CHAPTER – 4

TEXTURE OF MEANING
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Ramanujan as a linguist uses the words which carry manifolds of meaning. The surfacial analysis of his poems provide the meaning of the words only while the substantial meaning of his poetry reveals a deeper vision which can be defined as the objective delineation of human emotions. Among Indian thinkers, Bharthari is the first thinker who works the linguistic interpretation of words (sabda sakti) in order to realize the effect of the poetic language in the composition of a poet. The grammarians generally defined "poetry as a unity (Sahitya) of sabda (expression) and artha (significance)".

The theories of Rasa and Dhvani without merging with each other hardly provide any essence of the emotive contents in the poetic composition. The problem of meaning came to the systematic solution only when Anandavardhana analysed them in his treatise Dhvanyaloka. It was only them that poetics in India came to be raised to the rank of Aesthetics. The poetic language is something different from the language of sastra (science). Naturally all the possible meanings in daily discourse and scientific writing viz, the informative/literal secondary /metaphoric and the affective/emotive, were not only included, but imaginatively coloured so as to become aesthetic in their illustrations of arthalankara(s). According to Anandavardhana:

Svabhavokti or sensitive description of nature as it is, can be termed alankara only by way of exception; and emotional states (cittavrtti(s)) become only when they are rasa, i.e. when they have undergone imaginative transfiguration.
In the poetry of A.K.Ramanujan, the power of the word can be analysed through the sabda-sakti if Indian poetics such as abhidha (primary power), Lakṣaṇa (indicatory power) and vyānjanā (suggestive power). Ramanujan's poems bear on the linguistic depth. His social vision can only be given the right texture of meaning, when it is to be decoded linguistically. For example, in his famous poem 'Two Styles in Love' the range of his imagination surpasses theory comprehension of the conventional meaning (abhidha) "Love you are green only to grow yellow". 3

The colour imagery bearing the witness of "green" and "yellow", becomes symbolic of two things: the beginning enthusiasm in love and its maturity to come to the fruition. Once again the yellow becomes suggestive of its repenting condition. The level of criticism should be imitative. The Indian poetics assigns some definitive roles for judging the work of art:

The artist is to be equipped to deal with all levels of people of pundita (the scholar) bhakta (the devotee), rasika (the critic), acarya (the teacher), and alpabuddhijana (The common man). It is important to remember that in the truly great Indian works of art there are no private symbols, personal idiosyncrasies and personal value patterns which the reader of beholder is called upon to decipher and since there are shared assumptions enjoyment of the work that is, to those who share the tradition, should be easier than in much in western art and literature. 4

The analysis of the poem "Two Styles in Love" brings the Eastern and the Western mode together.

It is only in the realm of imagination, that is, in fairy tales that the flames of love do not diminish. Thus he writes "in fairy tales, men manage
to love." In the second part of the same poem, the poet speaks of the growing fulfilment of love. In fact, the initial fervour of love is a foreshadow of the ripening maturity that is to come later. Unless the crop grows to its full ear it is not possible to reap in a rich harvest. Similarly, love can attain its fulfillment only with the passage of years.

Love, only green has a fall of
    yellow/hours.
Only growing has gold to reap.\(^6\)

The poet goes on to say that love is not what one reads about in fairy stories where after the bitter comes the sweet and the story concludes with the ringing of the wedding bells and the lovers living happily ever after.

Love is no hurry, love is no
    burning;
It is no fairy tale of bitter and
    Sweet.\(^7\)

Love is not a sudden upsurge of emotion. It is a gradual process taking time to blossom. Couples in love take time to shed off their inhibitions before entering into a physical relationship. They need to discover each other before discovering the realm of sensual pleasure. Thus, the poet writes:

No, no love is sudden,
    Coupling hands take time to
kill the frost
    Even leaping beast shall wait to be
hidden by Beauty.
    Come lightly, love, let us wait-
to be found, to be lost.\(^8\)

The poet makes use of colour symbolism in this poem. The colour green is used to denote youthful love while yellow signifies mature love.
Love, being a dominant emotion, the poet discusses all its aspects in great detail. In the poem entitled Love-‘2’: What He said groping'(dated1990), he talks of the pain of one-sided love. According to the poet, the condition of such a lover is very pathetic. It is similar to that of a man who loses his spectacles in a crowded village fair and does not know the local dialect. His condition is as traumatic as of him who wakes up one fine morning and finds that he is bereft of his fingers. He appears to be drugged and for him the world moves at a very slow pace.

