The study of A.K. Ramanujan’s poetry shows him as a distinguished Indian English poet in whom there is a fusion of the rich tenets of his native culture and the detached outlook of the Western thoughts. S. S. Dulai states about Ramanujan who made a multicultural commitment and transcended the limitation of an expatriate poet, in the following words:

His poetry is born out of the dialectical interplay between his Indian and American experience on the one hand, and that between his sense of his own self and all experience on the other. Its substance is both Indian and Western. Starting from the centre of his sense of self and his Indian experience, his poetry executes circles comprehending ever-wider realities, yet maintaining a perfectly taut connection between its constant, and continuously evolving central vision and the expanding scene before it. . . . (Dulai 151)

His poetic self presents a unique amalgam of the traditional and the modern. If his sensibility is rooted in the Indian heritage, his vision is definitely that of a modernist’s. His credit lies in his remarkable ability to maintain a considerable balance between tradition and modernity. S.K. Desai says that Ramanujan “is not just that of the Hindu or merely an Indian in the sense that he sees only those. His perceptive eye roves wider and the limit of his perception is encompassing a wider area” (qtd. in Pandey 146). The conclusion of the three chapters entitled “Introduction”, “Deities and Nature” and “Infinite in the form of Finite” comprises of the poet’s attitude and temperament towards the religious, cultural and several other aspects related to Man and his life. The religious aspect of the life of human being gets elaborate expression in almost all the creations of A.K. Ramanujan. In his poems the treatment of gods and goddesses has been done according to the beliefs and traditions that are associated with them in the Indian society and along with it the poet’s own attitude and belief towards them
also get expression. D. Ramakrishna says that:

The American anthropologists like Robert Redfield and Milton Singer coined terms like “Great Tradition” (involving the ancient pan-Indian Sanskrit texts) and “Little Tradition” (seen as local, mostly oral, and carried by the illiterate) and stressed the need for “texts of a culture” in preference to “fieldwork”.

(Ramakrishna 5)

Ramanujan argues that these terms need modification, and asserts:

Written and hallowed texts are not the only kinds of texts in a culture like India’s. Oral traditions of every kind produce texts. “Cultural Performances” of every kind, whether they are plays, rituals, or games, contain texts, written and oral. In a sense, every cultural performance is a text in itself. (qtd. in Pandey 5)

A.K. Ramanujan recalls the varied experiences and anecdotes of his youth with a renewed sense of analysis. Another characteristic of Ramanujan’s poetry is his anti-sentimental approach to life in general and personal experiences in particular. His poems scarcely reveal any sentiment bordering on tenderness. He can relate in a calm and detached manner any of the dismal realities of life. There is an immense difference between the approaches of both A.K. Ramanujan and P.B. Shelly who with his sensibility rooted in sentiment, feels: “Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thoughts” (qtd. in Bloom 48). King presents his idea about Ramanujan: “Ramanujan is widely read in India, along with Western and Western-influenced modern poetry in Indian languages. This unpredictable fusion of varied roots in Ramanujan’s poetry is true of the attitudes it expresses” (King, Modern Indian 211). In the words of the poet himself:

Memory,
in a crowd of memories, seems
to have no place
at all for unforgettable things. (Collected Poems 21)

Every great poet displays consummate technical skill and Ramanujan is no exception. He does credit to his muse by giving shape to his poetic art in the most estimable manner. He seems to find the exact word and expression to convey his feelings and thoughts. Moreover, he uses a wealth of poetic devices like simile, metaphor, alliteration, assonance, images and symbols and so on, thus reflecting his mastery over the art of creative writing. William Walsh rightly remarks that “His poems all show an extreme precision so that the contour of each phrase, the sense of each image, the slightest rise and fall of rhythm, is defined with an unqualified accuracy” (qtd. in Naikar 22). Ramanujan’s poetic technique is critically examined by M.K. Naik:

In his poetic technique, of all his contemporaries, Ramanujan appears to have the surest touch, for he never lapses into romantic cliché. His unfailing sense of rhythm gives a fitting answer to those who hold that complete inwardness with language is possible only to be poet writing in his mother tongue. Though he writes in open forms, his verse is extremely, tightly constructed. (qtd. in Rajeshwar 176)

