

Stream of Consciousness: Narrative Technique in A. K. Ramanujan's Selected Poems

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Abstract

Literature is the lifeblood of human society. It is the soul of human life. There are many literary figures who have contributed with the excellence of their creativity in the field of literature. It is the reflection of a writer or poet's personality and opinion of the surrounding atmosphere. Every work of art is the product of writer or poet's thought processing. When thoughts come and get concrete form is a significant phenomenon in the literary world. There are various kinds of literary innovations taking place, among them stream of consciousness is the modern literary narrative technique. It is the product of the modern age of literature. Stream of consciousness is the narrative technique in many forms of literature. It represents the mindset and mood of the speaker. It creates the imagery of the speaker's psyche to the reader. It occurs in an unstructured manner, whatever thought comes into the poet's mind, he writes without observing the logical sequence of thoughts. It can be interchangeably used with the term interior monologue. This aspect can be found in A. K. Ramanujan's various poems. This research article is an attempt to study "Stream of Consciousness: Narrative Technique in A. K. Ramanujan's selected poems".

Key Words: Narrative technique, poet's creativity, A. K. Ramanujan, stream of consciousness, poems

Introduction:

A. K. Ramanujan is one the most distinguished poets of India who has contributed innovative poetry charm to readers. Due to his interest in linguistics, he has created many poems with linguistics excellence. He writes mostly in free verse. He has appropriate poetic diction to choose phrases, idioms, irony etc. His poems are the epitome of human expressions and life experiences. He has captured the real scenario of human life. He has depicted himself as the persona of the poem and he has expressed himself as the 'watcher' of every moment of life. He has observed the human world and tried to bridge between the real human world and imaginative world in literature.

Stream of Consciousness as a Narrative Technique:

The term “Stream of Consciousness” is used by William James in his “Principles of Psychology” (1890). With the adaptation of the stream of consciousness, there are various writers and poets who express the flow of ideas, perceptions, memories and thoughts. It is mostly used in many modern narratives. It has the connection with psychological study of characters by which a poet or a writer delineate the inner conflicts of characters. It helps to germinate the creativity of a poet. It leads to the character's introspection also. It provides the random associations of thoughts of characters. A persona expresses the thunder of his thoughts in a flow without knowing its purpose to express and it delineates suppressed thoughts, emotions and feelings of the persona.

Since 1920, there are many writers, poets, novelists and playwrights used to write their work of art in stream of consciousness. Some literary figures like Samuel Richardson, William Faulkner, Henry James, Edouard Dujardin, James Joyce, Dorothy Richardson and Virginia Woolf, etc. apply this narrative technique in their work of art. M.H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Aarpham opine about stream of consciousness that, “...to describe the unbroken flow of perceptions, memories, thoughts, and feelings in the waking mind; it has since been adopted to describe a narrative method in modern fiction.” (378)

It originated in psychology after that many literary figures have used it to depict how people think. It can be written in the first person or the third person. It is the expression of the character one sided. This narrative technique is more realistic to denote the reality of a person's life. It is rich in its content and many writers and poets apply this for the better convey of the realism of life to the readers. It became widely popular during the modernist movement and still many literary figures have been applied for their narrative techniques. A poet can get a better chance to understand a character's psyche and behavior. It was developed after World War – I because of emotional and psychological disturbance among the citizens. It's like an amalgamation of various kinds of feelings and emotions. A writer wants to create an instant piece of work of art. It is an unstructured and non-linear way of expression.

Stream of Consciousness in A. K. Ramanujan's Poems:

The narrative technique is the significant aspect of literary creativity. It is a medium to express creativity. In various poems, Ramanujan has delineated his thoughts in stream of consciousness. His poems are the matter of first hand experience. He has discussed less about the particular persona in his poems but he has given his own voice as the persona. In “On a Delhi Sundial”, Ramanujan has depicted the city with a stream of consciousness. The poem itself starts with the haphazard way without focusing on the structure etc. He delineates the meaninglessness of the city and the given description is also not suitable with the title. He thought about the city and suddenly the ideas came into his mind. He says,

“Four-faced clocks on market-towers school the town

And make the four directions sell and buy

In the stalls below where watches run

Their certainties on the uncertain pulse.

Pretty machines on mantels slice the country silences.” (Collected Poems:8)

“The Opposable Thumb” is one of the poems which has the same treatment. Ramanujan was a good observer of human life and he has put his observations in this poem. He has amalgamated many themes in his single poem. In the same poem, he talked about sudden thoughts. He says,

““One two three four five

Five fingers to a hand’

Said the blind boy counting

But he found a sixth one

Waiting like a cousin for a coin;

A budlike node complete with nail,

Phalanx, and mole

Under the usual casual opposable thumb.” (Collected Poems: 6)

“On Memory” is also part of the stream of consciousness narrative technique. Ramanujan himself presents as a persona of a poem. Memory of one’s and its description by persona is the matter of stream of consciousness. Ramanujan has expressed his childhood nostalgia in a poem. He set forth,

“Ask me;

Nursery rhymes

On Tipu Sultan or Jack and Jill:

The cosmetic use of gold when

The Guptas ruled:

An item of costume in

Shakespearian times; ” (Collected Poems: 21)

The structure of the poem is also unstructured as Ramanujana used to write poems in free verse. He has not derived the themes of the poem logically but it comes to his creativity in a form of unstructured manner. He was one of the eminent poets of the modern age, and that is why the influence of modern narrative techniques was observed by him.

