

## Introduction

Being a student of English literature, it is quite amazing that I have not chosen any British poet for my Ph.D dissertation rather A.K.Ramanujan, an Indian poet writing in English. The reason is not far to seek. To quote Tagore:

[The rainbow whatever be its largeness,

It shines in the sky,

But my love is for the wings of the butterfly

Which belongs to this earth.]<sup>1</sup>                      (Translation mine)

The rainbow, which adorns the sky, can only satiate the eyes, but can never gratify a soul. Being an inhabitant of the sky, it fails to establish a rapport with the man on earth. Moreover, it is short-lived and soon it fades away. Again, a “dotted butterfly” (CP:83) like a human being springs from and thrives on the earth. Though tiny, it corresponds to a rainbow in its beauty. Since it is close to the earth, a man can watch it, touch it and can enjoy its beauty to his heart’s content. Distance and inaccessibility perturb one’s mind. Proximity, on the contrary, removes the barriers, develops an intimate kinship and so, man derives immeasurable joy. Hence, my preference is for a poet who belongs to my own land and writes in English, echoing Indian sensibility. Once, while I was reading the poem “Mother” by K.N.Daruwalla, the concluding lines of the poem, captured my attention:

Then why should I tread the Kafka beat

or the Waste Land

when Mother you are near at hand...? <sup>2</sup>

I, at once, decided not to explore the remote literary horizon, but to engage myself in diving into the sphere of Indian English poetry to assess the creative genius of the poets of my own country. I got hold of an anthology of modern Indian English poetry

and went through the poems of a few poets. Among the poets, the poetry of A.K.Ramanujan impressed me so much that I instantly decided to carry on my Ph.D thesis on him.

Born in Karnataka in 1929 in a South Indian Tamil brahmin family, A.K.Ramanujan, a polyglot who writes in English, Tamil and Kannada, is a real gem of literature. He is a highly talented and sensitive poet, a translator, an eminent linguist, a critic, a folklorist and an outstanding litterateur. It is always poetry which is never far away from his thinking as Ramanujan himself confesses "All you have to do is to make it clear that my interest in poetry is central to my being and all my work" (Krishnan. 1993. 28). With the publication of his first volume of verse The Striders in 1966 the secret of his genius came to limelight and it won for the poet a Poetry Book Society Recommendation. The second volume of his poetry Relations, published in 1976 deals largely with his personal contacts and family relations. Second Sight (1988), the third volume dwells on Indian history—its myths and legends. The Black Hen, which is incorporated in *The Collected Poems*, is a posthumous publication. Besides his original works he translated a number of books from Kannada and Tamil into English, which earned him fame. His translations include *Fifteen Poems from a Classical Tamil Anthology* (1965), *The Interior Landscape* (1967), *No Lotus in the Navel* (1969), *Speaking of Siva* (1972), *Samskara* (1976), *Hymns for the Drowning* (1981) and *Poems of Love and War* (1985). It is his translations, which hold a mirror of Dravidian culture and literature to the entire English speaking world.

As a creative artist, Ramanujan possesses a wider vision and a refined sensibility. It is not possible to deal with all facets of his dynamic poetry. This dissertation is concerned with the major themes and images that occupy the space of his poetry. As an expatriate, a sense of alienation and an acute feeling of loneliness overwhelmed

Ramanujan. Hence, my first chapter "A Quest for the Roots" explores how alienation and quest for roots constitute a recurrent theme of modern literature and how Ramanujan's poetry reveals this experience. Loss of identity makes him keenly aware of the nourishing quality of his own roots and so, he makes an effort to affirm his identity through a quest for a relevant and useable past.

The second chapter, having three sections, deals with three major themes of his poetry. The first section—"Poetry as a family record", concentrates largely on his family and relations. "Love theme in Ramanujan", the second section of this chapter, throws light on Ramanujan as a poet of love with a wider knowledge about the different aspects of love. In the concluding section—"Poetry as a record of reminiscences", he turns to his private past to make an inward journey to establish his link with the lost dimension of that past. He tries to evoke a sense of the past and inherit the native tradition. Here memory serves as a tool in his exploration of the past.

Ramanujan's poetry shows an unflagging interest in the native culture and traditions. Poetry for Ezekiel is a medium of confession. For Ramanujan, it is a mode of perception. His Hindu consciousness binds him to his native tradition. He searches deeper into the layers of Hinduism, World and Self and becomes intensely aware of his entire culture, Indian philosophy and ways of life. Chapter three, "Poetry, a revelation of the mysteries of life" focuses on this aspect of his poetry.

Ramanujan is a conscientious craftsman who pays minute attention to the choice of words, phrases and expressions and appropriate application of rhyme and *vers libre* and above all to the creative medium. Imagery, which has been largely deplored by the modern poets, has been found in abundance in his poetry. The fourth chapter, "Imagery—a study of its origin and functions", deals with the origin, scope and

functions of imagery in his poetry. "The world of imagery—a study in major images and symbols", my last chapter, highlights the predominant images and symbols employed in his poetry. This chapter has been divided into two sections. The first section, "A Poet of Senses", reviews Ramanujan as a poet of keen sensibility. The images are examined and classified on the basis of diverse sense perceptions. The second section, "Ramanujan's Universe", considers the dominant images and symbols used in all four volumes of poetry. The key images which occur in his poetry are "city", "tree", "woman", "insect", "animal", "water", "bird" and "colour".

While writing this thesis, I have depended on *The Collected Poems of A.K.Ramanujan* published in (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), which has a Preface by Krittika Ramanujan and has an Introduction by Vinay Dharwadker, for textual references. The research methodology specified in *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* by Joseph Gibaldi (New Delhi: Affiliated East-West Press Pvt. Ltd., 1996) has been strictly adhered to in this dissertation.

## Notes and References

1. Rabindranath Tagore, *Sanchayita* [Collection] (Calcutta: Visva Bharati, 1975) 757.
2. Saleem Peeradina ed, *Contemporary Indian Poetry in English. An Assessment & Selection* (Madras: Macmillan India Limited, 1972 Rpt. 1991) 77.

## Work Cited

- Krishnan, S. "A Poet's Quest". *Indian Review of Books*. 2. 11. (Aug.16-Sept.15):