

**Chapter Two**  
**A.K.RAMANUJAN'S**  
**RELATIONS**

## CHAPTER TWO

### A.K. RAMANUJAN : RELATIONS (1971)

#### INTRODUCTION :

A.K. Ramanujan, a trilingual writer with equal mastery over English, Tamil and Kannada, preferred English for his creative writings i.e. poetry. His themes concerned mainly his experiences of first thirty years in India, his frequent visits and field trips and his personal and professional preoccupation with Kannada, Tamil, the classics and folk lore. His Relations contains some of his poems of these themes exploring his various relations to Religion, Family, Society, Nature, and Foreign Land. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar observes : "Relations is an even maturer achievement, and is something of a bridge spanning childhood and age, and India and America"<sup>1</sup>. The noted Anglican poet R. Parthasarathy, has rightly suggested that the "family is one of the central metaphors with which he thinks"<sup>2</sup>. In the view of Chirantan Kulshrestha, Ramanujan has a "plurality of identity" and "Being phenomenal, the self assumes a number of identities in time. Some of these are even mutually incongruous, but all gain validity from the heightening of feeling in particular situations. It would be rash to conclude that such a relativity of identities implies fickle or abnormal psychic behavior, it may indicate, on the other hand, the self's craving for constancy and stability in flux"<sup>3</sup>. About the subject matter of Ramanujan's poetry Bruce King remarks: "Ramanujan's

concern is with memory and the way it establishes or falsifies relationship in a changing world. He is neither a nostalgic traditionalist nor an advocate of modernization and westernization. He is a product of both".<sup>4</sup>

In the first instance, we may refer to the poems, - 'The Hindoo : he reads his Gita and is calm at all events', 'The Hindoo: the only Risk, 'Entries for a Catalogue of Fears' and 'One, Two, Maybe, Three Arguments Against Suicide', and 'When it Happens' as dealing with the poet's relations to the religion. The poet's relations to the divine, God are referred in the poems, 'Man and Woman In Camera and Out', 'Prayers to Lord Murugan' and 'Time and Time Again'.

The poems, 'Of Mothers Among other Things', 'Love Poem for a Wife - 1' and '2', 'Any Cow's Horn Can Do It', 'It Does Not Follow, But When In the Street', 'Routine Day Sonnet,' 'History', 'A Wobbly Top', 'Obituary', 'Lapse of Memory' and 'Real Estate', discuss the poet's relations to Family.

His relations with society are discussed in the poems, 'Old Indian Belief', 'Army Ants', 'One More after reading Homer', 'Eyes, Ears, Noses and A Thing About Touch', 'When It Happens', 'Compensations', 'Smalltown, South India', 'Time to Stop', 'Small Scale Reflections on a Great House' and 'The Last of the Princes'.

Although, nature peeps in each poem of Ramanujan through symbols and images, the relationship is specially marked out in such poems as - 'Some Relations' and 'Poona Train Window'. As a citizen of the U.S.A., he has developed

some relations, which are brought out in the poems - 'Take Care,' 'Some Indian Uses of History on a Rainy Day' and also in 'One More after reading Homer'.

Then, we may further classify these poems thematically, referring to Ramanujan's treatment of various themes such as - alienation, self-identification, search for roots, history and culture, and ultimate salvation.

## 2.2. INTERPRETATION :

### 2.2.1. RELIGION :

Hinduism is a chief current in the social life of India. Indian philosophy is found in the holy books like Ramayana, Mahabharata, Upnishadas and many others. And Gita is the core of all these. The theory of Karma, the theory of rebirth, the concept of Sthitaprajnya, and the rejection of suicide and fear are mainly discussed in it. The total surrender to the God, is also a chief preaching of it. Each and every Hindu is deeply rooted in this philosophy. There are certain peculiarities in his character. Ramanujan, being born in a traditional Tamil Brahmin Family, has studied these particular characteristics. As an Indian and also as a Hindu, he is rooted in this philosophy. But the long period that he has stayed away from his motherland makes him afraid of losing his religious depths. So, in many of his poems, he seems to be in search of the Hindu philosophy in which he has been steeped from the childhood, but which now he seems to lose. Sometimes, we feel that he is assuring himself that still he is a true Hindu. He notices that Hinduism is wrongly justified by many people, in this modern world

His true Hindu self does not allow him to keep quiet. In his three 'Hindoo' poems and few other poems, he tries to explain it rightly. In the poem, 'The Hindoo : who reads his Gita and is calm at all events', he discusses the concept of Sthitaprajnya. 'The Hindoo : the only Risk' explains the theory of Karma, which is again referred to the 'Entries in the catalogue of Fears'. And the theory of rebirth is discussed in his poem, 'The Hindoo : he doesn't Hurt a Fly or a Spider either'. In other poems like, 'Small Scale Reflections on a Great House', 'One, Two, Maybe Three Arguments Against Suicide', 'When It Happens', 'Obituary', we find Ramanujan's version of Hindu philosophy.

The poet asserts his relation with the Omnipotence in the poems such as 'Man and Woman In Camera and Out', 'Time and Time Again' and 'Prayers to Lord Murugan'.

2.2.1.1. 'THE HINDOO: WHO READS HIS GITA AND IS CALM AT ALL EVENTS'.

The Hindu, in this poem, is trying to be a sthitaprajnya, a person who is not affected by good and evil - or joy and sorrow. He tries to be disinterested in anything that relates life. The iridescence of horsepiss cannot please him, at the same time, he is unmoved to see knives, bombs, scandals and cow-dung falling on newly married women. He controls his passions, because his Hindu mind tells him that everything that happens in this world is just a reaction to his own Karma. As love is a natural process, he is not envious of lovers. He can see the

lovmaking quietly; he can suppress his emotions on such events.

But he fails to control his emotions, passions, when he sees innocence suffering. He chokes, because he finds himself in the same condition. He can understand that suffering has its roots in his previous actions. But, when he knows that he is innocent like a child, his suffering becomes rootless and inexplicable. He questions Gita, why does innocence suffer? He does not get any answer. But he, as the title of the poem, reads, 'reads his GITA and is calm at all events'. His understanding of Gita is that, 'Man has to pay back for his Karma in the same birth; if we face any misfortune, it is only a reaction to the wrong we have done before'.

Many critics argue that Ramanujan satirizes the Hindu philosophy. Laxmi Raghunandan observes, "An important fact that emerges from the conclusion of the poem is the ineffectiveness of the Gita to overcome fear. In this situation, the Gita is ineffective, for the poet is satirizing the Hindu who misinterprets the notion of disinterestedness. Disinterestedness born of negation, rejection or suppression of emotions is not true disinterestedness. To 'come unstuck/and stand apart' without having overcome the pain of gossip at social gatherings is as negative an attitude as the refusal to "marvel at good and evil"<sup>5</sup>. As she says further, "The danger of misunderstanding the concept of non-involvement is evident in the last verse; for such rejection can not stand the test of any crisis"<sup>6</sup>. Emmanuel Narendra Lall has

also the similar opinion. According to him "The way in which Ramanujan structures the poem enables him to reiterate Polarity within the persona. On one level, the space between the title and the concluding line of the poem spatially measures the polarity between belief and practice, and on another level, it forces the persona to accept his mortality because he is still enlightened. He knows that he must re-acquaint himself with the Gita"<sup>7</sup>.

#### 2.2.1.2. 'THE HINDOO: THE ONLY RISK'

The same theme is continued in this poem where the risk is to get misunderstood by the world as a heartless person. The Hindu, who is a follower of the Karma theory in Gita, is a firm believer in the results of his good and bad deeds. He is sure that one's own actions result in 'the striptease' or 'committing suicide'. The word 'striptease' does not mean here 'the dance in which one throws off all the clothes from the body', but it means 'the misfortune that makes him to face utter poverty and miserable conditions'. The poet tries to keep his neighbour's hand away from kitchen knife taken to commit suicide in such miserable condition. To be a true follower of the karma theory, he suppresses his strong desire (itch) to take a quick glance at the dead dog before the scavengers come. He knows that having a strong desire is also equivalent to the action.

The second aspect of this theory is to follow death naturally and peacefully. Committing suicide is against it, as Ramanujan repeats the statement in the poem, 'One,

Two, Maybe Three Arguments Against Suicide'. So, he wants 'not to be caught/dead at sea, battle, riot, adultery or hate/nor between the rollers of a giant lathe'<sup>8</sup>. He keeps cool when he hears stranger's children hissing something about himself, they think a secret. It is his Hindu mind that keeps him cool.

