A.K. Ramanujan was a great poet, a brilliant translator and a Folklorist. He has also helped to give Indian English poetry “a local habitation and a name”. As a trilingual poet, he wrote in English, Tamil and Kannada. Ramanujan has created history by translating literatures in the classical languages such as Sanskrit, and Tamil into modern English language. His translations are good examples of “new writing”, because he was conscious of the tradition of Tamil and Kannada poetry. The double impulse of being expatriate writer who has to satisfy the natives of both the countries of birth and domicile, seemed to have worked upon him. Thus he states:

“English and my disciplines (linguistics, anthropology) give me ‘outer’ forms – linguistic, metrical, logical and other such ways of shaping experience, and my first thirty years in India, my frequent visits and field-trips, my personal and professional pre-occupation with Kannada, Tamil, the classics and folklore give me my substance, my ‘Inner’ forms, images and symbols. They are continuous with each other, and I no longer can tell what comes from where” (1976:95-96)
A.K. Ramanujan was born into a well-to-do family in Mysore. His father was a noted scholar and a Mathematician. He learnt and thought English literature. He obtained Ph.D degree in linguistics. He married a Keralite Syrian Christian woman, a novelist. It ended in a divorce. The influence of Buddhism on him remained all through his life. He was a professor of linguistics in Tamil and Dravidian Languages at the University of Chicago where he passed away on July 14, 1993. India has lost its most outstanding expatriate Indian English poet. A.K Ramanujan was a unique writer of poetry in three languages namely English, Tamil and Kannada. He has translated at the age of forty, words obeyed his call. As a folklorist he tried to collect folk tales from different Indian regional languages for the benefit of the readers.


"Ramanujan’s repossession, through his poetry, of the past of his family and of his sense of himself as a distillation of that past is to me a signal achievement and one that was to
be of value to other poets who are looking for a poetry to teach
them the use of their own voice” (1976:192)

In this way, Ramanujan’s poems take their origin in a mind that is
simultaneously Indian and western. Most of his poems are written on Indian
themes about familial life. His poetry arises from a tension between self and
history. It becomes the reflections of the poetic self’s predicament. The need for
relating one self to history through traditions stands face to face with the
contemporary milieu whose main modes— the continuity of tradition-myth,
literature and family—are largely sterile. He could fuse the essential Indian
sensibility with the temper of modernity in his poetry with a great deal of skill.
It is the combination of the sensibility peculiar to the Indian spirit. It is the
sharply ironic and skeptical view of the actualities and surface of life. His felt
“alienation from the immediate environment” thus becomes a source of
“continuity with an older ideal” the cultural range within his poetry as well as
the kind of form and content equation is the outcomes of the strong relationship
between the intellect and the emotion of the poetic self. Added to this is another
fact that most of the Indo–English poets find themselves to be the victims of
linguistic isolation from their adoption of English as a medium of creative
expression. This kind of predicament imposes severe strains on the ingenuity of
the Indo-English poet. In his Kanthapura, Raja Rao rightly says,

“one has to convey in a language that is not one’s own.

The spirit that is one’s own. One has to convey the
various shades and missions of certain thought
movement that look maltreated in an alien language” (1967: P.VII)

But, Ramanujan could reach out from his predicament to a state of creative freedom by cultivating a uniquely personal idiom. His poetry manifests the quest of the modernists, the quest for roots in the tradition and the quest for higher than the existing self, distracted by the contraries of life. The image of home becomes the central unifying force for Ramanujan’s individual and traditional emotion and intellect and past and present. Viewed in this light R.Parthasarathy observes and rightly points out that the family is for Ramanujan one of the central metaphors with which he thinks. After having looked into Ramanujan as a poet, it is pertinent to take note some of his best poems in order to see the poet at practice. The selection of certain poems here does not indicate in any way that Ramanujan’s other poems are not worthy of attention on contrary, this merely indicates that these selected ones are definitely his gems.

‘The Striders’ is one of the significant poems in the first volume entitled ‘The Strider’ (1966) particularly due to its place in the order of the post writes in the foot note that “strider’ is the new England name for the water insect in this poem” (1995:3) The poem comprises two stanzas of eight and seven lines respectively. The first stanza starts as follows:

“And search
for certain thin-
stemmed, bubble-eyed water bugs.

See them perch.

