The thought-processes of two intellectuals belonging to the same epoch of history are apt to be similar. Because man is universal, whether he belongs to the West or the East, the basic problems and aspirations are almost the same. The dissimilarities do occur because of the differences in the geographical, historical and philosophical backgrounds. But the basic concern of the Western and the Eastern philosophy is more or less the same, the Destiny of Man. Whether it is ‘inward’, that is the soul of the man, or ‘outward’, that is his relation to space and time, the philosophy concerns itself with man as the centre of all thought.

Both Larkin and Ramanujan are poets of distinction. They belong to their respective Western and Eastern cultures and beliefs. But the feature that is predominantly common in them is a modern mind’s quest for the identification of the ‘Self’ in this complex contemporary world. Both of them have tried to probe into the riddle of human existence and they examine every situation of life they encounter critically.

One significant aspect that is common in both these poets, apart from other similarities, is that both Larkin and Ramanujan have taken
their vocation of writing poetry seriously. This fact is evident from the thinness of their volumes of poetry. Larkin himself has commented on this fact in an interview with *Paris Review*. Accepting the fact that he writes slowly, Larkin is of the opinion that to find out what to say and how to say it definitely takes time.¹ For Larkin, writing poetry is a serious though mysterious act of preservation which cannot be taken frivolously.

While we read Ramanujan’s writings, we do get the impression that he is a perfectionist,

a craftsman who was never satisfied with merely the observed. He shaped and polished each poem and essay, cutting facets until the result approached the directness and clarity for which he strove. He is said to have drafted certain poems over many years, up to forty times before he felt they were done.²

In this respect, both Larkin and Ramanujan conform to Eliot’s idea of the ideal condition of the making of a poem. According to Eliot:

The poet’s mind is in fact a receptacle for seizing and storing up numberless feelings, phrases, images, which remain there until all the particles which can unite to form a new compound are present together.³

Larkin’s oft-quoted remark on his disbelief in any “tradition” or “myth-kitty” expresses his dislike of modernity and complexity in
poetry. We have discussed Larkin's idea of "tradition" in Chapter 1 where we have shown that Larkin's objection is to the particular idea of 'tradition' as interpreted by Eliot. According to Eliot, tradition in art and literature is a continuous process; it cannot be 'improved', but it can change according to the change of time. But this change is to be considered as a development. Eliot admits that the poet, who is aware of this fact, will also be aware of great difficulties and responsibilities. Difficulties, because he has to 'depersonalize' his mind and think in terms of the poetic sensibility alone. The poet has also a great responsibility because while creating his art, he has always to keep it in his mind that he is going to add something to the development of a process, of a tradition, that has come down the ages. Larkin was strongly against this notion of the process of the continuity of tradition that is its backbone in Eliot's view. We have seen that Larkin is thoroughly against 'modernity', that 'modernity' which involves an undesirable complexity, and becomes elitist. This attitude of Larkin is evident in his selection of the poems for his anthology Oxford Book of Twentieth-Century English Verse. Here, though he has allotted twenty-nine pages to Eliot, the second place is obviously allotted to Hardy with twenty-six pages. He has also given special importance to Betjeman. The T.L.S. Review of this anthology says that

Other than an hostility to Modernism, either official (i.e., Franco-American) or homegrown, his selection shows
two notable leanings or quirks of taste. He dislikes obscurity in poetry and he is romantically patriotic.4

(Emphasis, mine)

Larkin’s attitude to tradition differs from Eliot’s or Pound’s, who were internationalists. He was not interested like Eliot, Pound, or Yeats in rediscovering the tradition of Modern English poetry. We can think of Larkin as a “deeply located poet”5 whose only concern was the tradition of Modern British poetry.

Eliot and Pound, who do not belong to the line of English poetic tradition, nearly created a gulf between the tradition of British poetry and their modernistic English poetry. There was a reaction against their experimental poetry in the 30s and the 40s which can be called post-modernist poetry. About the ‘fracture’ that was created between the modernist and the post-modernist poetry, Geoffrey Thurley commented thus:

It has become customary over the past five years or so to distinguish at least two kinds of modern poetry. The word ‘modernist’ is now in fairly general use to designate the heroic revolutionary art that emerged just before and just after the First World War. There is then a clear fracture between the formally experimental verse of that period, and the technical conservatism of W.H. Auden’s generation and most poetry written since.6
We find in Larkin's poetry a happy and satisfactory rejuvenation of the tradition of the native British poetry. The sensitive mind that underlies the poetry of Larkin is truly in line with the heritage of the English poets, namely, Wordsworth, Hardy, Betjeman. We can trace the shadow of Ophelia’s comment “Only I am the more deceived” in the title of Larkin's second volume of poems, The Less Deceived. In an interview with the Observer, Larkin says, “... it was a lovely summer morning, and someone suddenly started reading the Immortality Ode, and I couldn’t see for tears”. All these facts show that his studies of the literature of his own country has its impact on his subconscious mind.

