CHAPTER – 2

TRADITION
AND
EXPERIMENT
TRADITION AND EXPERIMENT

T. S. Eliot in his famous definition of poetry brings forth the importance of tradition and individual talent. To T.S. Eliot, tradition stands for the pastness of the past and modernity/experiment denotes the individual talent or the poetic imagination of the poet. Even the Vedic poetry represents an age when religion and science, life and literature, were almost interchangeable terms. The poets of the Vedic period regard hardly any distinction between the different aspects of human personality like feeling reason and imagination. When the function of the poet and the priest, of the mystic and myth maker still remained undivided.

Ramanujan is full of two sensibilities: One that is his cognition/Indian culture; and another that he derives in contact with Americans while working as a professor of English there. Sometimes, it seems that he oscillates between these two sensibilities, but he maintains the objective scenario in the entire bulk of his poetry. Above all Ramanujan experiments with different aspects of life both in India and in the west he, however remains an authentic India voice for its culture in his poetry:

The Indian ethos pervades Ramanujan's poems, and it is in the Indian ethos that the poet realizes himself. The reality of the poet's predicament is the reality of a Universal predicament the quest for individual identity. Therein lies the applicability and Universality of Ramanujan's theme.¹

The question of identity becomes an aspect which analyses the original thinking of the poet. He thinks of the devaluation of moral values, social issues and political corruption in his poetry.

Ramanujan as a poet works on his childhood memories. His memories as part or traditional store of the knowledge become a device for
seeing the things in the present; and it, indeed, becomes his experimental composition, obviously, there lies a recurrent search for the root in his poetry, which is finally shaped in the form of memory. Even Vandana Dutta feels the over burden of memories in the poetry of A.K.Ramanujan:

No wonder, a large bulk of Ramanujan's poetical works deals with the Indian past. Memories of childhood cover the whole range of his imagination. In a number of poems, there is an accurate representation of certain instances.²

The notion of tradition constitutes a very significant element in Indian thinking. They particularly proud of the cultural heritage that has been inherited from ancestors. In this context place to quote Yogendra Singh:

It is sometimes held that a continual re-articulation of tradition in the writings of Indian sociologists, right from the time of the "pioneers" to the contemporary generation, only reflects the perpetual quest for an Indian identity for sociology in the face of challenges from the western paradigms both of science an society.³

Spirituality forms an inseparable part of Indian tradition without the mention of which any discussion on the former would be incomplete. It would be pertinent to give the words of Dr. Radha Krishnan here:

It is the intense spirituality of Indian and not any great political structure or social organisation that it has developed, that has enabled it to resist the ravages of time and the accidents of history.⁴

According to him, Spiritual experience forms the basis of the rich cultural tradition of India. Echoing the sentiments of Dr. Radha Krishnan, Swami Vivekananda says:
The one common ground that we have is our sacred tradition, our religion.\textsuperscript{5}

An Indian poet in English who is well schooled in Indian philosophy, folklore and religion (that is, Hinduism) is likely to experience a cultural ambivalence, Ramanujan's achievement lies infect- that he is able to fuse the two cultures together. Yet it is not a Tennysonian Compromise; when taken in its essence, his work has a modernist's temper; Malcolm Bradbury defines Modernism as follows:-

One characteristic of modernism is surely that, intruded between world and art, history and canvas or text, there is an active and reflexive consciousness, that of the artist. That fore grounded the artist insists on the elusiveness of his role, his unfixed social location, his function as expression not of a time, an ideology or a constituency but as a radical pioneer of experience. The art he produces thus manifests his discreetness, his distinctiveness, his withdrawal, and its specific appeal is to a state of affairs that does not yet exist, but might do so, and to an audience yet to come. It is his business to re-dispose his form, his language or his paint in order to reform it, privatise it, make it transhistorical.\textsuperscript{6}

A.K. Ramanujan and Jayanta Mahapatra often come through as poets steeped in their cultural milieu despite the fact that Mahapatra is a third generation Catholic: Mahapatra deals mostly with inner landscape and therefore, there are fewer opportunities for him to comment on outmoded social customs as Ramanujan has. His comments on many traditional beliefs are caustic but this should not lead the reader to imagine that A.K.Ramanujan rejects his Hindu (Tamil Brahmanical) back ground. Despite his stay in the states for over thirty years, he was no Michael
Madhusudan Dutt to forsake his religious heritage by embracing another faith. He can be regarded as a kind of reformist but to say that he is not proud of being a Hindu is to miss the point of his poetry completely.

