CHAPTER II

THE CONTEXT OF INDIAN POETRY IN ENGLISH
The nature of poetic sensibility is somewhat complex since it combines both knowledge and experience. There is no doubt that direct experience of life, and not all experience but that which has its most profound impact on the poet's mind, is at the very foundation of poetic sensibility. T.S. Eliot in his essay - "The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism" talks about the formation of his own poetic sensibility. Some images of life, for some reason or the other, continue to haunt the imagination of a poet as if to divulge their secret meaning to the poet.

"Why, for all of us", Eliot asks, "out of all we have heard, seen, felt in a lifetime, do certain images recur, charged with emotion, rather than others? . . . . . the leap of one fish . . . . the scent of one flower, an old woman on a German mountain path etc" and then continues" such memories may have symbolic value, but of what we cannot tell, for they come to represent the depths of feeling into which we cannot peer"¹.

The images which Eliot mentions in the essay are used in his poem "The Journey of the Magi" and the meaning of the poem is surely enhanced by these images and the images are also given a kind of universality by the context of the poem. What makes these images powerful and effective is the language
which has preserved them and devices which are purely linguistic increase their significance.

Language assimilates experience and once it is assimilated, experience is transformed by the inner process of language itself. Communication is the basic purpose of language and communication of experience in life is such a common affair that we have not paid full attention to the transformation of experience when we are involved in the act of communication. Experience qua experience has its antecedents and consequences and again its experiential aspect. But when it is converted into language it loses its experiential aspect and it also becomes autonomous. If I suddenly encounter a snake while walking in a garden I experience every detail of the horror until the snake escapes into a bush or I cleverly avoid to step on it. But the same experience loses its physical aspect when I relate it to someone. I have to place an imaginary snake in an imaginary garden and recreate the whole situation in an imaginary context of time and space. This secondary situation is autonomous since I can use it for any purpose that I like.

Direct experience may or may not enlighten a person about the nature of experience since experience and understanding do not occur simultaneously. One has to recollect, reflect and contemplate on what one has experienced in order to
understand it. Memory, like reflection and inference, is also a mode of understanding, with this difference that while remembering one has to re-experience the same thing in a different context. Communication of experience is solely for the purpose of understanding and this purpose alters the structure of experience itself. And this structural alteration, it seems, is due to the intervention of language.

Sensibility, in one sense, is experience embedded in language which is autonomous and can function without the paraphernalia of the raw experience. As far as poetry is concerned this is the fact. This is not to say that poets do not borrow from their direct experience for expression in poetry. But it is equally true that major portion of poetry is not based on first hand experience. Authenticity of poetic expression does not depend upon the personal experience of the poet nor is it an evidence to prove the effectiveness of poetic expression. What makes experience sound fresh or intense is the efficacy of the poetic technique, the art or craft of writing poetry.

Who says that fictions onely and false hair
Become a verse? Is there in truth no beautie?
Is all good structure in a winding stair?
May no lines passe except they do their dutie
Not to a true, but painted chair?²
These lines by George Herbert express a distrust of poetic technique and seem to defend the poetry of statement. But it cannot be forgotten that even a simple statement in a poem follows a technique, may be a technique of simplicity.

When experience finds its expression in language it has to draw more and more upon the resources of language from which there is no escape. What is necessary to note here is that poetry imitates experience as well as produces meaning or, to be more precise, it follows experience in order to produce meaning. From this standpoint the use of figures of speech can be defended. The figures of speech are mainly linguistic devices and are concerned with the production of meaning. It is worthwhile to note here what Roman Jakobson says in this regard.

