CHAPTER-ONE
INTRODUCTION

A.K. Ramanujan is an outstanding Indo-Anglian poet. His poetry displays a mastery of diction as well as craftsmanship, and is the expression of an authentic voice. As an artist, Ramanujan does not engage in mere philosophical speculations, nor in moral ideologies; neither does he indulge in socio-political questions that generally motivate a good number of writers in our century. On the one hand, his art embodies a personality which is individually detached but steeped in common humanity as well as uncommon sensitivity towards the realities of life. In addition to these, his poems present the cross-cultural encounter between the east and the west moving towards a synthesis. But in him more than in others and his contemporaries, what is achieved remarkably, almost singularly is that the two literary traditions, one of the modern west and the other of an ancient east, are moulded but into a model for the modern Indians writing in English. Therefore, his art is the embodiment of a complex sensibility which is modern while remaining traditional, at the same time.

Ramanujan has published three volumes of poems, The Striders (1966), Relations (1971) and Second Sight (1987), which carry the evident signs of a mind that is alive to an expanding horizon of life, its living relations, and also alive to a growing vision of the self. However, at the outset, one is prompted to ask as to the output over a period of two decades. His preoccupation with some other areas of his professional literary career might be one possible reason. He is not only a poet of repute but at the same time, a translator of international standing. His translations of the Tamil as well as the Kannada Classics shine very much by their grace and sophistication, and come closest to the originals,

Apart from these, Ramanujan published in 1969 his first collection of Kannada poems, entitled *Kokkullalli Hoovilla* and in 1977, he brought out his second collection of Kannada poems, called *Mattu Itara Padyagalu*. Ramanujan himself has also authored a novel in Kannada, *Mottabana Atmacheritre*. While his Kannada poems as well as the poems in translation are resonant with the elements of innovation and the idioms of modernism which the poet induits into the modern Kannada literary tradition, his Tamil translations bear testimony to a perfectibility in his artistry. In their close approximation of the originals, these translations have been highly acclaimed in India as well as abroad. But Ramanujan’s singular accomplishment lies in the fact that these translations introduce the western readers to a fascinating, unfamiliar and indigenous tradition of ancient India. Therefore, the area of his creative enterprise is vast and his scholarship versatile. Such creative endeavours must have affected Ramanujan’s individual career as a poet in English, in relation to his output.
This slimness of his poetic output may also be attributed to his fastidious concern for the quality of work. Modern poets, particularly those who take art for a serious volition, are the most conscious of craftsmen. Ramanujan also processes his works through the channel of selection and revision. "The Striders", for example, confirms that Ramanujan is bent on continuously chiselling his craft. It is a fact that he has deleted the opening line - "Put away, put away this dream" from the original version of the poem. "Still Another View of Grace", prior to its revision was entitled "A Poem on Logic". In the light of the original, E.N. Lall while pointing out the changes in syntax and the redistribution of lines in the stanzas, finds the poet's attitude to his craft as one of "constant search for the exact word and the precise image". Selected Poems includes a poem "A Hindu to His Body" from The Striders. The revised version of the poem shows that an adjective "unkissed" as well as a major portion from the original is dropped. Thus the brevity and the quality are effected, along with the redesigning of a line or two. I quote the portion which has undergone a major cut:

.... you brought me
curled in womb and memory
Gave me fingers to clutch
at grace, at malice; and ruffle
someone's hair; to fold a man's shadow back on his world;
to hold in the dark of the eye through a winter and a fear
the poise, the shape of a beast;
a pear's silence, in the calyx
and the noise of a childish fist
You brought me; do not leave me
behind. When you leave all else,
...... my unkissed
alien mind, ...

Not only Ramanujan's poems, but also his translation works are put to the similar process of revision. "His Dances", a Tamil religious poem (puram) that earlier appeared in the *Hymns for the Drowning* (1981), one notices, is finally reprinted after its revision in the *Poems of Love and War* (1985). Well, it is quite known that the later Yeats, apart from his many younger modern contemporaries, has had his poems revised from time to time, for their concentrated quality, subtle nuances and artistic beauty. Ezekiel appears to have learnt from Yeats how to make poems about the self while standing at a distance from himself. But it is Ramanujan, who in his interview to Rama Jha, admits of the great moderns' influence including Yeats's, on him. He could possibly have learnt from Yeats the art of craftsmanship. Moreover, the slimness of Ramanujan's poetic output can not be ascribed to his intellectual thinness: this is to be studied in Chapter Two, because his intellectual capacity manifests remarkably even within the three volumes of his poetry.

Interestingly, however, there has spread a web of criticism around Ramanujan's slim output, particularly around *The Striders* and *Relations*, through the passage of time. Amidst the allegations
raised against Ramanujan's art and his artistic consciousness, the most persistently repeated one is that he suffers from a multi-faceted alienation. Raghavendra Rao has come to observe The Striders as the creation of an exile drowned in a "welter of alienations". Where, Naik encounters in Relations a Ramanujan whose "persistent obsession with his Indian ethos", as the critic finds, drives him feverishly to "search for roots". One is really surprised at Rao's accusation that the poet's mind could hardly work outside the scope of "reverse romanticism", which the critic "designates" as "a frame of mind and the operational strategy" that transforms "the remote into the immediate" and thus imposes "a pseudo-realism on essentially romantic modalities of experience". The critic has referred to a number of poems like "Breaded Fish", "The Opposable Thumb", "A Leaky Tap after a Sister's Wedding" and "On a Delhi Sundial" to prove his charge of alienation against Ramanujan, and has come to assert that these poems introduce "an inevitable ghost from a past becoming more present than the present...". To my mind, Rao has confused his sensitive observations on some of the real perspectives of Ramanujan's art with his own biased premises from which he began, i.e. from "reverse romanticism". It is to Ramanujan's credit that he could transmute the remote into the immediate. This transformation neither produces any imposition nor makes "the present" less important to our life. The perspective of "a past" becoming more present than the present as well as of the remote becoming the immediate, needs to be looked into from the angle of Ramanujan's quest for the self: from his ideas of living memory and real time and not from the angle of alienation. All these certainly do not happen
to the critic's mind. And ironically, the poems referred to by the critic, do not bring into our mind the semblance of alienation as Ramanujan's "Hindoo" poems and his family-and-memory poems do. Naik too proceeds from the wrong premises and expectedly arrives at unjustified conclusions. More particularly, a recurrent ironic awareness of Ramanujan of his family relations, and also his sceptical outlook on the Hindu views of life, lead the critic astray to observe that the poet struggles for his "roots" and that he lacks in capacity "to have a bold, all-out confrontation with experience". The "Hindoo" poems are faulted on one reason or another, for the critic's expectation of a Hindu in the poet is not realised.

Naik's study of Ramanujan's investment of irony into his family traditions as well as his ethos, comes at time to a point, where the reader may confuse the artist's irony as the mode only of his alienation, or as a tool ideal only for an alienated mind in Ramanujan. Ramanujan's ironic tool, which will be a major thrust of my study in Chapter Three, is as subtle as his vision. Now, therefore, the question of his alienation from his ethos may be looked into, and in this context, Ramanujan's "Hindoo" poems are important to begin with.

... And who can say I do not bear, as I do his name, the spirit of Great Grandfather, that still man, untimely witness, timeless eye, perpetual outsider, watching as only husbands will
a suspense of nets vibrate
under wife and enemy
with every move of hand or thigh:
watching, watching, like some
spider-lover. a pair
of his Borneo specimens mate
in murder, make love with hate,
or simply stalk a local fly.

