

**A STUDY OF A.K. RAMANUJAN'S POETRY IN
RELATION TO THEMES AND IMAGES**

**A thesis submitted to the University of North Bengal
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English**

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Certification

Certified that this is a genuine and *bona fide* work.



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Declaration

I declare that this dissertation has been composed by me and that it has not substantially formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma or similar title.

Sukriti Das
Sukriti Das.

*Dedicated to my mother, Chibi
and my late father, Friday
whose love and blessing, dream
and desire gave me an impetus to
pursue this work.*



Attipat Krishnaswami Ramanujan
B-1929, D-1983.

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Abbreviations Used.

- CP** -- The Collected Poems of A.K.Ramanujan.
- SP** -- W.B.Yeats Selected Poetry
Ed. A Norman Jeffares .
- CE** -- The Collected Essays of A.K.Ramanajan.
Ed. Vinay Dharwadker .
- RP** -- Rough Passage by R.Parthasarathy.

Introduction

Being a student of English literature, it is quite amazing that I have not chosen any British poet for my Ph.D dissertation rather A.K.Ramanujan, an Indian poet writing in English. The reason is not far to seek. To quote Tagore:

[The rainbow whatever be its largeness,

It shines in the sky,

But my love is for the wings of the butterfly

Which belongs to this earth.]¹ (Translation mine)

The rainbow, which adorns the sky, can only satiate the eyes, but can never gratify a soul. Being an inhabitant of the sky, it fails to establish a rapport with the man on earth. Moreover, it is short-lived and soon it fades away. Again, a “dotted butterfly” (CP:83) like a human being springs from and thrives on the earth. Though tiny, it corresponds to a rainbow in its beauty. Since it is close to the earth, a man can watch it, touch it and can enjoy its beauty to his heart’s content. Distance and inaccessibility perturb one’s mind. Proximity, on the contrary, removes the barriers, develops an intimate kinship and so, man derives immeasurable joy. Hence, my preference is for a poet who belongs to my own land and writes in English, echoing Indian sensibility. Once, while I was reading the poem “Mother” by K.N.Daruwalla, the concluding lines of the poem, captured my attention:

Then why should I tread the Kafka beat

or the Waste Land

when Mother you are near at hand...? ²

I, at once, decided not to explore the remote literary horizon, but to engage myself in diving into the sphere of Indian English poetry to assess the creative genius of the poets of my own country. I got hold of an anthology of modern Indian English poetry

and went through the poems of a few poets. Among the poets, the poetry of A.K.Ramanujan impressed me so much that I instantly decided to carry on my Ph.D thesis on him.

Born in Karnataka in 1929 in a South Indian Tamil brahmin family, A.K.Ramanujan, a polyglot who writes in English, Tamil and Kannada, is a real gem of literature. He is a highly talented and sensitive poet, a translator, an eminent linguist, a critic, a folklorist and an outstanding litterateur. It is always poetry which is never far away from his thinking as Ramanujan himself confesses "All you have to do is to make it clear that my interest in poetry is central to my being and all my work" (Krishnan. 1993. 28). With the publication of his first volume of verse The Striders in 1966 the secret of his genius came to limelight and it won for the poet a Poetry Book Society Recommendation. The second volume of his poetry Relations, published in 1976 deals largely with his personal contacts and family relations. Second Sight (1988), the third volume dwells on Indian history—its myths and legends. The Black Hen, which is incorporated in *The Collected Poems*, is a posthumous publication. Besides his original works he translated a number of books from Kannada and Tamil into English, which earned him fame. His translations include *Fifteen Poems from a Classical Tamil Anthology* (1965), *The Interior Landscape* (1967), *No Lotus in the Navel* (1969), *Speaking of Siva* (1972), *Samskara* (1976), *Hymns for the Drowning* (1981) and *Poems of Love and War* (1985). It is his translations, which hold a mirror of Dravidian culture and literature to the entire English speaking world.

As a creative artist, Ramanujan possesses a wider vision and a refined sensibility. It is not possible to deal with all facets of his dynamic poetry. This dissertation is concerned with the major themes and images that occupy the space of his poetry. As an expatriate, a sense of alienation and an acute feeling of loneliness overwhelmed

Ramanujan. Hence, my first chapter "A Quest for the Roots" explores how alienation and quest for roots constitute a recurrent theme of modern literature and how Ramanujan's poetry reveals this experience. Loss of identity makes him keenly aware of the nourishing quality of his own roots and so, he makes an effort to affirm his identity through a quest for a relevant and useable past.

The second chapter, having three sections, deals with three major themes of his poetry. The first section—"Poetry as a family record", concentrates largely on his family and relations. "Love theme in Ramanujan", the second section of this chapter, throws light on Ramanujan as a poet of love with a wider knowledge about the different aspects of love. In the concluding section—"Poetry as a record of reminiscences", he turns to his private past to make an inward journey to establish his link with the lost dimension of that past. He tries to evoke a sense of the past and inherit the native tradition. Here memory serves as a tool in his exploration of the past.

Ramanujan's poetry shows an unflagging interest in the native culture and traditions. Poetry for Ezekiel is a medium of confession. For Ramanujan, it is a mode of perception. His Hindu consciousness binds him to his native tradition. He searches deeper into the layers of Hinduism, World and Self and becomes intensely aware of his entire culture, Indian philosophy and ways of life. Chapter three, "Poetry, a revelation of the mysteries of life" focuses on this aspect of his poetry.

Ramanujan is a conscientious craftsman who pays minute attention to the choice of words, phrases and expressions and appropriate application of rhyme and *vers libre* and above all to the creative medium. Imagery, which has been largely deplored by the modern poets, has been found in abundance in his poetry. The fourth chapter, "Imagery—a study of its origin and functions", deals with the origin, scope and

functions of imagery in his poetry. "The world of imagery—a study in major images and symbols", my last chapter, highlights the predominant images and symbols employed in his poetry. This chapter has been divided into two sections. The first section, "A Poet of Senses", reviews Ramanujan as a poet of keen sensibility. The images are examined and classified on the basis of diverse sense perceptions. The second section, "Ramanujan's Universe", considers the dominant images and symbols used in all four volumes of poetry. The key images which occur in his poetry are "city", "tree", "woman", "insect", "animal", "water", "bird" and "colour".

While writing this thesis, I have depended on *The Collected Poems of A.K.Ramanujan* published in (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), which has a Preface by Krittika Ramanujan and has an Introduction by Vinay Dharwadker, for textual references. The research methodology specified in *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* by Joseph Gibaldi (New Delhi: Affiliated East-West Press Pvt. Ltd., 1996) has been strictly adhered to in this dissertation.

Notes and References

1. Rabindranath Tagore, *Sanchayita* [Collection] (Calcutta: Visva Bharati, 1975) 757.
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Chapter I

A Quest for the Roots

All that we did, all that we said or sang

Must come from contact with the soil.¹ (SP: 193)

A true child of the soil, A.K.Ramanujan has presented his vision of India in his poetry. His mind constantly reverts to his past, goes to his origin and creates poetry out of it. As his poetry springs from the life of his country, he searches deep into the topography, culture and heritage of India to discover his roots:

I must seek and will find

my particular hell only in my hindu mind: (CP: 34)

Ramanujan's alienation from India has not made him altogether a stranger to his motherland. Rather, this has cut deep furrows in his mind and awakened his poetic sensibility. He believes, "Alienation from the immediate environment can mean continuity with an older ideal" (Speaking of Siva.1973.33). As he had been brought up in a multilingual and multicultural environment, he developed a critical and rational outlook of the rich cultural and spiritual heritage of the East. In the essay "Telling Tales", he asserts:

As we grew up, Sanskrit and English were our father-tongues, and Tamil and Kannada our mother-tongues. The father-tongues distanced us from our mothers, from our own childhoods, and from our villages and many of our neighbours in the cowherd colony next door. And the mother-tongues united us with them ... Sanskrit stood for the Indian past: English for colonial India and the West ... Each was an other to the others, and it became the business of a lifetime for some of us

to keep the dialogues and quarrels alive among these three and to make something of them² (CE: 449-50).

Language acquisition is natural to him, and as a bilingual poet his mission of life is “to keep the dialogues and the quarrels alive among these three and to make something of them”. The formative influences of Tamil and Kannada poets mould his poetic mind and he honestly confesses that his acquaintance with the classical Tamil form helps him to write The Murugan poems, which like the Kannada medieval mystical writings combine prayers with some ironic attitudes. His intimate association with the Indian milieu and his exposure to three different languages since childhood as he “spoke Tamil downstairs and English upstairs and Kannada outside the house” (Jha. 1981. 5), assist him to achieve competence in Indian languages. The traditional Indian culture forms the basic scaffolding for his poetry. In an interview with Rama Jha he admits, “My knowledge of English has been deeply affected by my knowledge of Indian literature and Indian Poetics” (Jha. 1981. 7). His poetry in English gets its nourishment from the Indian culture and Indian languages and it is the distant detachment, which enables him to define his Indian experience and his Indian self.

Self-scrutiny or a quest for an identity is a major concern of the Indian poets. It constitutes the cherished end of the poetic speculation. This search, as Ramanujan views in the poem “Drafts”, is similar to the search of the daughters:

adopted daughters researching parents

through maiden names in changing languages,

telephone books,

and familiar grins in railway stations.

(CP: 158)

It does not stop only by prying into the socio-cultural background but penetrates further into the deepest level of universality of all life. So, he contemplates the

familial scene, recalls his childhood impressions and seeks to burrow the doctrines of Hinduism. The urge, the poet experiences while exploring the self, invigorates him to undertake a "spiritual odyssey" (Pathak. 1992. 4). As the poet has lost his social and spiritual moorings in his exile, he, like the New England waterbug of the poem "The Striders", in search of a deep insight to realise the Divine, makes a search and transcends the immediate world and enters the world of the spiritual tradition of India. His quest for the roots "is almost in the nature of a pilgrimage, a search for a Guru, whose mute experiences are transmitted through languagelessness"³.

Ramanujan's poetry is the poetry of self-search. Nissim Ezekiel, though bred in westernized surrounding, has intense involvement with the Indian precincts. He declares that he is not a Hindu by birth. His background makes him a natural outsider, but circumstances and decisions relate him to India. The tension between his Bene-Israel roots and his Indian environment is evident in his writing, but he makes no attempt to relive the past. Ramanujan is aware of the importance of having roots because "only a tree that has driven deep roots into the soil could put forth ample foliage and yield abundant fruit" (Iyengar. 1996. 60). He finds it impossible to isolate himself from his roots, which stimulate and inspire his creativity. Despite his long sojourn in USA, he is never oblivious of his provenance and so, wherever he goes he carries the whole storehouse of Indian experiences with him; reviews and recreates them in his poems and recounts the depth of his origin. Surjit S. Dulai rightly observes that "Ramanujan's harking back to his Indian experience has always played a fundamental role in the shaping of his poetic sensibility and the content of his poetry" (Dulai. 1989. n.p.). The greatness of India lies in the history of its past. Ramanujan, a product of the Indian heritage, feels that his Indianness is a part of his past and in his words, "Just as our biological past lives in the physical body, our social and cultural

past lives in the many cultural bodies we inherit - our languages, arts, religions, and life-cycle rites"⁴ (CE: 184). This 'cultural past' moulds his poetic vision and his frequent visits to India reinforce his ties with his country and make his voyage easier.

A man embedded in the Indian culture cannot feel at home in the western atmosphere and, Ramanujan is, therefore, sometimes beset with doubts about his origin. He feels insecure and is afraid of losing self-identity. This predicament of an immigrant is like that of a foetus preparing to be born:

A foetus in an acrobat's womb,

ignorant yet of barbed wire

and dotted lines,

hanger-on in terror of the fall

(CP: 149)

The baby in its mother's womb has an identity, that of its mother. But once born, the baby is severed from the mother and gets its own identity. As the little baby starts growing, it starts getting alienated from its family members. This baby grows up into the world of money, earning and living and in this process again it loses touch with the family and feels isolated:

getting ready to make faces,

and hands that will soon feel the powder touch

of monarch butterflies,

the tin and silver of nickel and dime,

and learn right and left to staple, fold

and mutilate

a paper world in search of identity cards.

(CP: 149)

The modern man is, thus alienated not only from his own family but also from the society he belongs to.

As Ramanujan moves to the foreign country, he feels himself like the plucked fruit, plucked away from his family. He has to start a new life and make a fresh beginning in a new atmosphere. But he finds it difficult to accommodate in the new environment and hence, suffers from rootlessness. The western world, its culture, life styles and values have made the search for the self difficult. Standing between two worlds—the land of his birth and the land of his domicile, -Ramanujan feels himself insulated from his origin:

not knowing who I am or what I want

I roam the city walk into movies

hurtle down a roller coaster...

(CP: 216)

As he strives to discover his roots, he finds it difficult and seems to lose all connections with his native land:

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.

(CP: 185)

It is difficult for him to correlate both the worlds;—the eastern and the western. Sometimes he falters, stumbles but refuses to reject either:

As I transact with the past as with another

country with its own customs, currency,

stock exchange, always

at a loss when I count my change:...

(CP: 189)

He is bewildered and is not sure who he is and there by, suffers from an identity crisis:

I resemble everyone

but myself, and sometimes see

in shop-windows,

despite the well-known laws

of optics,

the portrait of a stranger,

date unknown,

often signed in a corner

by my father.

(CP: 23)

The poet is, however, certain of one thing, the father's signature in the corner, which obliquely suggests his origin or his roots. The mirror does not only reflect his external physical appearance but also gives an insight into his inner self, the self of self-recognition. Parthasarathy also experiences the loss of identity, the most crucial problem for the exile. In both the poets—Ramanujan and Parthasarathy, it is the father who establishes a link with the past. But the father in Ramanujan is a constricting influence whereas in Parthasarathy—he is either a living presence or as a memory—creates a reassuring link with the past.

Being a product of his time, place and ethnic roots, Ramanujan's personality is shaped by and linked to his Indian experience. He looks at the world from the vantage point of his native background. Expatriation, which brings forth a breach, a rift between the self and its home, serves as a dynamic and an enriching force in him. The

salutary work atmosphere and the success of achievement in an alien land cannot transform the United States into a home. As he lives in abroad, he becomes acutely conscious of his Indianness. Thoughts and feelings for his motherland engage his mind continually, enkindling his poetic self and thus enabling him “to interpret the soul of Mother India to the West in a very forceful manner” (Dwivedi. 1995. 149). Ramanujan’s poetry has almost become a verifiable and veritable record of what in essence, India or Indian society and culture stand for. An objective evaluation of his poetry will at once bring to focus the poet’s willingness to clutch and cling to the social and cultural moorings of his homeland. If the squalor, dirt and misery, the exploitation and corruption of urban life in India have been skilfully portrayed by Ezekiel, Ramanujan depicts realistic pictures of India—both the urban and the rural landscapes. He does it with such cold, acquired detachment that one immediately recognizes the striking balance between his language and the tone. Even the unhygienic condition of the Indian landscape totally absorbs his attention:

I look out the window

see a man defecating

between two rocks, and a crow (CP: 80)

lifts with his one good finger

his loincloth, and pisses standing

like a horse... (CP: 190)

Ramanujan’s poems, therefore, “arise out of a specific soil and flicker with a spirit of place.”⁵

If “a realistic and clinical perception is the source of genuine poetry” (Desai. 1984

114), Ramanujan's poetry can be considered as a poetry of perception. As a perfect seer, he has displayed a remarkable faculty of observation in delineating the natural sights and sounds of his country. The portrayals of three women carrying baskets on their heads and one of them balancing "a late pregnancy," and of "buffaloes swatting flies/with their tails" (CP: 81), exhibit typical Indian scenario. Thus, while presenting a replica of the real life of India, he makes an effort to absorb the Indian lore in his poetry and aims at reaching the root of Indian life. He authenticates his sense of place by becoming nostalgic about his own past in India. He ransacks the cupboard of memory and revitalizes his sense of belonging to India by delving deep into the soil where his roots lie and originate. He often recollects the country of his birth—a country with a "frothing Himalayan river" (CP: 186) and strengthens his ties with the roots of his own subjective self.

Since poetry as defined by Matthew Arnold is "a criticism of life" and a poet is the production of his time, the social reality around him naturally has not escaped his attention. Ramanujan has been a social critic in his poetry and has presented a vision of social realism in some of his poems. Not a visionary but a realist as he is, the loss and disaster caused by a flood stimulate his poetic imagination. To Keki Daruwalla, the Ganga at Banarasi, a pilgrimage centre, is "a meeting place of polarity, life and death" (Ramachar. 1989. 39):

where corpse-fires and cooking fires

burn side by side?⁶

While to some poets the river is holy, beautiful and sacred, to Ramanujan, it is destructive, pitiful and tragic and so he makes "a daring effort to penetrate beyond the veil of illusion and unfold the grim truth behind the devastation caused by the river" (Das. 1985. 24) in spate:

it carries away
 in the first half-hour
 three village houses,
 a couple of cows
 named Gopi and Brinda
 and one pregnant woman

(CP: 39)

He points at the fact that the flood not only affects the present generation but also has a tremendous effect on the future generation and so the mother's womb turns a prenatal grave of the unborn and unnamed twins.

In quest of his identity, Ramanujan learns that the "roots are deep"⁷ (RP: 17) lying dormant in the society and accordingly he makes an attempt to explore the existential problems of the society to which he once belonged. In his innermost heart Ramanujan is a humanist whose heart is fraught with pity and kindness at the sight of the distressed humanity. In some of his poems, like William Blake in his "Songs of Experience", he has expressed his deep concern, compassion and love for the downtrodden. He does not watch them from a distance as exotic beings, but as a core unit of our society. K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar observes:

Ramanujan summons from the hinterland of memory buried moments of suspense, surprise or agony, and turns them into disturbingly vivid poems. The mutilated beggar, the drowned woman,—they are caught in their contortions and misery, and they are there, like the denizens of Dante's hell. (Iyengar. 1962. 671)

As a sensitive poet he is moved by the miserable plight of the "lepers of Madurai,/male, female married,/with children," (CP: 122). He does not hesitate to point out the evil of the society which is comprised of pretenders and liars—the

degenerate personals devoid of morality where “sunlit beggar squatting/on his shadow” (CP: 49) and ostentatious society shows charity to the dishonest beggars:

pandering lies

for our charity's

counterfeit *pice*.

(CP: 49)

Ramanujan is “essentially a poet, a sensitive antenna” (Desai. 1984. 121), who is easily moved to pity on seeing a rickshaw-puller struggling for his survival and whose “tattoo will stand, green, red,/when all else is gone” (CP: 24). Thus, the poetic self is disenchanted after an encounter with the reality.

A search for an identity resulting in the discovery of self-knowledge leads the poet to frustration as he confronts with much ugliness and absurdities of life. While indulging in self analysis, he makes an attempt to penetrate into the realities around him and illuminates the atrocities of the society. S.N.Pandey argues:

In a substantially large number of poems Ramanujan recalls all the monstrosities (stored in his subconscious) perpetrated on women in his family by their male counterparts right from the days of his great grandfather down to his own childhood (Pandey. 1998. 94).

So, his granny became a tragic victim of her husband's wrath whose four fingers were chopped off “one sunday morning half a century ago” (CP: 6). Ramanujan is aggrieved because of the insipid attitude of his great grandfather, who witnesses his wife being sexually assaulted and robbed of womanhood. The image of the woman as a victim of cruel forces in a corrupt society has been realistically portrayed by Jayanta Mahapatra in his poem “Hunger,” where the fisher-man-father, driven by poverty, allows his daughter to resort to prostitution. The fisherman's daughter is presented as a helpless and a passive tool and a victim of male-lust:

I heard him say: my daughter, she's just turned fifteen...