Loving some
not in love
is to lose one’s glasses
underfoot without a language
in a village
fair, to wake up without
fingers,
to drug the heart
and slow down a world.⁹

It is true that most of Ramanujan's poems are based on imagery drawn from real life. However, along with this pre- eminent streak of realism, the philosophical element is also quite obvious in Ramanujan's poetry. Very often, he talks of issues pertaining to the higher level of consciousness in a matter of fact tone.

In the poem "Blind Spots", the poet talks of the limitations of our sensory organs. Eyes, ears, hands and noses can perform wonderful functions but cannot go beyond a certain limit. Eyes for example, can follow the flight of a bird as long as it remains within the periphery of one's vision. One loses track of the soaring bird when it flies out of sight.

Eyes cannot follow
a bird
over the hill.\textsuperscript{10}

Like the visual, the power of the auditory too is restricted. One can trace the origin of mundane sounds but not the ones nature chooses not to reveal. The sounds produced by the blowing of a whistle or the turning of a wheel are easily heard but not the rustling of grass.

Ears hear a whistle,
a wheel,
but not the grass.\textsuperscript{11}

Similarly, hands can reach after a worldly thing but not the unworldly. The tactile can feel the tangible but not the abstract. Hands can feel the touch of the body but not the unspoken thoughts of the mind. Hands can ruffle through curly hair but cannot tread on what goes on in the minds of the lovers.

but not a thought
in the air
read between lovers.\textsuperscript{12}

The nose is quick to detect any kind of smell, be it the fragrance of flowers or the pungent odour of some thing burnt. But it lacks the power to detect fear.

Noses know when anything burns
anywhere but cannot
learn the smell of fear.\textsuperscript{13}

In a aforementioned poem, the poet draws the reader's attention to the fact that the power of the sense organs is not unlimited. They are unable to function beyond a certain extent. They are not able to unravel all the secrets of nature.

Feeling anxious has almost become a second nature of the modern man. One can hardly free oneself from the grip of worry and tension. The stress of living has crept into the works of most of the present day writers
and Ramanujan too is not left untouched. Though primarily a detached observer, he is aware of the nature of anxiety. Thus, in the poem 'Anxiety', the poet denotes the various characteristics of mental tension.

Anxiety does not follow a single track. It spreads its tentacles far and wide. It is more troublesome than fear. One is afraid of something in particular but one may be anxious about many things. Unlike fear which proceeds in one direction only, anxiety can spread in various directions.

Not branchless as the fear tree,
   it has naked roots and secret twigs.\(^{14}\)

Comparing and contrasting it with hope, the poet says that unlike hope, anxiety does not have a definite shape. Anxiety can take different turns at various stages. It encompasses many complexities within its manifold. The difficulties arising out of anxiety surmount as a complicated whole. Thus, the poet says.

Not geometric as the parabolas
   of hope, it has loose ends
   with a knot at the top
   that's me.\(^{15}\)

Anxiety has a blurred visage. Wriggling like a snake it clouds the surface of the mind, obstructing the free flow of thoughts.

Not wakeful in its white snake
glassy ways like the eloping
gaiety of waters,
it drowses, viscous and fibred and
as pitch.\(^{16}\)

Finally, after having explained the nature of anxiety through various implied comparisons, the poet concludes that "anxiety can find no metaphor to end it."\(^{17}\)
Linguistically, the potency of words signifies not only the conventional meaning, but it also brings into being indicative and suggestive meanings. Bharthari, the best exponent of revealing the powers of the words, has propounded the theory of "sphota" ("burst"). It is primary a concept of semantic and at the same semiotic theory, According to this theory, the meaning, in poetry is revealed in a flash by the whole and the indivisible aspects of speech. This is an aspect which shows the Characteristics of syllables and sounds;

Since words can have meaning only in the context of a sentence, the sphota of the sentence as a whole should be regarded as the revealer of meaning. This involves recognition of the revealing potency in the whole sphota-aspect of words and sentences..... The revealer of meaning is thus the semantic aspect of sabda and the revealer of this in turn is its own linguistic aspect.  

If some one analyses the poems of Ramanujan only on the basis their conventional meaning they cannot bring forth the real and suggestive meanings of his poetic contents. Fear and anxiety are the two terms which are enter related with the contextual and situational realities for example:

For you, fear
is terror
wound museums
of Hiroshima
the smell
of cooking
in Dacca sewers,
Madame Nhu's
Buddhist barbecues;
That well-known child

91
is napalm flames
with x-ray bones
running-running
a stationery march
in the rods
and cones
of everyone's
Reuter eyes.¹⁹

The images 'Wound Museums of Hiroshima', "The Smell of Cooking", "Buddhist Barbecues", "Napalm Flames", "X-Ray Bones", and "Reuter Eyes" are semantic and semiotic both. The word power used in these images brings forth the denotative and suggestive meaning together. Apart from the linguistic improvisation these images also reflect the situational and the contextual referents and these referents become suggestive for showing the barbarism of man against man. They leave a special message to be followed in times to come.