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

"The spirit of Great Grandfather" and "a suspense of nets"
vibrating "under wife" are, as the poem here works out, obviously
the contradictory elements in the "Hindoo" tradition. While
Ramanujan's ironic hammer thrashes the grandmother, because "one
day" in a "spider-fashion", she "clamped down and bit" her husband
"while inside her"; his ironic shaft at his grandfather is wielded
but not to pierce him. By piercing him, the poet-persona will
have to pierce himself, severe the cord that binds him sith his
"true ancestor". Again, the syntactical manouvre, in the above
mentioned passage, bears testimony to such an assertion as
Ramanujan's inhering his grandfather's spirit: the initial propo-
sition raised "who can say I do not bear . . ." brings in the end
no interrogation nor even an exclamation, but ends on a point of
final certainty with a period.

In "The Hindoo: the Only Risk" and "The Hindoo: he reads
his Gita and is calm at all events", an ironic feud between "the
Hindoo" and the "simple" "heart" within the persona is enacted.
But then the titles of the above mentioned poems come out to be
ironic, indeed, in the light of the experiences that the poet-persona
encounters in the real life. In "The Hindoo: the Only Risk", the
observation that emerges out of the harsh experiences is that it
is heartless to reduce "the heart's given beat" to the "simple";
and hence the title which means that "the Hindoo" is "the only
risk" to the essential man in the Hindoo. Someone asks if Ramanujan
has not let down "the Hindoo" in himself and with the Hindoo his
"Hindoo" tradition as well. The charge of his alienation from the
ethos has a point, here, certainly. In "The Hindoo": he heads Gita and
is calm at all events, almost the same conclusion is arrived at.

Let us closely read:

Yet when I meet on a little boy's face
the prehistoric yellow eyes of a goat
I choke, for ancient hands are at my throat.

Well, an innocent, childhood embodying sex is a self-discovery,
and sex which is "prehistoric" i.e. more ancient than the ancient
Gita is truer and more real. Thus, the poet's utterances as the
critics smell, betray his spirit of alienation. But it is not
simple to decide finally on the poet's alienation as complete,
here. There are also occasions when Ramanujan means to "live"
in the tradition, the "conventions of despair":

... But, sorry, I can not unlearn
conventions of despair.
They have their pride.
I must seek and will
find my particular hell only in my hindu mind:

"Conventions of Despair" - 5
Do these utterances in any way reflect Ramanjuan's alienation?
No, they do not; because the poet who could "live" his "particular hell" only in his "hindu mind", would also, it follows, live the virtues of this ethos despite its risky philosophical views on life. Every ethos has its own oddities. And Ramanujan does not discard at least "a hindu" in him. A Hindu poem, "A Hindu to His Body" brings to light Ramanujan's poetic personality and its attitude towards the Hindu belief systems. What I observe in the poet is that he is "a Hindu" and not "the Hindoo", not that Hindu which the Vedantic philosophies expect man to conform to. Why he can not conform to "the Hindoo" is a question that will be answered in its proper context, and particularly, in relation to the poet's vision of the self. Is Ramanujan a completely secular mind that the poem "A Hindu to His Body" projects? or, in other words, is this poem's title a misnomer as to the non-religious experience which forms its body. Naturally, the question, whether or not a Hindu's body merges into a tree, has a definite relation with Ramanujan's alienation. As I find, there is an important Vedantic motif, hidden in the poem, adopted freely from the original, Brihadarayan Upanishads in one of its episodes reveals but in the form of a dialogue, how human body dissolves into the elements after man's death:

Artavaga asked: "Yajnavalkhya! when the vocal organs of a man who dies are merged in fire, the nose in the air, the eye in the sun, the mind in the moon, the ear in the quarters, the body in the earth, the ether of the heart in the eternal ether, the hair of body in the herbs, that on the head in the trees, and blood and the seed are deposited in the water, where is the man?"
In reply, Yajnavalkhya, of course, reiterated the philosophy of man's re-birth according to the *karma* theory of life.

What my italics suggest is that Ramanujan's awareness of his Hindu ethos and its philosophical stance on life shapes his own artistic consciousness. To this aspect of poetic consciousness in Ramanujan's art, we will return shortly. But the question, whether the ironic mode of the poet is a means for us to explore his sense of alienation from the ethos, needs to be examined. Because, most of the critics of Ramanujan create a confusion in the readers' mind that irony, apart from being a mode of aesthetic distance, becomes a signifier of the poet's alienation.

In this context, "Small-Scale Reflections on a Great House"—R may be first considered, because it is a representative poem of Ramanujan on the family themes and the Hindu family traditions. Here Ramanujan's ironic thrusts enliven each and every aspect of a Hindu joint family ethos, and also brings out the essential qualities of its tradition. Its tradition is great, no doubt, in naturalising the alien, in absorbing within its capacious fold everything that "ever comes" into this house; but it is also great ironically in its absurdities like the elders supervising the mating of the lame cows in "the broad day light" while the girls watch from hiding places; in this tradition, the daughters once widowed remain perpetual virgins, or a nephew with "stripes" on his shoulders, "half-gnawed by desert foxes", is brought home "in plane, and train and military truck". For Lall, the poem "becomes an ironic comment on a hallowed tradition"; whereas,
for Naik, its "familial motif" is "a symbol of the larger theme of the Hindu heritage". Both the critics are justified in their viewpoints:

sons who run away come back
in grandchildren who recite Sanskrit
to approving old men, or bring
betelnuts for visiting uncles
who keep them gaping with
anecdotes of unseen fathers,
or to bring Ganges water
in a copper pot
for the last of the dying
ancestor's rattle in the throat.

Nonetheless, the poet here shows a complex sensibility: there is a cool, critical and ironical observation, on the one hand; while on the other, there is his calm awakening to every little happening which again is calmly accepted. The essential difference between the spirit of this "great house" and that of the poet lies in his ironic stance only. King is remarkably well-disposed to the inner symbol of this great absorbing tradition and reads the poem as "symbolic of the mind in which all new experience and information becomes part of the past and is changed, just as the past is changed by the experience of the modern world". Ramanujan's artistic distancing through comic absurdity and ironic humour does not suggest his estrangement from the symbolic mind, rather it shows a spirit in him that bends to a half-way celebration of life, the life that shoots, grows and changes within the tradition of
this great house. Therefore, Ramanujan's use of irony does not reflect adversely on his belonging to the Indian ethos. A proposition that Ramanujan is rooted in his cultural ethos as well as indigenous literary tradition, will be explored in this chapter.