Feel her. I'll be back soon, your bus leaves at nine.

The sky fell on me, and a father's exhausted wife.

Long and lean, her years were cold as rubber.

She opened her wormy legs wide. I felt the hunger there,

the other one, the fish slithering, turning inside.⁸

Ramanujan, too has painted shocking pictures of girls who have to endure the tortures and insults of the society and sometimes become victims of “a careless pregnancy/after a picnic with loafers” (CP:95).

A social historian may find in Ramanujan a plethora of information providing him the real food for the social history of India. He has, very ably, captured every detail of the social life of the country he comes from. Surjit. S.Dulai has rightly observed that “the India of his mind is both the mirror and the reflection in the mirror that comprise his art” (Dulai. 1989: n.p.). Though it is said that the woman is the real source of creation, an epitome of perfect life, yet in a patriarchal society like India, she seems to lose all significance after the demise of her husband. The death of Ramanujan's father has an effect on his mother. She is “a changed mother” (CP: 112) as she is now without the vermilion on her forehead and her bangles being broken and removed according to the Hindu conventions. He recollects his mother “cutting across the bangles broken/on mother's hour of widowhood” (CP: 271). Womanhood is a curse and the widow has to lead an austere life wearing white clothes and is left to the mercy of her children.

Being a true solipsist and acutely conscious of his psyche, the poet's self tries to explore his poetic mind—a mind being obsessed with superstitions and the religious

belief prevailing in our society which are unknown, mysterious and beyond comprehension:

There are more things in heaven and earth,
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.⁹ (1.5)

To Keki N. Daruwalla, Haranag, a sinister creature, is the symbol of impending misfortune and misery. The cawing of a crow, for Nissim Ezekiel, foretells the arrival of a guest. Ramanujan believes that ants cannot stand the smell of a live cobra but “they’ll pick/the flesh of dead ones” (CP: 106). For him Saturdays are inauspicious ‘because the day of Saturn’ invites disaster resulting in the death of his mother and brother. ‘Ominous Saturdays’ as he calls them because:

The body we know is an almanac.
Saturdays ache
in shoulder bone and thigh bone, (CP: 151)

The poet is deeply, rather sensitively aware of the Indian customs and rituals. His mother’s attitude towards “a basketful of ritual cobras” (CP: 4) alludes to the Indian rite of offering milk to the snake on the *Naga-panchami* day to protect oneself from snake-bite:

...Mother gives them milk
in saucers. She watches them suck
and bare the black-line design
etched on the brass of the saucer. (CP: 4)

“Obituary” throws light on the rituals performed by the poet after the sudden death of his father:

several spinal discs, rough,
some burned to coal, for sons

to pick gingerly
 and throw as the priest
 said, facing east
 where three rivers met
 near the railway station; (CP: 111).

A poet cannot remain always "a music maker" and "a dreamer of dreams". He must observe minutely the external reality around and be the chronicler of his time in his poetry. Ramanujan, like W.B. Yeats is a true nationalist, extremely devoted to his country. Yeats's nationalistic spirit is aroused as he has witnessed the martyrdom of the Irish nationalist. In his view "A terrible beauty is born"¹⁰ (SP: 93) of the daring deeds and sacrifice of the martyrs:

Too long a sacrifice
 Can make a stone of the heart.¹¹ (SP: 95)

Ramanujan too, like W.B. Yeats, is aware of the political aura of his country and so his patriotic zeal is stimulated by the revolt in Assam and the violence and militancy in Punjab threatening the solidarity and integrity of the country. The poem "Bosnia" refers to the bloodshed in the eastern Europe. The poet's heart is full of compassion for the innocent men and women whose lives are destroyed in the war. The poet here looks at death with a sense of alarm and is completely devoid of the irreverence.

Politics is a dirty game and the politicians, the backbone of the Indian society, according to O.P.Bhatnagar, are without morals and are worse than beggars. In the eye of Keki N.Daruwalla, they are hypocrites, seem to be leading a simple life but in reality loll in luxury. Politics, for Ramanujan, is a man killing game of dirty people and the politicians are opportunists. He calls them "bead eyed" beetles (CP: 50), who

dream “of futures and seals of state/and signatures of brass/on their most casual turd” (Ibid).

Ramanujan possesses a profound historical sense. He feels it obligatory to relate himself to history through tradition in order to represent its strength and weakness. The glorious past is contrasted by him with the inglorious present in the poem “Some Indian Uses of History on a Rainy Day”, where the disciplined monks of old king Harsha, standing in a queue, represent the disciplined society, whereas the modern Indian “Head clerks from city banks/curse, batter elbow/in vain the patchwork gangs” (CP: 74) of seat are “the degenerate descendants of those ancient intellectuals—only handle other people’s money in the banks and are an indisciplined lot in a generally indisciplined society” (Naik. “...the search for Roots”. 1989. 19).

Ramanujan’s sharp historical sensibility is also manifested in the poem “The Last of the Princes” which combines familial experience with a historical consciousness. It refers to the period of history when Aurangzeb had died and the Mughal empire had lost all its glory. The last of the prince refers to Bahadur Saha Zafar, a true patriot, who suffered from poverty and illness but did not yield to the British cruelty. The poem depicts pomp and opulence of the Indian princely house, which enjoyed peace and prosperity in the past:

...Father, uncles, seven

, folklore brothers, sister so young so lovely

that snakes loved her and hung dead,

ancestral

lovers, from her ceiling; brother’s many

wives, their unborn stillborn babies, numberless

cousins, royal mynahs and parrots

in the harem: (CP: 105)

but now, the last of the royal family having lost grandeur and sovereignty stands out as a pathetic figure:

... he lives on, to cough,

remember and sneeze, a balance of phlegm

and bile, ... (Ibid)

The poem throws light not only on individual suffering but also highlights the anxiety and distress of the people of that period who had endured misery and hardship for long.

A search for self in an alien environment is the predominant motif of Ramanujan. As he goes down to his roots, he, as advised by R. Parthasarthy, "Turn inward. Scrape the bottom of your[his] past"¹² (RP: 50) and thus, provides us a glimpse of India's rich cultural heritage as reflected in her myths and legends. He, like W.B. Yeats, uses them out of a desire to seek cultural identity. So, he picks up bits and pieces of old stories as he has heard of them, interprets and gives life to them.

Myths and legends can be regarded as indispensable for the rediscovery of roots and for correlating one's personal stance with the historical one. While presenting the mythological figures, Ramanujan does not hesitate to dissemble the follies and foibles in these characters. The poem, "No Amnesiac King", illuminates the crime of King Dushyanta, who forgot all about his marriage with Sakuntala, abandoned her and was reluctant to recognise her, which had nearly ruined her life.

The divine power of God and His triumph over human being are illumined in the myth of King Parikshit in the poem "A Minor Sacrifice", who killed a snake "to garland a sage's neck/with the cold dead thing" (CP: 144), and consequently earned

“a curse,/an early death by snakebite” (Ibid). The arrogant and proud son Janmejaya, to avert his father’s death, performed “a sacrifice,/a magic rite/ that draws every snake from everywhere” (Ibid), and killed all snakes except the poisonous Takshak, who stuck to the leg of Lord Indra’s throne, acted according to his advice and ultimately bit the king.

“Mythologies 1” refers to the myth of Lord Krishna and the prank played by him as a child, when Putana, a female demon picked him up and offered him her breast to suck. The infant seized her breast with both hands and went on sucking till he had sucked her life away:

The Child took her breast

: * in his mouth and sucked it right out her chest.

Her carcass stretched from north to south.

(CP: 221)

“Mythologies 2” uses the myth of Hiranyakashyapu, the king of the antigod, whom Lord Vishnu, the preserver of earth and mankind, assuming the form of a man-lion killed him:

... ... to hold

him in your lap to disembowel his pride

with the steel glint of bare claws at twilight.

(CP: 226)

The omnipotence and grandeur of Lord Vishnu have been illustrated in the poem “Zoo Gardens Revisited”. He, in his third incarnation became a boar, slew the demon Hiranyakashyapu who abducted the earth and lifted the earth “with his tusk/from the deep”¹³. He, assuming the shape of “Matsya” saved Manu, the progenitor of the human race, from a great deluge. He is represented in the Indian mythology as Kurma, the Tortoise. He carried Mt. Mandara on his back to help the God and

recovered valuable artifacts lost in the flood. He also became Kalki-‘the white horse’-to purge the universe.

The myth of Lord Vishnu, who is the embodiment of exquisite power, is also referred to in the poem “The Difference”. Lord Vishnu, assuming the shape of a dwarf Vamana, before the demon king Bali, measured the three worlds—heaven, earth and nether-world by three steps:

giant head and giant feet
 growing away from each other,
 time itself rose to view:
 how the lord
 paced and measured
 all three worlds!¹⁴

Besides glorifying the deeds and valours of ancient Gods, the great virtues possessed by our great heroes are not condoned. “Army Ants” hints at the myth of Karna, the son of Kunti and the great hero of the Mahabharata. He did not vacillate to part with the earrings and armour, the saviours of his life, when Indra in the guise of a brahmin begged of him.

Ramanujan has multifarious interest in myths and legends and he is able to visualize the world of Indian myth as a complete and comprehensive society, which he exhibits in a series of poems. His objective is not only to familiarise the foreign readers with the greatness of India’s rich heritage but also to assert on his understanding of it. Myths are the deposits of culture and by using myths in his poems, Ramanujan not merely sharpens his imagination but pertains him to the past of his country. Living in an age of self-scrutiny, he tries to seek a national identity in unfolding them and thus he stands out as a critic of the past, present and himself.

Ramanujan is aware that his “deepest roots are in the Kannada and Tamil past, and he has repossessed that past, in fact made it available, in the English language” (Parthasarathy. “The Making of a Tradition”. 1979. 6.). Both the works The Striders and Relations, in the view of R.Parthasarathy “are the heirs of an anterior tradition”(Ibid). The poem “Prayers to Lord Murugan” is an imitation of the Tamil poem “Tirumurukarruppatai” where the Dravidian God of youth, beauty, war and love is invoked in the tradition of the classical Tamil heroic poem. The poet here makes an attempt to explore “the psychological connections between the traditional past of Indian psyche and the demythicised reality of the decadent milieu” (Kurup. 1996. 222). This ancient Dravidian God, “becomes a symbol of the comprehensiveness required of an individual to cope with the complexity of reality” (Kurup. 1996. 223), which the poet seems to have encountered during his poetic voyage in search of the discovery of the self.

Ramanujan believes that the self is the product of one’s racial heritage. While exploring his racial heritage, he tries to assess the conventional views of Hinduism. He feels closely attached to the orthodox Hindu religion. As a true Hindu he believes “a Hindu is born not made. With such a belief, there is no place for conversion in Hinduism; a man born to caste or faith cannot choose and change, nor can others change him”¹⁵. He knows that it is very difficult to understand the meaning of many things in life as an element of mystery permeates in the phenomena. So, one cannot distinguish between a leaf and a parrot, a branch and a root. He believes in the unity of all life on earth—human, animal and vegetable:

For a moment, I no

longer know

leaf from parrot

or branch from root

nor, for that mater,

that tree

from you or me.

(CP:33)

While assessing the strength and weakness of India's culture and heritage, Ramanujan turns to his private life of sensibility for the theme of his poetry because he too, like J.B. Yeats believes that "it is exciting to write the poetry of life"¹⁶ and the subject matter of the poetry is knotted to a life as "a man can only paint the life he has lived"¹⁷. As Ramanujan felt like a fish out of water in his exile, his poetic self turned inward, made a voyage within and provided us with the interior landscape of his mind. He harks back to the past, recollects with nostalgia, the various members of his family as well as different objects associated with his early life. He, though equally involved in both the cultures, believes that the American environment forms the exterior of his poetic self, and the Indian environment the interior. He, unlike Ezekiel, does not feel detached from the Indian scene but launches a journey for "a relevant past" (Kurup. 1996. 295) and reminisces his childhood days. Poems like "Looking for a Cousin on a Swing" and "History" are ruminative poems, where Ramanujan looks back at the past, which fosters his poetic mind in the art of his creation.

As Ramanujan's poetic personality interacts with the surrounding, memories flash before his eyes. His poetry springs from personal and concrete experiences and leaves traces of his private life. Hence, his poetry is mostly concerned with family—a record of his own life story. Therefore, his poetry is not only a "poetry of reverie" (Kurup. 1996. 201) but also a documentary of his bygone days. M.K. Naik rightly observes:

In poem after poem, Ramanujan goes back to his childhood memories and experiences of life in south India. Recollected in adult tranquillity abroad,

these memories and experiences, indelibly etched on the impressionable mind of a sensitive growing boy, now pulsate into life. The memory of the day when a great aunt dies, of another when a basketful of cobras come into the house, and a host of such other felt experiences give a certain immediacy to these poems, ... (Naik. "Echo and Voice ...". 1980. 39).

Ramanujan is persistently obsessed with his Indian past—both familial and racial. In an interview with Rama Jha he admits, "Creativity comes out of sustained attention to one's own experience, one's own locality, one's own environment"¹⁸. His poems that dwell on his family and relations give an intimate and authentic account of the joint Hindu family that has moulded his personality. The 'great house' in the poem "Small-Scale Reflections on a Great House" has an absorbing power of the traditional culture because "nothing/that ever comes into this house/goes out" (CP: 96) and anything that "goes out/will come back" (CP: 97). This 'house' stands for the ancient house of Hinduism, whose motto is *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, which means the entire earth is one family. "A meditative, musing tone and the deft repetition of a common phrase ("lost long ago") help the reader perceive that the self has gradually become the "theatre" in which the history of the ancient house is presented" (Kulshrestha. 1980. 181-182). Being an offspring of this family, he feels in his nerve the gravitational pull of the past and yearns for returning to the great ancestral home. Like the prodigal son whose eyes resemble his fathers, the poetic self returns to its root to get itself defined.

It is the rootedness in one's own culture and the intimate relationship to one's family that provide emotional stability to Ramanujan, which enables him to connect himself to the outside world. The values, which he has inherited from the culture of the Great House, have helped him to adapt in other cultures. It is true that the milieu

influences a man. So it does with the poet. As he stays long in the west, he absorbs a new ethos and develops a different attitude of looking at his own culture objectively through western perspective. Therefore, his attitude towards Lord Murugan is an ironic irreverence. His portrayal of Lord Murugan evokes neither bhakti nor faith; there is only irony and existential angst:

Lord of lost travellers,

Find us. Hunt us

down.

Lord of answers,

cure us at once

of prayers. (CP:117)

Politics, for him is a matter of fun as he says in "Compensations":

the dumb and the colourblind rise

rapidly in politics;... (CP:109)

A general survey of Ramanujan's poetry reveals the fact that his poetry is rooted in life-experience and his poetry is like "a plant with roots in the soil" (Naik "Echo and Voice..." 1980. 39). His poetic self is like "a banyan tree which though being always stable at its own place searches endlessly with its branches and quests incessantly around with its roots" (Kurup. 1996. 216). His quest is not merely a personal quest, unveiling his personal life but a universal quest providing us with a complete spectacle of India, her culture and tradition and his deep involvement with it.

It is true that both Ramanujan and R.Parthasarathy are preoccupied with the problem of roots. Ramanujan is more concerned with the exploration of the past—both familial and racial and hence, he uses memory as an instrument to achieve his end. He derives strength from going back to his roots. Parthasarathy, on the other hand, is

obsessed with the primacy of experience and his poetic self suffers from a conflict, which arises from the clash between two cultures—the Indian and the Western. He tries to sublimate this tension by falling back on memories, both personal and linguistic.

A true Indian although exposed to two different cultures—occidental and oriental, Ramanujan remains true to his own country and his thoughts and feelings are nurtured by a Hindu consciousness. His poetry is not only the product of a “specific culture” (Parthasarathy. “How It Strikes A Contemporary ...” 1996. 195) but also amounts to “some revelation of the heart of India, some sincere penetrating analysis of native passion” (Iyenger. 1996. 209). According to R. Parthasarathy “His poems are like the patterns in a Kaleidoscope, and every time he turns it around one way or other, to observe them more closely, the results never fail to astonish”¹⁹

Ramanujan’s quest as revealed in his poems, is two-fold. First, he makes a search for roots in the tradition, recreates his past experiences and turns to myths and legends in order to present India’s rich heritage to his readers. Secondly, he undertakes a quest for a higher self, which is torn and distracted by the contraries of life. To achieve this end, he mocks at the self and reveals its bankruptcy, which helps him to clean, not merely the self but also the attitude in relation to the society he lives in.

The long-term expatriation in Chicago does not make Ramanujan oblivious of his own roots. On the contrary, alienation serves as means of self exploration. Exile does not lead to nostalgia but it “has led to a reappraisal of his roots” (SenGupta 1992. 93) as he is no more left in the dark about his origin, his identity:

Composed as I am, like others,

of elements on certain well-known lists,

father’s seed and mother’s egg

gathering earth, air, fire, mostly

water, into a mulberry mass,

moulding calcium,

carbon, even gold, magnesium ...

(CP: 121)

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Chapter II

A. Poetry as a family record

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. (CP: n. pag.)

This "Prologue" to the second collection of the poems Relations richly illustrates Ramanujan's interest in the affairs of family and family relationships. This concern remains a driving force behind his poetry. Since his childhood was spent in India amidst relatives, his life developed around family in which he was born. Emmanuel Narendra Lall observes, "Ramanujan finds his objective correlative in the family around him and then shapes his experience into poems that become neat vignettes on family relationships in India" (Lall, 1983, 66-67). Remoteness cannot sever his link with his family. Family and its 'tiny histories' constitute an eminent theme of his poetry. Family history is the only history that the poet chooses to bank upon. There are vivid evocations of family life in many of his poems. His intimate ties with his family and the private familial circumstances mould his personality. This family history helps him to redefine his identity in the present situation. Parthasarathy rightly

says "Ramanujan's repossession, through his poetry, of the past of his family and of his sense of himself as a distillation of that past is to me a signal achievement" (Parthasarathy. "How It Strikes...". 1976. 192). His world of relations is thickly populated by relatives. Living away from them he feels isolated, depressed, but living among them binds his feet.

Family, for Ramanujan provides him with "a psychological sustenance" and "a sense of security" and "it works as an antidote against his sense of loneliness and helps in the preservation of 'inner continuity' of his self" (Rao. 1983. 73). His attachment to his relatives is like a child tied to his mother with the umbilical cord, which is cut off at the time of birth and the child is separated from his mother:

The child's umbilical cord shrivels and falls

But new connections begin,¹

However, it is merely a physical separation and as he grows up, he develops "new ties, new attachments that are more difficult to cut off for they are intangible" (Ragunandan. 1990. 150). Since a man's life revolves around his family, Ramanujan has felt the need of relations. So, his poems abound with references to mother, father, uncles, aunts, cousins, nephews and nieces. A reading of his poetry is like looking at the photographs of his family album. He seems to have unlocked the casket of memory and painted them with fresher dyes.

The family, an integral part of the social structure, is the most important unit of a society. It acquaints us with the social life. Ramanujan, in his poetry, is concerned with the family life within the context of the social structure. Many of his poems throw light on his individual relationships and their effect on his poetic mind. In modern, urbanized and industrialized India 'extended' family is almost becoming

obsolete whereas 'nuclear' family is more common. In Ramanujan's poetry we come across his reflections on his own nuclear family as well as his extended family.