The seems to suggest the utility of life in comparison of death. In his poem "Obituary" the poet speaks of his father's death and his narrative becomes fully Indian. For example:

Father when he passed on,
left dust
on a table full of papers
left debts and daughters,
a bed wetting grandson
named by the toss
of a coin after him

...............  
And he left us
a changed mother
and more than
one annual ritual²⁰

The phrases "a changed mother" and "one annual ritual", are ironic and sarcastic which at same time suggest the realistic tone of the poet. Similarly the poet mocks at history and traditional rituals too. He makes fun of history in "Some Indian Uses of History on a Rainy Day". He portrays the picture of a Sanskrit Professor, lost in Berlin.

In "Entries for a Catalogue of Fears"; the poet discusses the paradoxical emotions of hope and fear. He feels that there cannot exist a clear demarcation between hope and fear. The face of a person overlooking a house which is in flames reflects both fear and hope. Realising the desperate situation he or she is trapped in, the person is frightened out of his or her wits. At the same time, as long as there is even a slim chance of escape, the person clutches on to the last straw of hope. Thus, the face betrays both hope and fear. Dwelling on the inherent differences between fear and hope, the poet realises that fear is a more well defined concept when compared to hope. According to him, fear is "born blind". In other words, it cannot always rationalise.

However, its other sense organs are extremely alert. These organs almost make up for its loss of sight. Fear is firmly rooted in its place and does not have to fumble in the dark. So, he writes:

Though I cannot always tell a fear
from a hope or a hope from a face
in the window
of a house on fire,
I know
fears are more precise
than any hope.
Born blind, a whole skin listening and a seeing ear,
they do not have to grope.\textsuperscript{21}

The poet goes on to describe various kinds of fears-the fear of sinking into depths or falling from a height or other mundane but varied fears:

\begin{quote}
Add now, at thirty nine, to the old
old fear
of depths and heights.\textsuperscript{22}
\end{quote}

Pain is another subject that has been touched by Ramanujan in his poetry. He talks of both physical and mental pain. Both can be acute and equally traumatic in nature.

In the poem entitled "Pain", the poet discusses at great length an acute ankle pain. The pain is so severe that even nerves throb continually;

\begin{quote}
Pains in my ankle flicker, nerve ends glower and dim like cigarette ends in a chain smoker's mouth night and day. \textsuperscript{23}
\end{quote}

Doctors prescribe an elaborate process of treatment and the patient is compelled to undergo a series of medical tests but to no avail. The poet persona makes use of unusual imagery like that of police files and age old fossils in order to bring home the point that the foot had been scrutinised carefully and thoroughly. Samples of his blood were examined and the X-ray of the foot was projected on the "Computer Screen". Not only this but various doctors came to study the afflicted foot but were unable to detect the problem, let alone cure it:

\begin{quote}
Doctors X-ray the foot, front face
and back
left profile and right as if for a
police,
file; unearth shadow fossils of
neanderthals
buried in this contemporary foot;
\end{quote}
the draw three test tubes of blood
as I turn
my face away,
..............

Men and women of different races
and sizes in white smocks look
at the dots
and shake their heads.24

The persona of the poem continues to suffer from pain. At frequent
intervals, a burning coal is pressed against his ankle to locate a crucial
nerve:

   The pain in the ankle glowers on a red-hot
   coal pressed now and then against a
   nerve
   nobody can find.25

At one point, the pain becomes so unbearable that he implores upon
the supernatural to relieve him from suffering. He begs the omnipotent God
to come to his aid. He also believes that a mother even without a formal
degree in medicine, has the capacity to alleviate the pain which the learned
doctors have been unable to do:

   O God of know ledge, busy wizard,
of diagnosis, father of needles, dials,
and test tubes, send your old companion
here,
that mother of mothers, goddess though
of ignorance,
send her soon so she can kill away
my pain
as she has always done.26
In the poem "Pain": trying to find a metaphor, the poet talks of the agony resulting from acid rain. The term 'acid rain' refers to rain containing acid formed from industrial waste in the atmosphere. This result in the formation of cysts and blisters on the skin which is very painful. The poet writes:

I never knew I could bear pain.
But then I never knew about acid rain. A nerve in the vice of a cyst in the bone, a growth like a bonsai tree spreading like smoke in the mist of an X-ray,
Vague as a face in a corridor on fire.  

Apart from bodily pain, Ramanujan also talks of the trauma of emotional pain. "Pain' is a very short poem on the subject. According to Ramanujan, when one voices one's pain one gets sympathy from others. One often ridicules ones sorrow and is unlike poets who give vent to their grief in the form of a poem. The poem runs as follows:

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.  