However, the greatness of a poet lies also in his consciousness of the tradition and culture he belongs to, and his desire to retain his individuality in his creation. In Larkin's poetry we find a profoundly sensitive mind's response to the complexities of life; an unillusioned observation of the contradictions and ironies which have become an integral part of the human existence in the modern world. Larkin's originality lies in his capacity to express the gloom of modern life with an air of authenticity. And alongside his realistic observation, we find the other most impressive element of Larkin's poetry, his moments of epiphany, the honest and sincere yearning of a tormented modern mind to conquer the darkening gloom that surrounds it. Without this particular quality, his poetry could have become another appendix to
the bulk of modern poetry — a modern mind's inevitable reaction to modern life. This timbre-like feature of his poetic vision has made him rank with Wordsworth, Hardy, and Betjeman. Larkin's is a poetry that is strongly rooted in the contemporary situation, and at the same time he manages to gear up his imagination to a level of transcendence that can give a possible meaning to the riddle of existence, a possible grain of affirmation in the struggle of life. So, Larkin's poetry is a reincarnation of the tradition of British poetry, without ever being a blind imitation. John Press has pointed out the Wordsworthian qualities in Larkin's most controversial and significant poem "Church Going". Press says, "Larkin's poem is Wordsworthian in its brooding meditation, its tentative honesty as it explores a puzzling theme and gropes towards its weighty conclusion". We can say that Larkin's poetry is to some extent atavistic, but not imitative. So, when he talks about "pleasure principle" in poetry it inevitably looks back to Wordsworth's 'grand elementary principle of pleasure' which underlies the very life and dignity of man. Larkin has indeed redefined the meaning of tradition; he is at once within the tradition and also has developed and moulded it by imprinting it with his originality. Though "Church Going" has a typical Wordsworthian meditative note, it also has a typically complex modern stance of doubt, disbelief and dim hope. Larkin's poetry is essentially rooted in 'now' and 'here'. But when the moments of epiphany occur in his poems they are strictly
balanced within the context of the ordinary, mundane life. This we have noticed in the poems “Here”, “The Whitsun Weddings”, “Show Saturday”, “To The Sea” and “High Windows”. The ambiguities of statement are there, but 'ambiguity' is inherent in modern life that is disinherit ed from the simple faith in God or religion. At the same time, he feels the absolute necessity to have some faith in something that can give meaning to an existence in a chaotic, hopeless world. In Larkin’s poetics we have seen an honest depiction of the complexities of a modern mind that can neither suppress its modernity nor remain completely oblivious of the value of tradition and culture.

Larkin’s poetry is unique in its revelation of the human predicament in this complex world: man’s helplessness and his ultimate surrender to the indomitable power of time which is an agent of death. He had a strongly-felt emotion for this sad, wretched condition of man. So, when the language of his communicative poetry becomes savage with irony and bitterness, it can never be anything but a mask to conceal his strong feelings. The title of the poem “The Old Fools” (HW,19-20) is an appropriate example. The desperate questions of the persona express his impatience with the quiet submission of the old people to their fate or situation: “What do they think has happened, the old fools, / To make them like this?”, “Why aren’t they screaming?”, and “Ash hair, toad hands, prune face dried
into lines – / How can they ignore it?" In a letter to C.B.Cox, Larkin writes about this poem:

I don’t know that TOF is so very good, but I felt I had to write it. It’s rather an angry poem, but the anger is ambivalent – we are angry at the humiliation of age, but we are also angry at old people for reminding us of death, and I suppose for making us feel bad about doing nothing for them.11

Larkin’s letter explains the mixed mood of the poem that we can perceive after a careful reading. This poem could have been explained plainly as an expression of the old age, but for the last line: “Well, / We shall find out”; here the persona accepts the universality of the horror of the old age and the approaching “Extinction’s alp”. Again, in this same poem the poet’s almost romantic expression of his gratefulness for our existence in this world as “a unique endeavor / To bring to bloom the million-petalled flower / Of being here” cannot and should not be missed. For, it is the unique quality of Larkin’s poetry – to accept the helpless human surrender to the inevitable forces of old age and death, and at the same time his capacity to recognize the rays of affirmation that life offers us.