On dry capillary legs.

Weightless

On the ripple skim

Of a stream. "(Ibid)

Though the opening of the poem is casual, the poet minutely describes the striders. The striders are 'thin-stemmed and 'bubble-eyed' and are perched on the ripples on a stream. He describes the location and weightlessness of the water-bugs. The second stanza compares the water bugs with prophets:

"No not only prophets
walk on water, this bug sits
on a land slide of lights
and drowns eye-
deepp into its tiny strip
of sky" (Ibid)

The poet depicts one particular strider-"This bug.....etc", He is not speaking in general. It is clear that the strider cannot bear too much light and keeps its sight buried into its small blue wings. The expression 'of sky' at the end of the poem suggests its colour.
Ramanujan tells about the physical appearance of the striders and about their disgust for light but he suddenly turns from 'bugs' to a 'bug'. Commenting on this poem, Prof S. Nagarajan tells that "There is a 'chanciness' in the conclusion drown in this poem" (1977:20) In this poem, the poet has faltered, and faltered beyond reclamation. It is the fact that the initial impulse of the poet is disturbed and he is not able to carry it through out the poem. It was possible to understand his sense of allegiance to a foreign soil and love of its dirty, dry insects. The poet shows his prosensity for the concrete and concise in this poem. Though the poet's comparison of this insect with 'prophets' is quite unconvincing, the presentation of the water bug has human associations.

The poem 'The Striders' is remarkable in forging an oblique, elliptical style, all Ramanujan's own. It has a cold, glass like quality achieved through the poet's attitude towards the striders and through his employment of speech rhythms and slang's. 'Looking for a Cousin on a Swing' is one of the finest poems of A.K. Ramanujan; it is remarkable for its unadorned style and simple diction. It is a short poem, which contains 23 lines: The poem begins with,

"when she was four or five,

she sat on a village swing

and her cousin, six or seven,

sat himself against her;"
with every lunge of the swing
she felt him
in the lunging pits
of her feeling;
and afterwards
we claimed a tree, she said". (1995: 19)

As the poem tells, it recalls the peculiar sensation felt by a premature girl of four or five and a little older boy of six or seven while they were ‘on a village swing’. After this kind of sensation, they climbed a tree which was ‘not very tall’, and which was ‘full of leaves’. They were innocent. The girl is grown up; the same girl becomes a mature woman who lives in a city and goes on hunting for companions of her lust. She is ever ready to ‘give’ herself to anyone but for asking——— ‘if someone suddenly sneezed’. The following stanza is very interesting:

“Now she looks for swing
in cities with fifteen suburbs
and tries to be innocent
about it”. (Ibid)

Obviously, the girl is trying to perpetrate her initial crime. The tone is ironical in the extract and tries to be innocent / about it. As the theme of the poem is love, the turbulence of passion in the grown-up-woman is carried home through
the choicest use of phrase-‘swing’ ‘crotch’ ‘burst’, ‘scarlet figs’, and ‘suddenly sneezed’. The imaginary of the poem is conspicuous in the last lines,

“not only on the crotch of a tree
that looked as if it would burst
under every leaf
into a brood of scarlet figs
if someone suddenly sneezed” (Ibid)

The image ‘crotch of a tree’ reveals that the children feed on their sensation in innocent days. The woman’s raging passion is translated into the words. The term ‘sneezing’ is full of implications. In this poem, the lucidity of language employed with literary devices shorn of embellishments. The poet shifts the scene in the poem from villages to cities, where one has an immense scope of sin and corruption. As a full-blooded woman, matured in age she is out to seek illicit love in cities. Adulthood has come for her with its repercussions. Viewed in this light, the poem becomes kaleidoscopic, and the total effect created by it is almost astonishing.

‘A River’ is a poem on the river Vaikai which flows through a city called Madurai where has been the seat of Tamil culture for about two thousand years. In Ten Twentieth - Century Indian Poets, R. Parthasarathy remarks that the river becomes “a point of departure for ironically contrasting the relative
attitudes of the old and new Tamil poets, both of whom are exposed for their
callousness to suffering, when it is so obvious, as a result of the floods”.

