

Chapter III

Memory: its Literary Manifestation

Ramanujan deals with memories and specially the concept of memory. Of all the memories, the ones that are anchored to his familial personal past make his poetry very fragrant with the characteristic native element or the Indian experience. Ramanujan's poetry is basically the poetry of subjective experience which draws from memories and impressions of a familial past. Ramanujan's obsession with his past and with his roots makes him rely heavily upon memory as theme, and his strategy as well. Memories of aunts, sisters, great grand-mother, grand-father and a host of relatives, mother in particular, and of a world of childhood and boyhood in a traditional South Indian Brahmin family form the key characteristics of his poetry. The traditional Hindu attitude to family relationships and joint family further form the basis of his poetic credentials.

Ramanujan's poetry is largely reminiscent and retrospective. He keeps looking backwards to his past life. His poetry is mainly based on the events that occurred in his family, based on the emotion recollected in tranquillity. Of course, we cannot assert that all his poems are nostalgic, because the word "nostalgic" implies a certain degree of wistfulness or a longing for the past experiences to return. Not all the poems, in which the poet gives us his recollections of the past, are nostalgic because some of his past experiences are depressing and he would not like to undergo those experiences once again though he does, in a sense, relive those experiences by recollecting them and depicting them most clearly in his poems.

Ramanujan's poetry is very redolent with the characteristic native element of the Indian experience. Infact, his alienation finds a consolatory transformation in his vivid, subtle and innumerable remembrances. All his poetic collections are full of poems inspired by the remote personal past, reminding the poet of umpteen incidents, relations, situations and experiences

that are ineluctably associated with his family in relation to his own self. A.N. Dwivedi believes:

the most delicate and luminous of the poems are those which picture experience of India, and in particular his family life--Ramanujan is particularly striking when he portrays typical Hindu Conventions and consciousness (242).

K. Raghavendra Rao points out five types of alienation in Ramanujan:

Fundamentally a Brahmin, he feels increasingly separated from an emerging secular, modern society (ii) he faces linguistic alienation (iii) he is formally trained in a non-literary culture but now pushed into the literary realm (iv) his stay in the States has caused a physical alienation (v) and, perhaps, there is the universal sense of alienation that sensitive persons experience in a world in which human relationships are falling apart.

Raghavendra Rao says,

Experience is transformed into the remote, the unrecognizable, the sacred and the mystic. It is a strategy to escape from the conditions of the humdrum and the mundane. In other words, it is a frame of mind and the operational strategy which transforms the remote into the immediate. It tries to turn the exotic into the ordinary and thus make the ordinary the exotic. As a consequence, a poetry of this kind must, of necessity, thrive on memory, remembered life... the key element in this operation is carefully preserved memory... of ..' the tiny cones on slow noon roads', of an aunt, sister, and infact, the entire world of childhood and adolescence evoked with a hunting sense of loss (124).

These memories of the poet's typical Indian past bestow the description and the imagery that may be identified as Indianness. They are preserved photographically with their fine and vivid detail, as in "Still Another for Mother"

something opened
 in the past and I heard something shut
 in the future, quietly,
 like the heavy door
 of my mother's black-pillared,
 nineteenth century
 silent house, given on her marriage day
 to my father, for a dowry. (*CP* 16)

Ramanujan thus turns simple and common place stuff into poetry. Simple things such as ordinary bugs, the sandwich with a mark of a woman's bite and the rikshawalla's tattoo are the subject matter of his poetry (Amanuddin 119).

Satanarayana Singh says:

The eye for "the particular physiognomy of the subject and an insight into the characteristic quality informing it", are also among the striking contents of his poetry. However, Satanarayana Singh becoming unhappy complains that "the imagery is fanciful", "the idea is puerile". Further, "Ramanujan's poems perfect as some of them are in image, craft and in their superb sense of language and rhythm- suffer from thinness of thought-content and exclude a large area of human experience"(166).

The poem "Still Another View for Mother" mixes memory and desire, past and present, in an effective manner. It begins with a consideration of 'that woman/beside the wreckage an/on Hyde park speed who does not allow them rest by constantly fighting with her husband, and who looks like 'some friends mother', and ends with the sudden memory of the poet's mother and her black-pillared, nineteenth century silent house given on their marriage day to his father for a dowry.

"Looking for a cousin on a Swing" is a short lyric of barely twenty-three lines, and is fairly, notable for its simple diction. In the poem the poet

tells us about the strange sensation felt by a premature girl of four or five and a small boy of six or seven while they were on a 'village swing'. After this sensation they climbed a small, leafy tree and take rest in complete childish innocence and harmlessness. Very artfully, the poet informs us that the same girl has now grown into full-blooded women, and living in a large city she goes on hunting for partners of her eager desire or lust.

Now she looks for the swing
in the cities with fifteen suburbs
and tries to be innocent
about it. (*CP* 19)

The girl is trying to commit a blunder for her initial impulse.