“Self-Portrait” is another poem which emphasizes the poet’s self-introspection. In stream of consciousness, self-introspection is the major element by which a persona ex[presses himself/herself. It is a psychological process. Ramanujan expresses,

“I resemble everyone

But myself, and sometimes see

In shop-windows,

Despite the well-known laws

Of optics,

The portrait of a stranger,

Date unknown,

Often signed in a corner

By my father.” (Collected Poems: 23)

“Conventions of Despair” is the matter of stream of consciousness. Ramanujan himself has a persona in it and expresses his thought processing. It is the repentance of the poet and expresses his thoughts. He delineates his repent without the logical sequence of thought. It is one of the suitable examples of stream of consciousness. He says,

“Impale a six-inch spider

under a lens. Join the Test-

ban, or become The Outsider.

Or pay to shake my fist

(or whatever-you-call-it) at a psychoanalyst.

And when I burn

I should smile, dry-eyed,

And nurse martinis like the Marginal Man.

But, sorry, I cannot unlearn

Conventions of despair. ” (Collected Poems:34)

“An Image for Politics”, is a satirical poem and written in stream of consciousness narrative technique. It is written by a poet without the perfect structure of language, grammar and rhythm. It is slightly based on memory and spontaneous expression of unstructured thoughts. Ramanujan says,

“Once, I’d only heard

of a Chinese fancy-dish

of fish

that rots

till it comes alive

and a maggot-spaghetti squirms

where once a mackerel gasped for worms:” (Collected Poems: 46)

“A Poem on Particulars” is a poem based on Ramanujan’s observation and opinion about daily routine life. It happens regularly in the common man’s life. Ramanujan has given the voice to the ordinary people. This poem presents the persona “I”, Ramanujan says about the scenario of market in stream of consciousness manner. Ke denotes

“In our city markets

I have often seen a wicker basket

sit

upon its single, ample

hip,

its rattan pattern filled

with another,

subtler

bubble-bed pattern of oranges:”(Collected Poems:53)

“Man and Woman in Camera and Out” is a wonderful poem written by Ramanujan which depicts the requirement of concentration for writing poetry but this poem starts unconsciously by the poet. He says,

“In the small bright square

of the viewfinder

one image slurs another.

I try to match the circle

with the square, play

at the hocus-pocus

of man, tree, and door,

peeking in and out

of the black box” (Collected Poems: 58)

Ramanujan’s poems are about life experiences. His creativity is the matter of spontaneous overflow of his emotions as he says in his one of the interviews with Chirantan Kulshrestha,

“Something around me often touches me and returns me to an old unfinished piece and makes me see what I tried to say there. I return to it and redo it and if this redoing is any good, it reflects not only the change in myself, but in redoing it I find myself changed.” (45)

“Routine Day Sonnet” is another poem written by Ramanujan. It recollects his memory about office hours and nostalgia about time spent with his daughter. The flow of consciousness has the connection with past memories of the persona. It is derived by him as the matter of nostalgia without any valid reason behind the creation of the poem. The title presents aptness of the subject matter, Ramanujan has expressed his routine day activities and it should be like the flow of his daily matters. It is written in fourteen lines. So, the title has its aptness. He has delineated the routine with the flow of his thoughts and it comes suddenly in his mind. He says,

“For me a perfectly ordinary

day at the office, only a red lorry

past the window at two;

a sailor with a chest tattoo.

A walk before dark
 with my daughter to mark
 another cross on the papaya tree;
 dinner, coffee, bedtime story
 of dog, bone and shadow.” (Collected Poems:68)

“Compensations” is a virtue full poem which depicts sympathy towards soldiers of the world war. The tone of this poem is pathetic but Ramanujan has expressed it with the technique of stream of consciousness. The essence of human value is the chief element of his poems. He has kept the human world in the centre during writing poems. Ramanujan has delineated sympathy towards soldiers. He says,

“I’ve even heard of surviving
 World War men with wooden legs
 doing cha cha’s and jitterbugs
 at Army Hospitals, near debris
 and craters, especially
 outside the amputation theaters;
 the dumb and the colourblind rise
 rapidly in politics; the born deaf
 practice psychiatry born; fingerless
 men become tailors for royalty ” (Collected Poems: 109)

The ideas come in poet’s mind to write something better matter. He was the creator of many poems and his poems are the milestone for many poets in coming generations. His poems are a matter of variety in terms of subject matters, themes, treatment of words, poetic diction, poetic structure etc. “Obituary” is one of the most famous poems of Ramanujan. He has expressed the deep consolation for his father and it is the matter of kinship with his father. It thoroughly describes the sadness of death of his father. The narrative technique used by him is the wonderful. The poem starts with the poet’s nostalgia about his father and whole family. He says that all the nostalgia in stream of consciousness. He expresses,

“Father, when he passed on,

left dust

on a table full of papers,

left debts and daughters...” (Collected Poems: 111)

He has given a holistic approach to his poems. It touches almost all fields of knowledge. The recollection of memory is deeply attached in his mind.

Conclusion:

Every literary work needs some method for its expression. Ramanujan has expressed various observations and matters of life in his many poems. Stream of consciousness is one of the significant elements of Ramanujan’s poems. He has delineated various subjects with the real scenario of the world. He was a good observer of society. His poetic genius is an output of his life experience, whatever he has felt, shown, enjoyed, observed, communicated, witnessed and experimented with.

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