(1976:95)

The poem ‘A River’ comprises 49 lines. The initial lines described the location of the river – Madurai, a city of ‘temples and poets’, These poets

“Sang of cities and temples:

every summer

a river dries to a trickle

in the sand,

baring the sand – ribs,

straw and woman’s hair

clogging the Watergates

at the rusty bars

under the bridges with patches

of repair all over them,

the wet stones listening like sleepy
crocodiles, the try ones

shaven water-buffalos

lounging in the sun”. (1995 : 38)

It is understood that the incalculable amount of loss and havoc has been wrought by the devastating floods. The river becomes lean and dry during the summer. It bares to the sight the sand-ribs, straw and woman’s hair closing the
watergates, the bridges with patches of repair and the wet and dry stones
glistening in the sun. The poets of yore sang “only of the floods,” (Ibid) not of
the ruins and ravages caused by them. These ruins and ravages are stated in the
following lines.

“He was for a day
when they had the floods,
people everywhere talked
of the inches rising,
of the precise number of cobbled steps
run over by the water, rising
on the bathing places,
and the way it carried off three village houses
one pregnant woman
and a couple of cows
named Gopi and Brida, as usual”. (Ibid)

When the river was in its full fury, the people spoke about its speedy, rising,
submerging the ‘cobbled steps’, about the ‘bathing places’, they even talked
about the sweeping off the ‘three village houses’, the drawing of ‘one pregnant
woman’ and a couple of cows/named Gopi and Brinda. The poet witness these
things he remained totally indifferent towards the losses and sorrows of the
people. The following stanzas reflect their cold, callous attitude:
"The new poets still quoted the
old poets, but no one spoke
in verse of the pregnant woman,
drowned, with perhaps twins in her
kicking at blank walls
even before birth." (p-39)

The new poets never worried about the sorrows, agonies and miseries of the human being – of the drawing of the pregnant woman, expecting twins in her belly who died before their birth, of the destroying the three village houses and a pair of cows. The poets waxed torturous and poetic over the rains and floods, but they never think of the destroyed innocent creatures.

Ramanujan shows his concern about the sufferers and the bereaved. Skillfully it shows his sympathy for them. It is thus a realistic portrayal of the human beings' unmerited suffering at the hand of cure and uncontrollable doomster, who often heap 'travails and teens' on humanity it is obvious that the poet shows his love not only for human beings, but also for animals and houses and for all creatures in this poem. The poet uses the simple and ordinary language and his compassion conveyed directly. The tone is ironical toward the portrayal of the in different attitude of the old and new poets about the destructive role of the river. They are equally to blame for being 'poetic' at the cost of human lives and property. The poem hits hard at these poets and their
varieties. These poets are born and bred in cities and they have their false notion about the rural life and its acute problem because the neglect is the part and parcel of the rural life. It is the sum and substance of the poem. It implies that this world is like elfins or sprites, having no concern with the sad sides of human existence.

"Still Another View of Grace" is an artistically flawless poem of Ramanujan who expresses his feelings of love toward his wife. His wife is being a Keralite Syrian Christian. He is being a Tamil Brahmin. The dramatic tension in the poem arises out of his passion for her who belongs to a different caste and creed. It is decidedly one of the best poems of Ramanujan. The poem is composed into four stanzas of four lines each and the last line is a separate single line in which he creates situation, in which he is burning with passion. His mental diversion is toward the object of love. In the first stanza, the poet admonishes his beloved thus:

"I burned and burned. But

one day I turned

and that caught that thought

by the screams of her hair said: Beware.

Do not follow a gentle man's morals" (1995: 45)

It is obvious that the lady has been following the man of 'morals' with a 'determined air' to captivate him. The term 'Beware' is a warning to her
implying that he will not spare her through he is ‘a gentle man’ of moralistic
attitude of mind. The words and phrases ‘burned and burned’, caught that
thought ‘a gentle moral’ are the outcome of a deliberate selection and careful
choice. The poet creates an image of a woman standing on a dusty road and
following her lover in a mood of utter a ban dormant.

In the second stanza the poet continues the extortion of poet- lover to the
woman of his heart and evokes the image of the bonds of marriage. His ladylove
gets ready for the ceremony of wedding by indicating the term ‘find a Priest’.
The marriage provides her with a husband, who will offer ‘a houseful/of
legitimate sons. The wedding or begetting is not considered as ‘sin’ or ‘treason’
for which she is quite ripe.

