

# A.K. Ramanujan – As an Expatriate and Nostalgia

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*As mentioned earlier, A.K. Ramanujan is a diasporic poet, an Indian expatriate living in America. His poetry is a curious combination of Eastern wisdom and Western skepticism. Being a voice of the Indian diaspora, his poetry is loaded with nostalgia for his lost motherland but the Western enlightenment has sharpened his critical facility.*

*Indiaporic is portmanteau word, formed by combining India and diasporic. Diaspora is a word that signifies people of a certain racial origin the inhabit different areas and territories across the world. Their heredity is rooted in a certain civilization, India in the case of those who are referred to here, though their environment differs in accordance with their chosen country of residence. This dichotomy of heredity and environment breeds in the diasporic mind a kind of schizophrenia, a confusion of identity.*

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Attipal Krihnaswamy Ramanujan was born in Mysore in 1929 and went to D. Bhanumiah's High School to receive his early education. Thereafter, he proceeded to Maharaja College, Mysore. He was a fellow at Decan College, Poona in 1958-59. To be a Ph.D. degree holder, he joined the Indiana University during 1960-62, and stayed back in the United States of America where he was invited on a teaching assignment by the University of Chicago. Since 1962, he worked as a professor of Linguistics and Dravidian studies in the University of Chicago. His mathless contribution to Indian English literature earned for him a Padmshri from the Indian Government in 1987, and his erudition earned him a MacArthur genius grant in America in 1983. Paying tributes to him, his colleagues, Susanne and Lindy Rudolph, credited him as "Both transnational and subnational, capable of the most sophisticated universalism even while remaining rooted in microhumanity, his regional culture." At the age of sixty-four, Ramanujan died suddenly. The Indian Express honoured him as a "Well known Kannada poet-litterateur and eminent traslator" and The Stateman admired him as a "Well-known Kannada litterateur, poet and critic."

Ramanujan chose to work and live in the United States, but his voluntary exile could not cut him off his native environment and roots. It could not subdue his apparent Indian sensibility on which he laid much emphasis. This isolation rather became a boon for him and awakened his poetic sensibility. It has enabled him to delve deep into India's past. According to Paul Verghese, Ramanujan's Indian sensibility was sharpened and conditioned by Western education.

## As an Expatriate and Nostalgia:

Ramanujan was an Indian poet and scholar of Indian literature. Ramanujan's poems are remembered as enigmatic works of startling originality.

The excile's nostalgia is also the defining theme of the poetry of A K Ramanujan [1929-1993]. Born in a family of Taint! Brahmins, Ramanujan migrated to the U.S.A. in 1970, where he settled down and married an American girl the only diasporic poet of any real consequence. Ramanujan is beset with the identity crises right from the beginning. India attracts him with her great culture. but-repels- him

with her current squalor and greed the U S attracts him with its rationalism and humanism, but repels him with its gross materialism and rampant consumerism.

His eagerness pursuit for nostalgic memories of their past life. these memories are particularly related to their, region, town, ancestral house, family, members, streets, rivers, or places Their mind recedes to the past to depicts vividly whatever in imprinted in the sub-conscious.

In the depiction of nostalgic reminiscences, the name of A K Ramanujan occupies the foremost place Ramanujan is basically a poet of family relations In poem after poem, he conjures up his childhood memories and experiences of life in south India Recollected in cool tranquility in an alien land these families memories, childhood impressions and associatiois are indelibly etched on the impressionable mind of Ramanujan.

In fact, the prominent themes that we discern in many of his poems, such as "Obituary", "Love Poem For A Wife : I & II", "Small-Scale Reflections On A Great House", "Of Mothers, among other things", "History" and "Looking for a Cousin on a Swing" are Indian memories seen through the prism of rationalism. Despite his long stay abroad, his poems are scented with nostalgic memories of his family, but an ironic stance overhangs these recollections. To quote one such example soaked in irony :

Father, when he passed on,  
left dust  
on a table full of papers,  
left debts and daughters,  
A bed wetting grandson  
named by the toss  
of coin after him.

We see that Ramanujan oscillates between two cultures-the Indian and the Western-to reveal his identity, while Kamala Das arrestingly exposes the sexual permissiveness and uninhibition rooted in her native culture.

Of all Indian English poets of today, Nissim Ezekiel enjoys immense historical significance and admiration by virtue of his unflinching devotion to the muse and the unique quality of his verse. His poetic career started with a host of inhibitive complexes owing to his Jewish background which creates the recurring notes of anguish and anxiety in his poetry. William Walsh considers Ezekiel as a permanent

expatriate, but one who has freely elected to stay. He further assesses his position thus, "Displaced by his own spiritual past, he is in place by an act of the will. His eye is familiar with, but at a distance from, the object, and his specifically Indian poetry is both inward and detached, a combination making for a peculiar strength and validity.

