

Blurred Culture: A Reading of A.K Ramanujan's Obituary

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Abstract: *In India cultural boundaries of Hinduism has multiple in innumerable ways, both in theory and practice. Migrants depicted Indians and Indianess in their own perspectives.A.kRamanujan has a different vision on Indian culture, for him, certain rites are in valid and some should be sustained for the next generation .These cultural interpretations are explained in Obituary.*

I. Introduction

India is a place of "isum" which give birth to Hinduism, Buddhism Jainism and so on multiculturalism and diversity has inspired many writers to jot their own perspectives of the country's culture. These writings paint a complex and often conflicting picture of the culture of India. Literature played a significant role in spreading cultural morals and its importance. In Indian English literature culture moves out of "a boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which something begins" (p.1.quoted in Locations of Culture Martin Hedeggar, 'Building, Dwelling, Thinking')

On cultural path some have tried to preach Indianess through irony, significant among them is A.K Ramanujan.Bruce King introduces "Ramanujan, a Brahmin, yes, and perhaps the world's greatest scholar of the languages and literatures of southern India" . (p.xThree Indian Poets.)the diaspora and blend culture remains an object of discussion something that ... continue to describe and debate. There are two important ironies here, one is he want to erase presence because there is no warrant for it, he brings intellectual resources with him to his projects like death is a reason and obituary is a celebration. Ramanujan's poetry is "rooted in and stems from the Indian environment and reflects its mores, often ironically." (p.3.Ten Twentieth Century Poets.) ChittaranjanMisra feels that: "In spite of his constant exposure to American beliefs and culture he has consistently written about India- not as an obsession, but as a source of inspiration. One observes in his writing a possibilitythat an artist as an Individual is capable of doing a restructuring a personal (Indian) past and nourishing the same as insulated from theideological oppositions that affect the time and space in which his text iswritten. (p.10.Indian English Literature Volume III.) These discussions are true in the words of A.K.Ramanujan. The boundary of my study is restricted to his poem obituary. I attempt to distinguish him through multiple perceptions on the ground of a complex subject 'obituary'.

The last cultural rites which presents in the poem are: "Cultural traits set in the fixed tablet of tradition" but the social articulation of difference... is a complex on – going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridity that emerge in moments of historical transformation" (p-2.location of culture.).The pre-text of King Bruce, "but married to a Syrian Christian and for most of his life a professor in an American university.(p.x.Three IndianPoets.)transforms him from the aged historical tradition to the modern so called civilization. Certain argument in his 'obituary'highlights cultural sustainability in the minds of modern youths of India.

In the poem "Obituary" the poet describe an ironical vein the tragic effect on the family due to sudden disappearance of his father, causing repercussions on or affecting the whole family set-up. The poem begins in a flat ironic tone he writes:

When my father passed away he Left debts and daughters, a bedwetting grandson named by the toss of a coin after him,(p.25.Illuminations I) reflects that his father was cremated and disappeared all too easily by transforming his responsibility on his heir only are the trail and tribulations .The above list shows he is the only bread winner of the family . It paves way to think, male were given superior prominence in forming the society. It also reflects the utter failure of the Hindu sociological patter of Hindu patriarchal families in Indianculture father is considered the head of the family .Ramanujan comments on the gender bias indirectly. This is also an effective tale of Brahmin community .he warns us to think beyond the culture as an intellectual and this type of cultures are undigested by the present modernisation. His humorous way measuring equality among human kind is "as we always attempt to measure everything in terms of what it means for the self would I do it? Would I like it? What is he feeling, thinking, wanting, needing...? This sense of isolated and self-judging selfhood has been left behind."(p.146. subjectivity). The poet's play of words in the lines: Being the burning type

he burned properly at the cremation as before, easily and at both ends. (p.25. Illuminations I) Generally poems written on 'death', end with a philosophical resignation. His use of South Indian Brahmin background in complex ways just presented the situation as it is, affecting the relationships in a realistic manner. There is an undertone suggesting his father's mysterious position, which left nothing to his son except debts, responsibilities and expenses for performing endless ceremonies even after his body turns into ashes. He states that the priest plays a deliberate role to sustain his traditions by insisting poet to 'pick' the bones. Poet explains the miserable condition through this line: To pick gingerly and throw as a priest Said, facing east Where three rivers meet (p.25. Illuminations I)