"On Memory" is about the role of memory in our day to day life. The poet's memory is sharp enough to retain various things from nursery rhymes on Tipu Sultan or Jack and Jill through the cosmetic use of gold during the Gupta period to an item of costume in the Shakespearean times. On the personal plane, the insistent preoccupation with the past produces a poetry in which memory plays a strong, energetic and creative role. In fact, Ramanujan appears to make demands on memory which it cannot completely fulfil, leaving him regretting that "Memory/in a crowd of memories, seems/to have no place/ at all for unforgettable things" (*CP* 21).

But this is obviously an amplification inspired by over-expectation, because in poem after poem, memory does bring "the light of other/days around him", though not in the comfortably sentimental fashion in which it did to Thomas Moore. Furthermore, it is not 'emotion recollected in tranquillity, but recollection emotionalized in untranquil moments that appears to be the driving force behind much of Ramanujan's poetry. Time and again 'a hood/of memory like a coil on a heath" unfolds itself in his mind.

These memories are mostly of life seen through the eyes of a sensitive and attentive, diligent and obedient boy growing up in a traditional middle class Southern Hindu Brahmin family. Early ideas recorded with almost total recall are of various kinds. First, there is the terror felt when "a basketful of

ritual cobras” with ‘their brown-wheat glisten ringed with ripples” comes into” the tame little house”. ‘They lick the room with their bodies curves/uncurling, writing a sibilant alphabet of panic/on my floor’ (*CP* 4). “The snakeman wretches their writing/round his neck/for father’s smiling/money. But I scream” (*CP* 5). This screaming child is the father of the man who, when he walks in “museums of quartz/or the aisles of book stacks/...or touching a book that has gold/on its spine” thinks of snakes.

Then, there is the shock of first acquaintance with death and the horror of the sight of a dead body. An early memory of “a dark half-naked/length of woman, dead/on the beach in a yard of cloth/dry rolled by the ebb, breaded/by the grained indifference of sand’ is suddenly activated years later when the wife prepares some breaded fish “specially for me” (*CP* 7). Contrasted with this, there is the far more pleasant memory of the wonder at the strange alchemy which gradually transforms the water in the grandfather’s shaving glass from a drab white into a winedark mystery, when potassium permanganate is added to it.

A more complex strategy is employed in poems like “History” and “Looking for a Cousin on a Swing’. These poems disclose how a childhood impression recalled years later and only none properly understood from the vantage ground of adult experience suddenly yields a surprisingly new significance. In ‘History”, the impression recalled is that of the persona’s “little dark aunt’ looking for something under the cot of the great aunt who is just dead. His impression at the moment is that she is only “looking for something/... may be a rolling pin/her little son had brought for play”. Years later, the full significance of what the woman was actually doing there, is disclosed to the protagonist, when his mother discloses that what the “little dark aunt” was looking for were the ornaments of which she and her sister, ‘unknown each to the other/ alternately picked their mother’s body clean /before it was cold/or the eyes were shut” (*CP* 107-107).

“Looking for a Cousin on a Swing” describes the faint, not precise and half-formed sexual rousings of childhood, the real meaning of which comes

home years later. The woman protagonist in the poem recalls how, “when she was four or five/she sat on a village swing/and her cousin, six or seven/set himself against her; lunging pits of her feeling” (*CP* 19). The poet comments: “Now she looks for the swing/in cities, with fifteen suburbs/and tries to be innocent/ about it” (*CP* 19).

Occasionally, the drab present contrasted unfavourably with a beautiful past underscores the age-old truth that “beauty vanishes, beauty passes”. The childhood recollection of a youthful mother is that “from her ear-rings three diamonds/splash a handful of needles, and I see my mother run back/from rain to the crying cradles”. Now the aged mother’s “hand are wet eagle’s two black pink-crinkled feet/... her sarees/do not cling; they hang, loose/feather of a onetime wing”, and when the son sees “her four/still sensible fingers slowly flex/to pick a grain of rice from the kitchen floor”, his “cold parchment tongue licks bark in the mouth” (*CP* 61).

In “Small Town, South Indian” a vivid visual memory of the temple street in Madras flashes upon the inward eye, with its characteristic Indian detail of cows, buffaloes and temple employees. The poem “The Last of the Princess” is much more moving and ingenious or mysterious. Like all traditions the Indian Princes with their long dynasties, are quite die-hard. They “fall in slow motion from Aurangzeb’s time” (*CP* 105). Their manner of death and devastation is varied and vivid. Some die of tuberculosis, some due to imported wine and women, some in war, some in poverty. They die and yet not without an heir. He lives on, with two school-going daughters on half-fees;

His first son, trainee
in telegraphy,
has telegraphed thrice already for money (*CP* 105).

This is irony mingled with pathos that the royal long fingers are after all destined to pound on wireless keys.

S. Amanuddin suggests that “the Indian social context or consciousness in Ramanujan’s poetry is unstated but compulsive and unexpected”. He further points out that “the reader who knows that

Ramanujan is from India immediately realizes that the poet is making unstated comparisons with life in India. One can at least trust friends in India and no fear of wives suing their husbands” (123).