Ramanujan is very often extolled for “his unique tone of voice, a feature that accounts for the characteristic style of his poetry” (Parthasarthy 194). S.C. Harrex observed with regard to the quality of Ramanujan’s creative medium:

A.K. Ramanujan used language with a surgeon-like precision, realizing that the secret of life is more likely to be found in the smallest rather than the most comic
particles of existence. . . . We should note under language that Ramanujan has evolved a personal pliant. English which retains its normal power of analysis yet is so internalized to achieve a resonance of Indian feeling and Hindu impulse.

(qtd. in Sahu 32)

An important fact revealed by Ramanujan’s poetry is his comprehensive knowledge of Indian mythology, folk-lore and religion. His expatriate experiences did not in the least dissuade him from his Indian culture. But possessing a rational mind, he was able to inculcate a practical approach towards his own culture. A.K. Ramanujan also describes the worship and reverence of the animals including serpents in India, as they are considered to be the symbol and ornament of lord Shiva. Even the festival Naag Panchami is celebrated to show the dedication and reverence to them. And the poet also gives instance of this festival in his poem “Snakes” when he says:

Mother gives them milk

in saucers. (CP 4)

Ramanujan is involved in “mapping the mutual independencies of body, nature, culture and time until they cover an immense span of human and natural history” (Pandey 134). Though Ramanujan is primarily concerned with human relationships, Nature also plays a major role in defining his mode of poetic experience. He concludes that man and Nature are not separate altogether and there is a mysterious link between them. He also gives expression to his varied response to Nature in different poems. His reactions are personal and unique, but his expression is always acute and accurate. “Raja Rao and Ramanujan, for instance, connect the past they carry with them with the present as it exists now, and their work grows out of his tension” (Kumar 148). R. Parthasarthy asserts the importance of the images of A.K. Ramanujan
and says:

The images are primarily visual. Words tend to collocate together into an image which then triggers off the poem. The entire poem is, in fact, one image or a complex of more than one image. It is this in this context that the use of the image is seminal. (qtd. in Bhatnagar 43)

A.N. Dwivedi rightly calls Ramanujan as “A poet of striking imagery and perfect language with “an eye for the specific physiognomy of an object or situation” (Dwivedi 2). Among all the natural objects, the trees have their own peculiar significance not only in the rites and rituals but in the mythologies also. The depiction of “Kalpavriksha” and “Chaityavriksha” in the ancient Indian scriptures indicates that tree worship is certainly an ancient practice in India. The poems have the description of natural objects such as trees, animals and rivers etc. which are related to Hindu gods and goddesses in one way or the other or have been associated with the deities due to their mythical and religious significance by the people in India.

The poet reveals the beliefs and traditional rites and rituals of the people in India and thus both aspects i.e. deities and nature occur in his poems naturally. Being an Indian poet it was natural for him to introduce the traditional beliefs of his native land. These traditional beliefs have been developed by the people from the time immemorial and who have adjoined them with the natural objects because these natural objects occupy a great place in Indian myths and legends.

Ramanujan reminds of the cultural beliefs of the people. They don’t want to perish the things which are attached with their emotions and sentiments. Here the poet shows how the people possess intense love and care for the things which have their place in their rituals, rites, traditions as well as in their daily practice of life, though the things are natural objects. It has
always been a general characteristics of the human beings to show intense care and affection for the things that grow up with them or have passed a long time with them and only because of this the poet’s mother prohibits the cutting of the tree in the poem “Ecology”.