Aware of Ramanujan's achievement in English poetry, Bruce King observes, "He showed that Indian poets could both be modern and work from within their own literary traditions." King's re-assertion of his observation on Ramanujan's vital link with the Tamil as well as the Kannada Classics finds expression thus: "The use of the self as a centre for a poem filled with ironies which unpredictably changes directions and attitudes... is within the tradition of medieval saints' poetry." With his sensitive assessments of Ramanujan's umbilical relation with an old, indigenous and almost forgotten tradition, King has not broken new ground on the overall Ramanujan-criticism. Nevertheless, his effort has added a credible difference, all the more creditable, for that matter, to the question of Ramanujan's alienation both in terms of culture and literary tradition. One recalls, in this context, the stance of R.Parthasarathy, who while examining the general problems encountered by an Indian writing in English, goes on record, "there is no perspective at all in which to evaluate" his achievement as an Indian poet. Most Indo-Anglians would come within the broad spectrum of Parthasarathy's observation. However, Ramanujan stands as an exception to Parthasarathy's general rule. Ramanujan, rooted in Tamil and Kannada as well as Kolatkar, rooted in Marathi, does present some redeeming prospect in the general bleakness of a pan-Indian tradition in English poetry in our times.
Taking Parthasarathy's position on the Indo-Anglian tradition as a case of "militant modernism", Naik has tried to advance his own view that "surely, a tradition could not have survived for a century and a quarter without having had at least some areas of excellence whatever its deficiencies". To make his observation weighty, his sense of irony comes handy and he adds, "it is equally obvious that post-Independence Indian English poets did not suddenly fall from heaven." He re-affirms his viewpoint by illustrating that there has been a tradition since the day Henry Derozio published his *Poems* in 1927. Whether "a century and a quarter" old, this Indo-Anglian tradition seems to be a consistent phenomenon in our modern time, and its solid merits whose signs are, of course, visible now, are still more in promise than in the present achievements. The history of Indo-Anglian tradition would reveal that this tradition has been inspired by the changing literary ideas and movements in the West. As was the case with our 19th century masters, moulded once under the shadow of English Romantics including the Victorians and the Edwardians, so is it with our 20th century moderns who can not simply wish away the Anglo-American modernists as of no consequence to them. Therefore, the evaluation of Dom Moraes, Ezekiel, Jussawala and even of Daruwalla, all important Indo-Anglians, would yield good results broadly in a European tradition. But it is Ramanujan who could satisfy the criteria of an Indian speaking to the Indians. This is not to say that Ramanujan is alienated from the European tradition of modernism, a world phenomenon, at large. It may be borne in mind that Ramanujan's deep sense of an indigenous literary tradition does not work towards his alienation from the modernist tradition of English poetry. Both the literary traditions, one of the ancient east
and the other of the modern west, fuse into his creative consciousness that engenders an art of integrated sensibilities. In Ramanujan, the traditional and the modern are blended to a print of artistic finesse. Therefore, a complex of all these aspects in his art would bear upon my study.

Ramanujan's creative bond between him and his Tamil Classics is found in those of his poems which are so far being considered as all modern. It is important to begin with "Love Poem for a Wife 1". This love poem opens wonderfully:

Really what keeps us apart at the end of years is unshared childhood. You can not, for instance, meet my father. He is some years dead. Neither can I meet yours: he has lately lost his temper and mellowed.

The dramatic opening with an appeal of real-life immediacy, the elements of seriousness and levity, bringing a sudden turn off the opening logic, are real charms, here, which are also the essential elements of modern poetry. Does not the poetic diction in its sophistication as well as in supple flow bring into our consciousness a modern poet in the Eliotian tradition? Yes, of course, it does; but the real influence on Ramanujan’s deeper mind comes from a traditional source, a Tamil Classic, Cempulappayaninmar of the 3rd century A.D., whose poem is quoted here for our contextual significance.
What He Said

What could my mother be to yours? What kin is my father to yours any way? And how did you and I meet ever?

But in love our hearts are as red earth and pouring rain, beyond mingled parting.

In this little love lyric of Cempulappayaninar, one interesting and enduring element that moves it from a domain of the tragic to that of the comic, is irony which twists a serious theme like man-woman alienation by inducting comic vivacity into it.

Again, Ramanujan's mind as well as idea in "A Rather Foolish Sentiment" is deeply shaped by an ancestor of his indigenous Tamil tradition, Auvaiyar who has a poem which reads:

\[
\text{O I did not think of you?}
\text{and thinking of you,}
\text{did I not think and think again of you?}
\text{But as I thought of you}
\text{was I not baffled}
\text{by the world's demands}
\text{that held me to my work?}
\]

The shaping influence of Auvaiyar on his young kin, Ramanujan can be marked and measured in terms of idea as well as ironic manouvre.

But only the passing touch of people whom I once touched in passing when they let me
pass. Perhaps it will not pass,
for in that touch I think I stumbled
on a pulse, and wondered like a fool
who has no proper sense of body
if it were yours, or mine,
and wondered if you wondered too
("A Rather Foolish Sentiment"-5)

Auvaipiar and Ramanujan in their respective works move towards self-discovery: and an exercise of subtle irony informs their thought-movements, which end in a living-statis. One's play on the word, "think", and the other's play on "pass" and "wonder" are comparable in the thrust of a similar idea. Furthermore, Milaipperunkantan's influence on Ramanujan in his theorised love poem "Two Styles in Love"-5 is noticeable. Ramanujan discards the idea of love as only accomplished in haste and ascribes the attainments of love to patience. His poem affirms that "love is no hurry" and "love is no burning": "no love is sudden" and even the "coupling hands take time to kill the frost". "Come lightly, love," the poet-persona summons softly the beloved, "let us wait to be found, to be lost". The echoes are from Ramanujan's ancestor, Milaipperunkantan whose poem is quoted in full:

What He said

Love, love
they say. Yet love
is no new grief
nor sudden disease, nor something
that rages and cools.
Like madness in an elephant, 
coming up when he eats 
certain leaves,

Love waits
for you to find
someone to look at.

The bearings of an indigenous literary tradition upon Ramanujan’s deeper consciousness are not limited within these and other love-lyrics. Even the influence of the Tamil as well as the Kannada saints and mysties has its telling effects on Ramanujan’s art. Ramanujan makes no secret about his ancestors’ influence on him. In an interview to Rama Jha, he states "they (Kannada mysties) were part of my education, yes ..." and further illustrates, "the Murugan poems, for instance, that combine prayer with some of the ironic attitudes that some of the Kannada medieval mysties had." Moreover, these Murugan poems also stand witness to Ramanujan’s consciousness of some of the Tamil religious poets of the Sangam era. The ritualistic nuances of the first two prayers in Ramanujan’s "prayers to Lord Murugan" are surely the reverberations from the ancient poets. The great Kannada vacanakaras of the 12th century, namely Allamprabhu, Basaveswar, and Basavanna were famed for their piquant, unconventional utterances, of course, within the Bhakti tradition. Ramanujan’s vital link with the tradition of these vacanakaras may be examined by bringing Basavanna’s line and Ramanujan’s, together.

Basavanna’s writes:


Do not make me hear all day
‘Whose man, whose man, whose man is that?’
 letting me hear, 'This man is mine, mine, this man is mine'.

O Lord of the meeting rivers
make me feel I’m a son
of the house.

*Speaking of Shiva*, 1972 (Penguin Books, P-115)

And Ramanujan says:

Lord of the last-born
give us
birth.

Lord of lost travellers
find us. Hunt us
down.

Lord of answers
cure us at once
of prayers.

