Chapter 5

Conclusion

Creative tension refers to a situation where disagreement or discord ultimately giving rise to better ideas or outcomes. The gap between one’s vision and current reality stretches the width of tension and therefore an attempt is aimed at gaining more energy, resources and creativity into finding ways to close that gap. The present study titled “The Chiaroscuro of Creative Tension: A Study of Select Poems of A.K. Ramanujan”, has been undertaken to establish the creative efforts of the poet to uphold the essence of poetic composition in the context of Indo-Anglian poetry. Through his recurrent concerns, double vision and poetic craftsmanship.

The study has been divided into five chapters. The introductory chapter has shown the origin and development of Indo-Anglian poetry and its significance. The need for the study in the form of a thesis statement has been made so. As poetry flows from a source deep within our soul, the increasing desire to delve deep into the creative process has been attempted with reference to A.K. Ramanujan who weaves poetry into and out of time at different milieu.

Several Indian writers like Henry Derozio, Michale Madhusudan Dutt or Toru Dutt tried hard at creative self-expression through English medium. They were criticised for imitating the style of poets like John
Keats or Sappho. It was found that Indian English poetry during independence described Indian situations generalized by the European imagination, substantiated by mysticism, mythology, or legends of great warriors and emperors. It was typical of a colonial poetry in which the writers felt the profound need to assert a national past. Ramanujan makes a significant entry in this context. A.K. Ramanujan, born in Mysore, India in 1929, came to the United States in 1959, where he remained until his death in Chicago on July 13, 1993. He was not only a transnational figure, but also a trans-disciplinary scholar, a poet a translator, a linguist and a folklorist. Although he wrote primarily in English, he was fluent in Kannada, the public language of Mysore and Tamil the language of his family.

In order to substantiate the present study the researcher has selected relevant poems from his four volumes of poetry. They are *The Striders* (1966), *The Relations* (1971), *The Second Sight* (1986) and *The Black Hen* (1995). As regards methodology, the researcher has made use of cultural studies as the base for her research. Wherever necessary other literary approaches are taken into account.

Kavi is a word which connotes a ‘seer-poet’ or a ‘poet-prophet’, whose ears have heard the Holy word. A kavi comprehends the essence of life and succeeds in the felicitous use of language to communicate it. He does have the intellectual ability to negotiate one culture in terms of
another. As a renowned Kavi, A.K. Ramanujan describes himself as ‘the hyphen in Indian-American context’. The introductory chapter has contextualized the writer and thrown light on the need to carry out the present study.

The second chapter, under the caption “Recurrent Concerns” has analysed the poet’s area of observation and emphasis. A reading of his poems helps us discover Indian especially the south Indian culture. At the same time his poetry presents the impact of the American cultural milieu on him. His poems portray the changing perception of self and surroundings in a changed cultural environment.

His poem “Self Portrait” presents identity crises during his stay in the states:

I resemble everyone

but myself. (23)

And the poet’s identity keeps changing like a series of images in passing “shop-windows”. This imagery reveals the influence of the alien culture on him. *The Striders, The Relations, The Second Sight* bear evidence to the influence of American culture on his mind and artistic production. In “Prayers to Lord Murughan”, he makes an objective view of Hindu religion. What is abstract and mythical are rejected in the place of what is immediate and what could be reasonably accepted. Poems such as “Looking for the Centre”, “Chicago Zen”, and “Waterfalls in a Bank”
and the concluding title poem “Second Sight” illustrate the fact that the poet is very much disillusioned with the oriental myths and their emphasis on “Second sight”. The poet enunciates the fact that a scientific approach could improve one’s perception. The poet always goes in search of the reality of existence.

Ramanujan is neither an advocate of modernization nor a nostalgic traditionalist. He remains neutral. In other words, he desires to portray the genuineness of life. His “Love poem for a Wife I” is not a eulogy to the joys of conjugal relationship. It is a sarcastic and disdainful presentation of falsifying human relationships in the world which is supposed to rest on individual morality and consensus of hearts. He did not want to masquerade himself as an ardent follower of Hinduism. He wanted to be genuine in his poetry.

Family is a symbol of closeness and security in the texture of Indian family life. At the same time, family structure acts as a heavy binding on the members. Therefore, the desire to get liberated from this secure fabric is also discernible in the case of people who love freedom and individuality. Ramanujan postulates the duality of mind and the body in his poem “Looking for a Cousin on a Swing”. This short poem narrates a girl’s memory of an exclusive experience of her childhood. As the girl is grown up; she hopes to experience the re-enactment of the childhood desire. But the difference is in the earlier meeting and playing, there was
innocence, laughter and childhood love. But the mind of the child has grown so big or the emotion of the child has so widened that the girl suffers from an incestuous longing. Thus the dichotomy between body and mind is highlighted in the poem. Besides, the familiar context of losing innocence as one advance in years is also underlined.

The third chapter titled “Double Vision” has dealt with the poet’s inner landscape and the outer forms which are responsible for triggering his creative desire and expression. Every poet has a point of view founded in himself. It is seen with reference to his intellectual acumen and emotional honesty. Ramanujan’s “Small-scale Reflections on a Great House” deals with several of his relatives. It relates personal incidents. For instance, it describes the death of one of his nephews, The ‘Great House’ stands for his ancestral house reminding the poet of his past. Being placed in a dislocated position, he leans backwards in time and space. So the ‘in-between’ condition of the poet is obvious.