A thorough reading of Larkin’s poetry gives this impression that the reliable personae in many of his poems, as well as the implied authority behind his unreliable speakers, is
not only a man speaking to men, but a sensitive and sympathetic sharer of life's pain and joy.\textsuperscript{12} Even behind the bleakness of his gloomier poems (e.g., "The Old Fools", "The Building", "Next, Please"), there is always a sympathy and compassion for the suffering humanity. This profound sympathy elevates his poems to a spiritual level resulting in an ennobling experience of life.

There are imprints of the influences of his predecessors in the different phases of Larkin's poetic career; but, as we have already said, the most important thing is to see what the poet is doing with those influences. In Larkin's case the influence could not overshadow his original power of grasping the manifold meaning of life, it could not cripple his original imaginative faculty. Larkin's communicative poetry is based on Wordsworth's "radical experimentation with the real language of men"\textsuperscript{13} in delineating 'the still sad music of humanity'. In Larkin's poetry not only the language is ordinary, his poetry deals with the very ordinary people and themes to suit his language. The 'cut-price crowd' of "Here", the post-war persona of "Church Going", Mr. Bleaney - all are characters drawn from the familiar world. Their activities, life-styles - all are in accord with the modern post-War human world. The key principle of Larkin's poetry is the poet's engagement in recreating the familiar. There should be no hesitation in accepting P.R. King's comment that, Larkin's verse
is a consummately crafted verse and to be valued for its skill in creating a sense of our world that we all may recognize and for its honest adherence to one man's testing of experience. The reader may be grateful for this attempt to record things as they seem to the poet, and he may acknowledge that this is the way many of us at some time view our lives.  

The originality of Larkin's poetic genius lies in a special phenomenon: he has been able to blend the traditional with the modern. Commenting on the basic difference of Larkin from Wordsworth, Kuby writes:

Most unlike Wordsworth, however, is Larkin's treatment of the ordinary. No matter how average Wordsworth's characters are, or how simple their pursuits, they come "trailing clouds of glory". That combination of the ordinary and the glorious is what makes Wordsworth Wordsworth. He invests triviality with a luminescence derived from a spiritual universe. Larkin's universe is bleak if not black. His vision is more like Frost's than Wordsworth's, and uncannily like Hardy's.

In this context, Laurence Lerner's comment can be quoted, which is rather amusing:
Larkin illustrated better than any other contemporary poet what we can call the apple-pie principle, that apple pie is nicer than apple, but the nicest part of the apple pie is the apple. Larkin's visionary gleam is the finest thing in many of the poems, but we value it more fully when we find it in the crusty context of the voice complaining 'I detest my room... / And my life, in perfect order'.

However, as Kuby has commented and as we have seen, Hardy's influence on Larkin's poetry is a much discussed and well known fact. But this immense influence also could not overshadow Larkin's inherent potentiality. Even an early poem by Larkin, "Coming" (written in 1950, TLD.17), which can be taken as virtually an imitation of Hardy's "The Darkling Thrush", shows that Larkin has the capacity to twist the theme of a poem, the form of a poem, in such a manner that it can be fitted in the contemporary scene. While Hardy's poem is written in a romantic mood, Larkin's poem is strikingly realistic. And this effect he has given chiefly by his selection of imagery which is highly realistic. The description of the scenery in Hardy's poem reads, to cite again:

... Winter's dregs made desolate
   The weakening eye of day.
The tangled bine-stems scored the sky
   Like strings of broken lyres,
And all mankind that haunted nigh
    Had sought their household fires, ...

The longer evenings of Larkin's poem are described in a different way:

    Light, chill and yellow,
    Bathes the serene
    Foreheads of houses.

In contrast to the thrush of Hardy's poem that "Had chosen thus to fling
    his soul / Upon the growing gloom", Larkin's thrush is singing with its
    "fresh-peeled voice / Astonishing the brickwork". Hardy expresses in a
    plain manner his ignorance of the blessed Hope for which the bird
    sings, Larkin expresses his ignorance of the reason of the happiness
    attached to spring with the help of an image that is at once simple, yet
    highly impressive and realistic:

    And I, whose childhood
    Is a forgotten boredom,
    Feel like a child
    Who comes on a scene
    Of adult reconciling,
    And can understand nothing
But the unusual laughter,
And starts to be happy.

There is no trace in Hardy's poem that the poet is able to accept and share the joyous message of the bird, but Larkin, even without knowing the reason for becoming happy, shares the joyous mood of his surroundings and becomes happy with the bird.

