

Chapter-II

B. Love theme in Ramanujan

“Life,” says P.Lal

is a flower of five petals

Love's the first

where a lusting bee settles,

quenching thirst.¹

Love, “a burning passion” (Das. 1986. 94), “the bed rock of life” (Das. 1986. 72) constitutes one of the major themes of the poetry of A.K.Ramanujan. A truly poetic impulse that dwells in the heart is animated with love. Philip Sidney in Astrophel and Stella advocates that a true poet is one who looks within one's heart and writes:

Biting my truant pen, beating myself for spite,

‘Fool’, said my Muse to me, ‘Look in thy heart, and

write’.²

To the pre-independence poets love is secular or divine, a triumph over death as the legend of Savitri shows. For Sri Aurobindo “love is the heavenly seal of the Supreme”³ and “the bright link twixt earth and heaven,”⁴ which comes from and returns to God. Love, to Emerson “is not only a relation binding two bodies, but the power which works miracles in human life” (Rizvi. 1986. 53).

Love, a perennial theme of literature, for the post independence poets is of supreme importance and has been viewed from different angles. Nissim Exekiel evaluates the significance of love in his “Tone Poem”:

...I feel

I am

not in pursuit

of anything

except

animal faith

with the mysteries

of love

dissolved in it.⁵

Love, for P.Lal is unique and transforms the land into a unique one. It, however, does not end with the union of lovers but bears upon itself far reaching consequences in human life. It is like

... a flower

Has roots that reach

Beyond fragrance, beyond power

Of loving speech,⁶

A true love, in the opinion of O.P.Bhatnagar cannot be bound by shackles of time. Again, love is a precious possession as Jayanta Mahapatra opines and he wants to retain it by any means. For Ramanujan, love is dubious, undependable and hence unsafe. He is aware of the insecurity of love. So, he advises:

If you wish to be safe in love

court a mermaid.

She's single-thighed. (CP: 41)

Ramanujan believes that "love is not an expression of passion but it is an observation of a detached objective viewer" (Jainapur. 1987. 126). Therefore, a lover must wait for the right moment for love making:

Love is no hurry, love is no burning;

it is no fairytale of bitter and sweet. (CP: 11)

As “no love is sudden” (Ibid.) he asks his beloved to wait in order “to be found, to be lost” (Ibid).

A comparative study of the love poems of Shakespeare, Shelley, Donne and Ramanujan brings out the concord and discord in their attitude towards love.

Shakespeare immortalizes the glory of love in the mortal world in Sonnet 18:

And every fair from fair sometime declines,

But the eternal summer shall not fade

Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow’st;⁷

Shakespeare is aware of the invincible power of time. Time decays all things but love is beyond the clasp of time, for he writes in Sonnet 116:

Love’s not Time’s fool, though rosy lips and cheeks

Within his bending sickle’s compass come;

Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,

But bears it out even to the edge of doom.⁸

John Donne too, emphasizes the indestructibility of ‘love’. Time is destructive but love is strong enough to withstand its ravages and even triumphs over time.

Hence, in “The Anniversarie”, he argues that love is even superior to the power of time:

All other things, to their destruction draw,

Only our love hath no decay

This, no tomorrow hath, not yesterday,

Running it never runs from us away,

But truly keeps his first, last, everlasting day.⁹

Ramanujan does not believe in what Shakespeare and Donne had said long ago. On the Contrary, he resembles Shelley in his attitude towards love. For both the poets love's transience remains central. Shelley laments the transitoriness of love in "The Flight of Love":

When hearts have once mingled,
Love first leaves the well-built nest;¹⁰

Love is fleeting and human heart, an impermanent abode of love, plunges into sadness as love departs:

When the lamp is shatter'd,
The light on the dust lies dead—
When the cloud is scatter'd,
The rainbow's glory is shed.
When the lute is broken,
Sweet tones are remember'd not;
When the lips have spoken,
Loved accents, are soon forgot.¹¹

Ramanujan believes that love is ephemeral. It cannot avoid "Circling sickles" of death and destruction. Love, in the prime of youth, is full of vigour and vitality but gradually with the passage of time fades and decays:

Love, you are green only to grow yellow.

Circling sickles in the wind will reap
your ghost from the branching gallows.

You will need no help to get to the heap. (CP: 11)

So, he disapproves growth and discourages love as it is bound to be lost sooner or later. In the poem "Love 3: What he said, remembering", he says all the fever and fret

of youth have now vanished. The fire of youth has now turned to ash. The warm 'bloodtide' of youth has turned to ebb than flow because he is aged and the 'flaming bush' of passion of the youth has been put off and the remains of it is the 'ash' of the old age:

The hours brown,
 bloodtide more ebb
 than flow.
 the flaming bush
 now ash. (CP:225)

As a love poet, Ramanujan is different from the traditional love poets. There is no sudden burst of emotions as we experience in traditional love poets. He does not present love as a passionate suffering but he rather looks at it from the outside and reveals his keen sensibility and intellect through his love poems. His experience of life is extensive as he has "traversed a vast expanse of love-experience and offers us a fresh and first hand account of it. He starts with a statement of the true nature of love, moves through its different aspects-longing, frustration and despair, infatuation, promiscuity and sensuality, and arrives at the secure and sure haven of wifely love" (Dwivedi. 1984. 1).

