

A. K. RAMANUJAN: A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT

By

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DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED

IN PART FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF
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Supervisor's Certificate

I certify that the dissertation entitled " A.K. Ramanujan: A Critical Assessment" submitted by S. Baral, in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of the Master of Philosophy of the North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong, is the record of original investigation carried out by him under my supervision.

He has been duly registered and the dissertation presented is worthy of being considered for the award of the M.Phil degree. This work has not been submitted for any degree of any other University.

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For
the Visionary of
Ambivalent Wholeness

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S. BARAL

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CHAPTER-ONE

INTRODUCTION

A.K. Ramanujan is an outstanding Indo-Anglian poet. His poetry displays a mastery of diction as well as craftsmanship, and is the expression of an authentic voice. As an artist, Ramanujan does not engage in mere philosophical speculations, nor in moral ideologies; neither does he indulge in socio-political questions that generally motivate a good number of writers in our century. On the one hand, his art embodies a personality which is individually detached but steeped in common humanity as well as uncommon sensitivity towards the realities of life. In addition to these, his poems present the cross-cultural encounter between the east and the west moving towards a synthesis. But in him more than in others and his contemporaries, what is achieved remarkably, almost singularly is that the two literary traditions, one of the modern west and the other of an ancient east, are moulded but into a model for the modern Indians writing in English. Therefore, his art is the embodiment of a complex sensibility which is modern while remaining traditional, at the same time.

Ramanujan has published three volumes of poems, The Striders (1966), Relations (1971) and Second Sight (1987), which carry the evident signs of a mind that is alive to an expanding horizon of life, its living relations, and also alive to a growing vision of the self. However, at the outset, one is prompted to ask as to the output over a period of two decades. His preoccupation with some other areas of his professional literary career might be one possible reason. He is not only a poet of repute but at the same time, a translator of international standing. His translations of the Tamil as well as the Kannada Classics shine very much by their grace and sophistication, and come closest to the originals,

by their subtle evocations. Ramanujan brought out in 1965 his first translated work - Fifteen Poems from a Classical Tamil Anthology and in 1967, The Interior Landscape which include selected poems from a Tamil anthology, called Kuruntokai. In 1969, he published a volume of poems in translation, again from Tamil entitled No Lotus in the Navel. In 1972, he produced a translation of the Kannada saints and mystics, entitled Speaking of Siva, and in 1976, he published his translation of Samskara, a Kannada novel. In 1981, Hymns for the Drowning and in 1985, Poems of Love and War, were two of Ramanujan's works in translation from Tamil.

Apart from these, Ramanujan published in 1969 his first collection of Kannada poems, entitled Kokkullalli Hoovilla and in 1977, he brought out his second collection of Kannada poems, called Mattu Itara Padyagalu. Ramanujan himself has also authored a novel in Kannada, Mottabana Atmacharitre. While his Kannada poems as well as the poems in translation are resonant with the elements of innovation and the idioms of modernism which the poet inducts into the modern Kannada literary tradition, his Tamil translations bear testimony to a perfectibility in his artistry. In their close approximation of the originals, these translations have been highly acclaimed in India as well as abroad. But Ramanujan's singular accomplishment lies in the fact that these translations introduce the western readers to a fascinating, unfamiliar and indigenous tradition of ancient India. Therefore, the area of his creative enterprise is vast and his scholarship versatile. Such creative endeavours must have affected Ramanujan's individual career as a poet in English, in relation to his output.

This slimness of his poetic output may also be attributed to his fastidious concern for the quality of work. Modern poets, particularly those who take art for a serious vocation, are the most conscious of craftsmen. Ramanujan also processes his works through the channel of selection and revision. "The Striders", for example, confirms that Ramanujan is bent on continuously chiselling his craft. It is a fact that he has deleted the opening line - "Put away, put away this dream" from the original version of the poem¹. "Still Another View of Grace", prior to its revision was entitled "A Poem on Logic". In the light of the original, E.N. Lall while pointing out the changes in syntax and the redistribution of lines in the stanzas, finds the poet's attitude to his craft as one of "constant search for the exact word and the precise image"². Selected Poems includes a poem "A Hindu to His Body" from The Striders. The revised version of the poem shows that an adjective "unkissed" as well as a major portion from the original is dropped. Thus the brevity and the quality are effected, along with the redesigning of a line or two. I quote the portion which has undergone a major cut:

.... you brought me
curled in womb and memory
~~Gave me fingers to clutch~~
at grace, at malice; and ruffle
someone's hair; to fold a man's
shadow back on his world;
to hold in the dark of the eye
through a winter and a fear

the poise, the shape of a beast;
a pear's silence, in the calyx
and the noise of a childish fist

You brought me; do not leave me
behind. When you leave all else,
..... my unkissed
alien mind, ...

Not only Ramanujan's poems, but also his translation works are put to the similar process of revision. "His Dances", a Tamil religious poem (puram) that earlier appeared in the Hymns for the Drowning (1981), one notices, is finally reprinted after its revision in the Poems of Love and War (1985). Well, it is quite known that the later Yeats, apart from his many younger modern contemporaries, has had his poems revised from time to time, for their concentrated quality, subtle nuances and artistic beauty. Ezekiel appears to have learnt from Yeats how to make poems about the self while standing at a distance from himself. But it is Ramanujan, who in his interview to Rama Jha, admits of the great moderns' influence including Yeats's, on him. He could possibly have learnt from Yeats the art of craftsmanship. Moreover, the slimness of Ramanujan's poetic output can not be ascribed to his intellectual thinness: this is to be studied in Chapter Two, because his intellectual capacity manifests remarkably even within the three volumes of his poetry.

Interestingly, however, there has spread a web of criticism around Ramanujan's slim output, particularly around The Striders and Relations, through the passage of time. Amidst the allegations

raised against Ramanujan's art and his artistic consciousness, the most persistently repeated one is that he suffers from a multi-faceted alienation. Raghavendra Rao has come to observe The Striders as the creation of an exile drowned in a "welter of alienations"³. Where, Naik encounters in Relations a Ramanujan whose "persistent obsession with his Indian ethos", as the critic finds, drives him feverishly to "search for roots"⁴. One is really surprised at Rao's accusation that the poet's mind could hardly work outside the scope of "reverse romanticism", which the critic "designates" as "a frame of mind and the operational strategy" that transforms "the remote into the immediate" and thus imposes "a pseudo-realism on essentially romantic modalities of experience"⁵. The critic has referred to a number of poems like "Breaded Fish", "The Opposable Thumb", "A Leaky Tap after a Sister's Wedding" and "On a Delhi Sundial" to prove his charge of alienation against Ramanujan, and has come to assert that these poems introduce "an inevitable ghost from a past becoming more present than the present ..."⁶. To my mind, Rao has confused his sensitive observations on some of the real perspectives of Ramanujan's art with his own biased premises from which he began, i.e. from "reverse romanticism". It is to Ramanujan's credit that he could transmute the remote into the immediate. This transformation neither produces any imposition nor makes "the present" less important to our life. The perspective of "a past" becoming more present than the present as well as of the remote becoming the immediate, needs to be looked into from the angle of Ramanujan's quest for the self; from his ideas of living memory and real time and not from the angle of alienation. All these certainly do not happen

to the critic's mind. And ironically, the poems referred to by the critic, do not bring into our mind the semblance of alienation as Ramanujan's "Hindoo" poems and his family-and-memory poems do. Naik too proceeds from the wrong premises and expectedly arrives at unjustified conclusions. More particularly, a recurrent ironic awareness of Ramanujan of his family relations, and also his sceptical outlook on the hindu views of life, lead the critic astray to observe that the poet struggles for his "roots" and that he lacks in capacity "to have a bold, all-out confrontation with experience"⁷. The "Hindoo" poems are faulted on one reason or another, for the critic's expectation of a hindu in the poet is not realised.

Naik's study of Ramanujan's investment of irony into his family traditions as well as his ethos, comes at time to a point, where the reader may confuse the artist's irony as the mode only of his alienation, or as a tool ideal only for an alienated mind in Ramanujan. Ramanujan's ironic tool, which will be a major thrust of my study in Chapter Three, is as subtle as his vision. Now, therefore, the question of his alienation from his ethos may be looked into, and in this context, Ramanujan's "Hindoo" poems are important to begin with.

...

And who can say I do not bear,
as I do his name, the spirit
of Great Grandfather, that still man,
untimely witness, timeless eye,
perpetual outsider,
watching as only husbands will

a suspense of nets vibrate
under wife and enemy
with every move of hand or thigh:
watching, watching, like some
spider-lover. a pair
of his Borneo specimens mate
in murder, make love with hate,
or simply stalk a local fly.

"The Hindoo: he doesn't Hurt a Fly or a Spider either"

"The spirit of Great Grandfather" and "a suspense of nets" vibrating "under wife" are, as the poem here works out, obviously the contradictory elements in the "Hindoo" tradition. While Ramanujan's ironic hammer thrashes the grandmother, because "one day" in a "spider-fashion", she "clamped down and bit" her husband "while inside her"; his ironic shaft at his grandfather is wielded but not to pierce him. By piercing him, the poet-persona will have to pierce himself, sever the cord that binds him with his "true ancestor". Again, the syntactical manoeuvre, in the above mentioned passage, bears testimony to such an assertion as Ramanujan's inhering his grandfather's spirit: the initial proposition raised "who can say I do not bear . . ." brings in the end no interrogation nor even an exclamation, but ends on a point of final certainty with a period.

In "The Hindoo: the Only Risk" and "The Hindoo: he reads his Gita and is calm at all events", an ironic feud between "the Hindoo" and the "simple" "heart" within the persona is enacted. But then the titles of the above mentioned poems come out to be ironic, indeed, in the light of the experiences that the poet-persona

encounters in the real life. In "The Hindoo: the Only Risk", the observation that emerges out of the harsh experiences is that it is heartless to reduce "the heart's given beat" to the "simple"; and hence the title which means that "the Hindoo" is "the only risk" to the essential man in the Hindoo. So one asks if Ramanujan has not let down "the Hindoo" in himself and with the Hindoo his "Hindoo" tradition as well. The charge of his alienation from the ethos has a point here, certainly. In "The Hindoo": he heads Gita and is calm at all events", almost the same conclusion is arrived at. Let us closely read:

Yet when I meet on a little boy's face
the prehistoric yellow eyes of a goat
I choke, for ancient hands are at my throat.

Well, an innocent, childhood embodying sex is a self-discovery, and sex which is "prehistoric" i.e. more ancient than the ancient Gita is truer and more real. Thus, the poet's utterances as the critics smell, betray his spirit of alienation. But it is not simple to decide finally on the poet's alienation as complete, here. There are also occasions when Ramanujan means to "live" in the tradition, the "conventions of despair":

. . .

But, sorry, I can not unlearn
conventions of despair.
They have their pride.
I must seek and will
find my particular hell only in my hindu mind:

"Conventions of Despair" - S

Do these utterances in any way reflect Ramanujan's alienation? No, they do not; because the poet who could "live" his "particular hell" only in his "hindu mind", would also, it follows, live the virtues of this ethos despite its risky philosophical views on life. Every ethos has its own oddities. And Ramanujan does not discard at least "a hindu" in him. A Hindu poem, "A Hindu to His Body" brings to light Ramanujan's poetic personality and its attitude towards the Hindu belief systems. What I observe in the poet is that he is "a Hindu" and not "the Hindoo", not that Hindu which the Vedantic philosophies expect man to conform to. Why he can not conform to "the Hindoo" is a question that will be answered in its proper context, and particularly, in relation to the poet's vision of the self. Is Ramanujan a completely secular mind that the poem "A Hindu to His Body" projects? or, in other words, is this poem's title a misnomer as to the non-religious experience which forms its body. Naturally, the question, whether or not a Hindu's body merges into a tree, has a definite relation with Ramanujan's alienation. As I find, there is an important Vedantic motif, hidden in the poem, adopted freely from the original. Brihadarayan Upanishads in one of its episodes reveals but in the form of a dialogue, how human body dissolves into the elements after man's death:

Artavaga asked: "Yajnavalkya! when the vocal organs of a man who dies are merged in fire, the nose in the air, the eye in the sun, the mind in the moon, the ear in the quarters, the body in the earth, the ether of the heart in the eternal ether, the hair of body in the herbs, that on the head in the trees, and blood and the seed are deposited in the water, where is the man?"

In reply, Yajnavalkya, of course, re-interated the philosophy of man's re-birth according to the Karma theory of Life⁸.

What my italics suggest is that Ramanujan's awareness of his Hindu ethos and its philosophical stance on life shapes his own artistic consciousness. To this aspect of poetic consciousness in Ramanujan's art, we will return shortly. Bu the question, whether the ironic mode of the poet is a means for us to explore his sense of alienation from the ethos, needs to be examined. Because, most of the critics of Ramanujan create a confusion in the readers' mind that irony, apart from being a mode of aesthetic distance, becomes a signifier of the poet's alienation.

In this context, "Small-Scale Reflections on a Great House" - R may be first considered, because it is a representative poem of Ramanujan on the family themes and the Hindu family traditions. Here Ramanujan's ironic thrusts enliven each and every aspect of a Hindu joint family ethos, and also brings out the essential qualities of its tradition. Its tradition is great, no doubt, in naturalising the alien, in absorbing within its capacious fold everything that "ever comes" into this house; but it is also great ironically in its absurdities like the elders supervising the mating of the lame cows in "the broad day light" while the girls watch from hiding places; in this tradition, the daughters once widowed remain perpetual virgins, or a nephew with "stripes" on his shoulders, "half-gnawed by desert foxes", is brought home "in plane, and train and military truck". For Lall, the poem "becomes an ironic comment on a hallowed tradition"⁹; whereas,

for Naik, its "familial motif" is "a symbol of the larger theme of the Hindu heritage"¹⁰. Both the critics are justified in their view points:

. . .

sons who run awy come back
in grandchildren who recite Sanskrit
to approving old men, or bring
betelnuts for visiting uncles
who keep them gaping with
anecdotes of unseen fathers,
or to bring Ganges water
in a copper pot
for the last of the dying
ancestor's rattle in the throat.

Nonetheless, the poet here shows a complex sensibility: there is a cool, critical and ironical observation, on the one hand; while on the other, there is his calm awakening to every little happening which again is calmly accepted. The essential difference between the spirit of this "great house" and that of the poet lies in his ironic stance only. King is remarkably well-disposed to the inner symbol of this great absorbing tradition and reads the poem as "symbolic of the mind in which all new experience and information becomes part of the past and is changed, just as the past is changed by the experience of the modern world"¹¹. Ramanujan's artistic distancing through comic absurdity and ironic humour does not suggest his estrangement from the symbolic mind, rather it shows a spirit in him that bends to a half-way celebration of life, the life that shoots, grows and changes within the tradition of

this great house,. Therefore, Ramanujan's use of irony does not reflect adversely on his belonging to the Indian ethos. A proposition that Ramanujan is rooted in his cultural ethos as well as indigeneous literary tradition, will be explored in this chapter.

Aware of Ramanujan's achievement in English poetry, Bruce King observes, "He showed that Indian poets could both be modern and work from within their own literary traditions"¹². King's re-assertion of his observation on Ramanujan's vital link with the Tamil as well as the Kannada Classics finds expression thus: "The use of the self as a centre for a poem filled with ironies which unpredictably changes directions and attitudes.... is within the tradition of medieval saints' poetry"¹³. With his sensitive assessments of Ramanujan's umbilical relation with an old, indigenous and almost forgotten tradition, King has not broken new ground on the overall Ramanujan-criticism. Nevertheless, his effort has added a credible difference, all the more creditable, for that matter, to the question of Ramanujan's alienation both in terms of culture and literary tradition. One recalls, in this context, the stance of R.Parthasarathy, who while examining the general problems encountered by an Indian writing in English, goes on record, "there is no perspective at all in which to evaluate" his achievement as an Indian poet¹⁴. Most Indo-Anglians would come within the broad spectrum of Parthasarathy's observation. However, Ramanujan stands as an exception to Parthasarathy's general rule. Ramanujan, rooted in Tamil and Kannada as well as Kolatkar, rooted in Maratthi, does present some redeeming prospect in the general bleakness of a pan-Indian tradition in English poetry in our times.

Taking Parthasarathy's position on the Indo-Anglian tradition as a case of "militant modernism", Naik has tried to advance his own view that "surely, a tradition could not have survived for a century and a quarter without having had at least some areas of excellence whatever its deficiencies". To make his observation weighty, his sense of irony comes handy and he adds, "it is equally obvious that post-Independence Indian English poets did not suddenly fall from heaven"¹⁵. He re-affirms his view point by illustrating that there has been a tradition since the day Henry Derozio published his POEMS in 1927. Whether "a century and a quarter" old, this Indo-Anglian tradition seems to be a consistent phenomenon in our modern time, and its solid merits whose signs are, of course, visible now, are still more in promise than in the present achievements. The history of Indo-Anglian tradition would reveal that this tradition has been inspired by the changing literary ideas and movements in the West. As was the case with our 19th century masters, moulded once under the shadow of English Romantics including the Victorians and the Edwardians, so is it with our 20th century moderns who can not simply wish away the Anglo-American modernists as of no consequence to them. Therefore, the evaluation of Dom Moraes, Ezekiel, Jussawala and even of Daruwalla, all important Indo-Anglians, would yield good results broadly in a European tradition. But it is Ramanyjan who could satisfy the criteria of an Indian speaking to the Indians. This is not to say that Ramanujan is alienated from the European tradition of modernism, a world phenomenon, at large. It may be borne in mind that Ramanujan's deep sense of an indigenous literary tradition does not work towards his alienation from the modernist tradition of English poetry. Both the literary traditions, one of the ancient east

and the other of the modern west, fuse into his creative consciousness that engenders an art of integrated sensibilities. In Ramanujan, the traditional and the modern are blended to a print of artistic finesse. Therefore, a complex of all these aspects in his art would bear upon my study.

Ramanujan's creative bond between him and his Tamil Classics is found in those of his poems which are so far being considered as all modern. It is important to begin with "Love Poem for a Wife 1". This love poem opens wonderfully:

Really what keeps us apart
 at the end of years is unshared
 childhood. You can not, for instance,
 meet my father. He is some years
 dead. Neither can I meet yours:
 he has lately lost his temper
 and mellowed.

The dramatic opening with an appeal of real-life immediacy, the elements of seriousness and levity, bringing a sudden turn off the opening logic, are real charms, here, which are also the essential elements of modern poetry. Does not the poetic diction in its sophistication as well as in supple flow bring into our consciousness a modern poet in the Eliotian tradition? Yes, of course, it does; but the real influence on Ramanujan's deeper mind comes from a traditional source, a Tamil Classic, Cempulappeyaninar of the 3rd century A.D., whose poem is quoted here for our contextual significance.

What He Said¹⁶

What could my mother be
to yours? What kin is my father
to yours any way? And how
did you and I meet ever?

But in lover our hearts are as red earth and pouring rain:
beyond mingled parting.

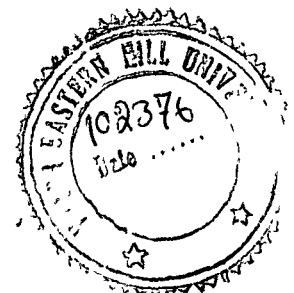
In this little love lyric of Cempulappeyaninar, one interesting and enduring element that moves it from a domain of the tragic to that of the comic, is irony which twists a serious theme like man-woman alienation by inducting comic vivacity into it.

Again, Ramanujan's mind as well as idea in "A Rather Foolish Sentiment"-R is deeply shaped by an ancestor of his indigeous Tamil tradition, Auvaiyar who has a poem which reads:

O I did Inot think of you?
and thinking of you,
did I not think and think again of you?
But as I thought of you
was I not baffled
by the world's demands
that held me to my work?¹⁷

The shaping influence of Auvaiyar on his young kin, Ramanujan can be marked and measured in terms of idea as well as ironic manouvre.

But only the passing touch
of people whom I once touched
in passing when they let me



pass. Perhaps it will not pass,
 for in that touch I think I stumbled
 on a pulse, and wondered like a fool
 who has no proper sense of body
 if it were yours, or mine,
 and wondered if you wondered too
 ("A Rather Foolish Sentiment"-S)

Auvaiyar and Ramanujan in their respective works move towards self-discovery; and an exercise of subtle irony informs their thought-movements, which end in a living-statis. One's play on the word, "think", and the other's play on "pass" and "wonder" are comparable in the thrust of a similar idea. Furthermore, Milaipperunkantan's influence on Ramanujan in his theorised love poem "Two Styles in Love"-S is noticeable. Ramanujan discards the idea of love as only accomplished in haste and ascribes the attainments of love to patience. His poem affirms that "love is no hurry" and "love is no burning"; "no love is sudden" and even the "coupling hands take time to kill the frost". "Come lightly, love," the poet-persona summons softly the beloved, "let us wait to be found, to be lost". The echoes are from Ramanujan's ancestor, Milaipperunkantan whose poem is quoted in full:

What He said¹⁸

Love, love
 they say. Yet love
 is no new grief
 nor sudden disease, nor something
 that rages and cools.

Like madness in an elephant,
coming up when he eats
certain leaves,
Love waits
for you to find
someone to look at.

