

Mapping Identity through Human Emotions: A Critical Study of A. K. Ramanujan's Poetry

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Abstract

A. K. Ramanujan as an expatriate poet has an ability to bring harmony between the inner world of his self and identity and outer world of his vocation and dwelling. His poetry offers a deep exploration of human identity and universal emotions. Ramanujan poems reflect the complex relationship between memory, culture, family and migration by revealing the way of shaping identity by emotional experiences. The study examines the role of emotions such as nostalgia, love, belonging, alienation and self awareness in inculcating self and cultural identity. Ramanujan is of the opinion that identity is not a static idea but rather a dynamic and changing process. In spite of geographical displacement and shifting social realities, his lyrical vision shows that memories, relationships, and cultural heritage continue to be essential to the construction of the self. Ramanujan emphasizes the lasting importance of emotional and cultural ties in understanding identity by turning individual experiences into universal reflections on human life. The study comes to the conclusion that his poetry provides insightful perspectives on the emotional aspects of self-identity and the perpetual conflict between cultural belonging and personal experience.

Keywords: migration, identity, culture, displacement, memory, homeland

Introduction

Technological advancement and rapid growth of internet have combined the entire world into a single unit. The obstacles among boundaries across the globe have come to an end so literature of a particular realm does not remain confined within the same. Literature is considered as a medium to convey emotional experiences that bind people together irrespective of their diverse culture, language and geography. Emotions that have constantly influenced literary traditions

across civilizations include love, fear, loneliness, remembrance, and the quest for identity. His poetry explores emotional truths and is universally accessible while being influenced by Indian traditions, family systems, mythology, multilingualism, and diasporic experiences. Instead of portraying feelings as an abstract ideas, Ramanujan integrates them into daily life to show how cultural customs, familial ties, and personal recollections influence a person's identity. The study greatly focus on the poetry of prominent post colonial poet A. K. Ramanujan that provides a wide range of ideas and concerns on familial relations in true sense, nationalism, cultural fusion, linguistic globalization and universal human emotions. His poetry challenges readers to transcend borders and embrace global unity. In a continuously unified universe, his poetry serves as a reminder of the necessity of empathy, compassion, nationalism and accountability to all around the world.

Human emotions have been observed as one of the most persistent themes in literature, which allow the authors to expose the universal facts of human life while delving deep into the complexities of personal experience. Literary writings from several cultures and periods observed the emotional influence of perception, relationships and self-awareness.

Poetry, specifically has the ability to transform personal experiences into worldwide understanding that enables readers from diverse cultures to find the images of their self in the expressions of the poet. Ramanujan's poetry has been remarkably studies from cultural, autobiographical, postcolonial and linguistic perspectives but the importance of human emotions in developing a person's self seems less contemplation. Analysing his poetry through the lens of human emotions gives a more in depth understanding of making identity by means of personal experiences, cultural legacy, and individual awareness. The present study investigates how emotional experience serve as a bond between the individual and the group showing that quest for self identity, belonging and sense is not precise to any single culture but continues to be a defining attribute of human condition. It reflects that Ramanujan's poetry preserves the diversity of human emotions while sustaining their universality.

Memory as the Foundation of Identity

Ramanujan believes that one person can never fully detach from one's memories. A individuals identity is mostly shaped by his cultural heritage, family history, and memories of the past. In order to realize the significance of the self, he revisits childhood experiences, familial relations, Indian mythology, folklore, and history in his poems. His lyrical imagination makes the connection between the past and the present so effortlessly that memory is no longer just a remembrance but a living force. The cultural environment of South India, where he grew up, is essential to his quest for identity. While living in the United States, Ramanujan often experienced nostalgia and emotional displacement. Although he established himself professionally in Chicago, he constantly looked back to India his motherland for emotional and cultural grounding. This sense of exile transformed his poetry into a continuous exploration of selfhood, belonging, and identity.

Identity and Familial Relationships

Ramanujan's poetry has a strong connection between familial connections and the concept of identity. He considers his mother as the embodiment of kindness, genuine love, and devotion. She is a symbol of motherhood and sacrifice and is a very submissive, kind, and compassionate lady. Although she was quite lovely when she was younger, she is now in a pitiful state of weakness. In the poem "Of Mother Among Other Things," he emphasizes her sad and pitiful condition as she ages besides genuine and eternal love of a mother which is a common aspect. Moreover, the poet examines the emotional gap between husband and wife in Love Poem for a Wife. He contends that an invisible boundary separates them since they were unable to have a similar upbringing. Because his father has already died, his wife is unable to know him, and he is unable to fully understand her father due to his changed temperament and advanced age. As a result, they are still unable to make sense of their disparate family histories.