Ramanujan's extended family in India consists of parents, grandparents, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles and cousins. He has painted the portraits of these members of his family in such detail as they seem alive and throb with life. To Ramanujan, his mother is the epitome of kindness, the most binding of human relation and the darling of his childhood. A popular Sanskrit proverb glorifies mother: "*Janani Janmabhūmicha Swargadapi Goriyashi*", which means mother and motherland are greater than heaven. She is held in high esteem. Parthasarathy believes that the mother exercises a salutary influence over her children. He recollects his mother and her "turmeric days" in "Home coming 7":

A more than smug childhood

I have eviscerated since

from the scalloped folds of her sari. ² (RP:55)

Ramanujan's mother is very affectionate, loving and caring. Even at the fag end of his creative career he remembers fondly what his mother advised:

... you should

not forget your oil bath

every tuesday

when you go to America. (CP: 259)

A sensitive lady, with a heart as soft as clay, cannot endure the separation from her child and so bids him farewell dumb-struck. In "Farewell" taken from the series called "Images", Ramanujan recollects the moments of his parting from his mother:

Mother's farewell had no words,

no tears, only a long look

that moved on your body

from top to toe. (Ibid)

The memory of his loving mother always haunts him even in exile. For him, his mother is a symbol of patience, suffering and sacrifice. A diligent house wife and a charming lady in her youth but decrepit age has made her delicate and fragile and she stands out as a pathetic figure:

... I see her four

still sensible fingers slowly flex

to pick a grain of rice from the kitchen floor. (CP: 61)

Again, the mother is keenly susceptible to her children's suffering and is ready to suffer for the sake of her children. Ezekiel in "Night of the Scorpion" presents the tolerance of the mother highlighting her love for children. She heaves a sigh of relief as none of her children has been bitten:

Thank God the scorpion picked on me

And spared my children.³

Ramanujan's mother, a pious lady, is so devoted to her children that she will not let him chopped down the "three Red Champak trees" whose smell gives "her first blinding migraine"(CP:124) simply because her daughters and her grandchildren enjoy in collecting them. In "Love 3: what he said, remembering" Ramanujan speaks about his mother and his baby sister. The child poet is asleep and when he wakes up, he sees his mother and finds 'a patch of scab' on her crown, but she is calm and says 'no rush' as he washes her face and in a fit of fear, he runs 'berserk'. Later, as time passes; his mother carries his baby sister asleep in her lap, while she offers her breast to her son and he suckles till he glows on milk still warm. He enjoys the warm milk but becomes jealous of his sister as she is taking his place. The poet admits that he

suffers from Oedipus Complex and he too at a moment becomes Oedipus towards his mother. This shows that he is attached to his mother and has become possessive towards her.

Ramanujan's mother had a liking for music and she used to listen to the music coming faintly every morning while she was working in the kitchen. In the poem "A taste" he points out that the mother weans her baby by smearing "neem" which is very bitter. Similarly, at a later stage in life, the same mother prepares a dish of bitter gourd, which is served as a side dish along with rice in India. Here he presents the mother as a judicious lady, who puts a stop to 'greedy babies' for the mother's milk and thus weans them and puts them on their feet. The same mother develops a taste in the child for the bitter gourd, in other words, a sense of tolerance and acceptance for the negative of life.

The children in ancient India worshipped parents like gods. But now the attitude of the children towards their parents is critical and they even protest against their parents. The Indian poets write about their fathers in an unconventional manner. Mamta Kalia, unconventional and worldly, in her poem "Tribute to Papa" (Peeradina, 1972. 90), is sick of her old-fashioned father's sense of duty and morality whom she thinks an "unsuccessful" man as he cannot establish himself in the society:

You are an unsuccessful man, Papa.

Couldn't wangle a cosy place in the world.

You've always lived a life of limited dreams.

... ..

But you've always wanted to be a model man,

A sort of an ideal.

When you can't think of doing anything,

You start praying,

Spending useless hours at the temple.⁴

She is not proud of her old-fashioned, religious and ideal father, who wants his daughter to be like him or like Rani Lakshmi Bai. She is an ultra modern daughter who cares only for wealth and pleasure of life but her father, on the other hand, is conventional, tradition-bound, who respects the moral values of life. Kamala Das does not speak of her father with love or regard in "My Story". Thus, while describing her father in his death-bed, she confessed, "we were not ideal children/Or useful"⁵ and it was mere selfishness and not their true love, that made them cry:

And more for ourselves, now without a guardian.

Who would send us money to bail us out of jail,

Who would come when we land as junk at the city hospital? ⁶

A similar attitude to the father is revealed in the poem of Ramanujan. He is quite indifferent to his father's death as if he is a stranger. He does not feel any loss at his death. Though he has performed his death-rites according to the customs but no memorial is erected in his honour. His father "didn't quite/manage to do himself"(CP: 112) anything. He is obscure and so commands no respect and popularity. Even so, someone told him that:

he got two lines

in an insight column

of a Madras newspaper

sold by the kilo

exactly four weeks later

to streethawkers.

(CP: 112)

Ramanujan's father, a man of genius, was a mathematician, an astronomer, a Sanskrit scholar and an expert in astrology:

Sky-man in a manhole

with astronomy for dream,

astrology for nightmare; (CP:134)

"A South Indian Brahman gentleman", as Ramanujan calls him, "whose clothes represented his inner life. ... He wore neat white turbans, a Sri Vaisnava caste mark (in his earlier pictures, a diamond earring), yet wore Tootal ties, Kromentz buttons and collar studs, and donned English serge jackets over his muslin *dhotis* which he wore draped in traditional brahman style" (CE: 35-36). He is calm and composed, maintains peace and is not disturbed under any circumstances. He is rational whereas his wife is blindly superstitious. Ramanujan gives a vivid description of his father in the poem "Still Another for Mother":

And the handsome

short-limbed man with a five-finger patch of gray

laid on his widows' peak, (CP:15)

This cool and generous man turns out to be one who is disinterested in his family and turns out to be quarrelsome, finally being separated from his family:

He walked straight on, towards me,

beyond me, didn't stop at the clicks of red

on the signals. (Ibid)

The father, the "centre of authority in an Indian family" and "the prime-mover of the family in his capacity of its patriarchal head, also proves to be its (i.e. family's) main liability" (Kumar. 1998. 13). He, at the time of death, left his sons and daughters no legacy except a table full of dust and paper. Ramanujan depicts his father as a

smiling and generous person who gives money to the snakeman. He is fat, bilious, witty and mystical who sits “with the sunflower at the window/deep in the yellow of a revolving chair” (CP: 14). The same father was an object of fear to him when he was a boy of five, whose beard seemed to resemble “a hanging hive” (CP: 155) and his toes looking like ‘talons’:

I scream at the hair
 on his hands
 as they hold me close
 to ask me why. (CP: 155)

But as he grows up, his fear recedes and he tries to imitate his father:

slap soap on my back
 like father
 and think
 in proverbs (CP:169)

Ramanujan’s father “played a significant role in the intellectual make-up of the poet” (Dwivedi. 1995. 84). “Excerpts from a father’s Wisdom” contains some of his witty remarks, which bring forth his wisdom. He defines “despair”:

Just comb your hair.
 You shouldn’t worry about Despair.
 Despair is a strange disease.
 I think it happens even to trees. (CP: 41)

In “Warning”, he warns the children about poverty. Thomas Hardy, while speaking to the unborn child of a pauper woman says that death in the womb would be the best end to its life because this world is full of hardships, misfortunes and sufferings which the child would have to endure if it comes into this world:

BRAEATHE not, hid Heart: cease silently,

And though thy birth-hour beckons thee,

Sleep the long sleep:

The Doomsters heap

Travails and teens around us here,

And Time-wraiths turn our songsingings to fear.⁸

Ramanujan's father, being a judicious person, is aware of the grim reality that to be born in a poverty-stricken world is to suffer from hunger and thirst. Hence, he warns his children about poverty:

Poverty is not easy to bear

The body is not easy to wear.

So beware, I say to my children

unborn, lest they choose to be born. (CP: 42)

While relapsing into the memory of his family members, the poet does not necessarily idealize, nor tags them to Olympian greatness. On the other hand, he treats them as common and ordinary men and women of flesh and blood with virtues and vices at their back. He presents the members as he has clinically observed and studied them" (Mohanty. 1983. 41). "History" portrays the self-centred avaricious "petite little aunt" (CP: 107), who while cleaning the dead body of the great aunt took away all except "the gold/in her teeth and the silver g-string" (CP: 108). "A terrible aunt" (CP: 4) as Ramanujan calls her who instead of mourning her death grabbed her mother:

of diamond ear-rings,

bangles, anklets, the pin

in her hair,

the toe-rings from her wedding

the previous century, (CP: 108)

Ramanujan's "private mythology is peopled by sisters, parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins" (Kevin. 1967. 142). Grandmother, whom he lovingly calls "granny", has been presented as one having a dynamic personality; "rolling her elephant leg/like a log in a ruined mill" (CP: 6). This "great swinging grandmother" (CP: 62) is his "true ancestor" (Ibid). Kamala Das's grandmother, hailed from an aristocrat family, is a loving woman who has influenced her and whom she often remembers in her solitude. The house became desolate as she passed away:

... That woman died,

The house withdrew into silence, snakes moved

Among books.⁹

She is a symbol of past glory. Ramanujan's grandmother, a symbol of superior knowledge, is a charming storyteller. She is "a bentover grandmother, black/and wrinkled as a raisin," (CP: 189). This "grandma with a yellow daffodil in her hand is symbolic of prejudices which are so much a part of her age" (Raghunandan. 1990. 165).

Again, grandfather though he is a bad-tempered and an angry man, is yet a lovable person. He is a sagacious old man with a taste for music whom the poet imitates:

Yet like grandfather

I bathe before the village crow (CP: 169)

He is a dominant figure in his family poems but he is "totally alienated from the poet so that he does not even acknowledge him as his grandfather. He is only grandmother's husband" (Raghunandan. 1990. 165).

Family, "a representative unit of the social milieu" (Rao. 1983. 74), being a major theme of his poetry, a number of poems reveal his profound interest in his relations. Although he is physically alienated from them, yet they are locked up in his heart and, therefore, he constantly refers to them in his poems. Sister, an intimate associate, with her thick braids "with a knot of tassel" (CP: 5), is one with whom he shares his feeling for they both feel pity for the tree attacked by the woodpacker's beak. Cousin, a scientific minded architect, has an eye for the building. He is a great humanist who:

... calculates

stress and strain on wood

and steel, on liver and lower brain. (CP: 91)

He is very helpful to the people in time of need. He has a soft corner for the widows and the mentally disturbed clerks. This possessive cousin knows the buildings and their shape and gender; he also knows the glass used and its quality, with all its "apparent transparency" (CP: 91). He is kind and helpful to the wounded. This architect cousin has two ways of looking at reality. He possesses a clear reflective vision of nature that outwits man's ingenuity by sprouting mushrooms in crotches of rotting timber in houses that are very carefully planned by the uncle. "Only we, our uncle's nephews" (CP: 92) says the poet, realise that windows cannot exist without walls, or that the purpose of the windows is namely to let in air and sunlight. But he does not hesitate to point out the follies of his cousins. The cousin in "Looking for a Cousin on a Swing" is adulterous and full of lust and the cousin in "Real Estate," though a good architect, fails to have his own house properly covered because of his dreamy nature. These flaws in his cousins finally put them in tragic situations of homelessness and adulterous life.

The ancestors and relations of Ramanujan are sources of his inspiration. "They are the people who generate immense poetic heat in him, and he can't rest until he has unlocked his pent-up feelings and thoughts about them" (Dwivedi, 1995, 82). His poetry seems to be an autobiography exploring his private history and providing a glimpse of his personal life. Ketaki Kushari Dyson, while portraying her hard-working mother-in-law, "a petite woman of the Pennies" discloses the secret that "she was not happy about having an Indian daughter-in-law" (Sen, 2000, 1). Ramanujan too, exposes his family secret by referring to the love affairs of his grandmother with the fisherman lover "who waylaid her/on the ropes in the Madras harbour, /took her often from behind" (CP: 62).

Ramanujan gives us the details of his nuclear family, which consists of himself, his wife and their children. In "Love Poem for a Wife and Her Trees" he brings out the soft feeling and tender thought towards his Christian wife. In his view, she is still young and charming though she is now a mother—"certified dead but living on" (CP: 180). The brahmin poet is irresistibly attracted towards her, though she comes from a different cultural background. She haunts his mind everywhere:

Dear woman, you remind me again
 in unlikely places like post offices
 where I lick

 your stamps, that I must remember
 you're not my Daughter, unborn maybe
 but always

present:

(CP: 181)

The long coveted lady, Helen of Yeats, Maud Gonne, who was an orator and an ardent nationalist, was a constant source of his inspiration. She, in her youth, was "Beautiful and gentle in her Venetian Way"¹⁰ (SP: 192). But with the approach of her old age, she became "Hollow of cheek as though it drank the wind/And took a mess of shadows for its meat"¹¹ (SP: 128). Ramanujan's wife, who is a journalist and a writer, is a woman of extensive knowledge because she

... knows what I'll never know:

languages of the deep south, weathers

underground faults

in my own continent, mushrooms

for love and hate, backrubs and sinister

witchery,

(CP: 182)

But sometimes, she seems to be childish and fights with her brother James over a trifling thing. She is a lady having practical common sense, physical and mental charms and a wonderful woman in her different roles of a Jewish mama, a sob-sister, a help-needing daughter, a sex-pot next door and a simple Indian wife at the village well. He laments that he has not been able to find emotional fulfilment in his relationship with his wife. The cause for such alienation, in his opinion, is "unshared childhood" which keeps them "apart/at the end of years" (CP: 65).

Ramanujan disappointed with his wife, gets emotional gratification following his attachment with his children. His love for his children is so intense that he will

... 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)

This affectionate father imagines of a possible disease jaundice of his unborn daughter. She is his dream child. In "Some Relations", he speaks of his daughter's turtle who tries "to hibernate in the jar, very far/from the ocean, beginning to be confused/by the heat of this Chicago winter" (CP: 101). In a changed social condition, the man chasing his daughter arises fear in his mind and he becomes worried about her safety:

sudden knives and urchin laughter

in the redlight alley

add now

the men in live

behind my daughter.

(CP: 86)

The same fear is the source of his dreams in which he sees his son "skewered/by a bamboo arrow/in a jungle trap;" and his daughter "lowered/like a match/into a sulphur mine/of hungry men" (CP: 155).

The poem "Son to Father to Son" shows how closely the poet is attached to his son who resembles him- "I wake with a round/shadow for my head" (CP: 156)- and is greatly surprised to discover him so fully developed. His love and affection for his son is also highlighted in the poem "Moulting" where he invokes God to protect his son in his hour of change:

Lord of snakes and eagles, and everything in between, cover
my son with an hour's shade and be the thorn at a suitable height in
his hour of change, (CP: 176)

Ramanujan like a biographer presents us the gallery of almost all his near and dear ones, and his poems are full of dramatis personae. His poems can be termed as

'itemised autobiographies' (Rao. 1997. 103) as K.R.Rao has said. For R. Parthasarathy, "The family, for Ramanujan, is in fact, one of the central metaphors with which he thinks"¹² and "his poetry rests in the shade of the family tree" (Daruwalla. 80. XXIV).

Ramanujan has a scientific bent of mind who discovers the presence of DNA, a constituent chromosomes, in his organism. He speculates about the possible source of his and his family-members' present illness in the eccentricities and obsessions of his father and family relations. So, when his large tooth in his left jaw aches he remembers his mother "complaining of the large tooth/in her left jaw/the week before she died" (CP: 259). Father's love for sunflowers and grandma's fascination for daffodils may be the cause of possible jaundice to the unborn daughter. The poet himself has inherited a musical quality from his grandfather, epilepsy from his "grave lowbrow uncles" who have "movable scalps and wrinkled long black hands" (CP: 153), migraine from his mother and calm, indifferent temperament from his great grandfather. He thinks himself as "a link in the long chain of family descent" (Rao. 1983. 74) and so segregation from his family not only aggravates his sense of insecurity, but also results in the loss of significant others.

The worlds of Parthasarathy's Rough Passage and Ramanujan's Relations are thickly populated by relatives. Living away from them they realise that roots are deep, but living among them bind their feet. Though both belong to Srivaisnava brahmin families and deal with the same world, one can observe an attitudinal difference with regard to the family. Parthasarathy believes that his roots are deep and the tree of tradition provides shelter. So, we experience a natural flow of affection in his family poems. Ramanujan too admits the influences of his family on his psyche and sensibility. But we notice a change in his attitude as he sometimes contrives an ironic

stance and adopts a satiric tone in presenting some of his relations. There is a fundamental difference in their points of view. Ramanujan viewed his relation from the outside. As he sees them from exterior it tends to get more distanced from and less involved with that he sees. Parathasarathy, on the other hand, is more close and involved as he sees them from the interior. This contrast between them can be compared to the contrast between Chaucer and Langland. Chaucer looked at the medieval English church from outside and laughed at its corruption. Langland, himself a clergyman, looked at the church from within its bosom and shed hot tears. Ramanujan looks at his family through the window of the railway carriage and his "Routine Day Sonnet" is almost tongue-in-cheek in its attitude towards the boredom of routine:

For me a perfectly ordinary
 day at the office, only a red lorry
 past the window at two;
 a sailor with a chest tattoo. (CP: 68)

Parthasarathy, on the contrary, deals with the agonizing grimness powerfully and vividly:

The street in the evening tilts homeward
 as traffic piles up.
 It is then I stir about.
 Rise from the table and shake the dust
 from my eyes. Pick up
 my glasses and look for myself
 in every nook and corner

of the night. The pavement turns informer
hearing my steps. A pariah dog

slams an alley in my face.

I have exchanged the world

for a table and chair. I shouldn't complain.¹³ (RP: 58).

The contrast between the two angles of vision can be understood by reading "Homecoming 4" and "Obituary". Parthasarathy, while speaking about his father's death says that an unexpected November shut the door in his face. He was shocked and felt that the part of his self died with his father:

I crashed, a glasshouse

hit by the stone of Father's death

At the burning ghat

relations stood like exclamation points.

The fire stripped his unwary body

of the last shred of family likeness.¹⁴ (RP: 52).

Ramanujan, on the other hand, treats the same theme too lightly and shows no concern about him. Rather he ponders ironically over the domestic responsibility left by his dead father:

Father, when he passed on,

left dust

on a table full of papers,

left debts and daughters,

a bedwetting grandson

named by the toss

of a coin after him,

(CP: 111)

Bruce King remarks, "A comparison of the distanced irony of Ramanujan's "Obituary" with Parthasarathy's assumption that he and his son will be cremated like his father with the family assembled at the burning ghat shows a difference in attitudes" (King, 1987, 241).

E. N. Lall has given a separate title to Ramanujan's poems—"Poetry as family history". His poems "emerge as a sort of microcosm of his family history" (Parthasarathy, "How It Strikes ..." 1996, 192). The family theme in his poetry serves certain functions. It connects his self with the Indian past, which will create a sense of belonging and can cure himself of his rootlessness. The recollections of his family members will bring peace and tranquillity to the hearts that:

... make connection

with alien veins, and continue

your struggle to be naturalized:

beat, and learn to miss a beat

in a foreign body.

(CP: 136)

This oneness with the family helps the poet to preserve his identity even in an alien environment. It is said "a house cannot be built on shifting sun-dunes, and Ramanujan has built his artistic house on a solid foundation of concrete and mortar" (Dwivedi, 1994, 49). His family is so extended and widespread that he even dreams of his grandson and his great grandson yet to be born and hopes:

my future

dependent

on several

people

yet

to come

(CP: 170)

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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).

