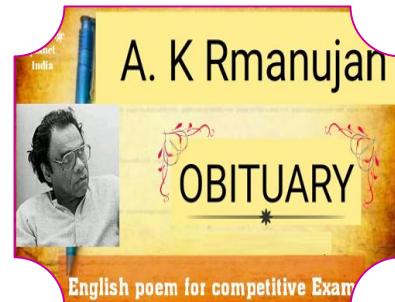




AN INSIGHT INTO MIDDLECLASS FAMILY IN A. K. RAMANUJAN'S POEM 'OBITUARY'

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ABSTRACT

Hinduism has many shades exists both in theory and practice. Indians and their tradition are depicted with multiple perspectives by foreign authors. A.K. Ramanujan has a different vision on Indian culture. What a life is to a middleclass man and how does he perceive Hinduism. Such relations and interpretations are explained in Obituary with respect to middleclass father and son.

KEYWORDS: Middleclass, Indian culture, Obituary, Hinduism.

INTRODUCTION

A.K. Ramanujan presents reminiscences of his father, and aftermath of his death. The opening lines gives details of things the father left behind after his death: table with some papers, full of dust, debts and daughters and bed wetting son. Middleclass man lives an ordinary and mundane life full of trials and tribulations. His father has not contributed much in terms of creativity or productivity to the world. Girl child is considered to be a burden on a father; she is not lesser than debts. Parents are bound with the responsibility of marrying their daughter with adequate dowry to suit their financial status.

He also left one old decaying house that leant on the coconut tree through their growing years. The deteriorating house is metaphor to life also. A middleclass family tends to live life borrowing from others like the house leans on the coconut tree for support. The poet's father burnt properly at the cremation being the burning type. This phrase connotes the life of a middleclass father, who physicality being dried and worn out all through his life in an attempt to make both ends meet. It also refers to his introvert personality. Poet further talks about the cremation of his father:

he burned properly
at the cremation
as before,easily
and at both ends,

His eyes appeared as coins in the funeral pyre, and were not any different and came across as they always did. This amounts to the fact that they did not have any feeling in them even while he was alive. He also left some half-burnt spinal discs that were half-burnt that the priest advised the children to pick carefully and immerse them in the Thriveni River, the junction of the three rivers where the bones of the dead are immersed as per the Hindu rites. No conspicuous or insignificant tombstone was erected for the dead person bearing dates of his birth and death. Therefore, neither was his birth of much consequence nor

was his death. He is deemed so incapable, that even his birth is a Caesarean one for which, he did not have to put in much effort. His death also came easily to him in the form of heart failure at the fruit market.

All he gained in his life worth mentioning is that he managed to get two lines of obituary inserted in some newspaper in Madras. The paper was sold to hawker, who in turn sold it to a grocer from whom the poet occasionally bought provisions. This underlines the triviality of whatever the father has achieved. The poet states that earlier on, he used to read the papers which had groceries like salt and jaggery wrapped up in it. However, nowadays he does it for the reason that some day he may succeed in finding those lines relating to his father's obituary. Thus the poet attempts to discover some meaning of his father's existence in his life: this is the significance of the quest in the end.

In the poem "Obituary" the poet describes 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 pattern of Hindu patriarchal families in Indian culture father is considered the head of the family. Ramanujan comments on the gender bias indirectly.

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 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 tradition s 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.

The rituals like burning the dead body which pollutes the ecology. The concluding rites does 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 does not construct a head stones which consist of his death and birth dates, on which a man 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 a 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.

Ramanujan's affiliation with Indian culture and tradition is nicely exposed in his poetry in the form of his familial past, visual images, and his observation towards Hinduism. His poetry reflects a touch of humanity and Indian ethos of life. He is the outcome of perfect and profound multiculturalism which is typical Indian one. His English poetry assimilates with linguistic, literary and cultural features of Kannada and Tamil into form of English literature. The kaleidoscopic pattern in his poems brings forth the vigor and color of India with all its oddities and distinctions. The beauty of Ramanujan's English narrated with vernacular fluidity, deep emotions and scenes go into the making of many a literary gem. It may be the result of childhood experiences in India, cultural encounter in America and marriage with Jewish wife forces him to depict Indian panorama with great intensity.

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