Since, love "has wings,/And like light can flee,"¹² Ramanujan cherishes a deep longing in his heart to capture the happiest moment of love. His desire to immortalize love is as strong as "the desire of the moth for the star,/Of the night for the morrow"¹³. Such a profound longing for his lady love leads to despair and frustration as she leaves him after having lunch with him and the poet has to endure the pangs of separation. The poet-lover has no other means to alleviate his sorrow and so he pretends to read. But the sight of "the half-eaten/sandwich,/bread,/lettuce and

salami,/all carrying the shape/of her bite” (CP: 12) makes him melancholic. “Reality has changed since the woman left and what is left is this parody of a work of art, which the poem turns into art the way a painter might use a fish or fruit for a model” (King. 1991. 68). The physical separation of the poet and his ladylove is ‘a kind of death-bed scene’ as is described by John Donne in his poem “A Valediction: forbidding mourning”:

As virtuous men passe mildly’ away,
 And whisper to their soules, to goe,
 Whilst some of their sad friends doe say,
 The breath goes now, and some say, no:

So let us melt, and make no noise,
 No teare-floods, nor sigh-tempests move;
 ‘T were prophanation of our joyes
 To tell the layetie our love.¹⁴

Ramanujan asserts that the two lovers are two different beings, yet they are made one by the intensity of love. In “The Good-Morrow”, John Donne also says that a true love blends the lovers and makes them one:

What ever dyes, was not mixt equally;
 If our two loves be one, or, thou and I
 Love so alike, that none doe slacken, none can die.¹⁵

“As body is not the man, nor the soul is not the man, but the union of the soul and body—makes up the man” (Clements. 1966. 169). Kamala Das finds no difference between body and soul. She writes in her poem “The Suicide”:

Bereft of soul
 My body shall be bare.

Bereft of body

My soul shall be bare.¹⁶

A true love, in the view of Ramanujan is a harmonious blend of the two souls. In “The Extasie”, John Donne opines that a man and a woman united by love can achieve perfection:

When love, with one another so

Interinanimates two soules,

That abler soule, which thence doth flow,

Defects of loneliness controules.¹⁷

Ramanujan believes that a true love is not to be found in the traffic of flesh, but in the concord of souls. If a man cherishes the former sort of love, he is sure to be panic-stricken, because with the approach of the old age, his physical strength will wane and he will earn only the “fascination/of passing/old women” (CP: 88), and he will have no option but to handle his things helplessly.

Ramanujan’s love fails to attain the kind of perfection that Donne’s poems try to celebrate. This is precisely because in a good number of poems, Ramanujan honestly depicts the gap and the emerging raptures in his relationship with his wife. Consequently, it produces “a bitter sense of ennui and estrangement between the two” (Dwivedi. 1984. 5). He “attempts to find proximity and shared experiences with at least one other person, his wife. Unfortunately his wife comes from a different family background thereby precluding the possibility of having common childhood experiences” (Raghunandan. 1990. 170). His wife’s “unshared childhood” keeps them “apart/at the end of the year”(CP:65). Accordingly, there is no emotional and spiritual union between them although the poet yearns for it. This emotional sterility alienates the poet from his wife. An ideal love embraces both body and soul and to achieve

emotional integration in marital life the poet offers two alternatives in "Love Poem for a Wife,1":

... Probably
 only the Egyptians 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. (CP: 67)

Relationship between the spouses as we perceive in Ramanujan's poem is not a 'joint' relationship, but a segregated one. He suggests that it is impossible for him to experience 'togetherness' in marriage. He thinks that through his wife he can be 'androgynous as a god', but he is aware that the happiness these thoughts bring to him is transitory and that he will again be his separate self. He feels alienated from his wife:

I forget at night and remember at dawn

you're not me but Another, the faraway
 stranger who's nearby, (CP: 182)

An ideal marital relationship evokes a feeling of oneness. When love is consummated, both husband and wife lose their identity and become one in love. Kamala Das writes in the poem "Convicts":

... .. When he
 And I were one, we were neither
 Male nor female.¹⁸

Ramanujan does not want his wife to be 'Another', to have a separate identity of her own but must be an appendage to him. He shares his views with Alex Comfort who says that love "includes not only physical attraction and satisfaction, but also 'mutual respect, mutual communication' and a strong desire to protect one another without any corresponding wish to manipulate or mould"¹⁹