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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)

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Chapter-III

Poetry, a revelation of the mysteries of life

“Poetry is more philosophical than history, for poetry deals with universals, history with particulars” (Preminger. 1975. 615) enunciates Aristotle, who feels that every poet is a philosopher and it is philosophy, which remains in the background of his mind, directing his mood and shaping his poetry. The eminent Romantic poet of the nineteenth century, P.B.Shelley declares, “Poets are philosophers of the very loftiest power” (Preminger. 1975. 616), and that “poetry is the center and circumference of all knowledge” (Preminger. 1975. 616-617). “Philosophy first, and poetry, which is its highest outcome, afterwards” (Hudson. 1910. 94), articulates Robert Browning. The poet is a ‘legislator’ and his poetry communicates a philosophy. In the opinion of Lowell, “no poem ever makes me respect its author which does not in some way convey a truth of Philosophy” (Ibid). For the critics in all ages, poetry is an utterance of philosophy, a vehicle of philosophic truth, evincing the poet’s attitude towards life and cultural heritage.

A.K.Ramanujan too, is explicitly a philosopher as his poetry expounds philosophy and takes us to the core of the Hindu heritage. That he has made Indian philosophy a part and parcel of his poetry and assimilated the essence of the Upanishads could be seen when we study his poetry vis-a-vis philosophy, and religion, providing “Sweetness and Light” (Arnold. 1961. 43) to his poetry. He offers us philosophy in the fashion of poetry which, being transfigured by imagination and feeling, is wrought into a true poetic experience. A philosophic insight renders his poetry a richness that is rare.

Being a profound philosopher, Ramanujan explores in his poetry the nature of the human body, and its relation to the phenomenal and the natural world. The poet like William Wordsworth acknowledges the bond between man and nature. Nature, to him is not a great machine as is held by the poets of the eighteenth century; but a being with a soul, linked inevitably with the human soul. One is at once reminded of Shelley's poem "To Jane: The Recollection", where he writes:

A spirit interfused around,
 A thrilling silent life;
 To momentary peace it bound
 Our mortal nature's strife; ...¹

For Wordsworth "the source of man's moral and spiritual growth is to be found in all the external forms of nature" and that "nature acts upon the whole of man's personality" (Cowell, 1973, 64) as nature moulds feelings and directs them through proper channels:

... of all that we behold
 From this green earth; of all the mighty world
 Of eye, and ear, -both what they half create,
 And what perceive; well pleased to recognize
 In nature and the language of the sense
 The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
 The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
 Of all my moral being.²

Ramanujan, on the contrary, looks at the union between human body and nature from a different angle. While exploring the human body and nature nexus in the poem

“Towards Simplicity”, he presents the body as a natural mechanism, a structure, which consists of:

Corpuscle, skin,
 cell, and membrane,
 each has its minute seasons
 clocked within the bones. (CP: 37)

Wordsworth believes that between man and nature there is a ‘mutual consciousness’, and a ‘spiritual communion’. Ramanujan also points, at the intimate ‘relationship of co-ordination’ between body and nature. Unlike Wordsworth, who establishes soul-to-soul relationship between man and nature, Ramanujan, on the other hand, presumes that the body’s internal seasons resemble the external seasonal cycles. He holds the body in high esteem because the mind, which possesses a unique power, dwells in the body and hence, transcends the domain of nature. “Since external nature thus controls our internal organic processes and mechanical properties from beginning to end, it completely ‘contains’ our bodily lives”³.

Everything in our environment has to be recycled. Ramanujan is aware of this principle of conservation and, therefore, he regards man as a part of nature. Like an environmentalist, he admits that the human body is “entirely natural, is contained in nature, and returns after death, or ought to return, to nature”⁴. In “Towards Simplicity” he writes:

From the complexity
 of reasons gyring within reasons,
 of co-extensive spring and autumn,
 into the soil as soil we come, (CP: 37)

Even in “Death and the Good Citizen”, he writes:

Good animal yet perfect

citizen, you, you are

biodegradable, you do

return to nature: ... (CP: 135)

This intimate relationship between nature and human body is reflected in the Bible:

... : for dust thou art,

and unto dust shalt thou return.⁵

The Speaker, in the poem, "In March," lying in a sick bed completely unaware of his physical self and surrounding, feels the entire natural world—continents, oceans, dolphins, icebergs, island, seashores, rivers, alligators, forests and birds circulating inside his body. He is thus assured that not only the body is contained in nature, but also the whole of nature seems to have its co-existence in the human body.

Man, being an integral part of the natural world, is the very 'life of her life'. This identification of man with nature reminds us of Shelley, who, while lamenting the death of John Keats in "Adonais", identifies Keats with nature:

He is made one with nature: there is heard

His voice in all her music, from the moan

Of thunder, to the song of night's sweet bird;

He is a presence to be felt and known

In darkness and in light, from herb and stone,

Spreading itself where're that Power may move

Which has withdrawn his being to its own;

Which wields the world with never-wearied love,

Sustains it from beneath, and kindles it above.⁶

In the poem "A Meditation", Ramanujan associates himself with nature. As he enters a trance he visualizes his ageing body as a black walnut tree toppled over by a storm, whose planks are used to fashion a table and a chair and other parts of the tree to produce writing paper. While using the various products of the tree in every day life, he imagines himself sitting.

... in this chair,
 paper and pencil on my table,
 and as I write

I know I'm writing now on my head,
 now on my torso, my living
 hands moving

on a dead one, a firm imagined body
 working with the transience
 of breathless

real bodies. (CP: 239)

He, therefore, affirms that like Wordsworth's Lucy, he too simply "Rolled round in earth's diurnal course,/With rocks, and stones, and trees" and be 'naturalised' in due course.

Ramanujan visualizes a close affinity between man and nature. In "Love Poem for a Wife and Her Trees", he draws an analogy between the human body and a tree. He cherishes the metaphorical notion that bodily reproduction occurs on the 'branches' of a 'family tree' and that the human spinal cord is like a tree-like formation:

... : your spinal cord
 will wither—

that stem of all senses, that second tree
 with the root at the top, branches branching
 in limb and lung,
 down to toe, hangnail, and fingertip. (CP: 181)

The comparison is heightened as he co-ordinates these trees with an apple tree, which corresponds to the tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden. Thus, "the relation between body and nature becomes an instance of the trope of metonymy, which equates trees with bodies and bodies with trees"⁸.

As the poet proceeds further to investigate the body-nature relationship, he opens 'an old anatomy book' "where/pictures in flesh tones/unfold a human body, layer/under layer," (CP: 184). The human body, with its constituents appears to him nothing, but "a map/of the heavens" (CP: 185). The solid body of flesh and bone contains the largely empty, mineral heavens and the human body can be substituted for the insect or animal body in nature. The human body keeps up a natural rhythm, which one can discern in the vegetable and mineral worlds.

While exploring the body-nature link, the poet, apprehends the eternal truth that death is the supreme reality in life. Death, the indomitable, ingests not only the human body but annihilates the entire order of the animate nature. Birth, copulation and death occur not only in the human domain but also in the natural world. "The clock that ticks inside the natural mechanism of any living body is also the clock ticking away in the natural world outside, and it is the nature of this universal clock to tick inexorably towards the terminal irony of death"⁹.

Ramanujan, though confronted with the new culture in Chicago, however, does not yield to the temptation of the west, but remains steadfast in his traditional faith. As we

read his poems, we experience that his poetic self attempts to establish a link between himself and his Hindu past. The Gita and the Upanishads nourish his poetic imagination and some of his poems unfold the mysteries of life.

While plunging deeper into the abyss of Hinduism, he feels that the 'Hindoo' possesses a 'Second Sight' – a privileged vision. This "first, and only, sight" (CP: 191) is the "natural direct vision of reality through the five senses, the vision with which we are born before it is corrupted by doubts, ideas, false learning and other mental processess ..." (King. 1991. 82-83).

Stepped in the Hindu ethos, Ramanujan's 'Second Sight' penetrates the veil of the world of illusion and perceives the family tree from where he comes in. He describes this family tree as

... those topsy

turvy trees

with their roots in heaven

and branches in the earth.

(CP:180)

Does not this tree resemble the Tree of Life, the cosmic tree, "asvattham" (peepal tree) as alluded to in the Gita, which is imperishable having its roots above and branches below? "As the tree originates in God, it is said to have its root "above"; as it extends into the world, its branches are said to go "downwards"" (Radhakrishnan.1993.326). This world tree as referred to in the Kātha Upanishad is eternal and rooted in Brahma:

Its roots is above, its branches below –

That eternal fig-tree!

That (root) indeed is the pure. That is *Brahman*

That indeed is called Immortal.

On it the worlds do rest,
 And no one so ever goes beyond it.
 This, verily, is That!"¹⁰

The root is the radiant and constant Brahman, the Supreme. All the worlds find refuge in Him and none can overcome Him. He is indestructible, the changeless reality and the source of all life and all living beings originate in the Brahma.

The three "Hindoo" poems expounding the teachings of the Gita reveal the fact that Ramanujan's Hindu sensibility is always operating in his conscious mind and thus provides strength for his poetry. "A Hindu to His Body" throws light on the concept of body and soul as preached in the Gita. "The soul", as is said in the Gita chapter two, verse twenty, "is never born, nor does he die at any time, nor having (once) come to be will he again cease to be. He is unborn, eternal, permanent, and primeval. He is not slain when the body is slain" (Radhakrishnan. 1993. 107). The Gita thus celebrates the triumph of soul over body. Ramanujan asserts that when the body is killed, the soul is liberated. Hence, his existence is not completely wiped out. A body may die but his soul may live on forever:

... a mere odourless soul,
 a see-through man-shaped hole

 in the air, a late lamenting ghost
 looking in vain for an empty seat

 at the full house of your posthumous
 fame where you can see but not hear

 the rain of applause, the jangle
 of medals on the breast of your happy

unhappy widow ... (CP:71-72).

In the poem "A Hindu to His Body" Ramanujan regards the body as important as the soul. He addresses the body as "a pursuing presence" because "the soul is reborn time and time again, every time rejecting the old body and assuming a new one: hence pursuing" (Chindhade. 1996. 71). Chapter two, verse twenty-two in the Gita holds a similar view about the soul and the body:

Just as a person casts off worn-out garments and puts on others that are new, even so does the embodied soul cast off worn-out bodies and take on others that are new (Radhakrishnan. 1993. 108).

The body, an image of the soul, is "dear" because:

... you brought me
curled in womb and memory

Gave me fingers to clutch
at grace, at malice; and ruffle
someone else's hair; (CP: 40)

Ramanujan deviates from the point of view of the Hindus who do not regard body as "dear" but desire for "Moksha" as it liberates the soul from the circle of bodily birth and ultimately unifies it with the Brahman, the Highest and the Absolute truth. The Hindus believe that the body is perishable whereas the soul is not. Verse twenty-four of chapter two in the Gita sings the glory of the soul:

He is uncleavable. He cannot be burnt. He can be neither wetted nor dried. He is eternal, all-pervading, unchanging and immovable. He is the same for ever (Radhakrishnan. 1993. 109).

The metaphysical poet, John Donne treated the body and the soul alike. Ramānujan, on the contrary, holds the body in high esteem and for him the body is the source of dharma. Body, for him is an organic site where birth, copulation and death come together. So, the body as the Gita propounds is “the field in which events happen; all growth, decline and death take place” (Radhakrishnan. 1993. 300). The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad postulates the body as “the constituent of all action; it is from the body that all action originates. The body is like the mantras of the Sama Veda; the body is the soul of all action. It is the body that sustains all the action in the universe” (Debroy. 1993. 213). The poet, therefore, yearns for the permanent company of the body, which leaves the soul after physical death:

to rise in the sap of trees
 let me go with you and feel the weight
 of honey-hives in my branching
 and the burlap weave of weaver-birds
 in my hair. (CP: 40)

The poet here equates the body to a tree and the sap its spirit or soul and echoes the teachings of the Chhandogya Upanishad embodied in the twelfth verse of book six: “The Self as life, fills the tree; it flourishes in happiness, gathering its food through its roots” (Swami. 1971. 93).

As the poet ruminates over the relation between body and soul, he becomes acutely conscious of the limitation of the body, its impermanence and mortality because he knows that the body

will one day be short of breath,
 lose its thrust,
 turn cold, dehydrate and leave

a jawbone with half a grin

near a pond: (CP: 209)

“The Hindu: he reads his Gita and is calm at all events” examines critically the concept of “*sthitaprajna*” (A state of absolute nonchalance), which advocates to maintain mental equilibrium in all situations. The Gita teaches a Hindu to remain calm at all events:

He who regards pain and pleasure alike, who dwells in his own self, who looks upon a clod, a stone, a piece of gold as of equal worth, who remains the same amidst the pleasant and unpleasant things, who is firm of mind, who regards both blame and praise as one (Chapter-14. Verse-24. Radhakrishnan. 1993. 324).

He who is the same in honour and dishonour and the same to friends and foes, and who has given up all initiative of action, he is said to have risen above the modes (Chapter 14, Verse 25. Radhakrishnan. 1993. 324).

So, non-involvement as the poet holds forth and practices should be the motto of our life:

... yet I come unstuck

and stand apart. I do not marvel

when I see good and evil ... (CP: 79)

To maintain the equilibrium and equipoise of the mind as the poet attempts at, one should have the courage to accept good and evil, joys and sorrows in an equal spirit because “He is a *jitatman* (one who has control over one’s body and organs) whose calm and serenity are not disturbed by the pains of the opposites” (Radhakrishnan. 1993. 191). As a true Hindu Ramanujan is detached and indifferent to all happenings around him:

I've learned to watch lovers without envy

as I'd watch in a bazaar lens

houseflies rub legs or kiss. I look at wounds calmly. (Ibid.)

As time moves on, the poet finds it impossible to attain such an ideal state, loses the tranquillity of his mind and becomes disbalanced as he witnesses primeval violence in the innocent face of a boy:

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. (Ibid.)

In the poem "The HINDOO: the only risk", the poet visualizes that a person cannot attain true freedom by controlling physical urges. "Just to keep the heart's simple given beat/through a neighbour's striptease or a friend's suicide" (CP: 90.), is not the true practice of "*mukhtasangah*" (Stoicism). Such a poise may lead to a dangerous result and "the perfect equanimity of this ideal may, in actual practice, easily degenerate into callousness and indifference" (Kurup. 1996. 218).

At the bottom of all this bottomless

enterprise to keep simple the heart's given beat,

the only risk is heartlessness. (CP: 90)

"The HINDOO: he does not hurt a fly or spider either" is a poem, "where the Indian ethos of reverence for all kinds of life on this planet and the creed of non-violence is epitomised" (Mahajan. 1993. 32). Both Jainism and Buddhism make non-violence or *Ahimsa* as a rule of life, -one of the five virtues which constitutes right conduct, the other four being truth-speaking, non-stealing, chastity and non-attachment. "A man is not noble (or elect) because he injures living creatures. He is called noble because he does not injure living beings"¹¹. The Upanishad counsels the Hindus to emulate the

doctrine of non-violence because “he who is harmless (*ahimsanti*) toward all things elsewhere than at holy place (*tirtha*)- he, indeed, who lives thus through his length of life; reaches the Brahma-world and does not return hither again”¹². Compassion to living beings, as the Gita says, is the greatest virtue which makes a man godlike:

Non-violence, equal mindedness, contentment, austerity, charity, fame and ill-fame (are) the different states of beings proceed from Me alone. (Chapter-X, Verse. 5 Radhakrishnan. 1993. 257)

This tenet of non-violence has greatly influenced Ramanujan-the poet, as we can discern in this “HINDOO” poem. As a Hindu, he controls his violent nature, as he believes in the philosophy of non-violence. He reveals his affinity with the Vedantic and Buddhistic ways of life and with the mysticism of the Upanishads. Being a typical Hindu, he believes that every creature, big or small deserves love and mercy. The attitude of the poet towards the living world bears the testimony of the fact:

I’m so gentle, do not hurt a fly.

Why, I cannot hurt a spider
either, not even a black widow,

for who can tell Who’s Who? (CP: 62)

His compassion for a dog, the neglected and ugliest creature, is evident in the poem “Epitaph on a Street Dog”. He observes that the tails of peacocks are mere ornamentation but the pair of breasts in a dog, though devoid of beauty, has life sustaining power and, therefore, excels the beauty of a peacock:

Peacocks may have eyes in their tails, and crests.

But She had in a row four pairs of breasts,
where blind mouths plucked and swilled their fill

till mouths had eyes, and She was full of flies. (CP: 43).

The poet seems to be aware of the creation of the universe that all spring from Brahman. In the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad it is mentioned:

As threads come from the spider, as little sparks come from the fire, so all senses, all conditions, all gods, all beings, come from this Self (Brahman). He is known as "Truth of all truths". The senses are true, but He is the truth of them all (Swami. 1971. 128).

So, to kill a life is to assassinate Brahman as He is the spirit of life. Being deeply influenced by the admonition of the Gita and the Upanishads, he becomes a staunch supporter of non-violence and leads a life of austerity.

Ramanujan's obsession with the concept of continuity and change is deep. The universe is transient, and, therefore, every being or object, however stable, is in reality ephemeral. The world is in a constant flux. It is a law of nature that "The old order changeth, yielding place to new"¹³. Under such circumstances, the self and even the identity of a person change socially, psychologically and physically as it happens in an American Square dance where one constantly swerves a partner. As "this part of me/that turns and returns/with a different partner" (CP: 22), the personal identity cannot be firm.

Ramanujan, being a poet-philosopher, with a poetic insight, can perceive the reality and tries to unearth the origin and the end of the universe. The caterpillar image—"caterpillar on a leaf, eating,/being eaten" (CP: 123)- points at the truth that the world of desire is continually recycling, a reference to that is found in the Taittiriya Upanishad. It is said that Brahma, an embodiment of Knowledge, Truth and Infinite, has created air, fire and water, which have brought forth the earth. Out of earth comes

vegetation, seed, food and man. All creatures are born of food, sustained by food and return to food after death:

From food, verily, creatures are produced,

whatsoever [creatures] dwell on the earth.

Moreover by food, in truth, they live.

Moreover into it also they finally pass.¹⁴

So, human beings come from and will return to the Brahman. We are within the Brahman and the Brahman is within us. "What began as a composition of elements becomes, as part of the world of continual change, a decomposition, and this is the only constancy of life" (King. 1991. 87).

"Questions" opens with a quotation from the Mundaka Upanishad. Two birds sit on the "selfsame tree:/one of them eats the fruit" while "the other watches without eating" (CP: 130). These two birds represent two aspects of the self—"the '*Jivatma*', or individual self and the '*Paramatma*', or Supreme Self. The former is Pure Consciousness conditioned by the body and mind on account of Its association with ignorance (*avidya*). The latter is Pure Consciousness, the Lord Himself, who is eternally, pure, free and illumined and is the master or controller of *avidya*" (Nikhilananda. 1951. 297). The first, the human soul is the active soul in the world of desire, which is continually transformed, recycled and reborn and the second is the immobile observant self, which avoids temptation of the world of flux and illusion. Here, the poet is concerned with two fundamental questions: what are the causes of human sorrow and happiness, and were the various parts of the self already there in the past, and when being born into this world of mixed pleasure and pain? These questions, which come uppermost in his mind—questions which baffle the poets down the ages that life is beset with joys and sorrows. So, everybody yearns for an

escape from “The weariness, the fever, and the fret”¹⁵ of the world. Ramanujan knows that the human ego self is afflicted with desire, which does not perish when the body withers: “Desire, bodiless, is endless” (CP: 72). Therefore, “Parts of me burn” (CP: 130)^{*} with desire and it is desire, which is the root cause of all evils. Even W.B. Yeats confesses that his heart, sick with desire is tied down by the mortal body. His heart is the seat of passion and so, he requests the saint to consume his heart sick with desire:

Consume my heart away: sick with desire

And fastened to a dying animal

It knows not what it is; and gather me

Into the artifice of eternity.¹⁶ (SP: 105)

Ramanujan reminds us of the legend of the burning of the god of Love and Sexual Desire-Kamadeva-by Lord Shiva in great fury, when the former had stirred the latter into passion while the Lord was in deep meditation. He advocates us to burn all desire and even the desire of Kama (love or passion) as it is the cause of all sorrow. This attitude of the poet reflects the doctrine of Buddhism, which regards “Sorrow, suffering, dissatisfaction, and all the manifold unpleasantness which are referred to by the word *dukkha* (sorrow), are inherent in life as it is ordinarily lived; they can only be eliminated by giving up “thirst” (*tanha*, often translated “craving”), which includes personal ambition, desire, longing, and selfishness of all kinds” (Basham. 1954. 270). This pursuit of desire and the pleasure, which springs from it lead to rebirth.

