

## Implicit and Explicit Voice of Protest in the Poetry of A. K. Ramanujan

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A. K. Ramanujan is the author of fifteen books that include verse in English and Kannada, among them *The Striders* was a Poetry Society Recommendation, and *Speaking of Shiva* was nominated for a National Book Award. He was honored with the Padma Sri in 1976 and a Mac Arthur Prize Fellowship in 1983. After a deep study of Ramanujan's work, one cannot say that there is abundance of the voices of protest, but obviously, there are some significant voices raised against some very important issues in his poetry. Ramanujan has aimed at numerous Indian situations about which Satya Narain Singh writes :

" Ramanujan reacts to certain aspects of Indian life and situation but his comments are never direct or explicit . His criticism inheres in the way he designs and constructs his images on themes of power - mad politicians, of sensation - loving poets, and hypocritical society men. "

He writes not only against Indian quandary and situations, but foreign too. He writes about 'lepers of Madurai', 'after the riots, downtown Nairobi', 'city like Calcutta', 'Madras lawyer', 'Chinese wall', 'Delhi zoo', 'giraffe in London ', 'Wrestler of Mysore', 'travelling on a highway to Mexico', 'Jewish mama', and 'Chicago Zen '. In his poem "Image for Politics" Ramanujan attempts an "Objective correlative" to the politics of utter cannibalism which manages to survive on executing all opposition. The excellence of current day politics is embodied in 'the image of the eater who finally gets eaten up':

Once, I'd only heard  
of a chinese fancy - dish  
of fish  
that rots  
till it comes alive  
and a maggot - spaghetti squirms  
where once a mackerel gasped for worms, cannibal  
devouring smaller cannibal  
till only two equal

giants are left to struggle,  
entwined,  
like wrestlers on a cliff.  
and at last  
only one  
omnipotent  
maggot - ceaser who rent  
his rival  
and lived ...

The physically powerful consume the weak and the desire for blood leads up to where the conqueror - sufferer bleeds and thus continues the garish game of power politics. Sometimes his protest gets reflected in an ironical way. A. K. Ramanujan in 'A River ' discusses ironically on the attitude of the old and the new poets in Madurai since their lyrical awareness is awakened only by the rising flood in the river and their souls never stir by human grief and sufferings:

The poets sang only of the floods.  
He was there for a day  
When they had the floods.  
He aims at poets writing:  
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 blanks walls  
Even before birth

The ' River' is an attack at the poets who will compose only of the episode that tickles them most oblivious of what it means to others - to whom poetry is no more than a form of self - indulgence. The river in summer days is just a ooze - too arid and uninspiring- but a river in floods is an thrilling vista:

The river has water enough

To be poetic

About only once a year.

But the jiffy which sends the poet into the stance of intense delight brings devastation and catastrophe to a near - by village:

It carries away

In the first half - hour

Three village houses,

A couple of cows

Named Gopi and Brinda.

And one pregnant woman.

In "One Reads", Ramanujan writes against the diseased moral of society composed of pretenders and liars. "Leprosy of light and shade" is a prominent metaphor that works on two levels : one in enacting the scene of a "sun - lit beggar squatting on his shadow" and the other in suggesting society's ethical wantonness which shows itself in its sham charity to a deceitful beggar :

Pandering lies

For our charity's

Counterfeit pice.

"Conventions of Despair ' is again a protest poem. Opening lines of the poem instruct us to be itinerant and modern to fit in the current or contemporary world and to stay away from the bitter sense of anguish and dissatisfaction:

Yes, I know all that. I should be modern.

Marry again. See strippers at the Tease.

Touch Africa. Go to the movies .

Whenever, I, talk of indirect protest, I, mean a struggle within one's self. The sense of loss is something to be fought with. When a poet feels lonely and tries to overcome it or protest, he gives voice to his feelings. The sense of loss is clearly peeping out through Ramanujan's , 'Conventions of Despair '.

But, Sorry, I cannot unlearn

Conventions of despair.  
They have their pride.  
I must seek and will find  
My particular hell only in my hindu mind:  
Must translate and turn  
Till I blister and roast  
For certain lives to come, ' eye - deep'.

The poem “Small - Scale Reflections on a Great House” tells us about the house, which absorbs not only good things but also bad things. The pretentious humiliation of the girls of the house is superbly brought out in the first few lines:

Things come in everyday  
To lose themselves among other things  
Lost long ago among  
Other things lost long ago;  
Lame wondering cows from nowhere  
Have been known to be tethered,  
Given a name, encouraged  
To get pregnant in the broad daylight  
Of the street under the elders  
'Supervision, the girls hiding  
Behind windows with holes in them.

