

Diasporic Concerns in A. K. Ramanujan's Writings

Anamika Kumari

Research Scholar

P.G. Dept. of English

T.M. Bhagalpur University

Bhagalpur, Bihar, India

DOI: 10.53032/tcl.2019.4.2.06

Abstract

Ramanujan appears to be poised and perched between two worlds. The world in which he is born and the other which he has acquired. It then becomes very obvious that the perception of Ramanujan "is not just that of Hindu or merely an Indian in the sense that he sees only those. His perceptive eye roves wider and the limit of his perception is encompassing wider area." His perception is pluralistic absorbing other culture. This does not Point towards assimilation or integration of the others into the Indian or the Indian into the global. Ramanujan used to describe his position as "being the hyphen in Indian-American Identifying with E. M Forester's great urge to "connect" Ramanujan also makes his greatest work out of disconnections. His life's mission seems to be "to keep the dialogues and corals alive and to make something of them." His aim is to achieve a synthesis between warring cultural coordinates, "It looks as if I live between things all the time two (or more) languages, two countries, and two disciplines. In all his writing translations, critical essays or poetic compositions, there is an invisible thread which lends homogeneity to his writings. In his encounter with different cultures, Ramanujan feels "himself translated a little in each encounter" and learns "a good deal about myself and about Indian arts".

Keywords- Indian, Perception, Culture, Perspective, Synthesis

The perspective of "a past" becoming more present than the present as well as of the remote becoming the immediate, needs to be looked into from the angle of Ramanujan's quest for the self: from his ideas of living memory and real time and not from the angle of alienation. All these certainly do not happen to the critic's mind. And ironically, the poems referred to by the critic, do not bring into our mind the semblance of alienation as Ramanujan's "Hindoo" poems and his family-and-memory poems do. Naik too proceeds from the wrong premises and expectedly arrives at unjustified conclusions. More particularly, a recurrent ironic awareness of Ramanujan of his family relations, and also his sceptical outlook on the Hindu views of life, lead the critic astray to observe that the poet struggles for his "roots" and that he lacks in capacity "to have a bold, all-out confrontation with experience." The "Hindoo"

The Creative Launcher

An International, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E- Journal in English

Vol. IV & Issue II (June- 2019)

poems are faulted on one reason or another, for the critic's expectation of a Hindu in the poet is not realized.

Naik's study of Ramanujan's investment of irony into his family traditions as well as his ethos comes at time to a point, where the reader may confuse the artist's irony as the mode only of his alienation, or as a tool ideal only for an alienated mind in Ramanujan. Ramanujan's ironic tool is as subtle as his vision. Now, therefore, the question of his alienation from his ethos may be looked into, and in this context, Ramanujan's "Hindoo" poems are important to begin with:

Sons who run away come back
in grandchildren who recite Sanskrit
to approaching old men, or bring
betel nuts for visiting uncles
who keep them gaping with
anecdotes of unseen fathers,
or to bring Ganges water
in a copper pot
for the last of the dying
ancestor's rattle in the throat. (*Selected Poems*)

Nonetheless, the poet here shows a complex sensibility: there is a cool, critical and ironical observation, on the one hand; while on the other, there is his calm awakening to every little happening which again is calmly accepted. The essential difference between the spirit of this "great house" and that of the poet lies in his ironic stance only. King is remarkably well disposed to the inner Symbol of this great absorbing tradition and reads of the poem as "symbolic of the mind in which all new experience and information becomes part of the past and is changed, just as the past is changed by the experience of the modern world. "Ramanujan's artistic distancing though comic absurdity and ironic humor does not suggest his estrangement from the symbolic mind, rather it shows a spirit in him that bends to a half-way celebration of life, the life that shoots, grows and changes within the tradition of this great house. Therefore Ramanujan use of irony does not reflect adversely on his belonging to the Indian ethos. A proposition that Ramanujan is rooted in his cultural ethos as well as indigenous literary tradition.