The third stanza highlights that the poet was born and bred in a strict
traditional discipline of conservative Brahmin family. His family members
followed spiritualism unfailingly in all seasons and circumstance. But the poet’s
ladylove lacks the knowledge about these woman kind- “And I have no reason
to know your kind” (Ibid). The poet is a man born in such a family. He is
disturbed by the hungers of passion that cannot be controlled by the law or the
presence of ‘constable’

The fourth stanza brings out the boldness of the woman and her straight
‘look’ into his face, which is both inviting and challenging. The term ‘look’
indicates her readiness to submit to his hunger as well as urges the man of her heart to shake off his shyness and cowardice and ‘dare’ in order to win the coveted creature. The submission to ‘passion’ is suggested in the last few lines.

“Commandments crumbled
in my father’s past. Her tumbled hair suddenly known
as silk in my angry had. I shook a little
and took her, behind the laws of my land” (Ibid)

From this it is clear that the lover is greatly raged at the time, that he holds her silken fair in ‘angry hand’ and that he takes her beyond ‘the laws of my land’ with a momentary decision. There is a wonderful marriage of ‘thought’ and ‘action’ in this poem of Ramanujan. ‘Still Another View of Grace’ is a remarkable study in cultural contrast between the two races of the same country. The irresistible force of love enables the lovers to move the man-made barriers. Human life is a bundle of compromises on several counts; art has been reconciled with life in this poem.

In the second collection ‘Relation’ the poem ‘Love Poem for a Wife 1’ is based on one of the intimate family relationships especially the poet’s relationship with his wife. The poem has twelve stanzas out of this the first eleven consists of seven lines and twelfth has six lines only. The first stanza runs thus:

“Really what keeps us apart
at the end of years is unshared
childhood. You cannot, for instance,
meet my father, he is same years
dead. Neither can I meet yours:
he has lately last his temper
and mellowed.” (1995:65)

It describes the poet’s sense of estrangement from his wife, because of
‘unshared childhood’. As a result, the couple never understand each other and
their parents. It is explicit in this stanza:

“In the transverse mid right gossip
of cousins’ reunions among
brandy fumes, cashews and the absences
of grand parents, you suddenly
nostalgic for my past and grow I
entry you your village dog-ride
and the mythology”. (Ibid)

The couple think of their past nostalgically and look upon one another’s
indulgements enviously. The third stanza tells about the recognition of each
other. The fourth stanza illustrates that how the wife can form the idea of
husband’s parents. She is looking after the family and listening to his brothers’
anecdotes. She (the wife) looks strangely at a sepia wedding / picture of father
in a turban’ and at ‘mother standing on her bare feet’ wearing ‘silver ring on
her second toes. In the fifth stanza her father grown aged, consequently he lost his memory and temper. He becomes weak and he does not bother about her whereabouts, about her meeting ‘a nice muslim friend’ at odd hours. She also mentions the petty things. Suddenly she becomes assertive and wagers the family belongings and the husband’s earning as seen in the following lines:

“to flap in the other room
    in a midnight wind: you wagered heirlooms
    and husband’s earning on what
    the uncle in Kuwait
    would say about the Bathroom
    and the well, and the dying
    by now dead.”(p-67)

The poet wants to drive home the point that his wife would have found a fitter life – partner in her brother. The stanza is thought – provoking as

“tree next to it. Probably
    only the Egyptians had it right:
    their kings had sisters for queens
    to continue the incests
    of childhood into marriage.
    Or we should do as well-meaning
    Hindus did”.(Ibid)
The poet and wife should have lived more happily had they been betrothed before their birth. It could have cemented their relationship:

“betroth us before birth,
forestalling separate horoscopes
and mothers’ first periods
and wed us in the oral cradle
and carry marriage back into
the namelessness of childhoods.”(Ibid)

That would have saved the labour of horoscopists and astrologers.

