

A.K. RAMANUJAN

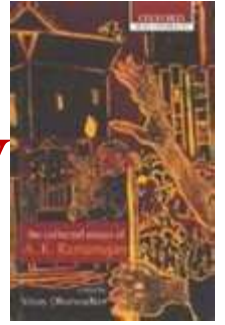


HIS LIFE AND WORKS



Attipate Krishnaswami Ramanujan (March 16, 1929 – July 13, 1993) also known as **Ramanujan** was a scholar of Indian literature who wrote in both English and Kannada. Ramanujan was a Indian poet, scholar and author, a philologist, folklorist, translator, poet and playwright. His academic research ranged across five languages: Tamil, Kannada, Telugu, Sanskrit, and English. He published works on both classical and modern variants of these literature and also argued strongly for giving local, non-standard dialects their due. He was born into an Iyengar (Brahmin) family in Mysore City on 16 March 1929. His father, Attipat Asuri Krishnaswami, a professor of mathematics at Mysore University and an astronomer, had a study crammed with books in English, Kannada. and Sanskrit. The house was alive with ideas. Ramanujan's mother was an orthodox Brahmin woman of her time, limited by custom in the scope of her movement and control, in this way a typical housewife. He was educated at Marimallappa's High School and Maharaja College of Mysore. In college, Ramanujan majored in science in his first year, but his father, who thought him 'not mathematically minded', literally took him by the hand to the Registrar's office and changed his major from science to English. He was a Fellow of Deccan College, Pune in 1958 - 59 and Fulbright Scholar at Indiana University in 1959 - 62. He was educated in English at the Mysore University and received his Ph.D. in Linguistics from Indiana University. In 1976, the government of India awarded him the honorific title Padma Shri, and in 1983, he was given the MacArthur Prize Fellowship (Shulman, 1994). In 1983, he was appointed the William E. Colvin Professor in the Departments of South Asian Languages and Civilizations, of Linguistics, and in the Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago, and, the same year, he received a MacArthur Fellowship. As an Indo-American writer Ramanujan had the experience of the native milieu as well as of the foreign milieu. His poems like the "Conventions of Despair" reflected his views on the cultures and conventions of the east and the west.

His Place in Indian English Poetry



A.K. Ramanujan, (1929-1993) was a great poet. Though he spent a considerable part of life in a foreign country, he did not sever his connections with his native Indian tradition, feelings and ethos. His expatriate sensibility provided him a chance to portray his experiences in India and America in an objective and accurate way. As E.N. Lal said “Ramanujan’s poems take their origin in a mind that is simultaneously Indian and Western - the Indian mode of experiencing an emotion, and the western mode of defining it”. Most of his poems, though intensely personal, have a universal dimension of their own. The main themes of Ramanujan’s poetry are family, love, despair and death. They are full of irony, humour, paradox and sudden reversals.

LOVE POEM FOR WIFE-I

Love Poem for a Wife - I" enacts the short anecdotes of domestic nature arranged in a criss cross order. The lack of emotional integration between the poet and his wife was traced back to lack of sharing each other's child-hood experiences. Both of them were eager to know each other's past. The poet gives details of two different family backgrounds juxtaposing one against the other. His wife is curious to know his past through family rumours and brother's anecdotes and through albums showing the

"Picture of father in a turban

Mother standing on her bare

Splayed feet, silver rings

On her second toes;"

The poet feels a streak of jealousy for not sharing his wife's part.

"I envy you your village dog-ride

and the mythology

of the seven crazy aunts,"

The poet's father-in-law never cared to remember the past and never bothered to think about his young daughter's wanderings. The hiatus between the attitudes of the poet and his wife is shown even in the present when she started a heated argument with her brother James about the location of bathroom in her grand father's house, even betting on her husband's income ignoring her husband's presence.

and I were blank cut-outs

fitted to our respective

slots in a room".