For Ramanujan, "an ideal instance of affinity is the loving relationship of husband and wife, but in his own case this affinity is disproved in the heated exchange of words and sharp rebukes" (Raghunandan. 1990. 171). However, in the poem "Love Poem for a Wife,²", 'the sense of estrangement disappears' and the intellect bridges the emotional gap between them. Therefore, the sight of "my[his] wife's always/changing syriac face" (CP: 83) "instead of arousing a sense of estrangement within takes him to a conscientious effort to share on an intellectual plane her feelings for her own heritage" (Kurup. 1996. 228). She is now a part of his being "a soul within his soul" and thus overcomes all barriers of unshared experience and evokes an awareness of oneness:

I dreamed one day
 that face my own yet hers,
 with my own nowhere
 to be found; lost; cut

loose like my dragnet

past. (CP: 84)

“Love 5” brings out the man-woman sexual relationship in a clear tone without any hesitation. The passion of the lover for his lady is so intense that he does not see whether it is day or night, he won’t even wait for the ‘half-dark’ and goes ahead into the sexual relation with his lady. He becomes so restless in passion that he:

... won’t even wait for the half-dark
 to watch her watch him rise and fall,

 wants the lights on when she takes off
 her underthings, to see her resume
 her natural curves and catch the waft
 of odours transcending all perfume, (CP: 229)

The poet brings out the persona’s eagerness to have his eyes fed with the sight of his lady’s nakedness and enjoys the odour of her body, which is for him the most transcending of all the other perfumes. This man enjoys to kiss her deep, to say unspeakable things, to taste her juices at their sources in order to add fuel to produce the heat to their passions, so that the lady would be more passionate and finally, through all this he is trying to bring “gold out of touch and taste” (CP: 229).

A few poems of Ramanujan expose the love hate relationship between husband and wife. He is a “home-bound pilgrim” (Mohanty. 1982-83. 39) having passionate love for his wife and is ready to run any risk just to gratify her:

... ; I walk on air,
 I walk on water, can even bear
 to walk on earth for my wife

... ..

... and eat
 on an ancient sandalwood door. (CP: 57)

In "A Rather Foolish Sentiment", the poet lover has been depicted as an emotional person who aspires to enjoy the sensation of the passing touch of 'one' whom he has loved and touched but he knows it well that

... it will not pass,
 for in that touch I think I stumbled
 on a pulse, ... (CP: 18)

He feels restless, as he is infatuated with a girl who pines "for some one else's/love" (CP: 20) and keeps on shifting ground. Had he been coward, cold or old, he could have reconciled himself to his hapless lot, but being young and fiery, he found it impossible. Passion agitates him:

I'd have breasted
 my shotgun pluses
 and spread my patchwork sail
 between her smile
 and the counter-image
 of her twining love... (CP: 20)

He feels isolated as "he cannot establish a continuum with her because he knows that she has an alien will which operates independently" (Devy.1981.10). Since "unreciprocated love is a torment of the spirit" (Clements.1966. 175), it tortures his spirit, creates excitement and tension in his mind which ultimately give rise to hatred. In the view of Donne, the woman is 'Nature's lay Idiot', but is also an object of contempt. Ramanujan does not hesitate to express his own hatred for his wife:

... : she hates me, I hate her,

I'm a filthy rat and a satyr. (CP: 68)

Ramanujan, a Tamil brahmin, is a representative of the Indian society and culture. His Indian-Hindu sensibility has been “shaped in the strict traditional discipline of a conservative Brahmin family” (Kurup. 1996. 225). He is meek and hesitant to accept love. But his Christian wife, a product of the western culture, shows her upright courage and boldness in her attitude towards love. So, when the poet’s “inner life interacts with the elemental pull of life—the pull is so irresistible that under it one simply gets “burned and burned” and all “commandments” get “Crumbled” in one’s “father’s past”” (Kurup. 1996. 225). He cannot control his strong animal desire, sustained by the western environment and ultimately surrenders:

... Her tumbled hair suddenly known
as silk in my angry hand, I shook a little

and took her, behind the laws of my land. (CP: 45).

Ramanujan’s love poems are like Tamil Akam poetry, a poetry of the “inner world” (The Interior Landscape. 1994. 103). Like the Akam poetry, no personal names are mentioned. The dramatic personae of the love poems as in The Black Hen are types. They are like men and women in love, and not the celebrities. “The love of man and woman is taken as the ideal expression of the “inner world”” (The Interior Landscape. 1994.104). Unrequited love for Ramanujan is a one-sided affair and loses sublimity:

Loving someone
not in love
is to lose one’s glasses
underfoot without a language
in a village

fair, to wake up without fingers,

to drug the heart

and slow down a world. (CP: 223)

Ramanujan, unlike Kamala Das is not bold and daring in the portrayal of love, rather he has maintained a puritan attitude in his treatment of love. He, like R. Parthasarathy affirms purity and nobility in love. He refrains from sexual exploitation and “takes love as an essential biological urge demanding to be gratified, but is not prepared to sacrifice his Murugan at the altar of sex” (Dwivedi. 1984. 6).