The poem presents the argument that identity is not just personal but is formed by inherited experiences and shared memories. The broken connections of modern life are reflected in the emotional alienation caused by the lack of shared memories.

The Search for Self Identity

Ramanujan searches for his true self by means of poetry. He was born into a traditional South Indian Hindu household and relocating to America through marriage to a Christian woman which provided him an opportunity for the development of the poetic self. He has used the combined perspectives of the east and west to analyse the state of humanity. Ramanujan's poetry places a strong emphasis on the Indian viewpoint and experience about human issues. The speaker's uncertainty about who they really are is evident in this poetry.

Ramanujan moved to foreign land for better vocational opportunities but sense of identity loss constantly disturb his mind. The poet is trying to convey his mental state through the theme of losing one's roots and identity. Among Ramanujan's poems, *Self Portrait* presents the most direct exploration of identity. The shift from his motherland creates uncertainty about his own identity which is symbolized through the distorted image in the mirror.

Instead of reflecting his own face, the mirror presents the image of a stranger:

The poet's broken sense of self is represented by the stranger's image. Despite his efforts to establish his own personality, he frequently runs across his father's influence. The father's signature stands for social legacy, inherited customs, and family values. The son cannot totally reject the cultural legacy that has been transmitted through the centuries, even though he may detached himself from his roots both intellectually and geographically. Moreover, his father's autograph acts as a reminder that his familial principles are hard to abandon completely. At the same time, he focuses on the materialistic age where everyone runs after money and luxuries at the sake of sacrificing moral values. The people have become cold, callous and calculating. They go to the verge of insanity in order to achieve power and success which is present day's demand.

The poem makes the argument that identity is influenced by tradition, memory, and family rather than being entirely self-created. Although the poet's search looks ambiguous, part of his identity remains kept alive through his father and his cultural legacy.

Human Existence and Emotional Identity

In his poem "Elements of Composition" he illustrates how humans are composed of five elements: earth, fire, water, sky, and air. The body dissolves in the same elements from which it originated after cremation. This is an example of the concept of "Panchabhuta" in Hindu mythology. He also discusses the chemical structure of calcium, carbon, gold, and magnesium as well as the biological aspects of conception through the mother's egg and father's seed. Regardless of caste, culture, or nation, we are all human beings born of the same process. To put in other words Ramanujan examines human existence by portraying each person as an integral part of the nature. The main emphasis is on the idea that human existence is made up of the same elemental forces that make up the universe, drawing the notion of Indian philosophy of five elements : earth, water, air, sky and fire. In this way the existence is intricately linked to the nature and the universe rather than existing in isolation. The poem highlights the transience and continuity of life by emphasizing that birth, development, decay, and death are all natural phenomena controlled by these elemental cycles.

In addition emotional identity is also reflected by portraying emotions as an integral part of human situation rather than something beyond from physical life. Familial relations, past reminiscences, cultural custom's and life events all influence one's identity. Love, desire, sorrow and self- awareness are among human emotions that naturally arise from interconnected life. The notion of permanent and isolated self is also opposed by Ramanujan. Instead, identity is depicted as flexible and constantly rebuilt by associations with family, surroundings and society. The innate bond between the material and spiritual aspects of existence is signified by the fusion of physical components with emotional experiences.

Ramanujan depicts human life as a harmonic equilibrium of physical composition and emotional consciousness by mingling ancient Indian philosophy with contemporary poetic language.

Eventually, the poem “Elements of Composition” claims that human self is a dynamic amalgamation of nature, culture, feelings, reminiscences and emotions rather than just an individual concept. It identifies the distinct emotional experiences that shape each person’s sense of identity while also celebrating the universality of human life.

