



THE POETIC ART AND VISION OF A.K.RAMANUJAM WITH A FOCUS ON THEME OF LOVE AND 'FAMILY' RELATIONSHIP AS PICTURISED IN HIS POETIC REALM

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In India, Ramanujan's contemporaries Nissim Ezekiel, Dom Moraes and R.Parthasarathy have recognized his work as the best that Indo - Anglian poetry has to offer and his poetry in English has been viewed impressively all over the English speaking world fetching him handsome compliments for linguistic ingenuity and his poetic sensibility that governs both his thematic concerns and poetic techniques. Attipatt Krishnaswamy Ramanujan, one of the most significant of the contemporary Indian poets, wrote creatively in Kannada and English and translated a considerable body of poetry and fiction from Kannada and English and translated a considerable body of poetry and fiction from Kannada and Tamil into English.

A.K.Ramanujan was born in 1929 and was educated at D.Bhanumaiah's High School and Maharaja's College, Mysore. He was a fellow of Deccan College, Pune in 1958-59 and a Full bright Scholar at Indiana University in 1960-62. He worked as a lecturer in English Literature in Quilon, Belgaum and Baroda for eight years. Since 1962, he had worked in the University of Chicago as Professor of Dravidian Studies and Linguistics. He has to his credit publication of two volumes of poems written in English namely *The Striders* (1969) and *Relations* (1976). His other works include *Fifteen Tamil Poems*, *The Interior Landscape*, *No Lotus in the Navel*, *Speaking of Siva* and a translation of N.R.Anantha Murthy's *Karnada Novel Samskara* and selected poems. In recognition of his poetic creations, he was awarded Gold Medal by the Tamil Writers Association for the *Interior Landscape* in 1969. Though he had lived in the United States for nearly fifteen years, his Indian experience repeatedly gets reflected in his verses. There are, no doubt, Indian influences or parallels to what seem modernist characteristics of his poetry and his poetry generally develops out of his own emotions and experience.

Being the most gifted and most individual among the Indo-Anglican poets of the Post-Independence era, A.K.Ramanujan is the one who has given Indian poetry a new turn and a new status. The most striking feature of his poetry is that he makes the Indian family scene the basic theme of many of his poems and comments upon it rather objectively and without any inhibition. Being a very realistic poet, Ramanujan naturally gets interested in turning his all-observing eye on the shams and hypocrisies that cult at the very roots of the family system. He turns overcritical when the family system fails to uphold the harmony and the moral values of the society. He is grieved that it is no longer able to play its effective role in maintaining the cultural tradition. This all round decline is responsible for the pungent treatment that he metes out to the relations, in many of his poems especially 'History' 'when it Happens' 'Real Estate', 'Routine Day Sonnet' and 'Looking for a Cousin on a Swing'. Family is the still centre of his poetry. He writes parents, wife and children with insight and dedication. Most of his poems are primarily concerned with family life.

Family in India has the deepest root in the very cultural pattern itself and so it is a vital concept to be reckoned with. As it is well-known to all, a family is a unit made up of parents and children descending from a man and wife related by blood with common characteristics and family duties are the direct role responsibility of the member of the society. With rare exceptions almost everyone is born into a family and each one is kinsman to many people. One can either escape the religious duties or the political burden of the society but the family duties, for the family is the fundamental instrumental foundation of the larger social structure in that all other institutions depend on its contributions. Thus, in brief, 'family' is a human society in miniature and at the same time, the natural basis of society. The purpose of the family is not only to perpetuate the human race but also to form a good nation.

"The Family", writes Leo XIII, is the cradle of civil society, and it is largely within the confines of the domestic health that prepared the destiny of Nations" (Victor 51). Ramanujan finds his objective correlative in the family around him and then vignettes on family relationship in India. This is so dominant a theme in his poetry that it has led Parthasarathy to remark, "The family for Ramanujan is one of the central metaphors with which he thinks" (P 189). A.K.Ramanujan depicts his family life almost untiringly, as is clear from the poems collected in the Second Volume *Relations* particularly *Of Mother Among Other Things*", "Love Poem for a Wife" and "Small-Scale Reflections on a Great House". The family relations always haunt the poet and there are many poems dealing with the memory of his relations and the ambiguous freedom that always t life always confers on them. The poem talks about the wonderful assimilative and digestive powers of the house which absorbs not only good things but also bad things it is very warm to guests, sons-in-law, wives coming from poor houses, daughters married to short-lived idiot sons returning in grandchildren, nephews killed in the war on the borders.