"Textbooks believe in the occurrence of poems devoid of imagery, but actually scarcity in lexical tropes is counterbalanced by gorgeous grammatical tropes and figures. The poetic resources concealed in the morphological and syntactic structure of language, briefly the poetry of grammar, and its literary product, the grammar of poetry, have been seldom known to critics and mostly disregarded by linguists but skillfully mastered by creative writers".3

Let us take, for example, a very common device like pun or play upon words which has more meanings than one. Since
the meaning of a word is not active as is the meaning of a sentence, the ambivalence of meaning does not interfere with the act of communication. In ordinary communication we tend to suppress one meaning in favour of another meaning. A poet can take advantage of both the meanings and can express them in a single context for the purpose of irony or for the richness of poetic expression. But what happens in this process is that the poet has to use the resources of language rather than those of experience, since experience by itself cannot be ambivalent. A house as an object of the world can have only one meaning, but 'house' as a word can have many meanings either ironically or metaphorically. Meaning is shaped by the intention of the speaker or the writer. 'The House of Atreus' or 'The House of Orleans' does not mean a house in brick and mortar, but a complex of men and women belonging to a family constituting a line of generations. In actuality they are two different objects but in language they have the same designation. What is used in poetry is the plurality of connotations rather than singleness of direct experience. The purpose behind this process is to produce meaning.

This is true of all poets and even of those poets "who look into their hearts and write". The ancient poets knew this phenomenon by instinct. The whole system of rhetorics is based on the awareness that the poet uses experience
embedded in language and a system of meaning handed over to the poet by tradition. Language, like other systems of culture, is involved in transforming items of experience into symbols of culture. Erich Heller in his essay on "The Hazards of Modern Poetry" argues that what is disasterous to culture is the disintegration of word and its symbolic meaning:

"The dispute is about the nature of the eucharist, the sacrament of the Lord's supper. The bread and the wine -- are they the 'mere symbols'? Luther, with all his deviations from the traditional dogma, is the man of the Middle Ages. The word and the sign are for him not merely 'pictures of the thought', but the thing itself. Yet for Zwingli, steeped in the enlightened thought of the Italian Renaissance, this is a barbarous absurdity. The sacrament is 'merely' a symbol, that is, it symbolically represents what in itself it is not".

The dispute between Luther and Zwingli is a typical example of the rift between the real and the symbolic which characterises the modern age. A Kannada poem entitled "Panchbhootagalalli Vandu" (One of the Five Elements) by Ramanujan in Hokkulalli Hoovilla presents this cultural disaster in a light-hearted way. The poem depicts the pollution of water in the urban area and water, one of the five elements of nature, is devoid of all sacredness and becomes profane. It cannot be used either for the death rites of the grand-father or for any
other religious function. "What should be done if one of the five elements gets polluted"? The question at the end of the poem is really disturbing. What it implies is not the physical pollution but water losing its sacredness.

A closer analysis of this problem will yield some interesting findings. The word 'water' has a specific meaning and this meaning is inseparable from the word. But the sacredness is a new meaning added to it which is tentative. In a rationalistic age when the process of demythologising is at full swing the tentative meaning becomes symbolic. In ancient times the sacredness of water was one with the literal meaning but now it becomes only symbolic. When the symbolic is separated from the literal, only the literal becomes the real.

What is called 'tentative meaning' here is not 'symbolic meaning'. Every age creates its own set of symbols for the embodiment of the abstract ideas and these symbols are used by any poet for the sake of concreteness. The tentative 'meaning' is different from the symbolic meaning in the sense that it is generated by the process of poetic use of language. There is an element of expectedness in a symbol because a part of its meaning is already known to the reader of poetry. For example, 'lotus' is a favourite symbol in Indian poetry which stands for beauty in erotic poetry and for peace in religious
poetry. The meaning of this symbol is approved of by the culture of India and the use of it in poetry has the desired effect. But the tentative meaning is unexpected and new. Here is an example of that kind of meaning.

One can see what will trouble
This sleep of mine, whatever sleep it is.
The woodchuck could say whether it is like his
Long sleep, as I describe coming on,
Or just some human sleep.

'Essence of winter sleep is on the night'. The poem mentions a different kind of sleep in the beginning and the lines cited above are at the end of the poem. The farmer who is 'overtired' of the harvest that he himself had desired is now exhausted and succumbs to a long sleep. Sleep here is only a state of inactivity, a logical consequence of over-activity. But the farmer who has experienced the whole of life in terms of apple-picking longs for another kind of sleep. He wonders whether it is going to be the long sleep - the condition of hybernation of the woodchuck or 'just a human sleep'. The words 'human sleep' may evoke death or ordinary sleep. But the word 'sleep' without being symbolic evokes other meanings also. But these meanings are tentative because the word 'sleep' cannot be used in these senses in some other context. The meanings do not cling to the word. But what is proved here is that language can produce meanings
and the meanings are produced only on the level of language.

