

## **Buried Landscapes and Literary Echoes: Unveiling the Wayanad Landslides in Gangadharan Nair Pulingat's *Landslide***

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### **Abstract**

The complex relationship between nature's majesty and its capacity for destruction by examining the 2024 Wayanad landslides in Kerala alongside Gangadharan Nair Pulingat's poem *Landslide* is explored in this article. The real-life disaster, triggered by intense monsoon rains, led to significant loss of life, destruction of infrastructure, and socio-economic hardships, highlighting human vulnerability in the face of natural forces. In contrast, Pulingat's poem offers a literary interpretation of a landslide, using evocative imagery to convey the terror and emotional devastation experienced by affected communities. By juxtaposing these perspectives, this analysis underscores the unpredictability of nature, the urgent need for disaster preparedness, and the broader environmental consequences of human activities. Additionally, it emphasizes literature's role in deepening our understanding of natural disasters by providing emotional and symbolic interpretations of real-world catastrophes. Through this comparative study, we gain a richer appreciation of both the immediate impact of landslides and their long-term implications on human resilience, ecological balance, and the necessity for sustainable coexistence with nature.

**Keywords:** Wayanad, Landslide, natural disasters, environmental impact, human vulnerability, literary representation, resilience, trauma, ecological balance, disaster preparedness, sustainability

Nature's majestic beauty and its capacity for destruction are intertwined facets that captivate and challenge human understanding. As we explore the often volatile relationship between humanity and the environment, we encounter instances where nature's grandeur manifests not only as a source of inspiration but also as a formidable force of destruction. The Wayanad landslides of 2024 in Kerala, India, and Gangadharan Nair Pulingat's evocative poem "Landslide" offer compelling insights into these dual aspects of nature. Through a detailed examination of both, we can gain a richer understanding of how such phenomena impact human lives and how they are interpreted across different mediums.

On August 9, 2024, Wayanad—a region known for its lush landscapes and serene hills—was transformed by one of the deadliest natural disasters in its history. The landslides that engulfed the area were triggered by an unusually intense monsoon season, resulting in an unprecedented combination of rain and instability. The catastrophe was swift and overwhelming, illustrating nature's capacity to wreak havoc when human vulnerabilities and environmental conditions collide. The disaster had devastating consequences, including significant loss of life, extensive property damage, and profound socio-economic impacts. This event not only underscored the destructive power of natural forces but also highlighted the urgent need for improved disaster preparedness and environmental management.

In contrast to this real-world calamity, Gangadharan Nair Pulingat's poem "Landslide" provides a literary exploration of a similar disaster. While fictional, the poem captures the essence of the terror and upheaval associated with landslides through vivid imagery and poignant emotional depth. By portraying the landslide as an enraged beast that consumes everything in its path,

Pulingat's work reflects the primal and uncontrollable nature of such events. The poem delves into the emotional aftermath of the disaster, offering a lens through which readers can understand and empathize with the human experience of catastrophe.

This comparative study delves into the intersections between the real-life

Wayanad landslides and Pulingat's literary depiction of a landslide. It examines how both the actual event and the poetic representation addresses themes of unpredictability, vulnerability, and the emotional impact of natural disasters. By analyzing these perspectives, we aim to uncover how literature can illuminate the human experience of natural calamities and offer deeper insights into the broader implications for society.

Through this exploration, we will see how Pulingat's poem mirrors the real-life devastation of Wayanad, highlighting both the literal and metaphorical aspects of nature's power. The juxtaposition of these representations allows us to reflect on the fragility of human existence in the face of natural forces and underscores the need for a harmonious relationship with the environment. By engaging with both the historical event and its literary reflection, we can appreciate the complexity of nature's impact on human lives and the role of literature in enhancing our understanding of such profound experiences.

A catastrophic event occurred on August 9, 2024, in Wayanad, a picturesque district in Kerala, India. It experienced one of the deadliest natural disasters in its history. The landslides that struck six villages—Punjirimattom, Meppadi, Mundakkai, Attamala, Chooralmala, and Kunhome—unveiled the devastating impact of nature's fury when combined with human vulnerabilities. This tragedy serves as a grim reminder of the unpredictable and often uncontrollable forces of nature.

The landslides were precipitated by an unusually intense monsoon season that inundated region with unprecedented rainfall. The soil, already saturated from previous rains, became unstable, leading to the catastrophic collapse of slopes. The event unfolded with terrifying speed, burying entire villages under a torrent of mud, rocks, and debris. Eyewitnesses reported a thunderous roar as the earth shifted violently. The landslides hit with minimal warning, leaving little time for inhabitants to escape. Many were caught off guard, particularly those in makeshift tents who were asleep at the time. The scale of the destruction was immense, with entire homes, roads and infrastructure being obliterated.

