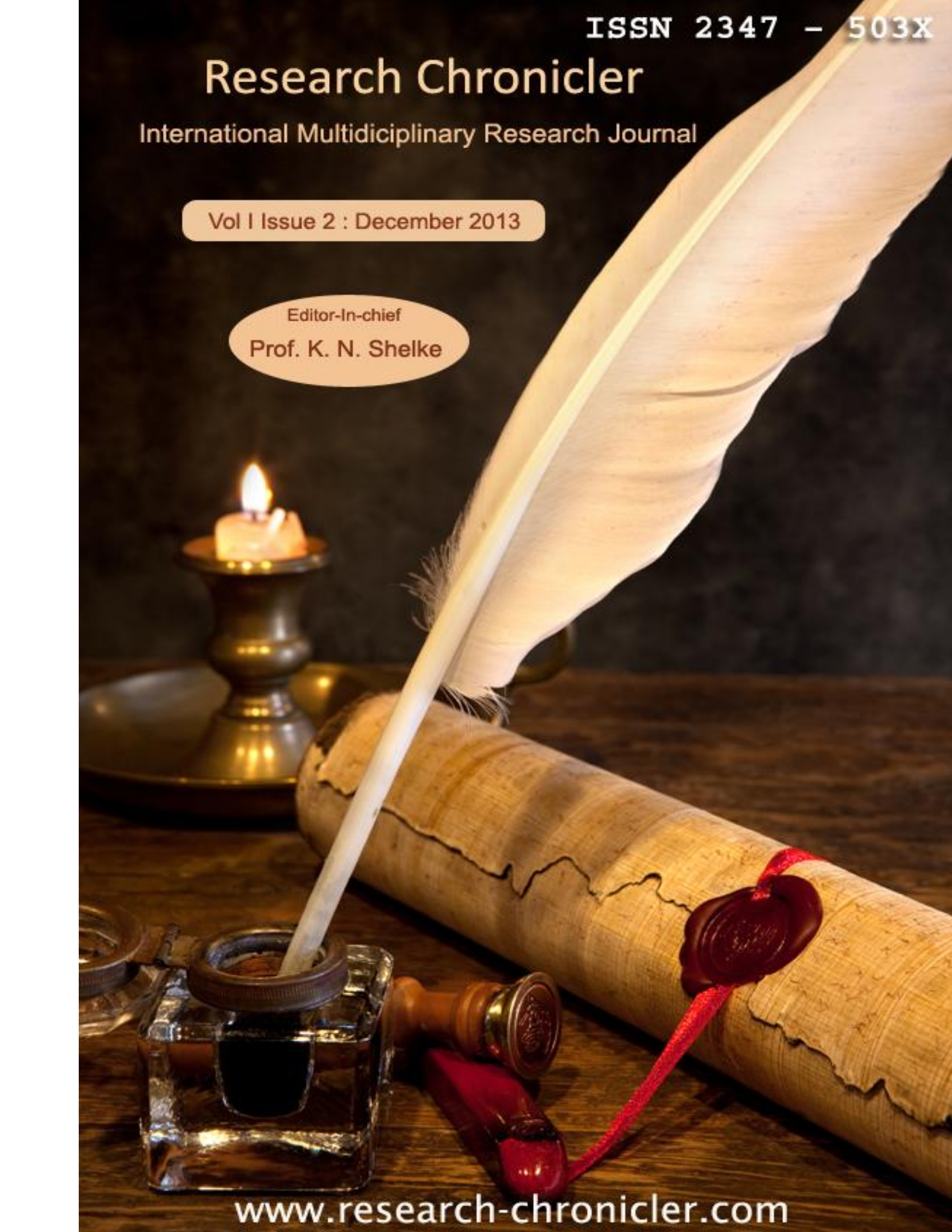
International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

Vol I Issue 2 : December 2013

Editor-In-chief

Prof. K. N. Shelke

www.research-chronicler.com

A detailed illustration of a quill pen resting on a scroll of parchment. The quill is white and has a dark tip. The scroll is made of aged, yellowish parchment and is tied with a red ribbon. A red wax seal is visible on the scroll. In the background, there is a lit candle in a brass holder and a glass inkwell with a quill pen inside it. The scene is set on a wooden surface.