While Larkin's mature poetry registers the influences of Wordsworth and primarily of Hardy, his early poetry in *The North Ship* shows the prominent influence of Yeats and his symbolism. In *The Less Deceived* there are poems like "Coming", "Dry Point", or "Going" written in a symbolical manner. But *The Whitsun Weddings* contains no symbolist poem where the influence of Hardy is prominent. But, again, as critics like Andrew Motion and Barbara Everett have pointed out, in the poems of *High Windows*, the symbolist bent has appeared more boldly and prominently. Andrew Motion has commented that Larkin's words on his being free from Yeats's influence, as a 'patient sleeping soundly' after the Celtic fever had abated cannot be taken literally, as the influences of Yeats is prominently present in his last volume of poems. Barbara Everett has pointed out that Larkin's "Sympathy in White Major" (HW.11) "parodies with conscious discord" the French Parnassian poet Théophile Gautier's poem "Symphonie en blanc majeure" (italics,
By using the term ‘parodies’, Everett, perhaps, unknowingly points to the difference of Larkin's poem from the poem by Gautier; a parody cannot be an 'imitation' in the sense in which the term has been used by Everett. Everett has further pointed out that Larkin's poems "Arrivals, Departures" (TLD.44) echoes Baudelaire's prose-poem "Le Port", "Toads" (TLD.32) resembles Baudelaire's prose-poem "Chacun sa Chimère"; she points out that "Poetry of Departures" (TLD.34) is a poem that displays with its ironic casualness the whole phase of French Symbolist verses. But the significant element that emerges in Larkin's poems in question should not be overlooked, and both these critics, A. Motion and Barbara Everett, have not overlooked. The real difference lies in the difference of Larkin's handling of these influences (if we may call it 'influence'). By pointing out the limitations of symbolist poetry Andrew Motion says,

> By encouraging personal associations, disconnected images and irrational intimations rather than plain speech, it withdrew itself from familiar reality and cultivated an esoteric – and often rather precious – privacy.

He accepts that Larkin's symbolical themes are not private or obscure like the original symbolist poetry, it is much less 'precious' and much less 'obscure'.

...
Barbara Everett has remarked on "High Windows", which she has pointed out as close enough to Mallarmé's poem "Les Fenêtres" thus:

... the title-poem, 'High Windows', meditates on the human pursuit of happiness in a style that at first displays an abysmal, rock-bottom four letter-word 'modernity', the tone of the present day: but this colloquial brutality quietly modulates towards the refined and extreme contradictory intensity of the end –

And beyond it, the deep blue air, that shows
Nothing, and is nowhere and is endless.\(^{21}\)

So, what emerges is 'new poems', not 'mere imitation'. And here lies the reasons for Larkin's popularity. The themes of his poems are strictly based on contemporary life and situation, whereas some of his titles, as we have just seen, are loaded with meaning that may indicate a whole sphere or area of aesthetic history or the history of symbolism. The ordinary reading public can enjoy the themes even without any knowledge of the underlying hint of the titles, while the knowledgeable readers can easily find out the implications and, thus can enjoy the contrast between the modernistic poetry and Larkin's communicative poetry.
Above all the significant and non-significant influences of his predecessors on Larkin's poetry, it is the originality of his poetic genius that has given his poetry the strength to surmount the pervading trend of modernist poetry. If we take his three significant poems according to the chronological order of their composition, we will be able to perceive the maturity that his poetic genius has achieved with the maturity of his age and experience. In "Church Going" (1954) we find an affirmation of Larkin's profound interest in "externals of religion"; here, he is not concerned about the 'church' that has been built for the purpose of 'religion'; he is concerned about the 'church' as a meeting place of birth, marriage, and death – the three most important stages of human life. What is implied in "Church Going" gets a stronger expression in "Show Saturday" (1973) where Larkin hopes that social reunions like "Show Saturday" should 'always be there' to support and strengthen social values and traditions. All these hopes and affirmations of life's meaning culminate into a stoic acceptance of life's more sure event – death, in "Aubade". The first three stanzas that Larkin wrote in 1974, express a horrified expression at the thought of death; this then leads on to a calm resignation to the irresistible force of life's ultimate destination in the last stanza of "Aubade" written after his mother's death in 1977:

Slowly light strengthens, and the room takes shape.
It stands plain as a wardrobe, what we know,
Have always known, know that we can't escape,
Yet can't accept. One side will have to go.
Meanwhile telephones crouch, getting ready to ring
In locked-up offices, and all the uncaring
Intricate rented world begins to rouse.
The sky is white as clay, with no sun.
Work has to be done.
Postmen like doctors go from house to house.