The bearings of an indigenous literary tradition upon Ramanujan's deeper consciousness are not limited within these and other love-lyrics. Even the influence of the Tamil as well as the Kannada saints and mystics has its telling effects on Ramanujan's art. Ramanujan makes no secret about his ancestors' influence on him. In an interview to Rama Jha, he states "they (Kannada mystics) were part of my education, yes ..." and further illustrates, "the Murugan poems, for instance, that combine prayer with some of the ironic attitudes that some of the Kannada medieval mystics had"¹⁹. Moreover, these Murugan poems also stand witness to Ramanujan's consciousness of some of the Tamil religious poets of the Sangam era²⁰. The ritualistic nuances of the first two prayers in Ramanujan's "prayers to Lord Murugan" are surely the reverberations from the ancient poets. The great Kannada vacanakaras of the 12th century, namely Allamprabhu, Basaveswar, and Basavanna were famed for their piquant, unconventional utterances, of course, within the Bhakti tradition. Ramanujan's vital link with the tradition of these vacankaras may be examined by bringing Basavanna's line and Ramanujan's, together.

Basavanna's writes -

.....

Do not make me hear all day

'Whose man, whose man, whose man is that?'

Let me hear, 'This man is mine, mine,
this man is mine'.

O Lord of the meeting rivers
make me feel I'm a son
of the house.

Speaking of Shiva, 1972 (Penguin Books, P-115)

And Ramanujan says:

Lord of the last-born
give us
birth.
. . .
Lord of lost travellers
find us. Hunt us
down.
. . .
Lord of answers
cure us at once
of prayers.

"Prayers to Lord Murugan"-R

Both the poems centre on man's longing to get accepted by the lord, or to get his prayers granted. Basavanna's is an irony of the most delicate kind, creeping beneath the musical lines, enlivening an argument of affection as between father and son, and finally losing itself in humility. Ramanujan's irony is marked by sudden contrasts and it takes both the "Lord of answers" and the man of "prayers" into its ironic treatment. This difference may be said to be symptomatic of the poet's respective ages. Not the influence of the Kannada saints alone, but that of the early Tamil classics, particularly of their religious poems, also, has shaped Ramanujan's inner consciousness of a tradition "lost long ago".

The process of our sole preoccupation with English literature, to the exclusion of our own indigenous or Indian literature, yields us the fruits of ignorance. Thus, the result of our unawareness or ignorance of the indigenous tradition is that we readily take the ironic mode, of seeing or organising human experience in poetic form, for a western convention. But then, my effort throughout has been persistently intended, in the light of many readers' contributions, to give force towards dispelling such a notion. The religious texts of ancient India, which house all our secular, literary and even so-called modern ideas and thoughts, are exemplary: if the Ramayana is full of irony, the Mahabharata is steeped in it. This is, of course, in the way of a sweeping generalisation. But here, we see what a secular literature in a Tamil corner of the world, developed in the 1st-3rd century A.D., and in Kannada during the 12th-15th century A.D. And this classical literature of India shows how its poets are audacious to bring within ironic exposure men as well as gods. Why talk of the westernised Indians or the westernised Indian readers (myself included), even the Tamils themselves are now unconscious of their poetic tradition of great antiquity. This becomes all the more evident when Ramanujan concludes his "Translator's Note" to Poems of Love and War (1985) with a sense of pride and humility:

"I am grateful and astonished, to be one of the links, undreamed of by them or by me", while referring to the ancient poets in Tamil who now "have reached ages unborn and accents yet unknown".

Harriet Zinnes's review of The Striders is of significance in relation to Ramanujan's ironic attitude which she considers as "completely" Un-Indian. She observes that although Ramanujan writes frequently about his "Indian experiences" and thus "flavours the poems with the images" of the Indian ethos, "he is completely western in his language, diction and attitude toward the object"²¹. Well, the suggestion of Ramanujan's poetry synthesizing the east and the west, to which I would return later in this chapter, is welcome; but here finding his "attitude toward the object" as "completely western" is contestable. To describe his "language" and "diction" as "western" is either stating a truism or not saying enough. When Iyengar observes that Ramanujan has "Englished with great simplicity and force some of the Vachans from Kannada" and "some of the love lyrics" from Tamil Kuruntokai²², he means a quite different thing, and to my mind, the real thing expressed in a delicately new way. One could easily detect that the Indian sentiments and the Indian idioms are, for their most part, objectively recaptured by Ramanujan, poem after poem. So, in a most important way, Ramanujan's knowledge of the English language and his mastery of its diction are directed towards this end in view. A part of "A' Leaky Tap after a Sister's Wedding"-S will illustrate the truth in this context:

They often stopped: may be for a chat
with a buyer,
or a dip
into the patchwork pouches for betelnut
and tobacco,

or likelier still, to lay
a little silver nest-egg under the mat
to hatch on a rainy day.

Here is a sign of the poet's objective and ironic attitude, But what is shrouded in humour and irony is an idiom of the Indian life, the reality of an Indian silversmith. Similar examples can be piled up from the poet's three volumes of poetry: "Small-Scale Reflections on a Great House", "Poona Train Window", "The Last of the Princes", "Prayers to Lord Murugan", and "Of Mothers among other things" from Relations; "Looking for a Cousin on a Swing", "The Lines to a Granny", "The Opposable Thumb", "On a Delhi Sundial", "Epitaph on a Street Dog", "A Poem on Particulars" from The Striders; "Ecology", "No Amnesiac King", "Astronomer", "Death and Good Citizen", "The Difference", "Second Sight" from Second Sight.

One may benefit again from Iyengar's admiration for Ramanujan in his quaint expression that the poet has "Englished" the Kannada vacanas. That is, by Englishing the vacans of the Kannada saints, Ramanujan has, to an appreciable extent, de-Englished English (if such an expression is possible). This idea is nowhere to search for its illustration, but in Ramanujan's own disclosure. By acknowledging "his knowledge of English" as "ddeeply affected" by his "knowledge of Indian literature and poetries", he elucidates that English "can not get us far", if it cuts us "from our culture", because "Indian English when it is good, does get its nourishment from each individual's knowledge of Indian culture and Indian languages"²³.

The poet's assessments needs to be complemented:

Lord of lion face, boar snout, and
fish eyes, killer/of killer oran es,
shepherd of rampant elephants, devour
my lambs, /devouf than whole, save
them in the zoo garden ark of your belley
("Zoo Gardens Revisited"-SS)

In these lines, the prayer mixed with an ironic attitude, to the gods, defines the poet's declared premises. And they also testify how in diction and in spirit, English is "deeply affected" by an individual's knowledge of his own culture and his own indigenous languages. In "A Leaky Tap after a Sister's Wedding", one is aware of Ramanujan's crafty collocation in "woodpecker peck-peck-peck-pecking away", which is an example of his Indianising the English language. In "Ecology"-SS, the expression like "her daughters and daughters' daughters..." has to itself all the Indian scent.

Thus, for Zinnes to call Ramanujan "western" in "attitude to the object" may be an error of judgement. In the poem, "Conventions of Despair"-R, his utterances are clear:

"Yes, I know all that. I should be modern.

Marry again. See strippers at the Tease".

To this initial proposition, Ramanujan brings subtle ironic thrusts in the very next lines:

"And when I burn

I should smile, dry-eyed", but

soon the poet turns up to observe:

"But sorry, I can not unlearn

Conventions of despair".

Do we get any idea from the lines quoted above, that the poet is well-disposed to the things and objects of the west? No. If the answer needs to be supplemented further, the poet does not leave us wondering. He re-affirms:

I must seek and will find
my particular hell only in my hindu mind.

The process of Indianising the English language is also inherent in Ramanujan's induction of the Indian myths and legends into English poetry. It is a fact that the moderns have revived great interest in myths, legends and folklore, a study of which becomes a means of exploration into the nature, mind and spirit of modern man and his age as well. Ramanujan has immaculately introduced many Indian myths into his English poetry.

The myth of Siva's frenzied dance, popularly known as Tandav may be adapted thus -

Daksha once held a great sacrifice (yanjna) without inviting his son-in-law, siva to be present . Sati (another name of Parvatee) Siva's consort, seeing all the gods trooping off to the sacrifice, enquired where they were going and was disconsolate when she heard that they were all going to her father's home. She went herself to her father and pleaded with him to invite Siva. But Daksha's unrelenting posture made Sati ashamed, as she could not vindicate her husband's honour, she jumped into the sacrificial fire. Siva, hearing this, stormed into the scene, and producing from his hair some violent demons, destroyed the sacrifice. In the uproar which

followed, he scattered all gods and cut off Daksha's head. He then gave himself up to insane grief over Sati's death, retrieving her body from the embers and clasping her, and calling on her to answer him. So violent was his emotion and the rhythm of the dance into which he threw himself, encompassing the world seven times that the whole universe and its creatures suffered too. Finally Visnu cut Sati's body into fifty pieces and put an end to this frenzy of Siva's mourning. Now; the weight of the charred body gone from his hands, Siva came to his senses. He repented of his murder of Daksha and brought him back to life²⁴.

The myth's relevance to our present-day world speaks for itself. The Tandav dance of Siva symbolises both the annihilation and its reintegration into the world-spirit of a new creation. So it represents the destruction of the illusory world (one of maya). Ramanujan's poem is a modern recreation of the myth with ironic twists. What appears more important is not the god of war, but men who are now more powerful than the god, and are bent on their self-destruction. One is aware of an Eliotian element in the mythical allusion. But an ironic exposure of the gods, can be traced in the tradition of Kannada as well as Tamil Classics. Therefore, Ramanujan's knowledge of the ethos, both ancient and modern, will prove his critics wrong who have so far held him as an alienated poet from the basic Indian experiences. The instances of such knowledge again can be drawn from many of his poems. In "The Difference"-SS, when the persona suddenly

took a fancy to "Visnu, the Dark One" but had to realise soon that he had hardly enough clay left for the god's "big toe". This poem has, of course, a different perspective from what "Compensations"-R has, on a myth about God in one of his incarnations. It exposes the persona's own deficiency, and hence irony becomes a means of self criticism. Ramanujan's unerring sense of the Indian ethos comes resonant in many of his poems such as "Small-Scale Reflections on a Great House", The "Murugan" poems, his "Love Poems for a Wife...", "Second Sight", and "Zoo Gardens Revisited".

In the "Love Poem for a Wife 2" Ramanujan has another Indian motif, delicately embossed into its body. His moment of reflection on the dream experience which brings him wholeness "for once" may be cited here:

..... happy for once
at such loss of face,
whole in the ambivalence
of being half woman half-
man contained in a common
body,
androgynous as a god
balancing stillness in the middle
of a duel to make it dance:

The mythical allusion to a god "being half woman and halfman", here, is attributed to no other god than Siva, whose hermaphrodite form is better known as Ardha-Nariswara. Shakti (Parvatee) and Siva contained in a common form pronounce the

ultimate balance of the female and the male principles in the Creator. Well, a myth is also attached to this Artha-Narishwara form of Siva. It reads thus:

Bhringisa, also known as Bhringi, was singlemindedly devoted to the worship of Siva in his masculine aspect alone, such that he entirely neglected his feminine principle. To test his devotee's faith, Siva adopted the form of Artha-Narishwara, but Bhringi was least disturbed. He changed himself to a bee, made a whole through the combined form of Siva and managed to revolve round His masculine aspect alone. This devotion to Siva infuriated his feminine principle, Parvatee, who cursed the devotee to become weaker daily. The curse reduced him day after day to an emaciated state when he could hardly support himself with both of his sagging legs. Siva, now feeling pity for his devotee, whose faith and austerities to Him alone were unswerving, blessed him another leg for support. This is why Bhringi is represented in sculpture with three legs and three arms²⁵.

The poet's dream of wholeness which corresponds to a divine state of "Balance" denotes to some extent, the idea of Ramanujan's essential self and his creative thirst for wholeness, which again endorses his deep sense of belonging to the ethos.

Hence Ramanujan's significance in Indo-Anglian poetry has an enduring distinction which dazzles out of his impeccable images and the flawless precision of language. This distinctive quality of Ramanujan's art is also visible in his unique ability

to extend into English poetry some of the most significant motifs of Kannada and Tamil literature. In his unique ability to induct creatively Indian myths and legends into English Poetry, Ramanujan is Yeats-like. Ramanujan's images and symbols, drawn on the folklores and myths of his ancient land add one subtle aspect to his art, i.e. they are creatively adopted by a mind that desists from mere elaboration and details. As a modern artist, he intends and achieves economy by a creative association of experience with myth and also brings into his art an authenticity through his modern recreation of Indian motifs. He also tells us that his deep "personal and professional preoccupations with Kannada, Tamil, the classics and folklore" give his poems their "inner forms, images and symbols"²⁶. Therefore, the charges of "alienation" in its many facets are themselves a myth or a misrepresentation of Ramanujan's creativity.

However, with the publication of Bloom's The Anxiety of Influence (1973), another facet of alienation in terms of "anxiety" has come to the fore. Harold Bloom's "anxiety principle" has also strengthened the position of the critics, much to their enthusiasm; who are, from the beginning, very critical of Indo-Anglian poetry. I am applying Bloom's theory to Ramanujan in my study, without my going into a wide survey or a detailed applicability of Bloom's principle to Indo-Anglian poets. William Walsh describes Ramanujan as "the most individual and the most gifted of contemporary Indian poets"²⁷ and says that the poet, an expatriate though is "without any of the anxieties of Parthasarethy, who works from a deep unfractured Indian spirit"²⁸. Bloom's theoretical position,

in its broad reference, of course, asserts that "the Return of the Dead"²⁹ in ephebe, i.e. the return of the strong precursors in the strong poets of an age even without their knowing, is the source of their anxiety, "a centre" of the unforgiving "dread" of their "threatened autonomy"³⁰. It is to be noted that Walsh's idea of anxiety is not adopted from Bloom's thesis. Of the two stand points, however, the one taken by Walsh in the light of Bloom's thesis is defensible. The return of the strong precursors, the ancient masters in the works of Ramanujan is a fact which needs no further elaboration. The question is: Is Ramanujan "anxious"? Is he trying to get rid of the influence of his precursors, which in Bloom's phrase, is "a variety of melancholy"³¹? The instances already illustrated point to the one and the only end that the poet has impeccably emulated his ancient celebrities. It is a great marvel that Ramanujan is in the father, but he is all the strong in the full glare of this knowledge. And this quality of inhering the father is a classical Indian virtue. Ramanujan writes of his Tamil ancestors, to their defense against Bloom's theory that "this Indian Oedipus does not slay his father, but obeys and fulfills him, after sacrificing his potency for his elders (as Bhishma did in the Mahabharata). At his best, he becomes himself by first surrendering to them"³².

In this context, one appreciates the view point of Homi Bhabha, who discerningly says, "A.K. Ramanujan and Arun Kolatkar are free of this (Bloom's) source of anxiety and are involved in a calmer revision and revaluation of indigenous tradition". Like his great ancients, Ramanujan makes infinite use of finite means. Therefore, his root in tradition and its calmer revaluation has

to be deeply appreciated, which again has a clearly different perspective from Bloom's idea of "the counter-Sublime", a consequence of anxiety³³, as Bloom means.

Howevef, his creative art embodies another important aspect without which my study here may remain incomplete, and what is more, Ramanujan's art may look distorted. His poetry is "the poetry of encounter"³⁴, and better still, an east-west "synthesis"³⁵. Ramanujan's prolonged living in U.S.A., because of his professional necessity and his study of modern poets have their important bearings on his art, and on his artistry in particular. A man steeped in the ethos of his ancient land, but making a living in an environment of modern civilization, modern ideas and modern movements in art and literature, cannot remain unaffected by the ambient life. It is all the more pressing when a man is not an insensate thing, when he keeps open his house, with its doors and windows wide open to the wider skies. Thus Ramanujan's art is an exotic house of poems which are like "the patterns in a Kaleidoscope"³⁶. But whether alien or modern, things that enter his premises do not stay alien for long, for he himself is already a part of the scene. Le us consider "Second Sight"-SS.

In Pascal's endless queue,
people pray, whistle or make
remarks. As we enter the dark,
someone says from behind,
'You are Hindoo, aren't you? .
You must have second sight'.

Against this backdrop of a western experience, "Pascal's endless queue", Ramanujan has drawn a very human situation of a Hindoo: human in the sense that he is too ordinary like all others to be an exception, to have "second sight" befitting a god. Then, how is a hindu separated from Pascal's land of disorder and futility, of suffering and mystery? Is he not a part of the scene? Is he not already there in the landscape itself? The answers come in the positive. Therefore, Pascal's world ceases to be merely a background, and becomes the scene of a living drama of life.

Furthermore, Ramanujan's cultural synthesis in his poetry is best manifest in the poem, "Prayers to Lord Murugan"-R besides "Still Another View of Grace", "Still Another for Mother", "Entries for a Catalogue of Fears" and "Compensations" to name but a few, which admittedly have variations on the theme of synthesis. Let us take for discussion the fourth as well as the fifth prayer in the "Murugan" poems:

Lord of great changes and small
cells: exchange our painted grey
pottery
for iron copper the leap of stone horses
our yellow grass and lily seed
for rams'
flesh and scarlet rice for the carnivals
on rivers O dawn of nightmare virgins
bring us
your white-haired witches who wear
three colours even in sleep.

With the very first line "Lord of great changes and small cells", the ideas of two ethoses, east and west, ancient and modern, are fused. It is not a patchwork, but a filigree. The lord of "great changes" is reminiscent of Hindu God of many incarnations. Here lies the poet's signature of how to assimilate two cultures artistically. This import permeates throughout the prayers. "Painted grey pottery", "lily seed", "rams", "scarlet rice for the carnivals" are nonelse than the idioms of an ancient Tamil culture. Nakkiranar's "Murukan: His Places"³⁷ would illustrate the validity of my observations:

Where goats are slaughtered,
 where grains of fine rice are offered
 . . .
 where the daughter of the hill tribe
 worships ...
 scattering flowers
 wearing two cloths
 different in color and kind
 .. .
 and offering soft white rice
 mixed with the blood
 of strong fattened large-footed rams
 in small offerings ...

Not surprisingly, the first prayer in its concentrated form seems, in all probability, to be drawn on Nakkiranar's "Murukan, the Red One"³⁸. Again a faint echo of an old western ethos is audible in the images like "nightmare virgins", "white-haired witches" and "three colours in sleep". These two traditions of

"carnivals" happen to meet significantly "on rivers" (rivers being associated with all ancient civilizations). Metaphorically speaking, the rivers of the two old ethoses meet at a point where Ramanujan's art takes a dip. "Iron copper the leap of stone horses" stands for the modern facet of an Indian ethos and its validity can be found in Ramanujan's poem, "The Difference"-SS.

The last lines of the fifth prayer would reaffirm the same conclusions:

Ever-rehearsing astronauts,
 we purify and return
 our urine
 to the circling body
 and burn our faeces
 for fuel to reach the moon
 through the sky behind
 the navel.

Two motifs, one, Hindu motif and the other modern western motif, emerge out of this stanza. The image of "the sky behind the navel" is, on the one hand, a creative approximation of the age-old philosophical wisdom of the ancient India, which professes the cause of Creation is Brahman, Atman who is the formless, odourless and colourless one but gives all tangible forms to all things and all nothings. In the Mahabharat particularly, Brahman is revealed in the shape of Visnu. Brahma, His sole agent to design the universe is depicted as "having issued from the lotus blossomed from the navel of Visnu"³⁹. This motif also means that Brahman Himself rose from within Himself and spread out into this universe and gave it its form and meaning. The western motif, on

the other hand, is based on its modern ethos, that is, how the astronauts in their odyssey to the moon, also sustain themselves on the energy behind their "navel". It is known that for all practical purposes, the astronauts do live during their journey to the moon, on their own "urine, faeces" etc, which are the energetic fuel behind the "navel". Ramanujan's implicit irony here does not dislodge his affirmation in the creative energy found at the very base of our own body, as Brahman rose out of His own navel to pervade this universe. Such east-west synthesis is the quintessence of Ramanujan's creative imagination. On the one hand, his creativity evinces his deep root in his Indian ethos, and on the other, it shows his awareness of the western ethos. Why western! It is indeed our modern world ethos. But the ethoses, one modern and another ancient, are never mutually exclusive aspects of his creative imagination, his creative energy. They are its integral parts, they are it. And irony here does not divert the artist's aim fixed to a goal, rather it steadies his boat to reach the shore. The east-west synthesis in the creative art can be said almost to have reached its climactic point in Ramanujan.

My efforts are now directed towards assessing his modernism in some detail. Ramanujan started writing both in Kannada and English in the fifties. His contribution to Kannada poetry is in terms of innovation and fusion of modern elements. "In Kannada if Gopalkrishna Adiga", says S.K. Desai "was somewhat Eliotian ... Ramanujan was our Ezra Pound"⁴⁰. In his interview to Rama Jha, Ramanujan frankly admits of the English poet's "great impact"⁴¹ on him, particularly of W.B. Yeats, Wallace Stevens, Carlos Williams

among various others whom he has read and studied. On the art of translation, in special, he greatly appreciates Pound as an authority.