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A peer-reviewed refereed and indexed international multidisciplinary research journal

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Traces of Hindu Eco-Ethics in the Poetry of A.K. Ramanujan

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ABSTRACT

Indian culture and tradition has been ever eco-oriented since Vedic days. Eco-oriented ancient practices still can be seen at least in rural belts of India. Indian culture is not opposed to growth and development. Development should take place but without disturbing the eco-system. Indian philosophers distinguish themselves by their spiritual philosophy from material philosophy of the West. Spirituality of the East never taught schemes of exploitation and appropriation. In the ancient Hindu traditions, man was looked upon as part of nature, linked inextricably with elements around him. In the present article, it has been sought to find out nook and cranny of eco philosophy in Ramanujan's poetry.

Key Terms: Culture, eco-ethics, Hinduism, A.K. Ramanujan

The Hindu tradition is the oldest living religious tradition in the world. It believes in the all-inclusive world-view. It sees divine presence in all living and non-living objects. Hinduism is a theory and practice in compliance with principles of Vedas, Upanishads, Puranas, Smritis, and many more sacred Hindu texts. Since Hindus feel the Supreme Being's presence in everything around them, they feel obliged to honour all living creatures and organic things on the earth. They know how to live in harmony with His creation including earth, fire, rivers, forests, pet and non-pet animals and birds, trees, plants, sun, air etc. No other religion lays as much emphasis on the superiority of nature as does Hinduism. In fact Hinduism is an argument for reverence towards all things in the cosmos.

Hinduism looks at the world of nature which is utterly different to that of Western religions. It is based on the Vedas, Upanishads, Puranas, Gita, Vedant etc. According to Hindu thought, there is no gap between the Divine and the world of nature. Physical world is just the manifestation of Him. All things and beings are just manifestations. Hindu sacred texts stress on the fact that human beings cannot separate themselves from nature. Hindus adore divine forces hidden in nature. Hinduism believes in the attainment of liberation to soul. It accepts the world of nature or real world as described by science but rejects altogether materialism. It approves reason but rejects rationalism as the final view of life. Simultaneously it rejects theology in the form of blind faith. Hinduism accommodates science philosophy, and

theology. Hinduism does not agree to Western notion that God needs human aids in His progress project. Every social work done extra-self-interest is worth to the adoration of God. Hinduism is every inch synthetic, coherent, and universal. It is coherent because it succeeded each and every scientific enquiry. It is synthetic because it gives place to all schools and systems of thought by virtue of moderation and toleration discrediting sectarianism. It is universal because it holds that every man is son of God and he can feel His presence by himself. Without doubt, every creature is another manifestation of God. Millions of people around the world, especially in the West, are practicing some aspects of the Hindu system, such as Yoga, Meditation, Vegetarianism and Ahimsa or non-violence. Many of these aspects are currently being researched and used in the fields of Health and Medicine, Management, Self-development, Environmental issues, Human and animal rights and Socio-Political issues (Ahimsa).

Man is an intermediate player in the drama of material and abstract reality. He is made of as per Hindu belief, five elements- space, air, fire, water, and earth – form the fabric of interconnected web of life. Hinduism teaches that the five great elements (Panchbhutani) that constitute the environment are all derived from prakriti, the primal energy. Hinduism relates nose to earth, tongue to water, eyes to fire, skin to air, and ears to space. As such Hinduism establishes the inseparable bond between our senses and the elements with the natural world. For Hinduism, living beings are the by-products

of the environment. They are not outside us, not alien or hostile to us. Harmony among five constitutive elements keeps man alive and working. Any kind of tussle, if there happens, causes ailments and even sometimes death strokes. The point to drive home is that we cannot live without ensuring viable environment. We should live with and by environment like a sympathetic and sensitive friend. All creatures (plants, animals, birds included) of the world above and below the earth are members of a bigger family called environment. Reincarnation of soul is central in Hinduism. Hindus believe that in the cycle of life and birth one may come back as an animal or a bird and so on and so forth. This is the solid basis for adopting the path of non-violence against creatures. The Vishnu Purana states that one who does not harm and kill non-speaking creatures or animals, pleases God (Vishnu Purana 3:8:15).