One of Larkin’s colleagues in the university says, “I remember reading it, and it upset me so much it nearly ruined my holiday. A lot of us felt like that”.\textsuperscript{23} About this universal appeal of “Aubade” William Sieghart writes: “What makes this poem a masterpiece for me is the way he manages to express, in a universally accessible way, his fear of dying with imagery as raw and spare as his feelings. Great poetry gives the reader a language for emotion that he or she may not be able to find. I cannot think of a more moving example”.\textsuperscript{24} It is the warmth of his love of humanity and his authentic expression of universal feelings that have made Larkin’s poetry valuable.

A still latter poem by Larkin “The Mower” (\textit{CP}, 214) written in 1979 after killing a hedgehog by accident, expresses his sincere, humane feelings at the death of the creature. This incident initiates him
to think about the vacant space that death creates and to realize the need to be tolerant, to be kind to each other:

I had seen it before, and even fed it, once.
Now I have mauled its unobtrusive world
Unmendably. Burial was no help:

Next morning I got up and it did not.
The first day after a death, the new absence
Is always the same; we should be careful

Of each other, we should be kind
While there is still time.

All these four poems express the genuinely felt experiences of a personality that is too difficult to be forgotten once one reads them.

The mastery to synthesize the parallel levels — being imaginative, visionary and at once, to be strongly located — has actually made Larkin a popular poet, a poet of the common man having a strong dislike for poetry to be ‘studied’. His poetry is strongly rooted in the British tradition while at the same time has managed to maintain a freshness of expression through his simple yet vibrant language which has used the modern modes of expression like irony,
but has sieved the bitterness from it. He has used imagery and symbolism, but has brought them as the themes demand them, not to show off his complexity by making them unnecessarily difficult and obscure.

II

To find his place in the tradition of Indo-English poetry was far more difficult in the case of Ramanujan. Staying far away from his mother-land, it is the memory of his childhood and his family that has provided a strong footing to him in the tradition of his country. It was difficult because he is expressing his own feelings, the ethos of his country and culture through a language that is foreign to him. But the originality of his thought and expression has given him the power to surmount the difficulties. What C.D. Narasimhaiah writes on this particular problem that the Indian writer of English poetry faces is quite plausible:

What one has in mind is a shared tradition, a community of interests, and a set of values that a people live by, all of which give a sense of identity to individuals and nations. The individual artist has to ‘discover’ as well as ‘create’ his own identity. He does not find it ready-made.25
However, in the early stage of Indo-English poetry, we have seen that the poets were influenced by the English Romantic poetry. We can find romanticism in the poetry of Sarojini Naidu; we can find romantic-mysticism in Sri Aurobindo's epic-poem *Savitri*; we can also find a combination of romanticism and Hindu Vaishnava culture and the influence of the Upanishads in the poetry of the most poetic of them all, Rabindranath Tagore.

But Ramanujan, instead of going back to the tradition of early Indo-English poetry, turns to the ancient Indian mythology and devotional literature, and also to the local tradition manifested in folkiore to 'discover' the tradition and tries to 'create' his own identity. It was his belief that in the present, the work of a poet can only get its necessary sustenance from the tradition of the past. In the Introduction to *Speaking of Siva*, Ramanujan says, "Defiance is not discontinuity. Alienation from the immediate environment can mean continuity with an older ideal.” Ramanujan's physical alienation from his country and his rejection of the romantic-mystic poetry of his predecessors turned him to the roots of Indian culture and tradition. In one of his essays, "Bharati And His Prose Poems" we find an echo of Eliot's views on tradition:

> Some poets are significant in their tradition because they render their past usable. In their individual works, they
In another essay, "Is There an Indian Way of Thinking?" Ramanujan has said that there is not one but can be several answers to this question. One is, "India never changes; under the veneer of the modern, Indians still think like the Vedas". As the second answer he says that there is no single Indian way of thinking, because it is a culmination of 'Great' and 'Little' traditions, ancient and modern, urban and rural, classical and folk. Ramanujan had paid no importance to the dichotomy of 'Great' and 'Little' traditions, and had the belief that under the apparent diversity there is a unity of viewpoint. The third answer can be that India has no specialty of its own. It holds the imprints of all the influences that have come to it during its way of evolution – feudal, Marxist, Freudian; or, all these influences have been assimilated so much in the Indian thought that it can be said that India has its own way of thinking and it has imprinted its influence on all the aspects that have entered into the sub-continent.