Fear is something that comes out of man's inner self. Taranee Deka in her paper entitled ‘A Poet with Indian Sensibilities: A Deconstructive Reading of A.K Ramanujan’s Poems’ writes: “Ramanujan puts anxiety in a process of continuity. He explains it indirectly, not directly. ‘fear’ is the kindred of anxiety. So he begins with it. The source of all tension is the individual : “..... it has loose ends/with a knot at the top/that’s me’. He explains the issues relating to anxiety through ‘water’ ‘flames’ and ‘pigeons’ and ultimately he confesses:’ but anxiety / can find no metaphor to end it.’ He cannot explain the things in a metaphoric way, rather in a metonymic process.” In a poem named “ Entries For a Catalogue of Fears "he writes:

My delicate  
Nails grow long  
During a public lecture  
And no one will hear me for  
The noise of rustling nails nor  
See my face  
For the rivalry of their silicate  
Tangle.

The exposure to contemporary urban life is to be witnessed in the poem "Still Another view of Grace ", 'which narrates the painful hesitancy on the part of the poet and the upright boldness on the part of the Christian woman in their approaches to love.' In the poem "Still Another for Mother" he writes:

And that woman  
Beside the wreckage van  
On Hyde Park street : she will not let me rest.  
As I slowly cease to be town's brown  
Stranger and guest

Above passage demonstrates his belief that one can hardly attain the peace of mind in the midst of a metropolis like London. Protesting Poverty he writes:

Poverty is not easy to bear  
The body is not easy to wear.  
So beware, I say to my children  
Unborn, lest they choose to be born.

In his poem "Still Another View of Grace "he portrays the picture of hunger :

I shudder to the bone at hungers that roam the street  
Beyond the constable's beat.

Bruce King in Three Indian Poets writes about his ironic tone :

"... While he may use memories of South India as his subject, his concern is rather with how the past has shaped him than as nostalgia for a lost paradise. Often his tone is ironic since the past returns in the form of fears, anxieties and other psychological effects. "

While protesting against his Brahmin heritage, he is conscious of laws being broken rather than simply losing his past. In 'A Poem on Particulars' he defines that one cannot recapture the past, fix the present or guarantee the prospect:

You can sometimes count

Every orange

On a tree

But never

All the trees

In a single

Orange.

"In "Zoo Gardens Revisited " he explains that how the animals suffer at human hands as visitors to the zoo 'shrewdly' set the tail feathers of ostriches on fire, or feed monkeys 'bananas with small exquisit needles in them '. The natural world has been destroyed and we see the effects of modern civilization where tigriss, 'superintended by curious officials adulterate their line with half - hearted lions to breed experimental ligers and lions', and tigers 'yawn away their potency'. Like the humans who torture animals, the repression of the natural finds other forms of expression, especially in hurting others or the self as in the poem 'pleasure' where the monk's repressed sexual desire finds expression in the perverse pleasures of a painful death'.

Poem "Looking and Finding " presents a contrast between desires and reality, and the need to accept limits. The poem contrasts such desires as the wish for unity of purpose with the reality of existence, which often is expressed in images of fury as frustration seeks an object in others. Another remarkable poem of Ramajujan is " Looking for Centre ' where he writes that there is no solution in the modern world to worries about personal identity, tradition and displacement.

Looking for the centre these days

is like looking for the centre

for missing children

which used to be here, but now has moved.

About the poems of his volume *Second Sight*, Bruce King writes :

“... they tend towards complexity, violence and obscurities. There are signs of crisis, tensions in his marriage and a growing awareness of death.”

Dr. V. Ayothi's views about ramanujan's poetic strain are no less important when he writes: “...Ramanujan's works include nostalgia, inwardness, documentary realism; but there is no idealization and the vision does not become dark inspite of the ironic and satiric tone.” Ramanujan's poems are living examples of the voices of protest, the echoes of these voices are found in later poets. Ramanujan in his poems portrayed the hateful picture of society, scenes of hunger, cruelty towards nature, ironically protested against prostitution and abhorring aspect of modernity. His 'poems represents the complex distillation of a lifetime of unusually rich sensitivity, intellectual rigour, and feeling ... Ramanujan's interests included folklore, anthropology, structuralism, and biculturalism.'

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