It is perhaps Ramanujan's long sojourn abroad that explains his persistent inclination with his Indian past both familial and racial. The past thus constitutes a major theme in his poetry. Speaking in the same vein, R. Parthasarathy says:

There is something to be said for exile, you learn your roots are deep.\(^7\)

Despite being a modernist in essence, Ramanujan's roots are too deep to be amputated. It is true that he is exposed to a completely different cultural environment for a considerable period of time but nonetheless his links with his motherland are too strong to be revered. Driving home this point S.K. Desai claims that:

Ramanujan's expatriation is a marginal affair and his alienation is a myth created by critics. Though he lives in Chicago, he is all the time preoccupied with India, one of his continuing projects being collection of folk tales, proverbs, riddles which brings him to India once at least in two years.\(^8\)

A.K. Ramanujan's poetry exemplifies how an Indian poet writing in the English language can derive strength from retracing his steps to his roots. In poem after poem, he recalls the memories of his childhood and his experiences of life in India. In his poems, one may discern an enlightened intellect looking at things in a dispassionate manner. Never the less, "there is no attempt to disown the richness of past experience".\(^9\)

Acute awareness of traditional social behavioral patterns is a distinctive feature of Ramanujan's poetry. This encompasses the various customs, the religious standpoint, the prevalent social hierarchy and the
caste distinctions widely rampant in different parts of India. Though Ramanujan is consciously aware of his roots, he is not blind to the discrepancies of the native culture. "Small Town South India" is a short poem, laying bare the narrow mindedness of a certain section of people who are afraid to discard the age old superstitious beliefs, which have become an inseparable part of their existence. In contrast, we have the opinion of these broad-minded people who have ventured out of their shell and have had a taste of the wide world beyond. To the poet recently returned from the U.S.A. even the cow and buffaloes of the particular town seem to be within the clutches of tradition:

    The street cows have trapezium
    Faces.
    Buffaloes shake off flies with a
twitch of ripples.\(^{10}\)

    As the poet returns to South India after a long period of absence, he experiences the suffocation of a drowning man. Sinking to the bottom of the sea-bed in a barrel is an expression of the poet’s resentment at these shifting restrictions. The sun dons a pickled look through layers of seawater his toes appear greenish in colour as if affected by mildew while trees are "porous coral". As if this is not enough, he is encountered by the "City shark" and "the wifely dolphin": The poet expresses his anguish in the lines:

    I sink to the sea-bed
    in a barrel,
    Water layers salt and pickle
    the sun.
    Toes mildew green, trees
    are porous coral:
    Ambush of city shark
and wifely dolphin.\textsuperscript{11}

It was the course, the contact of Ramanujan with America as a professor of linguistics that brought a tussle between two cultures: the one that he inherits from his birth; and the other he develops in the contact of the western realism. Apart from the long line of imitators of the western models, two poets before A. K. Ramanujan that stand out as true heirs of Indian tradition and definitive experiments are Tagore and Sri Aurobindo, Ramanujan with his poetic vision that can penetrate unerringly into the eternal truth/objective delineation of the facts underlying our national myths, symbols and folktales might yet succeed in writing the essence of poetic principles. The Indian poetics as a critical treatise always stood for the ideal, and in all its myriad forums, has idealized the real and truthful and turned away from the starkly real. Indian poetics now throws out a challenge to contemporary poets of Indian English Literature to extract significance from life.