The fourth answer, however, comes as an apparent anti-climax and seems to nullify all the former theories or answers by its sceptical stance, as it asks "whether Indians think at all: It is the West that is materialistic, rational; Indians have no philosophy, only religion, no positive sciences, not even a psychology; in India, matter is
subordinated to spirit, rational thought to feeling, intuition. And even when people agree that this is the case, we can have arguments for and against it. 30 We, as Indians, have stood in one or another of these stances at different stages or moments of our life, and there is no end to these questions, and probably no answer is uncontroversial. This complexity or confusion regarding the Indian way of thinking has arisen because India is a country that holds the dictum — “Unity in diversity” — different people belonging to different castes and sects live here. It is an ancient culture embracing all that came to it.

The above description of the Indian way of thinking may appear to be irreverent and, somewhat irrelevant to be quoted here; but it is indeed necessary to know about the thinking-processes of the modern Indian intellectuals in the context of understanding the mind of Ramanujan, an eminently modern, Indo-English poet.

Ramanujan has an extensive knowledge of the Indian classics and the complexities of Indian culture. But being typically modern, he avoids going to the classical and tries to discover his roots in his Indian, particularly Hindu Tamil tradition. His translations of classical devotional poems from Tamil and Kannada show his familiarity with the classics. In this context, we can refer to an incident that shows the clear conception that Ramanujan has about the Western and Indian classics and philosophy. Once being asked by one of his colleagues and friends Milton B. Singer, whether there is a parallel in Indian
philosophy to Walt Whitman's line, "I am a cosmos", Ramanujan referred to him one of his translations of a poem of the ninth-century saint Nammalvar, in *Hymns for the Drowning*. The poem reads:

We here and that man, this man,
and that other in-between,
and that woman, this woman,
and that other, whoever,

those people, and these,
and these others in-between,
this thing, that thing,
and this other in-between, whichever,

all things dying, these things,
those things, those others in-between,
good things, bad things,
things that were, that will be,

being all of them
he stands there.
The poem is so simple, yet so full of a deep meaning. Ramanujan was definitely influenced, or we can say, attracted by the philosophy of these poems while translating them. But his knowledge of the Indian classics has refined his poetic sensibility, but never overshadowed his originality. Like Larkin, Ramanujan has also been able to give a twist to his knowledge of the classical literatures and philosophy by his originality. In 'Self-Portrait' (*The Striders, 21*), we find that Ramanujan, for whom his family is his miniature macrocosm, his 'cosmos', is in a difficult position to find out his identity separated from his family. As in the classical poem the Creator pervades His whole creation, so in Ramanujan's poem the identity of the self can only be discovered when it is attached to the signature of the father. Thus Ramanujan's classical knowledge has been modified into a modern, individualist creation that suits the complexities of the modern psyche.

Apart from his deep penetrating knowledge of the Indian classical literatures and philosophy, Ramanujan's interest and his lifelong studies of the Indian folklores have made him a folklorist apart from being a poet. To him tales are carriers of culture in motion as they pass from one generation to another. Their simplicity is their special feature that attracts all - learned and illiterate, children and adults, and unites them with a common interest, that is, the pure enjoyment of the tales. What David Daiches says about folk poems is applicable to the folk tales also:
The typical folk poem takes an experience that has continually impressed its significance on the minds of generations of sensitive people and gives it poetic expression without going beyond the limits of that experience in finding devices to enrich the total meaning. It is this limitation of reference that makes the folk poem, when it is successful, so impressive: such limitation constitutes 'simplicity' only in a very special sense. Ramanujan's lifelong studies of folk tales has given him a keen attentiveness to details; his search for them has brought him an enriched vision. This has an impact on every particular that he observes around him in the world. With his unique capacity to connect the minute details of life with a deeper meaning. We may note again how he has been able to give us such poems where the persona, while watching his mother, comments, “From her ear-rings three diamonds / splash a handful of needles, ...” This simple description encapsulates both a custom and his own irrepressible attachment to his mother.

Regarding the orthodox Hindu belief about religion, Ramanujan says:

An orthodox Hindu believes a Hindu is born, not made. With such a belief, there is no place for conversion in
Hinduism; a man born to his caste or faith cannot choose and change, nor can others change him.\textsuperscript{34}

In his “Hindoo” poems, in “Obituary” (Relations, 55-56) his reference to Hindu rituals after death – these point to his consciousness of his Hindu origin. Though these poems are tinted with an ironical overtone, that tone only gives a typical modern, universal approach to the long-accepted customs. His consistent reference to his Hindu Tamil origin makes it clear that his exposure to the western culture could not change the essential Hindu within him. There is a meaningful tension in Ramanujan’s poems between the particularly Indian and generally universal dimensions, which has given a special quality to his poem and makes it valuable. He used to comment on himself as the hyphen in Indo-American. But his works prove this remark to be a happy joke. His unique genius has enabled him to combine the best of both the worlds – the East and the West. That Ramanujan’s remark on himself as the hyphen between Indo and American is a happy joke can be supported by his own words:

I was born in South India and I’m here in the United States speaking English, listening to and wanting to understand Chinese poetry, African epics, and Caribbean novels. I’ve students born in Japan, Iowa, or Czechoslovakia who learn Tamil or Sanskrit, become experts in Zuni rituals or Javanese music. Who is to keep
us from breaking out of labels like Indian, Black, WASP, wog or Korean? According to Ramanujan, a literary classic expresses a whole community for a long period of time, but if one wants to work for understanding and experiencing this culture, the literary classic then transcends the limits of that community and begins to belong intensely to that person. Ramanujan further says:

We need to attend carefully both to the uniqueness of cultural expression as well as to the universal elements in it, both to its specificity and its accessibility, both to its otherness and its challenge to our ability to share it.

Ramanujan’s vast experience and his own talent have given him the superb capacity to amalgamate the Indian culture that is ingrained in his constitution and the sophistication and irony which are the hallmarks of western culture and philosophy.

It is their consciousness of and sincere feelings for their respective western and eastern roots that have given the uniqueness which marks the poetry of Larkin and Ramanujan. However, Ramanujan has referred consistently in his poetry to his memories of his family and relations, which serves as an immediate link between his feelings for his family and the tradition and culture of his country. In Larkin’s poetry we do not find any such explicit reference to his family. Ramanujan’s is a typically Indian sensibility that gets its support and
sustenance from the family and relations and hovers around it through the different stages of life. In Larkin's poetry and personal life, however, we find a split between the poet and the man. Larkin has written only one poem, "Mother, Summer, I" (CP., 68), where we find a reference to his mother. And here also, the first stanza is only about the mother, the other stanza is about the son:

My mother, who hates thunderstorms,
Holds up each summer day and shakes
It out suspiciously, lest swarms
Of grape-dark clouds are burking there;
But when the August weather breaks
And rains begin, and brittle frost
Sharpens the bird-abandoned air,
Her worried summer look is lost.

From Andrew Motion's biography of Larkin, we come to know that Larkin had deep feelings for his parents. While writing about Larkin's reaction to his father, Sydney Larkin's sickness, Motion writes:

Larkin realized he was facing a crisis. Sydney had been the dominating figure in his life—a model of intellectual rigour, an audience for his writing, and an example, too, of how an independent mind might be snared in a
domestic trap. The son had often been alarmed by the father's severities but had always looked up to him, and over the years they had steadily grown closer to each other. To lose him, Larkin thought, would be to lose part of himself.  

After his father's death Larkin wrote in a letter to J.B. Sutton: "I felt very proud of him: as my sister remarked afterwards, 'We're nobody now: he did it all'". Shortly after Sydney Larkin's cremation, Larkin wrote a poem on his father which is almost romantically full of pathos. Sydney used to prepare jam every year and this peculiar combination of the dominating and at the same time feminine character of his father has been remembered fondly by the son:

An April Sunday brings the snow
Making the blossom on the plum trees green,
Not white. An hour or two, and it will go.
Strange that I spend that hour moving between

Cupboard and cupboard, shifting the store
Of jam you made of fruit from these same trees:
Five loads – a hundred pounds or more –
More than enough for all next summer's teas,
Which now you will not sit and eat.
Behind the glass, under the cellophane,
Remains your final summer – sweet
And meaningless, and not to come again.

(The poem is almost elegiac in tone. About his mother, Larkin's attitude was one of mixed feeling – of distaste and devotion. He writes his feelings about her without concealing his dislike for her nagging nature: “... the monotonous whining monologue she treated my father to before breakfast, and all of us at mealtimes, resentful, self-pitying, full of funk and suspicion, must have remained in my mind as something I mustn't under any circumstances risk encountering again”. Yet during her long widowhood, Larkin was loyal to his mother and behaved like a devoted son to a mother. He never neglected his duty towards his mother. After her death, Larkin wrote to Ray Brett, “It's just the thought of someone being wiped out of existence for ever that is so hard to comprehend. My thoughts keep turning to an empty space”. So, when he writes a poem like “This Be the Verse” (HW,30), it might be out of his bitter remembrance of the sombre atmosphere of their home that was generated perhaps from the lack of understanding between the parents. He himself has commented on his line “They fuck you
up, your mum and dad" that "I wouldn't want it thought that I didn't like my parents. I did like them. But at the same time they were rather awkward people and not very good at being happy. And these things rub off". All these references are very much revealing for the understanding of Larkin the man. These references to his feelings towards his parents also point to one of the many ambiguities in the personality of Larkin, like, for example, his dislike of company as expressed in "Vers de Société" (HW, 35) and his acceptance of the necessity of the social mask in the same poem, a serious form of which we find in "To the Sea" (HW, 9-10) and "Show Saturday" (HW, 37-39). This psychology is, no doubt, complex, but then that is the characteristic modern western psychology – sceptical, and somewhat, ambiguous. Or, we can take these poems ("This be the Verse", "Vers de Société") as the poet's expression to support his own choice of remaining a life-long bachelor, and his dislike of company. But above all these paradoxes, what emerges from his poetic vision is a strong bond with a long-flowing tradition which is expressed in poems like "To the Sea", "Show Saturday".