The following poems are more pertinent to the theme of family relationship;

1. Looking for a Cousin on a swing.
2. Of mothers, among other things.
3. Love poem for a wife-I.
4. Obituary.
5. Still Another view of Grace and The Striders.

Looking for a Cousin on a Swing”, one of the most delightful love songs of Ramanujan, highlights the peculiar sensation felt by a young girl of four or five and her cousin of six or seven and their subsequent involvement in promiscuity that is intolerable in a traditional society. Experiencing this strange sensation while in a village swing, they climb a tree which is “not very tall” and “full of leaves”! They are innocent about what they do on the tree. The witty poet tells us that the same girl now having grown into a woman lives in a busy city and goes on hunting for companions on her lust. She is always ready to give herself to anyone who asks for her,

“Now she looks for the Swing
in cities with fifteen suburbs
and tries to be innocent
about it” (P 17).

The poem is clearly on the theme of love-But nowhere it is stated explicitly. It has the charm of under - statement- “We climbed a tree” and implicitly ‘did the rest’. The poem which starts on a casual note drifts towards the flaming imagery of passion at the end. The turbulence of passion in the now-grown-up woman is carried home through the choicest use of phrases- “Swing” “Crotch” “burst”, “Scarlet figs” “Suddenly sneezed” (P 21). The imagery for which Ramanujan is well-known becomes conscious only in the last lines:

not only on the crotch of a tree
that looked as if it would burst
under every leaf
into a brood of scarlet figs
if someone suddenly sneezed (P 17)

The term “Sneezing” is full of implications-on the one hand, it indicates the consummation of passion on the tree, “or the other, it hints at one of the popular image of girls in the poem “a village to cities” where one has an immense scope of sin and corruption. Here as a full-blooded woman, she is out to seek illicit love in cities. Adulthood has come for her not without its repercussions. Seen on this light, the poem becomes Kaleidoscopic and the total effect created by it is almost astonishing. Ramanujan’s best love poem is perhaps “Still another view of grace” which successfully captures the heat of passion in the heat of the poet. “The exposure to contemporary urban life is witnessed in the poem “Still Another view of Grace” which recounts the painful hesitancy on the part of the poet and the upright boldness on the part of the Christian lady in their approaches to love. The poems “Still Another for Mother” and “Conventions of Despair” handle this subject in one way or the other.

“Love Poem for a Wife I” is a luminous evocation of the poet’s family life. His sense of frustration caused by the marriage of an ultra-modern lady is quite evident here. He actually desires to overcome his alienation from his wife, but emotional and cultural gaps yawn before him. In the words of C.Kulshrestha, the poem ends with the problematic uncertainty with which it begins, implying that the speaker’s longing to enter another life by trying to share its past is fraught with bitterness and disillusionment. The ironic twist with which the poem concludes seems to confirm the status underlying the relationship as also the persisting acrimony and suspicion that have been responsible for the speaker’s emotional aridity” (P 34). This poem “Love Poem for a Wife-I” is based on one of the intimate family relationships. The poet’s relationship with his wife is depicted herein

Really what keeps us apart
at the end of years is unshared
childhood, you cannot, for instance
meet my father. He is some years
dead. Neither can I meet yours
he has lately lost his temper
and mellowed” (P 9)

It brings out the poet’s sense of estrangement from his wife. The reason for this is ‘unshared childhood’. As a result, the couple cannot know each other’s likes and dislikes and temperament. Also they cannot know about their parents. The wife



and the husband think of their past nostalgically and look upon each other's indulgements enviously. The recognition of each other comes slowly, as stated in the third stanza:

“of the seven crazy clunts.
You begin to recognize me
as I pass from ghost to real
and back again in the albums
of family rumors, in brother
anecdotes of how noisily
father bathed” (Lines 15-21)