Similarly, Parthasarathy considers that Ramanujan’s poems are “products of a specific culture” (195). Ramanujan himself says about his own works:

English and my disciplines give me my ‘outer’ forms-linguistic, metrical, logical and other such ways of shaping experience, and my first thirty years in India, my frequent visits and fieldtrips, my personal and professional preoccupations with Kannada, Tamil, the classics and folklore give me my substance, my ‘inner’ forms, images, symbols. They are continuous with each other and I can no longer tell what comes from where (cited by Parthasarathy 195).

“Elements of Composition” is a tone-setter of new element. An additive process begins. Father’s seed and mother’s egg, panic on sister’s face, lepers of Madurai, riots down town Nairobi, things like Stonehenge or cherry trees, uncle’s eleven fingers, Muharram tigers compose the composite imagery:

I pass through them
as they pass through me
taking and leaving. (*CP* 122)

Thus, while the metronome of memories still ticks loudly, new beats are also mingled with it.

“Extended Family” is a perfect memory poem, characteristic of the Ramanujan mode of comprehending an experience. The poem is all wrapped in memories of the people in the family. The poet bathes like the father and the “dry chlorine water” is his “only Ganges”:

the naked Chicago bulb
a cousin of the Vedic Sun (*CP* 169)

The poet slaps soap on his back like his own father and also thinks in proverbs. Like his mother he hears the faint morning song through the string that make a Japanese music next door. Like his little daughter he feels shy in a moment of regression. Again –

hand over crotch
my body not yet full...
I hold my peepee
like my little son
play garden hose
in and out
the bath tub (*CP 170*)

Even the unborn grand and great grand sons are thought of:

my future
dependent
on several
people
yet
to come (*CP 170*)

“Some People”, an elegy in memory of the poet’s wife, has the sense of integrity at its most intense. The poem underlines the recurring idea that even in his complete alienation the kith and kin are always with him. Here it is the wife:

Others see a rush, a carnival, a million,
why does he see nothing, or worse, just one:
a singular body, a familiar head?
you saw your wife from another life
wed and left behind in childhood,
now six weeks dead yet standing there
in raw-silk sari, in sandalwood footwear?(*CP 177*)

The vision and memory of the dead wife is evoked from a complex clutter of sensuous imagery.

For Ramanujan, “memory” is not confined to the family only, or to something that happened in the present or the past. It is anthropological:

I pass through them
as they pass through me
taking and leaving
affections, seeds, skeletons
millennia of fossils records
of insects that do not last
a day (*CP* 122)

This is how Ramanujan is able to bring his scholarship in anthropology to his observation of life around him.

Ramanujan’s poetry is a recollection of emotions. Memory unfolds itself in his mind. He has the memories of the South Indian family life. Indian sensibility is present in almost all images. His poetry assumed to have originated from the Hindu Indian milieu. It will be accurate to say that the Hindu milieu constitutes the inner substance of Ramanujan’s poetry and the Western milieu shapes the outer substance.

Ramanujan is neither a nostalgic traditionalist nor an advocate of modernization and westernization. He is a product of both and his poems reflect a personality conscious of change, enjoying its vitality, freedom and contradictions, but also aware of memories which form his inner- self, memories of an unconscious ‘namelessness’, which are still alive, at the foundation of the self (Ghosh 190).

In “A Poem on Particulars” Ramanujan shows how various trees are connected with the pedigree of a “Single orange”. He suggests that one should be harmonized to the world of flux. As a Hindu married to a Syrian Christian and living in America, Ramanujan is aware of the colonial and post-colonial conflicts. His poems disclose his awareness that the past and the present

constantly interact, reminding us of Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent".

History,
which usually
changes slowly,
changes sometimes,
during a single conversation. (*CP* 107)

In History poem, Ramanujan combines the serious and the trivial and describes scenes that only an insider can have knowledge of. He draws on an Indian experience but treats it with an objectivity and detachment which is Western (Lall 51).

When Lall regards Ramanujan's poetry as going beyond family history, he obviously means that the individual familial past and memories have their roots deep in Indian social context. Taqui Ali Mirza also thinks that "the strong nostalgic note, which is such a prominent feature of much of Ramanujan's poetry, does not portray the nostalgia of an individual for times and things past. It is rather the collective nostalgia of a whole people who look back, often in an attitude of love hate, to the past, at once drawn towards and repelled by it. The specificity of allusion to personal experience only leads the poet to a delineation of 'shared' experience... the myth that the poet creates is not personal or private but a common heritage, going backwards in time" (155).

In "History", Ramanujan shows change as a perspective. The speaker as an adult remembers his childhood. The poem takes the reader into the midst of an action. History becomes a reality of the present. "Small –Scale Reflections on a Great House" brings history close to the present. The house is a past, a memory, a tradition. This poem is about the nostalgic memory of his childhood. The poet in this poem gives a long list of things that enter the great house but never leave the house. Cows, books, sweet-dishes, daughter-in-law and even the song of beggar are the things that enter the house. Ramanujan went to America. His nostalgic memories of the ancestral house and the joint-

families are revived in this poem. The things lost long ago revive in the speaker's memory. The poet intermingles comic, tragic touches together. The widowed daughter, the dead soldiers, the sons-in-law are a part of the poem. The poet makes an exposure of the great house. He remembers some of the events of his life in this great house.