Tied to their particular traditions, Larkin and Ramanujan have written their poetry that is coloured with and enriched by their originality, which contributes to the further enrichment of their individual traditions. Both of them are very much confident about their own roots and have a clear concept of the richness of their traditions. Larkin is
conscious about his British tradition and has never gone beyond it by
trammelling them with allusions from European classics that need
scholarly studies.

In Ramanujan’s poetry we find a continuous yearning to be
linked with his Indian roots. We find the delineation of Indian tradition in
Ezekiel’s poetry too. But it hardly reflects the profundities of the Indian
tradition. Like his contemporary Ezekiel, Ramanujan has also
employed irony extensively, but it is more positive in his case, since
though obliquely, he communicates with the genuine Indian tradition.
Both of them have control over the language, but there is a difference.
As Ezekiel himself has said:

> I am not a Hindu, and my background makes me a
> natural outsider: circumstances and decisions relate me
to India. I cannot identify myself with India’s past as a
> comprehensive heritage or reject it as if it were mine to
> reject: I can identify myself only with modern India.\(^{42}\)

So, while Ezekiel is a Jew and an urban poet who knows where he is
at the modern and westernized Bombay, Ramanujan remains a poet
who is constantly nourished by the streams of Indian culture which no
modernization can ever suppress.

Both Larkin, who was a deeply located poet, and Ramanujan,
who was a very much rooted poet, deliberately avoided snobbish
complexity in their poetry. They felt it unnecessary, and even
unhealthy. A thorough reading of all the poems of these two important poets reveals how sensitive and sophisticated minds are at work. And for this very particular reason it seems that they are not merely anthology poets. No anthology can really cover the range and beauty of their poems.

If Larkin had not returned to the British tradition, it would have withered further. He showed that a modern British poet could reject an Eliot as also a Yeats, but still survive. Further, what Dylan Thomas, Stephen Spender, Macneice, or even Auden, writing and growing under the shadow of the two undeniable giants, Eliot and Yeats, could not do, Larkin does so well. Without any qualms or complexes, Larkin proceeds, though so slowly, to consolidate a native tradition embodying the woes, the awkwardnesses, the little joys and great thrills of a life lived here and now, in England and everywhere.

Similarly, Ramanujan’s happy isolation enables him to reforge his link with the Indian heritage even while he lived and breathed in a western cultural climate, abjuring both a pseudo-western and a pseudo-Indian tradition. He has no need to affect modernization as he was at home in the West. Nor was he to dig deep into the Indian culture and fabricate his own version of it. He was an heir to it and he rediscovered it by his study of the traditional lore in a systematic way. He only reawoke to it with his researches. For all his sophistication, Ramanujan is an innate Indian. He takes liberties with it, makes light
remarks about it at times, even like Larkin. But there is a core in him which is inseparable from the deepest core in his culture.

A close study of both Larkin and Ramanujan would reveal that they stood voluntarily circumscribed, with an incredible inner modesty of which they are unconscious. Their success has to be measured by what they intended to achieve. There should be no hesitation in saying that Larkin in modern British poetry and Ramanujan in Indo-English poetry stand very high, above their peers because of their very self-chosen parameters. It would be doing them, and ourselves, wrong to ask an anachronistic question, 'are they great?' Perhaps the days of greatness, the heroic age of art, including literature, is now a matter of history. The modern artist's tragedy lies in his voluntary embracement of the phenomenon of unheroism, and his choice to work within his own co-ordinates. The modern artist is neither a giant, nor a pigmy. He wants to be a plain man and he does not mind paying the highest cost, denial of the title of greatness. The eminence of both Larkin and Ramanujan is a modest eminence. Both of them rise to their calling in a similar way and occupy their positions with exceptional self-awareness. Perhaps, they are proud of their humility.