Here, Ramanujan speaks that pain in a down to earth manner. There is no tendency to wallow in self pity or glorify grief, nor does he sport an escapist's attitude. On the one hand, he does not brood over melancholy while on the other, he does not philosophise on pain as a distant emotion
touching others but not himself. He accepts pain both physical and mental, as an indispensable part of life.

Closely related to pain is entitled "Despair". It is a short poem where in the poet, very summarily, puts down his concept of despair. According to him, despair is a common phenomenon engulfing all living creatures. Even trees are not spared.

It is akin to an illness. However people should not plunge deep in it or worry about it affects all and sundry. One should learn to take it in one's stride:

Just comb your hair
You shouldn't worry about Despair.
Despair is a strange disease.
I think it happens even to trees.\textsuperscript{29}

In his attempt to write poems on abstract themes as well as on the material, Ramanujan does not forget to write on desires. In the poem "One, Two, May be. Three, Arguments against suicide", he vehemently discourages the act of committing Suicide. In the last part of the same poem, he comments:

Desire, bodiless, is endless.\textsuperscript{30}

Here, through the image of sensuality, the poet talks of desires in a broad spectrum. There is absolutely no end to desire. While speaking of the carnal instincts in man, he refers to the scriptures of Hindu mythology. The Holy books advise one to keep all physical desires firmly under leash:

Remember what the wise callous
hindu
Said when the love god burned:
Keep your cool,
make for love's sake no noble gesture.\textsuperscript{31}
Thus, in order to maintain the sanctity of love, one should be careful not to be swept off by the tide of passion.

That Ramanujan is a poet who likes to call a spade a spade is evident from the fact that many of his poems are based on realistic observations. In the poem, "After Meeting a Celebrity" the poet talks of the fuss made over the visit of a celebrity figure. One may experience immense excitement at this but it is not of any consequence to the celebrity. It is hardly possible for a dignitary to retain a particular meeting in his memory. It is a red lettered day for the one meeting the famous personality and not vice versa:

    I will pass from his mind
    as image from a mirror.
    Then why was I so clever?32

Hypocrisy or pretension is dealt by Ramanujan very succinctly in a short poem entitled "Lies". A new born baby is associated with tender beauty but this is far from the truth. In fact, a baby just born, before being washed, presents a repulsive sight. But people praise it as a picture of loveliness:

    The new born was ugly, moist
    hairy all over like a wet rat:
    every visitor said
    she was a beauty,
    had her mother's eyes.33

In the next continuity of the texture of meaning in the poetry of A.K. Ramanujan there comes the theory of time and space. The theory of time and space becomes a tool with him for internationalizing the process of culture and certain other anthropological issues. Through his memories, he combines the East and the West for the philosophic dimension of culture. Plato in his Republic and Laws asserts human freedom but he also remarks that man is the play thing of God.
Virgil the Roman poet supports the Homeric doctrine of man's destiny. Even Gods are subjected to the decrees of fate. Spinoza is a stout champion of fate. Hobbes, Locke and Hume also supports the contention of Spinoza and Liebinitz.  

The concept of fate is indirectly related with the concept of time and space. This is due to the fact that playing on memories revives the bhutkala (time past) and that is linked with time present. Even the puranas, the concept fate as Kala (time) is repeatedly stressed.

The Epics and the Puranas exact Kala (time), as the ultimate cause of universe. Brahma is also consumed by Kala(time). The Puranas and the Epics conceive Kala as Daiva or fate. Fate leads the willing but compels or literally drags the unwilling. Fate has been treated as a powerful force in the texts of the western religion and philosophy also.  

The textural pattern in the composition of A.K.Ramanujan can be understood only when one understands his method of composition. The poem *Turning Around* an inclusion in *The Black Hen* in *Collected Poems*, becomes a wonderful example for sealing the long passage of time. The flock of sheep inside it are the real sheep in Pahalgaum, Kashmir, in 1972. The collection of the sheep under a tree conjoins their before taken to the slaughter house. Their prescient sense of doom and their recognition of immanent extinction form a sort of impenetrable heavy air around them like a mountain mist. "The sheep could easily have been people. The haunting moment was palpable." The same sheep visits his mind after nineteen years and he puts up the question thus:
But what am I to this herd
of Indian sheep to be fed
and sheared or
Slaughtered, or to this man
who she shares a throaty cry
with his father.
and his father's father,
his cousins and enemies
for miles around?37