A. K. Ramanujan as a poet accepts this challenge in a positive manner of his outlook that is to be expanded in the range of his poetry. He is well-versed in Indian myths, epical stories and folklorism. In the poem "Mythologies" he reveals symbolically the traditional character Pootna, the female demon, for bringing the contemporary facts of human life.

\begin{quote}
The breast she offered was full
of poison and milk
Flashing eyes suddenly dull,
her voice was silk.\textsuperscript{12}
\end{quote}

The above citation brings the evils in a woman. However, evil is met with the good and Lord Krishna whom she intends to kill redeems her from the bondage of life and death. Evil cannot be removed by the ways of the erroneous path; but it should be improved in the sight directions. Failing in
her deadly mission to kill Lord Krishna with the twin images of "poison and milk", she was the blessed one who received redemption;

The child took her breast
in his mouth and sucked
it right out
of her chest.
Her carcass stretched from
north to south.\textsuperscript{221}

Another poem which brings the skilful use of Indian myths and legendary figure is mythologies-2\textsuperscript{2} Bringing back an age old mythical tale through his poetic imagination, Ramanujan deals with the tale of Hiranyakashyapa and his subsequent defeat in the hands of Lord Vishnu. Hiranyakashyapu has got as an evilman a boon to evade the essence of death on any public place; he however, meets his death by the omnipotent God. The message that one receives through this poem is the fact that man himself weaves the plot of his destruction:

"When the clever man asks
the perfect boon:
not to be slain by demon,
god, or by
beast, not by day not by
night,
by no manufactured weapon,
not out
of doors nor inside, not
in the sky
nor on earth,
come now come soon
Vishnu, man lion, neither
and both, to hold
him in your lap to
disembowel his pride
with the steel
glint of bare claws
at twilight".13

All the conditions placed above brings the idea into being that Hiranyakashypa appears invincible but Ramanujan through Indian tradition materializes the truth about the mortality of each being on this earth. Again, he goes on to experiment that even the evil person with his erroneous intention can be transformed. He finally acknowledges his evils before the omnipresent god. He also prays to be redeemed from the cyclic of birth and death:

O Midnight sun, eclipse at noon,
net of loopholes, a house all threshold,
Connoisseur of negatives and assassin
of Certitudes, slay now my faith in doubt.
End my commerce with bat and night owe.
Adjust my single eye, rainbow bubble,
So I too may see all things double.14

In the poems analysed above, one-steps into a world altogether, different from the world of stark reality. The heart accepts the world of art
which our reason reject. The mind with its love of the mystic, has always
given to poetic or imaginative truth a place higher than scientific truth.
Indian tradition of poetry before the objective correlative theory of
T.S.Eliot yields the fact of Sadharni Karana (tranpersonalization) of human
emotions:

Both of mystic philosopher and the epic poets are "Seers"
they see deeper into the life of things, and in this they are
alike. The difference lies only in the methods adopted by
them to embody their vision .......It is only in this ideal
sense that one can fully appreciate the traditional equation
of the poet and the seer.15

In poems like "Conventions of Despair", the poet makes it explicitly
clear that it is impossible for him to shun his roots completely and step into
the shoes of modernity whole-heartedly. Ramanujan looks at traditions with
an unbiased criticism. Nevertheless he remained loyal to the ideas, which
entered into the psyche during his formative years in India.

Yes, I know all that I should
be modern.
Marry again. See strippers at
the Tease.
Touch Africa, Go to the movies.
Impale a six-inch spider
Under a lens. Join the Test-
ban or become the outsider.
or pray to shake my fist
(or whatever you call it)
at a psychoanalyst.
And when I burn-
I should smile, dry-eyed,
And nurse martinis like
the Marginal Man.\textsuperscript{16}

A deep analysis of his own personality convinces Ramanujan that he
cannot compromise with his identity in terms of his Hindu Cultural
heritage. So he cries out empathically:

'I must seek and will find
my particular hell only in my
hindu mind:
must translate and turn
till I blister and roast
for certain lives to come,
"eye-deep"
in those boiling Creates of
oil.\textsuperscript{17}