To be a true Hindu is not an easy task. It is a bottomless enterprise. And the result of this enterprise, is to be known as a heartless person. Subsiding this only risk, the efforts for being a true Hindu are proved fruitful. It is the insight and deep-thinking of Ramanujan, on this subject, which has led him to the stability in life. Ramanujan proves himself to be a true Hindu by his study of Hinduism and his deep roots in it. His use of taboo words like 'horsepiss', or 'itch' and 'striptease', creates confusion in the minds of the critics. They misunderstand his true feelings as satirical comments. M.K. Naik observes, "There is a great danger inherent in this ideal Sthitaprajnya, as 'The Hindoo: the only Risk' points out. The danger is that the perfect equanimity of this ideal may, in actual practice, easily degenerate into callousness and indifference"<sup>9</sup>. Laxmi Raghunandan also supports his view, "Continuing his satire against the misconceptions and misunderstandings of the notion of disinterestedness, he remarks in 'The Hindoo: the only Risk' that if one tries to merely control physical urges through repression of emotions, one cannot attain true freedom"<sup>10</sup>.

Although, the critics think that Ramanujan is



severely attacking the vain gloriousness of Hinduism, it is not the whole truth. It is true that he satirizes the outdated traditions in India, but his indoctrination from childhood in a Hindu family does not allow him to attack the whole Hinduism thoughtlessly. Instead, he is a genuine thinker of this great philosophy.

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

This poem also justifies his deep thinking about Gita. The theory of rebirth is discussed, taking an incident from his ancestry. With it, there are two more points of view to look at the spider and the fly. First of them is to see both the spider and the fly or the hunter and the prey, with the same attitude. And the other is that the sinners will be punished by the God. In terms of this attitude, the adultery of the Grandmother is forgiven by his Grandfather and not because of cowardice. There are three sections. In the first, there is an allegorical information about the spider and the fly. The spider is a fisherman lover of his grandmother and the fly is the grandmother. The second part tells us the story of his grandmother's adultery. And, the third contains the character sketch of his Great Grandfather.

Spider is a poisonous insect which kills its prey. It represents the hunters. The poet suspects that the spider may be the fisherman lover of his grandmother who trapped her slowly like the spider. While speaking of his forefathers, he says that his grandmother was seduced by a

fisherman lover. He was his 'true ancestor' and his great Grandfather was the patient onlooker of his wife's adultery. He was not outraged or envious, although he was an outsider. It is not his cowardice but the reason of it lies in his Hinduism. He had forgiven them, but he knew that they would be rightly punished by God. According to the poet, the grandfather is also a true Hindu like himself, who doesn't attempt to hurt his enemy also. He is a quiet witness to his wife's sin. His patience is deeply rooted in Hinduism. And the basis of Hinduism lies in full faith in God. That's why, he is :

"Watching, watching, like some  
spider lover a pair  
of his Borneo specimens mate  
in murder, make love with hate  
or simply stalk a fly"<sup>11</sup>.

As A.N. Dwivedi rightly comments, "The three 'Hindoo' poems - 'The Hindoo: who doesn't Hurt a Fly, or spider either', 'The Hindoo: who reads his Gita and is calm at all events' and 'The Hindoo : the only Risk' - are essentially Indian in background and treatment. They take us to the core of the Hindu philosophy, to the Gita"<sup>12</sup>. But M.K. Naik comments that Ramanujan, "declares and finds the explanation himself in the fact that he bears both the name and spirit of his great grandfather who was a helpless victim and a passive spectator of the adultery of his wife ..... In this poem Ramanujan pillories the cowardice that may pass for gentleness"<sup>13</sup>.

2.2.1.4. 'ONE, TWO, MAYBE THREE, ARGUMENTS AGAINST SUICIDE'.

Ramanujan's poems are basically related to Hinduism and Indian culture. This is confirmed by his poem, 'One, Two, maybe Three, arguments against Suicide'. In Hindu philosophy, 'suicide' is regarded as a great sin. It states that the person who commits suicide goes to Hell. Ramanujan pleads for this principle. He gives some more realistic, factual reasons to it. The poem is in three parts. As Ramanujan claims in the title, first two are the rigid arguments against suicide, and the third is not so rigid, for he says 'maybe three'.

In the first argument, he says that a sin fearing person is also misunderstood if he commits suicide. His good fame gets spoilt. His body, when subjected to the postmortem, gets cut down carelessly by the doctors. Ramanujan argues that when one wants to die strongly, his soul is already dead because his desire of living is lost. He lives only to wait for his physical death. Doctors can certify the dead body, but they cannot certify the dead soul. The soul becomes an outsider and,

'a late lamenting ghost  
looking in vain for an empty seat'<sup>14</sup>

He becomes so disinterested that he can see his post humous life. His widow would be partially unhappy for his death and he would remain as a 'whole', a person with desires. He would really wish to be alive and,

"..... wish the rain  
or a touch of that intangible breast,

even that garden hose full blast  
on the rose-bush would quench the  
icy fire".<sup>15</sup>

The love, he hates, that burns and consumes, leaves him a whole. In the third section, Ramanujan speaks of 'suicide' from another point of view. He has heard that,

"..... the wise callous hindus  
said when the love-god burned : keep you cool,  
make for love's sake no noble gesture".<sup>16</sup>

But Ramanujan's own philosophy asserts that one cannot fulfil one's desires without body. He further says in the poem,

"All symbol, no limbs, a nobody all soul,  
O Kama, only you can have no use for the 'Kamasutra'  
Ashes have no limbs".<sup>17</sup>

#### 2.2.1.5. 'ENTRIES FOR A CATALOGUE OF FEARS'

This poem is one of the representative poems in Relations. It consists of eight stanzas of varying length and catalogues different fears arising in the poet's heart and mind at different stages of life. This poem also proves Ramanujan's deep interest in and long meditation over the philosophy of Gita.

He defines his concept of 'fear' in the first stanza. for him, 'fear', like 'expectation and desires', is not the outer expression only. He cannot distinguish fear from a hope or,

"a hope from a face  
in a window

of a house on fire"<sup>18</sup>

It is abstract, to be felt in the heart. The born blinds need not go out in search of fear because they can feel it within themselves. Recollecting his childhood memories, he says in the second stanza that at that time he was afraid of his father. But when, he himself becomes a father at the age of thirty-nine, he cares more for his daughter because,

'Sudden knives and urchin laughter  
in the redlight alley,  
add now  
the men in line  
behind my daughter"<sup>19</sup>.

In the changed social condition and atmosphere, the men chasing his daughter add fear in his mind because he loves his daughter very much.

The third stanza is about the political conditions. Public lectures enrage him, for he is afraid of the future of his country. His anger gets converted in charity with his growing age and he starts giving food to insects, birds like beggardoves in the park. He changes into a merciful man. Step by step, he moves away from the society and the social life.

As Matthew Arnold describes the psychological condition of a man while growing old in the poem, 'Growing Old', Ramanujan also describes his psychological condition at the age of sixty in the fifth stanza of the poem. He, now being a religious man, talks :

"..... now and then of God

find reasons to be fair  
everywhere  
to the even and to the odd,  
see karma  
in the full of a tubercular sparrow"<sup>20</sup>.

This theory of Karma is discussed by T.N. Shreekantaiya in his book, Imagination in Indian Poetics and Other Literary Studies as, "Fate, Chance, Destiny, Adrsta, Daiva - call it by whatever name you please - is simply the fruit of man's own past actions. Anything that we do in this life will have its consequences on our next life. As we have sown in the past, so do we reap in this presence. It is our past Karma that has become our present Adrsta. Since, we have no knowledge now of our past lives we cannot explain many things that have befallen us in this life. But the chain of cause and effect is perfect though we cannot see all links"<sup>21</sup>.

The tubercular sparrow and seventy one dead men, women and children die, according to A.K. Ramanujan, because of their past actions. He refers to the Karma theory even in his 'Hindoo' poems. He shows his firm belief in Hinduism. There is no ironic or satiric tone behind it. Hindu people accept Wanaprasthashrama (a willing exile in the last few years of life) and devote their last period of life to the worship of God. In the same way Ramanujan also feels the presence of the Omnipotence in all - 'the One in the Many'. The age of seventy creates the fear of character in him. He wishes to

keep it stainless and pure. But sometimes, he cannot avoid noticing 'the fascination of passing old women' and it seems to him like,

"Wiping out a whole difficult life time  
of dignity"<sup>22</sup>

At the end of life, dreadful Death frightens him. In dreams, he sees his death and the crematory fire wakens him up from that dream sometimes; he dreams that his dead body is being eaten by the vultures, as the wood peckers pluck out worms from the tree. This seventh stanza is full of death imagery.

The last stanza asserts his fear after death. He loves his children to such a great extent that after death, 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 : "<sup>23</sup>  
And then, he fears,  
"They will serve a sentence  
without any term  
and know it only dimly  
long afterwards  
through borrowed words  
and wrong analyses"<sup>24</sup>.

He has accepted it with pain in his heart.