Continuity is a term that is applicable to Ramanujan's works within a specific genre like poetry or its relation to others like folklore, language, cultural anthropology. Ramanujan exemplifies the specific Indian level but also the universal.

In "A Wobbly Top", Ramanujan tries to capture the dynamic, sustaining relationship between the father and the son. The Wobbly top is a gift from the father which is dear to the son retains scars within which are not visible, because of the top's fast rotation. The top, here, puts for the memory of the father. Like the top, the memory of the father moves within the poet so fast that it appears still, it does away with its scars. The top as a gift illustrates the vastness of the relationship that exists between the father and the son. Thus the poem begins with the image of the father, but gets concluded with the vastness of a relationship to which the son is exposed. In "A Wobbly Top" the play thing given by the father becomes the image of memories as well as a total identification with the father:

every scar on its body now describes
a perfect circle within other scars,
perfect concentric circles. (*CP* 60)

As though, they have entered mutual consciousness.

Ramanujan explained the importance of memory to Rama Jha in an interview where he says that his writings obtain its nourishment from Indian culture "those are the roots. That is what binds us back to our childhood and all our early years".....one cannot live in the past, neither can you entirely live in the present, because we are not like that. The past never passes. Either the individual's past or historical past or cultural

past, it is with us, it is what gives us the richness... of the understanding. And the richness of expression...

An expatriate, he lives in two different worlds- the one within, the one without” creativity comes out of a sustained attention to one’s own experience, one’s own locality and one’s own landscape you know. And the circumstances which one can feel and experience deeply without any scheme, without learning this, that and other...

Whatever world it may be. It may be a personal world, it may be a social world, but a world which is fully embodied in poetry. We need enough of that, some part of our experience to explore it as best as we can”(Jha 5-13).

S. Nagarajan while discussing about the relationship between memory and poet’s personal emotion observes:

Most of the poems in the new volume, as in the first, have their origin in recollected personal emotion. They deal with the poet’s memory of his relations and the ambiguous freedom that life away from them confers (18).

Prof. M. K. Naik in his article “A. K. Ramanujan and search for roots” observes:

It is perhaps his long sojourn abroad that explains Ramanujan’s persistent obsession with his Indian past both familial and racial, and it is this obsession that constitutes a major theme in all his poetry (14).

Prof. K. Raghavendra Rao who has made a very important discovery in the poetry of Ramanujan that of the element of reverse romanticism has noticed the relation between Ramanujan’s poetry and memory. He writes:

One can go laboring to the point that memory serves as the basis of Ramanujan’s reverse romanticism in his first collection of poems. But memory can be understood as time framed in an

objective, cultural historical context. In some poems the one dominates and in some the other” (124).

Memory is not central to the first volume *The Striders* which represents the modernist phase of Ramanujan’s poetry. In poems like “Breaded fish”, “Still Another for Mother”, “Looking for a cousin on a swing” memory functions largely like moments of epiphany when something is suddenly revealed. The resources of memory are still repressed and are not available for narration. The poet is still trapped in the world of discrete objects where connections are few and far between. “A Poem on Particulars”, the penultimate poem in the first volume, illustrates the nature of the conflict in this type of verse. The ‘wicker-basket’ that holds oranges arrests the poet’s attention in the market place. The “pell mell piled” oranges open up a rich world of organic colours and shapes. Some green, others with just a fingerprint of green, some pulpy and velvet-skinned – the act of seeing becomes progressively complicated as we enter the inside world of the orange. Here we notice the grandpa grip of its fibrous fabric. From this densely patterned inner world we move to the outer tree which pours its future from forgotten roots to feed “this fall-minded pot-bellied bud till it rounded for our baskets” (CP 53). Ramanujan’s modernity has to be located here as a way of incorporating the world of the market and the fall it implies, into his field of vision. In the final stanza, Ramanujan reverts to the paradoxical wisdom of popular saying which neither accepts nor rejects the contradictions between the rooted tree and the plucked fruit: “I have heard it said/among planters:/you can sometimes count/every orange/on a tree/but never/all the trees/in a single orange” (CP 54). The central paradox of the poem is the mutually exclusive worlds that do not enter into each other. They can only be ironically juxtaposed. In the popular saying at the end of the poem, however, there is an attempt to go beyond the empirical. It is in the collective wisdom of the community that the particulars are recovered as part of the whole. Such a possibility is hinted but not realized in this poem. The baskets of oranges in the market, their tightly textured insides, the green world of the orchard where they, hang from the

branches and finally the planters, remarks- Ramanujan does not grade these worlds and establish a hierarchical relationship between them. In his book, *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger comments that the convention of perspective which is unique to European art, makes the single eye “the centre of the visible world” (16). In the above poem, the perspective used by Ramanujan is largely unitary as the visible world is viewed from a single perspective. When he reverts to speech at the end of the poem the ocular centrality of the poem is offset to some extent but not subverted entirely. The illusion fostered by a single view point can be offset only when alternative fields of vision enter the poem. It has been observed that one of the major influences on Ramanujan’s early poetry was William Carlos Williams. A poem like “The Striders” carries the stamp of Williamsian ideology which was concerned with the minute details of the objective world. But as Ramanujan developed as a poet he could see the limitations of such an imagistic ordering of reality. He felt the need to comment and interpret. His search for an alternative poetic can be seen in his subsequent volumes when he makes efforts to order his poems around a different logic.