A poem by Ramanujan in Kannada has these lines:

I returned home with my body burning with anger.
In the courtyard garden
The fire-champak tree was all ablossom.

Anger burns the body only on the level of language and the champak tree has fire only on that level. One might explain it as the metaphorical use of language. But figures like simile, metaphor or paradox being linguistic devices belong solely to language. We use language to interpret the world and the interpretation of the world creates a parallel world of emotions and feelings.

II

T.S. Eliot in his celebrated essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" tried to reconsider the relation of a poetic work with the poet.

"Poetry", he says, "is not a turning losse of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality."

He adds a note of warning that only those who have personality and emotion know how to escape from them. It is obvious that Eliot who called himself 'a classicist' in literature was making a fervant plea for a poetry that is impersonal and detached. The function of the individual talent of a poet,
according to Eliot, is only to add to the significance of the poetic tradition either by enriching the significance or by altering the significance.

Eliot was profoundly concerned with the meaning of poetry which, he believed, should transcend the private wisdom of an individual. Therefore he argued that poetry should be impersonal. Impersonal meaning may not be as intense as the personal meaning but, surely, it is universal and profound. But what Eliot failed to mention was, perhaps he took it for granted, that it is religious faith rather than impersonality that gives meaning its universality and profundity. Impersonality without faith tends to become mechanical as it has to explore the area of empirical reality only which by its very nature is subject to change and deterioration. W.B. Yeats knew about this hazard when he also tried to go beyond personal emotion. He said -

"... but all that is personal soon rots; it must be packed in ice and salt.... Talk to me of originality and I will turn on you with rage. I am a crowd, I am a lonely man, I am nothing. Ancient salt is best packing".  

The Romantics discovered the validity of personal expression in order to avoid the drudgery and boredom of empirical reality which is objective and mechanical. The
Romantic poetic expression is not merely an exercise in 'egotistic sublime' but it is a desperate attack on the objective world. The new poetics developed by the Romantic poets - Coleridge, of course, is the chief exponent of this poetics - discovered that the form of poetry is organic and poetry is something that is created and not made. The organicism of poetry makes it imperative that the poet be its creator. Gone are the days when the poet was only a 'maker'. The relation between the 'maker' and the thing made is entirely different from the relation between the creator and the work that is created. The maker makes an object and that object reflects only the skill of the maker and does not say anything about his moral sense. On the other hand, the work that is created necessarily inherits the personal traits of the creator.

Romantic poetry, seen from this point of view, reflects the personality of the poet and this fact is considered natural and even logical. The poetics of the Romantic poetry does explore the mysterious relationship of the poetry and the poet. Organicism of the poetic form impels the critic and the poet to think in terms of a vital link between the poet and his work.

Eliot's theory of impersonality did not question the organicism of the poetic form though it denied the importance of the poet's personality in the process of poetic creation. The form of poetry is still organic and living, only it is surrendered to serve a higher purpose of the unity of being
or some other abstract ideal. Eliot is aware of the dominant presence of the poet's personality, but he insists on the separation of 'man who suffers' and 'the mind which creates'.

"...the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates; the more perfectly will the mind digest and transmute the passions which are its material".  

This separation of the experiencing man and the creating intellect or imagination raises many difficulties. The mystery of the relation of the work with the author does not get clarified by such clever arguments. Eliot's own poetry is personal although all the personal emotions that his poetry expresses are surrendered to the higher cause of religion and his own imagination, in one sense, is received imagination.

The status of the poet in the poetry that he writes is, thus, a problem which is difficult to deal with. In modern times every poet begins with his own experiences unlike the ancient poet who used to write about impersonal subject-matter. The poet was a member of a whole community and he had not yet become an isolated individual. The birth of an individual different from the community comes very late in the history of human civilization; perhaps it is the gradual outcome of the European Renaissance. The 'dissociation of sensibility' that Eliot speaks about is also due to this historical event.
By the time we come to the time of English Romantic poetry the separation of the individual from his community was complete. The moment of separation, as far as India is concerned, is definitely after the British period when the new system of education opened the eyes of the Indians to a horizon of western enlightenment. Gradually the educated Indian has been alienating himself from the rest of the community, a majority of people who are denied the advantages of education.