Ramanujan's remarkable use of metaphors and similes is seen throughout the poem. The 'glasses' in the fifth stanza are not opticals but that 'one glass eye' stands for his attitude of seeing 'One in the Many'<sup>25</sup>. People have double meaning of everything, one material and another spiritual. This 'double vision/with one small adjustment/of glasses'<sup>26</sup> is lost at the age of sixty. The last stanza contains the wonderful metaphor of a 'sentence'. As the sentence is remembered only dimly after a long period and then it is wrongly analysed losing its references, poet is also afraid of being forgotten and wrongly estimated. The metaphor seems to refer also to the meaning of 'sentence' as 'punishment', i.e. he fears his children would serve without any term. The images of woodpecker plucking tree-worms and vultures picking soft parts of the body, make us understand his feelings.

Ramanujan's conscious attitude towards the relationship of past and present is expressed in his desire to look for 'the presence of the past' in the present 'by staying on the roof', after his death, 'as a peeping-Gan-ghost'. He is firm in his opinion that one is always related to past, present and future at the same time. Past is always present in the present, present is established on the foundation of the past and the present only decides the future.

Bruce King comments : 'Entries for a Catalogue of Fears' also uses images of growing from the past but they are of an unwanted future imprisoned by an unhealthy sense of traditions"<sup>27</sup>. According to Laxmi Raghunandan, " In



'Entries for a Catalogue of Fears', Ramanujan views life from birth to death and after death as well to show how fear is an important constituent which the self finds difficult to remove".<sup>28</sup>

2.2.1.6. 'WHEN IT HAPPENS'

In 'When It Happens', the poet explains the concept of good and evil. To clarify the concept of good, he explains all forms of evil or sin. A good person will be surprised when he will see mother, a symbol of love and forgiveness, meaning harm for her children, behaving like the step-mother, a virgin widow bringing ripe papayas which are used to abort the foetus from her womb and giving 'a backdoor address in a whorehouse alley,'<sup>29</sup> brothers practicing circus knives, and making her stand between identical nightmares. Every effort is made to abort the birth of the evil. And if, instead of all these efforts, it is born, they try to destroy it or

"a bulbous foetal eye  
in formalin pickle will outstare  
you from a schoolroom jar"<sup>30</sup>

And if these ways also fail, those children are found in the orphanages struggling for their futures as 'girlscouts and campfire girls' do. And the mother, practicing nun's habit, can not purify the mind. The poet explains that Christianity is unable to prevent or abort the birth of evil. For this, there is no satisfactory answer in Christianity, where, Hinduism can answer it. It

says that Sin or wickedness to which man yields in this life is due to the effects of a previous birth.

Poet's moderate attitude towards the evil in the society, is finely explained by the use of detailed descriptions.

#### 2.2.1.7. 'MAN AND WOMAN IN CAMERA AND OUT'

Man's association with nature and love in full bloom are symbolized in this poem. 'The Camera' suggests the human mind which records the inputs and outputs mysteriously. Inside the black box of the camera the images of man, tree and shadow find their respective places 'by a tiny act of grace'. Laxmi Raghunandan has given it a philosophical meaning : "The tree in full bloom anticipating loosened dropping flowers of the morrow is the love of man and woman with the danger of its disintegration in the imminent future, while the distorted focusing of lens that makes 'half man, half tree/the left above the right' is the 'ardhanarishwara' figure again this time showing the close affinity of 'Purusha' and 'Prakriti'<sup>31</sup>". One image slurring another is not the error of the Camera but it is the oneness of nature and human beings. The self of the poet and of the tree are not different, but one. The private lives of man and woman, the process of photography and the synthesis of Purusha and Prakriti in an awareness of self, are brought together by using the term 'in Camera'.

In the camera of the mind, there are several inputs in the form of memory. These try to prove their

superiority over others, from nursery rhymes to historical data. But the important memory, the memory of that one glorious face of the Divine has no place in it.

As usual, the metaphoric use of camera makes the poem suggestive rather than direct.

2.2.1.i. 'PRAYERS TO LORD MURUGAN'

'Prayers to Lord Murugan,' a poem of eleven sections, is an invocation to Lord Murugan, an ancient Dravidian god of fertility, joy, youth, beauty, war and love. He is represented as a six-faced god with twelve hands. He calls the god 'with cock fights and banner/dance' when men and women dance in an ecstatic devotion:

'When will orange banners burn  
among blue trumpet flowers and the shade  
of trees  
waiting for lightnings?'<sup>32</sup>

Here, 'orange' colour is of the clothes worn by pilgrims to the temple of Murugan and the 'blue trumpet flowers' stand for the unselfconscious 'bhakti'. 'The shade of trees' is again the symbol of the individual's search for enlightenment which comes like the flash of a lightning. His devotees are waiting for His arrival because of their present condition.

The second section praises the form of the god :  
'Twelve etched arrow heads/for eyes and six  
unforseen/faces, and you were not/embarrassed'. While  
describing His arms and eyes of each face, he humorously

comments on the changed attitude of human beings :

'you found work  
for every face,  
and made  
eyes of only one  
woman .....',<sup>33</sup>

In the third section of the poem, the poet expresses his grief of loss of natural beauty in the 'blue print city : 'The Lord of green growing things' is invoked to fight the destructive insects like the 'fruit fly'. As Laxmi Raghunandan says, "The surface level of satire, aimed against ill planned cities that have no provision for flowering trees like the gulmohor, yields to the substructural meaning that implies revelation of the 'self' in the "City of nine gates' the human body".<sup>34</sup>

The fourth section implies the microcosmic, 'Sukshma' and macrocosmic 'Divya' nature of Lord Murugan. Poet prays to god to give strength, in this weakening world at present to 'our yellow grass and lily seed' to make them, 'rams' flesh and scarlet rice for the carnivals. The mythological reference of 'white-haired witches' is brought out by L.Raghunandan : "Following the Thirumurugandhupadai tradition of describing Murugan surrounded by celestial damsels, the poet describes demonesses who go through devil dances while Murugan acts down the Asuras. The 'whitehaired witches who wear/three colours even in sleep' is a reference to the brightly coloured faces of demonesses whose faces remain vivid even in death".<sup>35</sup>

The fifth section argues against the hypocrisy and

selfishness which is found in corrupt Indians. As tigers and leopards leave their kills to be demolished by civet cats and hyenas, these Rajahs cannot do anything for their countrymen. People have become worms eating,

'..... legends and leavings,

remember the ivory, the apes,

the peacocks

they sent

..... in the Bible

to Solomon, the medicines for smallpox,

the similes',<sup>36</sup>

Indians can only remember their glorious past and these memories are compared to 'wavering snakeskins, 'the slough discarded after it has served it's purpose' or 'a cloud of steam' which evaporates rapidly. Modern Indians take interest in training astronauts to go into the outer space, recircling urine through the body and burning faeces' 'for fuel to reach the moon/through the sky behind/the navel',<sup>37</sup> Murugan, the Master of War is obviously the master of blood stains. Here also the poet finds corruption because of which the colour of man's blood has become brown, impure. It is inexplicable to feel their non-existent muscles tingle as if pricked with pins and needles by amputees. It proves the presence of the 'other life' beyond our life.

In the seventh section the poet questions Lord Murugan with twelve right hands, why his mirror image, man is so imperfect and inefficient, as if possessing two left hands. So the poet invokes Lord Murugan to help him to get back 'self' or

'..... the face

we lost early

this morning',<sup>38</sup>

In the eight section, three requests are made to the Lord which express human sufferings. In the first, he requests to give the man power to read small prints of their 'headlines' or 'fate'. Secondly, as men have lost their powers to use the five senses, he requests Lord Murugan to give these five senses back. Thirdly, he asks the 'Lord of Solution' to provide flexibility in the time of several problems.

The Omnipresent Lord Murugan is now invoked to deliver man from 'proxies/and absences'. Modern living is constantly attacked by the poet throughout this collection. He also asks to deliver the mythologies of nights and mornings for in Sanskrit, there are different legends and mythological stories with reference to day and night symbolizing 'life' and 'death'. The westernized Indian in London, who has forgotten all these relations with Indian mythologies, needs to acquire this knowledge. He further prays that the future may reproduce the glory of the past.

The lack of spiritual birth makes the poet ask for it from God Murugan. The poet requests that even the last born person also, should be aware of his 'self'. The awareness of self-existence would make him conscious about everything that is lacked by man in present.

The eleventh and concluding section expresses poet's earnest desire to surrender himself to God, for he

knows, as Prof. K.L. Bhalla says, " self-surrender is essential for God's realization - by submitting oneself to the will of the Almighty, one can have direct communion with the Lord"<sup>39</sup>. The poet wants to surrender his self to the Lord and to follow the way of prayers for the ultimate salvation :

'Lord of last travellers,  
find us. Hunt us  
down  
Lord of answers,  
cure us at once  
of prayers"<sup>40</sup>.