Thus many of Ramanujan's poems reflect the fact that his roots bind
him to the early years of his childhood. Though memories constitute a
major section of Ramanujan's poetry he does not draw any succors by
falling back on these reflections. At times he has a skeptical attitude even
towards the nature of memory. The poem titled "Lines to a Granny" can
still be regarded bordering on fond remembrances. Ramanujan has a great
regard for his grandmother for she is a symbol of past glory. Here, the poet
vividly recalls the breath taking fairy tales savoured by him long ago at his
grandmother's knee. The fact that he yearns to relive those moments once
again is a prominent streak of sentimentalism in his other wise detached
sensibility. The poem begins with these lines:

Granny,
tell me again in the dark
about the wandering prince;
and his steed, with a neem-
leaf mark
upon his brow; will prance
again to splash his noonday
image
in the sleep of these pools.
He will break
with sesame words
known only to the birds,
the cobweb curtained
door; and wake
the sentinel, the bawdy
cook;
the parrot in the cage
will shout his name
to the gossip of the kitchen's
blowzy flame.18

The above lines bear a streak of similarity with walter De La Mare's
Arabia wherein the poet writes:
   Far are the shades of Arabia
   Where the princes ride at noon, 19

Ramanujan Continues the tale of "The Sleeping Beauty" in the same
dream like vein:
   Let him, dear granny,
   Shape the darkness
   and take again
   the Princess
   whose breath would hardly
   strain
   the spider's design.20
As the poem draws to a close, the poet seems to overpower memory by obliterating its negative aspect. Thus, he quizzically asks his grandmother:

But tell me now: was it
for some irony
you have waited in death
to let me learn again
what once
you learnt in youth,
that his is no tale, but
truth?\(^{21}\)

P.K.J. Kurup has rightly pointed out that in the poetry of Ramanujan,
The image of Home becomes a unifying force among individual and tradition, emotion and intellect and past and present. And again the same image home provides the poetic self of Ramanujan with a sense of cleansing and a sense of affirmation in facing the actualities of living.\(^{22}\)

'A Minor Sacrifice' is a poem dealing with a popular Indian folklore coupled with an incident from the poet's past. The poem begins with a discussion of the well known tale of Indian mythology concerning the king Parikshit and his son Janamjaya. The first two stanzas describe the king's encounter with the sage having garlanded the saint's neck with a snake, followed by his curse and then the subsequent step taken by the king's son for the demolition of this poisonous reptile, thus trying to acquit his father of the fatal prophecy of snake bite:

'I'd Just heard that day
of the mischievous king
in the epic
who kills a snake in the forest
and-thinks it would be such
fun
to garland a sage's neck
with the cold dead thing,
and so he does,
and promptly earns a
curse,
an early death by snakebite.
His son vows vengeance
and performs a sacrifice,
a magic rite
that draws every snake from
everywhere,
till snakes of every stripe
begin to fall
through the blazing air
into his alter fires.  

The poet relates this incident to a similar one in his childhood, one
day in his childhood, as the poet recalls, his uncle, a staunch believer in
non-violence, being driven to exasperation, was forced to kill a scorpion.

Then that day, Uncle of
all people,
a man who shudders' at
silk,
for he loves the worm,
who would never hurt a fly,
but catch it most gently
to look at it eye to eye
and let it go,
suddenly strikes our
first summer scorpions
On the wall next of Gopu's bed
with the ivory dragon head
on his walking stick
and shows us the ripe
yellow poison-bead
behind the sting.24

The traumatic experience caused by a scorpion's sting is effectively portrayed in Nissim Ezekiel's 'The Night of the Scorpion'. The sting of the scorpion mentioned in this poem reminds us of the intense pain suffered by the woman in Ezekiel's poem, the intensity of her trauma can be felt in the lines".

My mother twisted through
and through
groaning on a mat.25

To go back to Ramanujan's recollection, he remembers vividly his grandmother and his uncle enlightening the children on the subject of scorpions:

Grandmother then tut-tutting
like a lizard.
Tells us how a pregnant
scorpion
will took for a warm
secret place,
say, a little girl's
underwear
or a little boy's jockstrap,
and then will burst her back
to let loose in her death
a host of baby scorpions.²⁶

His uncle throws further light on these winged deadly insects by giving a picturesque though rather far-fetched description of their physical appearance:

They're quite red at birth
the little one's Uncle says.
They glow like hand-carved rubies
From Peking, rudder than garnet,
especially when you hold them up
to the light
And when they grow big,
they take on the colour of gray,
China Jade, Beautiful, beautiful,
he says, shaking his marmoset head.¹⁴⁵

Together with a lad named Shivanna, the poet hatches a conspiracy to get rid of the scorpions once and for all. Shivanna suggests that by casting a spell on them they can lure them inside a tree and then set fire to them enmasse. To the poets inquisitive queries. Shivanna replies:

Witchcraft, says he,
shining darker than an ebony turtle.
We can make them come at our bidding
When the sun is in Scorpio,
like guests to a Wedding,
into the hole of this very tree,
And they will burn in a bonfire
you and I will light.

In his eagerness, the poet wanted to begin the task immediately but
Shivanna calmed him down saying that first they have to appease the
scorpion god with hundred wingless grasshoppers caught on a Tuesday
having the new moon:

Not so fast, kiddo.
What can you get without a
sacrifice?
First, we have to feed
the twelve handed god of
scorpions
something he loves as other
gods
love goats and rice
For that you need
one hundred live grasshoppers
caught on a new moon Tuesday.
But remember: no wings on those
things.

So, on the destined day the poet sets out along with another
accomplice named Gopu in his cruel mission of massacre. They accomplish
their task with surprising alacrity and deftness:

So we steal three pickle Jars
at dawn
on that breezy new moon
Tuesday.
Leaping and hopping all
over the lawn,
we become expert by noon
at the common art
of catching grasshoppers
on the wing.¹⁴⁶

Ye: another aspect that lures and should to the principles of
contemporary criticism is the use indigenous backdrop. The poem "A
Leaky Tap after a Sister's Wedding" sets the Indian locale when the poet
remembers his sister at his adulthood. This sort of device based on
memories presents the re-reading of the social, mythical and cultural
dimensions:

Our Sisters were of various sizes, one was ripe for a
husband and we were not poor.²⁷

As a linguist, Ramanujan employs the specific function of the words
in his composition. The sound in the poetry defines the actual roles of the
words. According to the poet the alliteration and the obliance expression
workout the essentials of literature and this kind of expression comes to
Indian mode of literature:

In the sound aspect alone, words in poetry will present a
pattern of rhythm and rhyme, alliteration and assonance,
unknown elsewhere; this is the sabdalankara. In there
sense aspect, they acquire a heightening (atisaya) or
undergo a transfiguration which is the sin quo non of the
poetic, art. A Synonymy of alankara in this wide
connotation is vakrokti or oblique expression.²⁸
Ramanujan as a linguist adopts the oblique method of thematic contents, and imagery becomes its best tool for expression. In the poem "The Opposable Thumb," the poet uses three different images. The blind boy in the poem has been described as "a bud-like node complete with nail, phalanx and mole under the usual casual opposable Thumb."  

The second quality of the image lies with the Muslim Weaver thumb which "resembles" a puckered stump, sewn like a sausage head. The third aspect of the thumb rests with the finger of the grandmother. She has been deprived of other four fingers a standing testimony of her husband's the temper. She has had to bear the burnt of her husband's "Knifing temper of Sunday morning half a century ago."  

Another very important poems for oblique expression of A.K. Ramanujan are "The Rickshaw- Wallah" and 'Still Another view of Grace'. The imagery of a "tattooed rickshaw-wallah" serves the purpose of memories obliquely:

His arms and legs were wholly
literate
in green and in red,
the indelible
names of friends long- dead.

The arms and legs as perception/time present links the chain thoughts with that of the past by which he includes the memories of the long-dead friends. In another poem, "Still Another View of Grace; Ramanujan yet again uses the oblique expression when he shows the irresistible sex appeal of a woman. The bodily gestures, the disheveled hair and the lustrous strands of silk with passionate awakening of carnal instinct in a woman become a wonderful example of the vakrokti theory in this poem:
Her tumbled hair
suddenly known
as silk in my angry hand,
I shook a little.
and took her, behind the
laws of my land.³²

The various parts of images of a human body are not the only source in Ramanujan's imagery; he extends these images to an extent by which he engulfs wider range of the world of animals, inanimate objects and even the world of supernatural objects:

My night full of ghosts from a
sadness
in a play, my left foot listens
to my right football,
a clock work clicking in
the silence
Within my walking.³³

Ramanujan was consciously aware of his roots, which were steeped in tradition; he did not lack the ability to appreciate the modern outlook to wards life. All along, he has been honest enough to acknowledge the total impact of influences which have shaped his poetic genius. Ramanujan asserted with Rama jha in a conversation:

Yes, my knowledge of English has been deeply affected
by my knowledge of Indian literature and poetics.....if
English cuts us from our culture it won't get us very far....Indian English, when it is good, does get its nourishment....from each individual's knowledge of Indian culture and Indian languages. It certainly does for

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me. That is what binds us back to our childhood and early years.\textsuperscript{34}

He is often critical of certain beliefs and traditions, which have been handed down reverentially of the succeeding generation. In 'No Amnesiac King', the poet explodes the Shakuntala myth. He bristles at the callous manner in which Dushyanata treats his wife Shakuntala. Having married her in the seclusion of a hermitage, the king conveniently forgets his wife some time later. He regains his lost memory only at the sight of the wedding ring he had presented to Shakuntala, which was accidentally discovered in the belly of a fish:

One Knows by now one is no amnesiac
King, whatever mother may say
or child believe.
One Cannot wait anymore in the back
of one's mind for that conspiracy
of three fishermen and a palace cook
of bring dressed in cardamom
and clove,
the one well-timed memorable fish,
so one can cut straight with the royal knife
to the ring waiting in the belly,
and recover at one stroke all lost memory,
make up for the years drained in cocktail glasses
among dry women and pickled
men, and
give back
body to shadows, and unto the
curse
that comes on the boat with love.\textsuperscript{35}

Here, the poet analyses almost the unpardonable offence of the king
in forgetting Shakuntala and making her life miserable. He has a better
opinion of common people of the present time who are more humane and
considerate. Ramanujan's broadened outlook resulting from his stay in the
west perpetuated him to question the untold reverence shown to a king with
such a derogatory flaw in his nature. He recalls the myth as he waits for his
wife endlessly at the sea beach. The sight of a bright pomfret fish probably
reminds him of that fish of long ago which had swallowed Shakuntala's
ring:

\begin{quote}
as I wait for my wife and
watch
the traffic
in sea side market places
and catch
my breath at the flat-metal
beauty
of whole pomfret,
round staring eyes and
scales of
silver,
in the fisherman's pulsing
basket,
and will not ask, for I know
\end{quote}
I cannot, which, if any, in its dead white belly has an uncooked signet ring and a forest legend of wandering king and waiting innocent, complete with fawn under tree and inverse images in the water of a stream that runs as if it doesn't.  

Here we are inclined to agree with K. Venkata Reddy who remarks:

As a modern poet Ramanujan shows no blind reverence for old myths and tradition.  

At times the glory of the Hindu heritage is overtly contrasted against the inglorious Indian present; "Some Indian Uses of History on a Rainy Day" is one such example. It presents three distinct pictures-each revealing the wide gulf between the past and the present. The first picture is that of a rainy day in Madras in 1965, the clerks Jostle with the porters for a lone seat in a bus:

Madras, 1965, and rain.
Head clerks from city banks curse, batter, elbow in vain the patchwork gangs of coolies in their scramble for the single seat in the seventh bus:

Their Conversation revolves round king Harsha's reign when the emperor made thousands of monks stand in a row and distribute expensive gifts among them. They also mention the Chinese traveler Hiuentsang in the course of their talk. They get so carried away by their conversation that
they ultimately miss the eighth bus also, Then they have to depend only on their own two feet to carry them to their destination:
    they tell each other how
    old king Harsha's men
    beat soft gongs
    to stand a crowd of ten
    thousand monks
    in a queue, to give them
    and the single visiting
    Chinaman
    a hundred pieces of gold,
    a peare, and a length of cloth;
So, miss another bus, the eighth,
and begin to walk, for king Harsha's
monks had nothing but their own
two feet.²⁴

In the above line, we get a glimpse of the chaos and disorder, which has seeped into the once disciplined Indian Society.