As in "Invisible Bodies" one notices that the displaced man, the visitor, a seer of the other's life a person apart, finds himself among disparate images, and sees connections. As poet, he can connect by making metaphoric or metonymic leaps. This is a self-sustaining act. It needs no fuel, but it fuels the creativity of the poet. In an interview with A.L. Becker and Keith Taylor, Ramanujan accepts the following facts related to his vision of time, space and memories. He has shown his interest in folktales, because the folk motifs combine all the three objects into one:

That was my other interest in the folktales. I feel that they were told early enough to children to be important. There are three things in which I'm constantly interested—the aesthetics, the past and the world view. All three of them are important in these tales, even more in these tales than in the mythologies. In the mythologies one hears the official views.38

In the entire gamut of the texture of meanings in the poetry of Ramanujan there arises constantly the question of aesthetic experience.

The reason of this question is that writing and speaking are merely external acts which go side by side with enjoying aesthetic experience. Aesthetic bliss is primarily concerned with the internal emotions of the poet
or the Sahrdaya, and therefore, the act of writing or speaking does not hamper the emotions converting into rasa. If Indian Poetics places the poet and the Sahrdaya both on the same footing it because it acknowledges the fact that "the aesthetic experience is common to both, but while the poet is endowed with the divine power of expressing his emotions verbally or in writing the Sahrdaya lacks in endowed with this faculty any Sahrdaya can earn the title of the poet."  

The poet's aesthetic experience may be seriously affected by his concern to choose proper words. But this does not apply to the accomplished poets, because they are never wanting in choice expressions, as there are at their finger-ends and come in quick succession. And in the case of other poets, their aesthetic experience is no doubt interrupted for that duration when in their quest of suitable expressions they have to wait for a while. But this interruption is just like that of a reader when he does not understand a passage in a poem, or like that of a spectator when he fails to apprehend or appreciate a scene in a drama or poetry. Yet it is quite clear that before and after this situation a poet continues to experience "स्नान्युपाति" (aesthetic delight as other sahrdayas do).

The sahrdaya can understand the objective co relationship of different ideas in the poetry of A.K.Ramanujan. His famous poem "Elements of Composition" brings the facts of cyclic time, time and the displacement of being from his root. Acknowledging his composition with "father's seed and mother's egg" the poet becomes a serious reporter about the other facts of life. The clock time goes into memory and the poet becomes nostalgic; he comes to India as a boy form America through imagination and reports:

   a woman's picture in their wallets;
   and the lappers of Madurai
   male, female, married
with children
lion faces, crabs for claws,
clotted on their shadows
under the stone eyed.⁴⁰

The images such as the "children with lion-faces", who wait for another comparison "crabs for claws". The "crab" as an insect of multiple cells is being compared the low mimetic condition of children at Madurai. The cognized mode of the poet at an early age gets an objective correlation ship with his perception at America, and he thus invites a similarity between the child at Madurai and the sea insect with its multiple cells. These images become wonderful examples of Vakrokti (an oblique expression). They have been shown as the "stone-eyed." creatures, knowing no way to their future action. Again, the scene from Madurai shifts to America and the theoretically, the poet links his own fate-the fate that finally determines his own existence.

The arousal of rasa with its sthayins occurs with the dominance of the scenes and situation in which a man lives. There must be some Laukika Karnas (worldly emotional reasons) for its arousal:

In every day life these emotions are evoked by (i) causes (Karnas) such as surroundings, the object of emotion, (ii) effects (Karya) such as physical reactions brought forth by emotions and (iii) accompanying mental states (sancaribhavas). In literature, the same causes, effects and subordinate mental states are called vibhavas, anubhavas and vyabhicaribhavas respectively. And when an emotion is evoked by the representation of these vibhavas and so forth, it is called rasa.⁴¹
Constantly brooding over the childhood happenings, the range of emotions in the mind of the poet surpasses the mental states of other and he finally merges his own carings related to his existence while staying in America. The last lines of the "Elements of Composition" become symbolic and suggestive of the inner most pangs of the poet:

and even as I add,
I lose, decompose
into my elements,
into other names and forms
past and passing, tenses
without –time
Caterpillar on a leaf, eating
being eaten.\textsuperscript{42}

The images of "Caterpillar" and the process of "decomposition" bring yet the post structural viewpoints of the poet.

He has got the process of decomposition. But the question arises what kind of decomposition is this the poet speaks of. It is certainly the decomposition of the colonial postcolonial perceptions he witnesses them during his stay at America. The poem, "The Black Hen" brings the same psychological process into being obliquely:

It must come as leaves
to a tree
or not at all
yet it comes sometimes
as the black hen
with red round eye
on the embroidery
stitch by stitch
dropped and found again
and when it's all there
the black hen stares
with its round red eye
and you are afraid.\textsuperscript{43}

In \textit{Indian Poetics} the theory of \textit{Vakrokti} defines the usage of such words which depict the situational and the contextual reality:

Kuntaka vehemently opposed the naming of different \textit{ritis}
on the basis of geographical localities, saying that ritis were not peculiarities of any region like marriage between cousins. He was also opposed to considering certain ritis as inherently superior and certain as inferior. If any riti were inferiors, why deal with it at all in a criticism of poetry.