The human cost was staggering. A total of over 400 people lost their lives, marking it as the deadliest landslide event in Kerala's history. Most victims were

workers from neighboring states, living in temporary accommodations on tea and cardamom estates. Over 397 individuals were injured, and more than 206 remained unaccounted for. The disaster also highlighted severe socio-economic impacts. In addition to the loss of life, the landslides caused extensive property damage. More than 1,555 residential houses were destroyed, along with 100 other buildings, including schools, dispensaries, and public offices. The infrastructure damage was severe, with 124 kilometers of electricity lines, two transformers, and several rural roads and bridges rendered unusable.

Agriculture, a vital part of the region's economy, suffered immensely. Approximately 310 hectares of land, including crops such as cardamom, coffee, pepper, tea, and bananas, were lost. This agricultural devastation not only impacted local farmers but also had broader economic implications for the region. The disaster left survivors grappling with grief, loss, and the daunting challenge of rebuilding their lives. The emotional and psychological impact was profound, as entire communities faced the overwhelming task of recovery and reconstruction.

A poetic reflection of Gangadharan Nair Pulingat's poem "Landslide" provides a literary exploration of the experience of a landslide. Although fictional, the poem captures the essence of the terror and devastation associated with such natural disasters. Through vivid imagery and emotional depth, Pulingat's work reflects the human experience of catastrophe, offering a poignant commentary on the interplay between nature and humanity.

The poem begins with a serene depiction of a village nestled in the hills, creating a stark contrast to the ensuing chaos. Pulingat describes the landslide with dramatic imagery: "Rain, heavy rain, and flood / Caused such a heavy damage." (Pulingat, 1,2) This metaphor likens the earth to an enraged beast, suggesting a primal and uncontrollable force. The choice of words like "flashfled" and "heavy rain" conveys the violent and sudden nature of the disaster.

Pulingat's imagery reflects the sense of helplessness felt by those caught in the landslide. The description of the village being "swallowed whole" emphasizes the complete and overwhelming nature of the destruction. This vivid portrayal aligns with the

real-life devastation experienced in Wayanad, where entire communities were engulfed by debris.

The poem also delves into the emotional impact of the landslide. Lines such as “No where to go for safety / Abandoning the houses difficult” (Pulingat,11,12), capture the profound grief and loss experienced by survivors. The poem portrays the collective trauma of a community facing sudden and catastrophic loss, mirroring the real-life experiences of the Wayanad survivors who faced both mourning and the arduous task of recovery.

The landslide in Pulingat’s poem can be interpreted as a symbol of larger forces at play. It may represent nature’s response to human encroachment or serve as a metaphor for the unpredictable and often cruel twists of fate. The poem’s portrayal of the landslide as a living, sentient force suggests a deeper existential crisis, where the stability of life is questioned by nature’s sudden upheaval.

The comparative analysis of both Pulingat’s poem a literary work and the Wayanad landslides a reality highlight the unpredictability and vulnerability associated with natural disasters. In the poem, the landslide’s sudden onset and overwhelming force reflect the real-life experience of Wayanad residents who faced the disaster with little warning. The imagery of the earth consuming the village aligns with the physical destruction observed in the region.

Despite technological advancements and increased knowledge, humans remain vulnerable to nature’s whims. This realization is both humbling and terrifying, emphasizing the inherent fragility of human life in the face of natural forces. The unpredictability of nature is a central theme in both representations, underscoring the need for preparedness and resilience in the face of such events.

Pulingat’s poetic imagery serves as a powerful representation of the landslide’s impact. The metaphor of the earth as an enraged beast and the depiction of the village being swallowed whole provide a vivid and evocative portrayal of the disaster. This literary representation mirrors the actual devastation observed in Wayanad, where entire communities were buried under debris.

The poem's language brings the horror of the landslide to life, making it accessible to readers who may not have experienced such an event firsthand. The convergence of fiction and reality in Pulingat's work underscores the power of literature to reflect and interpret the human experience of catastrophe. The poem's evocative imagery helps readers grasp the scale of the disaster and the emotional weight of such events.

The emotional and psychological impact of the landslide is a significant theme in both the poem and the real-life event. Pulingat's portrayal of survivors' grief and despair captures the collective trauma experienced by those affected by the disaster. This emotional resonance is mirrored in the real-life experiences of the Wayanad survivors, who faced immense grief and struggled to rebuild their lives.

The poem's focus on the emotional aftermath of the landslide highlights the broader human experience of loss and recovery. The psychological toll of the disaster, including the trauma and stress experienced by survivors, is an important aspect of both the literary and real-life accounts. The poem provides a means of understanding and empathizing with the emotional challenges faced by those affected by natural disasters.