However, modernism in literature, which is basically an Anglo-American phenomenon with a solid European support, happens to enter the Indian literary scene only in its post-Independence era, in the early 1950s. Ezekiel's return from England and his A Time to Change published in 1952, brought a freshness, craftsmanship and purposefulness to the act of writing poetry in India. The romantic voices of Toru Dutta, Sarojini, Rabindra Nath Tagore and Sri Aurobindo in some way, faded soon into Time's distant green. But with the arrival of A.K. Ramanujan, R. Parthasarathy, Daruwalla, Jayanta Mahapatra, Kamala Das and de Souza among many others, the tradition of Indo-Anglian poetry has come to appear not as a distant dream. Incidentally, Ramanujan went abroad as a Fulbright scholar to U.S.A. in 1960-62, where he found his craft perfect, as he published his first collection of poems, The Striders in 1966, while there. Prof. Nagarajan, very critical of Ramanujan, has at least a word of praise for his The Striders, and states that "he is a consummate artist who tries to achieve perfection before publishing a work"⁴². Ramanujan is not only a creation of his age, but also a creator within its tradition, that is, modern tradition. When to our mind, he appears at one time as an Eliotian or at another, as Kapilar, one recalls James Reeves. The critic is of the view that a critic may be delighted to find that a young poet is like T.S. Eliot, while "the young" may have been "trying desperately to be as unlike Eliot as possible"⁴³. He moves on to suggest that "the business of the reader is to find out how

he (the young poet) is himself, and what he has to say which is personal and unique"⁴⁴. James Reeves's sane review of modern poets could fairly well form a preview of A.K. Ramanujan.

What comes immediately and strikingly to my mind is the title piece of The Striders, which has been so far veriously interpreted. Apart from Nagarajan's criticism of the poem as suffering from a "chanciness"⁴⁵, Buxton Raffel finds in the image of the bug merely a scientific soundness and no authentic poetic experience. King dwells on the poem as "wonderfully concentrated"⁴⁶, reflects on its "sound patterns" and "rhetorical structure" but leaves the poem at this stage that it is "without wider resonances of the kind most poets hope to establish through allusion, references or symbolism"⁴⁷. An unromantic, in a way, too insignificant an image like "the striders" has misled Raffel. But in such images that I find Ramanujan's considerable strength as a modern poet, as well as his quest for identity to be himself as fully and characteristically as his ambient world is, as the masters, the "prophets" have this world to themselves. Can a man's preoccupation with the significant lives wish away the so-called insignificant ones from a world of theirs as well as ours? No, never; they are always there in the "tiny" strips of their sky, even if we do not see their place or do not recognize their significance. As to to the poetic experience, in its romantic gloss, our world unfortunately has very limited opportunities. The memories of the last two World Wars in our century and the consciousness of the shifting morals and values of a modern life are not poetic experiences, but ironically they are the experiences in a majority of modern poems and also have informed the major

poetry of our time, The Waste Land. In this context of our age, Reeves again reflects, "the age is one in which, whatever private and limited certainties we enjoy, we are collectively certain of nothing-nothing, that is, except our personal identities"⁴⁸. Ramanujan's cool, conscious and concentrated viewing of a strider as "thin-stemmed", "bubble-eyed", its perching, "dry capillary legs" etc. is a search for his "personal" identity: and this objective viewing comes to a sudden flash of resonance with the image of the "prophets". It is remarkable to see how this analytical observation slowly blurs not only in diction, but in idea as well, because the poet "drowns eye-deep" into his "sky", into his place and personal identity. The poem itself is the stability, as art is a way of transcending the flux of being.

The unromantic image of "striders" has another important function to perform. In the modern age, an image is used to reflect or create a sense of liberation, a sudden contrast with tradition or the past. The "strider" stands in sharp contrast to Sarojini's Koel or even to Keats's Nightingale. In many of Ramanujan's poems, we often come across such dull images as snake, breaded fish, tortoise, adjutant stork, army ant, pot-bellied bebbies, dark aunts, $KMNO_4$, wobbly top and so on and so forth. But the moderns attach special importance to an image, which, in an instant of time, arouses a complex of feelings: intellectual, emotional and ironic. Ezra Pound and his school's IMAGIST manifesto⁴ (1913) would significantly define the contours of the poem "The Striders", and of course, the contours of many of Ramanujan's poems, like "Still Life", "The Rickshaw Wallah", "This Pair", " $KMNO_4$ in Grandfather's shaving Glass", "Epitaph on a Street Dog" etc. The poems referred to above are seen to be placing a premium

on concentration, objectivity and presentational immediacy, quite reminiscent of Classicism, and they like imagist poems with their virtues of firmness and discipline seem to counter the wordiness of Victorian poetry and the subjective mushiness of an Impressionist tradition. Thus they are loud only in a breach with the immediate past, which is a firm sign of modernism. But in Ramanujan to trace his classical link, one needs to discuss other poems than these. This aspect has already been assessed while discussing his alienation from tradition.

It is true that Ramanujan has not shut himself behind his indigenous Classics completely. He is like a sensitive antenna, ready to receive the signals from the wider world, and relay something like an alchemy that his art is. In this context, we may discuss some of his unusual images presented in his poems. The image of Pascal's endless queue in "Second Sight"-SS is alluded to, not simply as a backdrop against which man's disillusion and despair are to be depicted, rather more significantly it is the circumambient life itself that man lives now, in our time, In a "Dancers in a Hospital", the poet writes:

Spinoza grinding lenses brings me
into focus, and I see my small brown
hand as a species
of eternity.

The image of Paracelsus suggesting old age and uncouthness is built creatively into "I could Have Rested"-S. In "Christmas", a tree is imaged as Euclid's ghost (Euclid: a Greek mathematician whose geometric principles are famous), when the persona's tree is "two in one" like a skinny Janus, two-faced Italian God. He appreciates Janus, for his lively affinity with human condition,

when he views Euclid as only interested in abstract principles that least applies to life's living situations. An image of a victorious Roman hero can be twisted as "only One maggot-caesar who rent his rival" (mark the distortion in Caesar) in "An Image for Politics". Ramanujan with his impeccable sense of ironic humour, draws a parallel between his father's "caesarian birth" and his death by heart-failure in the fruit market ("Obituary"-R). Then again, Ramanujan's reference to an image of "Smilesian diary" is apt, when he alludes it to his father-in-law, who like the novelist Samuel Smiles, steeped in Victorian didactic values, passes "sentences" on his daughter's stages of growth ("Love Poem for a Wife 1"). Even in a poem like "Small-Scale Reflections on a Great House"-R which carries the image of his great tradition from the ancient times to this day, the characters, taken from the history and literature of the west, Alexander and Plotinus are revealed with ironic flashes:

that every Plotinus we read
is what some Alexander looted
between malarial rivers.

This is again to Ramanujan's point that all ethoses live their own oddities.

These images as studied above are classical and modern in nuances, which of course denote Ramanujan's knowledge of some of the myths, creative arts, historical personalities and their situations, basically of western antiquity. This is not all: Ramanujan creatively twists them, more often than not, and imaginatively adopts them to the varied but mostly negatively connotated aspects of modern man's existence. He means to say that men, whether

Indian or western and their ethos, whether ancient or modern, are not fully free from their own absurdities, rather they even share the same world.

In this century, a modern city, as artists have worked and shown, symbolises our civilisation in its panoramic crises. Eliot (Waste Land) and his London; Baudelaire and his Paris; James Joyce (Ulysses) and his Dublin; Pound (Cantos) and his City: "old bitch gone in the teeth" and such like, need no introduction. A city has become a microcosm of all cities and of all life; in various degrees and from various angles, all the cities are places of violence and apocalyptic experience, corruption of human nature; of industrial madness and riotous mob; of hollow men and "international tatrines" ("Dancers in a Hospital"-SS). In Ramanujan, this city symbol is a recurrent feature. Of course, no particular city has obviously haunted the artist, but the nuances of modern life are not less evident. Madras is the city of bank clerks, queuing up and hurrying for congested buses; Madurai, the city of decadent poets and lepers; Calcutta, the city of people "cramped to the top of its gates" like the scavenger birds. If Hiroshima is the city of "wound museums" and Dacca, of "sewers", Chicago is the city of "the Centre for missing children", of "international tatrines" where people "do not walk slow. Find no time to stand and stare". Chicago is the city where "Down there, blacks look black/ And whites, they look blacker" ("Take Care"-R).

In a nutshell, Ramanujan's city is "the black white city, waking not quite awake, not quite dead" ("Dancers in a Hospital"-SS).

At times, Ramanujan employs some images, which for all their ingenuity and novelty lack in clarity, and are hardly decipherable. Some of them are "low melon moons" as in "Epitaph on a Street Dog"; "walking, a sleet of faceless acquaintances" as in "Images"-S; "ideal tomorrow's crowfoot eyes" in "Conventions of Despair"-S and as in "Love Poem for a Wife and Her Trees"-SS, the images of "sobsister" and "sexpot nextdoor". But "I Could Have Rested"-S contains some unusual images, very difficult to decipher.

I would have sold
and fled my treeless island youth
and told her/several birds ago
Before they nested
in the south
of my burning foolish mouth.

My italics expose in Ramanujan not only a modern spirit but also an esoteric mind, which has interwoven three ideas: "treeless island", betrayed "youth" and "birds" in the most intricate manner. And hence, the reader is intrigued. At best, he could make some hard attempt at drawing some meaning: youth and its loneliness is imaged on a treeless island, but bringing in the "birds"-image to suggest any association with other lovers or years ("several birds ago") is not rewarding for a meaningful import. Esotery and obscurity are now in our age valued as modern elements of all arts. Obscurity, in the above poem, comes to score a world altogether. But one thing that the symbolist technique of confusing ideas for mystification might be the poet's objective. However, the sudden jumps of emotions into one another

could here hardly meet that objective. I am intrigued why the persona's utterances become so confusing towards the end of the poem, while he has been pleading coherently from the beginning. However, Ramanujan's image-creating ability in the manner of a modern artist is very much rewarding.

"Two Styles in Love"-S has a houseful of wonderful images and metaphors, they assist the readers to feel and wonder how a symbolist could work. In the poem, time that nips off the branching youth is imaged on a Shakespearean idea, i.e. "circling sickles in the wind will reap your ghost from the branching gallows". The idea of normal growth and evolution is expressed in the imagery of "gorilla-heads sunflower-turning toward almost-man". Youth being vulnerable to time has the expression: "youth's a sowing of shell-less nut", when a reward in waiting for love is so marvellously and sensuously caught in the image of "leaping Beast" who even "wait to be bidden by Beauty". What comes to our mind is how ingeniously Ramanujan infuses the flints of novelty into all these traditional images, and how the traditional ideas get wonderfully transformed with new glosses and freshness. In "Snakes", "snake" is one of Ramanujan's characteristic images, its effectiveness owes much to the passions aligned to his ethos. As a complex, symbol, snake is associated here in the poem with his mother's traditional rite and worship, father's delight, and the snake charmer's economic security, whereas it is associated with a child's fearpsychosis, the poet-persona's in particular. This inner fear of snakes is dramatised in a dream vision later in the poem "Snakes and Ladders"-SS, while

in the "Moulting"-SS snake becomes a symbol of auspiciousness.

Politicians find no favour with Ramanujan. A politician of our time is either "a cannibal devouring small cannibal" as in "An Image for Politics" or "a crow ... stopping its beak on the back of a cow" as in "Lack into Seal". Or, the politician can be at his best one of the watchers, "impotence their supreme virtue" as in "The Watchers"-SS.

On the whole, Ramanujan's images by their genuiness and by their ingenuity confirm one thing, that is, he is a modernist. His modern sensibilities are displayed in his method of modern recreations of the old as well as in creating new images and symbols. "No man is an Island", "Sometimes", "Images", "Breaded Fish" and "KMNO₄ in Grandfather's" and "Two Styles in Love" as well as "Love Poem for a Wife and Her Trees" through many of their dominant images which carry Ramanujan's stamp, would testify to Parthasarathy's view that in Ramanujan as well as in other modern Indo-Anglian poets, the image is not only "the springboard of poetic composition, but the Kernel as well"⁵⁰. Image is the sign of our age and the signature of modernity in art and literature. Indeed, Ramanujan's art does not fail carrying this signature; a modern's "special notion of the Image", to borrow a phrase of Frank Kermode.

It is a fact that the modern artists and philosophers, the most sensitive of all modern men, are acutely conscious of Time as well as its particular moment. As the imagists view or feel an image "in an instant of time", so also the symbolists smell some special notes in flitting moments. Each poet for Wilson "has

his unique personality, each of its moments has its special tone, its combination of elements"⁵¹. Such consciousness of time entails the necessity of a language which must bear time's burden or beauty. In this respect, my effort is directed to see how Ramanujan, the man and the artist, is steeped in an immaculate sense of a moment. Ramanujan, in many of his poems gives me the impression that he has utilised time as producing tension and how time and tension are used as a significant technique.

A close look at "Still Life"-S reveals that in the wake of his beloved's departure, the persona reads for a while. But missing her has already created a tension, which is kept suppressed, apparently "still" but "suddenly" let off. The tension moves along and measures on each item:

sandwich

bread

lettuce and salami,

till the persona is visited with a passionate longing for her ("the shape of her bite"). The items left behind are not merely her mementoes to fill a vacuum created in her absence, they are but the passionate objects capable of carrying her identity in abstract terms, and also her shape, her feel, all of her, in terms of sensuous closeness. This tension has a quality of creative dynamism in that it proceeds beyond the limit of an instant, beyond, the structure of the poem itself. This is why the persona relapses into a kind of wonder, a sort of sensuous reawakening. "Breaded Fish" can also be weighed in the same balance. Her act of thrusting breaded fish into his mouth raises a tension which is not resolved, it goes beyond the point of time

that spurs it. The tension lingers: "I headed for the shore, my heart beating in my mouth". "I Could Have Rested" presents a tension which shoots off from an instant-knowledge of the beloved's infidelity. The tension that is time-created is not time-bound, here too. The unresolved tension is alive in the persona (his yet "burning foolish mouth"). Thus, a moment's consciousness is a necessary condition of tension. A tension so created brings in a sensuous longing or a bitterness, which by its very nature surpasses time itself.

Also, there are poems which finally produce a resolution of tension. "Still Another View of Grace", love poem wonderful in its organisation and dramatic imagination, presents a lingering tension in the persona's mind. But tension is vibrant only when he "turned and caught" that thought "one day", and it continues on a singular tenor till the lady gives the lover a "look". A change is struck in its tenor, and a sedate note on the tension is marked here. Its resolution comes "suddenly" when the defiant lover feels her tumbled hair as "silk" in his palm. The poem "Second Sight" deals with a tension in similar terms. "Snakes and Ladders", a poem dramatising a dream experience projects a sense of resolution as the persona embraces a toilet sink, his "cool porcelain sister". Another source of such tensions is the poem's structure, which is built out of contrasting images, clashing situations, and above all, of wit and irony, employed to their full. "Still Another View of Grace" has this tensional structure integrated out of these elements.

It is relevant here to note that Cleanth Brooks suggests "paradox" and "irony" as the possible source of essential tension, for words and images of a poem are charged with contrasting images

and values through their textual associations⁵². Allan Tate is of the view that tension supplies "the meaning" of poetry⁵³; while for John Crowe Ransom, tension arises from "the interplay" of a poem's structure of general meaning, and its "decorative structure as the imagery, metrics, sound patterns and dramatic parallel or contrasts" with the sense of the lines⁵⁴. Such tensional theories by the American critics are said to have influenced American poetry and criticism for about a decade from the later 1930's to the 1950s. As Ramanujan went to U.S.A. in the early sixties, his awareness of them can not be ruled out, but his practice does not show that he is working out these theories entirely or on exactly similar lines. "A Rather Foolish Sentiment" (S) works on a sensuous wonder at the touch of a girl whom the persona "once" touched in passing her. Again, we find how the dancer-persona in "Instead of Farewell" could achieve the impossible i.e. 'squaring ... the ancient circle' but 'in a glimpse' only, and no less in "Christmas" S could the persona attain something of a universal unity of beings "for a moment" at least. Thus, Ramanujan's poetic device, inducts elements of novelty rather than toeing the line of American poets or critics. Other poems like "Snakes", his three "Love Poems" for a Wife", "Epilaph on a Street Dog" and "Routine Day Sonnet" etc. point to certain variant uses of "time and tension", variant in degree as well as in drift.

While concluding this chapter, I have kept many issues open for discussion and development in the subsequent chapters. Nonetheless, my study, here, is intent on removing certain wrong ideas and interpretations current in the Ramanujan-criticism. I have

dwelt greatly on Ramanujan's belonging to his ethos and substantiated that the poet, being deep-rooted in his indigenous literary tradition, suffers no blight of "poetic anxiety". In a related sense, he also steadily appears Yeats-like. Ramanujan, steeped in Indian mythology and legends, has rendered the flavours of their nativity into English poetry. In this light, I have tried to establish his considerable strength towards Indianising English. In all essentials his sensibilities are modern, and in all possibilities, his art is in the making of a classic.

Endnotes

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3. K. Raghavendra Rao, "Reverse Romanticism: The Case of A.K. Ramanujan's The Striders", Aspects of Indian Writing in English, ed. F.K. Naik, Delhi: Macmillan, 1979, p. 120.
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10. M.K. Naik, Dimensions of Indian English Literature, 1984, p.20.
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17. ^{ibid} Interior Landscape, London: Peter Owen, 1967, p. 52.
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19. "Sunday Review", The Times of India, 1980, Jan - 20, p.13.
20. Sangam poems - The literature of classical Tamil (100 B.C. - 250 A.D.) is known as Sangam literature in the later period: the poems are classical i.e. ancient; they are also "classics", works which have stood the test of time, "the founding works of a whole tradition" (adopted from A.K. Ramanujan's "Translator's Note" to Poems of Love and War, 1985).

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CHAPTER-TWO

CREATIVE USE OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

All art gets its nourishment from the life. But art is not a mirror-image of the life, nor its objective critique. Art is like a tree which has its roots struck deep into the soil of life and its branches grown out in the air, even in the wider skies. Thus the real art has the best of the two worlds, the inner locale of all felt experience and the outer landscape of all thoughts and ideational encounters. Well, what is mysterious in the nature of art is that these two worlds get integrated and fused into a creative whole by its own chemistry. Therefore, the life of an artist as illustrated in his work, can be hardly historical in process or in perspective. At best, it is a creative anachronism; its relevance is in its felt essence, or in living and creative absence rather than its factual connections and evidences. The creative personality is a riddle and even not answerable to our queries such as why it is this and not that, because our questions do not govern its function or its power. But how it makes itself felt on us, or happens to arouse deeply our natural or considered feelings, is the area of our concern. Particularly in case of Ramanujan, many such puzzles will be rewarding even without unravelling themselves, if we accept and appreciate our role in the just considered category.

Reflecting on the nature of a creative mind, C.G. Jung observes, "every creative person is a duality or a synthesis of contradictory qualities. On the one hand, he is a human being with a personal life, while on the other, he is an impersonal

creative process"¹. The forces personal and impersonal that get fused by his creative imagination are what characterise Ramanujan's art, almost in its entirety. But the results evidence a complex pattern more like a kaleidoscope than like any simple and complex deductive formulae. Let us then see how Ramanujan the poet and Ramanujan the artist interact to create many such patterns.

Family and relations are two motifs like two chips in Ramanujan's artistical kaleidoscope. Family is a sustained symbol in his creative consciousness. Though for the ordinary human beings, the family is a locale of intimate relationships which only absorb them, for an artist like Ramanujan it is a way of understanding the self, a means of developing a vision of the vital process of life. With Ramanujan, the familial bond endures but it engenders in him a superior artist. Hence, his detachment from the family and its man is equally important to his creativity.

The memories of the old granny, who is a loving, lovable and non-opposable figure, are enshrined in some of Ramanujan's poems like "The Opposable Thumb"-S, "Lines to a Granny"-S, "In the Zoo"SS and "The Hindoo: he does not Hurt a Fly or a Spider either". Granny's fairytales or counting of five princes with each of her five fingers in a palm that is mysteriously short of one thumb, or her elephantiasis is wonderfully imaged to sustain a child's curiosity and humour. But the poet in "The Opposable Thumb" seems very often tearing out of a child's innocent wonder. From a child's point of view, it is unconvincing and absurd to

see a granny's "rolling leg" likened to "a log in a ruined mill", too sophisticated a metaphor, indeed. For, not by its title alone, but also by its content, the poem is very much a nursery rhyme. "Lines to a Granny" brings a different note in which the poet at his youthful advent of the life, comes to realize that granny's tale of prince and princess in love is merely "no tale but truth". Because youth is a time when the love-life enacts more fantastic but real drama than what many fanciful stories cook up and tell. There may be also an element of Ramanujan's real-life affair here which becomes vibrant in his love-poem "Still Another View of Grace". In the Zoo however, the grey white adjutant storks remind him of grandma's "maggoty curds". Such fond memories of a granny are not so loving in another poem "The Hindoo: he does not Hurt a Fly, or a Spider either"-R. Here the "great swinging grandmother" is seen as sinning against the "great grandfather", whom she once bites "spider-fashion" and from the trauma of which the poor man could hardly recover. In the poem, the old man is a beloved figure, described as "that still man, untimely witness, timeless eye, perpetual outsider" whose spirit, the poet-persona wonders to have internalised, whereas, the old lady is cast in poor and doubtful light as "a suspense of nets vibrate" under her ways.