Riti too is born of \textit{kavyavyāpara} and a particular riti could be more appropriate to a given situation than other.\textsuperscript{44}

Strictly according to this definition the metaphor of "Black Hen" justifies the title of the poem. The poet brings forth the colonial reaction living in a European country. The existence of a man is not better than the black hen.

In 'This Pair', the poet compares and contrasts two couples- one with child and the other without a child. The pair without children presents a picture of elegance and sophistication while the other couple looks care worn and poorly dressed:

The envy of the elegant,
Childless couple, and the virgin aunt,
this fertile shabby pair
faintly smell of already unwashed hair,
worry about cash
and that powder they use for diaper rash
on certain fundamental places.\textsuperscript{45}

The proud parents are envied by the 'Childless Couple' and the spinster aunt. But along with the blessing of the child, they also woo other problems, the foremost among them being the cost of upbringing a child. They are also constantly concerned about the well being of the child and in the process neglect themselves. Nevertheless, they have willingly decided to brave all odds for the sake of a child who is delivered and made presentable by the deft hands of a doctor:

\begin{enumerate}
\item they seem to have traded,
\item without any discount, for that thing
\item hardly kneaded
\item into human shape by some obstetric
\item stranger.\textsuperscript{46}
\end{enumerate}

By making use of a common place image, Ramanujan talks about the serious and the deep. In the first stanza of the poem. 'Shadows', he says that a shadow is cast when one walks in the sunlight. Shadows cannot be formed unless something poses an obstruction in the way of light. While light is a pre-requisite for the formation of shadows, doubts take birth in darkness. Doubts have a tendency to grow fast and no sooner do the seeds of doubt begin to take root than the complete mind is caught in the web of uncertainty. Just as the vines extend their trailing creepers over the entire window, the branches of doubt spread out clouding the vision of the mind. So, the poet writes:

\begin{verbatim}
Shadows fall between people
When they walk in the Sun.
Doubts grow in the Sun
and by dawn the window
is tangled in vines.\textsuperscript{47}
\end{verbatim}
In the next stanza of the same poem, the poet draws one's attention to the fact that the inevitable cannot be stopped. Traditionally, the scaffolding was a platform used for the execution of a criminal. Using the twin images of a scaffolding and a tall tower, he says that one is swallowed by death when one runs out of time on earth. Similarly, with the passage of time, moss grows on the barks of trees and with the advent of old age, wrinkles appear on the face. In the same way, it is not possible to stop men from accidentally treading on land mines leading to an explosion and consequently death:

Scaffolding grid the steeple  
when time's work is done.  
Moss grows on the bark  
of the Oak, wrinkles on a brow,  
as men explode stepping on mines.\textsuperscript{48}

The poet proceeds to present a picture of familiar rituals in India. Tree worship is widely prevalent in India since time immemorial. It is not a rare sight to see devout women binding the peepul tree with sacred thread and then moving round it in a circular motion, earnestly praying for a son. The poet does not forget to mention the plight of daughters too. The freedom of the daughters is greatly curbed by the restrictions imposed on them. Their condition is compared to the trees thirsting for rains:

Women circumambulate the peepul  
tree hoping for a Son.  
Daughters breed in stark  
family dungeons like slow.  
perennials waiting for the rain.\textsuperscript{49}

In the last stanza, the poet describes the glorious return to soldiers who return triumphant from a war. Their victory in the battle compensates for their obnoxious behaviour back home:
War heroes return in special trains
Covered with blood and flags. They blow
bugles at home, brawl in pubs,
and bark
Orders at dogs, kill and flay twenty-one
nurses and hang one from a maple.50

'Traces' is a poem dealing with terrestrial and extra-terrestrial elements. The poet reflects on the stars, oceans and the imprints of time. In the opening stanza of the poem, he says that the planets have their own galaxies which are merely interpreted as groups of stars. It is only the earth's own constellation of stars that is known as the Milky Way Galaxy. The poet refers to the widely prevalent belief of man's fate being controlled by the positions of planets and stars. Astrologically, the seven stars in the sky are interpreted as seven saints overlooking mankind from above:

The stars are constellations
only to an eye light years away.
They do not even belong
to the same time or galaxy
except on the earth.
that reads its fate in the Seven
Sages and the Milky Way.51