These lines shed light on the Hindu Brahmin rituals to be performed after the death of a person. Though the poet Ramanujan lived more than 25 years in America, he has not forgotten the essence of his culture. Surgical operation on his mother's abdomen as the natural delivery was not possible. He troubled even his mother at the time of his birth his migration to America and marriage with a Syrian Christian push him to the new angle of examining his native culture in different domains as an alien and intellectual. From there he felt different fragrance of Brahmin culture.

His "every movement of the human quest for truth is an attempt to contribute to the invention of this huge common subject" (p.138, subjectivity) "obituary." The rituals like burning the dead body which pollutes the ecology. The concluding rites do not end unless those bones were thrown into the water by facing toward east. This also shed light on the tragic end of aquatic creatures. This is an art of persuading society this art "does not merely recall the past as social cause or aesthetic precedent; it renews the past refiguring it as a contingent" (p.7. location of culture), he negotiates these cultural values, which gives birth to the new revolution of culture. These "social differences are not simply given to experience through an already authenticated cultural tradition; they are the signs of the emergence of community envisaged as a project at once a vision and a construction that takes you 'beyond' yourself in order to return in a spirit of revision and reconstruction, to the political conditions of the present" (p.3 location of culture). His ideas not only restricted to negative comments but also reveals the use full message in the ritual that Brahmins perform they do not construct a head stones which consist of his death and birth dates, on which aman has no control over, for this he gives an example of his father's like his caesarean birth in a Brahmin ghetto and his death by heart failure in the fruit market. (p.26. Illuminations I) Father fails to control things though, he controls the world by executing his genius he could not rule himself by using the similar power. Philosophical tones like birth and death remain unanswered in his intellectual writing. his journey in the deep root of self-search left unreachable, "our intellectual and cultural work assumes a knowable world, it also assumes a structure larger than each and all of us, that is capable of grasping the knowledge human work is garnering in one massive superhuman art of god like intuition" (138. subjectivity) self-search is the only way of understanding the cultural practices. He questions the obituary line given in the newspaper which becomes next day's waste paper in turn used to rap the groceries. Poet calls that as useless publicity because death is always eternal, for some it is an event to mark the final existence.

The poet finds it a great burden to perform the death anniversary every year spending amount to appease the dead body. His last two lines explain the impact of his father's death on his mother he writes:

And he left us a changed mother and more than one annual ritual. (p.26. Illuminations I) Reveals the crucial Hindu society where, a woman has to live her life with changed costumes like wearing white saree, which is an indicator of lack of protection; this also shows the male dominance. It reminds the sati system which existed before has changed its form in the way of celebration that she is a widow and rusticated from all the Hindu rituals where she loses her importance in cultural traits. Poet tries to inculcate "every human problem must be considered from the standpoint of time (p.7. Black Skin, White Masks. quoted in location of culture). the solemn ceremony continues even after a year of his father's death.

Endnotes

- [1]. Babha, k. Homi. The location of culture. London. New York: Routledge, p.1.2.3.7. print
- [2]. Mansfield. Nick. Subjectivity. Australian: NIB. 2000. P. 138. 146 print.
- [3]. King, Bruce. Three Indian Poets. New Delhi: OUP, 2005, p.x. print.
- [4]. Misra, Chittaranjan. 'Image of Family in the Poetry A.K. Ramanujan',
- [5]. Indian English Literature Volume III, ed. Basavaraj. Naikar, New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2002, p. 10. print
- [6]. Parthasarathy, R. 'Introduction', Ten Twentieth Century Poets, Delhi: OUP, p. 3. print
- [7]. Illuminations I. Mysore: University press. p.25.26. print.