Nevertheless, Ramanujan does not leave clues for the readers to trace out who exactly are his great grandparents or grandparents. Well, "a" grandmother, "a" grandfather, "a" father or unarticled person or relation is certainly a term capacious to hold many in one. Secondly, Ramanujan's relations remain shadowy with his detached manners, comic ironies, satirical understones and cryptic comments. Moreover, the persons in the poems are not full

portraits but vignettes seen from a distance. These are some of the ways how the poet in Ramanujan has drawn on the man in him, and how his autobiography is elevated to the level of art.

However, quite interestingly, when Ramanujan talks of mother, he means her and no other. He leaves us no room for our misgivings about the loving image of his mother, who at times rises to a universal symbol. The poet's reminiscences of Mother could be sensuously gathered from "Snakes"-S: "Mother gives them milk/in saucers/she watches them suck/ and bare the black-line design/etched on the brass of the saucer". In the poem, "Of Mothers, among other things"-R, how her sarees do not cling as she picks him up from "the crying cradle" in the wake of rains, or how her "sensible fingers" flex to pick up "a grain of rice from the kitchen floor", are happily recollected by the poet. Again, "Still Another for Mother" depicts the poet's encounter with a woman, "large, buxom like some friend's mother" whose act of shutting the door brings alive from his memory lane "that heavy door/of my mother's black-pillared, nineteenth century/silent house, given on her marriage day/to my father, for a dowry". Usually Ramanujan works through the specifics: mother's silk saree, her crinkled feet, diamond rings, sensible fingers, crippled talon; "her bare splayed feet, silver rings on her second toes" as in "Love Poem for a Wife.†" or her "flashing temper" like her "twisted silver" as in "Ecology"-SS. The poet has five senses alert on such relation as Mother. And significantly his ironic humour is absent from his depiction of the mother-figure. If in "Still Another for Mother", his memory of a lost mother recounts on silence in repeating synonymous expressions like "quietly", "silent" and the persona re-lives

a heaviness of heart in the lines: "something opened/in the past and I heard something shut/ in the future quietly/like the heavy door of my mother's silent house,".., in "Ecology" he senses another lovable facet in her, that is, the ancient passion for protecting a "flowering tree", that unschooled, inborn sense of ecology, which has become a valuable asset for our existence in a world rocked by environmental pollution and ecological imbalance. But in the poem, as it is, her spiritual and aesthetic sense outweighs our modern attitude to things, to a tree. Ramanujan recalls in an evocative manner that "flashing her temper", Mother "would not let us cut down/a flowering tree/ almost as old as her,/ to give her gods and her daughters/ and daughters' daughters basketfuls/of annual flower/for one line of cousins/a dower of migraines in season".

It may be borne in mind that the past has a fruitful bearing on the life, and this is vital to Ramanujan's creative vision. Here, the tree "as old as" mother is a symbol of continuity. And to me, it appears it is a means for Ramanujan to realize both past and present together in a continuous flow. Further, the stanza quoted just above gives us an insight into Ramanujan's deep rootedness in his ethos and culture. And what is more, mother becomes a living symbol of closeness and confidence. She reveals to her grown-up son the sad event of his great aunt's death and how her two daughters cleaned her body, yet to be cold, of all her valuables before she breathed her last. The poet-persona's anger and disgust at his dark aunts have found expression through his bitter irony. Thus, irony has

become a mode of aesthetic distance from the near relations, and this is a tool in the hands of Ramanujan to keep himself in balance and not to let himself go down on the pan of sentimentality or moralise from the particularities of his experience (Chapter-Three).

However, Ramanujan's attitude towards his father is one of mixed feelings. He remembers fondly his father's "wobbly top", his revolving chair, fat physique, "bilious witty" nature. In "In the Zoo"-SS the poet is reminded of his father's baggy umbrellas" at the sight of the "noisy and heavy" adjutant storks, of his "smiling money" as in "Snakes"-S: of his "familiar sheep-mouth look in a sepia wedding picture" or, how he "noisily" bathed" by "slapping soap on his back" as in "Love Poem for a Wife 1"-R. Surely, Ramanujan's eye is fixed on "the specific physiognomy" of a thing, a person or a situation², which has been excellently commented upon by R.Parthasarathy. Well, his ironic observations on his father are inescapable. His sense of irony saves "Obituary" from becoming a sentimental piece of writing on his father's death and from becoming a crude caricature of his father, which again establishes Ramanujan as a master of subtle irony and detached artistry.

Ramanujan comes to our view as a playful, teasingly affectionate brother to his sisters. He says, "our sisters were of various sizes / one was ripe for a husband/we were not poor" as in "A Leaky Tap after a Sister's Wedding"-S. But in his childhood he recalls to have got the fright of his life at the sight of his sister's "knee-long bread" which dazzled like snake-like "scales". However, his bitterness towards some cousin

for professed humanism, the other name of hypocrisy, is not mined in any manner in the poem "Real Estate"-R:

My cousin knows buildings:
he knows them well,
He can even tell
their gender by one look
at the basement.

. . .

Humanist, he calculates
stress and strain on wood
and steel, on liver and lower brain. . .

The poet's irritation at an errant nephew, who with "stripes on shoulder was called an incident on the border" in the Sahara desert . . . finds expression in "Small-Scale Reflections on a Great House"-R, which as a poem again is replete with Ramanujan's ironic flourishes at the family tradition, the ancestors, the "prodigal" fathers, the curious girls looking at the cows mated in "the broadday light" and so on.

There are also some poems which exhibit how Ramanujan can be a loving, caring and anxious father to his children, worrying for their health or their little games. Once, a dream about his son "shot" by "bamboo arrows in a jungle trap" disturbs him so much that he pulls a long face, the whole day. One is aware of this depression in the persona in "Son to Father to Son"-SS. Whereas, "Moulting" invokes a prayer to "Lord of snakes and eagles"- to cover his son with an hour's shade and to be "a thorn" at a suitable height "in his hour of change". Well, what is more

interesting for us to find in Ramanujan is that he gets either more worried or more elated, depending on the situation of his inner mind, about his "unborn" children. He would draw some premonition from grandma's yellow daffodils and worry the "very possible" jaundice of an "unborn" daughter as in "On the Very Possible Jaundice of an Unborn Daughter"-S. However, in "It Does not Follow, But When in the Street"-R, he would draw some extra-sensory perception from a surrounding environment of "yellow laburnum" and would, in a heightened mood, walk in air, water and land, because he is going to have "a sharp gentle daughter". Here, one notices an absence of the logical correlation between what the persona encounters and what he concludes. But, one thing is clear that intuition or premonition, presage or extra-sensory perception has its due place in Ramanujan, and for that matter, in the real life of all ours, which his as well as our scientific rationalism can not simply hiss off. Ramanujan's scientific faith in heredity and its influence on a new-born child is revealed in "Drafts"-SS. Here the poet-persona ascribes his "son's green flecks in a painter's eye" to the influence of "mother's almond eyes mixed" with his "wife's ancestral hazel". But the poet is pretty sure of the fact that personality can not be explained fully by the hereditary factors beyond a certain point. Therefore, if the son inheres certain qualities from his mother as well as from his grandmother, "his troubled look is all his own". And here, it is apt to say that a work of art which inherits its sap from the life, can not be its mirror-image. It is something beyond, which points to the mysterious chrysalis of the poet's character.

Ramanujan, the artist remembers outside the gamut of family relations his childhood friends, Gopu and Shivanna. In a rather long narrative poem, "A Minor Sacrifice"-SS he recreates almost a childhood adventure on "a new moon Tuesday" in order to rid the world of scorpions, but by their childish performance of some witchcraft. In an unforeseen, final catastrophe, however, on that very newmoon Tuesday, his friend Shivanna expires in a hospital.

There is ample evidence, of course, in these family poems as dealt with above, that many shreds of irony work into every family portraiture. This fact reveals again that Ramanujan is not all-out praise for his relations, though it is the relations that keep coming into creative consciousness. As a man, Ramanujan is not forgetful of their love and affections, but as an artist, he is not blind to their lapses. From the study of his family and memory poems, one gathers the impression that the family relations are not meant merely for the grubs of affection, or for meeting the obligations, they are such vital bonds as bind man to his family, which he can not escape, which he bears even if he runs away from it. Thus, Ramanujan writes in "Small-Scale Reflections on a Great House"-R :

". . . that nothing/that ever comes into this house/goes out". Family, for Ramanujan, is an enduring symbol, a "great house", a great tradition, into which "things come in every day/to lose themselves among other things/lost long ago among/other things lost long ago". Even after two decades of his life spent abroad in U.S.A., Ramanujan continues to live the inner life of his own, the umbilical cord of the mother-India connections. In this context, Parthasarathy's observation is aptly made that "a man's family never

leaves him" and that "he takes it with him wherever he goes", because family is "one unchanging event" around which man's life continues to revolve³. Daruwalla has a similar view of Ramanujan's family poems as well as of his physical dislocation. The critic in his "Introduction" to Two Decades of Indian Poetry says that "the purely physical fact of living abroad" does not tell upon Ramanujan's creativity, for "his poetry rests in the shade of the family tree"⁴.

In Chapter-One, it is noticed how Ramanujan's close affinity with his Tamil classics, in terms of idea as well as spirit, has shaped and moulded his creative career as a poet. His enduring motif, family, closely resembles a Tamil classic, Orerulavanar's idea embodied in his "Relations"⁵, which reads :

Like a hunted deer
on the wide white
salt land,
a flayed hide
turned inside out,
one may run,
escape.

But living
among relations
binds the feet.

Therefore, family occupies an important place in Ramanujan's art, and his idea of the growth and continuity of an individual personality is closely connected with the family motif. However, his autobiographical accounts as encountered in his poems have transformed his art into something strange and rich. Ultimately,

these accounts become subservient to the marvellous realm of art. Ramanujan is a consummate artist to have transmuted the familial themes and the private motifs into their artistic values which endure.

Love is the most important of all human relationships. For some artists, it is a value which they struggle to live upto, in the life as well as in their works of art. Thus, love's manifold voices unfold in many of Ramanujan's poems. But blatantly borrowed ideas of love, or otherwise its stock expressions would scarcely inspire us to its living touches or livid wounds. What is important in love poems is not the form, nor the finesse, but the fire or the flavour of love, which touches and the touch that never vanishes :

Perhaps it will not pass,
for in that touch I think I stumbled
on a pulse, and wondered like a fool
who has no proper sense of body
if it were yours, or mine,
and wondered if you wondered too.

"A Rather Foolish Sentiment"-S.

Shakespeare, Keats and Yeats are the great names in love's temple, because their crafts are dipped in the fount of their own love-lives. There is always the extended arms of the life behind the great works of love, in painting or sculpture, in music or literature. Well, the man in Ramanujan goes into the making of the creator above him. Ramanujan the creator evokes or explores love's varying moods with his acute sense of the living premises of man's love-life.

But the way the love-experiences and the love-ideas are fused in his poems would raise him as a sophisticated love-poet in modern Indian poetry in English.

One may begin with every individual love lyric of Ramanujan, with a few important general observations, which would reveal the multi-faceted voice of love and also smoothen one's way through each of them to get at the poet's vision of the love-relationship. Each love-poem evokes or enacts a drama in monologue. Each moment of time is vital to the poet's creativity. And each moment of love brings in memory and reflection to play. Well, Ramanujan's poem takes off from a stumble at a moment: a stumble because it is neither a fall nor a bump, for the life is a continuously changing phenomenon, like flux. This quick moment, seized to invest it with an eternity, is a characteristic feature of the classical Tamil love lyrics. Thus, time and experience coalesce in an immediate thrust of a moment in Ramanujan. The love poems are variously enriched with suggestive association, sudden turns and surprises, comic vivacity and ironic niceties, which again emerge in the nimble moments of life. Characteristically in Ramanujan, love's moment is awaited.

At the outset, "Two Styles in Love"-S may be taken up for a discussion. I decide on it first not because of its complex inner pattern of ideas being its validity beneath the seemingly obvious contrasts, but because, as I see, its spiritual blood stream veins through the best ones of Ramanujan's love poetry. Love is a growing consciousness as the life is. Ramanujan's inner urge spurs him to capture as many moments of love as possible, for many such instants could possibly approximate to a near total

vision of love. For him, love is a slow process and in reality, it is not realised in haste, it must be awaited with patience:

Love is no hurry, love is no burning

Come lightly, love, let us wait to be found to be lost.

"Two Styles in Love"-S.

Ramanujan with his idea of love to be awaited reminds one of his contemporary modern poet Nissim Ezekiel, who in his "Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher" gives expression to the same:

To force the pace and never to be still

Is not the way of those who study birds

Or women. The best poets wait for words⁶.

Both the poets start from their theoretical concept, but Ezekiel speaks while standing apart from the process, and Ramanujan voices while in the process. Ramanujan's vision of love grows out of his felt life or passionate understanding of it. His understanding of the love-life, man-woman relationship comes oozing, which is spread over his poems.

It is said that knowledge comes drop by drop. So, one may keep oneself close to the drops of love, its moments, its moods for a better appreciation of Ramanujan's accomplishment as a love-poet.

A moment in "Breaded Fish" facilitates a peep into the grand, the beyond. This moment of love, the beloved's affectionate thrust of breaded fish into the lover's mouth brings into open a vision of universal indifference, that is ingrained in all life-forms: wife's coldness towards fish, the sea's indifference towards human being, and no less, a man's coldness towards his wife's love. Again,

a little reflection may reveal that love's private moment is not immune to other interventions. Further, the poet's consciousness swings back and forth continuously touching each moment, even living all times at once. This instability of time is also manifest in "Still Life". Here the poet-persona seems to have freezed his awareness of the beloved's departure into a sort of statuesque wonder, "still life". However, it is indeed not as much fræezing as ceasing into a ceaseless passion, a subconscious living, a quivering under a cover. Under the cover of a "still life" an anguished living could be perceived in the poem. "A Rather Foolish Sentiment" unveils another facet of love. Imaging himself as a "fool", the poet enjoys a moment of comic expenses at himself. But this self-mockery is self-redemptive: his foolish wondering, dwelling on "that touch", such a stumble on a pulse as "will not pass" discloses the mind of an impassioned lover. Magnificently playing on two recurring words, "pass" and "wonder", he creates a total atmosphere. The poet here transmutes an idea of the primordiality of passion into a living sensation. The image of "caveman's painting" in the poem heightens love's passion and its intriguing beauty, unaided by colour-paints or modern sophistications, nay sophisticated corruptions.

One comes across love's assurance on the face of lover's separation in "Instead of a Farewell"-S. The lover contests his beloved's misgiving by framing his logical defence from an image of "square-dance":

how can I say farewell
when farewells are made
only for people
who go away?

The central metaphor here is "square dance", an American folk dance in which each of the four pairs of dancers turns and changes a partner. Love is such a dance where to say farewell is next to impossible. And the impossibility, that is, "squaring" the "ancient circle" of the lovers is achieved but only "in a glimpse", an instant of time. The living paradoxes of the love-life are revealed in the expressions like "meeting before I begin to see,/ seeing after I have done/with meeting,". Because seeing or meeting each other for long does not necessarily ensure the eternal returns of love: love endures, lovers can say no "farewell", for love does not "go away" with farewells even if said. Love's eternal returns evidence only "in a glimpse".

Love's fruition in marriage is dramatically recreated in "Still Another View of Grace"-S. This is a well-knit poem with contrasting ideas, assonances, inner rhymes (priest-beast, treason, reason, brahmin-hymns, shook-took) and lyrical epithets. Being "bred Brahmin", Ramanujan took behind the ancient laws of his land, the hand of a Keralite Christian in marriage. The reader has "another view of grace" in the poem⁷. Grace here means self-liberation, freedom from orthodox "commandments", and still another view of it would mean grace does not come with Brahmin's blessings, but it is an inner blissfulness, attained by answering the call of the soul. H.M. Williams rightly observes that "an acute sense of sin and a wry portrayal of human fallibility inform the poem"⁸. However, finally this sense of sin melts into a silk-feeling, the feeling of grace.

Love's grace in a marital life is not the end of the road. In the man-woman relationship, problems have a share too. "Routine

Day Sonnet"-R mirrors this odd beat of the love-life. A sonnet, however routinized its form, may also embody a stranger idea or greater experience. Similarly, an apparently smooth routine life may spring a surprise now and then, adding quaintness and absurdity to a daily existence. As peace and understanding are in life, so are confusion and doubt, they have their moments, their shares. "I Could Have Rested"-S is a dramatic monologue on a problem of a love-life, on sexual jealousy. The love-lorn persona finds no way to self-accusation or to shy away from the beloved's larceny, her secret affair now. He shines in the fire of youthfulness, but pressed under a betrayed love, he burns in its jealousy. Well, if security in love is wanted, man should "court a mermaid" because she is "single-thighed" ("Excerpts from a Father's Wisdom"-R).

The sensual content of the love-relationship too gets some treatment, of course, sparingly in Ramanujan. In "looking for a Cousin on a Swing", memory and desire are brought in to lend credence and reality to the obvious act of sex, of course, indulged in at the time of an innocent childhood. But its promiscuous thirst in an adult, conscious age invites Ramanujan's disapproval. King considers the poem as one of "not just psychological insight into evolving sexuality", but like "Love Song^{*} for a Wife 1", a statement about "... the unselfconscious feeling of wholeness"⁹. Bringing of these two poems together is a hasty decision, because "Looking for a Cousin on a Swing" is deficient in such an unconscious feeling for wholeness, because the female persona's "to be innocent about it" has all the suggestion of her self-conscious desire for some indulgent acts. What is more, her pretence "to be innocent" here and the male persona's desire for a unity of beings in "namelessness

of childhoods" in "Love Poem for a Wife 1" are worlds apart. In one case, the poet's irony is in the nature of pointed satire, whereas in the other, it is one of the comic humour. In this context, a look at his third person point of view, keeping himself at large from the persona and the cousin as well, sounds unusual in a way. Could it be that Ramanujan does not enjoy a free-will, gratuitous entertainment in writing the physical act of love? This problem may be sensitively looked into in "A Poor Man's Riches 2"-SS. Here the poet seems to come alive on the subject of "body" and its throbbing passions. Could it be that an Indian bred as a Hindu Brahmin alone feels why stealing "kisses" outdoors is an act of "committing grand larceny", though this larceny leads to discovering rich and wonderful mines in the life's physical acts?

I discover
at least how a woman is made
as she laughs and makes a man
of me,
teaches me combination, how to pick
locks to raid her richest furs,
and loot the mint of gold and silver even as they turn
into common money ...

Nevertheless, the poet's faith and delight in the body are better expressed in symbols: the "haiku butterflies" sleeping in the ear of a "ruined Buddha" is certainly an affirmation of that faith.

But Ramanujan when counterposed with some of his contemporary Indo-Anglians, with respect to living in the body, would come under dimer light. Shiv K. Kumar's "To a Young Wife" opens sensationally:

Arabian horses
snort around our bed
pawing into frosted holes²⁰.

Dr. K.N. Daruwall's "Love among Pines" would move to the border of the vulgar:

What makes me whisper
 destiny lies
in the parting of hair
in the parting of grasses
in the parting of thighs¹¹?

However, Ramanujan is not incapable of the vivid suggestions, though he desists from the lurid illustrations of love-making: its sophistication is also to taste, its lusciousness is not in the detail but in the concentration of the idea. "Of Curves"¹² has all the liveliness of Ramanujan's living faith in the body-life:

The ancient Arab word for "sine"
is one which also means
the well-known curve
of Eve's own breast.
It is as if the maleness
of the straightest line
achieves design
and the significance
of tangency
only once:
with the perfect curve's
one caress.

Ramanujan's creative energy emanates from the sudden clashing of the opposites, and its physical immediacy is not missed, its suggestive power illuminates "Two Days" in which the poet says:

. . .

But I met
some one
who gave it
pretensions to a pattern:
a maplike waterstain
steaming upon a stone¹³.

Like yesterday, today was also vain, but today's meeting with a stranger is a turning point, she alone gave at least a pattern-like pretensions to life. Thus for Ramanujan, sex is not merely a sensual arousal of the life, it is a vital property to understand the life's vision. Poem after poem, he explores the multifarious voices of love, of union and separation, marriage and betrayal, indulgence and sensuous longing, its physical aspect and metaphysical contentment. Beneath the voices of love, his probe goes deeper to explore the man-woman relationship, the unity of beings. This is the reason why three important love poems of Ramanujan, "Love Poem for a Wife 1", "Love Poem for a Wife 2" and "Love Poem for a Wife and Her Trees" are kept together for discussion. My grouping them together is also not prompted merely by their titular resemblances, but more by their thematic correlation and a growing vision of the consciousness of the self which informs each of them.

"Love Poem for a Wife 1" is an attempt to understand the innate alienness in the lovers and to come to grips with the love-life. Marriage is conventionally understood as the merging of two minds and as the resolution of all contraries that beset the life. Beneath all seeming perfections in a marital life,

what lurks, rather sits deeply entrenched there, is an apartness, an alienation between man and woman. This disconcerting feature of the life is seen by E.N. Lall as a failure of "complete possession of his wife"¹⁴ by the man, in this poem. King considers this as the "problem of marriage"¹⁵. This problem of alienation comes to the surface in marriage, of course, but its root is seeded in the unitary differences of a couple's childhoods. Therefore, the persona's enterprise to work out a unity of two beings, man and woman, within the fold of marriage turns out to be a wild goose chase.

The poem opens dramatically revealing Ramanujan's acute awareness of this alienation:

What keeps us apart
at the end of years is unshared
childhood.