The poet goes on to describe the immense role played by oceans. These large water bodies surround the earth giving rise to continents, beaches and harbours. The lure people to come and shake off their fatigue and rejuvenate themselves. They provide a pathway for ships to sail across it. Submarines traverse through oceans in order to explore the under-water kingdom. An ocean provides home to countless sea animals including whales sharks and dolphins.
The moon causes high and low tides on the bed of the ocean. The poet not only talks of the geographical and scientific benefits of the ocean but many books have also been based on the ocean. The story of "The Tempest" thrived on a deserted island by the side of an ocean while Moby Dick was the name of a blue whale who lived in the ocean. Similarly, 'Robinson Crusoe' tells about the adventures of a sailor who found himself stranded on a lonely island by the sea.

Oceans swirl around earthlings
giving them shores, beaches, marinas,
vacations, continents, harbours,
ships and submarines, under sea
kingdoms, whale song, moon tides,
The Tempest, Moby Dick,
and Robinson Crusoe.\textsuperscript{52}

In the last stanza, the poet talks of the miscellaneous things carefully preserved in the bosom of the earth since the beginning of time. These objects may be as widely divergent as the imprint of a seed, a shell, a leaf suppressed beneath the layers of clay, or the bones and skulls of animals. They have been patiently waiting for ages to be discovered and studied in order to add a page in the history of mankind:

The earth itself has layers of time, Shelves of fossils that carry traces of anything that will leave a trace, like seed, shell, a leaf pressed on clay, wing bone and cowskull, waiting for people to decipher and give themselves a past and a family tree.\textsuperscript{53}

Most of Ramanujan's poems are based on recollections of the past. However, he is unique in his treatment of memory. Usually, poets have assigned a place of honour to memory and endowed it with a generous measure of sentimentality. But Ramanujan seems to be an exception.
According to him, memory acts as the store house of the mundane things of life. He can vividly recall the nursery rhymes learnt in infancy, the historical details crammed in school, the 'Cosmetic' uses of metals or the dress code popular during the time of Shakespeare:

Ask me:
nursery rhymes
On Tipu Sultan or Jack and Jill
the cosmetic use of gold when
the Guptas ruled:
an item of Costume in
Shakespearean times.\textsuperscript{54}

But the poet does not regard memory as a source of sustenance. He can only recall some common place incident or the facts that he had memorized but his memory does not aid him in remembering faces or conversation:-

But not
For all my blood-beat
nor the drill of that wood pecker beak
my will,
Can I hold or keep
one face
and those words random thrown
in a tumble of your multiple faces
as
they turn in this day's dazzle
this sun struck house of mirrors.\textsuperscript{55}

Ever since the dawn of civilization, man has always been fascinated by the phenomena of life and death. They have always been regarded as thought provoking issues. Poets, being more sensitive than the ordinary
layman, have reflected deeply on the concepts of life and death. They have always appealed to the modern sensibility and Ramanujan being a present day poet is no exception.

In the poem 'Birthdays', he dwells deeply on life and death. Since they are inevitable parts of existence, birthdays and death anniversaries come at regular intervals. Just as birthdays of the younger relatives are celebrated with zeal and fervour; similarly, death anniversaries are also remembered with equal reverence:

Birthdays come and go
for brother son, daughter,
Spouse, niece and nephew,
and among them, mine and as I grow older, they come as often as death anniversaries in all the families
I know
and they linger under tamarind trees like other absences.56

Not only are birthdays remembered in case of human beings but even institutions and museums have their specific foundation day celebrations. Not only this, but the age of a tree too can be calculated and with each passing year, it grows older:

Even universities,
art museums, apple trees
that recycle the seasons,
and inventions like guns
have their birthdays
like St. Francis, Shakespeare,
Gandhi and Washington marked on Calendars.57
The great men have their birthdays marked as red lettered days on calendars but it is not to say that the common man has no knowledge of his birthday.

Even the date for a particular invention is commemorated. Then the poet proceeds to distinguish between 'birth pangs' and 'death throes'. Like birth, death is not necessarily a long and complicated process. Birth of an individual is singular in nature while death of any living creature, say, a pregnant mother (human or animal) implies more than one death:

Birth takes along time
though death can be sudden,
and multiple, like pregnant deer
shot down on the run.\textsuperscript{58}

There are other differences too. In case of birth, preparation begins months before hand. As the foetus gradually grows in the mother's womb, it begins to kick the walls of the stomach. But death does not announce its arrival: One caught in the jaws of death makes no wilful exercise of one's limbs:

Yet one would like to think,
one kicks and grabs the air
in death throes as a baby
does in its mother's womb
months before the event.\textsuperscript{59}

