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Research Journal

*Indian Streams
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SMALL –SCALE REFLECTIONS ON A. K. RAMANUJAN’S POETRY

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ABSTRACT

A. K. Ramanujan is renowned Poet in Pre-independence era. He has tackled many themes in his poems as indianness, family matters, love, social concerns etc. his poems are noteworthy notes only for thematic virtuosity but also for technical craftsmanship.

KEYWORDS: Myriad mind, Amnesiac, Small-scale, austerity etc.

INTRODUCTION :

Modern Indian Poetry is widely acknowledged because of the salutary efforts of a select bans of talented practitioner like A.K.

Ramunajan, Nissim Ezekial, Kamala Das, K.N.Daruwala, and Pritish Nandi. They have blazed the new trail in modern Indian poetry in English and made it Indian first and last. Mainly the concern of all poets fall into three phases: the imitative, the assimilative and the experimental.

Among the Indian English poets, Ramanujan has compelled recognition as “One of the most talented of the ‘new poets.’” (Iyengar 671) Ramanujan, being a highly talented and perspective poet, was quiet alert to the surrounding and to the ongoing current affairs of the world. He is a multi splendored and myriad-

minded creative genius. He is a poet writing in the Symbolist-Imagist –Moder nist tradition of poetry.

His outstanding contribution in the realm of literature brought him a Padma Shri award in 1976. His five volumes of poetry are- The Striders (1966), Relations (1971), Selected Poems (1976), Second Sight (1986), The Collected Poems of A.K.Ramanujan (1995). His poems are known for their unforgettable images, innovations in language, familial relations, ironic description, hindu themes, indianness, fear and anxiety and a host of other things. There is an unmistakable authenticity of tone and treatment in his poetry.

Indianness of Ramanujan’s Poetry:

Indian myths and history, her people and customs, her rich cultural and spiritual heritage, these things form the dominant themes of his poetry. K.R.S.Iyengar has recognized certain well-marked area of operation for ‘Indianness’. These area

include ‘the choice of subject’, ‘the texture of thought and ‘play of sentiment’, ‘the organization of material’ and ‘the creative use of language’. His three poems present Indian background and treatment. The poem ‘A River’ focuses our attention on the role of the river Vaikai which flows through Madhurai. The poem ‘A Hindu to his body’ shows that the body is as important to a Hindu as a soul. ‘The Snakes’ throws light on one of the prevalent Indian customs and rituals that is offering milk to the Nagas. The poem ‘No Amnesiac King’ in the ‘Second sight’ records the well known legend of Raja Dusyanta and forest beauty Shakuntala. In ‘Obituary’, he talks about ‘Cremation’, ‘ashes’, ‘priest’ etc. in the context of his father’s death. It is appropriate to quote A.N.Dwivedi:

“Ramanujan’s poetry is undoubtedly a vigorous in interpretation of India’s hoary wisdom and glorious past, her spiritual and cultural heritage, her varied customs and creeds, her religious and rituals, her costumes and dialects.”(150)

TREATMENT OF FAMILY AND RELATIONS:

The family relation always haunts the poet, and there are many good poems which owes their origin to the recollected personal emotions viewed in this light. ‘Of Mothers among others things’ is a soft, soothing poem which encompasses the mother’s youth, her unerring care for the ‘crying cradles’, her devotion the her work, and her painstaking domestic responsibility.

Home or family is central to Ramanujan’s creative consciousness, both as a social or cultural unit or institution and as a concept or idea. The poem “Small–Scale Reflections on a Great House’ tells us about the wonderful assimilative and digestive powers of the house which absorbs not only good things but bad things. It records poet’s attitude to the Indian joint family system tinged with irony. In ‘Obituary”, he depicts his father’s death graphically though the tone grows ironical at places. Madras news paper published the news for his death in two lines. The death of his father brought into being

‘A changed mother
More than
One annual ritual.’(56)

A reader can reconstruct the history of his family and its wide spread network of relatives through these poems.