The second question confirms the poet’s belief in rebirth and in the theory that the self is “born over and over” (CP: 130) again each time rejecting the old body and assuming a new and beautiful form. “When body grows weak through age or disease, the Self separates itself from the limbs, as a mango, a fig, a banyan fruit separates itself from the stalk; man hastens back to birth, goes, as before from birth to birth”

(Swami. 1971. 153). And it is Karma, literary means “work” or “deed” which determines the existence of beings. A good act results in happiness whereas an evil act ensues sorrow. Karma is a ‘creative force’ and it is “Through karma the body of the next life, divine, human, animal or hellish, was acquired; and on previous karma depended a man’s character, fortune and social class, and his happiness and sorrow” (Basham. 1954. 324). Therefore, nobody can escape this law of Karma. When something goes wrong, we think this happens as an outcome of past Karma without making an effort to find out the real cause behind it. We do not attempt to improve the existing conditions. Ramanujan in his essay “Is There an Indian way of Thinking? An Informal Essay” defines Karma as

a notion that is almost synonymous in some circles with whatever is Indian or Hindu. Brahmanical texts had it, the Buddhists had it, the Jains had it ... *Karma* implies the self’s past determining the present, an iron chain of cause and consequence, an ethic of responsibility¹⁷ (CE: 37).

The ‘ethic responsibility’ is a serious matter, which a man cannot avoid and, therefore, has to reconcile with it by accepting the punishment awarded to him in proportion to his sins. Ramanujan seems to ridicule the Hindus who accept everything in the name of Karma. They can see Karma

in the fall of a tubercular sparrow,

in the newspaper deaths in Burma

of seventy-one men, women and children; (CP: 87)

But his hindu sensibility cannot ignore the doctrine of Karma. Fear predominates and he becomes charitable towards nature and feeds breadcrumbs to ants and doves in the park and shelled peanuts to bluejay and tries to be fair to all:

even I talk now and then of God,

find reasons to be fair

: * everywhere

to the even and to the odd, (Ibid.)

Hence is the emergence of Ramanujan's attitude to death. He is ever obsessed with the thought of death. Saturday, for him is a harbinger of death because his mother and one of his brothers passed away on a Saturday. It is said, "It is natural to die as to be born". Our birth, according to Ramanujan, is uncertain but "death is the only inexorable reality of human existence. It is the central frame of reference that lends meaning and coherence to the mystique of life" (Kumar.1995.52). So, death is inevitable

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. (CP: 37)

"...Great and mean/Meet massed in death" ¹⁸, so says Shelley in "Adonais". Death, for Kamala Das is "Life's obscure parallel"¹⁹, and "Death is/So mediocre, any fool can achieve/It effortlessly"²⁰. She acknowledges the ineluctability and universality of death, and so the sights at the seashore and the tombs at the cemeteries make her aware of the presence of death in every house and in every town:

From every town I live in

I hear the rattle of its death,

The noise of rafters creaking

And the window's whine.²¹

Kamala Das considers life “as a slow yielding to the ‘cold loveliness’ of death” (Kohli. 1975. 100). So, it is futile to challenge the power of death, and every human being, however, great and small, cannot escape death:

... We were the yielders,
 : • Yielding ourselves to everything. It is

 ... , not for us even to
 Question death, but as child to mother’s arms
 We shall give ourselves to the fire or to
 The hungry earth to be slowly eaten,
 Devoured---²²

The “clockwork clicking” (CP: 5) of the footfall reminds Ramanujan of the “inexorable passage of time, the limited number of hours of his existence” (Raghunandan. 1990. 158). Death, the “irrevocable law of nature” (Raghunandan. 1990. 162) is sudden and invincible:

Everyone in this street
 will become cold, lie under stones
 or be scattered as ash
 in rivers and oceans. (CP: 210)

Ramanujan does not “accept death as an end in itself, a final cessation of all activities”, but “a new beginning and an instrument that is responsible for the continuation and expansion of this beginning” (Mohanty. 1998. 150). Death may not be a sudden pause to life in the middle of the night after a nightmare of crematory fires or vultures. It may not leave the body as dead, unfeeling and as wood under the merciless beaks of woodpeckers plucking out worms like nerves. The body might

have just enough sensation to feel vultures picking out vulnerable part. Death does not liberate a man from all worldly attachments. Death, for Tennyson is nothing but a journey of the soul from this world to the other and ultimately becomes one with the divine. A man does not die but passess from world to world and from birth to birth.

Tennyson in "In Memoriam" writes:

... They do not die
 Nor lose their mortal sympathy,
 Nor change to us, although they change;

"Rapt from the fickle and the frail
 With gathered power, yet the same,
 Pierces the keen seraphic flame
 From orb to orb, from veil to veil"²³

'Gluttonous death' as John Donne calls it, will separate the soul from the body. The body will sleep in the grave but the soul will soar to heaven to face God.

In "Death in Search of a Comfortable Metaphor", Ramanujan suggests that life cycle is perpetuated in and through death and ushers in a new beginning and hence, he discovers in the scorpion an apt symbol for death:

Maybe death is such
 a scorpion: bursts its back
 and gives birth
 to numerous dying things,
 baby scorpions, (CP: 273)

Death, therefore, will not release a person from the cycle of existence. It is rather an entry into another life. Though the poet believes in the continuity of life, his search, however, will be to reveal the mysteries of death:

but death? Is it a dispersal
 of gathered energies
 back into their elements,
 earth, air, water, and fire,
 a reworking into other moulds,
 grass, worm, bacterial glow
 lights, and mother-matter
 for other off-spring with names
 and forms clocked into seasons? (CP: 207)

Ramanujan deeply interested in Buddhism, wanted to embrace it in his twenties, when the Buddha's concept of Nothingness seemed to hold the only key to life's mystery. According to Buddhist philosophy, the ocean flowing round the universe wherein we find ourselves placed, is the ocean of Nothingness, from which we are driven out into the universe. Everything has emerged out of Absolute Nothingness into this world. A true happiness is enthroned beyond the pleasures of the senses, and consequently beyond the world, at a place, where the great chasm of Nothingness yawns at the worldliness. This idea of Nothingness, of Zero occurs frequently in his poem:

How describe this nothing
 we, of all things, flee in panic
 yet wish for, work towards,
 build ships and shape whole cities with? (CP: 202)

The poem, "At Zero" speaks how at zero hour there is a standstill universal:

clocks lose their tongues,
 the hands fall off,
 spider legs: pendulums sway

no more, scrotums

of dead bulls: timepieces

on wrists and towers

lose time, (CP: 200)

The stillness of the zero hour is compared to the blankness and stillness of the life of the brahmin widow. At this hour, all the movements come to an end and there is a stoppage of passing time. Similarly, a saint's mind, at the moment of worship is filled with ecstasy and the mind is free from thoughts, emotions and consciousness.

Like W.B. Yeats, A.K. Ramanujan has plunged deep to know "the truth" of life and he feels that perennial truth is enshrined in the pages of Indian philosophy, the Bhagavad Gita and the Upanishads. And this Indian philosophy has made his roots so strong and his self and identity so authentic.

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Chapter – IV

Imagery – a study of its origin and function

Images consult

one

another,

a conscience –

stricken

jury,

and come

slowly

to a sentence. (CP: 142)

Image, “a mystical potency” (Lewis. 1947. 17), the soul of poetry, is an indispensable wealth of the poetry of A.K. Ramanujan. The string of images, which constitute his poetry are not mere embellishment but rather they unfold the themes of his poems. Imagery and meaning are so integrated that they cannot be segregated. The images, as Ramanujan has conceived of them are like “conscience-/stricken/jury” who act upon one another and are ready to pass the death sentence and finally when the images pass the ‘death sentence’, it gives birth to a poem. A poem, therefore, is made of images “which in awareness and ethical sense operate upon each other to form a seemingly ordered grammatical sentence and thought” (King. 1991. 84). Ramanujan has the gift of intuitive perception and his piercing eye can spy similarity in things dissimilar. As a conscious creative artist, he is deeply concerned with the problems of a creative writer and in the title poem of The Black Hen he deals with two types of creativity-

the natural and the artificial. "As is the way of modern poetry it is prosaic and low-key; but the image does the job of poetry if the words do not" (Winter. 1996. 3.). For Wordsworth "all good poetry is spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" (Jones. 1971. 5) and to Keats "poetry had better come as naturally as leaves to a tree or not at all" (winter. 1996. 3). Ramanujan acquiesces what Keats had said:

It must come as leaves
 to a tree
 or not at all. (CP: 195)

The artificial creativity, on the other hand, is not as instinctive as the natural one and hence, a poet has to rely on an artistic and a linguistic competence to accomplish perfection:

yet it comes sometimes
 as the black hen
 with the red round eye
 on the embroidery
 stitch by stitch
 dropped and found again (Ibid)

The images of "knitting" and "stitching", of "dropped and found again" refer to the second rank of poetry, which is spurious and unnatural. This poem abounds in images and affirms that an image is the "primary pigment" (Kermode. 1971. 153) of his poetry.

Before embarking upon the discussion of the major images in the poetry of Ramanujan it is pertinent to discourse about the origin and the function of imagery in the poetry. We should also touch upon symbol, which according to Yeats is "an image

that has transcended particular time and place, becomes a symbol, passes beyond death, as it were, and becomes a living soul"¹.

Many thousands of years ago a primitive man sitting in the depth of a jungle, became alive to a sensation of clawing in 'the pit of his stomach'- the basic organic demand of hunger. His brain-function was very dense and in a state of static immobility without any faculty of thinking the urge of the pang of hunger continued and in desperation he pounced upon a bird, like a bird of prey, but it flew away, then a hare which scampered away to the nearest bush, a rat which scurried away to a hole under a tree, a snake which slithered away to the pool of water close by, a fish which dived down a mountain stream—a total failure in all his attempts, which dejected him to a great extent. As he was frustrated in all his attempts he threw instinctively a stone, which killed a bird of a flock nearby. Thus, necessity being the mother of invention and this action having borne fruit made him avoid further frustration in future. This was at the root of the first of imagination. A fundamental and basic demand of nature created a proclivity in him to find food. This struggle of a human mind to satisfy a certain organic demand followed by an instinctive impulse to throw a stone and his subsequent innate effort towards success evolved a process of thinking in his brain, which was at the root of the origin of imagery. The next stage of his imagination developed in a like manner due to his other personal demands and this primitiveness is at the root of all imageries - ancient or modern. An image is, therefore, the creation of imagination but when we see an object or a scenery suddenly, the image is already there and imagination follows it and in this case the image creates the imagination. Thus, the relation between image and imagination is both mutual and reciprocal. Both are correlative and collateral. Since poetry springs from imagination "the images enter a poem by the right of analogy, as flowers entered

Plato's descriptions of his mystical and abstract Heaven" (MacNeice. 1968. 91). While indicating the origin of an image, W.B. Yeats writes in the poem "The Circus Animals' Desertion":

Those masterful images because complete
 Grew in pure mind ...² (SP: 202)

His poem consists of masterful images and the sources of images are numerous:

A mound of refuse or the sweepings of a street,
 Old kettles, old bottles, and a broken can,
 : * Old iron, old bones, old rags, ...³ (Ibid)

Poetry may be sublime and great, but its constituent element – an image can grow out of sensual, small and gross realities of life.

The poet uses an image for the sake of clarity and it is through an image that he gives himself away. For critics of the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries imagery is an "ornament, mere decoration, like cherries tastefully arranged on a cake" (Lewis. 1947. 18). The Elizabethans used emotional or sensuous type of image, which was often evocative but indistinct, whereas the poets of the seventeenth century tended to abandon it. The Caroline poets used sharp and precise images. The Romantic poets with a new attitude to life or to the world were more interested in natural objects and used sensuous images to convey the appearance of an object. A poetic image is not only a sensuous picture made out of words reflecting an accurate picture of external reality but also conveys the truth hidden behind it. It looks out from a mirror the life and perceives not only its face but reveals some truth about its face. Keats in "Ode to Autumn" evidences the significance of the patterning of an image:

: * SEASON of mists and mellow fruitfulness!

Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;
 Conspiring with him how to load and bless
 With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eaves run;
 To bend with apples the moss'd cottage-trees,
 And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;
 To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells
 With a sweet kernel; ...⁴

The poem, besides presenting a vivid and concrete picture of autumn, has personified autumn as a full-grown entity lingering and dying. The serene ripe beauty of the season is a prelude to death. There is a suggestion of fertility and ripeness on the edge of dissolution. Death is implicit in fulfilment and so the fruitfulness suggests a tragic destiny of Nature.

The Victorian poets used the Romantic type of image and the modernist poetry inherited imagery both from recent French poetry and from the late Elizabethan and the Metaphysical poetry. The contemporary Indian poets in English are primarily concerned with the complexities and hard realities. They give vent to their experiences by way of sophisticated imagery. M.K. Naik observes, "the imagery of a poet is a true index to the quality of his sensibility, and the Indian poet's imagery should bear the hallmark of the individuality of his experience" (Naik. 1980. 39).

The tradition of employing images is vehemently nurtured by A. K. Ramanujan. He makes an extensive use of imagery and even the names of some of his poems "Breaded Fish", "Images" etc are imagistic in configuration. The poem, "Images", is itself an image composed of 'multiplicity of images'. The poet describes his meeting with a celebrity who does not remember him in an image:

I will pass from his mind

as image from a mirror. (CP: 44)

As a result, he remains weather-blown, faceless and restless which is articulated with two beautiful carved images:

Waking is a blow
 of light;
 and walking, a sleet
 of faceless acquaintances. (Ibid)

Some of his poems seem to be the outcome of a single running image:

The entire island:
 an alligator
 sleeping in a mask of stone.
 a grain of land
 even on good days; on bad,
 the ocean foams in that mouth. (CP: 28)

In the modern age the most characteristic of the art of poetry is the use of 'new and striking' images, which are employed widely by Ramanujan in his poetry. Thus, in "Breaded Fish" we have "a hood/of memory like a coil on a heath/opened in my eyes," (CP: 7), in "Poona Train Window", "The tea/darkens like a sick/traveller's urine" (CP: 81) and a man between the two rocks looks like "the symmetry/of human buttocks" (Ibid). These images unveil the analogy of things as perceived by the poet and thus express the implicit likeness.

The vivifying function of imagery is to present a theme in a concrete form. India and her people constitute one of the major themes of the poetry of A.K. Ramanujan. He gives us the first hand account of his experience in India. So, with a purpose to evoke a typical Indian response, he often writes about the Indian heritage and culture

and the Indian milieu. While talking of India, he exploits powerful and startling images:

And ideas behave like rumours,
 once casually mentioned somewhere
 they come back to the door as prodigies

born to prodigal father, (CP: 98)

The profound and precise imagery of Ramanujan's poetry can flash a social observation. It can depict not only a common, everyday phenomenon of Indian life, but can hold up a mirror to the realities of life. Reflection of the external reality of "the beggar" is poverty and an image of poverty-ridden India has been delineated by Nissim Ezekiel in his poem "In India":

Here among the beggars,
 Hawkers, pavement sleepers,
 Hutment dwellers, slums,
 Dead souls of men and gods,
 Burnt out mothers, frightened
 Virgins, wasted child
 And tortured animal,
 All in noisy silence
 Suffering the place and time.⁵

Ramanujan presents a similar picture of the beggars in the poem "Element of Composition". Poverty, squalor and ugliness of the Indian lepers come up brilliantly in an image:

add the lepers of Madurai,
 male, female, married,

with children,

lion faces, crabs for claws,

clotted on their shadows

under the stone—eyed

goddesses of dance, mere pillars,

moving as nothing on earth

can move ... (CP: 122)

Images reveal the personality of a poet—his “innermost likes and dislikes, observations and interests, associations of thought, attitudes of mind and beliefs” (Spurgeon. 1935. 4). Ramanujan’s poetry is a world created from all that he has seen, known, felt, heard and thought, and his image-making faculty, his imagination blend together with his memories, which have sunk deep into his consciousness. This great memory as Yeats describes “is also a dwelling-house of symbols, of images that are living souls”⁶. The awareness of the past in a present moment is transmitted through images. An image, for Ramanujan is a mode of communication and he has used telling images to express his own impression of his mother during her youth:

I smell upon this twisted

blackbone tree the silk and white

petal of my mother’s youth.

From her ear-rings three diamonds

splash a handful of needles,

and I see my mother run back

from rain to the crying cradles. (CP: 61)

One of the functions of poetry "is to awaken the dead" (Drew, 1933. 151.) and the poet brings life to the spirit of his readers by making words alive and they almost visualize the scene as if they are present before their eyes. Such realistic and impressionistic images are used by K.N. Daruwalla in his poem "The Ghaghar in Spate" to present a lifelike picture of a devastating flood:

And through the village

the Ghaghra steers her course:

thatch and dung-cakes turn to river-scum,

a buffalo floats over to the rooftop

where the men are stranded.

Three days of hunger, and her udders

turn red-rimmed and swollen

with milk-extortion.⁷

The poetic image as C.D. Lewis defines "is a more or less sensuous picture in words, to some degree metaphorical, with an undernote of human emotion in its context, but also charged with and releasing into the reader a special poetic emotion or passion" (Lewis. 1947. 22). These 'word-pictures' not only "illustrate, illuminate and embellish his thought" (Spurgeon. 1935. 9), but the description the poet puts forth by means of analogy creates an atmosphere and evokes an emotion in the reader and he is stirred by the wholeness and richness of the scene:

every summer

a river dries to a trickle

in the sand,

baring the sand-ribs,

straw and women's hair

clogging the watergates
 : * at the rusty bars
 under the bridges with patches
 of repair all over them,
 the wet stones glistening like sleepy
 crocodiles, the dry ones
 shaven water-buffaloes lounging in the sun. (CP: 38)

Ramanujan, like a true artist paints 'cameo-like pictures' which elucidate the fact that he has not only an eye for detail but has the ability to recapture the very moment and presents us with the photographic accuracy:

Three women with baskets
 on their heads, climbing
 slowly against the slope
 of a hill, one of them
 lop-sided, balancing
 between the slope and
 the basket on the head
 : * a late pregnancy. (CP: 80-81)

"The essential quality and function of imagery," as Fogle says, "is a kind of creation; by bringing together of diverse objects, states of mind, or concepts new relationships are discovered, new connections between subject and object become apparent" (Fogle. 1949. 23). The creative power of imagery 'builds new structures of thoughts', enriches our knowledge of ourselves and of the world. It establishes a rapport between objects or ideas and, therefore, unsheathes the pattern of the world of reality as well as the mind of the poet. Ramanujan "looks at and into the things as they

are" (Mohanty. "Things as They are..." 1999. 165.) and can discern a similitude between oranges and human reality in respect of their origin. The apparent disparity fades away and he discovers a resemblance in the process of their creation, which he sets forth in a concrete image:

But
 every one of these
 had an absurd, almost human
 umbilicus
 at the top
 where once the Tree
 had poured its
 future
 from forgotten roots
 and possessed it close,
 to feed
 this Fall-minded
 pot-bellied
 bud
 till it rounded
 for our baskets. (CP: 54)

A careful study of the imagery of Ramanujan ascertains the fact that the imagery serves all three functions—mental, figurative and symbolic—in his poetry. Different feelings, passions of heart get appropriate expression by means of the poetic image and it records a single sensation. The image, as Miss Downey says, "must not be conceived as a material copy or thing but merely as the content of a thought in which

attention is centred on sensory quality of some sort" (Preminger. 1975 .363). It is an expression of a sense experience, revokes the original sensation and endows us with different kinds of mental pictures. Imagery as Miss Edith Rickert conceives "is a mode of expressing experience in the form of mental pictures" (Fogle. 1949. 5). All poets do not have the same kind of sensory capacity and different poets excel in exerting different kinds of mental pictures. Much of Browning's imagery is tactile. One can observe the pre-dominance of tactile and organic images in the poetry of Keats, whereas in Shelley we find plethora of imagery of motion. These mental images vivify the object and bring out the sensuous qualities of objects. Ramanujan uses all categories of images and one single image employed in his poem can arouse two different feelings:

A basketful of ritual cobras
comes into the tame little house,

... ..