There are many other dis-similarities between birth and death. While birth calls for celebration, death is an occasion for mourning: Birth is associated with creation while death denotes dispersal of elemental energies:

Birth seems quite special
every time a mayfly is born
into the many miracles
of day, night and twilight,
but death? is it a dispersal
of gathered energies
back into their elements,
earth, air, water, and fire,
a reworking into other moulds,
grass, worm, bacterial glow
lights, and mother-matter
for other off-spring with names
and forms clocked into seasons?\textsuperscript{60}

The poet interprets the human body not last forever. It will be subject to death and decay. As it draws its last breath, the limbs loosen their hold and the body loses its warmth. The dead body left for a long time shrivels and shrinks in size baring its teeth.

Will one day be short of breath,
lose its thrust,
turn cold, dehydrate and leave
a jawbone with half a grin
near a pond.\textsuperscript{61}

Like one well versed in philosophy the poet contemplates on the final out come of the physical body, be it of man or an animal. Death is the ultimate goal of the body and no one can escape the jaws of death. The poet goes on to describe the procedure followed after death. The corpse is either buried or cremated and the ash thrown in rivers and seas:

Every one in this street
will become cold, lie under stones
or be scattered as ash
in rivers and oceans.\textsuperscript{62}
Poets and philosophers down the ages have always been attracted towards the changing nature of time and Ramanujan possessing a philosophical bent of mind naturally glides into this category. In the poem titled 'Sonnet', he realises the continuous influx of time:

Time moves in and out of me
a stream of sound, a breeze
an electric current that seeks
the ground, liquids that transpire
through my veins, stems and leaves
toward the skies to make fog and mist
around the trees. Mornings brown
into evenings before I turn around
in the day.\textsuperscript{63}

In the mentioned poem, not only time, but also everything in nature seems to be in a state of constant motion. Nothing is really static.

Closely related to the same theme is the poem entitled 'Fog'. Here, the poet not only draws the reader's attention to the nature of time but he also emphasises on the inherent urge for change. Using animal imagery, the poet says that oxen are made to move in a circular motion in the process of extracting mustard oil. The fact underlined here is the continued movement and the change in position:

Stuck in the need to move on,
eyes turn round and round
oxen at the oil press.\textsuperscript{64}

Change is an eternal Law of Nature. The human body too is subject to the swaying nature of change. The poet then refers to the complete metamorphosis of the repulsive caterpillar to a lovely butterfly. The caterpillar will die in its drowsy stupor unless the pupa metamorphosis into
butterfly. Thus, the poet through varied examples lays stress on the permanent nature of change:

Waiting for change, the body
Changes, a Chrysalis
that will rot unless it breaks
into wings.\(^{65}\)

Ramanujan's Contemplating abilities enable him to reflect deeply on a wide range of issues. Having written on varied aspects related to humanity, he turns his attention to the animals. He comes to the conclusion that these supposedly inferior creatures actually lead a better existence in some respects than their so called superiors, that is, human beings. First and foremost, animals definitely enjoy greater peace of mind for their lives are not beset with unnecessary tension. The ravages wrought upon by war have no effect on, say, cats but the same cannot be said of people. Then, animals are free from the bond of relationships and their obvious obligations. A dog is not bothered about the well being of its siblings. Unlike human beings, animals are not agonized by the illnesses of their relations. Another enviable quality that the animals are blessed with is the absence of expectations. An animal is not expected to play the role of a bread winner. They are not possessive like men. Hence, they are not traumatised by any breach of trust. Finally, unlike the conscientious human race, animals do not have to live with the stigma of a guilty conscience. While a man is chastised from within for behaving in a dishonorable way, animals are not hounded by a bogeyman inside. In short, the poet feels that since animals do not have to abide by a set code of conduct, they lead a happier existence. In his own words:

Animals bring us tranquility. Cats
sleep through a war. Dogs ignore
your sister's
Cancer, forgive betrayals and rations,
while all morning a man cannot
bear his own
betrayal after sleeping with two women.
But a dog will not mount one bitch
after
another nor want to kill himself
for being a cad.\textsuperscript{66}

According to Indian Poetics the art of poetry is the translation of poet's experience. With the help of enchanting phrases and with the help of proper adjustment between sound and sense the poets "transplant his experience into the mind of the refined appreciator. Thus, poetry emanating from the mind of the poet is transplanted further into the mind of the connoisseurs and consequently it owes its existence both to the poet and to the connoisseur"\textsuperscript{67} the concept of poetry thus differs from person to person. It also differs from age to age. Ramanujan writes in the later twentieth century, he therefore uses such devise in his poetic craft as to reflect more and more the contemporary sensibility.
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