"Prayers to Lord Murugan"—R

Both the poems centre on man’s longing to get accepted by the lord, or to get his prayers granted. Basavanna’s is an irony of the most delicate kind, creeping beneath the musical lines, enlivening an argument of affection as between father and son, and finally losing itself in humility. Ramanujan’s irony is marked by sudden contrasts and it takes both the "Lord of answers" and the man of "prayers" into its ironic treatment. This difference may be said to be symptomatic of the poet’s respective ages. Not the influence of the Kannada saints alone, but that of the early Tamil classics, particularly of their religious poems, also, has shaped Ramanujan’s inner consciousness of a tradition "lost long ago".
The process of our sole preoccupation with English literature, to the exclusion of our own indigenous or Indian literature, yields us the fruits of ignorance. Thus, the result of our unawareness or ignorance of the indigenous tradition is that we readily take the ironic mode, of seeing or organising human experience in poetic form, for a western convention. But then, my effort throughout has been persistently intended, in the light of many readers' contributions, to give force towards dispelling such a notion. The religious texts of ancient India, which house all our secular, literary and even so-called modern ideas and thoughts, are exemplary: if the Ramayana is full of irony, the Mahabharata is steeped in it. This is, of course, in the way of a sweeping generalisation. But here, we see what a secular literature in a Tamil corner of the world, developed in the 1st-3rd century A.D., and in Kannada during the 12th-15th century A.D. And this classical literature of India shows how its poets are audacious to bring within ironic exposure men as well as gods. Why talk of the westernised Indians or the westernised Indian readers (myself included), even the Tamils themselves are now unconscious of their poetic tradition of great antiquity. This becomes all the more evident when Ramanujan concludes his "Translator's Note" to Poems of Love and War (1985) with a sense of pride and humility:

"I am grateful and astonished, to be one of the links, undreamed of by them or by me", while referring to the ancient poets in Tamil who now "have reached ages unborn and "accents yet unknown".

Harriet Zinnes's review of The Striders is of significance in relation to Ramanujan's ironic attitude which she considers as "completely" Un-Indian. She observes that although Ramanujan writes frequently about his "Indian experiences" and thus "flavours the poems with the images" of the Indian ethos, "he is completely western in his language, diction and attitude toward the object". Well, the suggestion of Ramanujan's poetry synthesizing the east and the west, to which I would return later in this chapter, is welcome; but here finding his "attitude toward the object" as "completely western" is contestable. To describe his "language" and "diction" as "western" is either stating a truism or not saying enough.

When Iyengar observes that Ramanujan has "Englished with great simplicity and force some of the Vachans from Kannada" and "some of the love lyrics" from Tamil Kuruntokai, he means a quite different thing, and to my mind, the real thing expressed in a delicately new way. One could easily detect that the Indian sentiments and the Indian idioms are, for their most part, objectively recaptured by Ramanujan, poem after poem. So, in a most important way, Ramanujan's knowledge of the English language and his mastery of its diction are directed towards this end in view. A part of "A' Leaky Tap after a Sister's Wedding" will illustrate the truth in this context:

They often stopped: may be for a chat with a buyer,
or a dip into the patchwork pouches for betelnut and tobacco,
or likelier still, to lay

a little silver nest-egg under the mat
to hatch or a rainy day.

Here is a sign of the poet's objective and ironic attitude. But what is shrouded in humour and irony is an idiom of the Indian life, the reality of an Indian silversmith. Similar examples can be piled up from the poet's three volumes of poetry: "Small-Scale Reflections on a Great House", "Poona Train Window", "The Last of the Princes", "Prayers to Lord Murugan", and "Of Mothers among other things" from Relations; "Looking for a Cousin on a Swing", "The Lines to a Granny", "The Opposable Thumb", "On a Delhi Sundial", "Epitaph on a Street Dog", "A Poem on Particulars" from The Striders; "Ecology", "No Amnesiac King", "Astronomer", "Death and Good Citizen", "The Difference", "Second Sight" from Second Sight.

One may benefit again from Iyengar's admiration for Ramanujan in his quaint expression that the poet has "Englished" the Kannada vacanas. That is, by Englishing the vacanas of the Kannada saints, Ramanujan has, to an appreciable extent, de-Englished English (if such an expression is possible). This idea is nowhere to search for its illustration, but in Ramanujan's own disclosure. By acknowledging "his knowledge of English" as "deeply affected" by his "knowledge of Indian literature and poetries", he elucidates that English "can not get us far", if it cuts us "from our culture", because "Indian English when it is good, does get its nourishment from each individual's knowledge of Indian culture and Indian languages".

The poet's assessments needs to be complemented:
Load of lion face, boar snout, and
fish eyes, killer/ of killer cran es,
shepherd of rampant elephants, devour
my lambs, /devouf than whole, save
them in the zoo garden ark of your belley

(Too Gardens Revisited"-SS)

In these lines, the prayer mixed with an ironic attitude, to the
gods, defines the poet’s declared premises. And they also testify
how in diction and in spirit, English is "deeply affected" by
an individual’s knowledge of his own culture and his own indi­
genous languages. In "A Leaky Tap after a Sister’s Wedding",
one is aware of Ramanujan’s crafty collocation in "woodpecker
peck–peck–peck–pecking away", which is an example of his Indianising
the English language. In "Ecology"-SS, the expression like "her
daughters and daughters’daughters..." has to itself all the
Indian scent.

Thus, for Zinnes to call Ramanujan "western" in "attitude
to the object" may be an error of judgement. In the poem,
"Conventions of Despair"-R, his utterances are clear:

"Yes, I know all that. I should be modern.
Marry again. See strippers at the Tease".

To this initial proposition, Ramanujan brings subtle ironic
thrusts in the very next lines:

"And when I burn
I should smile, dry-eyed", but .
soon the poet turns up to observe:
"But sorry, I can not unlearn
Conventions of despair".
Do we get any idea from the lines quoted above, that the poet is well-disposed to the things and objects of the west? No. If the answer needs to be supplemented further, the poet does not leave us wondering. He re-affirms:

I must seek and will find
my particular hell only in my hindu mind.

The process of Indianising the English language is also inherent in Ramanujan's induction of the Indian myths and legends into English poetry. It is a fact that the moderns have revived great interest in myths, legends and folklore, a study of which becomes a means of exploration into the nature, mind and spirit of modern man and his age as well. Ramanujan has immaculately introduced many Indian myths into his English poetry.

The myth of Siva's frenzied dance, popularly known as Tandav may be adapted thus -

Daksha once held a great sacrifice (yanjna) without inviting his son-in-law, siva to be present. Sati (another name of Parvatee) Siva's consort, seeing all the gods trooping off to the sacrifice, enquired where they were going and was disconsolate when she heard that they were all going to her father's home. She went herself to her father and pleaded with him to invite Siva. But Daksha's unrelenting posture made Sati ashamed, as she could not vindicate her husband's honour, she jumped into the sacrificial fire. Siva, hearing this, stormed into the scene, and producing from his hair some violent demons, destroyed the sacrifice. In the uproar which
followed, he scattered all gods and cut off Daksha's head.

He then gave himself up to insane grief over Sati's death, retrieving her body from the embers and clasping her, and calling on her to answer him. So violent was his emotion and the rhythm of the dance into which he threw himself, encompassing the world seven times that the whole universe and its creatures suffered too. Finally Visnu cut Sati's body into fifty pieces and put an end to this frenzy of Siva's mourning. Now, the weight of the charred body gone from his hands, Siva came to his senses. He repented of his murder of Daksha and brought him back to life.

The myth's relevance to our present-day world speaks for itself. The Tandav dance of Siva symbolises both the annihilation and its reintegration into the world-spirit of a new creation. So it represents the destruction of the illusory world (one of maya). Ramanujan's poem is a modern recreation of the myth with ironic twists. What appears more important is not the god of war, but men who are now more powerful than the god, and are bent on their self-destruction. One is aware of an Eliotian element in the mythical allusion. But an ironic exposure of the gods, can be traced in the tradition of Kannada as well as Tamil Classics. Therefore, Ramanujan's knowledge of the ethoses, both ancient and modern, will prove his critics wrong who have so far held him as an alienated poet from the basic Indian experiences.

