



The Decline of Mughol Dynasty in A K Ramanujan's *The Last of the Princes*

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Abstract: The paper depicts the past life and present life of princes in our country. The poet presents the glory of the princes past and their power. The paper focuses the vitality inherent in Indian culture and tradition. It shows how the princes who were powerful once are thriving for their existence in the present life. The poet takes the most powerful emperor, the Mughal Dynasty to exhibit the pathos in the mind of the readers. The poet has satirically attacked the snotty mentality of the last princes, their bad habits, their intoxication to imported wine and wife and their unpatriotic fervor.

Key Word: *Emperor, sensibility, dynasty, princes, power, tradition, culture, decline, and religion*

Introduction: Ramanujan was originally a poet of Mysore but taught in the University of Chicago from 1962. A poet of delicate and refined sensibilities. He tried his best of perfect a translucent style in his poetry. The title- poem of his first volume, *The Striders*(1966) refers to water- insects that can stand motionless upon the ripple skin/ of a stream'. This describes Ramanujan's preoccupation with the moment of fixity upon a torrent of change. His poetry reflects the traditional Hindu upbringing that he had, and the experiences that he encountered in a western culture. A poet delicate and refined sensibility, he tries his best to perfect a translucent style in his poetry. His poetry reflects the traditional Hindu upbringing that he had, and the experiences that he encountered in a western culture. But his American experience seems to affect very little of his verse. With only three volumes of verse, Ramanujan occupies a leading place among the Indian English Poets. He had earlier re-created some of the Vachana from Kannada and some of the love lyrics from Kuruthbhohai in fifteen Poems from a classical *Tamil Anthology* (1965). His achievement is multi- faceted. He was a poet, folklore, critic, translator and cultural historian.

The Last of the Princes appeared A K Ramanujan's second volume of poetry *Relations*. It is pathetic poem that deals with the fall of the great Mughol empire. The Great Mughol Empire that enjoyed power and prosperity suffered such a setback that they could not get enough food. The last of the Princes speaks of the slow but steady decline of the Mughol dynasty after Aurangzeb's time. Ramanujan describes the fate of one of the last princely descendants who clings on and perhaps stays alive on the strength of the memory of lost grandeur. The last of the Princes in the poem represents a social type rather than a unique individual. The poet use simple but vivid images to depict with restrained pathos mingled with fair satire, the end of a fairy-tale era of valiant princes and fabulous lifestyle.

The last of the Princes speaks of the slow but steady decline of the Mughol dynasty after Aurangzeb's time. Ramanujan describes the fate of one of the last princely descendants who, impoverished and stripped of all former power, clings on and perhaps stays alive one strength of the memory of lost grandeur. The Last of the princes in the poem represents a social type rather than a unique individual. Before the British came or even upto the time that she became independent, Indian was actually a conglomeration of numerous small kingdoms. The Kings and Princes of these princely states lost their power and wealth when British became the rulers and even more so when the late Indira Gandhi passed the Privy Purse Act. The fate of the once all-powerful Mughol dynasty was no different, unable to cope up with the changed circumstances and their newly demeaned status, the erstwhile royalty began to wallow and decay. The poem very vividly describes their condition. The Mughol Empire had great ruler like Humayaum, Akbar, Shahjehan and Aurangzeb. But after Aurangzeb's death glory began to wane. The poet writes:

"They took their time to die, this dynasty

Failing in slow motion from Aurangzeb's time

Some of bone TB

Others of London fog that went to their heads" (King Bruce, 21)

London fog is well known for its thickness. One can hardly see anything in the London for hardly even breathe. Ramanujan has a profound historical sensibility. He uses history, mythology, legends and folklore in his poetry for him past continues nourishing or depleting the present. The Mughols ruled over India for about 150 years during the 16th and 17 the centuries. When its power dwindled, the subcontinent degenerated into warring fiefs. The Mughols failed because they did not make efforts to pull India out of the middle ages. They hardly did anything for agriculture; trade and economy accept the Great Akbar. Aurangzeb was a fantastic who wreaked havoc among Marathas, Sikhs and Hindus. After his death, the dynasty was doomed to eventual atrophy and extinction. After Aurangzeb, Bahudur Shaha Zafar came to power. He was the last of the Mughols. He lost the battle in 1857 Mutiny due to his complicity. He was banished to Rangoon where he died in 1862. Ramanujan writes that great dynasty gradually decayed like a TB patient. The Ramanujan poet refers to some cause of disintegration. Some Princes could not understand

the cunning policy and tactics of the Britishers, some rulers blindly imitates the luxurious life style of the British people dirking wine and spending time in the company of women. They led the life of debauchery and adultery. Very few of them were brave enough to fight. The dead relatives of the last of the Mughol princes.’ The last powerful Mughols, nad inability to adapt unfriendly climes in distance lands. It is a beautiful image that depicts with clarity the slow but sure fading out of a dynasty, Aurangzeb is the last of the power Mughols. Many of the royal descendants chose to leave India and go to England, but the cold climate proved unsuitable for them and many of them died of illness.

It is pathetic poem which deals with the slow disintegration and ultimate dissolution of the Mughol Empire in India. The poet describes clearly and pathetically the extreme poverty and suffering of the great Mughols. Saleem Peeradina remarks about this poem “the question of intellectual adequacy is neatly skirted, the poem merely stating effectively an experience or providing a portrait; the reader is left to draw his own conclusion” (Saleem Peeradina,42)

The poet enumerates various causes of this disintegration. Some of the princes were confused due to the bewildering and cunning policies of Englishmen and could not think for themselves. Some of them apishly limited current trends and imported wine and women. The life of debauchery befogged their thinking and rendered them incapable of doing any great work of heroic note only one or two demonstrated heroic valour in war and such acts were celebrated in songs and ballad. Ramanujan describes the causes of the disintegration of Mughol dynasty.