Thus, to this basic premises of apartness, he suggests two alternative solutions which naturally imply that the marriage once carried back to "childhood" will sort out all differences between man and woman. Therefore, the poet imagines that either the Ezyptian lagacy of the incestuous marriage, or the Hindu tradition of the childhood marriage in the oral cradle, might resolve such differences.

. . . Probably
only the Ezyptians had it right:
their kings had sisters for queens
to continue the incests
of childhood into marriage.
Or we should do as well-meaning
hindus did,

betroth us before birth,
forestalling separate horoscopes
and mother's first periods,
and wed us in the oral cradle
and carry marriage back into
the namelessness of childhoods.

The sharing of childhoods, the common family past is suggested to dissolve the individual separateness of man and woman. But interestingly enough, the "old drag-out fights" between the persona's wife and her own brother both belonging to a common family part and a common origin, do not affirm the possibility of resolving the differences, rather this scene of "drag-out fights" is a wry and an ironic comment on either of the suggested alternatives. The poem projects Ramanujan's deeper probe into the man-woman relationship and also manifests how this strange apartness is not fully explainable and how it is not resolvable in marriage carried back to "the namelessness of childhoods". King's observation is apt while he says that wanting "the self-unconscious feeling of wholeness" supposed to be found in 'the namelessness of childhoods' could only be an exercise in "comic absurdity"¹⁶, for the poet, and that finally the poem is.

This problem is more forthrightly admitted in "Love Poem for a Wife 2" as the poet says: "We had never known/we would never know/my wife's always/changing syriac face". From experience, the poet learns that the strange existence of the wife has to be finally acknowledged. But then, the desire of wholeness remains still a lurking passion. This desire turned now subconscious manifests in a "happy" "dream", a thwarted reality is realised in a dream vision.

The persona dreams one day that his face is "lost", "cut loose" and his wife's face instead is connected to his body. The persona's new-found happiness "for once" is revealed thus -

. . : happy for once
at such loss of face,
whole in the ambivalence
of being half woman half-
man contained in a common
body,
androgynous as a god
balancing stillness in the middle
of a duel to make it dance:

The poem focuses Ramanujan's quest for the unity of being, for the wholeness of the life, is ultimately realised; but this realisation of the wholeness manifests only in a dream, only "for once", for a moment. Ramanujan's idea of the wholeness in "the ambivalence of being half woman and half man contained in a common body" stands a better testimony to the fact that the basic contradictions, strangenesses and alienations sedent in the individual personalities of man and woman can only be "balanced" to a "whole", but not dissolved wholly. This is what he has learnt as the final truth from life. And he has expressed the truth underlying the man-woman relationship in a sophisticated mythical motif (see, Chapter One). The time-element vital for such a realisation of the unity between two beings, man and woman, between the one and the other is a moment, a quivering instant of the life. As we see in the poem, the persona "soon" becomes himself, "the past still there", the alienation again persists. Therefore, the truth

of the man-woman integrated wholeness, for Ramanujan, is not one submitting to the other, merging into the other's being: not losing into another. This integration is a "balancing stillness" between two beings, between half woman and half man, between the masculine principle and the feminine one moulding into a complete principle, but for a while. My lingering on this aspect of Ramanujan's search and success is to drive home to the readers that we are encountering here a poet whose idea of the man-woman relationship closely resembles Lawrence's. D.H. Lawrence considers man and woman as two poles, two stars or two angels who achieve the creative fullness between each other in the way of a "trembling equilibrium", of the balance. In Women in Love, Lawrence professes his idea of the man-woman relationship in a style all his own. Birkin, his alter-ego in the novel wants a further conjunction than a mere physical union with Ursula: he wants a further conjunction, "where man had being and woman had being, two pure beings, each constituting the freedom of the other; balancing each other like two poles of one force, like two angels, or two demons"¹⁷. The relationship of unity between two pure beings, this pure relatedness, this "quick" is revealed and also re-lived but in a quivering, nimble moment of the life. When to "be fulfilled in difference"¹⁸ is the whole of Lawrence's vision of the man-woman relationship, to "be whole in the ambivalence" is all that characterises Ramanujan's vision.

His "Love Poem for a Wife and Her Trees" illumines another important but related aspect of woman as the symbol of "the other" as Lawrence would mean.

I forget at night and remember at dawn
you're not me but Another, the faraway
stranger who's nearby ...

In the poem, there is no more of the poet's search for a namelessness of childhood, no more either of his insatiable envy for the wife's syriac face. There is only a realistic acceptance and appreciation of the life's polarity, separateness, otherness. Another reason for the poet's coming to this solipsistic acceptance of the wife's strange aloofness might be her death, with which "Some People", an early poem in Second Sight deals, because death in a final turn of events establishes here strange existence, and her separate being. The echo of her death is also audible in the section II of "Love Poem for a Wife and Her Trees". And thus, the section III is the affirmation of Ramanujan's vision that the woman is not cast in the shape or shadow of her man: she is the other for the man as the man is the other for her. Like Lawrence, Ramanujan also means that between man and woman, each being "the other" for the other, each becomes fulfilled in the other, through the creative conjunctions from moment to moment. Could it be that Ramanujan is influenced totally by Lawrence, his vision of the man-woman relationship? Lawrence's shaping influence on Ramanujan may be enquired, proved or disproved only by the literary historians. But as Ramanujan's poems speak for themselves, there is no dearth of evidence that his is a growing vision. His long struggle, poem after poem, to grapple with time's nimble moments, the nature of woman, her strange existence, yields its own fruit, shapes its own vision. Whether it resembles someone else's or other's is immaterial. No less important is Ramanujan's own

individual search. If one's success brings the similar or same results with another's, could one's labour, sweat and blood be belittled? But then, is Ramanujan's vision simply Lawrentian? Its answer is embedded in the section IV of Love Poem for a Wife and Her Trees".

Yet I know you'll play at Jewish mama,
Sob-sister, daughter . . .
even the sexpot next door, topless
tree spirit on a temple frieze,
or a plain Indian wife
at a village well, so I can play son,
father, brother, macho lover, gaping
tourist and clumsy husband.

What in quintessence a dear woman is, is summed up by Ramanujan as in the roles she plays at different moments and different stages of her life, of their co-existence, of their vital relationships. It is known that for Lawrence, the image of the beloved as mother (Mater Dolorosa)¹⁹ is an anathema. It is this mother-fixation that results in Lawrence's failure in love as in Sons and Lovers; it is this image of Magna Mater that he simply dislodged from his mind in Rainbow, and this image that is severally discarded (one, Ursula's dance in her pregnancy) in Women in Love. For Lawrence, the beloved is a pure being: the pure-relatedness between man and woman would go thwarted unless the mother-image is undone. So, if Ramanujan is a Lawrentian at least upto a point, he is but himself since then. The dear woman can play the mother, and the man plays the son; she can play the "plain Indian wife" and he "a clumsy husband". The reciprocity of playing the different

roles is real and true to every changing moment of the life. Moreover, such a concept of the woman as appropriates the roles of mother, daughter, wife, enchantress and sister is not alien to the Hindu ethos. Here again, Ramanujan's root in his ethos is self-revelatory. For him, the dear woman is a complex symbol, more complex than that for Lawrence.

Furthermore, in the love poem, "Love Poem for a Wife and Her Trees", the tree-symbol is intricately associated with the woman. As the tree is: strange in character, distant and primordial in origin, so is the woman. But Ramanujan has invested some Vedic nuances to the tree, and its topsy-turviness as associated with the image of woman is another intriguing aspect of her character. It seems to me that Ramanujan has probably tried to disregard the Vedic idea of this material world as entangling man in all illusory activities which steal away from him his true goal, his liberation from this material world. In this love poem, the topsy-turvy tree with its "roots in heaven and branches in the earth", quite reminiscent of the Vedic Banyan tree²⁰, becomes "the one tree that's not upside down,/its mother root/unfolding in the earth a mirror image/ of every branch and twig thrust deep/into the sky". In this analogy, Ramanujan is of the view that it is the dear woman who helps her man to know what life is, because she alone knows "how to buy the perfect pomfret for dinner in a world of stranded fish, or pluck the one red apple in the garden for dessert ..."

Therefore, how could the man, born to this material world, live without its enjoyment? Perhaps Ramanujan here re-affirms his faith

in the living of life and hence, his living the spirit of this worldly life through the dear woman.

Ramanujan's art, as we see, unveils the rich ideas, wise and philosophical in a sense, about the life lived within the man-woman relationship. However, one important and allied aspect of this life needs to be explored here.

Self at the centre of all search manifests itself in Ramanujan's art from the very beginning of his creative life. And the artist has all through assumed an elusive character till his vision clears; well, but his vision is gained through experience. His vision of the self permeates most of his elusive poems, the poems which have so far been faulted on one count or another. First, the one comes to my mind is "The Striders", which is not by chance, the first poem of Ramanujan's first volume of poems, and this volume The Striders is also entitled after this poem. Ramanujan's concern with the self and hence his idea of the individuality of beings is very much there, but misted with an uncanny subject like Waterbug and more, gone veiled under an objectivist style of the moderns. "The Striders" to Ramanujan is a uniquely personal experience, such an experience as characterises " $KMnO_4$ in Grandfather's Shaving Glass". These two poems, among many others, are not as banal as they are made out to be. The style adopted in the poems is peculiarly a Ramanujan-device to serve best his slowly evolving vision of the self. In the first poem, the poet emphatically focuses on the miracle performed by the strider, a tiny creature, which always escape our grand-seeing eyes. The poet means what he says: "No, not only the prophets walk on water". He recognises the strider, he recognises the self. It is said that John Keats could smell the

beautiful even in the garbage. But it is Ramanujan who senses merit in the smallest. Well, with Ramanujan, it is not so much the case of appreciating the observed, the outward as an act of inwardising what is seen, what is encountered: there is always some symbiosis between outward observation and self-exploration. Such symbiotic relation is natural to the poet, to the artist, the sensitive soul; but to us, normal us, it only sounds absurd.

"The Striders" is a dramatic self-exploration, a quest for "a tiny strip of sky", for a little space of one's own in a vast world, infested with the masters, the "prophets". Thus underneath an objective mode of seeing minutely a strider's miracle, there is a deliberate, hidden, absorptive dwelling on the self. The strider's "perch" on "the ripple skin" of a stream gives an easy idea of its stability, fixity. But a close look would reveal how the waterbug adapts continuously to the rippling stream, in order to keep itself steady on the continuously changing phenomenon. It is imaginable how beneath a stable picture of cinematography there are a hundred continuous, swift snaps of photographs, juxtaposed mechanically to give an idea of the living. Thus, instability underlies the life's seeming stability: the self can not endure fixity; change and flux neatly describes the self's stable truth. Therefore, a strider is a symbol of an individual self, while the ripple skin of a stream is a metaphor of the flux of being. "Towards Simplicity"-§ is also another poem of Ramanujan in his search for the self and to understand its physical nature, in particular. It is roughly designed in a 'sonnet' form, which I quote in full:

Corpuscle, skin,
cell, and membrane,
each its minute seasons
clocked within the bones.

Millions grow lean and fall away
in the hourly autumn of the body.
But fertile in fall, ending as others begin,
to the naivete of death they run.

From the complexity
of reasons gyring within reasons,
of co-extensive spring and autumn,
into the soil as soil we come,
to find for a while a simplicity
in larger, external seasons.

The image of gyre here reminds us of W.B. Yeats and his idea of human history changing and resulting in all sorts of changes, qualitative as well as quantitative. Ramanujan's quest here is limited in scope, limited to the level of body which is such a mysterious house as embodying "co-extensive spring and autumn" and inside which millions of cells, tissues, and corpuscles die their "hourly" death: they are "fertile in fall, ending as others begin". This poem is an attempt on the part of the poet to understand the "co-extensive" changes, the continuously changing phenomena within this human body, within the self on its physical level. Birth, growth and death characterise the nature of our physical existence. But this is too simplistic to understand the "hourly" deaths and births that go ceaselessly within us; too deductive to comprehend "the complexity of reasons gyring within reasons". Again, the growth of this self and the process of this growth are to be envisioned in "KMNO₄ in Grandfather's Shaving Glass". We have to mark very closely how "a tall water column of clarity" which receives "a drop of potassium permanganate" turns into "pallor" till "pallor pales

into transparency", but the watercolumn gets "blued by a past sensation". And finally, with the addition of another drop of $KMnO_4$, the water goes "brewed to winedark". The poet is not merely re-enacting a child's wonder, here. But then a child's wonder is not for nothing being elucidated in a language of a mature man. A watercolumn of "clarity" to its "winedark" marks the process of change onto its growth, the process of which would also depict the change and growth of a human being, of the self from a childhood to a stage of manhood. We can also notice and feel how sensitively the poet describes the unravelling of $KMnO_4$ in living terms of human and plant proximity: vein, tress, and filament; past sensation, capillary roots; loosening skein and winedard. Thus, Ramanujan's interest is evidently not of a chemist's in this poem as his interest is not of a biologist's in "Towards Simplicity". These poems are his inner concerns to understand the vital process or processes that are integral to the moulding or making of the self. Therefore, to dismiss " $KMnO_4$ in Grandfather's ..." as not worth a poetic experience is an error on the part of the critics²¹ (see, Chapter One). Moreover, every experience leaves its scratch on the self, which our common intelligence or scientific rationalism hardly understands, the least notices. The poet in the above poem could sensitively mark how a drop of $KMnO_4$ plummets into the watercolumn "lensing a scratch on the wall". And not only that, this self also gets somewhat affected by each and every encounter, every experience, each past action, as the watercolumn slowly achieves a clarity but remains "slightly blued by a past sensation". Therefore, every event, each experience shapes our consciousness, shapes our vision; by this I pertinently mean that a new experience does not simply displace our past

experiences, nor dismiss our past consciousness. All consciousnesses result from their self-absorptions, and consequent inner changes, all changes shape the consciousness and the self. More often, a change is not visible because it happens with "the faintest current of stillness" as a drop of colour in the water unravells but "slow-motioned by the element".

"Elements of Composition", the opening poem of Second Sight introduces the readers to Ramanujan's idea of the self, its composition out of many elements, its process of change through a reciprocal giving and taking, and its sudden transformation to a completely new, unforeseen life-form, "caterpillar". This poem, to my mind, is a culmination of Ramanujan's long search for the identity of the self, its nature and its reality.

Composed as I am, like others,
of elements . . .
father's seed and mother's egg
gathering earth, air, fir mostly
water, . . .
into a chattering self tangled
in love and work,
scary dreams . . .

But into the making of one's personality, many incidents, many experiences go like scary dreams; uncle's eleven fingers playing childhood games; the riots of Nairobi; the lepers as well as the goddesses of Madurai; the Muharram tigers and the epileptic saints and all. The self is affected by them, as they are affected by the self. This self evolves, develops and grows through many divisions, decompositions ("Towards Simplicity"-S) and not only through

additions of experiences or elements. It will not be wrong to suggest that Ramanujan's vision of the self comes close to Henri Bergson's vitalism as illustrated in his Creative Evolution (1911). Life for both the creative artists, is to certain extent a mechanism, moulded out of "father's seed and mother's egg" and other elements added to them. But beyond this psycho-chemical phenomenon, the self remains a mystery which the mechanical theories fail to explain, as it embraces "the complexity of reasons gyring within reasons".

Bergson explains lucidly:

... our personality shoots, grows and ripens without ceasing. Each of its moments is something new added to what was before. We may go further: it is not only something new, but something unforeseeable. Doubtless, my present state is explained by what was in me and by what was acting on me a moment ago.²²

That the life is a creative evolution, and that every moment for this evolution is vital, are also fundamental to Ramanujan. The importance of a moment in Ramanunaja's art is also sensitively reflected on by King as he observes the artist's sense of "living from moment to ment"²³. The critic comes almost near the point but misses it as Ramanujan's vision eludes him. The vitality, the creativity of every moment as enshrined in Ramanujan's art can also be explained in Bergsonian terms:

Each of them (moments of the life) is a kind of creation. And just as the talent of the painter, is formed or deformed- in any case, is modified under the very influence of the works he produces, so each of our states, at the moment of its issue, modifies our personality, being indeed the

new form that we are just assuming. It is then right to say that what we do depends on what we are; but it is necessary to add also that we are to a certain extent, what we do, and that we are creating ourselves continually²⁴.

Ramanujan explains the phenomenon of mutual exchanges between the self and other forces -

I pass through them
as they pass through me
taking and leaving
affections, seeds, skeletons ...

Bergson also reflects on "these mutual exchanges, like those between two vessels separated by a porous partition", while on the biological inner process, he has to observe:

"Life does not proceed by the association and addition of elements, but by dissociation and division"²⁵.

To this, Ramanujan's awareness is kin and he has to say:

. . . even as I add,
I lose, I decompose
into my elements,
into other names and forms,
past and passing, tenses
without time . . .

Thus, like Bergson, Ramanujan views the life's continuity and discontinuity as fundamental and like the former, he also admits that the change beyond all mechanistic logics or Darwinian adaptation to the circumstances is sudden; it brings a new, unforeseeable form of the life, "a caterpillar on a leaf, eating,/being eaten". This change is not a complete dislocation but the continuation of

the same impetus, that suggests that "change" might be sudden, but the "tendencies" in the life towards this change are always up on toes. Bergson emphatically states: "We said of life, that from its origin, it is the continuation of one and the same impetus, divided into divergent lines of evolution"²⁶. And human life is one divergent force, the most valuable one in this planet.

As evolution moves into no fixed ends, and as it is the expression of a creative urgency to be fulfilled in some novel ends, inventively generated in the process of time itself, Ramanujan's metaphor of "a caterpillar on a leaf", a primitive, elemental life-form whose origin is a mystery and whose transformation into another form is more mysterious (butterfly), is very apt. The idea of the self's sudden disconnection brought about by its own chemistry gets a clear expression in Ramanujan's "Looking for the Centre"^{SS}. He thus says:

Suddenly, connections severed
as in a lobotomy, unburdened
of history, I lose
my bearings, a circus zilla spun
at the end of her rope, dizzy
terrified,
and happy.

Therefore, terror in a sudden decomposition and happiness in a new form are simultaneous processes in the life's inner circle. Change is a necessity for the self to endure. And as Bergson says, "... a psychic state which remains the same so long as it is not replaced by the following state does not endure either"²⁷.

As the critics fail to see Ramanujan's meanings as embodied in his poetry, he satirises them in "Connect":

But my watchers are silent as if
they knew my truth is in fragments.

This process of the self growing, changing and evolving, also informs Ramanujan's idea of memory. Without a little reflection on this aspect, the artist's vision, I fear, may remain either incomplete in our understanding or taste half-boiled for our watchers, me included.

Memory occupies a seminal place in the art of Ramanujan. The family poems almost invariably give the impression that memory is their indispensable part, which makes them livelier or more disturbing. That apart, it is also closely associated with Ramanujan's vision of the self. Here, many questions raise their heads. Is memory in Ramanujan or dead deposit, wherein all the present like the past would rush and get dumped? Is it like a memory bank in a computer? Or, is it a graveyard from which time's ghosts are conjured up to be exorcised by the psycho-analysts? In order to answer these question, one needs to consider Ramanujan's concept of Time which again is intimately linked with memory. 'On a Delhi Sundial'S helps us understand that Ramanujan grieves for a "sundial time" as opposed to the modern idea of it: 'four and twenty ghostly circles'. The poet says:

But who, among tourists
on a five-day tour, can put the clock back
and run into sundial time?

Sundial time is for the poet, a real and living concept, and

Or, as in "Loving for the Centre"-SS: this real time is realised "suddenly", on a point of time, when all the "connections" are "several" from "history" to bring about a completely new and strange beginning. The importance of a moment for Ramanujan's creative consciousness is already dealt at length in this chapter. With Ramanujan as with Bergson, real time is a flux, a continuously flowing phenomenon; it is a living as well as lived fact of life and not a dead concept. Therefore, time past is not a time passed for all time to come, as it reveals to the sharpened consciousness of all sensitive artists, time and again.

Memory, such as commonly accepted as a store-house for the times past, for the experiences done away with, is not the concept to which Ramanujan subscribes. To Ramanujan, memory like time is, for ever, "real". "On Memory"-S would soon reveal this point on a little reflection:

Memory,
in a crowd of memories, seems
to have no place
at all for unforgettable things.

"Memory" to have "no place" for unforgettable things" is something that sounds very self-contradictory. How are things "unforgettable" if they are not called up by memory? The fact is that Ramanujan by such a statement on memory as mentioned above does not intend to emphasize a self-contradiction. On the contrary, he brings to light a living paradox which is immanent to the true nature of a living memory. This can, of course, be substantiated only in the

light of the entire poem. Here Ramanujan suggests of two kinds of memory: the one is of facts, of history, of dates, of informatory knowledges gained through reading and recalling; the other is of intimacy, of experience, perhaps mingled in the "blood beat". While the first kind gives away its "tangent" answers, the other kind of memory, very distinct in scope and nature from the first, can not bring up sudden, readymade "images" or exact answers. This is because the living memory has undergone some imperceptible change in the process of being mixed with the other felt experiences. Memory hardly keeps into original reality. Thus, its successful evocation is truly creational with much of its original simplicity or complexity as being shred, but its original impetus not completely obliterated. Ramanujan reflects in the poem "On Memory":

. . . But not
for all my blood-beat
.
my will
can I hold or keep
one face
and those words random-thrown
in a tumble of your multiple faces
as they turn in this day's dazzle ..