She gives several other reasons to save the tree from the rage of his son. She says that the tree is grown up by the droppings of the passing bird which is considered by her a very good omen. And above all the ritual benefit of the tree as it gives the basketful of flowers to offer to gods is also put in the consideration of the poet. The flowers of the tree are used in most of the ceremonies and rituals of Indian society and are considered as the main material to adorn the gods and goddesses. In the poem “Zoo Gardens Revisited” the poet pleads to god to defend and save the animals and he describes the various incarnations of the god who took birth in the forms of animals himself. As he says:

Lord of lion face, boar snout, and fish eyes, killer of killer
cranes, shepherd of rampant elephants, devour my lambs,
devour them whole, save them in the zoo garden ark of your belly. (CP 154)

The poet in the praise of the Lord Vishnu describes various incarnation of the lord. The Lord of lion is Narsimha, who delivered the world from the clutches of Hiranyakashyap, the tyrannical father of the great devotee Prahlad. “Boar snout” refers to his assuming the shape of a Varaha, who lifted the stolen earth from the waters of the deep and thus freed it from the demon-thief. Lord Vishnu also appeared as Matasya- fish eyes, in order to save Manu, the progenitor of the human race, from a great torrent. According to an Indian myth, the lord rushed to the rescue of Gajendra from the jaws of a powerful crocodile. He is also represented in our mythology as kurma, the tortoise, sitting on whose back he recovered some valuable things lost
in the deluge. The Kurma back also served as the pivot of the mountain “Mandara” during the churning of the ocean in a tug-of-war between gods and demons. The Lord is also depicted as Kalki, the White Horse, who purged the creation. Thus, the association of gods and goddesses with nature cannot be alienated. And here the objective of the chapter is achieved by illustrating several poems of the poet which do possess such a great kinship.

And thus the chapter entitled “Deities and Nature” discusses A.K. Ramanujan’s approach towards the natural objects who regards them not only the natural objects but the rites and rituals associated with them also perceived by him. All the rites, rituals and customs are attached with the veneration of the deities and along with them the natural objects also get veneration because the mythologies give them importance along with the deities as well as several illustrations can be found in the Puranas, Upanishads, Vedas and other holy books also. In the holy book of Hindus, Shrimadbhagavadgita, Lord Krishna while preaching to Arjuna says that:

\[
\text{yo mam pasyati sarvatra} \\
\text{sarvam ca mayi pasyati} \\
\text{tasyaham na pranasyami} \\
\text{sa ca me na pranasyati (Shrimadbhagavadgita ch.6, text 30)}
\]

(For one who sees Me everywhere and sees everything in Me (as their essential spirit), I am never lost, nor is he ever lost to Me).

This sloka supports the chapter i.e., “Deities and Nature” very specifically. While the third chapter “The infinite in the form of finite” manifests the incarnation of the gods and goddesses or the emergence of the gods and goddesses in the human form on earth. The role of deities in the human form or it can also be said that the stories of the incarnation of the gods and
goddesses have been depicted in the poems of A.K. Ramanujan. The poems of A.K. Ramanujan contain the aspect of Hindu gods and goddesses in them. It is mainly due to the poet who is basically an Indian and to reflect the religious thoughts and the native customs and rites and rituals in his poetry was indispensable for him. The first among these are the Mythological poems entitled Mythologies 1, Mythologies 2 and Mythologies 3. The mythical tales related to the incarnations of Lord Vishnu get expression in the first two mythological poems and the third mythological poem entitled “Mythologies 3” is related to a devotee of Lord Shiva.

The echo of the holy book of Hindus entitled Shrimadbhagavadgita can be easily heard in the first two poems. As Lord Krishna preaches Arjun in these words:

\[
\text{paritranaya sadhunam} \\
\text{vinasaya cha duskritam} \\
\text{dharma-samsthapanarthaya} \\
\text{sambhavami yuge yuge} (Shrimadbhagavadgita ch. 4, text 8)
\]

(In order to deliver the pious and to annihilate the miscreants, as well as to reestablish the principles of religion, I advent Myself millennium after millennium). And the same idea reflects in the other verse of Shrimadbhagavadgita wherein Lord Krishna states:

\[
\text{yada yada hi dharmasya} \\
\text{glanir bhavati bharata,} \\
\text{abhyuthanam adharmaysya} \\
\text{tadatmanam srjamy aham} (Shrimadbhagavadgita ch. 4, text7)
\]

(Whenever and wherever there is a decline in religious practice, O descendant of Bharata, and a predominant rise of irreligion-at that time I descend Myself)