#### 2.2.1.9. 'TIME AND TIME AGAIN.'

The keen observation and deep meditation of A.K. Ramanujan is reflected in this poem. While talking about the clocks, he points out that there is a slight difference are caused by the accidental changes in the percentage of ingredients of alloy. Sometimes, 'a makers shaking hand in Switzarland, or the mutual distances/commemorating a donor's whim,/the perennial feuds and resonal alliance/of Hindu, Christian and Muslim -/cut off sometimes by a change of wind"<sup>41</sup> can create the slightest mistake in the make of a clock. And also the change in mind or disturbance of a siren in the back street for quarrel, results in a slight defect in the clockwork.

He thinks that the eyeless, silent and a zigzag sky is also a clock in which there is no clockwork. Its silence seems to show a peace-march, time bomb and in the

night of lightning, the same sky uncovers its exact, enerring nature of its make.

Here, Ramanujan wants to express his full faith in the Omnipotence and its supremacy over the human beings. He has still preserved his typical Indianness.

#### 2.2.2. FAMILY:

Family is central in the social structure of Indian life. And the peculiarity of it is its joint nature. There are two types of joint families, matrimonial and patrimonial. Mother is the central and main authority in the matrimonial family system which now is found in a few states in India, and father is the central and main authority in the patrimonial family system which is generally found everywhere. But, the mother has the highest place in the hearts of all the people. As the mother stands for love, forgiveness and sacrifice, the father stands for strictness. In large Hindu families, there is often found a small colony living together and dependent for guidance and instructions upon the father, whose authority is supreme. And so loyal is every Hindu to paternal authority that there is never any question raised by any one as to obedience to his commands.

The position of women in the Hindu home is fundamental, but is much misunderstood by the people of the West. As John P. Jones observes, "It is sadly true that the woman in Hinduism has suffered throughout the centuries, but she has never been a mere drudge in the



family. She has created for herself a place of power in the home. Whether it be as wife or mother, the woman of no other land wield greater power than the much abused women of India".<sup>42</sup>

After the death of her husband, the widow performs the funeral rites, shaves her head, removes ornaments from her body, wears white clothes and mourns for his death.

Ramanujan's views towards his family are traditional and typically Indian. In the poems about familial relations, he asserts the same attitude. In the poems 'A Wobbly Top' and "Obituary', father-son relationship is revealed which is further referred to the poem, 'Entries for a Catalogue of Fears'. In, 'OF Mothers, among other things', the poet's deep attachment to his mother is pointed out. The poem, 'History' discusses the lack of affection between parents and children, with reference to the relationships between his grandaunt and her daughters. In the poems, 'Love Poem for a Wife - 1' and '2', he expresses his estrangement with his wife, which is further converted in understanding. His deep love for daughter is seen in the poems, 'It Does Not Follow, But when In the Street' and 'Routine Day Sonnet'. The other poems like 'Real Estate' and 'Lapse of Memory' discuss the other family relations such as cousins, uncles and friends, etc. In the poem, 'The Hindoo, he doesn't Hurt a Fly or a Spider either', Ramanujan talks about his grandmother and grandfather, but there, he focuses on the Hindu attitude in the past.

#### 2.2.2.1. 'A WOBBLY TOP'

While studying his poems, we feel that Ramanujan is in search of self-identity and he is testing it in his relations and surrounding. In the present poem, he enumerates three main relationships. The first is his emotional involvement with his father. They both have similar temperaments and so the father gives him the wobbly top quietly, after they had a tantrum. But it is followed by periods of silent repentance. The relationship is on the emotional level in which the mutual feelings are interwoven. The father gives him the top to compensate for the quarrel. The relationship between himself and the top is explored secondly. He compares himself with the top and feels that he has also scars of imperfection which are temporarily lost in the fast spinning of it. Its 'wobbliness' is perfected in stillness. The last relationship is between himself and the sky. The sky also explores the concentric circles of day and night from within, like his mind.

Laxmi Raghunandan rightly comments, "The emotional relationship with father, the oppositeness in apparent stillness with the top and similarity with the sky in exposures are three distinct paths of self exploration that are worked out in all its shades of meaning in his poems".<sup>43</sup>

#### 2.2.2.2. 'OBITUARY'

'Obituary' is a moving personal document of the poet which is neither reflective nor meditative. It is

largely descriptive in character. The poet enlists the events dispassionately after the death of his father. He portrays the picture of his dead father. Summarily speaking, the first stanza gives the details of the domestic responsibilities 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',<sup>44</sup>

who is named after him - support these responsibilities as the brothers are obliged to find suitable match for their sisters. The house he left behind is also not in good condition; it is bending over the coconut tree in the backyard. Then he reports the burning of the dead body at the cremation ground, he burned,

'as before, easily  
and at both ends  
left his eye coins  
in the ashes that didn't  
look one bit different,  
several spinal discs, rough,  
some burned to coal, for sons',<sup>45</sup>

The ashes and the bones are thrown in the pious and holy place where three rivers meet, in the midst of mantric recitations, as the customs demand, but no memorial was erected in honour of the departed soul :

'no long standing headstone  
with his full name and two dates',<sup>46</sup>

The poet describes the position of his father in society ironically :

'everything he didn't quite  
manage to do himself,  
like his caesarian birth  
in a brahmin ghetto  
and his death by heart  
failure in the fruit market',<sup>47</sup>

But still, he got two lines in an inside column of a Madras newspaper which was then sold to street hawkers, who sold it in turn to the small groceries. The last four lines :

'And he left us  
a changed mother  
and more than  
one annual ritual',<sup>48</sup>

explain the present condition in which he has 'a changed mother' and is required to perform 'an annual ritual'. His mother has become a widow, wearing white saris, scorning ornaments, perfumes and vermilion marks on her forehead and on the head. A Hindu Widow lives a very simple life and the annual ritual is called 'Shradda' about which John P. Jones provides, more information. : "The ritual connected with the dead, which is called Shradda. is, among the higher classes, a most elaborate and complicated one, and lasts, with intermission, for a year. These are conducted with much effort by, and at great expense to the oldest son of the family. The son, by the dutiful performance of offering and ritual here upon earth can bring help and peace to his dead ancestors".<sup>49</sup> But Ramanujan's mere saying

'one annual ritual' expresses his dispassionate attitude towards his father and as Emmanuel Narendra Lall says, "He recalls his father's death, and uses the occasion to comment ironically on ceremonies and rituals associated with the dead"<sup>50</sup>. But Laxmi Raghunandan feels that the poem 'Obituary', "brings out the poet's own feeling at his father's death. He has obviously little regard for his father, for the whole narration reveals a singular lack of emotion"<sup>51</sup>.

In response to the entire poem, A.N. Dwivedi observer, "The diction is lucid and unadorned and it does not get stuck into the layers of images and symbols as many of Ramanujan's poems do. The details about the father's death are presented not only candidly but also realistically. The poet does not mince words in portraying the true picture of the father"<sup>52</sup>. The poem is remarkable for its simple, descriptive narration and also as a memorable family document.

#### 2.2.2.3. 'OF MOTHERS, AMONG OTHER THINGS'

The poem 'Of Mothers, among other things' discusses the delicate relationship between mother and child. Its theme recalls the memory of Ezekiel's poem, 'Night of Scorpion'. A sketch of a typical Indian mother is portrayed by Ezekiel. She says,

'Thank God! Scorpion picked upon me  
And spared my children'<sup>53</sup>.

Any Indian mother cannot see her children suffering. She can bear the suffering herself, but cannot see her children twisting with pain. She is always a great

sacrificer. She is an ideal of simplicity and so she is worshiped by her children.

Ramanujan's picture of his mother is no less than this. She is an old, thin lady wearing typical earrings with three diamonds. He has seen her running towards home in rain, for her children. She does not care for herself because of her motherly feelings, as:

'.... her hands are a wet eagle's  
two black-pink-crinkled feet',<sup>54</sup>

Because of hard-work and old age, she has become thin and so 'her sarees do not cling/they hang'. The awareness of the past makes her pick the grains on the floor. Poet's words freeze when he sees :

'her four  
still sensible fingers slowly flex  
to pick a grain of rice from the  
kitchen floor',<sup>55</sup>

The poem makes us feel the deep attachment of the poet with his mother.

