

‘A Flowering Tree: A Woman’s Tale’

By A. K. Ramanujan

(Q) What are the themes dealt with in ‘A Flowering Tree: A Woman’s Tale’? Discuss.

(A) The themes that are dealt with in A. K. Ramanujan’s short story, ‘A Flowering Tree: A Woman’s Tale’ are: (i) Relationship between organisms and environment, (ii) Relationship between woman and nature, (iii) Woman’s position in society, and (iv) Objectification and sexual exploitation of woman.

Let us now discuss each of these **four themes** in detail:

(i) Relationship between organisms and environment: The study of the relationship between organisms and environment is called Ecology. Ecology has three aspects with regard to this short story. **Firstly**, Ecology concerns devotion to the Mother Earth. Kumudha, as a flowering tree, is the very reflection of the Mother Earth or Nature. Each time she becomes a flowering tree, she begs the person who is with her, whether that be her own elder sister or her sister-in-law, to be careful not to reach any form of damage other than gently plucking flowers on her. **Secondly**, Ecology asserts an emotional attachment toward Nature in that Kumudha and she herself as a flowering tree are two facets of the same Nature. Each of the two facets empathizes with the other. For, a flowering tree is taken to be a mother, who has given birth. **Thirdly**, Ecology also entails the preservation and conservation of Nature. In this short story, the caution against plucking flowers on Kumudha more than what is needed conforms with the preservation and conservation of Nature.

(ii) Relationship between woman and Nature: A. K. Ramanujan's 'A Flowering Tree' shows a strong relation between woman and Nature. It is a story related to woman's ecology or Ecofeminism. As the Mother Nature becomes vulnerable under the influence of the consumerist society, so is Kumudha too when she makes herself a product by selling her flowers. Eventually, when she is left exploited and mutilated by her in-laws, she can be made whole only through her becoming a flowering tree once again.

(iii) Woman's position in society: In India, more often than not, it is the bride that falls victim to domestic violence meted out to her by the groom's side. Likewise, in this short story, Kumudha is victimized by her mother- and sister- in-laws. Kumudha is ravaged and, as a flowering tree, mutilated by her unmarried sister-in-law. It is therefore that in society, a woman is in need of protection and care at every phase of her life; as a daughter by her parents, as a wife by her husband and as someone in her old age by her children.

(iv) Objectification and sexual exploitation of woman: The ritual relating to Kamudha's flowering is symbolical of her being sexual or being just an object of sex. She, as an object of sex, like any other woman is most vulnerable to injury and exploitation when she is at her attractive best, that is, when she is in her state of flowering. The story suggests that Kumudha desires to flower, despite, or else face, the dread associated with it. This is but the objectification or reification of woman. Kumudha in the story is demanded only out of pleasure in random to transform herself into a flowering tree without the slightest regard for her own will and emotion. This renders her being just an object, the one she is reduced to, as when she is left mutilated by her sister-in-law in her flowering.