The instances of such knowledge again can be drawn from many of his poems. In "The Difference", when the persona suddenly...
took a fancy to "Visnu, the Dark One" but had to realise soon that he had hardly enough clay left for the god's "big toe". This poem has, of course, a different perspective from what "Compensations" has, on a myth about God in one of his incarnations. It exposes the persona's own deficiency, and hence irony becomes a means of self criticism. Ramanujan's unerring sense of the Indian ethos comes resonant in many of his poems such as "Small-Scale Reflections on a Great House", The "Murugan" poems, his "Love Poems for a Wife...", "Second Sight", and "Zoo Gardens Revisited".

In the "Love Poem for a Wife 2" Ramanujan has another Indian motif, delicately embossed into its body. His moment of reflection on the dream experience which brings him wholeness "for once" may be cited here:

... happy for once
at such loss of face,
whole in the ambivalence
of being half woman half man contained in a common body,
endogynous as a god
balancing stillness in the middle
of a duel to make it dance:

The mythical allusion to a god "being half woman and half man", here, is attributed to no other god than Siva, whose hermaphrodite form is better known as Ardha-Narishwara. Shakti (Parvatee) and Siva contained in a common form pronounce the
ultimate balance of the female and the male principles in the Creator. Well, a myth is also attached to this Artha-Narishwara form of Siva. It reads thus:

Bhringisa, also known as Bhringi, was singlemindedly devoted to the worship of Siva in his masculine aspect alone, such that he entirely neglected his feminine principle. To test his devotee's faith, Siva adopted the form of Artha-Narishwara, but Bhringi was least disturbed. He changed himself to a bee, made a whole through the combined form of Siva and managed to revolve round His masculine aspect alone. This devotion to Siva infuriated his feminine principle, Parvatee, who cursed the devotee to become weaker daily. The curse reduced him day after day to an emaciated state when he could hardly support himself with both of his sagging legs. Siva, now feeling pity for his devotee, whose faith and austerities to Him alone were unswerving, blessed him another leg for support. This is why Bhringi is represented in sculpture with three legs and three arms.

The poet's dream of wholeness which corresponds to a divine state of "Balance" denotes to some extent, the idea of Ramanujan's essential self and his creative thirst for wholeness, which again endorses his deep sense of belonging to the ethos.

Hence Ramanujan's significance in Indo-Anglian poetry has an enduring distinction which dazzles out of his impeccable images and the flawless precision of language. This distinctive quality of Ramanujan's art is also visible in his unique ability
to extend into English poetry some of the most significant motifs of Kannada and Tamil literature. In his unique ability to induct creatively Indian myths and legends into English Poetry, Ramanujan is Yeats-like. Ramanujan's images and symbols, drawn on the folklores and myths of his ancient land add one subtle aspect to his art, i.e. they are creatively adopted by a mind that desists from mere elaboration and details. As a modern artist, he intends and achieves economy by a creative association of experience with myth and also brings into his art an authenticity through his modern recreation of Indian motifs. He also tells us that his deep "personal and professional preoccupations with Kannada, Tamil, the classics and folklore" give his poems their "inner forms, images and symbols". Therefore, the charges of "alienation" in its many facets are themselves a myth or a misrepresentation of Ramanujan's creativity.

However, with the publication of Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973), another facet of alienation in terms of "anxiety" has come to the fore. Harold Bloom's "anxiety principle" has also strengthened the position of the critics, much to their enthusiasm, who are, from the beginning, very critical of Indo-Anglian poetry. I am applying Bloom's theory to Ramanujan in my study, without my going into a wide survey or a detailed applicability of Bloom's principle to Indo-Anglian poets. William Walsh describes Ramanujan as "the most individual and the most gifted of contemporary Indian poets" and says that the poet, an expatriate though, is "without any of the anxieties of Parthasarethy, who works from a deep unfractured Indian spirit". Bloom's theoretical position,
in its broad reference, of course, asserts that "the Return of the Dead" in ephebe, i.e. the return of the strong precursors in the strong poets of an age even without their knowing, is the source of their anxiety, "a centre" of the unforgiving "dread" of their "threatened autonomy". It is to be noted that Walsh's idea of anxiety is not adopted from Bloom's thesis. Of the two stand points, however, the one taken by Walsh in the light of Bloom's thesis is defensible. The return of the strong precursors, the ancient masters in the works of Ramanujan is a fact which needs no further elaboration. The question is: Is Ramanujan "anxious"? Is he trying to get rid of the influence of his precursors, which in Bloom's phrase, is "a variety of melancholy"? The instances already illustrated point to the one and the only end that the poet has impeccably emulated his ancient celebrities. It is a great marvel that Ramanujan is in the father, but he is all the strong in the full glare of this knowledge. And this quality of inhering the father is a classical Indian virtue. Ramanujan writes of his Tamil ancestors, to their defense against Bloom's theory that "this Indian Oedipus does not slay his father, but obeys and fulfills him, after sacrificing his potency for his elders (as Bhisma did in the Mahabharata). At his best, he becomes himself by first surrendering to them".

In this context, one appreciates the viewpoint of Homi Bhabha, who discerningly says, "A.K. Ramanujan and Arun Kolatkar are free of this (Bloom's) source of anxiety and are involved in a calmer revision and revaluation of indigenous tradition". Like his great ancients, Ramanujan makes infinite use of finite means. Therefore, his root in tradition and its calmer revaluation has
to be deeply appreciated, which again has a clearly different perspective from Bloom's idea of "the counter-Sublime", a consequence of anxiety, as Bloom means.

However, his creative art embodies another important aspect without which my study here may remain incomplete, and that is more, Ramanujan's art may look distorted. His poetry is "the poetry of encounter"\(^{34}\), and better still, an east-west "synthesis"\(^{35}\). Ramanujan's prolonged living in U.S.A., because of his professional necessity and his study of modern poets have their important bearings on his art, and on his artistry in particular. A man steeped in the ethos of his ancient land, but making a living in an environment of modern civilization, modern ideas and modern movements in art and literature, cannot remain unaffected by the ambient life. It is all the more pressing when a man is not an insensate thing, when he keeps open his house, with its doors and windows wide open to the wider skies. Thus Ramanujan's art is an exotic house of poems which are like "the patterns in a Kaleidoscope"\(^{36}\). But whether alien or modern, things that enter his premises do not stay alien for long, for he himself is already a part of the scene. Let us consider "Second Sight"\(^{55}\).

In Pascal's endless queue,
people pray, whistle or make
remarks. As we enter the dark,
someone says from behind,
'You are Hindoo, aren't you?
You must have second sight'.

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Against this backdrop of a western experience, "Pascal's endless queue", Ramanujan has drawn a very human situation of a Hindoo: human in the sense that he is too ordinary like all others to be an exception, to have "second sight" befitting a god. Then, how is a hindu separated from Pascal's land of disorder and futility, of suffering and mystery? Is he not a part of the scene? Is he not already there in the landscape itself? The answers come in the positive. Therefore, Pascal's world ceases to be merely a backdrop, and becomes the scene of a living drama of life.