According to S. Nagarajan, "the stanza that 'works' is the last one. The metaphors in the first two lines emphasis the futility of the poet's language to express the rough, bitter taste of the memory, and the last two lines provide an irresistible 'objective correlative' of the emotion".<sup>56</sup> And A.N. Dwevedi observes : "In reality, the function of images and symbols begins where the language is unable to convey feelings and emotions of the poet, and this is exactly what we find in this poem".<sup>57</sup>

#### 2.2.2.4. 'HISTORY'

How the greed for gold makes the relatives forget the blood relations is described in the poem, 'History'. It is his family History, rather than mere poetry, which changes slowly. The poet describes his little aunt who had neither expressions on her face nor she was 'older or colder/made holy/by deaths and children's failures'. The Poet had been an innocent eye-witness of her heartlessness, in his childhood. On the day, his great aunt died, he saw her dead body,

'laid out, face incurious  
eyes yet unshut,  
between glass curio bureaus  
under a naked cobweb bulb  
next to a yellow lion window'.<sup>58</sup>

And that time his little aunt, with expressionless face, was looking for something, where the poet, a child then, was looking for a green ball. But after some years his mother told him that when all the kith and kin were working in the kitchen at the time of the death of the great aunt, the little aunt, with her two daughters 'alternately picked their mother's body clean, - unknown each to the other'. They picked

'of diamond ear-rings,  
bangles, anklets, the pin  
in her hair,  
the toe rings from her wedding'  
and all except the gold in her teeth and silver of strings,

for they did not know of it, before her body was cold. In the end, says the poet, the changed expressions from her little aunt's face can be repeated only by the history. The lack of affection in little aunt for her sister and in daughters for their mother is caused by alienation. This root cause is further explained by Laxmi Raghunandan, "Lack of affection between children and parents is primarily responsible for the feeling of alienation for the first attachment that the child forms is to its mother. When the bond is served in the process of growing up, the adult will have little feeling for parents and can therefore, lay claim to all her parents' property without compunction even before the body is cremated"<sup>60</sup>. According to Emmanuel Narendra Lall, "In this poem Ramanujan combines the serious and the trivial and describes scenes that only the insider can have knowledge of. He draws on an Indian experience but treats it with an objectivity and detachment which is Western".

#### 2.2.2.5. 'LOVE POEM FOR A WIFE- 1'

'Love Poem for A Wife - 1' and 'Love Poem for a Wife-2' are companion poems which discuss the most intimate relationship in married life, that exists between husband and wife. The estrangement between him and his wife has become the major cause of his alienation. He thinks that distance between them is because of their 'unshared childhood'. They cannot know about each other's past from their fathers because his father has been dead and her father has lately lost his temper and mellowed. When the



poet's cousins meet in U.S.A., the customary habit of gossiping prevails till midnight, everyone talking at the same time, in transverse lines of communication, while they drink brandy, munch cashewnuts and feel the absence of their grand parents, she suddenly feels herself interested in his past life. While seeing his family album, she tries to recognize him. She is surprised to see his father in a turban, /mother standing on her bare/splayed feet, silver rings/on her second toes'<sup>62</sup>. From the picture, she concludes that his present-self is a sentence from his father's diary.

The poet envies her past, her village dog-ride and the mythological stories of the seven crazy aunts. He knows that her father had become irrevocable by the age. He thought that reminiscences were wicked and he would not acknowledge them. He never liked to be reminded of the night when her father paced to and fro in the balcony anxiously smoking cigarettes and waiting for his daughter who had gone out on a date with a Muslim. He becomes more angry to her quarrel with her brother James on the location of the bathroom of her grandfather's house in Aleppiy. When he and his sister-in-law fell left out :

'Sister in law  
and I were blank cut outs  
fitted to our respective  
slots in a room'<sup>63</sup>.

Her world becomes quite different from that of his. The thought of being out from her world hurts him and alienates him from the marital life. To this, he suggests

a solution-an Egyptian marriage which weds their kings to  
their own sisters to have a common past, or else, like the  
well meaning Hindus betroth husband and wife before birth,

'foretelling separate horoscopes  
and mothers first periods,  
and wed us in the oral cradle  
and carry marriage back into  
the namelessness of childhoods'<sup>64</sup>

This alienation is created by the clashes between  
them. In fact, these clashes are between traditionalism  
and modernity in which the first is represented by the poet  
and the other by his wife.

In words of Taqi Ali Mirza, "The strong nostalgic  
note, which is such a prominent feature of much of  
Ramanujan's poetry, does not portray the nostalgia of an  
individual for times and things about past. It is rather  
the collective nostalgia of a whole people who look back,  
often in an attitude of love-hate, of the past, at once  
drawn towards and repelled by it. The specificity of  
allusion to personal experience only leads the poet to a  
delineation of 'shared' experience. Aware of the  
wickedness of no reminiscence he seeks comfort in a  
'communal past'".<sup>65</sup>

While the structure of the poem is rightly  
appreciated by Bruce King as: "The manner is more relaxed,  
more talkative than earlier. Even the pun on the wife's  
father 'who has lost his temper/and mellowed' is good  
natured. The lines are less ornamented, less textured.  
There are many of the same techniques as before but less

tightly worked. Such words as 'really', 'some' and the phrase 'for instance' lower the tone, making the poem colloquial and relaxed".<sup>66</sup>

2.2.2.6. **'LOVE POEM FOR A WIFE - 2'**

The deep alienation caused by the different pasts of his wife and himself is converted to affinity in the poem 'Love Poem for a Wife - 2'. Although, they have lived together for years, they have experienced 'quarrels in a forest/waterfalls, exchanges, marriage/exploration of boys/and places" : but still he says,

'We had never known  
we would ever know'<sup>67</sup>

It is because of her changing nature, various expressions pass one by one on her face when she watches the emerald wilderness of Kerala, the cousins looking like mythic men, the forests of rubber plants and peppervine. She is surprised to see his grandmother who wears white clothes, day and night in a village She also feels that all of them are happy in their small world. As an outsider, that beautiful atmosphere turns to Aden where fierce Arabs are ready to stab, betray and whip, where trees and earth are 'borrowed'. The Keralites who are happy among ships/in harbour' seem to her as the place where wetness of the monsoon is never experienced, where the hot oppressive sirocco winds, make the place as hot as if it were in the crater of a volcano.

But he tries to overcome this situation and dreams that his face has been changed to hers by losing his past. He wakes up and sees in mirror, to turn to reality. He

becomes very happy, still lonely like the mountain peak,  
high and alone, for he attains the

'whole in the ambivalence  
of being half woman half  
man contained in a common  
body,  
androgynous as a god  
balancing stillness in the middle  
of a duel to make it dance',<sup>68</sup>

This happiness and dream is proved to be momentary by the thought of 'morning', for in the morning, he would be himself with the past still there, 'a drying/net on the mountain' to foster alienation.

These two poems explore the close familial relationships. The estrangement between husband and wife is suggested very skillfully because he sees,

'the face  
of her sleep, still asleep  
and very syriac on the bed  
behind',<sup>69</sup>

Ramanujan makes his verses a family history beyond poetry.

Laxmi Raghunandan observes, 'Love Poem for a Wife - 1' and '2' are the poet's 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. Alienation is then inevitable consequence".<sup>70</sup> A.N. Dwivedi comments, "The dominant mood here, thus, is one of bitterness, disharmony

and disappointment". However, the tone has softened considerably in 'Love Poem for a Wife -2' and the poet depicts the lean, lovely face of the wife.<sup>72</sup> And according to C. Kulshrestha, " the poem ends with the problematic uncertainty with which it begins, implying that the speaker's longing to enter another life by trying to share its past is fraught with bitterness and disillusionment".<sup>73</sup>

#### 2.2.2.7. 'REAL ESTATE'

The poem implies the meaning of the title as the real estate cannot be buildings and structures. Instead it lies within. The cousin of the poet, who has an eye for buildings has a scientific detachment and he is "Architect of our vertical/future". He can see not yet plazas and cranes in the sky and use of glass for 'it's rational/it reflects' Rationality is itself a reflection of the apparent for the man in the street, and refraction for the man inside. The metaphorical representation of rationality as 'glass' is effective, in the lines expressing that the attitudes of the sky, cloud, dazzle aeroplanes and filtered image of the sun's eclipse are all clear to the passerby, but because of its 'apparent transparency' the man within can see only some of the men. This scientific minded architect cousin has two ways of looking at reality : the clear reflective vision of nature that discloses man's immaturity by growing mushrooms in crotches of rooting timber, in houses that were very carefully planned by the uncle. 'Only we, our uncle's nephews, know, "says the poet, that windows can exist without walls before purpose

of windows of letting the air and sunlight in, is achieved by mind. Laxmi Raghunandan comments on the last stanza : "The last line, however, that compares mental enlightenment of 'windows without walls, to rapidly growing grass is weakened by the broken idiom, 'in the twinkle of an uncles eye',<sup>74</sup>

The responses of the poet to the uncle, to the cousin are clearly defined in this poem.