“Love Poem for a Wife 1” is a luminous evocation of the poet’s family life. The poet’s marriage with an ultra-modern lady causes his sense of frustration. He desires to overcome his alienation from his wife. He tries to seek fulfillment in wifely relationship but he fails the tension never diffuses. In his article “The Self in A.K.Ramanujan’s poetry”, C.Kulshrestha says

“the poem ends with the problematic uncertainly with which it begins, implying that the speaker’s longing to enter another life by trying to share its past is fraught with bitterness and disillusionment. The ironic twist with which the poem concludes seems to confirm the stasis. Underlying the relationship as also the persisting acrimony and suspicion that have been responsible as also speaker’s own emotional aridity” (1978-79:115)

The dominant mood is one of bitterness disharmony and disappointment.
One of the most pleasant poems, “Small – Scale Reflection on a Great House” centers on the family metaphors for its substance. The poet achieves singular effects in it by employing familiar speech-rhythms, clichés, and slangs to which Parthasarathy writes in his article, ‘How it Strikes a Contemporary: The poetry of A.K.Ramanujan” (1976:156) The structural pattern is to insert single line after every four stanzas of three lines each. The first part of the poem gives the details of the house

“some times I think that nothing
that ever comes into his house
goes out. Things come in every day
to lose themselves among other things
lost long ago among
other things lost long ago;
lame wondering cows from now here
have been known to be tethered
given a name, encouraged
to get pregnant in the broad day light
of the street under the elders’
supervision, the girl hiding
behind windows with holes in them’ (1995: 96)
The house has a vast digestive and assimilative power. The common phrase- ‘lost long ago’ is presented in a meditative, musing tone gives the history of the ancient house.

It built up a strange and bizarre catalogue of things that come into the house from outside to stay for ever and of things that go out but inevitably return: stray cows, library books, neighbours, dishes servants, phonographs, inherited epilepsies, sons-in-law, daughter-in-law, letters, ideas, beggar songs, windowed daughters and nephews killed in the war. The memory of these things and the circumstances of their arrival and return provide a certain intensity to the self of the speaker, drawing it compulsively backward within the precincts of the house like all other things accumulated over the years.

On the one hand, it is very intimate and hospitable to those coming from outside and is bent on scholarly pursuits; on the other hand it cares little for the neighbours’ needs, for borrowed books and ideas, and for correct entries in addresses of letters. Its former attitude is manifested in the following stanza;

“Sons-in-law who quite forget”
their mothers, but stay to check
accounts or teach arithmetic to nieces,
or the woman who come as wives
from houses open on one side
to rising suns, on another” (1995: 97)
There are apt comparisons. Though it has abstract ideas, it gives the human predicament of a great house.

"Obituary" is a poem, which consists of eight stanzas of seven lines each. It is one of the best family poems of Ramanujan and dwells on the death of the poet's father. The first stanza in 'Obituary' mentions the domestic responsibilities left behind by the dead father:

"Father, when he passed on,
left dust
on at table full of papers,
left debts and daughters
a bedwetting grandson
named by the toss
of a coin after him" (1995:111)

In his death the father left behind for his heir dusty papers on a table, debts, daughters and a very small grandson.

The house was in bad condition it was leaning on a bent coconut tree in the yard. The poet gives on account of the burning of the dead body at the cremation ground in the third stanza. The forth stanza bring out with the throwing of ashes into the pious confluence of the three rivers in the midst of mantric recitations and with the erecting of a memorial in honour of the departed soul. The memorial contains his full name and his birth date and death date. His death was reported in an inside column in a Madras newspaper which
was later sold to street – hawkers, who sold in turn to the small groceries. It is described thus;

“but some one told me
he got two lines
in an inside column
of a Madras news paper
sold by the kilo
exactly four weeks later
to street – hawkers.” (1995-112)

upon his father’s death, the mother has become a window wearing white dresses and neglecting ornaments, perfumes and vermillion mark on the forehead. The ritual is adopted on his death by his heir every year:

“for fun, and lately
in the hope of finding
these obituary lines
And he left us
A changed mother
And more than
One annual ritual” (Ibid)

‘Obituary’ is largely descriptive in character and it has a commendable ease and flow. The situations and obligations consequent upon the death of the poet’s father are described in this poem dispassionately. The diction is lucid and
unadorned. The details about the Father’s death are presented candidly as well as realistically. His father, as an educated man, he kept a table full of papers. He was born in peculiar circumstances and died in unexpected moments. The poem throws light on the ritualistic atmosphere of the post’s house. It is obvious from the way the sons immerse the father’s ashes into the confluence of the three rivers and more than /one annual ritual’. The poem— ‘these obituary lines’ --- succeeds admirably in evoking a total picture of the dead father, and as such it will ever be remembered as a moving personal document of the poet.