Cultural Duality and Emotional Consciousness

Ramanujan while residing and working as a citizen of a foreign land, adheres to urban characteristics as well. Contrary to his upbringing, the western attitude is more liberal and unconventional, yet he appreciates both of them for polishing his lyrical mind by means of the ideologies of different cultures. This concept portrays him as a cosmopolitan who is an Indian inside but a foreigner outside. His experience of migration finds manifestation in the poem “Chicago Zen”. While dwelling in Chicago, USA, he was exposed to a completely new environment, culture and social background. Everything appears strange to him, from the people to cuisine to the ambience and customs. The poem depicts the psychological ambiguity of an immigrant residing in two different cultures at the same time.

The poet creates a symbolic juxtaposition of America and India by contrasting the Himalayan landscape with the beauty of lake Michigan. His fragmented mind is reflected in the shifting of his thoughts between the two nations. His responses are still Indian though he gradually adopts American society. He focuses on the Zen Buddhist philosophy as well that claims life is like a river which flows constantly without any hinderance. In the same manner, he is desirous of living his life happily free from cultural, social and political barriers. The “country” symbolises spiritual enlightenment, inner peace or the ultimate truth. It’s a state of consciousness instead a real location. This reflect the Indian as well as Zen Buddhist philosophy which focus on inner awareness over external activities as a way of freedom.

The poem Chicago Zen is a clear manifestation of how migration cannot eliminate cultural identity. Ramanujan maintains his Indian heritage in place of giving it up since his American environment and Indian reminiscences mix together to form a complex, hybrid identity. Ultimately, the poet displays that despite of cultural diversions, all people share a emotional desire for inner peace, purpose and identity.

National Identity, Tradition, and Modernity

Ramanujan’s search for identity transcends beyond the individual to the cultural and national in the poem Death and the Good Citizen. Despite being outside for a long period of time, Ramanujan's firm devotion to India his motherland is revealed in the poem. He conveys his emotional connection to his own country by making allusions to Indian myths, customs, and rituals. There is also a sense of internal tension as the poet acknowledges the moral and social deterioration of modern India. He still remains attach to his family, customs, and cultural memory for his identity at the same time he criticises contemporary society. His yearning for a sense of belonging becomes stronger by living away from homeland.

In the poem he unfolds the balance between the customs and practices of Indian as well as Western society. The poem presents the poets desire of his body and soul get united with mother nature after death. He appreciates the foreign way of cremating the body after death which includes organ donation. They donate their body parts to help the person in need and also to fulfil medical and scientific purposes. The remaining body is only buried once these organs have been removed. This illustrates a utilitarian Western viewpoint in which the body is useful even after death. Ramanujan highlights two diverse cultural perspectives of death by means of this contrast.

The Western follow utilitarian approach through organ donation whereas the Indians regards body as a temple not as a lump of flesh which should be dismantled after demise. Ramanujan being a true Hindu Brahmin has firm faith in Hindu philosophy so he is desirous of being burnt on the sandalwood after death and transmit the ashes into holy river at his

motherland. He wants to be mingled in mother nature following the Hindu religious belief that human body is made up of five elements and comes together into those five elements after death suggesting at the same time that compassion and the inevitability of death are universal human concerns.

The vision of death represents the poem's spiritual climax. Ramanujan believes that his body will not naturally blend into the alien environment, even after death. Rather, he must be cremated in accordance with Indian custom due to his Hindu identity. This picture represents how cultural identity persists despite geographic separation and is fundamentally linked to a person's life.

Conclusion

Ramanujan's poetry consistently presents identity as a dynamic process shaped by memory, family, migration, and cultural inheritance. His poems reveal that physical distance from India never weakens his emotional attachment to his homeland. Whether exploring familial relationships in *Mother Among Other Things*, the fractured self in *Self Portrait*, the cultural duality of *Chicago Zen*, or the enduring Indianness of *Death and the Good Citizen*, Ramanujan demonstrates that identity is rooted in memories that cannot be erased. It is noteworthy that Ramanujan just believed in only western ways of expressing himself, even if he was receptive to such shifts and viewpoints. Additionally, unlike a number of expatriates, he did not support modernization and westernization. His poetry speaks to both the natural Indian sensitivity and the rational comprehension that came from living in the West for a considerable amount of time. He is a poet with a "mixed sensibility" who has been enriched by his internal conflict between two traditions and two facets of his psyche. He utilizes poetry to discover who he really is.

His poetry ultimately suggests that while individuals may migrate across continents, they continue to carry their cultural past within themselves, making memory the strongest foundation of the self.

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