#### 2.2.2.8. 'IT DOES NOT FOLLOW. BUT WHEN IN THE STREET'

Ramanujan is hopeful about his future although, sometimes, he relates himself to alienation. His optimism is rooted in the Hindu philosophy. The poem, 'It Does Not Follow, But When In the Street', contrasts the present with his past. His past is not happy, but his present makes him hope for better future. In his other poems, yellow colour stands for fear and diseased atmosphere although, he uses it here for hope. The 'Yellow trees' and 'Central Jail' ought to arouse fear in him, but his reaction is in fact quite the opposite, as he says,

'I forget the eczema on my feet,  
the two holes in my shoe',<sup>75</sup>

The dream of happy future gives him ecstatic joy which can make him walk on air or water. His dream is of an ideal family where he will share,

'a language, a fire, a clean first floor  
with a hill in the window: and eat  
on an ancient sandalwood door',<sup>76</sup>

These dreams alienate him from the broken,

frustrated past. He departs from the present also. This type of dreaming is found in his poem, 'Routine Day Sonnet'. The remarkable thing about this poem is, that the title is the part of the poem.

#### 2.2.2.9. 'A LAPSE OF MEMORY'

The same theme of alienation is continued in the poem 'A Lapse of Memory'. Ramanujan identifies metaphorically, the amnesiac with a tree struck by lightning, stripped of leaves. The ceasing of sap circulation and 'inverse/branching under the earth' has changed it. In the same way, the amnesiac's mind also gets changed, for the nerves circulating information cease working. He becomes alienated from his wife, friends, relatives, the home address because of estrangement. But, according to Ramanujan, the feeling of alienation is not permanent, it is temporary. So, the family and friends of the amnesiac, hope for his recovery. They know that his childhood memories, his routine life events or some mythical stories in which

'three obscene lines

mating white and black lizards

in schoolbook Sanskrit, or a slant

of rain on the sunshine and the Papaya tree'<sup>77</sup>

will bring back the 'sap' of his memory. The alienation also has its roots in its surrounding Ramanujan shows that one cannot get completely alienated from the world around him.

The 'sap' is his memory, which being propelled

upwards through pressure from the roots, is an apt image; the metaphor of the tree is eminent.

### 2.2.3. SOCIETY:

In his poems, Ramanujan expresses his relations with society and sometimes, comments also on its structure. He uses the animal worlds as metaphors for it. Ant community is mainly compared with the human society in 'Old Indian Belief' and 'Army Ants'. The problems of destruction and untouchability in society are discussed in 'One More after reading Homer' and 'Eyes, Ears, Noses and a thing About Touch'. The poem 'When It Happens' also depicts the evil in the society and 'Compensations' ironically portrays the picture of corruption and reality. The picture of his native place in South India is drawn in the poem 'Smalltown, South India'. The changing attitude of human beings towards violence is explored in the poem, 'Time to Stop'. The poem 'Small Scale Reflections on a Great House' refers to the Indian joint family and 'The Last of the Princes' points out certain typical traits of Indian people.

Ramanujan portrays the picture of Indian society from the third person point of view; he does not get involved in it. And, moreover, in the poem, 'Prayers to Lord Murugan,' he prays for the peace of the world.

#### 2.2.3.1. 'OLD INDIAN BELIEF'

Once again, in this poem, Ramanujan is in search of self-identity. He compares the animal and human worlds to



draw a parallel between them. Nature's laws of exploitation operate in human societies, but are often forgotten by man. Rediscovery of these laws correlates man to nature and establishes a closer link between individual and his environment. In his search for affinities (relationships) to identify the self, Ramanujan seeks to explore these similarities between human and insect societies. Men build this society by working hard continuously for years, but sometimes the strong and powerful enemies drive them away from their homes. But

'They'll pick  
the flesh of dead ones  
to the last ivory bone  
without disturbing its inner structure  
complete with fang and grin',<sup>76</sup>

Ramanujan compares the ant with the man because ants have the social sense like human beings. To have a well-balanced society, one must follow the strategies of ants. The old Indian beliefs hold that one can learn from the smallest creature of nature also. By identifying himself with an ant, the poet continues his search for self-identity. The metaphors of 'snake' and 'ants' successfully explore his expressions.

#### 2.2.3.2 'ARMY ANTS'

Ramanujan brings out similarities of social structure in human life and insect life in the poem, 'Old Indian Belief'. And in the poem 'Army Ants', he points out the destructive aspect of socialism. In the preface to the

poem, he quotes from C. Judson Herrick's 'The Thinking Machine' : 'The army ants not only make their houses but they are their house;' of their own living bodies they form the whole complicated dwelling'. The ants inherit the aristocratic tastes, for they have,

'separate apartments  
for the queen  
colonies  
for the various castes'<sup>80</sup>

There are wild ants also. They model their society for their benefits. They use the bodies of dead ants as bricks for the houses and make them,

'for a brick, altar  
and martyr in one',<sup>81</sup>

and males 'die young/or live older than death in nurseries of eggs'. They use their knees for things, heads for the plinths of their rainsoaked Corinth and hands and feet are used for the runway. It is said that the Great Wall of China has been built of slaves, enemy and dying favorites of the king but in ant colony, the living young ants are used as the brick and the mortar of the house. They die without leaving any legend behind. The last lines,

'And the work,  
as they say,  
is the workman at last',<sup>82</sup>

creat pathos. The worker-ants symbolize the common workers in the human societies. 'Building the house' is constructive and destructive at the same time. Some of

them destroy themselves to construct the new society.

2.2.3.3. 'ONE MORE AFTER READING HOMER?'

Using mythical references, the poet foretells the destruction of the modern world. Cassandra and Trojan Horse are two mythical references which stand for deceiving, destruction. Cassandra was the daughter of Priyam, King of Troy: She was loved by Apollo, who gave her the gift of prophecy and when she deceived him, ordained that her prophecies, though true, should not be believed. And the Trojan Horse was the cause of the destruction of Troy. The poet says that Cassandra can see the uncertainty of the existence of the city but she cannot see its destruction. Then he identifies himself with its innate sense for the occult, can see past and present in one moment of time :

'A faint tattoo  
on a great wooden horse  
getting wet in the rain'<sup>83</sup>

and,

'a half burdened shoulder blade  
greening in a lake of dead alewives'<sup>84</sup>

- both signs foretell the destruction of the city of Chicago. The Greek mythological images as well as modern images help the poet to reach his goal of foretelling the destruction.

2.2.3.4. 'EYES, EARS, NOSES AND A THING ABOUT TOUCH'

Man is related to his surrounding through his five

organs - eyes, ears, noses, skin and tongue. The senses provide man with certain knowledge about things, they come into contact with. Ramanujan discusses these relations also but excludes the sense of 'testing' because it is different from other four. Eyes, ears, noses and skin can relate man to other things. The sequence of them as given by A.K. Ramanujan is significant in this poem. He comes nearer from the long distance. With eyes, one can see the objects far away like,

'a man's face quartered by the cross  
hairs of a gunsight, Crows, Scarecrows,  
eyes in others' eyes',<sup>85</sup>

There is difference in the attitudes of the onlookers, as a brown dog dipped and gilded in sunshine can be seen 'blurred through someone else's glasses'.

Ears go nearer than the eyes, for the voices are heard from a limited distance only. We cannot prevent ears from hearing unwanted voices. We hear pleasant voices like 'birdcries at dawn' as well as unpleasant voices also, like

'the fall, delay, and fall  
of a wooden doll on the wooden  
stairs .....',<sup>86</sup>

The sense of 'smell' is similar to the senses of 'seeing' and 'hearing', in the sense that it is not bound to human wish in the routine life of a man. He cannot select only fragrance of flowering, avoiding,

'Urine on lily,  
woman's odours  
in the theatre, a musk cat's

erection in the centre of a zoo',<sup>87</sup>

But 'touch' is that sense of man, which he can use as he likes. He cannot avoid unwanted, unpleasant, sights, sounds and smells but he can avoid the unwanted touches. He has created 'untouchability'. He attacks the untouchables by his claws, jaws, although he does not touch them directly. The wounds of their hearts are severe than their bodily pains.

The poet expects that every human being should help others, putting away all the distinctions. When one sees others, hears them and smells them, why this change in attitude about touch? He himself plucks the harmful treespider from the other's back's hollow, to save him from a rash, by which he had suffered for seven whole days.

Ramanujan points out the major social problem of untouchability. He puts forth the reality as

Through all things that press,  
claw, draw blood,  
yet do not touch .....<sup>88</sup>

And the fine remedy to this problem is also suggested him. It is the humanistic attitude towards all living things. The balanced attitude of the poem is rightly printed out by Laxmi Raghunandan : "Eyes, Ears, Noses and a Thing About Touch' describes almost all sensory stimuli in relation to nature. For trees, crows, brown dog, bird cries, lily, Musk cat, flowers, dew, woods, burr & spider's hairy legs are balanced against man's face 'quartered by the cross/hairs of a gun sight', scarecrows, eyes within eyes, glasses, children with bells, wooden doll on

staircase, mother's voice, urine, women's odours, wet mouth on dry, clammy hands, iron work".<sup>89</sup>

2.2.3.5. 'COMPENSATIONS'

'Compensations' is a humorous poem which satirizes the present condition of Indian politics, and other corrupt institutions in Indian society. At the same time, there is a pursuit of human existence in this world. In this struggle for existence, man survives even after World Wars. Without being discouraged by the lack of limbs, man can dance even near debris, craters or amputation theatres. He ironically suggests that who does not understand the difference between red flag of communism and others, rises in politics.