They lick the room with their bodies, (CP: 4)

Here the feelings of sight and touch are powerfully combined. The word 'lick' combines two feelings—the feeling of sight as well as touch. Sound and sight are compressed in the image of a 'swing':

Sister swinging high
on the creaky swings (CP: 155)

Touch and sound are pressed in the image of a woodpecker in the poem "A Leaky Tap After a Sister's Wedding":

It is a single summer woodpecker
peck-peck-Peck-pecking away
at that tree

behind the kitchen (CP: 9)

The image of smoke in the opening line of "One More After Reading Homer" incites a sensation of vision and smell:

any cassandra with some e s p
 can see the smoke grow thick
 between her and the city faces (CP: 73)

Transfer of feeling to an object is a special function of an image and this trait is known as synaesthesia. 'Roaring bus' is such an example. "Roaring" is generally associated with a lion angry at heart. But the feeling of anger is transferred to the bus and thus, a living quality is transmitted to a non-living one:

the swastika
 on the neighbour's arm
 in that roaring bus from a grey
 nowhere to a green. (CP: 75)

Another function of imagery is to communicate the ideas to the readers in figurative language in order to concretize the theme of the poetry. As it is "a picture made out of words" so "an epithet, a metaphor, a simile may create an image; or an image may be presented to us in a phrase or passage on the face of it purely descriptive, but conveying to our imagination something more than the accurate reflection of an external reality" (Lewis. 1947. 18). The images of "tongue", "bark", "mouth", "fingers", "rice" and "kitchen floor" in the concluding stanza of "Of Mothers, among others things" function as literal objects and stimulate the emotion of pity and sympathy:

My cold parchment tongue licks bark
 in the mouth when I see her four

still sensible fingers slowly flex

to pick a grain of rice from the kitchen floor. (CP: 61)

The images in this stanza function literally and the objects are not interlinked figuratively.

The figurative function of imagery opens a new horizon in the field of grammar. A figure of speech or any parts of speech has tremendous potentiality to form an image. Miss Spurgeon says, "I use the term 'image' here as the only available word to cover every kind of simile, as well as every kind of what is really compressed simile-metaphor" (Spurgeon. 1935. 5). A great deal of similes and metaphors have been employed by Ramanujan to draw the analogy between different objects. The sprouting of 'six grains' in the poem "Foundlings in the Yukon" has been described through a series of similes:

they took root

within forty-eight hours

and sprouted

a candelabra of eight small leaves. (CP: 196)

and they 'unfurled' rapidly and like human beings are eager to have their genes passed on to their progeny:

as if long deep

burial had made them hasty

for birth and season, for names,

genes, for passing on: (Ibid)

The quick sprouting of the seeds is compared to the racial memory of men:

like the kick

and shift of an intra-uterine

memory, (Ibid)

It is then compared to the:

...pent-up

centenarian's sudden burst

of lust, ... (CP: 197)

Ramanujan has the ability to perceive the hidden likeness and can undrape "the permanent analogy of things by images, which participate in the life of truth" (Spurgeon. 1935. 7). In "The Fall", he describes a parachute jumper and how the silken parachute unfurls behind him and protects him against the 'howling winds' like "a mothercat's teeth/on the scruff of her kitten" (CP: 51) and how the air protects him like a child:

the very air a sheath

of safety

for the floating, the amniotic floating without hands

into an exhilaration

of larks, ... (CP: 51)

Ramanujan, with his poetic imagination "reconciles" thought and feeling, reason and imagination and can invent metaphor by which "disparate and hitherto unconnected things are brought together in poetry" (Preminger. 1975. 366). The movement of the snake as he trampled over it, the 'certainties' of time as ensured by the four-faced clocks on the market-towers and by the watches on the uncertain pulse have been skilfully analysed by means of metaphors:

... : I see him turn,

the green white of his belly

measured by bluish nodes, a water-bleached lotus stalk

plucked by a landsman hand. (CP: 5)

Four-faced clocks on market-towers school the town

and make the four directions sell and buy

in the stalls below where watches run

their certainties on the uncertain pulse. (CP: 8)

Sometimes, he seems to create life, or instils life into the things apparently lifeless.

Hence, he employs personification when he refers to the mechanism of a sundial,

which remains non-functional from dusk to dawn:

... Only they

sleep with us in the dark and wake into time

with the light of the moon like antiquity's

lovers. (Ibid)

Images open a new horizon in the field of grammar. Any parts of speech have tremendous potentiality to form an image. Similarly, an image has the power to convey the sense of any parts of speech. Verbs are often used metaphorically and consequently they are regarded as image making verbs:

a female ape with a black striped snout

sniff and lick lettuce leaves clean for her lord (CP: 217)

yellow trees bend over broken glass. (CP: 57)

The poetic imagery serves the symbolic function in the poetry of Ramanujan. A symbol is a recurrent image which stands for a person, an object or idea and which "instead of referring to something directly, refers to it indirectly through the medium of something else" (Chadwick. 1971. 1). The poet is a prophet, endowed with the

power to see behind and beyond the objects of the real world and can discern inherent characteristics concealed in the ideal world. It is by means of symbols that he communicates the essence of things. A symbol, therefore, is “the only possible expression of some invisible essence, a transparent lamp about a spiritual flame”⁸. It penetrates beyond reality into a world of ideas. A poet organizes images with relation to one another by means of ‘symbolic kinship’ and many images become potentially symbolic not only through likeness but also through one sort of association and so symbols can be interchangeably used with images. As we read the poem we shift our attention from the image of an object to its symbolism. Image and symbol are two sides of the same coin and in the opinion of Burke “One cannot long discuss imagery without sliding into symbolism” (Preminger. 1975. 367).

Ramanujan communicates his personal feelings through images. Sometimes he records his emotion directly and explicitly and sometimes he resorts to images and symbols. As all his poetry is image-making, the symbol becomes an essential mode of expression for him. To avoid direct portraiture, he makes ample uses of symbols to suggest something beyond the expressed meaning. The image of the bright, burning tiger in Blake’s poetry stands for the ferocity of nature. The New England water insect in the title-piece “The Striders”, besides being a description of an insect, “symbolises the life and work of the poetic self riddled with various alienations” (Kurup. 1996. 191). The bug does not move along with the stream but it sits “and drowns eye-/deep/into its tiny strip/of sky” (CP: 3). The insect, like the poet is an alien and symbolises alienation, and “tiny strip/of sky” emblemizes Ramanujan’s world of relations whom he frequently mentions in his poems.

Many of the symbols of W.B. Yeats are incomprehensible as they are derived from his occult studies. Symbols used by Ramanujan are less obscure as they spring from his native experiences. He often uses traditional symbols:

every morning

is a morning after,

only night has a roof

and the day has weals

on her back, as if

she had slept on a rafter. (CP: 26)

Here day and night are the traditional symbols of life and death. The “weals on her back” are the effects of her previous life being carried over into this life. The “rafter” represents ‘the continuous flow of life’ and night’s roof typifies the limitations of death.

Robert Frost in his poem “Birches” (Williams. 1954. 243) speaks of climbing to the top of a birch tree and swinging on its back down to earth. These two actions ‘climbing up’ and ‘swinging down’ are highly symbolic and mean something more. The first action ‘climbing up’ means a release or a desire to get away from the difficulties and responsibilities of daily life, while the inherent meaning of ‘swinging down’, is a return to earth to live a life as God has wished for. Similarly, the image of climbing a staircase in T.S. Eliot’s “Ash Wednesday” (Eliot. 1971. 60) suggests the idea of “raising” oneself spiritually or becoming purified. Ramanujan in his poem “The Fall” describes the experiences of a parachute jumper who realizes that his body is will-less and must surrender to the force of gravity:

he almost begins

to count,

till he reaches

his end, the Ground,

... ..
 ...

a fallen rider held by his reins

to a flight of horses. (CP: 52)

The image of the parachutist descending on earth symbolically “implies the descent of soul into human body” which “takes half a life span to sprout and take root in human consciousness” (Raghuandan. 1990. 189). The “fall” here implies a ‘total surrender of the soul to Super-human Force’, which “brings about the union of Spirit and Matter to produce a living being” (Ibid).

Since Indian philosophy nourishes his thought, Ramanujan is deeply aware of the Hindu tradition and so the symbols used by him are very significant as they have certain association with the Indian mind. In the poem, “The Opposable Thumb”, he brings out the importance of a thumb in the description of three types of hands. The thumb in the three different hands serves three different functions. The blind boy has an extra thumb, which actually means he has the capacity to perceive with an inner eye, which a man of normal vision cannot. A short thumb of the Muslim weaver signifies one who is a fanatic and cannot see anything in its proper perspective. The only thumb of the grandmother is unique as it relates to Purusha, who “no bigger than a thumb stands in man’s central self and is lord of what was and what shall be” (Raghuandan. 154). Thus, the thumb is a suggestive symbol with diverse connotations in varied contexts.

Ramanujan appears to us as an 'Imagist' as his poetry is more profound and precise in imagery, which not only flash a social observation but also gives us a personal cultural insight. The cluster of images used in his poems unfolds the theme of his poetry. At times his images are suggestive or symbolic and are used in figurative language to symbolize the theme of his poetry. His poems "are built up by clearly defined, sharp images which turn and turn, and are linked with such legendary flexibility that to separate one from the other becomes an impossibility" (Mohanty, "Time and Body..." 1998. 159).

Ramanujan is equally at home in two Indian languages—Tamil and Kannada. The epigraph poem that he chooses for his second collection, Relations, is taken from a classical Tamil Anthology which makes it clear that the poems included in this volume have drawn their sustenance from the Tamil poems. Images used in the Sangam poems have variety, subtlety and sophistication. He believes that the poems cannot be composed rapidly like oral epics, but it needs subtle care and artistry:

like a chariot wheel
 made thoughtfully
 over a month
 by a carpenter
 who tosses off eight chariots
 in a day⁹

The Tamil poets are minute and accurate observers of the fauna and flora of the Tamil regions, which are powerfully reflected in their images. Ramanujan is familiar with them and has employed them in many of his poems. In the poem *Kuruntokai*, Kapilar uses an image to describe herons looking for fish in the running waters:

There was only

a thin-legged heron standing
 on legs yellow as millet stems
 and looking

for lampreys

in the running water
 when he took me. ¹⁰

In Ramanujan's "Looking and Finding", herons make their appearance:

He can neither sleep nor wake from the one-legged sleep on this Chicago lake
 of yachts in full sail, herons playing at sages. (CP: 179)

Another *Kuruntokai* poem describes a young heroine who wonders, if there is
 someone like her, sick of love, spending sleepless night and hearing:

through the big rain
 blown about by the wind
 at midnight in the cold month

when the oxen
 shake off the buzzing flies
 again and again,

the poor thin chime
 of clappers
 in the crooked cowbells? ¹¹

We find similar descriptions in Ramanujan's poems where oxen yield place to
 buffaloes:

Buffaloes swatting flies
 with their tails. (CP: 81)

The streetcows have trapezium faces.

Buffaloes shake off flies with a twitch of ripples. (CP: 100)

A *Narrinai* heroine describes the fishermen “who go/from the little town in the seaside groves/into the sea ... spreading and drying meanwhile their nets/with many eyes, and knots” ¹². This becomes a beautiful image to describe the past in “Love Poem for a Wife,2 ”:

soon to be myself, a man

unhappy in the morning

to be himself again,

the past still there,

a drying

net on the mountain, (CP: 85)

It is said that the Tamils are famous for weaving thin muslin cloth and ancient and medieval Tamil poems abound with the images of muslin, waterfalls, snakeskin and stream:

There, among thin silver rills

that look like hanging snake skins,

high on the hill. ¹³

Ramanujan uses all these images in his poems:

We eat legends and leavings,

remember the ivory, the apes,

the peacocks we sent in the Bible

to Solomon, the medicines for smallpox,

the similes

for muslin: wavering snakeskins.

a cloud of steam. (CP: 115)

And then one sometimes sees waterfalls

as the ancient Tamils saw them,

wavering snakeskins,

cascades of muslin. (CP: 189)

Ramanujan intended to give Indian English poetry an indigenous tradition, not by blindly following the toes of the western poetic traditions, but by moulding the creative medium under the influence of the classical Tamil poetic traditions. The sharpness, the connectivity, the circularity of the images used by the classical Tamil and Kannada poets could shape and mould Ramanujan's images not only to give them a freshness and immediacy but also to engender in them a kind of authenticity and originality which are responsible for giving his poetry a specific indigenous identity, seminally and significantly Indian. Ramanujan is aware of this fact and he honestly admits:

English and my disciplines (linguistics, anthropology) give me my "outer" forms—linguistic, metrical, logical and other such ways of shaping experience; and my first thirty years in India, my frequent visits and fieldtrips, my personal and professional preoccupations with Kannada, Tamil, the classics and folklore give me my substance, my "inner" forms, images and symbols. They are continuous with each other, and I no longer can tell what comes from where¹⁴.

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Chapter V

The world of imagery: a study in major images and symbols

A. A Poet of Senses

Ramanujan's world of imagery is a fascinating subject of study. This world evolves from his own close observation of the universe around, from the everyday scenes and sights and the facts of everyday life. As his poetry is mainly poetry of perception, the imagery in his poetry records sense experience and thus evokes various sensations—sight, hearing, smell, touch and taste. Images are not merely made of words but are “naked sense – stimulus” (Fogle. 1949. 5). He completely identifies himself with the objects, which appeal to his senses, and an image in his poetry “is a copy or revival of a sense – perception of some sort” (Richards. 1936. 98).

What strikes one most about Ramanujan's poetry is the richness of his imagery, which forms the very core of his poetic art. His poetry is a fabric woven from threads of concept, emotion and sense. It is the senses, which help him observe his environment critically and objectively. Poetry as Hulme said, “is not a counter-language, but a visual concrete one. It is a compromise for a language of intuition which would hand over sensations bodily” (Fogle. 1949. 56). Ramanujan's poetry offers a perfect balance and equilibrium between general notion and sensation. Every image, he employs, relates to a kind of sense stimulation. So, while expressing general ideas, he constructs images with which his memory and imagination are steeped. As he has developed a potent sensory system, his poetry, besides inciting visual impression, stirs up diverse physical sensations. Hence, it is my endeavour to analyse his images in terms of various sensory experiences.

Ramanujan's piercing eyes gaze at a particular situation or an object minutely and communicates it through neat visual images. He, like Keats is acute in observation with an eye to the particulars of every object. His telescopic vision is focused on the simplest everyday things often seen and encountered. His descriptions of the water-bugs—"thin -stemmed, bubble-eyed water bugs" (CP:3) and the ants—"bean-eyed young, / hung perhaps with tigerheads /of red wild ants" (CP:69) are not only sculpturesques but also vivid, sharp and concrete which affirm that "he has an eye for the specific physiognomy of an object or situation which he then reveals with telling detail"¹.

Visual imagery is cardinal to Ramanujan's mode of communication. Shelley's visual imagery is the product of an eye usually directed either up or down and irradiates the distance. So, his skylark soars vertically into the heaven until it disappears:

Higher still and higher

From the earth thou springest

Like a cloud of fire;

The blue deep thou wingest,

And singing still dost soar, and soaring ever singest ².

But Keats's nightingale dwells on earth and does not venture far above the ground. He is concerned himself with describing the particular of things close at hand. Ramanujan is not always satisfied by describing merely the external features of an object. He, like Shelley, has an insatiable eye, which perforates to go beyond the physical world. So, he finds a semblance between a water-bug and a prophet – both having an extraordinary power to walk on water:

No, not only prophets

walk on water. This bug sits
 on a landslide of lights
 and drowns eye-
 deep
 into its tiny strip
 of sky. (CP:3)

Ramanujan pictures objects that are almost accessible to the senses of the average man. His visual imagery has an analytical quality, which enlightens some fundamental truths of the phenomenal world. Shelley's eye can see through the objects of its gaze and can anatomize it. The cloud passes through a series of dissolutions and rebirths, which he visualizes separately in his poem "The Cloud". These swift transformations have been delineated in the images of solid, simple and structural forms:

From cape to cape, with a bridge-like shape,
 Over a torrent sea,
 Sunbeam-proof, I hang like a roof,
 The mountains its columns be³

Ramanujan's inner vision can resolve the complexities of life. Birth and death—the two poles of human life—make up the life on earth. The pain suffered by the human beings on the eve of birth and death has been visualized by the poet in a simple, sharp image:

Birth takes a long time
 though death can be sudden,
 and multiple, like pregnant deer
 shot down on the run.

Yet one would like to think,
 one kicks and grabs the air
 in death throes as a baby
 does in its mother's womb
 months before the event (CP:206)

Ramanujan frequently uses colour images in order to create some visual pictures.

Kamala Das uses yellow colour to describe an ageing man:

And so,
 with every interesting man I meet,
 be it
 a curious editor,
 or a poet with a skin yellowed
 like antique paper,⁴

Sometimes yellow symbolizes paleness and melancholy:

It's goodbye, goodbye, goodbye
 To slender shapes behind window panes
 Shut against indiscriminate desire
 And rain; to yellow moons⁵

Yellow sometimes stands for the diseased:

I yellowed, sickened like the leaves on trees,
 Gained a freedom I never once had asked for.⁶

Kolatkar uses blue and yellow, which stand for the divine and the red for the physical love. Parthasarathy's predominating colour is gray. Yellow is a recurring colour in Ramanujan's poetry with symbolic significance. It is almost an obsession with him, which has been employed with different connotations. Sometimes it signifies fear:

dwelling on the yellower vein
 in the yellow amber
 or touching a book that has gold
 on its spine;

I think of snakes. (CP:4)

The 'yellow vein' in amber, or gold lettering on the spine of a book induces fear, which projects the picture of a snake into his mind. At times yellow stands for the colour of the sun and indicates brightness:

siamese cats with black on their paws
 tiptoe from the sulphur mines of the sun
 into the shadow of our house. (CP:14)

'Yellow' symbolizes spiritual maturity possessed by the intuitive witty father:

Father sits with the sunflower at the window
 deep in the yellow of a revolving chair, (Ibid)

"Yellowed underwear" (CP:71) gives rise to awe and horror whereas "yellow moustache" (CP:161) of the wrestler in the poem "At Forty" is an expression of his fury. Again it indicates dullness:

but all my furniture
 looked bilious yellow
 in its gorgeous light. (CP:232)

Yellow is a symbol of gloom as we see in the poem "It Does not Follow, but When in the Street". The "walls of Central Jail/drip with spring's laburnum/yellows, yellow on yellow" (CP:57), where the personae is imprisoned, is not made of bricks and cement but of sadness, melancholy and pessimism.