Furthermore, Ramanujan's cultural synthesis in his poetry is best manifest in the poem, "Prayers to Lord Murugan" besides "Still Another View of Grace", "Still Another for Mother", "Entries for a Catalogue of Fears" and "Compensations" to name but a few, which admittedly have variations on the theme of synthesis. Let us take for discussion the fourth as well as the fifth prayer in the "Murugan" poems:

Lord of great changes and small
cells: exchange our painted grey
pottery
for iron copper the leap of stone horses
our yellow grass and lily seed
for rams'
flesh and scarlet rice for the carnivals
on rivers O dawn of nightmare virgins
bring us
your white-haired witches who wear
three colours even in sleep.
With the very first line "Lord of great changes and small cells", the ideas of two ethoses, east and west, ancient and modern, are fused. It is not a patchwork, but a filigree. The lord of "great changes" is reminiscent of Hindu God of many incarnations. Here lies the poet's signature of how to assimilate two cultures artistically. This import permeates throughout the prayers. "Painted grey pottery", "lily seed", "rams", "scarlet rice for the carnivals" are nonelse than the idioms of an ancient Tamil culture. Nakkiranar's "Murukan: His Places" would illustrate the validity of my observations:

Where goats are slaughtered,
where grains of fine rice are offered
... where the daughter of the hill tribe
worships ...
scattering flowers
wearing two cloths
different in color and kind
... and offering soft white rice
mixed with the blood
of strong fattened large-footed rams
in small offerings ...

Not surprisingly, the first prayer in its concentrated form seems, in all probability, to be drawn on Nakkiranar's "Murukan, the Red One". Again a faint echo of an old western ethos is audible in the images like "nightmare virgins", "white-haired witches" and "three colours in sleep". These two traditions of
"carnivals" happen to meet significantly "on rivers" (rivers being associated with all ancient civilizations). Metaphorically speaking, the rivers of the two old ethoses meet at a point where Ramanujan's art takes a dip. "Iron copper the leap of stone horses" stands for the modern facet of an Indian ethos and its validity can be found in Ramanujan's poem, "The Difference".

The last lines of the fifth prayer would reaffirm the same conclusions:

Ever-rehearsing astronauts,
we purify and return
our urine
to the circling body
and burn our faeces
for fuel to reach the moon
through the sky behind
the navel.

Two motifs, one, Hindu motif and the other modern western motif, emerge out of this stanza. The image of "the sky behind the navel" is, on the one hand, a creative approximation of the age-old philosophical wisdom of the ancient India, which professes the cause of Creation is **Brahman**, **Atman** who is the formless, odourless and colourless one but gives all tangible forms to all things and all nothings. In the **Mahabharat** particularly, Brahman is revealed in the shape of Visnu. Brahma, His sole agent to design the universe is depicted as "having issued from the lotus blossomed from the navel of Visnu". This motif also means that Brahman Himself rose from within Himself and spread out into this universe and gave it its form and meaning. The western motif, on
the other hand, is based on its modern ethos, that is, how the astronauts in their odyssey to the moon, also sustain themselves on the energy behind their "navel". It is known that for all practical purposes, the astronauts do live during their journey to the moon, on their own "urine, faeces" etc, which are the energetic fuel behind the "navel". Ramanujan's implicit irony here does not dislodge his affirmation in the creative energy found at the very base of our own body, as Brahman rose out of His own navel to pervade this universe. Such east-west synthesis is the quintessence of Ramanujan's creative imagination. On the one hand, his creativity evinces his deep root in his Indian ethos, and on the other, it shows his awareness of the western ethos. Why western! It is indeed our modern world ethos. But the ethoses, one modern and another ancient, are never mutually exclusive aspects of his creative imagination, his creative energy. They are its integral parts, they are it. And irony here does not divert the artist's aim fixed to a goal, rather it steadies his boat to reach the shore. The east-west synthesis in the creative art can be said almost to have reached its climactic point in Ramanujan.

My efforts are now directed towards assessing his modernism in some detail. Ramanujan started writing both in Kannada and English in the fifties. His contribution to Kannada poetry is in terms of innovation and fusion of modern elements. "In Kannada if Gopalkrishna Adiga", says S.K. Desai "was somewhat Eliotian ... Ramanujan was our Ezra Pound". In his interview to Rama Jha, Ramanujan frankly admits of the English poet's "great impact" on him, particularly of W.B. Yeats, Wallace Stevens, Carlos Williams
among various others whom he has read and studied. On the art of translation, in special, he greatly appreciates Pound as an authority.

However, modernism in literature, which a basically an Anglo-American phenomenon with a solid European support, happens to enter the Indian literary scene only in its post-Independence era, in the early 1950s. Ezekiel’s return from England and his *A Time to Change* published in 1952, brought a freshness, craftsmanship and purposefulness to the act of writing poetry in India. The romantic voices of Toru Dutta, Sarojini, Rabindra Nath Tagore and Sri Aurobindo in some way, faded soon into Time’s distant green. But with the arrival of A.K. Ramanujan, R. Parthasarathy, Daruwalla, Jayanta Mahapatra, Kamala Das and de Souza among many others, the tradition of Indo-Anglian poetry has come to appear not as a distant dream. Incidentally, Ramanujan went abroad as a Fulbright scholar to U.S.A. in 1960-62, where he found his craft perfect, as he published his first collection of poems, *The Striders* in 1966, while there. Prof. Nagarajan, very critical of Ramanujan, has at least a word of praise for his *The Striders*, and states that "he is a consummate artist who tries to achieve perfection before publishing a work". Ramanujan is not only a creation of his age, but also a creator within its tradition, that is, modern tradition. When to our mind, he appears at one time as an Eliotian or at another, as Kapilar, one recalls James Reeves. The critic is of the view that a critic may be delighted to find that a young poet is like T.S. Eliot, while "the young" may have been "trying desperately to be as unlike Eliot as possible". He moves on to suggest that "the business of the reader is to find out how
he (the young poet) is himself, and what he has to say which is personal and unique⁴⁴. James Reeves’s sane review of modern poets could fairly well form a preview of A.K. Ramanujan.

What comes immediately and strikingly to my mind is the title piece of The Striders, which has been so far seriously interpreted. Apart from Nagarajan’s criticism of the poem as suffering from a "chanciness"⁴⁵, Burton Raffel finds in the image of the bug merely a scientific soundness and no authentic poetic experience. King dwells on the poem as "wonderfully concentrated"⁴⁶, reflects on its "sound patterns" and "rhetorical structure" but leaves the poem at this stage that it is "without wider resonances of the kind most poets hope to establish through allusion, references or symbolism"⁴⁷. An unromantic, in a way, too insignificant an image like "the striders" has misled Raffel. But in such images that I find Ramanujan’s considerable strength as a modern poet, as well as his quest for identity to be himself as fully and characteristically as his ambient world is, as the masters, the "prophets" have this world to themselves. Can a man’s preoccupation with the significant lives wish away the so-called insignificant ones from a world of theirs as well as ours? No, never; they are always there in the "tiny" strips of their sky, even if we do not see their place or do not recognize their significance. As to the poetic experience, in its romantic gloss, our world unfortunately has very limited opportunities. The memories of the last two World Wars in our century and the consciousness of the shifting morals and values of a modern life are not poetic experiences, but ironically they are the experiences in a majority of modern poems and also have informed the major
poetry of our time, The Waste Land. In this context of our age, Reeves again reflects, "the age is one in which, whatever private and limited certainties we enjoy, we are collectively certain of nothing—nothing, that is, except our personal identities." Ramanujan's cool, conscious and concentrated viewing of a strider as "thin-stemmed", "bubble-eyed", its perching, "dry capillary legs" etc. is a search for his "personal" identity: and this objective viewing comes to a sudden flash of resonance with the image of the "prophets". It is remarkable to see how this analytical observation slowly blurs not only in diction, but in idea as well, because the poet "drowns eye-deep" into his "sky", into his place and personal identity. The poem itself is the stability, as art is a way of transcending the flux of being.