When we think of a poet's personality we think in terms of history and the Freudian system of Psychology. The sense of history put the individual in his social perspective and the Freudian psychology provided a new set of norms, other than moral and religious to assess the individual. The impact of Freudian psychology on the civilized people of the whole world is too obvious to be stressed. The ethical categories used for the identification of the individuals in former times are now being replaced by psychological categories like sadist, masochist, introvert and extrovert etc. for the same purpose. The psychological categories, considered to be scientific, seem to be more accurate than ethical categories. But the problem is that, as the personality of the poet is given more and more importance, the poetry also began inheriting the traits of poetic personality. We do not hesitate to
talk about poetry that is masochistic or narcissistic unlike the old critics who would not describe poetry as evil or greedy. Even the didactic poetry did not necessarily derive from the moral austerity of the poet. Even licentious poets could write didactic poetry because the poet had to respect the norms of writing poetry.

Modern poetry in English, in order to avoid the problem of the relation between the poet and his work, found a way out by creating a dramatic character. Pound and Eliot have created such characters to voice the feelings of their poetry. It is a convenient device to change the personal into impersonal. Eliot might be speaking through the person of Prufrock but Prufrock also has something to say although there is a difference between what the poet says and what the character says. The dramatic element that the poem assumes is purely a device and a strategy on the part of the poet to avoid directness of expression. The resultant ambiguity of the poetic meaning helps the poetry again in richness and denseness. The dramatic form of modern poetry is not a matter of accident, but a consequence of the poet's effort to counter the dilemma of poetic expression. Robert Frost in his introduction to "A Way Out" says:
"Every thing written is as good as it is dramatic... A dramatic necessity goes deep into the nature of the sentence. Sentences are not different enough to hold the attention unless they are dramatic. No ingenuity of varying structure will do. All that can save them is the speaking tone of voice somehow entangled in the words fastened to the page for the ear of the imagination. That is all that can save poetry from sing-song, all that can save prose from itself."

The status of 'I' in the first line of the Prufrock poem - "Let us go then you and I" is not the same as the status of 'I' in the poetry of Wordsworth. But the 'I' in Wordsworth also may not be Wordsworth himself, but it is the embodiment of Wordsworth's poetic consciousness. There is no difficulty if we consider the first person narration in Wordsworth to be a formal device. The saint-poets of India like Meera, Kabir, Purandardas and Basaveshwar directly address God and give expression to their own feelings about God, which gradually became a formal device with the minor saint-poets. In classical poetry the author's voice is not present at all; what is present is only discursive fiction. The point to be noted here is that even the direct expression of the author's feelings and emotions does not make a poem or a literary work more sincere and authentic than the literary expression without the involvement of the author. In the same way the directness
of expression may be only another formal device that a literary work adopts. What is important is what happens at the level of interpretation. For a reader, even the voice of the author is a part of the fiction generated by the poetic text. It is difficult to isolate reality from fiction in a work of art, although critics tend to do it in a haphazard manner and evaluate the elements according to their quality. Criticism has a profound respect for reality - reality which is the proper subject of our rational understanding and treating fiction as something necessary for the illumination of reality. This is also true of categories like 'subjective' and 'objective'.

George T. Wright in his essay "The Faces of the Poet" discusses this problem and comes to a conclusion which is rather startling. He says -

"Indeed at the very source of poetry lies a persona whom no poet would identify with himself but whom, as he appears in every poem, the poet necessarily disclaims". 13

Mr. Wright recognises several personae interacting upon one another in a poem and a poem gets its formal design from the forces of these personae. The persona who lies "at the very source of poetry" is still a mystery, because poetry being speech, an unknown speaker must be postulated.
It is easier to identify the poet as a speaker than to trace out some other unknown speaker. The mystic poets of India believed that God spoke through them and the divine speech instead of following meaning produced its own meaning.