Notes and References

1. K.C.Lahiri ed, *Indo-English Poetry in Bengal* (Calcutta: Writers Workshop, 1974) 119.
2. W.T.Young ed, *An Anthology of the poetry of the Age of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: University Press, 1950) 186.
3. Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo International, 1954) 711.
4. Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*. 711.
5. Gieve Patel, ed, *Nissim Exekiel Collected Poems. 1952- 1988.* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983) 203-204.
6. K.C.Lahiri ed, *Indo-English Poetry in Bengal* (Calcutta: Writers Workshop, 1974) 121.
7. W.G.Ingram and Theodore Redpath ed, *Shakespeare's Sonnets* (London: University of London Press Ltd, 1964) 45.
8. W.G.Ingram and Theodore Redpath ed, *Shakespeare's Sonnets..* 269.
9. Helen Gardner ed, *The Metaphysical Poets* (Calcutta: Rupa and Co, 1978) 65.
10. Francis Turner Palgrave, *The Golden Treasury* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964) 195.
11. Francis Turner Palgrave, *The Golden Treasury.* 195.
12. Francis Turner Palgrave, *The Golden Treasury.* 226.
13. Francis Turner Palgrave, *The Golden Treasury.* 202.
14. Helen Gardner ed, *The Metaphysical Poets* (Calcutta: Rupa and Co, 1978) 73.
15. Helen Gardner ed, *The Metaphysical Poets.* 58.
16. Kamala Das, *Only the Soul Knows How to Sing. Selection from Kamala Das* (Kerala: DC. Books, 1996) 86.
17. Helen Gardner ed, *The Metaphysical Poets* (Calcutta: Rupa and Co, 1978) 76.

18. Kamala Das, *Only the Soul Knows How to Sing. Selection from Kamala Das* (Kerela: DC. Books, 1996) 56.
19. Quoted in Jayaprakash A. Shinde “ ‘Family’ as a Central Metaphor” in Surya Nath Pandey ed, *Millennium Perspective on A.K.Ramamujan* (New-Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 2001) 106.

Works Cited

- Clements, A.L. *John Donne's Poetry*. New York : W.W. Norton & Company. 1966.
- Das, Bijay Kumar. "Sunshine and Rain: Love and Death in Modern Indo-English Poetry". S.N.A. Rizvi. ed, *Love and Death in Indian Poetry in English*. Delhi: Doaba House. 1986.
- Das, Bijay Kumar. "The Crystal Gance of Love Poets". S.N.A. Rizvi. ed, *Love and Death in Indian Poetry in English*. Delhi: Doaba House. 1986.
- Dwivedi, "A.K. Ramanujan as a poet of love". *The Journal of Indian Writing in English*. 12. 1. Jan(1984):
- Devy, G.N. "Alienation as Means of Self-Exploration: A Study of A.K. Ramanujan's Poetry". *Chandrabhaga*. 6. Winter (1981):
- Jainapur, S.G. "A.K. Ramanujan (1929-)". *Poetry, Culture and Language: Indo-Anglian Poets from Karnataka*. (Calcutta: Writers Workshop) 1987.
- Kasture, P.S. "The Fact of Life: The Concept of Love and Death in Contemporary Indo-Anglian Poetry". S.N.A. Rizvi. ed, *Love and Death in Indian Poetry in English*. Delhi: Doaba House. 1986.
- King, Bruce. *Three Indian Poets*. Delhi: Oxford University Press. 1991.
- Kurup, P.K.J. "Search 'The Self' in the Poetry of A.K. Ramanujan". *Contemporary Indian Poetry in English*. Delhi: Atlantic Publishers. 1996.
- Mohanty, Niranjana. "The Home-bound Pilgrim: A study of A.K. Ramanujan's Poetry". *The Indian Journal of English Studies*. XXII. (1982-83):
- Raghunandan, Lakshmi. "A.K. Ramanujan". *Contemporary Indian Poetry in English*. Delhi: Reliance Publishing House. 1990.
- Ramanujan, A.K. Trans. Afterward. *The Interior Landscape*. Delhi: Oxford University Press. 1994.