However, Ramanujan's "The Past" anthologised in P. Lal's Modern Indian Poetry in English (1969) is more revealing on this aspect of memory. I quote the full poem:

The cavern's sculpture quickens
an actinic process
in the eye.

But it's frozen again
into the stone's oblivion
as the moment's retina roves
and moves
in the white suspense
of all the stalactites of remembrance.

A sight turning inward into experience and finally moving into the domain of a living memory is an entire process of the life's growing vision itself. The concept of real memory and the vision of the self informing it are also embodied in "Carpe Diem", another poem of Ramanujan which features in P.Lal's anthology. In the poem, the poet by means of the metaphors like 'tree' and 'fruit' explores the living continuity of real memory as well as of the self; he says that a fruit when plucked does not forget the tree's inverted image. This also affirms the fact that no single moment can be separable from real time, the flux. Memory is all the time alive there as the time past is always present, if not in our consciousness, but in our subconscious psyche. Ramanujan's "A Lapse of Memory"-R also illustrates this truth about real memory and suggests that the lost memory of an amnesiac is not lost really, perhaps gone asleep or gone suppressed "somewhere".

Many of the myths and legends, that some of Ramanujan's poems enshrine, unravel another significant facet of living memory, which pertains to the "collective unconscious" in Jung's phrase. For, the memory of the family relations is not the only type, individually lived or consciously presented in Ramanujan. No less important is the memory which comes from a distant past, perhaps even from time immemorial. "Prayers to Lord Murugan"-R and "The Difference"-SS

among others disclose such a memory. In "The Difference" the poet says:

But today, out of the blue,
when Vishnu
came to mind, the Dark One you know
who began as a dwarf

Therefore, real memory can also synchronise the time span of a thousand ages (Dwarf: the Vaman avatar of Vishnu may be traced back to a pre-Ramayan era) to a point of the present. Thereby, memory is a way to realise how the past persists in life, in the present. Ramanujan comes near Bergson again in his concept, of memory. Bergson says, "Memory is there, which conveys something of the past into the present". He further elucidates that man's "mental state, as it advances on the road of time, is continually swelling with the duration . . ." ²⁹. An uninterrupted change really inheres in each of Ramanujan's concepts like memory, time or self. Our scientific intelligence, our rational mind could see only an interruption here or a dislocation there. But the truth remains, as the poet means, that we change without ceasing. The fact that our life is not a reality divided between times is substantiated by Ramanujan himself in his interview to Rama Jha. There he answers:

Because you can not entirely live in the past, neither can you entirely live in the present: we are both these things. The past never passes ... It is with us, it is what gives us the richness ... understanding, the richness of expression ³⁰ [*italics mine*].

Ramanujan's statement can be supplemented by some textual evidences also. This persisting of the past into the present is present in

"One Reads"-S =

Our night's pomegranate mines
that cast
their ember seeds
into the future and the changing past
of files, charts and last year's twins.

. . .

And, in "A Poem on Particulars"-S, the poet, aware of the continuity of time as well as of an imperceptible presence of the future in time present itself, writes :

. . . every one of these (oranges)
had an absurd, almost human
umbilicus
at the top
where once the Tree
had poured its
future
from forgotten roots

From our discussion so far, it is now increasingly obvious that memory and time in Ramanujan are a twin concept rather than two separate ideas. Memory which conveys to us, the idea of real time as a flux and that of the self as a ceaselessly changing reality is, to Ramanujan, not a dead deposit, nor a graveyard, not even a mechanical unit. It is also not a means of "protecting his Indian psyche"³¹, as Devendra Kohli would find it. Memory constitutes Ramanujan's interior landscape and is "a means of self-exploration"³² as G.N. Devi rightly points out. Bruca King also aptly considers that 'memories' in Ramanujan are "at the foundations of the self" and they "form his inner self"³³.

In this chapter, my study focuses on how Ramanujan has turned most of his autobiographical elements into a vivid creative art. While exploring many facets of love in Ramanujan, it is established that his concept of man-woman relationship resembles Lawrence's to a significant point of difference. My study here has also taken into account Ramanujan's vision of the self which has close affinities with Bergson's vitalist idea of the self. How in the poet, memory is real and a means of exploring the self, is also looked into. One can come to a conclusion at this stage of our discussion on Ramanujan's art that he is a serious artist and he is not intellectually incompetent. This would finally answer Prof. Nagarajan's doubt on Ramanujan's artistic competence. Ramanujan's art is one of serious volition, but it does not run into the domains of the tragic vision.

Endnotes

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CHAPTER-THREE

IRONIC VISION

A deep awareness of life informs Ramanujan's art, which needs no re-statement. Each poem of Second Sight, is replete with irony. Ramanujan's irony is multi-faceted and of an all-pervasive nature. The family themes and the belief-systems, the socio-political mores and the half-forgotten realities of life: all come within his ironic purview. The poems in these three volumes reflect, of course, Ramanujan's individual excellence in his use of irony as a technique, but more significantly they reveal that his vision of life is ironic also. Do his ironic views on the family relations point to him as an alienated mind? Or, does he wield irony as a moral shaft? Is he a carping ironist, merely? Or, does his ironic perception of the Hindu ethics and ideals represent him as an atheistic existentialist? These are some of the questions which need to be answered as we study Ramanujan's irony which pervades his vision.

Self as the centre of life as we know informs Ramanujan's art as well as his vision. If life's "reasons gyring within reasons" arouse his humility, inspire him to quest for the self; its oddities as found in the mores and manners of men, in their ethos, inspire also his ironic intent. Thus Ramanujan's realism and irony both play their parts in shaping his vision.

His vision of the self is as serious as Bergson's; his vision of the man-woman relationship is as creative as Lawrence's, but in a way, all his own. However, his awareness of the life's oddities, deep embedded in it, as Lawrence is aware, leads him to accord a due place to these strange, odd elements in life. The

recognition of their values is not only found in the man-woman relationship, but also in ethos, in culture which shapes man's vision. Without living an ethos, none can be able to realise the vision of its life. If one is prompted to ask whether Ramanujan has realised the vision of his ethos, my answer is that Ramanujan has reached his goal in this. Not only has he realised this vision, but also lived this vision, nay, this vision remains the way of his living the life. He had not lived it, he could not have written two of his love poems: "Love Poem for a Wife 2"-R and "Love Poem for a Wife and Her Trees"-SS. In this context, one may be reminded of the fact (Chapter-two) that Ramanujan comes to live an essentially Lawrentian vision of the man-woman relationship, that pure relatedness between man and woman, each seeking fulfilment in the other. And we know that the image of woman becomes a complex and "whole" symbol, whole in the sense that a woman is whole as a man is whole, playing the changing roles to create the "trembling equilibrium", that "quick", that pure relatedness in every nimble moment of life. May be, this vision of the dear woman becoming mother, daughter, sexpot, sister and Indian village wife is alien to Lawrence, but not alien to a Hindu view of woman. And in a very subtle way, Ramanujan is also qualitatively different from Lawrence, i.e. if Lawrence lives the "dark" god, Ramanujan lives his Siva. Siva is more complete than the dark god, even Siva is the whole-ness, because Siva is the Complete Principle, being half-man "half-woman contained in a common body". Siva is His own complete self. But for man, as for Ramanujan, this completeness is to be realised only in a vanishing "dream", in a nimble moment, evanescent

instant. If Siva being "whole in the ambivalence", being complete in all self-contradictions, were not the vision of Ramanujan, how could Ramanujan live his whole being without living the oddities that are deeply buried in his being, and for that matter, buried in an ethos, as well as in life? To be a little clear, Ramanujan does not live the oddities themselves, he longs to live the pure state that is born out of a creative fusion of all contraries; of good and evil mingled completely; of odds and evens fused wholly. And this blissful state of creative fusion is revealed to men who are at an acme of life, this is revealed but in a sudden moment. This is to say again that the odds and the evens of life, more often than not, reveal their glaring differences to our consciousness, to our ordinary eyes even. And the artist whose life is all a struggle for wholeness, poses naturally to be ironical of the odd beats of life, of the oddities in an ethos, in a literary tradition, too. And here is an artist, A.K. Ramanujan, an unknown Indian, who has come out with his vision of the Self, in a way all his own, that comes resonant in his poetry. Another delicate meaning of life is also embodied in the symbol of Siva as Ramanujan comes to realise Him at different moments. If His complete principle as revealed in "Love Poem for a Wife 2" is Ramanujan's lived goal, His incomplete image as revealed to the artist in "Compensations"-R becomes the butt of the artist's irony. Therefore, irony, at least for Ramanujan, is not such a tool as ideal for an alien mind, estranged from his ethos, which Ramanujan is not. With our general view of how Ramanujan's irony is fundamental to his vision, we would attempt a detailed discussion on his attitude to the religious beliefs

of men, with sweeping reflections on his ironical view of the Hindu family traditions. Because the Hindu family traditions which are a way for Ramanujan to live his vision as well as a way to recognise the oddities inherent in such and other traditions have been discussed in Chapter One.

"Small-Scale Reflections on a Great House"-R is a representative poem of Ramanujan on his family themes as well as on the Hindu family traditions. A traditional Hindu family is a joint family with a complex network of relations. Ramanujan's ironic thrusts enliven each and every aspect of this "great house", and also brings out the essential qualities of its tradition. This tradition is great in naturalising the alien, but ironically it is also great in its own absurdities. Within this tradition also, as Ramanujan looks at it, the life shoots, grows and changes. And an example of the oddities of this great heritage is the history of the "little aunts" ("History"-R), which reveals in a tell-tale manner that human cruelty is buried deep in life, but it shows itself only in certain moments, "during a single conversation". Ramanujan's irony pierces his "petite little aunts" for their cruelty towards their own mother on her death bed. But why should the poet come ironically on his "great aunt"?

and the dark
stone face of my little aunt
acquired some expression
at last.

Mark the ironic shift in attributive epithets from "great aunt" to "little aunt". He could have sentimentalised at least the death of his poor aunt. One way of understanding Ramanujan here

is his vision is not tragic, but ironic; and the other way of our getting at his meaning is that sympathy and irony are both mixed and mingled. Thus, this is the vision that informs his "Obituary"-R, which is half understood by almost all the critics, to date Ramanujan's critical attitude to the Hindu rites, as detailed in "Obituary" at his father's funeral, has been taken so far as the artist's total expression of his disillusionment with this ethos. I feel like asking myself why Ramanujan can not simply say that he is disenchanted with this ethos; and why he is invoking the rituals in their particular nuances; why again he troubles himself with a search for "obituary lines" on the dead man, who is dead and gone. When his father is gone off the scene, for ever, left "one more annual ritual" behind: whether Ramanujan has accepted this ritual or not, is also another question raising in my mind. Answer to all this tangle of questions is simple, i.e. Ramanujan's ironic awareness of life is a way of living his vision. He does not discard the unhealthy growths in his ethos, by this it is not meant that he has not disregarded them. If he discards, his voice will be moralising, or akin to it, which Ramanujan, the artist, is certainly not doing. Our dwelling on the subject, a little more may be better revealing.

History

which usually
changes slowly,
changes sometimes
during a single conversation.

Ramanujan is certainly aware of the much-repeated, oft-quoted expression 'history repeats itself'. But he does not repeat this

meaning in his "History"-R. He means that history "changes" as memory "changes", as time "changes", as the self "changes". All changes. The change is noticeable over a period of time, or it may be revealed "during a single conversation". And in this change, there is a continuation of the old as well as a qualitative difference in our experience. This phenomenon of life is the creative evolution: it is true for Bergson, true for Ramanujan. But Ramanujan's vision is all his own, in the sense that irony percolates into the Bergsonian vision, which is undoubtedly Ramanujan's also (Chapter Two).

The point is why Ramanujan the artist does not simply state his hypothesis "history .. changes .. during a single conversation". The reason is that Ramanujan is not a historian: and that, art is not a biographical or autobiographical document, nor a philosophical statement. Art, all real art, one means, is a living, or if one prefers, an intelligent living, for the critic to come to his conclusion, if any. But it is the life for the artist to live it fully in order to realise his vision which he reveals in his art. This is the reason why the history of the "petite little aunts" is re-enacted in "History"-R: this is the reason why "Obituary" is sort of invocation of the rituals. Ramanujan the artist has lived them before coming to realise his vision. Therefore, all art has an unspoken demand on the readers that it be lived intelligently, before they hastily pass "a sentence" on it. And it is the reason why Ramanujan's art has not been understood fully, so far.

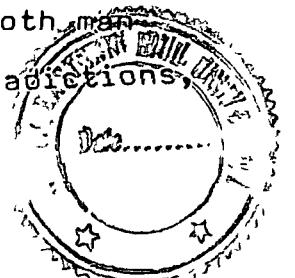
Within this perspective of Ramanujan's art, his ironic attitude to life, to ethos, to tradition, has its real value; within this perspective, his comic irony to understand the

absurdities of life needs to be valued. The comic absurdity of life is found in a wonderful, lively manner in three great "Love Poems for a Wife.." of Ramanujan. In "Love Poem for a Wife 1"-R, Ramanujan suggests two ironical solutions to the basic problem of alienation between man and woman, which read:

Probably
only the Ezyptians had it right:
their kings had sisters for queens
to continue the incests
of childhood into marriage.
Or we should do as well-meaning
hindus did,
betroth us before birth,
forestalling separate horoscopes
and mothers' first periods,
and wed us in the oral cradle
and carry marriage back into
the namelessness of childhoods.

This problem of man-woman alienation, as resolved in an ambivalent wholeness in "Love Poem for a Wife 2"-R, and this resolution being realised as the ultimate vision of life, which is in a way, all Ramanujan's own, in "Love Poem for a Wife and Her Trees"-SS, neatly describe Ramanujan's growth of the vision of the self. But with this growth, this lived vision, Ramanujan has all along brought his irony to play upon, to percolate into, to pervade this vision. Ramanujan thus brings within his irony both man and woman, himself and herself in their creative contradictions,

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in their creative adaptations to their roles in reciprocal changeability.

Ramanujan has his comic expenses at himself in many of his poems. Because he has to keep his self open, alive and changing, otherwise he may reduce his vision to a state of sentimentality. In "Highway Stripper"-SS, it is seen how his ironic thrusts on a stripper on the highway, change their direction and point at the observer-persona himself, Again, a moment of the self-exploration makes the irony more piercing:

was it me

moulting, shedding

vestiges,

old investments,

rushing forever

towards a perfect

coupling

with naked nothing

in a world

without places?

In the "Second Sight"-SS, this self-pointed irony rather reveals its comic element. When asked by a westerner of the Hindoos' "second sight", the Hindoo persona gropes ironically for his ordinary sight. The image of a "nightblind son-in-law" in this absurd situation is apt in making irony more effective: the persona gropes

like night blind

son-in-law

in every room for his wife,

and strike a light to regain

at once my first and only
sight.

A comic irony as found in "Second Sight" and a sardonic kind of irony as noticed in "Highway Stripper" both the kinds are present in some of Ramanujan's poems, particularly in "Alien"-SS. Here a dramatic imagination, and a metaphysical style of bringing disparate images together, shape Ramanujan's ironic threst:

While the mother-world turns somersaults,

. . .

as her body shapes under water

a fish with gills into a baby

with a face

getting ready to make faces.

But in a final ironic contrast, the baby would soon

fold and mutilate

a paper world in search of identity cards.

However, a dramatic irony is at its best in "Still Another View of Grace". The poem emerges out of a pattern created by a series of contrasts in terms of ideas as well as images, and a mode of all-pervasive irony holds such a pattern.

It is increasingly clear that with Ramanujan the artist, irony is not only a mode of looking at some incongruity between what is said and what is meant, but also it is a way of living one's life, one's being, one's vision, which is partly realised by us while reflecting on "Small-Scale Reflections on a Great House" in the present chapter with respect to Ramanujan's alienation from his ethos. To put it another way, the creative correspondence between irony and ethos in Ramanujan's art justified by many more

references to the images of Plotinis and Alexander, the processed clothes from Manchester and the Ganges water for the dying old men of the family.

The virtues of Indian ethos come to the fore and irony is a helpful tool: Madras,

1965, and rain.

Head clerks from city banks
curse, batter, elbow
... coolies in their scramble
for the single seat
in the seventh bus:
they tell each other how
Old King Harsha's men
beat soft gongs
to stand a crowd of ten
thousand monks
in a queue, to give them
and the single visiting Chinaman
a hundred pieces of gold,
a pearl, and a length of cloth;
so, miss another bus, the eight,
and began to walk, for King Harsha's
monks had nothing but their own two feet.

("Some Indian Uses of History
on A Rainy Day"-R)

Ramanujan's irony flays the head clerks from Madras city banks for their greed of money, for their talking wise when they themselves

are unruly and foolish. Ramanujan by means of ironic contrasts brings out the qualitative difference between the head clerks of Madras and the monks of Harsha, the King. But what escapes our notice is how Ramanujan's positive appreciation measures on the lines "Old King Harsha's men and a length of cloth", that is to say, Ramanujan's ironic eyes do not dismiss the merits of a tradition, rather they recognise them. Similarly, the millennia of Calicut muslim" with which the mummies are swathed becomes a sarcastic comment on the "fulbright Indians" with "tiepins of ivory, colour cameras for eyes", who are oblivious of their ethos but press their faces against "museum glasses" to have a look on these mummies. An ignorance of the solid traditional values, as found in a Professor of Sanskrit who goes to Berlin "on cultural exchange" but ironically takes the Nazi "swastika" for its Hindu counterpart, also invites Ramanujan's ironic weapon to a flourish.

From another perspective, a tradition of the poets who "sing of cities and temples" comes for criticism from the poet. When this poetic tradition, undesirable in its sterile growth, since "the old poets" till the new poets", is of course ironically commented upon; but the merits of the Sangam tradition (chapter-one) as well as of the Kannada classics, it is noticed, have profoundly shaped his creativity and given him an individual confidence of belonging to the tradition. In the poem "A River", the poet-persona infuses a fresh breath into the sterile tradition, by acknowledging into poetry the usual heppings in the wake of floods, that carry off "three village houses, one pregnant woman and a couple of cows named Gopi and Brinda, as usual",

Here also, Ramanujan comes to our view as an ironist-realist. Indeed, if "the ordinariness of most events"¹, is what moulds Ezckiel's art; to Ramanujan, the "usual" is also the wonderful, in the sense that the usual is often experienced but not often thought of, not often reflected upon. In "Army Ants"-R, his appreciation for the ants and their "aristocratic tastes" and their sacrifices, however small, that we usually do not see becomes an ironic turn-down at us. The poet grieves that unlike the slaves and enemies who are gone "cemented" on the "Great China Wall", the little ants are but "without legends", though they, "living", "young" and old alike, go into the making of "the brick and the mortar of this home". Mark the ironic contrast:

And the work,

as they say, is the workman at last.

Thus, the half-forgotten realities of life go into producing an ironic awareness in Ramanujan, which affirms his sense of doing merit to the deserving: whatever it may be, the ants or the ethos; the mangy old bitch with a life-affirming side to her or a rickshaw puller whose "hands are literate" and whose chest is broad for taking other women. It is Amanuddin who in a comparative study states: "Ramanujan explores the ordinary and common place with their subtle meanings. He is interested in the poetic treatment of passionate desires, but this he does usually with the cold detachment of an intellectual"². However, this cold detachment of an intellectual when flavoured with irony, which is a usual process with Ramanujan, does not remain 'cold' but turns to taste.

Around Ramanujan's "Hindoo" poems that is markedly seen is a network spread of confusions and criticism, curiosities and dissatisfactions. One of the reasons for such speculations is that he is a born Hindu and faith a "saivite", but he is critical of many tenets of the Hindu belief-systems. Another reason might be his ambivalence towards the Hindu gods.

While referring to Ramanujan's Hindu faith, H.M. Williams is aware of his deep sense of guilt pervading "Still Another View of Grace", but to the critic again, Ramanujan appears as the most "intriguing"³ of the Indo-Anglian poets. Whereas, to M.K. Naik's mind, Ramanujan's articulation of the Hindu ethos has so far produced the "poetry of periphery and not exactly the centre of the Hindu experience"⁴. But William Walsh sees that Ramanujan is "deeply possessed of ... the Indian ethos and psyche in its pure Hindu form"⁵. Walsh's criticism is in part correct and in part superficial. Whereas, Naik's critical view is seized with an obsessive quality, because he wants more of the Hindu in Ramanujan than that what the poet has to offer. To my mind, it consistently appears that for Ramanujan to be a "pure" Hindu is not to be an essential man, because Ramanujan values the essential man in him more than "the Hindu in him. As an artist he is on the side of life, first and foremost, a life which is stripped of all garbs and not on the side of life which conforms to some dogmas. When his heart despairs, he can wear no mask to hide his feelings. His inordinate passion for the truth in life necessitates his remaining at the centre of experience, the experience of a human being, not of a religious man.