The unromantic image of "striders" has another important function to perform. In the modern age, an image is used to reflect or create a sense of liberation, a sudden contrast with tradition or the past. The "strider" stands in sharp contrast to Sarojini's Koel or even to Keats's Nightingale. In many of Ramanujan's poems, we often come across such dull images as snake, breaded fish, tortoise, adjutant stork, army ant, pot-bellied bebbies, dark aunts, KMNO₄, wobbly top and so on and so forth. But the moderns attach special importance to an image, which, in an instant of time, arouses a complex of feelings: intellectual, emotional and ironic. Ezra Pound and his school's IMAGIST manifesto (1913) would significantly define the contours of the poem "The Striders", and of course, the contours of many of Ramanujan's poems, like "Still Life", "The Rickshaw Wallah", "This Pair", "KMNO₄ in Grandfather's shaving Glass", "Epitaph on a Street Dog" etc. The poems referred to above are seen to be placing a premium
on concentration, objectivity and presentational immediacy,
quite reminiscent of Classicism, and they like imagist poems
with their virtues of firmness and discipline seem to counter
the wordiness of Victorian poetry and the subjective mushiness
of an Impressionist tradition. Thus they are loud only in a
breach with the immediate past, which is a firm sign of modernism.
But in Ramanujan to trace his classical link, one needs to
discuss other poems than these. This aspect has already been
assessed while discussing his alienation from tradition.

It is true that Ramanujan has not shut himself behind
his indigenous Classics completely. He is like a sensitive
antenna, ready to receive the signals from the wider world, and
relay something like an alchemy that his art is. In this
context, we may discuss some of his unusual images presented
in his poems. The image of Pascal's endless queue in "Second
Sight" is alluded to, not simply as a backdrop against which
man's disillusion and despair are to be depicted, rather more
significantly it is the circumambient life itself that man lives
now, in our time, In a "Dancers in a Hospital", the poet writes:

Spinoza grinding lenses brings me
into focus, and I see my small brown
hand as a species
of eternity.

The image of Paracelsus suggesting ole age and uncouthness is
built creatively into "I could Have Rested". In "Christmas",
a tree is imaged as Euclid's ghost (Euclid: a Greek mathematician
whose geometric principles are famous), when the persona's tree
is "two in one" like a skinny Janus, two-faced Italian God. He
appreciates Janus, for his lively affinity with human condition,
when he views Euclid as only interested in abstract principles that least applies to life’s living situations. An image of a victorious Roman hero can be twisted as "only One maggot-caesar who rent his rival" (mark the distortion in Caesar) in "An Image for Politics". Ramanujan with his impeccable sense of ironic humour, draws a parallel between his father’s "caesarian birth" and his death by heart-failure in the fruit market ("Obituary"-\( R \)). Ther. again, Ramanujan’s reference to an image of "Smilesian diary" is apt, when he alludes it to his father-in-law, who like the novelist Sammuel Smiles, steeped in Victorian didactic values, passes "sentences" on his daughter’s stages of growth ("Love Poem for a Wife 1"). Even in a poem like "Small-Scale Reflections on a Great House"-\( R \) which carries the image of his great tradition from the ancient times to this day, the characters, taken from the history and literature of the west, Alexander and Plotinus are revealed with ironic flashes:

that every Plotinus we read
is what some Alexander looted
between malarial rivers.

This is again to Ramanujan’s point that all ethoses live their own oddities.

These images as studied above are classical and modern in nuances, which of course denote Ramanujan’s knowledge of some of the myths, creative arts, historical personalities and their situations, basically of western antiquity. This is not all; Ramanujan creatively twists them, more often than not, and imaginatively adopts them to the varied but mostly negatively connotated aspects of modern man’s existence. He means to say that men, whether
Indian or western and their dihoses, whether ancient or modern, are not fully free from their own absurdities, rather they even share the same world.

In this century, a modern city, as artists have worked and shown, symbolises our civilisation in its panoramic crises. Eliot (Waste Land) and his London; Baudelaire and his Paris; James Joyce (Ulysses) and his Dublin; Pound (Cantos) and his City: "old Sitch gone in the teeth" and such like, need no introduction. A city has become a microcosm of all cities and of all life; in various degrees and from various angles, all the cities are places of violence and apocalyptic experience, corruption of human nature; of industrial madness and riotous mob; of hollow men and "international latrines" ("Dancers in a Hospital"-SS). In Ramanujan, this city symbol is a recurrent feature. Of course, no particular city has obviously haunted the artist, but the nuances of modern life are not less evident. Madras is the city of bank clerks, queuing up and hurrying for congested buses; Madurai, the city of decadent poets and lepers; Calcutta, the city of people "crammed to the top of its gates" like the scavenger birds. If Hiroshima is the city of "wound museums" and Dacca, of "sewers", Chicago is the city of "the Centre for missing children", of "international latrines" where people "do not walk slow. Find no time to stand and stare". Chicago is the city where "Down there, blacks look black/ And whites, they look blacker" ("Take Care"-R).

In a nutshell, Ramanujan's city is "the black white city, waking not quite awake, not quite dead" ("Dancers in a Hospital"-SS).
At times, Ramanujan employs some images, which for all their ingenuity and novelty lack in clarity, and are hardly decipherable. Some of them are "low melon moons" as in "Epitaph on a Street Dog"; "walking, a sleet of faceless acquaintances" as in "Images"; "ideal tomorrow's crowfoot eyes" in "Conventions of Despair" and as in "Love Poem for a Wife and Her Trees", the images of "sobsister" and "sexpot nextdoor". But "I Could Have Rested" contains some unusual images, very difficult to decipher.

I would have sold
and fled my treeless island youth
and told her/several birds ago
Before they nested
in the south
of my burning foolish mouth.

My italics expose in Ramanujan not only a modern spirit but also an esoteric mind, which has interwoven three ideas: "treeless island", betrayed "youth" and "birds" in the most intricate manner. And hence, the reader is intrigued. At best, he could make some hard attempt at drawing some meaning: youth and its loneliness is imaged on a treeless island, but bringing in the "birds"-image to suggest any association with other lovers or years ("several birds ago") is not rewarding for a meaningful import. Esoterity and obscurity are now in our age valued as modern elements of all arts. Obscurity, in the above poem, comes to score a world altogether. But one thing that the symbolist technique of confusing ideas for mistification might be the poet's objective. However, the sudden jumps of emotions into one another
could here hardly meet that objective. I am intrigued why the persona’s utterances become so confusing towards the end of the poem, while he has been pleading coherently from the beginning. However, Ramanujan’s image-creating ability in the manner of a modern artist is very much rewarding.

"Two Styles in Love"—S has a houseful of wonderful images and metaphors, they assist the readers to feel and wonder how a symbolist could work. In the poem, time that nips off the branching youth is imaged on a Shakespearean idea, i.e. "circling sickles in the wind will reap your ghost from the branching gallows". The idea of normal growth and evolution is expressed in the imagery of "gorilla-heads sunflower-turning toward almost-man". Youth being vulnerable to time has the expression: "youth’s a sowing of shell-less nut", when a reward in waiting for love is so marvellously and sensuously caught in the image of "leaping Beast" who even "wait to be bidden by Beauty". What comes to our mind is how ingeniously Ramanujan infuses the flints of novelty into all these traditional images, and how the traditional ideas get wonderfully transformed with new glosses and freshness. In "Snakes", "snake" is one of Ramanujan’s characteristic images, its effectiveness owes much to the passions aligned to his ethos. As a complex, symbol, snake is associated here in the poem with his mother’s traditional site and worship, father’s delight, and the snake charmer’s economic security, whereas it is associated with a child’s fearpsychosis, the poet-persona’s in particular. This inner fear of snakes is dramatised in a dream vision later in the poem "Snakes and Ladders"—SS, while
in the "Moulting" snake becomes a symbol of auspiciousness.