Chapter-II

C. Poetry as a record of reminiscences

“Mnemosyne, the Grecian goddess of memory”, “the mother of the Muses”, termed as “brooding source”, (Rosenthal.1974.20) wafts in every mind. It is a driving impetus behind every poetic creation. The “flood of remembrance” (Ibid) enlivens the past. Memory is an organizing principal, which animates the past, relates the past with the present. It revives the past events, reinterprets them and rearranges them for the better understanding of the present. The ‘irrevocable past’ stimulates the poet’s imagination and he becomes aware of dual existence:

I confess

I am not myself

in the present. I only endure

‘ a reflected existence in the past.’¹ (RP : 45)

The poet lives in two worlds—the inner and the outer, and memory integrates both the worlds and inspires the poet for his art. For Parthasarathy, poetry seems to be an artifice to polish an imperfect past, to present it in vivid colours. He, in his solitude, feels himself like the deserted stone benches in the park and ruminates over the past, which will enable him to have an extensive view of life:

My past is an imperfect stone:

the flaws show. I polish

the stone, sharpen the lustre to a point.² (Ibid)

Certain moments are stored in memory. Again, it is memory, which in course of time revives the ‘past’ and thus, helps to define one’s identity. Memory, not merely stacks information, but constitutes an inner continuity and connects the present self with the past. This is true of an exile like Ramanujan, who carries the whole treasure

house of memory with him in Chicago. "Memory is the poet, his poetry is his memory, he writes of his memory" (Paul.2001.116). An active memory helps one to experience rootedness. Loss of memory results into a loss of identity. Ramanujan flees from the present western work-oriented world to the idyllic past by lanes of memory and in every poem, one can smell the presence of the past. The past sticks to his mind like a resin which helps him to keep alive his relationship with India, its culture and language and with his own family. So, the past is very significant to Ramanujan and in an interview with Rama Jha he confesses, "The past never passes. Either the individual past or historical past or cultural past. It is with us, it is what gives us the richness of - what you call it - the richness of understanding. And the richness of expression" (Jha.1981.7). Past, for him, is not abstract but concrete and is a constant source of inspiration in framing his poetic sensibility. He, therefore, "carries his past with him as an inner world of memories and laws that erupt into the present, transformed into anxieties, fears and new sights" (Satchidanandan. 1997.29). Though memory forms his inner self, he is not nostalgic while he reminisces. It is not merely a bundle of past events and experiences but is functional, strengthens his sense of history and provides vigour and nutrient to his writing.

"The presence of the past" (CP : 89) nurtures Ramanujan's vision and he, like Parthasarathy, composes poems only by meditating upon his past, specially his childhood, and explores the by-gone days. Like Parthasarathy, he also ransacks the cupboards of his "Brahmin childhood"³ (RP: 50).

Time, for Ramanujan is the central vital reality and so, a constant preoccupation with the past seems to be the dominant motif of his poetry. He consistently ruminates over the past and so "memory plays a vigorous, creative role" (Naik 1989.13). It is a

driving force of his poetry and is like “a crane-arm/unloads its ploughed-up rubble”⁴.

He acknowledges the role of memory in our life and thus defines it:

Memory,

in a crowd of memories, seems

to have no place

at all for unforgettable things. (CP : 21)

To some poets the memory can be a source of despair, while on the other hand, it may bring forth great happiness and joy to the mind. Ramanujan has made himself all the more real to us through his outburst of ecstatic memory. K.S.Ramamurti rightly observes:

Ramanujan’s poetry is basically a poetry of subjective experience which draws from memories and impressions of a familial past. Ramanujan’s obsession with his past and with his roots makes him rely heavily upon memory as theme, as well as poetic strategy. Memories of aunts, sisters, great-grandmother, grandfather, and a host of relatives, mother in particular and a world of childhood and boyhood in a traditional South Indian brahmin family form the key characteristics of his poetry (Ramamurti.1995.46).

A wistful and a visionary poet, sitting amidst the garden city, immersed in reverie yearns to reach the land of his birth, which “cannot be reached/by jet. Nor by boat on jungle river,” (CP :187) but has to be satiated by calling up the momentous happenings of the distant past. Parthasarthy asserts in Rough Passage that he aims at starting a dialogue between the poet and his Tamil past. He acknowledges Ramanujan as his Guru because it is “from Ramanujan he (Parthasarathy) learned how to use the poet’s past experience, especially memories of the complex South Indian network of family relations, as a way of evoking Tamil culture in English” (King.1989.233).

Ramanujan believes that his poetry receives sustenance from the past and the sweet memory of his childhood never leaves him alone, enables him to establish his contact with the land and the people of his birth, and to continue his relentless search for 'roots'. Kamala Das, being fed up with life around, becomes nostalgic and goes back to the days of a Malabar house where she had her unforgettable childhood days:

It comes naturally to me.

I had a house in Malabar

And a pale green pond,

I did all my growing there

In the bright summer months.