Ramanujan's encounter with "the prehistoric yellow of a goat" on the face of a little boy in his innocent childhood, reveals the essential man in him. The childhood supposed to be an epitome of innocence and goodness, incongruously, however, houses the "prehistoric" desire of sex, which is more ancient than the ancient Gita, more elemental than the passion for knowledge. Even an awareness of such incongruities finds expression in "The Hindoo: the Only Risk" (Chapter-One). The poet here also brings us home to a fact that the man within "the Hindoo" is a normal, spontaneous self who is burdened with religious preachings. But to be the Hindoo which all Hindu scriptures expect man to conform to, is for Ramanujan, to become untrue to his essential self. This essential self and Ramanujan's vision of it have been probed into at length in Chapter Two. The essential self shoots, grows and changes. It is in its creative evolution, which means ceaseless creation as well as continuous change. While it evolves and changes, it creatively adapts to the outward forces acting on it and shaping it. Therefore, to realize the essential self, one has to open oneself out to the wider world, to the ambient universe. Every moment of this circumambient universe has a subtle, inventive, creative bearing on the essential self. The question, therefore, whether Ramanujan is "a" hindu or "the hindu, is answered, here. Because to be "the hindu is not to be one's essential self; "the"hindu is like a closed house, and a closed house is like an island, isolated from all contacts which give life and meaning to its existence.

We may now consider Desai's standpoint that represents Ramanujan as an atheistic existentialist. Ramanujan's critical view of the Hindu ethos and particularly his ironic attitude

to the Lord Murugan, as the critic finds, are the firm signs of the artist, which prove him to be an existentialist. For Desai, Ramanujan has "no love" "no faith", no bhakti"⁶ to express in his Murugan poems. The critic casts the "Prayers to Lord Murugan" in the shadow of an "existentialist angst", and characterises the artists' "world-view" as "atheistic existentialism without Sartre's ethical passion"⁷. Our answer to Desai will be given in two parts: first, Ramanujan is an artist of ambivalent wholeness. Secondly, his art does not conform to Sartre's "Ontology". Desai happens to find only "irony" and "existential angst" in Ramanujan, while he discusses the artist's "Prayers to Lord Murugan", "A Lapse of Memory", "On Memory" and other poems of no importance to reflect his views. There is irony in the Murugan poems, one agrees, but irony is not a mere tool to cut Ramanujan's umbilical cord that connects him with his ethos, his ancestors (Chapter One) and with his Murugan, the lord, who is the ancestral Dravidian god, with six faces and twelve hands, who is the god of love, fertility, youth, joy, war and dance. What Dionysus symbolises for the ancient Greek as well as the modern artists of the western civilisation to-day, Murugan symbolises that for the Dravidians and more so for Ramanujan, a modernist. But there is a difference between the great moderns and Ramanujan, that is, Ramanujan while seeking the essential man in his prayers to the lord, becomes ironical of Him.

Lord of green
growing things, give us
a hand
in our fight

with the furit fly,

. . .

Lord of the sixth sense,
give us back
our five senses.

Deliver us () presence
from proxies
and absences
from sanskrit and the mythologies
of night and several
round table mornings
of London and return
the future to what
it was. (italics mine).

In the first two quotations from "Prayers to Lord Murugan" the signs of "existential angst" are apparent. But what my italics reveal is prayer mixed with irony. Ramanujan also in his interview to Rama Jha has confessed that he has learned this technique of mixing irony with prayer from his Kannad mystics. But the question arises, where is Ramanujan's essential man? Is he in the history which is shaped by "the several round table mornings of London"? Is he in the "sanskrit and the mythologies" as we, modern Indians know today, though we hardly understand them? Ramanujan's essential man of "five senses" belongs to a time of the "sanskrit and the mythologies of night", a time when man was all himself. And this is the reason why Ramanujan prays to God to "return the future to what it was". Ramanujan does never ask of the "Lord of solutions" for ready made, handy solutions

to man facing the problems of existence, today in our modern time. He only asks: "Lord of solutions,/teach us to dissolve and not to drown"; "give us birth" to live the life, and no salvation.

Lord of answers
cure us at once
of prayers.

The artist not only asks, here, for the strength and the hand in self-responsibility, but also asks for the power that would make him himself. A close look on the above mentioned lines would reveal another contour of the poet's mind. Why can not he pray: God, grant us at once our "prayers"? or "cure" us at once of diseases? Why such a prayer: "cure us at once of prayers"? Does it reveal only an ironic mind of the artist? But to me, it appears that Ramanujan suggests or means, prayer is a sort of or, a state of want like disease. Because so long as man is not whole, he offers prayers to be whole. Thus here is an artist who wants to be himself as God is Himself. Can one now say Ramanujan has "love", "faith", "bhakti" and all? As things are in the "Prayers to Lord Murugan", there is no definite answer to such a query. For this, we are to go to Ramanujan's other sources. The poem "Difference"-SS throws light on the question awaiting an answer:

But today, out of the blue,
when Vishnu
came to mind, the Dark One you know
...
and as I stare at this left toe and toenail
weighing on my hand, I can tell perhaps

the height
of this image as elephant trainers can
the height and gender of a runaway
elephant
by the size of his footprint in wet grass,
. . . ("The Difference"-SS)

The analogy between the clay-toy maker (poet-persona) and the elephant trainers can only mean at its simplest a familiarity with the objects or professions of their love. Or else, why should Vishnu come to the poet-persona's thought? And if Ramanujan has no love, no bhakti, how could he "tell the height of this image"? Because, his knowledge of the god's "height" presupposes his love; love is a state of intimacy. If he could guess the god's height, in a sense, is proud of such knowledge as the elephant trainers are, he soon despairs at his own inability to know other things. The self-pity of the persona is fully exposed, and, on the other hand, humility is what intersperses the lines: "but I know I've no way at all of telling/the look,/ if any, on his face, or of catching/the rumoured beat of his extraordinary heart".

Humility characterises all the prayers in "Prayers to Lord Murugan". If prayers are shadowed by irony, they are not totally exterminated by it. By combining prayer with irony, as Ramanujan admits, he could be best related to his Kannada saints of the medieval period. If there is no bhakti in Ramanujan, there arises no need for him to call on the Lord Murugan, no need for him to pray on his son's "hour of change" ("Moulting'-SS): no need for

him to offer prayers to the God Incarnate in "Zoo Gardens Revisited".SS) so that the zoo animals are saved within "the zoo garden ark of (his) belly". However, this humility loses itself into irony, while Ramanujan's awareness of the predicament of man turns bitter. The memory of the World Wars and the vicious atmosphere they created for us shapes his irony in "Compensation"-R. Both the modern man and the Hindu god of war, Siva are ironically observed in the poem.

. . . the three eyed
whirlwind of arms, dancing on
a single leg though he can dance
on many, kind returning god
of Indian deluges,
dying from time to time
of sheer fatigue, leaving
the technicalities of war,
famine, riot and the rest
to us, two-handed two-legged normal us,
in a periodic transfer of powers.

"The technicalities of war" and other devastations, of which the modern man is capable, surpass the war-god, in a far greater destructibility. But there is a qualitative difference between man and god, and their mastery of the destructive crafts. Siva, in his taandav, the war-dance on the occasion of a sad demise of Parvati, his consort, produced "war, famine, riot and the rest", beheaded Daksha Prajapati, his own father-in-law and brought the entire creation into a turmoil of destruction. Supplicated by the gods and their worship and sacrifices, Siva came to his normal sense

and restored the world as well as a head to Daksha (Chapter One). That is why, the poet has an appreciation, for the god, that sneaks in the line" ... though he can dance on many, kind returning god of Indian deluges ...". But the modern man is only destructive; though he has horrible powers, he has no "miracle of grace" to make amends. The title of the poem, "Compensations", has its ironical import that informs the entire body of the poem. We may recall how Ramanujan realises his wholeness in a dream vision, realises his Siva, the symbol of complete principle (Chapter One and Two). Then, how could Siva be, at one time, a god of ruins and at another, the god of completeness? Is Ramanujan confusing the Hindu god or confusing himself? Nevertheless, Ramanujan confuses neither. He remains true to his essential self as Siva remains true to His. In the flux of life, Self takes many roles, many forms; undergoes many changes and many evolutions. If this is what Ramanujan does not say, he must not have thought of or, shaped his art the way that could be imaginable in terms of the Bergsonian paradigm. And furthermore, he must not have written a poem, "Love Poem for a Wife and Her Trees", which points to his opening out to the image of woman not only as the woman, but also as mother, sister, daughter and seductress at different creative moments of the life, at ambivalently whole moments of the self. Therefore, ambivalence is all that describes Ramanujan's attitude to the life, to the Hindu gods, to himself. Ambivalence, of course, is a state of contradictions for ordinary humans like us; but for Ramanujan, it is a state of creative fusion of the contraries, of the odd and the even, of the good and the evil. And this fusion, the state of wholeness is not to be eternally

caught, nor can it be fossilized like a museum piece for everybody's pass-time. All it happens is in the flux of life. All that is meant is that Ramanujan is an artist of ambivalent wholeness. His god is also "whole in the ambivalence, balancing stillness in the middle of a duel to make it dance!"

From this observation, we now come to the other area of our investigation, i.e. whether Ramanujan's art fits into Sartre's existentialist Ontology. At times, it appears that Ramanujan resembles an existentialist, but the resemblance is on the surface; while in essence, the existentialism and Ramanujan's art are apart from each other. That is why, our purpose is to focus this essential difference, for, we are concerned with Ramanujan's essential man, or for that matter, with his essential vision. Speaking in a very general manner, one could observe that Sartre's ontology spells out the dialectic relation between the essential realms of being, the pour-soi and the en-soi. In Sartre's doctrine, the "pour-soi" is "consciousness" in "the most simple sense"⁸, and this "pour-soi" is in a state of perpetual flight. To Sartre, the flight of consciousness is a state born out of fear, the fear of being swallowed up by the "en-soi", because the "en-soi" is the very "in-ness" of our being, which by its nature has a dark tendency to absorb all conscious "pour-soi". Therefore, anguish⁹ is born of our being. For Ramanujan as for Bergson, consciousness is in a state of flux; whereas, for Sartre, it is in a state of flight. The apparently identical concepts are different in essence. While fear and anguish characterise Sartre's ontology, inventive adaptation and intelligent co-operation define Ramanujan's evolution of the self. According to Sartre, "... anguish is the mode

of being of freedom as consciousness of beings it is in anguish that freedom is in its being in question for itself"¹⁰. And the idea of Sartre's "nothingness" has no correspondence with any of Ramanujan's vitalist ideas. Nothingness or annihilation, as Sartre means, is not only immanent in "Being"¹¹ but also its very condition. Whereas, for Ramanujan, the creative evolution of the self means change, growth and maturity. It is apparent from our small-scale observations on a great subject like Sartrean Ontology that the oft-made charge of nihilism and defeatism against existentialism has a validity, which can not be levelled against Ramanujan's vision of the essential man. Therefore, Desai's critical stance on Ramanujan's world view is wrong. Again, for Sartre, morality is a question of choice, because man is free to choose and free to act. But his man being "condemned to be free" is also a basic premise in Sartre's ethical and moral framework, while, Ramanujan's essential man lives from moment to moment, appropriating the moral or ethical values, which are, of course, naturally lived. Thus, to define Ramanujan's art by the common parameters of morality or atheism or theism is to wrong his idea of ambivalent wholeness. But interestingly enough, Desai while framing the vignette of Ramanujan in an existential frame work, fails to see "Anxiety"-S which may correspond to the difference between existential anguish and fear: "anxiety can find no metaphor to end it". But it is wrong to generalise the vision of an artist, by drawing on his poems or examples which are few and which really do not shape his vision.

Moreover, why talk of Ramanujan's irony in relation to his ethos, his Hindu beliefs only? Ramanujan has poems which reveal

his ironic attitude to the Jaina, Buddhist and Christian ways of life, thought and philosophy.

In the poem, "Pleasure"-SS, a naked Jaina monk, a lifelong celibate in accordance with the golden precepts of Jainism, is dissected by Ramanujan's typical methods of an ironic open operation. The surgery brings to light the monk's "several mouths

thirsting for breast

buttocks, smells of fingers

long hair, short hair."

Ramanujan's ironic device is most devastating here. Even the sacred, cool Ganges turns "sensual" on him, smearing" his own private untouchable Jaina body". But in an ironic anticlimax with the monk's masochistic climb onto an ant-hill, it is observed how the ants tattoo him and reach his body "once naked, once even intangible". Ramanujan's lampoon at the Jaina monk also indirectly affirms his faith in the body, which is aligned to his vital vision of the self. Further, a Buddhist, Chicago Zen in "Chicago Zen"-SS is also brought into the satiric gallows but from a different angle. The poet-persona here as nowhere else, comes as an authoric interpolator: "watch your step, watch it, I say". The sarcasm is built out of juxtaposing the images of diverse values and meanings. One set of the prehistoric images - a frothing Himalayan river, crawling lake Michigan, a lobster louse, the Indies antipodes, the sea of Tranquility (on the moon) are yoked with another set of modern images - traffic light on 57th and Dorchester, hashish, moonshot, blue guitar, passport etc. The poet further notes in order to mark the Buddhist conscious how the "country", that is, the country of all Buddhists' quest, salvation, is not reached by

any modern enlightened ways. The Zen Buddhist is surely oblivious of the enlightenment which comes by way of meditation and intuition rather than by way of the study of the scriptures or the indulgence in all modern sophistications that America could easily afford. That is why in the fourth section of the poem, the poet comes up to teach one saner thing to the monk who is "always so perfectly sane": and watch

for the last

step that's never there.

The implication ironically is towards the step that is "ever" there but "never" seen. What is needed to see the "last step" above the "flight of stairs" is the intuitive eye and not the rolling eyes on the head to "watch" with. Consciousness in a flux does never certify a sudden dislocation of the first from the last. To quote Bergson, "this amounts to saying that there is no essential difference between passing from one state to another and persisting in the same state. If the state which 'remains the same' is more varied than we think, on the other hand the passing from one state to another resembles, more than we imagine, a single state being prolonged; the transition is continuous. But just because we close our eyes to the unceasing variation of every psychic state, we are obliged, when the change has become considerable as to force itself on our attention, and to speak as if a new state were placed alongside the previous one"¹².

In another poem, "Waterfalls in a Bank"-SS, Ramanujan's sardonic tone turns out to be one of sharper, bitter disgust. His strong attack on "a paralytic saddhu", the tapdancer of St.Vitus',

is intended to bring out the incongruity between the saddhu's sensual joy from passing urine at "red" oleander flowers and his professed way of life.

By now, it is evidently clear why Ramanujan satirises the monks and their professed tenets while they keep repressed the normal, spontaneous being within. Joy and shock visit the monks or saddhus, because all this is due to the magic of a moment and more so, because the life is in a flux. And Ramanujan's faith in the body is re-affirmed by his typical way of ironic indirections - positive thoughts are arrived at by negative means, by his sarcasms thrown at the so-called pure and sacred minds.

Again in "Death and the Good Citizen"-SS the Hindoo way as well as the Christian way of life are brought within Ramanujan's all pervasive ironic fold. If the Hindoo ethos around the dying is magnificantly evoked with subtle ironic nuances, Ramanujan's ironic digs at the Christian way of looking at the dead can also be counted from the repeated emphases on "you" in the following stanza:

Good animal yet perfect
citizen, you, you are
biodegradable, you do
return to nature: you will
your body to the nearest
hospital, changing death into small
changes and spare parts;

Ramanujan's rather serious scepticism of the Hindoo outlooks is revealed in "Questions"-SS. The epigraph of the poem is from "Mundaka Upanishad", which would in paraphrase read -

The body, the world is the selfsame tree;
the jivatman and Atman like two
friendly birds live in the same tree, while
the material self eats the fruit of
the tree, thereby, being entangled in
the worldly life, the Supreme Self (Atman)
sits unattached to worldliness, blissfully
indifferent to all worldly activities¹³.

This Upanishadic wisdom, as Ramanujan perceives, seems failing to answer the Down's syndrome, that is a genetic defect in the Mongoloids. Even this wise philosophy fails to explain some sad mysteries like "dead twin's cord of birth noosed around his brother's neck" or "a favourite dog eating puppies" in the garden. In his ingenious way, Ramanujan also aims his ironic flourishes at Brahman Himself who sits unattached, watching only the sad lot of man right from the every birth to his death. Perhaps, the poet could also include Brahman into the category of all the watchers in "Watchers"-SS, who are termed as "unwitting witnesses, impotence their supreme virtue". He expresses his disillusionment with the religious seers, the political watchers, the philosophers, categorised as the impotent watchers who do not feel the pang or pain in others, because they are "cool" like the fire in a mirror. But this disillusionment gets compensated with some real satisfaction in "a dog who groaned human in his sleep and barked at spiders". As we know, Ramanujan has his characteristic way of appreciation for a prerational, elemental life-form, which the dog-image here implies, in contrast to the cool watching, wise-looking philosophers.

But then Ramanujan's ironic sense is resilient, it returns, it strikes. The myth of Kama, the love-god with five impregnable sensual shafts, that occurs in "One, Two May be Three, Arguments Against Suicide"-R, comes within an ironic exposure. Kama, an interesting mythical figure, wielding his floral arrows is at the heart of Kamasutra of Vatsyayana¹⁴. But my interest in the poem is to study Ramanujan's irony in special.

Desire, bodiless, is endless
Remember what the wise callous hindus
said when the love-god burned: keep your cool,
make for love's sake no noble gesture.

Here, the poet addresses to the reader, or imagined audience to "remember" what a moral lesson, the episode of Kama as burnt to ash, imparts. To "remember" is, ironically meant, not to follow the wise sayings of the "callous hindus". The poet's sympathy either with the hindu philosophers or the reader is absent. This is a case of overt irony.

All symbol, no limbs, a nobody all soul,
O Kama, only you can have no use
for the Kamasutra
Ashes have no posture.

In these lines, there is sympathy with Kama, who is the poet's audience here. Irony through the negations becomes the way of empathy: that is typically Ramanujan's mode of ironic viewing of something. And this is here a case of veiled irony.

These two types of irony enforce the plea to making "noble gesture" for love's sake, for body's sake. The other subtle meaning is that when there was Siva, there was Kama, too; when

there is soul, there is body, too. That why, the two types of irony are moulded by Ramanujan into a self-sustaining mechanism which affirms a defense for the body-life principle. As the obverse (overt) irony turns outward like a centrifugal force, in a manner of true assessment of the "wise callous hindus": the inverse(veiled) irony turns inward like a centripetal force, in a manner of self-knowledge, but both being simultaneous to balance the momentum of Ramanujan's "arguments against suicide". Technically, Ramanujan as an ironist is a strategist, and as a visionary, his irony has all pervasiveness.

In an important respect, Ramanujan has a distinct way from the great moderns, i.e. in his ironic treatment of the gods, who have perhaps a better time with the great moderns. But to Ramanujan, as human beings are, so are gods, none immune to criticism. Of course, Ramanujan's ironic spear is hurled at his gods, only in moments of his vision of their momentaneous greatnesses, or their odd dispositions that exhibit only at certain pressing turns of history.

But in the poems of socio-political import Ramanujan's irony is no longer marked by its subtlety, it loses itself into sarcasm. "An Image for Politics" and "Lac into Seal" are two poems that indicate Ramanujan's characteristic attitude to politics and the politicians in general, Significantly, the poet's use of some specific verb-patterns in relation to the politicians beings out the meaning he tries to impart-"gasped", "devouring", "struggle", "rent" "rots": and his ironic implication is resonant in his use of "lived", and "pluck and serve". The verbs are so designed as

to prove that a man is best known by his action. And the attributes or analogies like "mackerel", "worms", "cannibal", "giants", "wrestlers on a cliff", "triumvirate" are a catalogue, indeed in order to induce irritations and breathless gasps in the readers, about the politicians who by their very nature are capable of inflicting ills on us, the way the worms and the like do. As a poem, "Lac into Seal" is livelier with such images as supported by their verbs, and there is enough breath for the readers' imagination to share the poet's experience of the politicians. The title is metaphorically meaningful and ironically it reflects on the politicians' dream for the "seals of state and of brass". "A Certain Democrat" projects a democrat who is a study in self-contradictions and more, while he feels ashamed of his cousin's beastly "living with a fourth in exclusive sin", his own nature cries for "sin", for "violation". The poem reflects that, "the mere thought of white enamelled eyeballs on the faces of lean black men" rushes all his "gall" and blood. Heterosexuality is all that a liberal democrat practises though he professes of all morals. In "Dancers in a Hospital"-SS, the familiar sarcastic voice of Ramanujan, the ironist is heard also:

wet/newspapers with a seepage of back page
news in international latrines
with Reagon or Mao
under our feet.

Ramanujan seems to be intent on bringing the image of "watchers" within his ironic bulldozing. He is severely critical of the social and political scientists, the watchers who fail to

connect "beasts with monks", and "slave economies" with "the golden bough". Most probably, his criticism of these watchers has his private angle, that is, the critics of his art are still cool like the "fire in mirror", are still watching without being affected even slightly by anything he has meant so far. The poet is also sarcastic about the newspaper readers who grow a habit of unconcern toward the events of "daily" miseries and ravages as reflected in his "One Reads"-S. He satirises modern man's concept of time in "On a Delhi Sundial"; he is sensitively aware of some deadness and stolidity that grow into habit with the frequenters of museums as in "Time to Stop"; he has also dramatically highlighted his ironic perception of time that is mechanically accepted and of time that is naturally lived in "Time and Time Again". Here, the tower-clock, the image of our mechanical time is seen as knocked out by a "precise act" of lightning, a symbol of the real time, the flux.