In his second volume *Relations* memory becomes an organizing principle. Memory in these poems does not suggest a point of origin with reference to which everything becomes significant. On the contrary, it recovers a dimension of the present which would otherwise be lost. In a poem “Small-Scale Reflections on a Great House” the self is not seen in terms of discrete objects but as part of a web of relationships. The poem does not use a linear perspective. A line such as “nothing that ever comes into this house goes out” is followed by a list of things which come into the house to lose their identity and become part of a common tradition. This assimilative character of the house makes a difference to everything that is “housed” inside. Anything that goes out “comes back, processed and often with long bills attaches”. The mystery of the house deepens as the poem progresses till the great house takes on the character of memory itself. It accommodates, transforms and waits. House is a site of interpretation of the public and the

private where history and biography meet. It resists abstractions. The house apprehends memory in spatial terms. The poem does not privilege grand narratives and thus resists the allegorical impulse which is assimilative and reductive.

The metaphor of the house in Ramanujan functions as memory in several other poems as well. In “Love Poem for a Wife-1” the poet says: “Really what keeps us apart/at the end of years is unshared childhood”. Shared memories point to a common identity. In this sense, culture is memory because it makes possible access to a common language of experience. In his Kannada poem, “When an Old Familiar Things Comes Home Again”, the past is seen as something that cannot be accommodated in the present. The baby elephant he played with passes by his house. He is happy that the elephant does not remember him. When he sends the mahout and the elephant away with some gifts, he feels his house has turned small. The optics of memory transforms the dimensions of his existence. Here, the old man’s relation with the past changes significantly.

In the poem “On Memory”, Ramanujan describes the conflict between “Memory” and “memories”: “Memory, in a crowd of memories, seems to have no place at all for unforgettable things”. The desire for transcendence and its impossibility in our own times is what animates a paradoxical statement like this. There are moments which in the course of time, become a dumping ground of unusable past. It is “the unforgettable things” that constitute the self and define one’s identity. As opposed to the static and mechanical memory which merely stores information, these “memories” constitute an inner continuity, making it possible to connect the present self with the past. ‘Memories’ make epiphanies possible because their significance is in the present. It is the invisible third dimension of our identity. This is particularly true of exiles for whom memory is a country they carry with them. In “A Lapse of Memory” the poet speaks of the loss of memory as the loss of identity. The amnesiac is a stranded man in a world of objects which he cannot relate to. What he misses is the sense of significance that only the past can

retrieve. In “No Amnesic King”, he feels lost in the city but does not want to seek the magic ring that will restore him to a world of lost connections. Ramanujan seems to think that modernity fosters selective memory by creating vast areas of amnesia. The Amnesiac King demystifies the transcendental power of memory. When seeing is not informed by memory the act of seeing becomes mere witnessing.

In “Elements of Composition” what is remembered becomes the self: “I pass through them as they pass through me”, and “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” (*CP* 123). One is composed by what one goes through. The word play on ‘composition’ is deliberate as it also refers to the act of writing poetry. The act of looking can be a hallucinatory experience when it is not informed by memory. Modern urban culture encourages spectacles of floating images. From advertisements and comics to museums and zoos, modern institutions regulate our visual experience. In the poem, “In the Zoo” which has the subtitle ‘a tour with comments’ every animal occasions comments which relate them to the poet’s past experiences. The faded black colour of adjutant stork reminds the poet of the Madras lawyers and the flight of these birds recall several instances of the past related to his father. What would have been a series of still lives is thus transformed into a dialogic frame of interpenetrating thoughts.

The hallucinatory nature of images which are not informed by memory is brought out by the “Highway Stripper”. This poem is about the voyeuristic nature of modern urban culture that encourages amnesia through alluring images. In “Highway Stripper” (*CP* 163-66) the speaker in the poem, while speeding in his car on the highway to Mexico, sees a woman in a speeding car ahead of him strip herself of all clothes. She throws away her hat, skirt, blouse, bra and panties one after the other. Egged on by excitement and curiosity, he overtakes the car and peers into the vehicle as they are level: “In that absolute/second,/that glimpse and after/image in this hell/of voyeurs, I saw/only one at the wheel:/a man, about forty,/ a spectacted profile/looking