The second picture provided by the poem is of well-dressed fashionable Indians standing awestruck before the wonders of Egypt. These wide-eyed Indians who are mesmerised by Egyptian antiquities are hardly well-versed in the glorious heritage of their own motherland. They are probably ignorant that the fine fabrics which are draping the mummies have actually been imported from India. Thus, there is a satirical description of the so called Indian tourists:-

    Full bright Indians; tiepins of ivory,
    Colour cameras for eyes, stand
    every July
    in Egypt among camels,
faces pressed against the past
as against museum glass,
tongue tasting dust,
amazed at pyramid full
of mummies swathed in millennia
of Calicut muslin.\textsuperscript{74-75}

The third section of the poem is a satirical vignette of an Indian professor of Sanskrit in Berlin in 1935. The professor is totally lost in an alien land. He struggles with the German language at every step and is at his wits' end trying to locate places and memories landmarks. Suddenly, the familiar sight of the "Swastika" symbol drawn on the arm of a stranger in a bus makes him feel at home. The "Swastika" interpreted at different levels by the Germans and the Indians ironically strikes a chord of familiarity. While the Hindus since the ancient times regard the "Swastika" as a good omen, the modern German holds an entirely different attitude towards it:

1935 Professor of Sanskrit
on cultural exchange
passing through; lost
in Berlin rain; reduced
to a literal, turbaned child
spelling German signs on door,
bus and shop,
trying to guess go from stop;
desperate
for a way of telling apart
a familiar street from a
strange
or east
from west at night,
the brown dog that barks
from the brown dog that
doesn't,
memorizing a foreign
paradigm
of lanterns, landmarks,
a gothic lotus on the iron
gate;
suddenly comes home
in English, gesture and
Sanskrit,
assimilating
the swastika
on the neighbour's arm
in that roaring bus
from a grey
nowhere to a green.\textsuperscript{75}

Although Ramanujan does not reject his cultural roots and Hindu
heritage, he is essentially a modernist. He has a clear vision and makes
good use of his analytical bent of mind. In 'Death and the Good Citizen', the
poet offers divergent solutions for the disposal of the human body after
death. From a modern and secular viewpoint of an environmentalist, the
human body originates from nature, is sustained by nature and after death
returns to nature. This return to nature is a fundamental principle of
conservation according to which everything in our environment should be
recycled. During one's life time the waste matter excreted by the body
should be used as fertilizers to improve the quality of plants:

I know you told me,
your night soil and all
your city's, goes still
warm every morning
in a government
lorry, drippy (you said)
but punctual by special
arrangement to the municipal,
gardens to make the grass
grow tall for the cows
in the village, the rhino
in the zoo: and the oranges
plump and glow, till
they are a preternatural orange.39

'Ecology' is another such poem where the poet cannot help expressing his indignation at the stubborn refusal to do away with age-old familiarities, even if they are flowering trees. The poet's mother, allergic to the pervading fragrance of the Champak flowers, found herself suffering from acute migraine year after year. But she would brook no talk of having those trees cut. She required the flowers for the performance of her daily ritualistic worship. Moreover, being steeped in superstition, she could not bear to dissociate herself from these champak trees, even if they caused her unbearable physical suffering. This was a recurrent phenomenon every year in the rainy season, which could be avoided, had logic and reasoning prevailed:

The day after the first rain,
for years, I would come home
in a rage,
for I could see from a mile away
our three Red Champak Trees
had done it again,
had burst into flower and
given Mother
her first blinding: migraine
of the season
with their street-long heavy-hung
yellow pollen fog of a fragrance
no wind could sift,
no door could shut out from
our black-pillared house.\textsuperscript{40}

In the poem 'The Guru', Ramanujan established himself as a modernist who is not afraid to raise his voice against the flaws and discrepancies in our societal structure. He makes no bones about his disdain for the self proclaimed godmen who undertake the responsibility of enlightening the ignorant people. While on one hand, the pseudo guru makes no mention of charity towards humanity in general, on the other, he is meticulous about his own comforts:

\begin{quote}
Forgive the weasel his tooth
Forgive the tiger his claw
but do not forgive the woman
her malice or the man his envy
said the guru, as he moved on
to ask me to clean his shoe,
bake his bread and wash his clothes.\textsuperscript{41}
\end{quote}