I swam about and floated,

And dived into the cold and green

I lay speckled green and gold

In all the hours of the sun,⁵

Ramanujan feels insecure in his exile where his friends and foes are doubtful and unbelievable. He feels nostalgic and hence, he remembers the house where he was born:

a house that leaned

slowly through our growing

years on a bent coconut

tree in the yard (CP:111)

The passing of time conjures up the painful personal events and the loss and death of near and dear ones. "Past seldom returns to him as a longing for a lost Paradise, it comes as a childhood fear, anxiety, a ridiculous ritual, as poverty, flood, dead cows, snobbish aunts, suffering parents"(Satchidanandan.1997.28).So, he recollects with

nostalgic mood the day his great aunt died. His eyes flash back and he almost visualizes the scene:

... ...I saw her
 laid out, face incurious
 eyes yet unshut,
 between glass curio bureaus
 under a naked cobweb bulb
 next to a yellow window. (CP:107)

“Small-Scale Reflections on a Great House” evokes the memory of “a perfectly good/chatty afternoon” (CP:99) when the dead body of a nephew was “brought back in plane/and train and military truck” (Ibid). The childish fear stirs up in his mind to see the cobra licking the room with their bodies. “KMnO₄ in Grandfather’s Shaving Glass” records the wonder of the child poet when he observed how the dissolution of potassium permanganate turned a crystal glass of water into wine dark in colour. He even recalls the happiest day of his childhood when “the wobbly top father gave me/quietly, after we both had a tantrum” (CP:60). The incident of a rain-stormy day is still fresh in his mind:

... ... when the rainstorm leaked
 through the roof
 and mother was ill
 and he had to mop
 the kitchen of our pattering feet. (CP:129).

In “Looking for a Cousin on a Swing” Ramanujan retrospects the bright and sunny days of his childhood when he, along with his cousin, a premature girl of four or five enjoyed the village swing. He craves for those days when he ‘shined’ in his “Angel-

infancy”⁶. His soul was fresh and pure and retained its contact with heaven. William Wordsworth in another context elevates the status of childhood and equates it with heaven. In the “Intimation Ode”, Wordsworth writes:

... .. we come
 ; *
 From God, who is our home:
 Heaven lies about us in our infancy!⁷

But at present, Ramanujan laments that he cannot visualize the earthly objects with a celestial halo as he loses the childish innocence and his cousin, having grown into a mature girl, cannot sustain the spiritual kinship with heaven:

Now she looks for the swing
 in cities with fifteen suburbs
 and tries to be innocent
 ; *
 about it. (CP:19)

The poems of Ramanujan, which originate from memories, belong to a different world. Like Jayanta Mahapatra, he considers himself as a man with many memories, who does not know what to do with them. His poetry enkindles and enlivens the past. For Parthasarathy “the most reassuring thing/about the past is that it happened”⁸ (RP: 17), and for Ramanujan it is “no tale, but truth” (CP:17) and “the search for a usable past is complex” because “the past itself is varied, has many branches, and changes as we seek it” (King.1991.74).

“The past changes each time we learn or lose some fact about it; it is changed by our perspective” (King.1991.74.). As it is not inert, memories acquire “a new significance through additional knowledge” (King.1991.75.). “History” shows how an adult information transforms the memory of a childhood event and how his view of history is changed as he learns the truth about inhumanity of his aunt:

and the dark

stone face of my little aunt

acquired some expression

at last (CP:108)

“The learning of new facts puts the facts of the past into a different perspective” (King.1991.76), and “time present here gains in experience through time past thereby leading to a maturer understanding in time future” (Datta.1994.129).

Jayanta Mahapatra’s poetry “unravels a fabric of the past” (Sundari & Ramamurti, 1986. 153) and thus provides us with the historical details of the land of Orissa. Ramanujan’s poetry unfolds not the historical past of the land but the history of his family and tradition. In some of his poems we witness how an experience is relived and colours his present perception. Ramanujan shows an extraordinary ability to recall the incidents of the remote past in such a manner that the past is wedded to the present. A past incident in London comes up from the storehouse of his memories. The sight of a “woman/beside the wreckage van/on Hyde Park Street/” (CP: 15) calls to the poet’s mind a similar scene in his own life. The “large, buxom” lady with “thick glasses on” (CP: 15) reminds the poet of his own mother and the present suddenly turns into the past as the poet envisages his “mother’s black-pillared, nineteenth-century/silent house, given on her marriage day/to my[his] father, for a dowry” (CP:16). The sight of the Adjutant storks, “noisy and heavy/in their take-off” (CP: 128), who flap themselves into air, remind the poet of his father and “his baggy umbrellas with three ribs/broken by his sons in a fencing match and three/by last years winds” (Ibid). The sound of a woodpecker peeking away at a tree conjures up in the poet’s memory the ‘drip drop’ of ‘a leaky tap after a sister’s wedding.’ The picture of a blind boy evokes the memory of a cousin waiting for a coin. The living present calls

up the past in the mind of the poet while “touching a book that has gold/on its spine, /I think of snakes”(CP: 4). His mind is like a camera and memories emerge from it.