He says,

'The dumb and the colourblind rise  
rapidly in politics',<sup>90</sup>

and

'the born deaf

practice psychiatry as if  
to the practice born',<sup>91</sup>

it is also suggestive just as,

'..... fingerless

men become tailors for royalty,  
painters, filigree workers in  
silver, or excel at the javelin  
throw .....

Further description of men with hooks and black strings and a boxing syndicate satirizes the corruption of such

institutions. It is humorous that the stutterers become  
salesmen for machine guns or pet woodpeckers. But the  
reality lies in the lines

'..... good  
upstanding men deformed  
by literacy abroad  
return middle aged to framing',<sup>93</sup>

The well educated people remain innocent. They cannot see  
the meaning behind the words as they know 'a spade for a  
spade and a bird/for a bird'. They become useless as the  
hydraulic engineers in the barren land. He sums up the  
contribution of Gandhiji who held the entire, ancient chaos  
of the country and died -

'at wrong time, at the aimless  
hand of an assassin, at the mercy  
of a watch that ran too fast',<sup>94</sup>

that aimless wrong hand is surpassed only by death-god,  
Shiva, who is,

'..... the three-eyed  
whirlwind of arms, dancing on  
a single leg, though he can  
dance on many',<sup>95</sup>

His arms of death are left on this earth in the forms of  
the technicalities of war, famine, riot, and the rest to  
men, 'two handed, two legged normal us/in a periodic  
transfer of powers'<sup>96</sup>. Man himself becomes the messenger of  
death on his turn of powers.

The poem, beginning with humour which gradually  
gets mingled with satire, ends with a serious thought. The

poet's travel from 'a modern life to devotion to the lord' is pointed out rightly by Laxmi Raghunandan : "The descent of Divinity into the worldly place of existence, its manifestation in various forms and the sorrow ensuing through man's destructive actions brings the poet to the final means of salvation, namely through prayer"<sup>97</sup>.

#### 2.2.3.6. 'SMALLTOWN, SOUTH INDIA'

It is a short poem of ten lines which contrasts the South Indian picture with that of U.S.A. The major use of 'sea imagery makes the poem typical. The contrast is in the narrow mindedness of South Indians and the broad mindedness of those who have seen the world. The Poet sensitively discovers the superstitious nature of the South Indian people who are still under the restrictions of religion and traditions. Even the cows and buffaloes seem hemmed in by tradition, for the street cows with 'trapezium faces' are as unchanged as a temple employee from ages. The experience of South India is closely related to the suffocation of drowning. To sink to the bottom of the seabed is to try to live life in restrictions. There, the sun looks pickled through layers of salt water, his toes look greenish as if with mildew and watertrees look like porous coral. He is ambushed by 'city shark and wifely dolphin'. This imagery is praised by S. Nagarajan: "One of the finest pieces of imagery is 'Smalltown, South India', wherein we have 'water-layers salt and pickle the sun./Toes mildew green, trees are porous coral:/ambush of city shark and wifely dolphin. It has been argued that a poet who



writes in images and symbols takes chances, and that some of the chances that Ramanujan takes do not quite come off because there are different layers of achievement in the same poem".

At last, he beds down with a longfinless slipper fish and gets weeds for ceiling obviously his 'sleep is brackish'. This sea world is keenly described by Ramanujan as Matthew Arnold in 'Foresaken Merman'. 'The seabed in barrel' aptly expresses his acceptance of that life although not facilitating which is possible in intimate relations only.

#### 2.2.3.7. 'TIME TO STOP'

Ramanujan's humanistic point of view towards life is marked out in this poem. When the repeated visits of any person make him see all the museum - specimen in real life, it is time to stop going to museums. To him, the 'pointilliste anthills' become more interesting than the living sorrows of the world. Milkmen's faces showing frustrations framed in the living room window look like the Picasso paintings. The reference to Picasso could have been supplemented with the reference to the Indian artists. A violet shadow all around the dead or dying cow is more important than the agony of the animal itself. And when

'after an accident,

blood

looks remarkably

like fresh paint,'<sup>99</sup>

it is time to stop going to museums, for the significance

of life is missed in the enthusiasm for art. There is no use of going there for the very purpose of museums, to preserve art and the cultural heritage of mankind for a better understanding of life, has failed.

The poet expects healthy relationship with the surrounding, so that man will not become heartless, cruel.

2.2.3.8. 'SMALL SCALE REFLECTIONS ON A GREAT HOUSE'.

The poem 'Small Scale Reflections On a Great House' is one of those poems which reflect Indian culture and philosophy and conventions. Ramanujan takes a representative village house to explain it. He begins with the eternal receptivity of the house, for each and everything that goes in, remains inside forever. Anything that goes out, comes back after some time, being processed. And if anyone goes out, he comes back after some period. Everything loses its existence in its wholeness.

The office-room of the old man of the house is full of unread books covered with dust and ledgers which keep records of expenditures. Festivals are the soul of Indian culture. In the rural area, there is much consciousness about them. In this village, the festival of wedding anniversary of Gods (perhaps Tulsi-Vivaha) celebrates the wedding of God Vishnu and Goddess Tulsi. Various plates of sweets are prepared by women on this occasion. While preparing them, they do not allow men to enter in the kitchen because they believe that the sacredness of the sweets is spoiled by them.

In an Indian Hindu family, every daughter in the

house leaves her parent's house after her marriage and goes to her husband's house forever. But in the case of great house, like some houses, they do not go out because the sons-in-law live there under the excuse of checking the accounts of the house or teaching arithmetic to their nieces. And sometime,

'daughters

get married to short-lived idiots'<sup>100</sup>

and come back as widows with their children. The daughters-in-law are trained to live inside the house because 'Paradah system' is still found in India. Women are not allowed to come out openly in society. They are accustomed to waiting for and yielding to the favourable times or the monsoons, in their lives.

If any material thing goes out, it comes back processed like the hooped bales of cotton coming back being milled and folded for price from unseen Manchester, which cloth is thereafter classified for different classes in society, i.e. loin-cloth for the middle class and muslin for the higher class. The letters also come back with many redirections to wrong addresses and red-ink marks earned in Tiruvella and Sialkot. The ideas get converted in the rumours or in the mythical stories like those of Alexander and Plotinus.

The run-away sons or the people gone on the pilgrimage come back after a long time with the holy water of the Ganges, used to pour in the mouth of a dying person, in a copper pot. The thrilling stories of soldiers and freedom-fighters reappear in the general talk of people in

the office-room of the old man. They repeat the story of a nephew who was a soldier and fought in the war and was brought back to the house in plane, train and military truck, even before the telegram.

The poem is a unique representation of a typical Indian joint family. The Hindu family is widely different from the family in the West. It is built on the old patriarchal idea, according to which three generations generally live under the same roof and enjoy community life. John P. Jones, writes about Indian family system. "This system fosters family dissension. It requires an ideal family, under the strong guidance of an ideal head, to live in peace and harmony under this system ..... Union is strength"<sup>101</sup>. This power of Union or receptive nature which is found in such great houses is described by A.K. Ramanujan as,

'nothing

that ever comes into this house

goes out'<sup>102</sup>.

Ramanujan not only describes the Hindu family system, but also comments on Indian culture, philosophy, customs and tradition. He satirizes the customs of early marriage system, superstitions, myth making and also the defects of administration, e.g. the delay for telegram, wrong redirections on the letters, etc. He admires the grandchildren reciting Sanskrit hymns. The concept of 'Vasudhaiv Kutumbakam' i.e. 'the world being one family, is also used in the poem. As the Hindu religion makes an allowance for various religions with their absurdities, the

great house also accepts many absurd things. The house symbolizes the Hindu philosophy. Ramanujan relates the present with the past. In other words, this poem is a picture of past which is seen through the eyes of the present.

Bruce King rightly comments that, "The house is seen as past, as memory, as tradition, as origin and different views are offered to it"<sup>103</sup>. M.K. Naik remarks, '.....Ramanujan notes its great absorbing power by picturing a typical joint family. At the same time, he doesn't fail to notice its inability to satisfy completely the modern mind, which cannot reconcile itself easily to the presence of elemental evil in life."<sup>104</sup> "Small Scale Reflection ...," says Laxmi Raghunandan, "however, does not attempt to prove or disprove alienation or affinity; however, the commonality of the human predicament should produce affinitive ideas rather than those of estrangement."<sup>105</sup> Bruce King has compared the poem with Yeat's 'Meditation in Time of Civil War' which dignifies ancestral houses.<sup>106</sup>

#### 2.2.3.9. THE LAST OF THE PRINCES'

The poem is the expression of Ramanujan's favorite subject i.e. relationship between History and present life or relationship between past and present. The narrator in the poem is the last prince of a royal family. He narrates his family history to the readers. He tells that his ancestry is 'falling in slow motion from Aurangzeb's time'. Some of his ancestors had died of bone TB, some of 'London

fog that went to their heads', some enjoying luxurious life and only few had died in the wars connecting their names to ballads. His forefathers had 'seven/folklore brothers, sister so young, so lovely/that snakes loved her and hung dead/ancestral/lovers.' The women lived in a harem like the royal mynahs and parrots trapped in the cages. This is the first part of the poem.