Ramanujan had seen influenced by Western life and its culture. But the cultural values of Hinduism to which he belongs have always clung to him. Therefore, there is always a tension in his three “Hindu Poems”. It is true that the poet acknowledges his indebtedness to Hinduism. Yet he is not blind to its loopholes. In fact he is vociferous in pointing out what is undesirable in Hinduism. “A great deal of Indian writing is upstairs English, platform English, idiom-book English, newspaper English. With
no slang available, they are struck in a register….The starch is showing in
the collar” (qtd. in Nandini Lal, 37). Ramanujan had to contend with split
selves. He was an Indian thinker working in the midst of American
academia. Yet he found a good deal of time to tell stories, cut an orange,
laugh outrageously, “a person, an American, an Indian, both and
neither”(qtd. in Nandini Lal,37).

Expatriate writers suffer account of losing their identity. They
experience a rift between one’s origin and domicile. It may be easy for a
man to move out of his country and settle down in an alien soil. But he
may find it difficult to take away the image of his country from his mind.
But Ramanujan succeeded in dovetailing the native tradition and the
English language. Poems such as “Of Mothers, among other Things”,
“Still Another for Mother”, “Love Poem for Wife I”, “Looking for a
Cousin on a Swing”, “Obituary” and a few others deal with the family
theme. There are three important poems in the volume “Second Sight”
that establish the poet’s obsession with the family theme. In the poem
titled “Extended Family” the poet is reminded of his grandfather as well
as the great-great-grandson. He takes a vow not to be dependent on
several people who are yet to come. In “Love Poem for a Wife and Her
Trees” the poet discusses three generations of women—mother, wife, and
daughter in linear progression. Ramanujan narrates that his family has its
roots in heaven but branches in the earth. In the poem “Looking for the
Centre”, he makes an attempt to discover his roots. As he finds it difficult, he frees himself from the bondage.

Ramanujan grew up in the multicultural milieu. He knew Tamil, English, Kannada and Sanskrit. Ramanujan speaks about his father who believed in astrology, Bhagavad Gita and Bertrand Russel with equal love and attention. Ramanujan wanted to take Indian civilization from the Brahmanical and hierarchical views. Ramanujan was not fascinated by Sanskrit. He always thought that only the mother tongues (Tamil and Kannada) stands for a democratic, anti-hierarchic, from-the-ground-up view, of India while it is the another tongue that holds people of all social distinctions together and the diversity of these languages characterise the ultimate expression of our life and the people. R.Parthasarathy and Nissim Ezekiel complimented Ramanujan as the best of the Indian poets. Though Ramanujan belongs to two hemispheres, the South Indian Brahmin and his life in Chicago, there was no other Indian poet who had dealt with the “fissured Heritage” more effectively than Ramanujan.

The fourth chapter under the caption ‘Craftsmanship’ has examined the quintessence of Ramanujan’s poetic technique. Among the poetic devices, the use of juxtaposition is significant. Ramanujan’s poems “Returning” has been built upon this technique. The poet has juxtaposed amnesia with memory. A person’s self is largely constituted by memory. Loss of memory is a curse, for it disrupts the self and also leads to
alienation. In “Returning”, the poet has subverted the theory of amnesia, for it is used to inculcate a belief. The poet has lost his mother but he is made to believe that the absent mother is present. The poet has felt ecstatic. But soon he is made to realise that it is only illusion. The ultimate reality of the situation is, that his mother is dead. Memory has played a miraculous role in retrieving the poet from false ecstasy to the acceptance of the real, however unbearable it might be. Ramanujan’s “Returning” has been a signature poem in the sense that he has shown his poetic craftsmanship in the handling of irony, amnesia and memory.

Another strategy that Ramanujan has used with regard to memory is, the mode of amalgamation or assimilation. Ramanujan’s “Snake”, “Lines to a Granny”, “A River”, “Obituary”, “Of Mothers Among other Things” etc.; deal with the use of memory. In these poems, memory is used not merely to locate the past or the past incident but to reallocate its continuity with and relevance to the present. Memory has assimilated the twin faces of time, past and present, leading towards the future.

Ramanujan has made use of images, mental pictures, which are meant to relate to, get connected with an event, a situation or individuals. These images have formed an inscape substantiating the poet’s identity. The poet’s “Snake” has been analysed to state a gradual movement, through the images, from the present to the past and then back to the present. The poet has enabled the readers to visualize the completeness or
wholeness through that cycle of images. Precision is the predominant factor with regard to the poetry of Ramanujan. “Buture’s Tao” in *Black Hen* has been analysed to exemplify the truth that Ramanujan is a sculptor; he takes away the unwanted or the unnecessary pile-ups until he achieves the desired shape. Rabindra K. Swain, therefore, says that the process of “creation” is also a process of “elimination”.

A study of select poems of Ramanujan has given the truth that the principal concern of most of his poems has been self-search during which memory plays an active role. Ramanujan belongs to a culturally-mixed milieu and the poet takes an earnest attempt to reassemble his broken self to understand what one is and to retain at the same time individuality.

And the poetic process of discovering the macro self in the micro self has been acknowledged as creative tension leading to an understanding that one should not miss the wood for the tree.

Ramanujan’s poetry is intimate, intricate, concrete, ironic and reflective. There is nothing puffy or obese and this skill has made him an impressive Indian sensibility. As he has brought into the Indian literary scene a welcome note of confident, individual and independent voice, his writings can be compared and contrasted with any writer adroitly, attentively, aesthetically, accurately and admirably.