Ironically the poet suggests that to solve this problem of alienation, one may follow the Egyptian custom of brother marrying his own sister or the Hindu custom of arranged child marriages. In other words, for a happy married life, mutual understanding and sharing of each others experiences are indirectly suggested. This love-hate-relationship is briefly shown in "Routine Day Sonnet" where the poet says:

"I wake with a start

To hear my wife cry her heart

Out as if from a crater

In hell; she hates me, I hate her

I am filthy rat and a satyr."

The poem- The River

**In Madurai,
city of temples and poets,
who sang of cities and temples,
every summer
a river dries to a trickle
in the sand,
baring the sand ribs,
straw and women's hair
clogging the watergates
at the rusty bars
under the bridges with patches
of repair all over them
the wet stones glistening like sleepy
crocodiles, the dry ones
shaven water-buffaloes lounging in the
sun
The poets only sang of the floods.**

**He was there for a day
when they had the floods.
People everywhere talked
of the inches rising,
of the precise number of cobbled steps
run over by the water, rising
on the bathing places,
and the way it carried off three village
houses,
one pregnant woman
and a couple of cows
named Gopi and Brinda as usual.**

**The new poets still quoted
the old poets, but no one spoke
in verse
of the pregnant woman
drowned, with perhaps twins in her,
kicking at blank walls
even before birth.**

**He said:
the river has water enough
to be poetic
about only once a year
and then
it carries away
in the first half-hour
three village houses,
a couple of cows
named Gopi and Brinda
and one pregnant woman
expecting identical twins
with no moles on their bodies,
with different coloured diapers
to tell them apart.**

Familial Relationship in Ramanujan's poetry

The archetypal theme of Ramanujan's poetry is family and its relationships viewed from different angles. In these relationships, we find nostalgia, pathos, irony, humour and sympathy. His poems reveal an assured identity of the poet with the family, which he very much needed after he settled down in Chicago. The linking of familial experience with history and tradition is a feature which runs through the poetry of Ramanujan. The theme of love, an indispensable part of family relationship, in its various aspects ranging from frustration, infatuation, alienation to ultimate understanding, is daringly portrayed through effective imagery. His Self-critical ironic approach made him juxtapose the Hindu orthodox world with the present day realities of modern life in his poems. Let us look at a few well-known poems and observe how he uses the theme of family for exploring and unraveling the values of Indian tradition, customs and attitude. "Still Another View of Grace" is regarded as one of the finest love poems, a passionate poem of intensity showing the poet caught between the clash of diverse traditions and back-grounds. Like metaphysical poets, he succeeds in combining emotion with reflection. The poet's severe angry reprimand to his desire "do not follow a gentle man's morals" at last ends up with surrender to love and crossing the barriers of his orthodox tradition. The transformation of s e e sensual passion into gentle love is beautifully suggested in the last lines.

-----"I shook a little

and took her, behind the laws of my land".

The drama of love takes place in thought and in action accompanying that thought simultaneously.



Controversy regarding his Essay

His 1991 essay "*Three Hundred Ramayanas: Five Examples and Three Thoughts on Translations*" courted controversy over its inclusion in B.A., History syllabus of Delhi University. It was included in 2006. In this essay, he had written about existence of many versions of *Ramayana* and a few versions portrayed *Rama* and *Sita* as siblings, which contradicts the popular versions of the *Ramayana*, such as those by Valmiki and Tulsidas. A student wing opposed its inclusion in the syllabus, saying it hurt the majority Hindus' sentiments, who viewed *Rama* and *Sita* as Gods and were husband and wife. They demanded the essay be scrapped from the syllabus. In 2008 Delhi High Court directed the Delhi University to convene a committee to decide on the essay's inclusion. A 4-member committee was formed, which subsequently gave its verdict 3-1 in favour of inclusion in the syllabus. The academic council however, ignored the committee's recommendation and voted to scrap the essay from its syllabus in Oct 2011. This led to protest by many historians and intellectuals, and accused the Delhi University of succumbing to non-historians' diktat.