The second part picturizes the present condition of the Prince. He is living in poor condition. Nothing is left for him by his ancestors, except faces in paintings, superstitions and some medicinal information. He is heir to the long fingers of the royal family. His two daughters Honey and Bunny go to school on half fees. His first son is a trainee in Telegraphy who has already telegraphed thrice for money and he is unable to send it. His wife, pregnant again, is heir to the 'heirloom pearl in her nose-ring.

The last prince, the representative of the Present, talks of his past. He also represents the typical Indian mentality of boasting the greatness of his ancestry. The last prince is living in very poor condition. What he needs is hard work to earn more money for his family because it is the need of his 'present'. But, instead of living in the present, he is living in his past which is of no use. He is looking at his past and obviously, his back is to his future. So he is unable to step forward in future. He cannot change his present conditions also. One cannot live in past, future and present at the same time.

In an interview taken by Rama Jha, as 'A

Conversation with A.K. Ramanujan', A.K. Ramanujan himself has said :

"You cannot entirely live in the past, neither can you entirely live in the present, because we are not like that. We are both these things. 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 understanding".<sup>107</sup>

Ramanujan never forgets and lets us forget that the roots of 'present' are in the 'past'. Taqi Ali Mirza points out Ramanujan's historical sense in his article, 'A.K. Ramanujan's 'Particular Hell': "What strikes even a casual reader of Ramanujan's poetry is his great historical sense. His awareness of history, which is hinted at in his first volume of poems, 'The Striders' (1964), gets powerfully projected in several of the so-called family poems in 'Relations'. The consciousness of the tragedy of India, and of being an Indian' - comes through clearly in poems like 'Compensations' and 'The last of the Princes'.

#### 2.2.4. NATURE :

Nature, in Ramanujan's poetry, does not have its own self; for it is always used as image or metaphor. He never uses it as mere nature; he identifies it with the human society. And particularly, he is fond of the ant community which he compares to the human society in the poems, 'Old Indian Belief' and 'Army Ants'. The animal world is used metaphorically to express his relationship

with his family in 'Some Relations'. The poem 'Poona Train Window' records the poet's experiences of natural scenes during his travel.

#### 2.2.4.1. 'SOME RELATIONS'

Sometimes, Ramanujan finds himself completely alienated from the environment but he cannot stand it for a long time. So he seeks relationships with animals to overcome the fear of alienation. This is expressed in the poem 'Some Relations' which is divided in four titled sections.

In the first section 'nursery turtles', he describes his daughter's turtles, 'carrying a daily cross/of window bars....' which are confused by the heat of the Chicago winter and

'..... try  
to hibernate in the jar, very far  
from the ocean',<sup>110</sup>

The poet himself is similarly spending his life in Chicago, away from his motherland, India. In the beginning, he was confused like those turtles. Then, he tries to identify himself with the kitten on the tiger skin, ignorant about the surrounding, making mistakes.

The third section describes the third stage of the poet's life where he is undisturbed by the happenings around him. He says, a praying mantis is unaware of probable death, temple of Madurai and someone's cleaning out,

'Scorpions



from the many armpits of Shiva  
one leg in the air<sup>111</sup>

In the fourth section, 'in rem time', the poet metaphorically identifies the three generations with the cold blooded creatures his ancestors with crocodiles and turtles, himself with lizard and his grand-daughter with the praying mantis. Finally, he asserts that he has overcome the coldblooded alienation in men.

The poet-nature relationship on the surface level metaphorically expresses his relationship with his family, in this poem.

#### 2.2.4.2. 'POONA TRAIN WINDOW'

As described in the poem, 'Eyes, Ears, Noses and a thing About Touch', the poet enlists the pleasant and unpleasant experiences he has experienced in his travel in 'Poona Train Window'. He looks out from the window and sees some things. The feelings of attraction and repulsion for them are given here.

He feels sympathy for a pregnant woman balancing a basket on her head lopsidedly and curiosity for

'..... rise and fall  
of hills in two sets  
of windows, faces, a rush  
of whole children, white  
hair in a turban',<sup>112</sup>

the clarity and ordered succession of these impressions recreate the experience of sitting in a train.

The poet has experimented with a new structure in

this poem. The lines are short and the stanzas increase with the number of lines : one for first stanza, two for the second and so on, until the sixth stanza of six lines is reached. Then, the progressive decrease in lines occurs until the last verse is reached again. The first and the third last lines rhyme and the last line is juxtaposed with the third last line in an eye rhyme.

#### 2.2.5. FOREIGN LAND :

As Ramanujan lived in the U.S.A. for more than twenty years, he formed the relationship with the land. He was not happy in the atmosphere of Chicago. In poems like, 'Entries for a Catalogue of Fears', 'Some Relations' and 'One More after reading Homer', he refers to the social background in the city of Chicago. But in the poems 'Take Care' and 'Some Indian uses of History on a Rainy Day', he focusses on his relationship with the foreign land. Bruce King rightly comments, "The poems of disdain towards India could be matched by poems which offer a less attractive portrait of Chicago"<sup>113</sup>

##### 2.2.5.1 'TAKE CARE'

The insecure and fearful atmosphere of the modern city like Chicago is described in detail in the poem 'Take Care'. Fears originate from social conditions because invisible crabs of evil disturb the air, and

'enemies have guns  
friends have doubts  
wives have lawyers',<sup>114</sup>

These lines clearly explain the social as well as the family life. The houses are not safe. Girls are raped in day light. Morality is lost from the minds of people.

Further, the distinction between black and white people is particularly noticed. "Black and White", observes Laxmi Raghunandan rightly, "are clearly defined distinctions in Chicago not only with respect to the colour of the skin but : 'pepper and salt', black and white squares on kitchen cloth, black houses against white snow and by inference, character as well, for

'the blacks black  
as the blacks  
in the Christmas snow'"<sup>115</sup>

In Chicago, walking slow in the street and also standing to stare, are dangerous for,

'Down there, blacks look black  
And whites, they look blacker.'<sup>116</sup>

Everyone has to take care to be safe in this situation. Indian social condition contrasts with the situation in Chicago. Twenty years' experiences have not succeeded to make him American.

#### 2.2.5.2. 'SOME INDIAN USES OF HISTORY ON A RAINY DAY'

Ramanujan looks at the glory of past using the fractured eyes of the present. He is not satisfied with the present. So he brings out the contrast between the past and the present. The three pictures, drawn in three sections present this contrast. These three events take place in Madras, in 1965, in rainy seasons. On the first

occasion, the head clerks from city banks scrambled with the coolies for a single seat and told each other how old king Harsha made ten thousand monks stand in a queue,

'to give them

and the single visiting Chinaman

a hundred pieces of gold,

a pearl and a length of cloth'<sup>117</sup>

Lost in the conversation, they missed the eighth bus and started walking as those monks who had nothing but their own feet. The head clerks, the descendents of the noble king and the disciplined monks (the ancient intellectuals) live indisciplined life in an indisciplined modern society.

The second picture ironically suggests that the Fullbright Indians are 'amazed at pyramidfuls/of mummies swathed in millennia/of Calicut muslin',<sup>118</sup> but are ignorant of the fact that their own land had an even more glorious past. And the Calicut muslin used to swath the mummies was actually imported from their own country.

In the third section, the poet draws the picture of the Professor of Sanskrit, in the year 1935 'on Cultural exchange'. He was lost in Berlin rain and felt himself alienated and lonely as 'turbanned child' in the German atmosphere where he was confused at night to tell apart 'a familiar street from a strange/or east/from west'.<sup>119</sup> He tried to find out the

'Landmarks,

a gothic lotus on the iron gate'<sup>120</sup>

and felt at home when saw the sign of Swastika, the ancient Hindu sign of goodluck on his neighbour's arm. But he

failed to distinguish between the piety and holiness of the sign in Hinduism and its adoption in a vastly different spirit by the Nazis under Hitler in Modern Germany. The theme of the poem is explained by M.K. Naik as, "The glory of the Hindu past is obliquely suggested by an overt or implied contrast with the inglorious Indian or general present. 'Some Indian Uses of History on a Rainy Day' and 'The Last of the Princes' are variations on this theme. The former presents three pictures, each disclosing the gulf between the present and the past"<sup>12)</sup>.

The present condition of India, foreign Land or in general, is picturized in this poem.

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