To cite A. K. Ramanujan’s words: “Thus a text like the Mahabharata is not a text but a
tradition. It used to be every poet’s ambition to write a *Ramayana* or the *Mahabharata*” (qtd. in Sharma 420). Ramanujan’s ironical attitude towards the things gets its height in “Prayers to Lord Murugan”. Lord Murugan is an “ancient Dravidian god of fertility, joy, youth, beauty, war and love. He is represented as a six-faced god with twelve hands” (*CP* 113). The poet laments over the present manner of prayers and the loss of ancient ritualistic practices which were performed at the altar of god. The timely obviousness of Ramanujan’s dig at the modern man’s irresponsible withdrawal from the spiritual centre is really captivating. His regret over the loss of faith is explicit in the poem.

The excellent poetic use to which Ramanujan has put this unforgettable Hindu myth of Lord Vaman and King Moradhvaj speaks volumes of his grounding in the quintessence of Indian culture and wisdom. Moulting is a small prose-poem, the concluding paragraph of which is quite important from the viewpoint of the application of Hindu mythology by the poet. The poem “The Difference” is a poem which mentions “The Hindu soul at death” and the “tiny Taj Mahals for tourists” and brings into sharp focus the myth of Lord Vishnu who assumed the shape of “the Dark one”-i.e., the Vaman god-who appeared before King Moradhvaj as a dwarf-beggar to test the latter’s world renowned generosity and charitable nature and who demanded of the King just three steps of earth. It will be appropriate to quote here the remark made by Kurup:

Ramanujan is essentially a poet, a sensitive antenna responding to the circumambient universe and the poet keeps the man alive and kicking. . . . it is this sensitivity that keeps his self away from being too much involved with art because too much of involvement with art corrupts the perception of the artistic self. (qtd. in Ghosh 6)
The deities in the form of idols reside in the temples and are venerated in a very auspicious way but they do not play any kind of active role in helping the have-nots and in removing their poverty. According to the poet the role of deities is thus negligible in the society and the veneration of them is futile. Idolatry is nothing but the disbelief of the people who consider that the gods and goddesses reside on the earth, see the miseries of the people and listen to their prayers and thus by assuming so they satisfy their belief of the existence of the deities.

All this leads to believe that Ramanujan possibly upholds the Gita-dictum: ‘Swa dharma nidhanam shreyah, pardharmo bhayavanah’ (Shrimadbhagavadgita ch. 3, text 35) (i.e. ‘it is better to die in one’s own religion, for the religion of other’s is dangerous’). This idea finds the beautiful expression in his another poem entitled “Conventions of Despair” when he says: “I must seek and will find / my particular hell only in my hindu mind” (CP 34). Ramanujan’s poetry is undoubtedly a vigorous interpretation of India’s hoary significant wisdom and glorious past, her spiritual and cultural heritage, her varied customs and creeds, her religions and rituals, her costumes and dialects. His short lyrical pieces place him immediately in the fore-front of Indian-English poets of our times.

Thus it can be very aptly said that Ramanujan’s poetry reveals his firm faith in his religion and its several other aspects apart from his rationality and modernism. Study of Man in the context of religion, culture, tradition and society dominated his poetry. In brief, Indian deities, playing an important part in the life of a common man constitute one of the major themes of Ramanujan’s poetry, worth explored. A.K. Ramanujan’s poetry can be classed with the best post-independence English poetry in India. He belongs to the same class of poets such as Nissim Ezekiel, K.N. Daruwalla, Jayanta Mahapatra, R. Parthasarthy and Shiv K. Kumar.
Ramesh K. Srivastava is quite apt in his remark:

> Whether it is a simple narration of common occurrences or a shock therapy for chronic social ailments, Ramanujan’s poetry is a broken sequence of pronouncements through words, images, symbols and hieroglyphics which slowly reveal to us the dark menacing shadows of dehumanization, narrowing their circle around us. (qtd. in Ram 63)

It can be suggested that Ramanujan’s style has an individuality of its own. As is evident throughout his poetry, in his style too, one notices Ramanujan’s strict adherence to his roots. In his desire to portray the minutest details of everything that is Indian, he at times attempts to describe the indescribable to use an expression. To quote P.K.J. Kurup:

> Such a poetic process not only helps him achieve a remarkable precision and subtlety in describing the indescribable but it also helps his poetic self, preoccupied with the desire to discover his roots, to catch the subtle nuances of the vibrations of his Hindu sensibility. (qtd. in Ghosh 105)

In Indian poetry in English, the reading public and the critics will swear by the older generations of the poets and among whom A.K. Ramanujan’s is unique and the importance and the influence of these poets continue in the academic world. Apart from being a major Indian poet in English, A.K. Ramanujan has been sought after teacher of Dravidian Studies and Linguistics, South Asian Languages and Civilisation and Anthropology. He is one of the very few poets who have made a great mark in the academic field as well. Another significant contribution made by him is his priceless translations of Tamil and Kannada literary texts into English. It is a special gift to the reading public in the multilingual India and beyond. Gifted by nature and circumstances, Ramanujan remains an artist and translator par excellence.
As an artist who has taken adequate advantage of his multilingual background, Ramanujan had no difficulty in making a success of himself in both India and abroad. Bruce King is struck while raising a point: “how much Ramanujan remained emotionally part of India and how insistent was he to distance himself from any form of the Hindoo” (King 79). Basavaraj S. Naikar suggests that:

Ramanujan does not indeed make any attempt to distance himself from the Hindoo. He is engaged in looking critically into the Hindoo forms, which is because of what Ramanujan calls his ‘outer forms.’ In reality, he does not wish to distance himself. As a mature artist, he tries to put things and show things as they are, with of course a tinge of bitterness. Ramanujan remains an instinctive insider, emotionally a home-bound pilgrim. . . . (Naikar 25-26)

Ramanujan happens to be a linguist, an anthropologist, a translator, and a poet all at once, but it is as a poet and a translator that his fame likely to last. He is a poet of talent and skill as according to Dr. Iyengar, he has “established as one of the most talented of the ‘new’ poets” (qtd. in Dwivedi 142). For his works he is to be ranked with Ezekiel, Kamala das, R. Parthasarthy, Pritish Nandy and Daruwalla. His poetry is a remarkable blend of emotion and reason, heart and head. Memory and desire, personal affliction and literary reminiscences and India and America coalesce in it. He is, no doubt, a victim of cultural ambivalence and personal dilemma, but he is an invaluable asset to us. It is gratifying to note that he has not naturalized the Western themes and traditions so much as the Indian ones.

Ramanujan is a distinguished poet of contemporary India who largely concentrates on his family and relations, on his Indian associations, on India’s glorious cultural heritage, on the Hindu myths and legends, on the Hindu gods and ways of life, for his poetic utterance. Thus the
present research work accomplishes the objective of representation of the deities in Attipat Krishnaswami Ramanujan’s poetry in a significant manner comprising almost all the attitudes of the poet. The relevance and importance of the research study lies in the fact of presenting the attitude of a learned person. In the present times what a person thinks about the rituals, rites and the gods and goddesses of his own native land which have their association with them and to perceive the attitude of a modern man towards his own rites, rituals and customs, the present research work i.e., “Representation of Deities in Attipat Krishnaswami Ramanujan’s poetry” is indeed helpful. Ramanujan, as a poet, can best be summed up in the following words:

Ramanujan is neither a nostalgic traditionalist nor an advocate of modernisation and westernisation. He is a product of both and his poems reflect a personality conscious of change, enjoying its vitality, freedom and contradictions, but also aware of memories which form his inner self, memories of an unconscious ‘namelessness’, which are still alive, at the foundation of the self. (Ghosh 190)

To conclude, A.K. Ramanujan stands out as an eminent poet who has made an indispensable position for himself in the realm of Indian English poetry. Despite his death in 1993, he will always be remembered as a poet gifted with a varied poetic sensibility, blessed with a treasure trove of memories which the passage of time refused to corrode, a skilful technical artist and as one who maintained a perfect balance between the traditional and the modern. He is credited for having kept intact his originality despite being subjected to the onslaught of various influences both Indian and Western.
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