The Wayanad landslides underscore the need for improved environmental management and disaster preparedness. The region's hilly terrain and deforestation contributed to the instability of the land, highlighting the consequences of human activities on natural processes. The disaster serves as a reminder of the delicate balance between human development and environmental preservation.

Pulingat's poem, while fictional, can be seen as a reflection of broader environmental themes. The landslide's portrayal as a force of nature responding to human actions suggests a commentary on the relationship between humans and the environment. The poem's focus on the physical and emotional impact of the landslide aligns with the real-world implications for affected communities, emphasizing the need for a more harmonious interaction with nature.

The role of literature in understanding natural disaster has long served as a mirror to reality, offering insights into the human experience of natural disasters.

Pulingat's "Landslide" provides a literary representation of a landslide, capturing the terror and emotional depth associated with such events. By engaging with the poem, readers can gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of those affected by natural disasters, even if they have not experienced one themselves.

The ability of literature to reflect reality is particularly important in the context of natural disasters. Through poems, stories, and novels, writers can explore the human side of these events, shedding light on the experiences of those affected and the broader implications for society. In this way, literature becomes a tool for empathy, allowing readers to connect with the suffering of others and gain a greater appreciation for the complexities of the human condition.

The Wayanad landslides of 2024 and Gangadharan Nair Pulingat's poem "Landslide" provide a profound exploration of nature's dual capacity to inspire awe and instill terror. This comparative analysis highlights how a real-world disaster and its literary depiction can both reflect and interpret the raw power of natural forces and their impact on human lives.

The landslides that ravaged Wayanad, serve as a stark reminder of nature's unpredictable and often overwhelming force. The catastrophic event demonstrated the devastating consequences of natural disasters exacerbated by human vulnerability and environmental mismanagement. The sudden and destructive nature of the landslides, which obliterated entire communities and caused significant loss of life, underscores the fragility of human existence in the face of natural calamities. The extensive damage to infrastructure, the immense loss of agricultural produce, and the profound psychological impact on survivors all highlight the urgent need for improved disaster preparedness, environmental stewardship, and resilience-building in vulnerable regions.

In contrast, Gangadharan Nair Pulingat's "Landslide" offers a literary reflection on the essence of such disasters. Through evocative imagery and emotional depth, the poem encapsulates the terror and disruption experienced during a landslide. The metaphor of the earth as an enraged beast and the vivid depiction of the village being consumed by debris provide a powerful narrative that mirrors the real-life devastation.

Pulingat's portrayal of the landslide as both a physical and symbolic force allows readers to engage with the emotional and existential dimensions of such events, providing a means to empathize with the experiences of those affected and to reflect on broader themes of human vulnerability and environmental interaction.

The convergence of these two perspectives—one grounded in the harsh reality of a natural disaster and the other in the interpretive realm of literature—reveals several important insights. Firstly, both representations highlight the inherent unpredictability and destructive power of nature. The immediacy and scale of the Wayanad landslides resonate with Pulingat's literary imagery, underscoring the alignment between real-world experiences and artistic expressions of catastrophe. This connection emphasizes the need for a nuanced understanding of natural disasters that incorporates both empirical evidence and emotional resonance.

Secondly, the emotional and psychological impacts of such events are central to both real-life disaster and its literary reflection. The grief, despair, and trauma experienced by survivors in Wayanad find a poignant echo in Pulingat's depiction of human suffering in the wake of the landslide. This intersection of emotional experiences highlights the role of literature in making sense of and giving voice to the human side of natural disasters. Through literary exploration, readers gain access to the internal struggles and resilience of those affected, fostering empathy and a deeper comprehension of the psychological toll of such calamities.

Finally, the environmental and socio-economic implications of the Wayanad landslides stress the importance of sustainable practices and disaster preparedness. The poem, while fictional, can be interpreted as a commentary on the consequences of human encroachment on natural landscapes and the resulting environmental instability. By reflecting on these themes, both the real-world event and the literary work contribute to a broader discourse on the need for balance between development and environmental preservation.

In conclusion, the Wayanad landslides and Gangadharan Nair Pulingat's "Landslide" collectively underscore the profound impact of natural disasters on human lives and communities. They illuminate the ways in which nature's power can be both a literal and



metaphorical force, shaping our understanding of vulnerability, loss, and resilience. Through this comparative analysis, we gain valuable insights into the relationship between humans and nature, recognizing the need for continued efforts to mitigate the risks of natural disasters and to engage with their human and environmental dimensions through both practical measures and reflective storytelling. The interplay between real-life events and their literary interpretations enriches our appreciation of nature's complexity and the enduring human spirit in the face of overwhelming challenges.

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