In his artistically flawless poem, “Still Another View of Grace”, Ramanujan expresses his feelings of love towards his wife. Much of the dramatic tension arises out of his passion for her who belonged to a different caste and creed. She being a Christian and he being a Tamil Brahmin, even if this drama is enacted on a mental plane, there is no dearth or warmth of feelings in it. This poem no doubt creates a situation of the poet's ‘burning’ with passion and his love. Besides being one of the finest love poems ‘Still Another View of Grace’ is a memorable study in cultural contrast between the two races of the same land. One may clearly mark the painful hesitancy on the part of the poet-lover, a Tamil Brahmin by birth and the upright courage and boldness on the part of the woman a Keralite Christian and thereby showing different approaches to love. But ultimately the irresistible force of love enables them to transcend the man by their intellectual relationships. And for turning ‘incompatibility into compatibility’ Ramanujan as poet deserves compliments since this is exactly what one discovers in actual life’. Human life is nothing but a bundle of compromises on several counts. Thus, art has been reconciled with life in this poem.

Indeed Ramanujan is a distinctive poem of love. His poems titled “Two Styles in love” and “Still Life” is delightful poems on the theme of love. The first part of the poem “Two Styles in Love” brings out the gradual growth of love into decay. No love on earth can avoid the ‘circling sickles’ of death and destruction. Under the circumstances, men manage to love only in fairy tales but in reality love burns inescapably with dragon-breath and the face of love are to be lost sooner or later. But the second part of the poem reverses what the poet has observed in the first part. Here he approves of growth and greenness- “only growing has gold to reap” (P 9). He fervently waits for the approach of the right moment for love-making and in a reassured mood speaks out thus:

Love is no hurry, love is no burning,
It is no fairy tale of bitter and sweet
Moons may turn at the full;
We turn without turning
And no mouth shall have shadow for meat (P 9).

As a lover, he asserts that “No, no love is sudden” and that “coupling hands take time to kill the frost” and that “Even leaping Beast shall wait to be hidden /by Beauty” (P 9). Hence the poet urges his beloved to ‘come lightly’ and be prepared to ‘wait’ for love. If the first part of the poem dissuades us from love, the second part goads us into it with a leisurely wait. Obviously, the first style in love favors detachment from love, the second style in love is a forceful plea for involvement in love.

The poem “Still Life” is also written on the subject of love for one who took lunch with the poet and then left. After her departing, he busied himself in reading for a while, but his heart was still with her and he intently watched “the half-earth sandwich, bread, lettuce and salami” (P 10). Which earned, “the shape of her bite” and with the poignant of memory. It is a wistful poem bringing out the lover's intense passion for the ‘one’ whom he had once touched. Once again, he wants to enjoy the sensation of the “passing touch”. But he knows it too well that-

It will not pass,
For in that touch, I think
I stumbled on a pulse...

Possible ‘ifs’ and ‘but’ interfere with his further venture in love, and thrown on the horns of dilemma, like Eliot's Prufrock he stumbles at a critical moment, at a moment when he has to decide upon the next daring step. Obviously he is a victim of indecision and inaction. Thus, A.K.Ramanujan cannot uphold the view that different social, cultural and religious background, he simply cannot. He further takes love as an essential biographical urge needing to be gratified.

Truly speaking, family relation in general denotes parent-child relationship, brother-sister relationship and husband-wife relationship. Ramanujan is found bringing all his feelings of family relationship quite well in the poems “Of Moths among Other Things” and “Obituary”. The poem “Of Mothers among Other Things” fondly reminisces the affectionate anxiety and the loving care only a mother is capable of showing towards her children.



To conclude, in the fabric of Ramanujan's poetry, 'home' remains a central force that unifies the individual and the family unit. It is the image of home that Ramanujan feels a sense of living, a sense of cleansing himself and a sense of affirmation in facing the essential facts of reality. No doubt, A.K.Ramanujan adds touch of intimacy and his family and relations. Hence the poet Parthasarathy of the central metaphors with which he thinks" (P 65). The obsession with the family theme finds its fullest expression in his three important poems collected in the last volume, "Second Sight", "Extended Family" and "Looking for the Centre". "Small Scale reflections on a Great House" is unquestionably based on the poet's family atmosphere in Kerala. In a way, the poet presents a detailed account of his ancestral house having "a vast digestive and assimilative power". Obviously, it is a large house still following the traditional Hindu joint family system and having the wonderful capacity to absorb all in coming things and persons'. In short, it may be said that Ramanujan is a distinguished poet of contemporary India who largely concentrates on his family and relations coupled with feelings of love and affection, all of which get beautifully reflected in his poetic creations.

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