Ramanujan, like Shakespeare has immense interest in colour contrast particularly of black and white. Shakespeare's sense of colour contrast is often connected with the theme. The purity of Desdemona and the opposition of her colour and that of the Moor is symbolized in black and white all through "Othello". The chasteness and fairness of Desdemona is manifested by the colour white:

Nor scar that whiter skin of hers that snow,
And smooth as monumental alabaster.⁷ (5.2)

The black Moor, Othello stands as a contrasting figure and is a symbol of devil as Emilia says:

O, the more angel she,
And you the blacker devil !⁸ (5.2)

Ramanujan is sensible to the colour and the contrasts of the various shades. His use of colour contrasts adds to the beauty of his poems. The unusual numbers of bright colours that we find in his poems are freely contrasted while describing an insect, an animal, a flower and a human being. This enhances the beauty as does the flash of light on jewels:

mating white and black lizards
in schoolbook Sanskrit. (CP:76)

..... white

hair in a red turban. (CP:80)

blackwhite kitten yawn,
mew, make water
on a livingroom (CP:101)

when will orange banners burn
 among blue trumpet flowers and the shade
 of trees (CP:113)

Ramanujan is well acquainted with the racial prejudice that prevails in the western world. "Black" and "white" in the poem "Take care" suggest this racial discrimination:

In Chicago,
 do not walk slow.
 Find no time
 to stand and stare.

Down there, blacks look black.
 And whites, they look blacker. (CP:104)

The auditory images employed by Ramanujan are straightforward, often sharp and harsh. Soft humming and buzzing noises, which are frequent in Keats are rarely heard in his poems. But like Shelley his auditory images are numerous—"One day /hear her skeleton crack beginning /with the backbone" (CP:236), "tinkling in glass-/bead curtains" (CP:180), "rattles my chains" (CP:235) strike a sharp note; whereas "A beggar once come with a violin/to croak out a prostitute song" (CP:98), "the jangle/of medals on the breast of your happy/unhappy widow" (CP:72), "a peanut seller's/raucous cry" (CP:76) register a harsh sound. Gentle, low-toned sound is audible in some of his poems—"the papers/rustle" (CP:190), "leaky taps upstairs and downstairs,/purring at my side like the kitchen fridge" (CP:215), "cats being cats will purr/at all sorts of occult things" (CP:73), "no one will hear me for/the noise of rustling nails" (CP:86).

Sometimes alliteration produces an auditory effect. "I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore"⁹ (SP:16)—the repeated 'l' sound echoes the sense of the water of the lake striking at the shore producing a melodious music. Similarly, "The twirls of their hisses/rise like tiny dust-cones on slow-noon roads" (CP:4) in the poem "Snakes", the reiterated 's' sound echoes the hissing sound of a snake. The slithering of the snake, and "a sibilant alphabet" (CP:4) suggest that the snake possesses a language which is full of 'sibilant' speech sound. Again, in the lines "The snakeman wreathes their writhing/round his neck" (CP:5)—"the rolling r's create a serrating sound here like a reptile would while wriggling on the floor" (Daruwalla. 1994. 21).

In the poem "A Leaky Tap After a Sister's Wedding" the sound of water leaking "drop after drop" (CP:9) from a tap is envisaged through images. The sound of the leaky tap sounds like "mallet touches/of silversmiths" (CP:9) working for the personae's sister's wedding. As Ramanujan's imagination soars higher, he further visualizes the sound with the 'pecking' sound of a summer woodpecker at a tree, which acquires symbolic implication. It reminds the poet of the husband's ceaseless pecking at his helpless wife.

The tactual imagery of Ramanujan like Keats is organic. It reckons with the sense of touch as well as with sight. The description of Cupid and Psyche in each other's arms in the poem "Ode to Psyche" is achieved by a concentration of tactual image, which strengthens the central visual impression:

They lay calm-breathing on the bedded grass;
 Their arms embraced, and their pinions too;
 Their lips touch'd not, but had not bade adieu,
 As if disjointed by soft-handed slumber...¹⁰

The tactual image Ramanujan manipulates in describing a chimp named Subbu in the prose poem "Zoo Gardens Revisited," who is paralysed neck down, creates a visual picture:

He couldn't lift his chipped blue enamel mug to his lips and slurp his tea

any more nor pout his lips to puff at his cigar. (CP:154)

Sometimes sight is enhanced by touch as in "A Minor Sacrifice" where the poet describes how the children, in keeping with the advice of Shivanna, catch scorpions, return home and retire to their bathroom to clear their hands of the sins committed :

sneak by the backdoor

to the bath house

to scrub and scour with coconut fibre

till the skins of our palms come off. (CP:148)

The words "scrub" and "scour" help in establishing the effect of vivid visual images.

Ramanujan like Shakespeare and Keats is very sensitive and delicate in the matter of touch. He has drawn similes from the texture of substances—silk, velvet, satin and so on. Shakespeare, susceptible to the smoothness of the skin, describes Perdita's hands "as soft as dove's down"¹¹ (4.3), Venus's "smooth moist hand"¹² and "flower-soft hands"¹³ (3.2) of Cleopatra's maidens. Keats, with a view to produce an effect of sensuous luxuriance, makes use of soft silky surfaces. The couch on which Adonis lies is silken; his coverlids are like the peach:

... on a silken couch of rosy pride,

In midst of all, there lay a sleeping youth

... ..

And coverlids gold-tinted like the peach,

Or ripe October's faded marigolds,¹⁴

Ramanujan is very conscious of and responsive to the feelings and the quality of various stuff. So, the new born salamanders soft and glossy are described as “naked earthlings, poor yet satin/to the eye, velvet to the touch” (CP:202), and the “tumbled hair” (CP:45) of his lady love is as soft as silk. The ripe oranges are so soft and light which can be felt in the finger-tips:

some so ripe, there was a hint

of fungi-ash

on a slightly hollowed cheek;

some flushed and saffron,

some gamboge, some tangerine;

some pulpy, velvet-skinned, (CP:53)

He articulates the endless sticky nature of anxiety by a tactual image. Anxiety is unwakeful and drowsy by temperament but it is “viscous and fibered as pitch” (CP:29). Images such as, “father bathed/slapping soap on his back”; (CP:65), “the calico cat laps water/from the white well,” (CP:215), “his dog would wake me/with licks on my sleepy face” (CP:253), “I wipe myself dry/with an unwashed/Sears turkish towel” (CP:169), “I’d watch in a bazaar lens/houseflies rub legs or kiss” (CP:79) convey some kinds of tactile sensations.

Ramanujan’s olfactory images like Keats’s are heavy and pervasive. Incense and its massive fumes overcloud the banquet-scene in “Lamia”:

Before each lucid pannel fuming stood

A censer fed with myrrh and spiced wood,

... ..

... fifty wreaths of smoke

From fifty censers their light voyage took

To the high roof, still mimick'd as they rose

Along the mirror'd walls by twin-clouds odorous.¹⁵

Inceuse, used in rituals has strongly appealed to him, which is soft and agreeable. The olfactory imageries of Ramanujan are both pleasant and unpleasant. The strong odour of “street-long heavy-hung/yellow pollen fog of a fragrance” of “Red Champak trees” (CP:124) permeates the atmosphere which causes migraine to his mother. So, a pungent fragrance often causes sickness. The smell of garlic cloves, a cure for cancer, is for the poet very redolent. Hence, “the breath of garlic as we enter/the elevator suffocates me” (CP:265). The poem “Eyes, Ears, Noses and a Thing about Touch”, dealing with the various sense perceptions states that noses possess a unique sense of smell which can smell everything that pervades in the atmosphere:

Urine on lily,

women's odours

in the theatre, a musk cat's

erection in the centre of a zoo, (CP:77)

Ramanujan like Shakespeare has a very acute sense of smell and is particularly sensitive to bad smell. Shakespeare's Coriolanus expresses his contempt for the common people through the image of a foul smell:

You common cry of curs! Whose breath I hate

As reek o' the rotten fens, whose loves I prize

As the dead carcasses of unburied men

That do corrupt my air, ¹⁶ (3.3)

His Henry V, while giving a realistic picture of the dead bodies fears “The smell whereof shall breed a plague in France”¹⁷ (4.3). Ramanujan's disdain for stink is evident in his description of the “fertile shabby pair” who smell of “unwashed hair”

(CP:13). The smell of a breaded fish “thrust a blunt-headed smelt”(CP:7) into his mouth as it revives the memory of the reek of a dead body of a woman.

Ramanujan is equally fond of aroma. So, the smell of “twisted/ backbone tree” (CP:61) reminds him of the youth of his mother when she was as delicate and beautiful as “silk” and “white petal”. Shakespeare connects the sweet smell of spring with sparkling youth who “smells April and May”¹⁸ (3.2). Ramanujan’s passion for perfumes is evident in “Love 5” where he says that the intense passion of a personae for his lady is abated only after enjoying the odour of her body and, therefore, he wants to “catch the waft/of odours transcending all perfume” (CP:229). The new groom in the poem, “Mythologies 3”, in spite of the strong warning of his bride, touches her as he is tempted by her perfumes:

... all he could think of was her round breast,

her musk, her darling navel and the rest.

So he hovered and touched her, ... (CP:228)

The “smell of a woman’s perfumes” is so invigorating that it will help an amnesiac to recover “all pasts and circulation of sap”(CP:76).

Closely related to olfactory images are gustatory images. It is not only the act of tasting, which arouses this sense but also the things meant to be tasted. The gustatory images of Ramanujan show that he possesses a tender, discriminating and touchy palate which can easily distinguish the different tastes—sweet, sour, salty, oily etc. A few examples of such images are—“a whiskey sour” (CP:15), “garden of sweet limes”(CP:107), “salt,/coriander,/and jaggery” (CP:112), “Water-layers salt” (CP:100), “greasy sweets” (CP:96) etc. A breaded fish, a food to be tasted, stirs up a sense of taste. The image of a dead snake in the poem “Snakes” –“ Now/frogs can hop

upon this sausage rope" (CP:5)—evokes a gustatory sense which is repulsive and disagreeable.

An intimate study of the imagery of Ramanujan reveals the fact that there is one characteristic which attracts him most throughout, that is, the quality of movement—both in the animal and the human worlds. The extensive use of kinesthetic imagery throws light on his poetic technique and creates some visual impressions on the mind. Shelley has many images of swift movement in the poem "Ode to the West Wind" where the west wind, with all its activities, is beautifully portrayed:

Thou, from whose unseen presence the leaves dead
 Are driven, like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing,

 O thou
 Who chariotest to their dark wintry bed
 The winged seeds, where they lie cold and low,
 Each like a corpse within its grave, until
 Thine azure sister of the Spring shall blow
 Her clarion o'er the dreaming earth, and fill
 Driving sweet buds like flocks to feed in air.¹⁹

The motor images employed by Ramanujan are both swift and slow, drawn from two worlds—the human and the animal. The pictures drawn from the body and bodily actions constitute a large section of his imagery. A number of images of quick nimble bodily actions are visible in many poems such as, "pacing/to and fro as you came to the gate"(CP:66), "Leaping and hopping all over the lawn." (CP:146). The grasshoppers are described as "little writhing objects"(CP:147) and when their wings are pulled off they "shiver a bit/as we put away/those wriggles in our bottles"

(CP:147) comes almost vivid to the eyes. We witness similar swift movement in the verbs—“herons fly round and round/in his eyes”(CP:230), “his steed, with a neem-leaf mark/upon his brow, will prance/again to splash his noonday image” (CP:17), “Even leaping Beast shall wait to be bidden” (CP:11), adjutant storks “flap *themselves into air*” and “it circles/*on motionless wings*” (CP:128).

Ramanujan’s love for movement is to be seen not only in his direct images but also in the use of certain words like “peep”, “peek” , “blink” expressing quick, darting action—“peeking in and out/of the black box” (CP:58), “not yet fully recovered/from birth,/blinking blackwhite kitten yawn” (CP:101), “suppress/that itch to take a peek at the dead street-/dog before the scavengers come” (CP:90) and “I walk through the holy place,/one eye wincing” (CP:246).

Ramanujan’s keen and sharp vision can even observe the minute movement and can convey it through an image. A few images of slow and smooth movement are—“a thin old snake vacillating” (CP:176), “Brown eyes, family faces, maculate giraffes/jiggle and disappear” (CP:205) and “twigs and twiglike insects/that turn slowly round the twigs” (CP:146-147).

Sometimes some human feelings or actions are set in motion to create a sense of activity. Shakespeare uses verbs of movement about things, which are motionless or abstractions, which cannot have physical movement. He even endows inanimate and motionless object with a sense of life:

that pale, that white-fac’d shore,

whose foot spurns back the ocean’s roaring tides,²⁰ (2.1)

He often attributes to them human feelings and infuses a sense of activity:

Where the Norwegian banners flout the sky

And fan our people cold.²¹ (1.2)

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B. Ramanujan's Universe

Ramanujan's artistry rests chiefly on his deft use of imagery, which is inseparable from the theme of his poetry. The realistic, fresh, exact, startling and polished images play a "key role" (Mizra. 1980.157) in his poetry, which clarify a picture and express an idea with more concentration. The objects he contemplates stir in his imagination a picture which gives rise to the imagery he creates. His response to an experience is not only finer but is more refined than an average man. Hence, his language is not only elegant but also different. He finds the imagery the only tool on which he can bank on for a total poetic effect. It is said, "wisdom first speaks in images" (Singh. 1992. 135). A study of images and symbols in the poetry of Ramanujan throws light on the peculiar ways the poet's mind functions in order to design the theme of his poetry.

An image in Ramanujan's poetry is a "constituent of a unified expression" (Srivastava. 1996.50), which imports his vision of life, reveals his critical outlook and analytical mind. As his poetry is "born out of the dialectical interplay between his Indian and American experiences" (Dulai. 1989.n. pag), he has presented us two sets of images—one, of rural India, which serves as "the backdrop", the other, the sophisticated urban life of "America serving as the frontier" (Mohanty. 1990. 167). The image of a shepherd driving home a flock of sheep represents the simple Indian landscape:

turning around I see a flock of sheep
 in a tree-filtered slant of sunlight
 gilding a cloud of dust
 coming towards me, black, white,

walking clouds of wool
 with downcast faces
 behind them a man in a dirty
 red turban and a brown
 rough blanket

wielding a stick ... (CP:224)

The imagery draws a picture of the rustic life—a life that is humble, devoid of ornamentation and revolves in harmony with nature. As he is born and brought up in India, scenes and images peculiar to Indian life abound in his poems:

his [shepherd's] father now blind

and sitting in the sun

outside his hut smoking

bidis all day (Ibid)

I return from the wide open spaces.

Temple employees have whiskered nipples.

The streetcows have trapezium faces.

Buffaloes shake off flies with a twitch of ripples. (CP:100)

Ramanujan is not persistently obsessed with India, he “sees reality of existence in the immediate environments and cultural atmosphere in America, the country where he has been living for the last thirty years” (Sharma. 1994. 181). So, he has painted the shallow, urban life of Chicago—a city of racial violence and vulgarity, where “dry chlorine water” replaces the holy Ganges and “the naked Chicago bulb” becomes “a cousin of the Vedic sun” (CP:169). In “One More After Reading Homer” Ramanujan

tells us how in Chicago “dehumanizing and stupefying elements dangle in the air”

(Mohanty. “ Chicago and AKR”. 1994. 39.):

... ... I come
 upon a half-burned shoulderblade
 greening in a lake of dead alewives
 among leftovers papercups and condoms.

I wonder if in Chicago too
 love indifference and hate
 in some devious way relate
 at all to deaths by fire. (CP:73)

The poem, “Take Care”, begins with a natural description of the city. The poet, then, through a series of images depicts how danger and calamities lark in the city threatening the security of the people:

In Chicago it blows
 hot and cold. Trees
 play fast and loose.

 ... Enemies have guns.
 Friends have doubts.
 Wives have lawyers.

 All tall buildings
 use telescopes.
 Give daughters pills,
 learn karate.

Prepare to get raped

bending for a book (CP:103)

Ramanujan, often juxtaposes the images drawn from two different worlds— the Indian and the western. In “Death and the Good Citizen” he has presented two sets of images to show the “ritualistic ubiquitous way of handling the dead body” (Mohanty. “Things as they are...”1999. 170). The typical Indian method of cremation is conveyed to us through a concrete image:

... .. they'll cremate
me in Sanskrit and sandalwood,
have me sterilized
to a scatter of ash. (CP:136)

This method of cremation is contrasted with that in the west;

Or abroad,
they'll lay me out in a funeral
parlour, embalm me in pesticide,
bury me in a steel trap, lock
me out of nature
till I'm oxidized by left-
over air, withered by my own
vapours into grin and bone. (Ibid)

The dominant images deployed by Ramanujan are tree, water, insects, animals, birds, widow which gradually evolve into symbols. He employs these images with a purpose to link poem with poem. The images knit the poems together giving them coherence and order and, thus, revealing the pattern of the poet's mind. The richness and fullness of his imagery instills life into his poetry and his poetry develops an

immense potentiality to “evoke the multi-dimensional experience of life” (Talwar. 1994. 41).

Ramanujan is deeply influenced by the medieval Kannada Vachana poets Basavanna, Mahadeviyakka and Allama Prabhu who have made an extensive use of tree image. Basavanna, a devotee to Siva, compares the relationship between Siva and his devotees with the ‘roots’ and ‘shoot’ of the tree:

The root is the mouth
of the tree: pour water there
at the bottom
and, look, it sprouts green
at the top.¹

Allama Prabhu, on the other hand, identifies tree with awareness which arises after the clearing of the physical nature, yields eight kinds of subtle bodies (flowers) and finally reaches the basic knowledge:

A tree born
in a land without soil,
and look!
eight flowers
thunderbolt-coloured.
Fruit on the branch
ripen at the root.²

The tree, for Ramanujan, “represents an evergrowing ramification of the family” (Rao. 1996. 60-61). The tree image used in different contexts acquires multiple connotations. The image of a fig tree in the poem “Looking for a Cousin on a Swing” indicates the growth and change that take place as a girl moves from childhood to

adulthood. The poet's cousin, as she grows up, develops a flabby body with a bulging belly like the fork of a fig tree and it seems that she will burst out with "a brood of scarlet figs" (CP:19). Again the tree symbol in "I Could Have Rested"—"treeless island youth" (CP:20)—"represents enlightenment for the calm and peace that accompanies enlightenment bringing about a total relaxation and rest" (Raghuandan, 1990.188- 189) which has been denied to the poet-lover as he is brave, young and hot-blooded.

The tree is used as a symbol of life and death as "contemporaneous forms of existence" (Raghuandan, 1990. 186). The "dynasties/of the mountain-pine" (CP:27) represents the royal dynasties that ruled the kingdom but whose banners are 'tattered' and "harped at the drizzling strings of rain" (CP:27). The dying dynasty is represented by the living ex-maharajah who loses his kingdom in politics. The endless nature of anxiety is presented through the image of a tree which like a tree branches out on all sides—"it has naked roots and secret twigs" (CP:29). A leafless tree in the poem "Despair" is symbolic of despair which denotes that a man should get relief of his own despair because he is not alone in his predicament. Tree image in this poem and also in "Anxiety" signifies *avidya* or ignorance which is common to all minds.

The paradox of birth and death is symbolized in the tree in the poem "Christmas". Christmas, the birthday of Jesus Christ comes in December. Again, this month heralds the death of the year. The bare branches, which look skinny and root like in winter become green with "a shock of leaf" (CP: 32) and throb with life with the approach of summer. Like the two-headed Janus, who is the patron of beginning and end, the tree is also "two in one" (CP:32) as it is dead and alive at the same time. The tree is like an angle both "open and shut" (CP:32). It is like Euclid, the first Alexandrian geometrician, who though dead is still alive and lives again through his books.