The Guru makes pretence of being kind and compassionate as he preaches to show concern for animals. But he is completely bereft of as Shakespeare Coined the phrase, "The milk of human Kindness".\textsuperscript{42}
"Give the dog his bone, the parrot
his seed, the pet snake his mouse
but do not give the woman her freedom
nor the man his mid-day meal till
he begs
said the guru, as he went on
do order his breakfast of eggs
and news
asking me to carry his chair to
the dais.\textsuperscript{43}

An analytical study of the poems of A.K. Ramanujan reveals the poet's strictly impartial mentality. His irreverent attitude to some of the traditional beliefs shows his ability to transcend the traditional outlook unflinchingly. Ramanujan is essentially a modern poet with a rationalist approach. He is rightly called the product of the education of enlightenment. To quote Taqi Ali Mirza:

R. Parthasarathy is closer to the mark when he says that Ramanujan's poetry is "the product of a specific culture" and that his real greatness lies in his ability to translate this experience" into the terms of another culture".\textsuperscript{44}

A.K. Ramanujan is not a traditional poet in the sense that he does not accept unquestioningly whatever cultural furniture has been handed down to him. At the same time, he does not aspire to be a modernist by rejecting his cultural roots. In his essay entitled "What is Indian in Indo-English poetry", Ezekiel highlights the blending of Indian and European Cultural elements in Ramanujan. Commenting on 'Conventions & Despair', he says that:
The poet tells us explicitly that he rejects the demand of the modern such as marrying again or becoming the outsider. 45

Thus, the poet realises that in no way can he snap his roots from his tradition and one of the ways of coming to term with the onslaught of modernity is to accept the philosophical concept of Karma, which is an inseparable part of the tradition bound Hindu religion. Ramanujan's poetry asserts his quest for interpreting the traditional from a modern perspective. In order to bring home the point that despite his repeated assertions of trying to "Seek".46

His particular hell47, only in the "Hindu wind".48 Ramanujan is essentially a modernist.

In the continuity of different poems, the one that appeals to the mind and heart of the general reader for the inner strife and inner turmoil if the poet about the cultural experiment apart from the burden of the tradition, is Still Another View of Grace filled with the Brahmatic order of thinking, there he presents the inner strife between two cultures: one that is innate and other that he borrows from the West:

The tension between two religions becomes more intensified when the poet remembers his Brahmin parentage and become nostalgic about the superiority of being a Brahmin: Bred Brahmin among singers of shivering hymns / I shudder to the bone of hungers that roam the street/ beyond the Constable's beat".49

Ramanujan as such Champions the cause of associating the multiplicity of religious and cultures. He hardly accepts the valieli of the established historical and anthropological facts; he scrutinizes them; and this kind of scrutiny becomes the approach of experiment in his poetry.
Ramanujan accepts the balanced approach in life. He is a man who has his head firmly fixed on his shoulders and does not allow emotions to predominate his intellect. He has accepted the presence of both the shaping forces in his cultural background. But has refused to identify himself completely with any and many of them. The overall impression after making a critical analytical study of his poems is that there are multidimensional threads in the poetry of A.K. Ramanujan:

The refusal to accept fully the traditional and conventional code of parental heritage he inherits from his Brahmanical order makes him a poet of integrity—an integrity that fills his poetry with an open ended ness and a higher poetic consciousness. As a modernist he works on contraries that make the poet distinguish between body and nature, nature and man, tradition and modernity, nature and culture and the individual and poetic selves.  

There are some inhibitive traits in his poetry too. These inhibitive traits make the poet undergo some psychological devices such as memories and nostalgia.

In fact, Ramanujan is such an artist who brings the total unity of all times and uses it as the total consciousness of human mind. He also uses freely Indian myths, symbols and images for creating a sense of super refined consciousness and the sense of experimentation in his poetry.
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