Aware of Ramanujan's achievement in English poetry, Bruce King observes, "He showed that Indian poets could both be modern and work from within their own literary traditions" King's re-assertion of his observation on Ramanujan's vital link with the Tamil as well as the Kannada classics finds expression thus:

"The use of the self as a centre for a poem filled with ironies which unpredictably changes directions and attitudes...is within the tradition of medieval Saints poetry." With his sensitive assessments of Ramanujan's umbilical relation with an old, indigenous and almost forgotten tradition, King has not broken new ground on the overall Ramanujan - criticism. Nevertheless, his effort has added a credible difference, all the more creditable, for that

The Creative Launcher

An International, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E- Journal in English

Vol. IV & Issue II (June- 2019)

matter, to the Question of Ramanujan's alienation both in terms of culture and literary tradition. one recalls in this context, the stance of R. Parthasarathy, who while examining the general problems encountered by an Indian writing in English, goes on record, "there is no perspective at all in which to evaluate" his achievement as an Indian poet. Most Indo-Anglians would come within the broad spectrum of Parthasarathy's observation. However, Ramanujan Stands as an exception to Parthasarathy's general rule. Ramanujan, rooted in Tamil and Kannada as well as kolakar, rooted in Marathi, does present some redeeming Prospect in the general bleakness of a pan-Indian tradition in English poetry in our times.

Taking Parthasarathy's position on the Indo-Anglian tradition as a case of "militant modernism," Naik has tried to advance his own view that "surely, a tradition could not have survived for a century and a quarter without having had at least some areas of excellence whatever its deficiencies." To make his observation weighty, his sense of irony comes handy and he adds, "It is equally obvious that Post- Independence Indian English poets did not suddenly fall from heaven." He reaffirms his Viewpoint by illustrating that there has been a tradition since the day Henry Derozio published his poem in 1927. Whether "a century and a quarter" old, this Indo-Anglian tradition seems to be a consistent phenomenon in our modern time, and it's solid merits whose signs are, of course, visible now, are still more in promise than in the present achievements. The history of Indo-Anglian tradition would reveal that this tradition has been inspired by the changing literary ideas and movements in the west. As was the case with our 19th century masters, molded ones under the shadow of English Romantics including the Victorians and the Edwardians, So is it with our 20th century moderns who cannot simply wish away the Anglo-American modernists as of no consequence to them. Therefore, the evaluation of Dom Moraes, Ezekiel, Jussawalla and even of Daruwalla, all-important Indo-Anglians would yield good results broadly in a European tradition. But it is now Ramanujan who could satisfy the criteria of an Indian speaking to the Indians. This is not to say that Ramanujan is alienated from the European tradition of modernism, a world phenomenon at large. It may be borne in mind that Ramanujan's deep sense of an indigenous literary tradition does not work towards his alienation from the modernist tradition of English poetry. Both the literary traditions, one of the ancient east and the other of the modern West, fun into his creative consciousness that engenders an art of integrated sensibilities.

Furthermore, Ramanujan's cultural synthesis in his poetry is best manifest in the poem, "prayers to Lord Murugan" – R besides "Still Another view of Grace," "Still another for Mother," "Entries for our catalogue of Fears" and "compensations" to name but a few, which admittedly have variations on the theme of synthesis. Let us take for discussion the fourth as well as the fifth prayer in the "Murugan" poems:

Lord of great changes and small
cells: exchange our painted grey
pottery
for iron copper the leap of stone horses
our yellow grass and lily seed

The Creative Launcher

An International, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E- Journal in English

Vol. IV & Issue II (June- 2019)

for rams
flesh and Scarlet rise for the carnivals
on rivers O dawn of nightmare virgins
bring us
your white-haired witches who wear
three colours, even in sleep (*Selected Poems*)

With the very first time “Lord of great changes and small cells”, the ideas of two ethos, east and west, ancient and modern are fused. It is not a patchwork, but filigree. The Lord of “great changes” is reminiscent of Hindu God of many incarnations. Here lies the poet's signature of how to assimilate two cultures artistically. This impart permeates throughout the prayers. “Painted grey pottery,” “lily seeds”, “rams”, “Scarlet rice for the carnivals” are none else than the idioms of an ancient Tamil culture.