Memory is central to the first volume of poems The Striders and “functions largely like moments of epiphany when something is suddenly revealed” (Ramakrishnan, 2001.93). In the poems “Breaded Fish”, “Still Another for Mother”, memory functions largely like moments of epiphany. Sometimes an early memory is abominable. The breaded fish, offered to the poet, crops up in his mind “a hood/of memory like a heath/opened in my[his] eyes” (CP: 7) and he cannot enjoy the food. The ‘breaded fish’ becomes an objective correlative to connect the persona with the past memory, which is grim and horrifying. Memory, which has sunk deep into his consciousness, is revived and he remembers:

... a dark half-naked
length of woman, dead
on the beach in a yard of cloth,

dry, rolled by the ebb, breaded
by the grained indifference of sand. I headed
for the shore, my heart beating in my mouth (CP: 7).

For Ramanujan, memory is “his essential mode of creativity” (Jainapur.1987.113) and hence, old memories of the past life play a significant role in the art of his creation. Again, in the poem, “This Pair”, “memory becomes fragmented into odds and bits, though desperately knits around the remembered destinies of ‘the elegant childless couple, and the virgin aunt’”. (Rao.1979.123). The ‘childless couple’ and the ‘virgin aunt’ serve as keys to the whole world of memory.

The poet's attitude towards the Indian past is critical and fears loom large in his mind about his own past. So, he does not want his children to undergo the same experience, which he had in his boyhood:

I'll love my children
 without end,
 and do them infinite harm
 staying on the roof,
 a peeping-tom ghost
 looking for all sorts of proof
 for the presence of the past: (CP: 89)

As he feels miserable in an alien world, he often resorts to his boyhood memory, which stands as 'a bliss in solitude'. So, when he sees waterfalls "a cascade of memories and images erupts" (King. 1991.101). The blinding traffic light in the street of America sends the poet into meditation:

you fall into a vision of forest fires,
 enter a frothing Himalayan river,
 rapid, silent. (CP: 186)

"Memory is no longer mere memory, a loss in time, but it becomes a structure coterminous with the present and the continuous" (Rao.1979.124). It is true present is born out of the past and past and present are knitted together as memory in his poetry:

the dry chlorine water
 my only Ganges
 the naked Chicago bulb
 a cousin of the Vedic sun. (CP: 169)

Everything becomes a memory as everything turns into the past. It is like “an endless river in which the past, the present and the future are mere shifting positional perspectives” (Rao. 1979. 124). Memory, for him, is a means to explore the nature of time and it is through memory he ventures, “to explore the existential problems of time and what it does to life” (Desai. 1984. 117). The poems “Fog” and “Sonnet” suggest that “time is woven into the very fabric of the body that is intermeshed with the co-extensive webs we call ‘nature’ and ‘culture’”⁹. Jayanta Mahapatra is keenly aware of the passage of time. He does not believe in the linear development of time but believes in the circular motion of time where the present becomes the focal of past, present and future. In the poem “Days” he says that the days are too long and are continuously in motion:

These days

Sometimes they just move my mind

a little.

Like cattle crossing a road,

they pause without knowing

and stare beyond them,

then walk on.¹⁰

Ramanujan too, acutely conscious of the fact that time is “neither remote and objective, nor fixed and abstract”¹¹, but is always on the move:

Time moves in and out of me

a stream of sound, a breeze,

an electric current that seeks

the ground, liquids that transpire

through my veins, ...

... ..
 Mornings brown

into evenings before I turn around

in the day. (CP: 220.)

As time passes on, change appears “simultaneously in the body, the natural world, the world of objects made by human beings, and the human mind”¹²:

Waiting for change, the body

changes, a chrysalis

that will rot unless it breaks

into wings. (CP: 208)

Ramanujan believes that in the world of flux it is only memory, which can resuscitate the past. So, a memory constitutes a large section of the texture of the poetic self and is a means of “protecting his Indian psyche” (Kurup. 1996. 188), and it forms an integral part of his life and art. It is an indispensable part of his being which can no longer be distinguished from his present self.

Ramanujan’s use of memory in his poetry serves more specifically two purposes. It gives him an opportunity to redefine his own identity in the present moment of facelessness. It also refines his understanding of the present. The sense of memory evokes the sense of place. The sense of place to which Ramanujan whirls back with a hope of getting protection, warmth and affection, is always his native land. Thus, Ramanujan’s handling of memory is both an instrument of defining his own identity and of authenticating his vision as a creative artist. Because Ramanujan’s ‘outer forms’ have instructed him in his poetry to look at or into things or events of the past without any specific bias. Even if he is deeply attached to the memories of his familial or racial past, he is not blind or biased in this attachment. By the use of irony and

satire he achieves the required objectivity to measure and know his own past through the instrument of memory. There is no doubt that the use of memory in Ramanujan's poetry entails a therapeutic effect upon his own self and his poetry becomes therapeutic in nature.