As per Hindu belief and practice, human body is made up of five elements (Panchbhutani)- air, water, fire, sky, and earth. After the death of the body (as soul is immortal and not subjected to death and decay), these all elements naturally return to their respective elements- “into the soil as soil we come,”. In the drama of life finally nature clinches the series. Simply say, nature is the master controller of the bodily existence. This is the reason why Hindus worship nature. In the poem “Towards Simplicity” Ramanujan writes that ‘corpuscle, skin, cell, and membrane’ all have certain life and are bound with one another in an intricate manner. Each element runs towards its perfection that is death. As

such life-death cycle runs infinitely. As he writes:

Millions grow lean and fall away
in the hourly autumn of the body.
But fertile in fall, ending as others begin,
to the naivete of death they run.(CP 37)

In “A Hindu to His Body” Ramanujan seeks to drive home the fact that to a Hindu, body and soul both are equally important. A little fancifully the poet calls the body “Dear pursuing presence”, “dear body”. That is why the body requests to the soul not to leave behind. As he knows that often the see-off of immortal soul, the body will return into nature. He writes:

When you leave all else,
my garrulous face, my unknissed
alien mind, when you muffle
and put away my pulse
to rise in the sap of trees

let me go with you and feel the weight
of honey-hives in my branching
and the burlap weave of weaver-birds
in my hair. (CP 40)

In Hindu philosophy, every creature has a perishable body and an immortal soul. Soul is immortal. And therefore every creature, big or small, deserves equal importance. The essence of Hindu philosophy is tolerance, sympathy, and sensibility or sensitivity. One should have ever mercy on others. Ramanujan being born in a south Indian Brahmin family is deeply rooted in Hinduism. He doesn't like to 'hurt fly or a spider either because he

thinks that these creatures might be one of his ancestors. He affirms:

Maybe it's once again my
great swinging grandmother,
and that other (playing at
patience centered in his web)
my one true ancestor, (CP 62)

In “Death and the Good Citizen” Ramanujan firmly affirms that human and non-human bodies are biodegradable. They are liable to return to nature:

Good animal yet perfect
citizen, you, you are
biodegradable, you do
return to nature: (CP 135)

In this poem again Ramanujan as an environmentalist argued that “the human body appears to be entirely natural, is contained in nature, and returns after death, or ought to return, to nature. This return is a specific instance of the general principle of conservation, according to which everything in our environment ought to be recycled”(CP xviii).

In the poem “Elements of Composition” Ramanujan reiterates that man is a bio-product. He writes:

Composed as I am, like others,
of elements on certain well-known lists,
father's seed and mother's egg
gathering earth, air, fire, mostly
water, into a mulberry mass, (CP 121)

Later in the poem, the poet assures that return to nature is inevitable:

I lose, decompose

into my elements,
 into other names and forms,
 past, and passing, tenses
 without time,
 caterpillar on a leaf, eating,
 being eaten.(CP 123)

In “One More on a Deathless Theme”, the poet broods over the mortal nature of everything in the cosmos. He even identifies plants, fruits, birds etc. with human destiny. He writes:

will one day be short of breath,
 lose its thrust,
 turn cold, dehydrate and leave
 a jawbone with half a grin
 near a pond: just as this dog(CP 209)

After the death, physical shape returns to nature. As Ramanujan affirms:

Everyone in this street
 will become cold, lie under stones
 or be scattered as ash
 in rivers and oceans. (CP 210)

“In March” a visionary poem, the poet “feels the entire natural world- continents, oceans, dolphins, icebergs islands, seashores, rivers, alligators, forests, and birds- circulating inside his body. Not only is the body contained in nature, but in an extraordinary, hyper real state of

consciousness all of nature also seems to be contained in the human body” (CP xxii). Here again Ramanujan firmly established mutual relationship of nature and living beings.

In the poem “A Meditation” Ramanujan imagines his aging body as ‘a black walnut tree’. In his meditation, he thinks that just as a tree is at its maturity, cut, recycled, redistributed for various purposes, so is the destiny of human life. After the death of physical contours they are sent to be recycled and redistributed for new and newer shape. He even goes farther and says:

Now here I sit in this chair,
 paper and pencil on my table,
 and as I write
 I know I’m writing now on my head,
 now on my torso, my living
 hands moving
 on a dead one, a firm imagined body
 working with the transience
 of breathless real bodies. (CP 240)

To the end, it can be said that Ramanujan never forgot his especial and incredible eco-training through Hinduism. This was his great achievement. Although he left India in his youthful days, he retained and resuscitated Hinduism on alien land.

Works Cited

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