The poet uses simple but vivid images to depict with restrained pathos mingled with faint satire, the end of a fairytale era of valiant princes and fabulous lifestyle. Some of bone TB, praise point to the varied reasons behind the death of the large family of the prince. It suggests poverty- induced illness and inability to adapt to unfriendly climes in modern day- vices. A few royal descendants become totally debauched. Ramanujan in his lucid style says:

“Some of current trends, imported wine and women,

One or two heroic in war or poverty,

With ballads

To their name. Father, uncles, seven”(King Bruce, 22)

Modern fashions which have acquired a vogue, such as drinking imported wines and associating with society women freely. Death and decayed killed them one by one. Ramanujan gives a vivid picture of them all dying and decaying. All family member and other died one by one. The modern day vices, it suggests the great courage and dignity with which some descendant of Aurangzeb met their end, battling hopelessly against either their mighty oppressors or against conditions of object poverty. It is a narrative poem and implies that brothers were eminent enough too suggestive of line 7. It suggests the great courage

and dignity with which some descendant of Aurangzeb met their mighty oppressors against conditions of object poverty. Bahadur shah afar, the last Mughol emperor was a well-known poet and ghazal writer.

“Folklore brothers, sister so young so lovely

The snakes loves her and hung dead,

Ancestral

Lovers; from their ceiling; brother’s many

Wives, their unborn still born babies, numberless

Cousin, royal mynahs and parrots

In the harem;

Everyone died, to pass into his slow

Conversation”(King Bruce, 22)

Here we have an example of a magnification of the girl’s beauty. She was so lovely that the snakes, on seeing her, simply died after they had just come of their hiding-places in the ceiling. The snakes would have bitten an ordinary person but, on seeing this damsel, they just died all passed away but only one, the last of the royal family survived to suffer poverty and hardship. All died except one, the last princes of the royal family Bahadurshah Zafar. He was imprisoned by the Britishers in Rangoon who longed to return to India. He wanted to be buried in Delhi but he was buried in Rangoon. He fell ill and suffered from acute poverty. He was so poor that he could not send his daughters to school. His wife had only heirloom pearl in her nose ring. His first son was a trainee in telegraphy. He had telegraphed thrice to his father for money. The poet describes the tragedy of the last Mughol prince in a vivid and heart –rending manner. He lamented pathetically before his death. The last princes unfortunately lived to recall memories of his great ancestors and talk about them to others. It was a very painful experience. He fell ill due to poverty he could not get proper treatment. How pathetic and poverty ridden is the condition of the last of the Mughols.

It is reference to one of the many superstitions surrounding snakes and fertility, babies, born dead as well as those yet to be Muslim aristocrat’s harem with countless wives and subsequently, an endless series of offspring. For the last princes, the figures and style of his past are but memories. It implies that these brothers were eminent enough to become legends among their people. The last survivor of the dynasty talks about his predecessor and their fate. That is how they pass into his conversation

“He lives on, hair to long

Fingers, faces in paintings and a belief in suspicious

Snakes in the skylight; he lives on, to cough,

Remember and sneeze, a balance of phlegm

And bile; alternating loose bowels and hard sheep’s pellets”(King Bruce, 23)

The word repeatedly in line 20 starkly contrast with their earlier everyone died. It has inherited the distinguished features and superstitious belief of his royal ancestors. A reference to one of the many superstitious surrounding snakes and fertility. The lines reference to the poor or uncertain state of health of the last, surviving prince in the context of the ancient science of Ayurveda which attributes all illness to the over- accumulation of either phlegm or bile in the body. The usual characteristics of a royal lineage, like long finger and certain closely held family belief survive in the last princes’, but he has become accustomed to middle –class life. He suffers from indifferent health and his two daughters to school availing of concessional fees.

“Two girls, Honey and Bunny, go to school

On half fees. Wife, heirloom pearls in her nose-ring

In telegraphy,

Has telegraphed thrice already for money”(King Bruce, 23)

The wife retains her heirloom, the nose ring, as a proof of her nobility while at the couple feel the acute shortage of money. It is a sad and telling account of the prince’s family suggesting both want and mediocrity. The modern names of the girls are a far cry from those of their distinguished great grandmothers; that wife wears perhaps the only salvaged piece of family jewellery and is pregnant again like his sisters in royal harem; the princess’s worthless first – born, will never be hair to a royal throne. So poor he was that he had to send his two daughters, honey and Bunny, to school half fees. His wife, who had only one heirloom pearl in her nose ring, was pregnant again. His first son was trainee in telegraphy. He had no money. He added only to his father’s poverty. It is very pathetic and heart touching poem in which the poet describes the complete tragedy of the decline and fall of the Mughol Empire precisely and economically.

Conclusion: this is a poem written in an entirely detached manner. Ramanujan here does not bring himself into the picture as he has done in most of his poems. This is the poem written entirely in an objectives manner about the way descendants of Aurangzeb fell evil days. Pathos is naturally the atmosphere of the poem though there are few touches of humour in it too; for instance, falling in slow motion. The pathos deepens towards the end of the poem in which the predicament and plight of the princes has been depicted.

the poem shows also Ramanujan's genius for condensing his material. His diction in this, as in most other poems, is most appropriate and it reinforces the effect aimed at by him

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