Behind Ramanujan's characteristic ironical attitude to a street dog or a rickshaw puller: to the striders or the army ants, there is an elusive spirit in him, which prompts the poet to merit the subject on its own strength. Thus, the rickshaw puller in "Rickshaw Wallah" is not a familiar figure to be studied in terms of our pity or his poverty. His "arms and legs were wholly literate", he needs no "compassion to redeem the damned"¹⁵. Similarly, "Epitaph on a Street Dog" evidences the strength of a bitch:

our bitch had all her mangy suitors

. . .

Peacocks may have eyes in their tails and crests

But she had in a row four pairs of breast.

The poet here is of course, alive to a stark and cold reality that characterises the bitch's existence, but nevertheless, he is more alive to her strength, hence his irony is mingled in a harsh reality to mould it into a softer vein.

Last but not the least, one sustained characteristic of Ramanujan's ironic flourishes is to re-affirm his faith and joy in living the life, in living the body. His ironic digs at an astronomer in "Astronomer"-SS are an indirect way to be alive in the body. Because, his essential man is one of blood and flesh. And this might be the reason why the persona in "A Hindu to His Body" aspires to rise up like sap in a tree after his death, to "feel the weight of honey-hives". But this is one reason in "Conventions of Despair"-S why he utters:

It's not obsolete yet to live
in this many-lived lair
of fears, this flesh.

And this is the reason when he says in "One, Two, Maybe Three Arguments Against Suicide".

All symbol, no limbs, a nobody all soul,
O Kama, only you can have no use
for the Kamasutra.

Ashes have no posture.

In this chapter, how Ramanujan's irony is multifaceted and how it is all pervasive are discussed. But significantly enough it is found that his irony intersperses his essential vision of the self. In this context, Ramanujan's individuality is again asserted. Again, that irony is not merely a mode ideal for an

alienated mind is looked into, in relation to Ramanujan's belonging to his ethos, and it is found that his ironic mode is in conformity with his vision of ambivalent wholeness. Moreover, the viewpoint that Ramanujan's world-view is existentialistic is examined and seen to be untenable. It is established further that Ramanujan's all pervasive irony wields a positive force on the standpoint that the artist is on the side of life, and that his faith and joy in the body is in tune with his vision of the essential man.

Endnotes:

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2. Syed Amanuddin, "Morales and Ramanujan: Major Indo-English Poets", World Poetry in English: Essays and Interviews, Delhi: Sterling Publ. 1981, pp. 119-26.
3. H.P. Williams, Indo-Anglian Literature 1800-1970 A Survey, Bombay, Orient Longman, 1977, p.
4. P.K. Naik, Dimensions of Indian English Literature, Delhi: Sterling Publ. 1984, p.22.
5. William Walsh, "Small Observations on a Large Subject", Aspects of Indian Writing in English 1979, p. 22.
6. S.K. Desai, "Fixing Memory and Desire: Small Scale Reflections on the Poetry of A.K. Ramanujan", Perspectives on Indian Poetry in English, P.K. Naik Delhi: Abhinav Publ. 1984, p.120.
7. ibid p.120
8. Maurice Natanson, A Critique of Jean Paul Sartre's Ontology, The Hague, 1973, p.55.

9. *ibid* p. 30
10. *ibid* p. 28
11. *ibid* p. 21, 23, 26-27
12. Henri Bergson, Creative Evolution, 1911, p.4-5 & 393.
13. A.C.B. Prabhu-dananda, Bhagavad Gita As It Is, New York, 1972, p. 28-9.
14. For the myth of Kama, see E.M. Lall, The Poetry of Encounter, 1983, p. 59.
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CHAPTER-FOUR

CONCLUSION

Once many a constraint afflicted Indo-Anglian poetry, many eyes even questioned its authenticity on the Indian soil. Of course, by the time of Indian national independence, the Indo-Anglian novelists were on a firm footstone, but the poets had to suffer many ills inflicted by the linguistic chauvinists during the post-independence years, for about a decade. In defense¹ of Indo-Anglian poetry, much has been said and written since then. Today we witness, indeed, a changed scenario of the poetry. Poets like Ezekiel, Mahapatra, Daruwalla, Kamala Das, Shiv. Kumar, Mehrotra, Kolatkar and not the least Ramanujan have enriched the Indo-Anglian tradition of poetry and have brought much respectability to their craft in the eyes of the writers at home as well as abroad. But then Harold Bloom's book The Anxiety of Influence (1973) with its broad spectrum seems to enclose many Indian poets. However, Ramanujan, as he is deep-rooted in his ethos and tradition, is immune to Bloom's poetic influence and its attendant anxiety. He like his Tamil as well as Kannada classics such as Kapilar, Aivuyar, Chempulappayaninar, Milaipperunkantan, Basaveswar and Basavanna and others made varied uses of tradition and of its given forms, images and symbols. Even from within his strong consciousness of the classics and the great moderns, his individual voice emanates unruffled. In this context, Ramanujan has dexterously used his ironic devices. Further, his remembered familial closeness and childhood memories constitute his interior landscape and imbue into his mind creative defenses against all sorts of anxiety. Therefore, Ramanujan's authentic voice may be probed in the poem, "Entries of a Catalogue of fears"-R:

Sixty and one glass eye,
even I talk now and then of God,
find reasons to be fair
everywhere
to the even and to the odd,
see Karma
in the fall of a tubercular sparrow,
in the newspaper deaths in Burma
• • •
actually see the One in the Many,
losing a life time of double vision
with one small adjustment
of glasses.

In the stanza cited above, two important tenets of the Hindu philosophy of life, come to one's notice: one is about Karma-yoga, the philosophy of Action and the other about Brahman, the One and Only Principle within all, the Cause of Cosmic life. These two tenets are creatively integrated into the body of the stanza mentioned above. The first doctrine, Karma relates to man, beast and practically all living forms of life, who take re-births in the material world according to their residual Karmas² of the past life. While the second tenet pertains to God, the One All-pervading Principle who is within all forms of life but beyond all forms of their worldly attachments³.

Evidently, the philosophical ideas, as handed down from the Vedic ages through the Gita to our own, do not seem by themselves to denote Ramanujan's authenticity. His authenticity lies in what he has done to these ideas with the available tools

of art i.e. language, idiom and style while fusing all the elements into an integrative form. Moreover, in his characteristic manner, he has invested irony to the Hindu tenets in order to re-assert his own vision of life. Through the self-pointed ironies, the persona affirms not "the One in the Many", but "a life time of double vision", which would closely correspond to his ambivalent wholeness. One subtle distinction between Ramanujan and his ancients like Basavanna, Makkiranar and such like is that for all their un-conventional postures, ironic flourishes at the traditional gods, the ancients look all the more saintly and faithful, whereas Ramanujan, out of his creative engagement with irony and age-old wisdom, emerges as a man. Ramanujan the artist is a man but with a difference, who is personally awakened to "the even and to the odd" within himself, within the gods and within the scriptural wisdoms. Thus when the artist has invested irony in the "Hindoo" poems or the Purugan prayers, he does not indicate his lost faith, nor ever does he imagine of his outright dismissal of the Hindu belief-systems and their philosophical canons. Because irony is not only a mode of aesthetic detachment, but also a vital way of defining his vision. One hastens to add that it is not merely a way of definition, but importantly, the way of his living the life, the self and its vision. It has been already observed that Ramanujan's vision is the vision of ambivalent wholeness which accommodates life's evens and odds within its completeness. For most of us, a state of ambivalence is a state of confusion, but for a few as creative and androgynous as gods, ambivalence is a state of fulness, of fruitful completeness.

For Ramanujan it is a desirable state, and at a rare moment of life, he reaches this:

whole in the ambivalence
of being half woman half-
man contained in a common
body,
androgynous as a god
balancing stillness in the middle
of a duel to make it dance.

We are now in a position to say that it is this attitude of Ramanujan's that substantiates his authenticity.

When an artist is authentic in his ideas, he naturally presents them authentically. Ramanujan's "oblique, elliptical style"⁴ has been discerningly considered by R. Parthasarathy. The critic notes "something clinical", "a cold, glass-like quality" in the poet's use of language. Keki Daruwalla also finds his language "rapier-sharp" and his poetry "both delicate and intricate as the spiral line of a shell"⁵. Further, Parthasarathy suggests that English being a foreign language, the words in Ramanujan; are invariably used inconspicuously, "rarely if ever reverberantly". But to my mind, the real question is not the rarity of reverberant words being consequent upon the artist's consciousness of an alien language (Chapter One), but the rarity of occasions which describe the outlines of his style. In the stanza above citing "whole in the ambivalence ...", one is strongly aware of Ramanujan's conspicuous, resonant style. It seems that one subtle area of his style has been ignored by the critics. Broadly speaking, whenever Ramanujan adopts an oblique style, his language turns

opaque: the words either blur in the exact contour of meanings or gain in the gloss of reverberations. And Ramanujan writes often than not, in a blended style, which can also be observed in "the Striders". Here the poetic style moves from the highly objective to one of symbolist confusion. It may be noted that such a change is in perfect tune with the poet's "drowning eye-deep" into his "tiny" sky of identity, into a search that attempts at self-knowledge. Hence the inconspicuous style gets immersed into a blurring of words and their objective nuances. Even one can notice how Ramanujan's style gets markedly opaque in " $KMnO_4$ in Grandfather's shaving Glass", also. A cold glass-like quality of $KMnO_4$ slowly unravels into a "looser vein", then into "pallor", and finally with another drop, the transparent water turns "winedark". What one has to mark sensitively is how Ramanujan's style carries the slow absorption of experiences into life. And such absorption can not be presented in exact words or in a studied language. Thus, the fusion of the living, human terms with the material elements produces something enrichingly strange. This fusion verily informs "Small Scale Reflections on a Great House", and again "No Man is an Island", "Anxiety", "Sometimes" "Chess under-Trees"; "Images", "Epitaph on a Street Dog" and "Towards Simplicity". Another reason for grouping them together is their haiku-like forms which mix the Imagists' caméo-like precision with the Symbolists' fusion of ideas. A modernist, Ramanujan uses this blended style with finesse. This becomes more resonant in Ramanujan's allusions to the myths and legends of India. Its immediate implications, one can find in "Love Poem for Wife 2", "Compensations", "No Amnesiac King", "Zoo Gardens Revisited", the Purugan poems, "the Hindoo: he does not Hurt a

Fly or a Spider together" and others. In the "Love Poem for a Wife", Ramanujan's allusion to "androgynous god" apart, the expression "of a duel to make it dance" is also reverberant of Siva's "Tandav" dance. Therefore, two mythical allusions are remarkably interwoven into one whole. One may recall how Ramanujan observes ironically Siva's "Tandav" in "Compensations". But in "Love poem" now the artist relishes the creative aspect of "Tandav". The poet's sensibility is too complex to explain in terms of traditional parameters, because ambivalent wholeness could only measure this "intricate and delicate"⁶ sensibility.

If Ramanujan's allusions to myths and gods bring back for the readers the half-forgotten echoes from some far-off events, the images of his sensuous poems on the family have all the haunting presence of his life's immediate experience. " $KMnO_4 \dots$ ", a poem on a different tune, brings us home to the concept of Time as "real duration"⁷, to borrow Bergson's phrase. Because the impatience of waiting or the pleasure of watching an unravelling of $KMnO_4$ in the shaving glass coincides with each imperceptible "unit" of time, which the mechanists may deny but the creative souls can not do without. But another aspect of Time is revealed to us in many of Ramanujan's poems, where the poet is conscious of each moment. This consciousness of each moment also means the consciousness in a flow and not in terms of dislocated points. Now, one can consider the poem "Snakes"-S. Here the poet-persona on looking at the "yellow amber" of a museum bookstack (the immediate present) thinks of "snakes", mother, father (all of past experiences), and involuntarily imagines of sister's "gleaming" braids (quickly back through the

present) but delights in dreaming that "I can walk through the woods" (the immediate future). "Breaded Fish" enacts such a swing from the present consciousness of wifely love to the memory of a half-naked woman, breaded by the sands and back again to the present "heart beating in my mouth". "Of Mothers, among other things" is also similarly a dramatisation of a consciousness that passes from the present "smell upon the backbone tree" to the past of cradle and childhood, which is a realised and re-lived fact in the present itself. One can come up with a long list of poems to highlight such a technique employed by Ramanujan. Such a technique takes us along a dramatised consciousness and places us in the full stream of experience. This technique is used as the vehicle of communicating all the essentially modern sensibilities by the modern novelists like Joseph Conrad, James Joyce and Virginia Woolf; by the modern poets like Ezra Pound in his Chinese poems entitled Cathay (1915) and Lustra, and H.D. in his "Dread" and other poems of Sea Garden (1916). Walter Sutton has to say that there is also the strong "suggestion of a stream-of-consciousness technique in the poems of T.S. Eliot such as "The Love Song of J. Prufrok", "Gerontion", and The Waste Land," especially in the musings of the repressed Prufrok"⁸. Nevertheless, it is seen that Ramanujan has made variant uses of this technique in various poems. In this context, Ramanujan's three important Love Poems for "a Wife" as taken together give a better illustration of this technique which perfectly suits the poet's slow and steady growing vision of the wife as "the other". Not the least, "elements of Composition"-SS important from the standpoint

of Ramanujan's Bergsonian ideas, will exhibit the use of this technique in carrying the flow and continuity of change that underlies the basis of being, our reality, our consciousness. Moreover, a stream-of-consciousness technique is not unlikely a thing for Ramanujan who, Lawrence-like, is possessed of the passion for moments and who is also very much a Bergsonian in his ideas of the self.

Ramanujan's quest for a unity of being in love leads him to a self-exploration and which brings him a new way of looking at the man-woman relationship. Woman can play many roles of mother, daughter, sister and beloved, and man can play the roles to reciprocate their creative living from moment to moment. This exploration of the basic absurdity, the apartness of the lovers, and to his comic reconciliation to their unitariness of existence. But Ramanujan goes further than Lawrence and comes to theorise on the origin of the self the way Bergson does. In "Elements of Composition"-SS, the poet says how a person is compounded out of many elements and how the self changes to an unpredictable end of a new life, a new form which he explains with the help of a "caterpillar"-image. However, long before Ramanujan happens to resemble the one or the other artist, he has already started his original groundwork. "The Striders", "Towards Simplicity" and even "Kṛpṇa₄ in Grandfather's Shaving Glass" of The Striders are but a few early attempts of the poet in quest of the self, its nature, its origin and its living from moment to moment. It is only when we come across the "Second Sight" that we begin to discover that Ramanujan's idea of the self is analogous to Bergson's. It is by now established that his understanding of the man-woman

relationship is close to that of Lawrence, which asserts the existence of the lovers, each being 'the other' for the other. In Chapter Two it has been discussed how Lawrence and Ramanujan resemble to a point of difference. Ramanujan has started his search into the meaningful relationship between man and woman much before he realises a Lawrentian vision in "Love Poem for a Wife 2". In "Still Life" he wonders how the life feels without the beloved and how a woman makes all the difference. "In Looking for a Cousin on a Swing" the artist is aware of the infantile sex, and in "Still Another View of Grace", he describes dramatically how love wines over one's relationship with ethos, family, religion and all forms of relationship. His "Hindoo" poem "The Hindoo: the Only Risk" in an elusive way reveals how he probes into sex and finds sex as prehistoric, more ancient than the Gita and more elemental than a meaningful relationship which of course is a slow development in human experience. Sex is aboriginal and Ramanujan can not accept a canon of the Gita which teaches man to watch all acts calmly. Therefore, his own genuine beginning as well as the advance made in such directions must not be minimised. Ramanujan's authenticity is multi-dimensional: it has a side of emotional initiative and another of intellectual capacity for development, both being complementary to each other. All that is meant is that Ramanujan the artist is in search of Ramanujan the essential man: that he has all the emotional experience which he probes from a grown-up stage and all his probes become an intelligent living for him, a re-living. William Walsh says, "on the evidence of Ramanujan's verse there is no want of idea (italics mine) in the artist's mind nor any failure of its projection into a wiry: bounding line".

On the poet's authenticity, he comes up brilliantly to observe that if we could link "the poet's linear precision" and "his bounding line" to a profound sense of the inexplicable ebbs and flows of life, we shall have the notes making up Ramanujan's personal tone"¹⁰. Therefore, his aesthetic and artistic accomplishments have their influences felt upon the new generation poets in India.

Parthasarathy admits that Ramanujan's "A River" (1916) "quickened his own poem on river. Both the poems attempt to evoke the river "historically" and as it is day by "deploying contrast ironically" so that it becomes "almost a mode of perception"¹¹. Well, if Ezekiel appears on the scene as a pace settler in professing and practising precision, craftsmanship and a devotion to poetic act, Ramanujan comes as a model in extending the resources of an indigenous tradition into English poetry. Thus his influence is noticed on a cross-section of poets: Parthasarathy, a Hindu; Daruwalla, a Parsee; Rodrigues, Silgado and deSouza, all Goan Christians. They learnt from Ramanujan how to compose as poems their personal experiences of the regional cultural background and the memories of family life. Here, one is poised to ask if Ramanujan with all his influence on his contemporaries is without moral outlooks, or philosophical probings. It has been observed in the first chapter that Ramanujan's intention is not pedagogic either in his moral outlook or in his philosophical speculations. The implications of moral feelings and philosophical musings are there in his poetry in ample measure. But he resists himself from moralising or philosophising. He wants to live such feelings and musings in

a normal, spontaneous, ambivalent manner. One may recall Ezekiel's "Poetry as Knowledge", a critical essay in which the poet-critic says that poetry lacks weight without "knowledge", "meaning" and "truth". Therefore, a poet must needs to invest his poetry with moral awareness, philosophical ideas and self-knowledge. Ramanujan's poetry will, without much trouble, satisfy Ezekiel's criteria. If we find his moral awareness in the poems on politics, in "History", "Real Estate", "700 Gardens Revisited", "Prayers to Lord Murugan", and "Questions": his self-knowledge we get in the "Hindoo" poems, "the Striders", "Kṛṣṇa in ...", "Elements of Composition", "Christmas and Love Poems for a Wife": and these poems also reflect Ramanujan's philosophical preoccupations. The list of these poems need not be considered as exhaustive, nor as strictly categorised into one or other water-tight compartment, because these are in themselves integrated and integral to the poet's vision. However, Ramanujan, it needs to be noted, does not infuse Ezekiel's criteria into his poetry to make it weighty. But as an artist he is concerned with the quality of living. And for such a living, meaning and morality, truth and knowledge are not unnecessary things, of course, but they are not the cause of Ramanujan's art nor its goal. What goal, a Bergsonian would chalk out for life other than living it? What goal, Ramanujan could set up before his unfixed mind other than living it ambivalently, wholly? It is the essential man in the artist who comes alive:

It's not obsolete yet to live
in this many-lived lair
of fears, this flesh.

Before concluding this study, the structural pattern of Ramanujan's three volumes of poetry needs to be commented upon, expressly, however, from a distinct hence limited angle. Ramanujan seems to have built carefully into each of the volumes its first poem and the last one: both of them accommodating their allied complex of themes that all other poems in between have imbibed. For instance, The Striders is overall indicative of a dispassionate search for the self; and the outlines of this quest are well provided by the first poem "The Striders", and the last poem "A Poem on Particulars". Similarly, Relations moves on the relations of the self with its past and moves within the bounds set by "It does not Follow but when in the Street" and "Prayers to Lord Murugan". And in Second Sight all the speculations and self-awareness, raised in the last two volumes, come to some resolutions. The voice of confidence and conviction is heard within "Elements of Composition" and "Second Sight". On Ramanujan, to end is to begin again, for to be alive is not to be tired of life.

Endnotes

1. Modern Indian Poetry in English (1969) ed. P. Lal, In response to P. Lal's questionnaire on Indo-Anglia, a cross-section of critics and poets contributed towards destabilising the chauvinistic tirades against Indo-Anglian poetry. Particularly Buddhadev Bose's article "Indian Poetry in English" in The Concise Encyclopaedia of English and America Poets (1963) p. 415 is severally scrutinised and proved inadequate and poor.

2. Swami Abhadananda, Bhagavad Gita The Divine Message, cal: Ramakrishna Vedanta Matha, 1969, pp. 866-96.
B.N.K. Sharma, The Brahma Sutras, Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1974, pp. 370, 390-91.
H.V. Divatia, The Art of Life in Bhagavad Gita, Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1970, pp. 78-84.
A.C.B. Swami, Prabhudananda, Bhagavad Gita As It Is, Bombay: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1968, p. 43-62, and 89-102.
3. ibid, p. 75.
4. R. Parthasarathy, "Introduction", Ten Twentieth Century Indian Poets, Delhi: DDP, 1976.
5. "eki M. Daruwalla, "Introduction", Two Decades of Indian Poetry, Sahidabad: Vikash Publ., 1980
6. ibid
7. Henri Bergson, Creative Evolution, New York, 1911, p.
8. Walter Sutton, "The Modern Revolution", American Free Verse, New York: A New Directions Book, 1973, p.35.
9. William Walsh, "Small Observations on a Large Subjects", Aspects of Indian Writing in English, 1979, p. 119.
10. ibid, p. 119.
11. R. Parthasarathy, "How It Strikes a Contemporary: The Poetry of A.K. Ramanujan", L.C. 1976, 12 (2&3).
12. Mission Ezekiel, "Poetry as Knowledge", referred to by Bruce King, Modern Indian Poetry in English, Delhi: DDP 1987 P.77-79.

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