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 them [2] (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 Murughan 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 wile.

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 vermillion 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 Aurangazeb 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" (Parathasarathy. "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 Kutymbakam,* 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 Ramanajan, 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 concened 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" (Raghunandan. 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 Janmabhumischa 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, Krementz buttons and collar studs, and donned English serge jackets over his muslin *dhotis* which he wore draped in traditional brahman style"[7] (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), migrain 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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