LOVE POEMS:

In his poems, he starts with a statement of true nature of love, moves through its different aspects- longing, frustration and despair, infatuation, promiscuity and sensuality- and arrives at the secure and sure heaven of wifely love. Amongst many poems on family life; there are some on the subject of love namely- ‘It does not Follow, but When in the Street’, ‘Love Poem for a Wife 2’ and ‘ Routine Day Sonnet,’ expresses the poet’s sense of alienation from his wife.

SOCIAL CONCERN:

A touch of humanity is the hallmark of his poetry. In “A River’, he satirizes both the old and the new poets who write only of cities and temples and are indifferent to the miseries of human beings and animals. The deplorable condition of lepers of Madurai is picturised in ‘Elements of Composition’. ‘An image for politics’ reflects the contemporary political situation in India. So it is clear that his poetry presents deep concern for the problems of society. To quote M. Rajagopalachary and S. Ravindar:

“He perceives the inalienable link between life and art and strives for the approximation of life into art.’(30)

The Historical Context and Historical Sensibility:

His knowledge of Indian myths and folklore is amazing. It is used as themes in his poetry. He links the familial experience with the historical consciousness. The strong nostalgic note is prominent feature of his poetry. He recollects collective nostalgia. His historical sensibility is sharp and acute.

His Technical Craftsmanship:**Precision and Accuracy:**

His poetry is remarkable for precision, accuracy and fidelity of youth. This precision is achieved by the use of telling vivid and visual imagery. One of the finest pieces of imagery is in the poem, ‘Small Town South India’, where we have the quotation in Relations:

“Water – layers salt and prickly the sun
Toes mildew green, trees are porous coral:
Ambush of city shark and wifely dolphin.’

The concrete and visual imagery is central to Ramanujan’s technique of communication. In ‘A river’, the images of ‘woman’s hair clogging the water gates’, ‘pregnant woman’ are effectively used. Paul Verghese has rightly remarked on the imagery of the poem as:

“The description of the snake reveals great skill in the use of images that is highly concentrated in their effect, ‘and that’ the images have vividness even in the abstractness.’(91)

USE OF IRONY:

His irony is all-pervasive. In ‘Obituary’ by using irony, he tries to detach himself from the trauma of his father’s death. In ‘One Reads’, the poet exposes the diseased moral of society composed of pretenders and liars. In ‘A River’”, he ironically exposes the callousness of the old and new poets who are blind to the havoc caused by the floods. It is also ironic to see that the river is filled with water only once a year.

Diction : Craftsmanship:

He uses the simple possible words, mostly mono-syllabic, thus achieving a concentration of vowel sound which makes his diction musical and sweet sounding. His diction has classical simplicity, austerity and perfection. For his lyricism and lucidity, clarity and simplicity, one may go to such poems as ‘Looking for cousin on a swing’, ‘A River’, ‘Small Scale Reflections on a Great House’, ‘Obituary etc. Sometimes the diction tends to be alliterative and rhythmical at certain places. Prof. Nagarajan rightly remarks:

“Rhythmically and metrically there is interesting variety and skill in the poetry’ and that most of his poems are ‘accent based and colloquial.”(19)

His Versification:

Compactness and terseness are the hallmark of his versification. It is replete with incisive wit, biting irony and striking subtlety. His use of free verse is excellent, widening the scope of expression considerably. Nice blending of sound and sense is there. Most of his poems are accent-based and rhythmical.

Ramanujan’s technical accomplishment is incontestable and his thematic strategy is precisely the right one for a poet in his position. His Indianness has been a source of irresistible charm for all of us. ‘home is the point one start from,’ and ‘home is the point one comes back to’. This is applicable to Ramanujan as a poet. To quote A.N.Dwivedi:

“At a time when we find around us a mushroom growth of poetasters in Indo-English writing, Ramanujan is definitely a redeeming feature.” (142)

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