A.,K.Ramanujan’s poetry has evoked strikingly divergent responses and comments upon it. He is a poet of scientific perception. The Indian culture and the poet’s personal relations are reviewed in the light of the American culture and milieu through which he tries to recognize things in their true perspective to arrive at the truth of ultimate reality of human existence. He has tried all native means and if he failed in locating the centre of truth or reality in changed situation he results to scientific analysis of things in American milieu in his book entitled Second Sight. In the opening poem ‘Elements of Composition’ of this book he tries to discover himself through such self-analysis:

“Composed as I am, like others,
of elements on certain well-known lists
father’s seed and mother’s egg,
gathering earth, air five, mostly
water, into a mulberry mass
moulding calcium
carbon, even gold, magnesium and such,
into a chattering self tangled
in love and work,
scary dreams, capable of eyes that can see,
only by moving constantly
the constancy of things
like Stonehenge or cherry trees".(p-121)

This scientific analysis of self and external reality "by moving constantly/the constancy of things" exhibits how the poet has realized the limitation of human perspective in a limited milieu. The poet is perfectly in harmony with new milieu and environs is vouched for in unambiguous terms:

“I pass through them
as they pass though me
taking and leaving
affections seeds, skeletons”.(p-122)

In this poem, self – identification with various things in changing milieu, has integrated the poetic self. Completely in its concluding lines and the poem ends on a note of affirmation of his belief in cosmic unity:

“and even as I add;
I loss, decompose
Into my elements
Into other names and forms
Past, and pasting tenses
Without time
Caterpillar on a leaf, eating
Being eaten”.(p-123)

The old and the new are brought together in a new integral vision and interpretation of reality in a broader perspective and wider human context. In his poem “No Amnesiac King” Ramanujan admits on the old Indian conception of reality:

“one knows by now one is no amnesiac
king whatever mother may say or child believe.”(p-126)

The concluding poems in his Second Sight bring out his ultimate disillusionment with all kinds of myth and oriented notion Second Sight, poems like “Looking for the Center”, Chicago Zen’, “Water Fall in a Bank” and the concluding poem ‘Second Sight’, suggest how the poet comes to rely on the scientific approach in immediate contact with the American cultural milieu as the only valid way of perception. In his poem “Looking for the Center” Ramanujan has a last laugh at those who believe in the concept of “Second Sight”: 
Looking for the center is a job
for eccentrics who can feel that thirteen
Motions of the earth
When they stand still in the middle
of the market: you too feel the galaxies
Moving, as they talk
About pebbles”.(p-184)

It is obvious that the poet realizes that sticking to one’s own ways of cultural existence in the face of new discoveries of reality cannot but be the job for eccentrics. In his poem ‘Chicago Zen’ the poet is emphasizing the need for first hand and direct observation of reality:

“watch your step. Watch it I say,
especially at first high threshold,
and the sudden low
one near the end
of the flight
of stairs,
and watch
for the last
step that’s never there”(p-187-188)

Ramanujan’s poverty projects his dependence on his own sight, which he is confident, is capable enough to see reality. His poetry projects the poet’s
preference for a wider, global and humanistic culture based on scientific perception and direct approach to reality.

The ultimate paradox occurs in the poem ‘Second Sight’ which is the last poem of the volume entitled Second Sight, the poet tries to come to terms with reality by refusing to pretend that he inherits the so-called “Second Sight” of Hindus:

I fumble in my nine
Pockets like the night – blind
Son-in-law groping
In every room for his wife
And strike a light to regain
At once my first, and only sight”(p-191)

Ramanujan felt that only thematic content cannot give Indian English poetry a distinct identity. Hindu consciousness is pivotal to Ramanujan’s thinking. It is this consciousness, which binds him to his tradition though he lives in a different country now: He states this unambiguously in “Second Sight”:

“you are a Hindoo, aren’t you?
You must have second sight”.(Ibid)

The poet’s vision of life is also coloured by his ‘Hindu consciousness’. The ancient tradition of South India interacts with his mind and to a great extent
determines his attitude to life. Ramanujan falters, stumbles but refuses to reject either. In a important poem called “Water Fall in a Bank” the poet states:

“As I transact with the past as with another

country with its own customs, currency

stock exchange always

at a loss when I count my change”: (p-189)