III

It is impossible to discuss the features of modern poetry without bringing in the idea of alienation or a sense of isolation. The journalistic critics who mostly use this term seem to be unaware of the diverse forms that alienation takes and seem to believe that it has only one form and one meaning. But it must be noted that the sense of alienation which Kafka depicts in his novels or the terror of alienation that is found in the poetry of Rilke who said -

"..... Alas, who is there
We can make use of? Not angels, not men;
and already the knowing brutes are aware
that we don't feel very securely at home
within our interpreted world...."14

is entirely different from the kind of alienation that a modern Indian writer seems to experience after being cut off from his old traditions. The educated Indian who feels liberated believes that he is cut off from the conventions and the burdensome past. The new world in which he lives is not an 'interpreted world' as it is with Rilke. The interpreted
world has a human meaning though it has lost its spiritual meaning and it is a world which makes some sense through history. The modern Indian world is hopelessly disintegrated and the poet who writes about this world has to search for a principle of unity which would introduce some order into this otherwise chaotic world. Writers like Rajarao would go back in the past to find out such a principle or unity. Other writers are satisfied with the snapshots of the present day India through the cameras of foreign make. They have more trust in their tools and gadgets of knowledge than in the object of knowledge itself.

The Indian writer writing in English has a more acute sense of alienation than the Indian writer who writes in one of the regional languages. Language apart from registering changes is also a sustained record of continuity. Each language has its own culture and therefore it has its own special areas of sensibility. The language can spell out our ideas of good and evil, degrees of moral concern and also our concepts of beauty, courage and compassion. For example, the episode of a bania sprinkling water on a four anna coin given by a Harijan boy in Mulk Raj Anand's *The Untouchable* sounds inhuman and horrible because the novel is in English. The English language with its nuances or humanistic culture makes the whole episode wholly inhuman and cruel. In the same way our sacrifices, modes of marriage, the place of women in
society and many other items of human experience are bound to look absurd, ridiculous and meaningless to the Westerners.

It is true that there are exceptions to this general happening. The Indian poets writing in English who belonged to the earlier generation like Toru Dutt, Shri Aurobindo and others tried to infuse a new spirit into English poetry. The narrative poems introduced the Indian mystical tales and Shri Aurobindo wrote poetry that is intellectual and mystic. But the Indianness in these cases is limited to the content of the poetry - and the form is purely English. Moreover the language of this poetry is a language of abstractions and this poetry lacks the experience of the living and concrete.

The new Indian poets writing in English are all characterised by a sense of rootlessness. Nissim Ezekiel, Gieve Patel, Keki Daruwala, Kamla Das, R. Parthasarathy and A.K. Ramanujan, to mention a few important names, are all busy in tracing the origin of their sensibility to some living tradition. The context of nationalism the fervour of which had lasted for half a century and which nourished the genius of the poets of an earlier generation is denied to the next generation. The political independence of the country did nothing to inspire a new system of values to live by. Poetry of patriotism is an embarrassment to the present day poets even in our regional language and it is practically impossible
to write such poetry in English. Dr. M. K. Naik in his essay, "Alienation and the Contemporary Indian English Poet" observes as under:

"... and certain aspects of life in post-Independence India cannot but make the artist believe that he hardly belongs. He is deeply affected by the glaring contrast between the values and mores of the days of the freedom struggle and those in present day India. It is a contrast between an era of idealism, selfless service and dedication to a cause and an age of unrepentant materialism, unlimited self-aggrandizement and unabashed pursuit of power. In an age like this, the artist is bound to feel that he is an outsider."

The new poets writing in English, therefore, took up new models of poetry-writing from the west.