Another poet, R. Parthasarathy, has also accepted his native tradition and extended it through his work. He has never disowned his Tamil heritage. In fact, he is quite obsessed with it and is entangled in the dilemma of finding his identity in two cultures-the Indian and the Western. In his poetic autobiography, Rough Passage (1976), he repents :

My tongue in English chains,  
I return, after a generation to you.  
I am at the end  
Of my Dravidic tether,  
Hunger for you unassuaged.  
I falter stumble.

According to Willian Walsh, "He is both attracted to and frightened by what is alien and distant in his life, whether this is in India, or the England his love affair with the English language took him to, or with the India he discovers when he is away, or the strange Tamil he decides to cultivate on his return, whether it is his experiences of love or his awareness of himself :

the street in the evening  
tilts homeward  
as traffic piles up.  
It is then I stir about :  
rise from the table  
and shake the dust from my eyes.  
Pick up my glasses  
and look  
For myself uneasily.

In fact, Ezekiel has taken lead in the direction of evolving a new kind of idiom in post-1960 Indian poetry in English. He is excellent in revealing the spirit of the actual character and situation. In an attempt to expose a self-praising character who pretends to be a patriot, Ezekiel satirises very aptly the ridiculous situation of such patriot :

I am standing for peace and non-violence.  
Why world is fighting fighting

Why all people of world  
Are not following Mahatma Gandhi,  
I am simply not understanding.  
Ancient Indian wisdom is 100% correct.  
I should say even 200% correct.  
But modern generation is neglecting.  
Too much going for fashion and foreign thing.

Undoubtedly, the poem exploits not only Indianism in subject-matter but also the Indian way of thinking in English, spoken excessively as a status symbol. The confused state of mind of the protagonist is apparent in his willingness to found a Ram Rajya on Gandhian pattermpattern. The poem is a mild satire on the Gujarati-influenced English often used in Bombay. Similar is the satirical piece "Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S." The poem is executed in dramatic monologue which very aptly handles an authentic picture of a typical life-situation. Linguistic and grammatical errors simply exaggerate the truthfulness of the situation :

You are all knowing, friends,  
what sweetness is in miss Pushpa.  
I don't mean only external sweetness  
but internal sweetness.  
Miss Pushpa is smiling and smiling  
even for no reason  
but simply because she is feeling.

Any evaluation of post-Independence poetry in English is usually considered incomplete without the question of national identity. Many of the contemporary poets, expatriate or stay-at-home, are preoccupied with it. In fact, their commitment to life and to country or to a place in particular has added new dimensions to their poetry. Among them it is Nissim Ezekiel who makes an honest confession of his position without any rhetoric. Ezekiel surpasses others in reflecting the Indian ethos in his verses in all its complex variety and details. Mark how he has drawn an impressive and realistic picture of India in microcosm with the brilliant use of telling images :

Always, in the sun's eye,  
Here among the beggars,  
Hawkers, pavement sleepers,  
Hutment, dwellers, slums,  
Dead souls of men and gods,  
Burnt-out mothers, frightened  
Virgins, wasted child

And tortured animal.

As a matter of fact, modes, patterns and forms of post Independence poetry stem out mainly from culture, tradition and history. This kind of poetry has drawn its sustenance from its surroundings. Therefore, the poets are in search of proper contexts which can only be discovered in their native culture, sensibilities, modes, concerns and themes. It has no locale or region to define, rather it is truly secular and democratic beyond the narrow and parochial peripheries and loyalties of region. It takes men, women, values and awareness pertaining to the whole country as its subject-matter and thereby, reveals the national psyche in a forceful and authentic manner.

Contemporary Indian English poets, specially the diasporic voices, are not typically Indian in their imagery. Dom Moraes has temporarily rejected India and its surroundings, while K.D. Katrak has revealed a mixed sensibility. In his poem, "Durga on a Hilltop Noon", the reference to Medussa calls for an illustration here. In fact, Kartrak's poems are replete with generous Western imagery which is suggestive of his characteristically mixed sensibility. In his poetry, we can view a synthesis of myths and imagery ranging from Durga, Vishnu, Dholak, Mantra, Moon in Baisakh, Doctor Freud, the Ghost in Hamlet, Unicorn, Gandharvas and goat-heads, Kali, Mahatma, Medussa and so on. Such juxtaposition of East & West is a marked quality of diasporic poetry.

Contemporary Indian poetry in English has flourished a lot with the native colours, situations and experience mainly after Independence. Its separation from the mainstream of English poetry confirms its independent entity and its emergence as a part of Indian literature. Some scholars think that much of Indian English poetry being written presently is trash and rubbish. There is a pinch of truth in it. In one of his papers, B.K. Das asserts, "One chief danger to Indian English poetry ..... is the addition of a cart-load of bad poetry to a thin body of genuine and good poetry.

About this characteristic feature of Ramanujan's poetry, William Walsh Write : "His poems on relatives and insects, on grannies and aunts show his devotion to the intense. His intricate, ironic reflective skill makes him, like Nissim Ezekiel, not only one of the most impressive of Indian poets in English, but the embodying and focusing of a true

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