Euclid's ghost arrests life for the poet and he completely identifies himself with the tree and realises that one Life Force pervades all forms of life. The tree as a symbol of all creations occurs again in "One Reads" where the shadow of a tree is merged into the shadow of a beggar—"his shadow, clotting/the antlers of bare April's trees" (CP:49).

Ramanujan's imagery often derives from his childhood memory. As T.S.Eliot says "only a part of an author's imagery comes from his reading. It comes from the whole of his sensitive life since early childhood"³. In the poem "Of Mothers, among other things" a tree with its white flowers and the twisted branches revives his memory of his deformed mother clad in silk. Here the mother and the tree are identified in one metaphor. The tree in "Man and Woman in Camera and Out" is a symbol of love in full moon which simultaneously hints at man's close association with nature. The images of man, tree and shadow find their respective places "by a tiny act/of grace" (CP: 58) inside the black box of the camera. The cherry tree in full bloom, symbolic of the love of man and woman, foresees the flowers dropping. The lovers in real life encounter a similar situation and are always afraid lest their love wanes in near future.

The image of the tree in the poem "That tree" upholds the Hindu view of the universe:

The legendary tree is upside down.

Roots in the air, branches in the ground. (CP:234)

The universe is like an inverted tree with its branches in the human world and its roots in the divine. But the image of the tree gradually acquires a new dimension and emerges as a symbol of family tree. "It is symbolic of the everwidening family relations and stands for "*Vamsa Vriksha*". The branching off of the tree is symbolic of the evergrowing family tree" (Rao. 1996. 62). Though isolated in his exile,

Ramanujan has tied himself up to the family tree and just as the tree gets nourishment from its roots, he too thrives with life as he thinks of his family. The parents and the relatives who are spread like “the inverse/ branching under the earth” (CP:76) give him back his normal life.

The image of water is manipulated in the poems “The Striders”, “A River” and “No Amnesiac King”. In the poem “The Striders” the stream image is associated with an insect image. Yeats’s living stream in “Easter 1916” symbolizes change and growth of life. The hearts of the martyrs concentrated on a single purpose—to liberate the country—are like stones and the living stream of life, which flows is disturbed by them:

Hearts with one purpose alone
Through summer and winter seem
Enchanted to a stone
To trouble the living stream.⁴ (SP:94)

In “West-Running Brook”, Frost’s brook symbolizes everything in life and human experience amidst the world of flux:

It flows beside us in this water brook,
But it flows over us; It flows between us
To separate us for a panic moment
It flows between us, over us, and with us.⁵

In “The Striders” Ramanujan combines the image of flow with that of fixity. “The ripple skin of a stream” (CP:3) denotes *samsara* or life in a state of flux. The bug stands for the “liberated- in- life” (Kumar. 1993 .13) and its perching on the stream or sitting on a “landslide of lights” (CP:3) suggests a fixity within the flux. Life is like a flowing river and so when we step into it, the river will have changed from what it

was before. So, a man longs for the past happiness. The poem "No Amnesiac King" reviews man's nostalgia for an idealized world in terms of a stream image. A human being always wishes for perfection but he is aware that his desire to catch and cling to the ideal world is, in fact, only the "inverse images in the water/of a stream" (CP:127) of the actual life he leads. But man tries in vain to retire to the ideal past, which is only an image or reflection of the actual he experiences.

The river Vaikai in Ramanujan poem "A River," which flows through Madurai, is symbolic along whose bank grows up the rich Tamil culture. For him, a river is holy and so death rites are performed near it. The ashes of his father were thrown according to the instructions of the priest at a place "where three rivers met" (CP: 111). K.N. Daruwalla's river Ghaghra is a symbol of the fury of a river in flood. In the afternoon she is "a grey smudge/exploring a grey canvas"⁶ and there is no sign of flood. But this deceptive calmness is destroyed as the river swells into flood:

When dusk reaches her
 through an overhang of cloud
 she is overstewed coffee.

... ..

And suddenly at night

... ..

Twenty minutes of a nightmare spin

and fear turns phantasmal

as half a street goes

churning in the river-belly.⁷

Ramanujan's river, calm and quiet in summer, becomes destructive and violent in the rainy season. The rise of the water level is described with precise accuracy, which not

only tolls human life but also causes heavy material loss:

People everywhere talked
of the inches rising,
of the precise number of cobbled steps
run over by the water, rising
on the bathing places,
and the way it carried off three village houses. (CP:38)

The archetypal image of flood, destroying all life upon the earth, is a very familiar image used by the poets and dramatists in all ages. Sometimes flood is symbolic of world destruction as we find in Yeats's "The Gyres":

Irrational streams of blood are staining earth;
Empedocles has thrown all things about;
Hector is dead and there's a light in Troy;
We that look on but laugh in tragic joy.⁸ (SP:180)

The image of the "flooded stream"⁹ (SP:100) in "A Prayer for my Daughter" is an irrational force symbolizing the 'irrational stream' of violence that would flood the world. Shakespeare sees in the image of "a river overbearing its boundaries a perfect analogy to the result of stress or rush of emotion in men" (Spurgeon. 1935. 93). When Desdemona has left Brabantio for Othello, he expresses his grief in a flood image:

... my particular grief
Is of so flood-gate and o'erbearing nature
That it engulfs and swallows other sorrows,
And it is still itself.¹⁰ (1.3)

Indian culture and civilization evolve and thrive along the river bank and so, the river forms the very hub of local culture. Both Parthasarathy and Ramanujan draw the

vignettes of rivers that run through the native landscapes. In the eye of Parthasarathy river Vaikai, is no better than “a sewer”¹¹ (RP:56) which is just a plaything for the children, and for men it is a place for washing dirt and cleaning their arse:

With paper boats boy tickle her ribs,
and buffaloes have turned her to a pond.

... ..
... .. a man on the steps
clean his arse.¹² (RP : 56).

Ramanujan presents the image of a dry river which in summer “dries to a trickle/ in the sand,/ baring sand-ribs” (CP : 38). In Parthasarathy’s river “There’s eaglewood in her hair/ and stale flowers”¹³ (RP : 56). Ramanujan’s river too is clogged by “straw and women’s hair/ ... at the rusty bars”(CP : 38). The river in Parthasarathy’s poetry represents decadence, whereas in Ramanujan’s poetry it is an evil force destroying both animal and human lives on earth:

... it carried off three village houses,
one pregnant woman
and a couple of cows
named Gopi and Brinda, as usual. (CP : 38).

“River as a trope of nativity and nation does no longer sustain life; during summers, it stinks, and during rainy season it overflows ominously to swallow the whole range of life on and around its shores” (Kumar. 1999. 202)

Ramanujan has composed a large numbers of poems whose central or controlling image is an animal—may be an insect or a bird. In the ‘Preface’ of *The Collected Poems* Krittika Ramanujan observes:

Animals appear everywhere in the poems, but the poems are not 'about' animals. They have a double *vision*. The poems are about life, death, cycles of birth, pain and love. They are also about poetry. They are full of irony, humour, paradox and sudden reversals.¹⁴

There are some poems in which animal imagery is used to criticize man's conduct—his moral and ethical behaviour. Human nature in social context is explored in the poem "Lac into Seal", where the crow, a symbol of evil and crookedness is compared to a politician who enjoys all the privileges in the society. The poor, timid masses are as innocent as crows:

When summer months branch backward
 day after day after day
 you'll only see now and then
 a crow or two stopping
 its beak on the back of a cow. (CP:50)

Again, the image of "a couple of cows/named Gopi and Brinda" (CP:39) carried away by the flood is very suggestive. Simplicity, innocence and purity are the qualities which are ascribed to this animal. The death of these cows deviously signifies that these virtues are being disappeared from our society.

Very often Ramanujan uses animal imagery to evaluate men in relation to animals. The "sheep—mouth look in a sepia wedding/picture of father in a turban" (CP:65) brings out the inherent quality of the poet's father who is innocent, gentle and simple like a sheep. The proud and learned uncle, having an extensive knowledge about animals and insects have been compared with a monkey—" he says, shaking his marmoset head" (CP:145). "Black—faced monkeys of grave lowbrow" (CP:153) at once reminds the poet of his uncles with "movable scalps and wrinkled long back

hands" (CP:153). The "later centurions" walking in a pompous manner is attributed to a cat who as it watches a stranger "walk close/ to his knee to arch the fur/on their backs and mimic/the strut of later centurions" (CP:73). The frog, an amphibian, and an enemy of a serpent symbolizes fertility and evolution which "moves from egg to tadpole/to adult, to grow/from water to land and back" (CP:198). The various stages of development that a frog passes through refer to the act of creation—a transition from water to the element of earth. As a cold-blooded creature it anticipates man and in this respect it represents the highest stages of evolution.

The salamander, a lizard like reptile lives in fire, quenches it with the extreme coldness of its body. Ramanujan finds a link between a man and a salamander. The salamanders eat fire but are born in the sludge in the woods after the rain. Man is no different from these salamanders because

... .. we, we burn
 and eat fire no less than salamanders
 but live in the wet, crawl in the slush,
 five-toed lizards eating dragonflies;
 waiting no less than the three-toed for a turn
 of the body's season to copulate (CP:202-3)

A man is very much like this lizard who keeps himself cool amid the fire of passion.

Ramanujan adopts a variety of methods to explore the animal world and his "animal poems symbolize inner aspects of human experience" (Pandey 1997, 74). Often he uses animal imagery to identify his instinctive self; to explain the human predicament. The poet's daughter's turtle "carrying a daily cross" (CP:101) reflects the poet's plight as an expatriate trying to live in an alien culture. There is an affinity between the poet and the animal. The turtle's precarious exile "very far from the

ocean" (CP:101) confuses it and it tries to hibernate in a jar. The turtle, an image of the poetic self, is as alienated in Chicago as the poet. The snake "on slow-noon roads" (CP:4) is an "alien" which hints at the alienation of the poet.

Ramanujan's attitude to the metaphysical question of death is exhibited in terms of animal metaphor. The praying mantis sitting on a can of DDT in the Madurai temple continues its act of praying being unaware that it is very near to death. The poet, like the praying mantis "disregards the proximity of death or institutionalized religion and continues to pray" (Raghunandan. 1990. 175). Again, he visualizes a close association between a man and an animal and identifies each generation with a cold-blooded creature—his ancestors with crocodiles and tortoises, his grand daughter with a praying mantis and himself with a lizard.

Ramanujan, in some of his poems draws analogy between men and animals. He surveys both the worlds – the world of his relations and the world of animals. With apt attention he explores similitudes between them. He identifies his aunt with the snake whose black lorgnettes are etched on its hoods like his aunt. He is afraid and hostile towards this creature like D.H. Lawrence, who in his poem "Snake", says "The voice of my education said to me / He must be killed"¹⁵. Ramanujan too heaves a sign of relief when the snake is killed:

Now

Frogs can hop upon this sausage rope,
flies in the sun will mob the look in his eyes,

and I can walk through the woods. (CP:5)

Whereas aunt arouses fear, the great grandfather, the "still man" puts to shame who like some "spider-lover a pair/of his Borneo specimens mate" (CP:63) will be a silent observer of the illicit love affairs between his wife and the fisherman. The grand-

mother, on the other hand, a crafty lady who like “spider-/fashion, she clamped down and bit/him” (CP:62). She is like a spider weaving web and watching quietly the insect entangled in the web, jumps suddenly to catch it. In like manner this spider-woman attracts and draws the fisherman into her fold .

Many strange and grisly insects crowd Ramanujan’s poetic landscape. He uses insects imagery to belittle the power of the theological despots. In “From Where” inchworms remind him of Hilter and his army:

green inchworms arching

their backs in ’39 from peapod

to desolate peapod, when I’d just heard

of the World and Hitler’s packs? (CP:271)

Cannibalism, a metaphor of modern polity is employed by Ramanujan to reveal the “petulant and murky nature of contemporary politics” (Kumar. 1998. 12). The fight between the politicians for scrambling power and wealth is delineated through the image of worms where the bigger worms devour the smaller ones:

cannibal

devouring smaller cannibal

till only two equal

giants are left to struggle,

entwined,

like wrestlers on a cliff: (CP:46)

The tussle continues until “One /omnipotent/maggot-ceasar” (CP:46) “emerges as a lone victorious survivor from the mob of worms” (Kumar. 1998. 12). This image of an insect, thus, flashes a social observation.

Ramanujan observes homogeneity between an insect and a human being. He

infuses human ideals of socialism into ant life in the poem "Army Ants". The young ants are used as brick and mortar in the construction of an anthill:

Extremists, true makers

of made things, they have

only themselves

for bricks; knees for hinges; heads

for the plinths of their rain-

soaked Corinthians; (CP: 70)

Like a true socialist they live for the benefit of the society. They are both constructive and destructive because it is the destruction of an individual that constructs the society.

Ramanujan, a poet of scientific perception, can smell danger in his immediate environment. To describe the milieu of a large modern city like Chicago he employs an insect imagery very effectively:

Invisible crabs

scuttle the air.

Small flies sit

on aspirin and booze. (CP: 103)

The flight of the crabs symbolizes air pollution; one of the major problems of a modern city, which destroys the healthy atmosphere of the place.

The bird imagery of Ramanujan is often rich in suggestion. He mentions particular birds with a purpose to characterize a human being or a place and as his typical Indian sensibility is ascetic he deliberately avoids ferocious animals and birds. Shakespeare's bird images are remarkable for the intense feeling. In "Macbeth", we

find, when Lady Macduff and her little son apprehend an impending danger, she compares his body to a poor bird:

Poor bird! thou'dst never fear the

The pit-fall nor the gin.¹⁶ (4. 2)

Othello, when he realizes that he has been deceived, uses a bird metaphor to express Iago's treatment of him:

demand that demi-devil

Why he hath thus ensnar'd my soul and body.¹⁷ (5. 2)

Lucrece's escape from Tarquin's brutality is denoted in a bird image:

Wrapp'd and confounded in a thousand fears,

Like to a new-kill'd bird she trembling lies;¹⁸

Ramanujan is an ornithologist, showing his considerable knowledge in the study of birds. The bird image has an abiding quality. Birds and men are often identified with one another. The archetypal concept of mother as a symbol of patience is envisaged in a bird image. Her saree is described as hanging loose like the "feather of a onetime wing" (CP: 61). The image of the feather is an obvious reminder of a bird, attributing a bird-like delicacy and a bird-like fleeting character to the existence of the mother.

Her hands are compared with an eagle with one talon broken:

But her hands are a wet eagle's

two black pink-crinkled feet,

one talon crippled in a garden-

trap set for a mouse. (CP: 61)

Apparently, the image of the eagle—a powerful, huge bird of prey—does not seem to go well with the delicate, fragile personality of a mother. In Greek mythology, the eagle is the vehicle of supreme God Zeus. The association of the eagle with the

associated with animality and sexuality, with corruption and defilement. She appears as a seductress in Poverty Poem:

She didn't know beggars in India
smile only at white foreigners.¹⁹

The picture of the woman sometimes reveals her sensuality and nakedness as we find in "Nudes 1978":

'Yes, this is me as I am',
naked seen, seeing nakedness,
named, flawed in detail,
womanly and vulnerable.²⁰

The image of a woman as a victim of cruel forces in a loose administrative framework features most prominently in Jayanta Mahapatra and Ramanujan's poetry. The humanist attitude of Mahapatra is highlighted in the image of a woman labourer in the poem "Again, One day, Walking By the river". It reveals the plight of a poor Indian woman:

A tar drum smoulders in front of the judge's house
as four women working rule the hot tar
onto the pitted face of the road.
It is two in the afternoon, and
the heat of yesterday still clings to the old walls
like harsh salt on the skin.²¹

The pitiable image of a woman makes a sad commentary on the economic condition of the working woman of the lower class. We experience it in "Poona Train Window":

Three women with baskets

on their heads, climbing
 slowly against the slope
 of a hill, one of them
 lop-sided, balancing
 between the slope and
 the basket on the head
 a late pregnancy. (CP:80-81).

The prejudices and superstitions that are so prevalent in the Indian society make the life of a woman miserable. In our patriarchal society a male child is preferred to a girl child and to beget a boy child a woman follows certain practices:

Women circumambulate the peepul
 tree hoping for a son. (CP:199).

If this does not grant a boy child, then the baby girl that is born will have to live in shadows:

Daughters breed in stark
 family dungeons like slow
 perennials waiting for the rains. (Ibid).

The image of widowhood is often found in the Indo-Anglian poetry. Mahapatra's widows are devoutly religious:

White-clad widowed women
 past the centres of their lines
 are waiting to enter the Great Temple.²²

Ramanujan's widows lead a plain, quiet and simple life and the white clothes they wear symbolize both purity and austerity:

grandmother wearing white

day and night in a village (CP:83).

mother, grandmother

the fat cook

in widow's white

who fed me

rice and ogres (CP:260).

Imagery lends charm and beauty to the poetry of Ramanujan- a conscious and painstaking artist who aims at precision and accuracy of language. His language has a "cold, glass-like quality"²³ which helps Ramanujan in achieving the objectivity and sophistication at the same time.

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Conclusion

Any attempt to assess the achievement of A.K. Ramanujan is as difficult as to delve deep into the mine of gold. A poet with a live cultural past behind him, and having at the same time an awareness of his roots, Ramanujan shows immense potentiality. He possesses a vision "to look before and after"¹. His poems take us in the past; infuse the past with the present and look forward to the future. Ramanujan is successful to bring a native tradition alive in his poetry. He does neither aim at a comparative study of the cultures of the east and the west, nor he talks in praise of modernism, nor gives a clarion call to return to his soil. Though conscious of the contemporary situation, his poetry is not a political protest. He does not feel an urge to reform the society. He has a keen sensibility, which helps him to see the entire universe in his private world.

The Indo-Anglian poetry of pre-independence era is like "a wagon hitched to the engine of English poetry" (Gokak. 1970. 22.), emulating the British poetry in form and meter and at times themes and models. But with the dawn of independence the rapid political changes brought about a change in Indo-Anglian literary scene. The poets resort to modern technique to convey their vision of life, to describe the essential humanity and universality. They feel to be closely associated with the whole world. Ramanujan, being a harbinger of this new generation of poets, employs all the modernist techniques, writes about his private and personal experiences, describes landscape of his region, highlights the social issues and chooses the universal themes of general human interest. Though an expatriate he has carried his whole storehouse of Indian experience, relives it from time to time and brings into contact with the present experiences. He admits that, "I would like to put my entire world into my work"².

A sense of alienation, a search for identity, a social consciousness and an interest in his own personal emotion characterize the poetry of Ramanujan. He possesses a distinct individual voice and is loyal to both cultures—the Indian and the human. His poetry deals in concrete terms with concrete experience and explores subtle meanings in the ordinary and common place. An introspective study of the self gives his poetry a new direction and a kind of authenticity. The medium, he uses in writing, establishes his kinship with the English poets, but at the same time he is not oblivious of his spiritual and cultural relationship with the great masters of Indian literature. He has brought innovations not only in text but also in the form of his poetry. He revises his poems repeatedly until he achieves perfection. His “ferocious images, boiling feverishly under quiet cadences” (Daruwalla, 1980, 168.) lend charms and beauty to his poetry. His poetry may be called both reflective and introspective—reflective because he reflects on the world around him and registers his reactions to it. It is introspective as he turns towards the internal world of memories and relations to define his identity.

It is a pity, a poet of profile has left us so soon. Though his untimely death has taken him away from this earth, yet he will live on forever in the pages of poetry for his immortal verses. In the world of his poetry he is all secure. No death can dislodge him, and “his fate and fame shall be / An echo and a light to eternity!”³

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