Politicians find no favour with Ramanujan. A politician of our time is either "a cannibal devouring small cannibal" as in "An Image for Politics" or "a crow ... stropping its beak on the back of a cow" as in "Lack into Seal". Or, the politician can be at his best one of the watchers, "impotence their supreme virtue" as in "The Watchers".

On the whole, Ramanujan's images by their genuineness and by their ingenuity confirm one thing, that is, he is a modernist. His modern sensibilities are displayed in his method of modern recreations of the old as well as in creating new images and symbols. "No man is an Island", "Sometimes", "Images", "Breaded Fish" and "KMNO₄ in Grandfather's ..... " and "Two Styles in Love" as well as "Love Poem for a Wife and Her Trees" through many of their dominant images which carry Ramanujan's stamp, would testify to Parthasarathy's view that in Ramanujan as well as in other modern Indo-Anglian poets, the image is not only "the springboard of poetic composition, but the Kernel as well". Image is the sign of our age and the signature of modernity in art and literature. Indeed, Ramanujan's art does not fail carrying this signature; a modern's "special notion of the Image", to borrow a phrase of Frank Kermode.

It is a fact that the modern artists and philosophers, the most sensitive of all modern men, are acutely conscious of Time as well as its particular moment. As the imagists view or feel an image "in an instant of time", so also the symbolists smell some special notes in flitting moments. Each poet for Wilson "has
his unique personality, each of its moments has its peculiar tone, its combination of elements. Such consciousness of time entails the necessity of a language which must bear time's burden or beauty. In this respect, my effort is directed to see how Ramanujan, the man and the artist, is steeped in an immaculate sense of a moment. Ramanujan, in many of his poems gives me the impression that he has utilised time as producing tension and how time and tension are used as a significant technique.

A close look at "Still Life" reveals that in the wake of his beloved's departure, the persona reads for a while. But missing her has already created a tension, which is kept suppressed, apparently "still" but "suddenly" let off. The tension moves along and measures on each item:

sandwich
bread
lettuce and salami,

till the persona is visited with a passionate longing for her ("the shape of her bite"). The items left behind are not merely her mementos to fill a vacuum created in her absence, they are but the passional objects capable of carrying her identity in abstract terms, and also her shape, her feel, all of her, in terms of sensuous closeness. This tension has a quality of creative dynamism in that it proceeds beyond the limit of an instant, beyond, the structure of the poem itself. This is why the persona relapses into a kind of wonder, a sort of sensuous reawakening. "Breaded Fish" can also be weighed in the same balance. Her act of thrusting breaded fish into his mouth raises a tension which is not resolved, it goes beyond the point of time.
that spurs it. The tension lingers; "I headed for the shore, my heart beating in my mouth". "I Could Have Rested" presents a tension which shoots off from an instant-knowledge of the beloved's infidelity. The tension that is time-created is not time-bound, here too. The unresolved tension is alive in the persona (his yet "burning foolish mouth"). Thus, a moment's consciousness is a necessary condition of tension. A tension so created brings in a sensual longing or a bitterness, which by its very nature surpasses time itself.

Also, there are poems which finally produce a resolution of tension. "Still Another View of Grace", love poem wonderful in its organisation and dramatic imagination, presents a lingering tension in the persona's mind. But tension is vibrant only when he "turned and caught" that thought "one day", and it continues on a singular tenor till the lady gives the lover a "look". A change is struck in its tenor, and a sedate note on the tension is marked here. Its resolution comes "suddenly" when the defiant lover feels her tumbled hair as "silk" in his palm. The poem "Second Sight" deals with a tension in similar terms. "Snakes and Ladders", a poem dramatising a dream experience projects a sense of resolution as the persona embraces a toilet sink, his "cool porcelain sister". Another source of such tensions is the poem's structure, which is built out of contrasting images, clashing situations, and above all, of wit and irony, employed to their full. "Still Another View of Grace" has this tensional structure integrated out of these elements.

It is relevant here to note that Cleanth Brooks suggests "paradox" and "irony" as the possible source of essential tension, for words and images of a poems are charged with contrasting images
and values through their textual associations \(^{52}\). Allan Tale is of the view that tension supplies "the meaning" of poetry \(^{53}\); while for John Crowe Ranson, tension arises from "the interplay" of a poem's structure of general meaning, and its "decorative structure as the imagery, metrics, sound patterns and dramatic parallel or contrasts" with the sense of the lines \(^{54}\). Such tensional theories by the American critics are said to have influenced American poetry and criticism for about a decade from the later 1930's to the 1950's. As Ramanujan went to U.S.A. in the early sixties, his awareness of them can not be ruled out, but his practice does not show that he is working out these theories entirely or on exactly similar lines. "A Rather Foolish Sentiment" \((S)\) works on a sensuous wonder at the touch of a girl whom the persona "once" touched in passing her. Again, we find how the dancer-persona in "Instead of Farewell" could achieve the impossible i.e. "squaring ... the ancient circle" but "in a glimpse" only, and no less in "Christmas" \(S\) could the persona attain something of a universal unity of beings "for a moment" at least. Thus, Ramanujan's poetic device, inducts elements of novelty rather than toeing the line of American poets or critics. Other poems like "Snakes", his three "Love Poems" for a Wife", "Epilaph on a Street Dog" and "Routine Day Sonnet" etc. point to certain variant uses of "time and tension", variant in degree as well as in drift.

While concluding this chapter, I have kept many issues open for discussion and development in the subsequent chapters. Nevertheless, my study, here, is intent on removing certain wrong ideas and interpretations current in the Ramanujan-criticism. I have
dwelt greatly on Ramanujan's belonging to his ethos and substantiated that the poet, being deep-rooted in his indigenous literary tradition, suffers no blight of "poetic anxiety". In a related sense, he also steadily appears Yeats-like. Ramanujan, steeped in Indian mythology and legends, has rendered the flavours of their nativity into English poetry. In this light, I have tried to establish his considerable strength towards Indianising English. In all essentials his sensibilities are modern, and in all possibilities, his art is in the making of a classic.

Endnotes


5. K. Raghavendra Rao, "Reverse Romanticism: The Case of A.K. Ramanujan's The Striders", Aspects of Indian Writing in English, 1979, p. 120.
6. ibid p. 121-22.
12. ibid p. 22
13. ibid p. 116
18. ibid, p. 60
20. Sangam poems - The literature of classical Tamil (100 B.C. - 250 A.D.) is known as Sangam literature in the later period: the poems are classical i.e. ancient; they are also "classics", works which have stood the test of time, "the founding works of a whole tradition" (adopted from A.K. Ramanujan's "Translator's Note" to *Poems of Love and War*, 1985).


28. ibid p.118


30. ibid p. 20-25.

31. ibid p. 25


38. ibid, p. 226-228.
44. ibid p. xxii.
47. ibid p. 219.


53. ibid p. 155

54. ibid p. 155.