only/at the road/beyond the nose/of his Mustang,/with a football radio on". There was no trace of a woman in the car. The middle-aged man in the car is one of the countless strangers you see on the road everyday. The speaker is at a loss to decide whether it was the man at the wheel shedding the woman he was wearing. Then the poem reaches its climax as it turns inward and exclaims : "or was it me/moulting, shedding/vestiges,/old investments,/rushing forever/ towards a perfect/coupling/with naked nothing/in a world/without places?". The whole scene has elements of the surreal. That the incident takes place on a speeding automobile moving from one country to another is significant. Speed is characteristic of Western culture which values mobility as a means of transcendence. But the speaker in the poem is a prisoner of images as he has no means of liberating himself from the clutches of desire. Voyeurism is debilitating as it seeks to possess, own and devour. In "Highway Stripper" female sexuality is seen as an object of voyeuristic desire. It finally terminates into a moment of anxiety and despair. "A perfect coupling with naked nothing in a world without places" suggests a sense of homelessness as release from the oppressiveness of time and place does not materialize.

While commenting on the Indian and Oriental traditions in painting, Gulammohammad Sheikh remarks:

Being essentially an outdoor vision, most Indian and Oriental painting in general is independent of the windowed view; and this among other reasons renders illusionism unsuitable for pictorial expression. (146)

The murals are characteristically Indian in that they require the spectator to move about while scanning the vast expanse crowded with shapes, figures and images of various kind. Ramanujan's poetry moves towards this kind of logic as his poems become panels of images directing our gaze towards various planes without emphasizing one asserts that the only sight he owns is the first one, the physical sight. The sensory experience is indeed the base of all imaginative experiences.

It is true that Ramanujan's poetry incorporates a sustained quest- the quest for roots in the tradition and the quest for higher self. Ramanujan was deeply involved with the problem of self-definition, the web of memories help him to develop a frame work with in which the identities of the self could be presented in their complexity. Not only this, one can discern in the poet's preoccupation with his personal and racial past the modernist exploration of the existential problems of time and what it does to life. The image of home was very significant for Ramanujan. He used this image again and again in his poetry. He was emotionally attached with the home. The home reminds him of his past and present. It can be seen easily by any reader that Ramanujan was alienated from his great Indian culture as well as from his family. He was not alienated from a Brahmin society but he was also alienated from his Tamil and Kannada societies. Hence, one can see that he was in search of his roots.

"Snakes" is a significant poem that shifts from the rural Indian locale to the urban Western background, and vice-versa. By combining the real and the dream experience, the poet suggests the need to confront real and imagined fear. There are vignettes of memory, of home and family, of mother giving milk to snakes in saucers, and the snake man looking "for father's smiling money". Precise, vivid, concrete images build up the panic. In a state of paranoia, the sister's knee-long braid held by a score of clean new pins reminds him of the scales of a snake. Images of family members are evoked now and then even while dealing with an abstract feeling.

Memory plays a special creative role in the poem "Looking for a Cousin on a Swing". It is not a mere recollection of an event. It is a childhood experience viewed, analysed and assessed from an adult perspective.

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. (*CP* 19)

The poem deals with the first intimations of sexuality by means of the deft use of the swing image. The cousin's initiation from innocence to awareness of the libidinous self is presented with deliberate dubiousness. The poem abounds in images of erotic suggestion, so that even a sneeze could mean an explosion of passion at the slightest provocation. Through this poem, the poet doesn't speak about the girl's sexual longing in explicit terms. He gives us only a couple of hints, and leaves the rest to our imagination. The poem is psychologically most significant. It throws a lot of light on how the experiences of childhood leave a permanent mark on a human being. Through this poem he wants to suggest how these experiences determine a person's thinking later in life. Although a child knows nothing about sex, yet a physical contact between two children of opposite sexes does give both of them some kind of pleasurable sensation. This sensation is never forgotten because sex is basic to human nature. As food is important for human belly sex is also necessary for him. Ramanujan through this poem deals about the feelings, sensations and the subsequent sexual longing of the girl, but there is no doubt in our minds that her male cousin must have experienced similar sensation and longings.

"Love Poem for a Wife-1" tries to analyse the cause of the emotional rift between the persona and his wife, and attributes the lack of a feeling of emotional oneness to an unshared childhood. What makes this poem different from other poetic recollections is that it attempts consciously to enter another's past reveals with utter clarity the limits of the existing relationship with that person. This poem shows that the desire to enter another's life inevitably ends in frustration. The poem records nostalgic recollections of both his and his wife's past. The images in a wedding picture of his father wearing a turban and his mother wearing silver rings on her second toe, or his father's noisy bathing habit of slapping soap on his back are as important as the image of the wife's anxious father, cigarette in hand, pacing to the fro, awaiting the

daughter's late return after what she thought "was an innocent/date with a nice Muslim friend/who only hinted at touches". The wife's attempt to reconstruct her childhood with the help of her brother James, each claiming the reliability of one's own memory, leaves him and James' wife total outsiders. The persona realizes that total emotional understanding between husband and wife is impossible to achieve unless they "carry marriage back into/the namelessness of childhoods". The tone shows a longing for the impossible, for the presence of absent people and places, and a desire to replenish emotional springs with new relationships.