The poetry of Ramanujan is rooted in life—the life of the present and through the by-lane of memory—the life of the past. As M.K. Naik observes “it is not ‘emotion recollected in tranquillity’, but recollection emotionalized in untranquil moments that appears to be the driving force behind much of Ramanujan’s poetry” (Naik, 1989, 14). His poetry reflects the personal emotions of the past and “his poetry is a distillation of a creative past” (Mohanty, 1982-83.39). Time may erase everything but not the memory of the past which haunts the poet without an end. It is the greatness of Ramanujan that he has brought about the synthesis between the past and the present. He, like Yeats’s golden bird, sitting upon a golden bough sings:

‘ To lords and ladies of Byzantium

Of what is past, or passing, or to come.¹³

(SP: 105)

Notes and References

1. R.Parthasarathy, "Trial 15" *Rough Passage* (Delhi: Oxford University Press,1977).
2. R.Parthasarathy, "Trial 15" *Rough Passage*.
3. R.Parthasarathy, "Homecoming" *Rough Passage* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1977).
4. Pritish Nandy ed, *Indian Poetry in English 1947-1972 an Anthology* (New-Delhi: Oxford and IBH Publishing Company,1972) n.pag.
5. Kamala Das, *Only the Soul Knows How to Sing Selections from Kamala Das* (Kerala: DC. Books, 1996) 87.
6. Francis Turner Palgrave, *The Golden Treasury* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964) 65.
7. Francis Turner Palgrave, *The Golden Treasury* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964) 310.
8. R.Parthasarathy, "Trial 2" *Rough Passage* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1977).
9. Vinay Dharwadker, Introduction. *The collected Poems of A.K.Ramanujan* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995) XXVI.
10. Arvind Krishna Mehrotra ed, *The Oxford India Anothology of Twelve Modern Indian Poets* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992) 32.
11. Vinay Dharwadker, Introduction. *The collected Poems of A.K.Ramamujan* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995) XXVI.
12. Vinay Dharwadker, Introduction. *The collected Poems of A.K.Ramanujan*.
13. A.Norman Jeffares ed, *W.B.Yeats Selected Poetry* (London: Macmillan and Co, 1962).

Works Cited

- Datta, Vandana. "Expatriate Experience in Indian English Poetry" in R.K.Dhawan and L.S.R.Krishna Sastry *Commonwealth Writing: A Study in Expatriate Experience*. New-Delhi: Prestige Books. 1994.
- Desai, S.K. "Mixing Memory and Desire: Small-Scale Reflections on the poetry of A.K.Ramanujan" in M.K.Naik. ed. *Perspectives on Indian Poetry in English*. New-Delhi: Abhinav Publications. 1984.
- Jha, Rama. "A Conversation with A.K.Ramanujan". *The Humanities Review*. 3.1.(1981):
- Jainapur, S.G. "A.K.Ramanujan (1929-)" in S.G. Jainapur. *Poetry, Culture and Language: Indo-Anglian Poets from Karnataka*. Calcutta: Writers Workshop. 1987.
- King, Bruce. "A.K.Ramanujan: 1957-1976" in Bruce King *Three Indian Poets*. Delhi: Oxford University Press. 1991.
- King, Bruce. *Modern Indian Poetry in English*. Delhi: Oxford University Press. 1989.
- Kurup, P.K.J. *Contemporary Indian Poetry in English*. Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors. 1996.
- Mohanty, Niranjana. "The Home-Bound Pilgrim: A Study of A.K. Ramanujan's poetry". *The Journal of English Studies*. XXII. (1982-83):
- Naik, M.K. "A.K. Ramanujan and the Search for Roots" in Madhusudan Prasad ed. *Living Indian English Poets-An Anthology of Critical Essays*. New-Delhi: Sterling Publisher. 1989.
- Paul, Premila. "Roots that Roam: Relationships in Ramanujan's Poetry" in Surya Nath Pandey ed. *Millennium Perspectives on A.K. Ramanujan*. New-Delhi: Atlantic Publishers. 2001

- Rao, K. Raghavendra. "Reverse Romanticism: The Case of A.K. Ramanujan's 'The Striders'" in M.K. Naik. ed. *Aspects of Indian Writing in English*. Delhi: The Macmillan Company of India Ltd. 1979.
- Rosenthal, M.L. *Poetry and the Common Life*. New York: Oxford University Press. 1974.
- Ramakrishnan, E.V. "Locating A.K. Ramanujan: Memory, Self and Identity in His Poetry" in Surya Nath Pandey. ed. *Millennium Perspectives on A.K. Ramanujan*. New-Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors. 2001.
- Ramamurti, K.S. Introduction in K.S. Ramamurti. ed. *Twenty-Five Indian Poets in English*. Madras: Macmillan. 1995.
- Sundari, G and K.S. Ramamurti, "Song of the Past" in Madhusudan Prasad. ed. *The Poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra A Critical Study*. New-Delhi: Sterling Publishers. 1986.
- Satchidanandan, K. "Against the Grain: The Role of Memory in A.K. Ramanujan's Poetry" *Journal of Literature and Aesthetics*. 5.2. Jul-Dec. (1997):