Modernism in literature, which a basically an Anglo-American phenomenon with a solid European support, happens to enter the Indian a literary scene only in its post-Independence era in the early 1950s. Ezekiel's return from England and his “A Time to change” published in 1952, brought a freshness, craftsmanship and purposefulness to the act of writing poetry in India. The romantic voice of Taru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu, Rabindra Nath Tagore and Sri Aurobindo in some way, faded soon into Time's distance green. But with the arrival of A.K. Ramanujan, R Parthasarathy, Daruwala, Jayanta Mahapatra, Kamala Das and Eunice de Souza among many others, the tradition of Indo-Anglian poetry has come to appear not as a distant dream. Incidentally Ramanujan went abroad as a Fulbright scholar to USA in 1960-62 where he found his craft perfect as he published his first collection of poems, *The Striders* in 1966, while there Professor Nagarajan, very critical of Ramanujan has at least a word of praise for his *The Striders* and states that “he is a consummate artist who tries to achieve perfection before publishing a work.” Ramanujan is not only a creation of his age, but also a creator within its tradition, that is, modern tradition. When to our mind, he appears at one time as an Eliotian or at another, as Kapilar, one recalls James Reeves. The critic is of the views that a critic may be delighted to find that a young poet is like T.S. Eliot, while “the young” may have been “trying desperately to be as unlike Eliot as possible.”

In Indian poetry in English the reading public and the critics will swear by the older generations of the poets and among whom A.K. Ramanujan's unique and importance and the influence of these poets continue in the academic world. Apart from being a major Indian poet in English, A.K. Ramanujan's has been sought after teacher of Dravidian Studies and Linguistics, South Asian languages and civilization and Anthropology. He is one of the very few poets who have made a great mark in the academic field as well. Another significant contribution made by him is his Priceless translations of Tamil and Kannada literary texts into English. It is a special gift to the reading public in the multilingual India and beyond gifted by nature and circumstances, Ramanujan remains an artist and translator par excellence.

The Creative Launcher

An International, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, E- Journal in English

Vol. IV & Issue II (June- 2019)

As an artist who has taken adequate advantage of his multilingual background, Ramanujan had no difficulty in making a success of himself in both India and abroad. Bruce King is struck while raising a point: “how much Ramanujan remained emotionally part of India and how insistent was he to distance himself from any form of Hindoo” (king 79) Basavaraj S. Naikar suggests that:

Ramanujan does not indeed make any attempt to distance himself from the Hindoo. He is engaged in looking critically into the Hindoo forms, which is because of what Ramanujan calls his “outer forms.” In reality, he does not wish to distance himself. As a mature artist, he tries to put things and show things as they are, with of course a tinge of bitterness. Ramanujan remains an instinctive insider emotionally a home-bound pilgrim... (Naikar 25-26).

His poetry is a remarkable blend of emotion and reason, heart and head, Memory and desire, personal affliction and literary reminiscences, and India and America coalesce in it. He is, no doubt, a victim of cultural ambivalence and personal dilemma, but he is an invaluable asset to us. It is gratifying to note that he has not naturalized the Western themes and traditions so much as the Indian ones.

Works Cited

- Arnold, M., “The Function of Criticism at the Present Time.” *Essay in Criticism*. Macmillan and Co. Ltd. 1969
- Arnold, M., “The Study of Poetry.”, *Essay in Criticism*, Macmillan an Co. Ltd. 1969.
- King, B., *Modern Indian Poetry in English*. Oxford University Press, 1987.
- Naik, M. K., *Dimensions of Indian English Literature*, Sterling Publication, 1984, P. 22.
- Parthasarathy, R., *Ten Twentieth Century Indian Poets*, 1979.
- Ramanujan, A. K., *Selected Poems*. Oxford University Press, 1976