A.K. Ramanujan’s “On the Death of a Poem” abounds in silences of different kinds and communicates only through the language of silence. The poem lends itself deliberately to the delaying of its meaning. It apparently functions on different levels. It is an attempt to arrive at particular view of reality where the world is held in suspension for a movement. In the poem, the image becomes the poem, and the poem becomes a metaphor on a reality. The poem ‘On the Death of Poem’ illustrates this point:

“I mages consult

one

another,

a conscience –stricken

jury,

and come

slowly

to a sentence”. (p-142)
The poem creates a feeling of dread and make to enter a world where seemingly ordinary objects, carefully perceived, suddenly acquire tremendous energy, but the frame of the poem is able to maintain its stasis. The tension between stasis and movement is maintained. It encapsulates flashes of insight. It also enables to perceive the poetic act through an amalgam of the first and the second sights.

The reflected self keeps multiplying in Ramanujan’s poetry till it splinters into several selves it is explicit in the poem ‘Not Knowing’ finds in the collection of poems called The Black Hen:

“till mirrors in a mirror shop
break me up into how many I was
show me in profile and fragment”(p-216)

The mirrored profile is a college of different people:

“Whose head I have whose nose”(Ibid)

This self is a funny product of different spaces and times. It is,

“like a clocks in the clock shop
quartz digital grandfather and micky mouse each showing a different
time all at once”( Ibid)

“Grand father and ‘micky mouse’ are markers of distinct cultural sensibilities of India and Chicago respectively. In the poem ‘Meditation’, the poet grows all the more aware of the multiple bodies and centers consciousness into which he has been split, processed, and distributed. These interact with and reflect upon
each other in ways that undermines the granted integrity of the self. Poetry becomes as act of parodic re-inscription of the lost selves. The “living hands” of the poet communicate with” a dead one.”

“firm imagined body
working with the transience
of the breathless
real bodies”(p-240)

The communication of the dead with the living or of imaginary with the real provides the basic excuse for parodic self-reflexivity in Ramanujan. Poetry is sheer vanity of the inactive, passive and docile poet, it is found in his poem ‘Images’.

“When a man speaks
of pain, he gains merit
if he can speak with irony
and does not move on then
to do what poets
do, i.e. make a poem”(p-259)

The very act and process of poetic creation is re-viewed and re-defined from an overtly cynical it perspective. Poetic creation is no longer an event of self-liberation or self-redemption in Ramanujan’s poetic credo; the act of creation entails a putting together and a pulling apart. The poet composes in his title poem “The Black Hen’ as,
“yet it comes some times
as the black hen
with the red round eye
on the embroidery
stitch by stitch
dropped and found again”(p-195)

In ‘No fifth man’, the poet recounts the parable of five Brahmins creating a tiger in different steps from thin air through their mastery of the sixty –four arts to parody the very process and climax of poetic creation thus:

“Poetry too is a tigers
expect there’s no fifth
man left on a tree
when she takes your breath
away.”(p-245)

It is through parody only that the poet punctures and deflates the totalizing and tyrannical impulse of power politics. Parodying the concept of ‘kitchen cabinet in the poem ‘A Ruler’, Ramanujan exposes the mundane character of modern polity thus:

“Governing the country from
a kitchen sink
She brandishes ladies as
Goddess her sword
Puts ministers to work like
Daughters -in-law
Sorting lentils and votes
Slicing the gourd”(p-252)

The might of the modern dictators is surreptiously humbled by “caterpillar and nice gnaw holes in the map”.(Ibid) The suggestion is that contemporary caterpillars and mice with all their gnawing skills could well be the rulers of the future. Thus in terms of character and intent, parody in Ramanujan’s verse is more post-modern than post-colonial. Mere nostalgia for the family or the nation does not lend cultural authenticity to a poet’s creativity, with which he chooses to look back. Ramanujan looks back at his cultural past only to parody it in terms of his post-modern present.

A study of A..K.Ramanujan’ s poems serve to highlight the human aspects in different angles, whether it is inside of the house or outside the house. The social outlook has its implications too and any right thinking reader will be able to discern the critical faculty that is at work in the hand of this great 20th century poet. It is now to be seen if this human attitude and gesture to move the others also in the same way are the toe in the poetry of one other equally great Indian poet, namely R.Parthasarathy. The poetic thoughts of this poet come up for a detailed discussion in the following chapter.