In "Small-Scale Reflections on a Great House", the great house could stand for the ancient house of Hindu heritage that absorbs from time to time various elements but attempts to make of them a beautiful synthesis. The poem is also a tribute to the great tradition of a large joint family. But it is, more than anything else, concerned with the crowded memories that will never let go, the ones that make up a family and sustain him wherever he may be.

Sometimes I think that nothing
that ever comes into this house
goes out. Things come in every day. (CP 96)

It could be stand for the poet's own store house of memory, retaining, nurturing and designating anything/any one that strays into it. The poem lists the ordinary, day to day events in the Great house in a semi-humorous manner, only to end the list with two out of the ordinary occurrences that envelope the Great House in gloom.

This poem has a large component of reminiscences in it. It is a mixture of the present and the past experiences; but there is a little amount of nostalgia in it. The poet recalls the happenings in his ancestral house in a somewhat detached manner, without expressing any particular emotion about those happenings. There can be nothing wistful about a beggar coming with a violin and singing a prostitute song in a harsh voice. Here, in this poem we witness the comedy of a number of strange and bizarre persons coming to the house never to go back, or to return to it. In the last stanza of the poem, there is a

mingling of humorous and pathetic effects when we are told about the nephew who went out of the great family house, fought in the war, and then returned to the house as a dead body on a particularly chatty afternoon.

“A River” that does not focus on a familial motif reveals his obsession with memory and relationships. The poem is born out of the memory and relationships. It brings forth his Madurai visit, when the floods made of the River Vaikai a real river. Here, the poet contrasts images of drought and floods. His complaint is that contemporary poets do not see poetic possibilities in human situations. Instead, they seek stock poetic subjects or sing of past glories. Even when faced with a disturbing situation they become literal minded, unmindful of human concerns.

In Madurai,
city of temples and poets
who sang of cities and temples. (*CP* 38)

Ramanujan locates this poem in Madurai, the seat of ancient Tamil culture and Sangam Literature. He uses grim images to suggest the emotional drought and artistic aridity in contemporary Tamil poetry, a contrast to the rich surge of old Sangam poetry.

Even the relationship with those who are dead is not irrelevant. With the help of an active memory, the past is activated, and interaction between the past and the present continues. Real events of the past come processed, bearing new meaning for the present. Memory helps to retrieve details, reinterpret them, rearrange them for the better understanding of the present. There is no lack or fear of a loss of connection as long as there is memory. The poet thus lives in both the worlds-inner and outer-both equally vivid and vital. Memory makes the co-existence and integration of both worlds possible, provides impetus for work and progress, and in these ways enables the artist to ‘see life steadily’ and to ‘see it whole’.

Keki Daruwalla observes,

Through the landscape of his poetry Ramanujan seems to be carrying on two kinds of conversation with himself-not just the

interior monologue or dialogue, but also mirror-talk; a mirror talk that turns things askew, as if epiphany and self-revelation are passing through a cubist's prism. If distorted reality is reality in fact, then this is how, I suppose, one would go about it" (34). Akshay Kumar notes Ramanujan's use of parody to achieve the same effect, i.e., through it" the self is continually reviewed and deconstructed (10).

"Of Mothers, Among Other Things", is a remarkable poem. The poet remembers his mother and recalls her youth, middle age and old age. He describes his mother in youth as beautiful and delicate like silk and white petals of a flower.

I smell upon this twisted
Backbone tree the silk and white
Petals of my mother's youth. (CP 61)

He remembers his mother's three diamond earrings which glittered like sunlight. In the middle age, his mother used to run to the cradles to calm the crying baby. The rain stands for the years of misfortunes she faced tackling and sewing. The burden of domestic work made the mother lose her youth and beauty too soon. She grew old and withered. Her hands become wrinkled like an eagle's feet. In her old age, her sari hung loose around her like broken feathers of a wounded bird. Thus, the poet becomes nostalgic about his mother's memory.

"Still Life" explores the relationship of memory to reality and art. The title refers to the genre of painting in which the model is immovable, contrary to live model. Being a Ramanujan's poem it concerns with the changing relationship of past to present:

When she left me
after lunch, I read
for a while.
but suddenly wanted to look again
and I saw the half eaten

sandwich
 bread,
 lettuce and salami,
 all carrying the shape
 of her bite. (CP12)

The piece of sandwich retains the memory of the bite of the woman in a concrete way. Taqui Ali Mirza's assesses Ramanujan's poetry and remarks:

Ramanujan's work bears the impress of all great poetry turning the ephemeral into the permanent articulating the predicament of whole people in verse which at one and the same time is changed with emotion and has the detachment of great art. (155)

"A River" is neither a divine agency nor an elemental power. It is the very image of life caught between continuity and change. It represents a multiplicity of metaphors and modes. A variety of motifs go into the meaning and structure of the poem. Ramanujan undermines the traditional notion that the river is a nourisher and preserver of life. It is on the contrary the cruel death-dealer. The poem opens with the dried state of the river symbolizing the hollowness within:

Every summer.
 a river dries to a trickle
 in the sand. (CP 38)

The trickle speaks of the poverty and impoverishment that permeates the entire life process. Nature very grudgingly doles out just the trickle. The insufficiency creates a harrowing existential battle. Life becomes a contest between living and dying. The river exposes its interior; it is empty; the very stirrings of life have gone dry and barren revealing the inner sand and stones. The sleepy crocodiles and shaven buffaloes create a sense of the grotesque. They are the ugly and hideous obstructions to the fluid imagination of the river.

Ramanujan creates an illusion of reality and affirms reality as the unalterable experience of life. The river bares its sandy ribs symbolizing the unfed and uncovered faceless masses exposing their lifeless ribs. It reveals a subhuman state of existence- a typical Indian rural reality and sensibility.

The subsequent lines of the poem provide a powerful study on the condition of Indian womanhood:

Straw and women's hair
clogging the water gates
at the rusty bars
under the bridges with patches
of repair all over them (*CP 38*)

By juxtaposing straw with women's hair Ramanujan creates a trifling sense of a woman's life-the insignificance of her existence. The hair clogging the water gates speaks of her victimization over the centuries. She has been held captive within the strangehold of custom and social regimentation. The worn out rusty bars hold tight the woman's hair. The patches of repair and reforms do not create a tangible change.

Ramanujan introduces the motif of floods against the existing passivity and routine of tradition. Floods symbolize the oncoming modernity and change with an uncontrollable speed. People start talking about its alarming intrusion.

People everywhere talked
of the inches rising.
of the precise number of cobbled steps
run over by the water, rising
on the bathing places. (*CP 38*)

At first, the impact of change is felt at the lower strata of society represented by the cobbled steps. It advances further at the bathing places where rituals are observed. The floods later engulf the unaccommodated and the vulnerable segments of society:

and the way it carried off three village houses,
 one pregnant woman
 and a couple of cows
 named Gopi and Brinda, as usual (*CP 38*)

The trauma of change creates an unprecedented havoc. The crop and the cattle of the village are carried away. The pregnant woman symbolizing creativity and motherhood is undermined. The traditional life of farming gets disrupted. Gopi and Brinda, the milk giving cows carrying folklore and mythology are drowned in the floods of modernity. Ramanujan attacks the poets who are not affected by the floods. They are at a safe and respectable distance:

In Madurai;
 City of temples and poets
 Who sang of cities and temples (*CP 38*)

Ramanujan exposes the cruelty and indifference of poets towards human calamity and suffering. He castigates the romantic ideology and self-seeking system of life. Hence the poem is dominated by the images of 'stone' and 'sand' symbolizing the very sap of life that has gone dry.

The river represents the clash between tradition and modernity. Bruce King aptly observes:

Ramanujan is neither a nostalgic traditionalist nor an advocate of modernization and westernization. He is a product of both and his poems reflect a personality conscious of change, enjoying its vitality, freedom and contradictions, but also aware of memories which form his inner self, memories of an unconscious 'namelessness' which are still alive, at the foundations of the self.(212)

Ramanujan as a humanist is quite sensitive to human suffering. His poetry ruthlessly exposes the cosmic and cultural indifference. The sandy sterility and the stony indifference underscore the need for the birth of a new consciousness to respond to human pain and suffering. In his comments on

Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* the postcolonial critic Homi Bhaba states that "memory is the necessary and sometimes hazardous bridge between colonialism and the question of cultural identity". He writes "Remembering is never a quiet act of introspection or retrospection. It is a painful remembering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present" (63).

Remembering enables the mind to come to terms with itself. Memories form the foundational basis of conscious existence. Some memories are evoked to give pleasure, while others-more offending than pleasurable-are deliberately blocked to give the mind an illusion of harmony. These obnoxious memories however have a way of influencing one in inexplicable ways. Many of the traumas of modern existence deal with the mind's inability to accept or cleanse itself of these retarding blocks to psychological stability. When these offending memories are released from their captivity as it were, then there is an attempt at a final spiritual reconciliation. The procedure of analysis theory, recommended here, as Leela Gandhi states, is guided by Lacan's ironic reversal of the Cartesian logic, whereby the rationalistic truth of "I think therefore I am" is rephrased in the proposition "I think where I am not, therefore I am where I do not think" (9).

It is quite significant that Ramanujan's temperaments and tones fascinate the critical privilege of the people because of his poetic height and perception. In his book *Modern Indian Poetry in English* Bruce King betrays this idea:

Ramanujan is widely read in India, along with Western and Western influenced Modern Indian Poetry in Indian languages. This unpredictable fusion of varied roots in Ramanujan's poetry is true of the attitudes it express. (211)

It is clear that the roots of Ramanujan's poetry are in memory; memory either subjective or psychological creates an interesting pattern of emotion in his poetry. He carries his past with him as an inner world of memories and laws which erupt into the present, transformed into anxieties, fears and new

insights. These memories of the poet's typical Indian past bestow the description and the imagery that may be identified as Indianness.

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