The images of Indian life which abound the Indian poetry in English are generally ridiculous, satirical and at best neutral. "A Night of the Scorpion", a poem by Nissim Ezekiel, is a most sympathetic portrayal of an event which is genuinely Indian. There is an honest effort to presenting a noble aspect of the Indian sensibility through the suffering of the scorpion-bitten mother. In spite of all this the poet and the protagonist of the poem cannot commit to a belief in the inner most values of Indian life. A subtle detachment from the environment and life has been an
unconscious attitude of Nissim Ezekiel's poetry. This is, in one sense, true of all the educated Indians in this country; their social norms and political views, their concepts of culture and their spiritual beliefs are radically different from their unfortunate, uneducated Indians. A book for an educated is not only a symbol of knowledge but also a symbol of everything that is modern. The world is turned into a book that is to be read and understood. The poet has to study the alphabet of the book and then study its contents, its form and then understand the technique in which it is presented, assess its impact and evaluate its importance. The alienation of the poet from the living world is complete.

In case of A.K. Ramanujan the problem of alienation is all the more acute than in the case of other Indian poets writing in English. For the last two decades he has been working as a Professor of Dravidian languages in the University of Chicago. Since he belongs to Mysore he knows Kannada and writes poetry in Kannada, but in fact his first language is Tamil from which he has translated his *Poems of Love and War*. According to his own statement he, as a young boy, used to speak Tamil to women, Kannada with his friends and discussed with his rather in English. This is not unusual in case of an educated Indian whose language of emotions is different from his intellectual language. English being the language
of intellect he can evaluate his experiences which are acquired from an Indian language. English for the most of the educated Indians is a language of rationality and sceptical intellect.

A.K. Ramanujan's only novel in Kannada entitled *Mattobanna Atma Charitre* (Autobiography of Someone else) is full of images of his Indian experience and multiplicity of the human self is the central theme of the novel. Since the work is a novel we need not consider the experiences presented in the novel as author's own. The process of experience turning into a set of evocative images has a significance from the point of view of the problem of alienation. An image which is the object of the eye is distant and it is a complex of emotion and sensation created for the sake of study; "immediate experience", says Eliot, "is non-relational". But knowledge which creates categories of the items of experience can recognize the relation between one image and the other. Images which are arranged in a particular order can form the alphabet of the book of experience for study.

The elephantisis of the narrator's aunt is one such image. It is not an experience which is a product of the protagonist's nostalgia. It becomes a symbol of 'otherness' - in this case the other and the unknown aspect of the human body. The narrator remembers his aunt fondling and caressing
it as if it were her child. As an image the elephantisis of the aunt is associated with many other such images - the story of the siamese twins or the double aspects of the narrator's personality who is divided into two personalities - AKR and KKR. The narrator taking advantage of the distance between his own self and the experiences tries to understand the meaning not of experience but of the relationship between the self and the experience. "The man who suffers" becomes an object of study for "the mind which creates". A grandson in India inherits the name of his grandfather and this customary fact is taken for granted. But Ramanujan's novel tells that the name of a person is like a "mantra" and it symbolises the rebirth of a grandfather as his grandson. A poem entitled "Kelavar Punarjanma" in his first collection of Kannada poems-Hokkulalli Hoovilla - explains this fact in more details. This meaning unlike the scientific meaning is not final but only tentative but powerful enough to tempt the reader to probe further.

What is important in this Kannada novel is the concept of the individual self and the inter-relationship of its aspects. The protagonist of the novel is a young boy who is growing up and trying to register the impressions of the adult world without much worrying about the meaning of these impressions. But the images are so arranged in the novel that they become meaningful. The adolescent who feels that he is
attacked by the sexual energy from outside enacts in a symbolic way the separation of the knowing self from the unknown psyche. It is not a problem of the conflict between the conscious mind and the unconscious. The boy who tries to understand the relation between himself and his relatives—father, mother, uncle, aunt etc., becomes an outsider into a world which has its own order and disorder, norms and taboos. The protagonist's private world of impressions, he cannot resist the temptation of recognising the similitude between the iron pipe of the public tap and the member of Sikh bathing under it— with its codes of meaning, is rudely shocked by the absurdities of the adult world.

To quote again the Kannada poem "Kelavara Punarjanma" (The Rebirth of Some) the problem becomes clearer. The protagonist who has seen his pet cat run over by a car tries to understand the experience of death and rebirth. He knows that the butterfly is born out of the death of a caterpillar, and knows also the Chinese proverb that the mulberry leaf becomes the silkworm; he also knows the verse from the Gita that the soul migrates from one body to the other as one puts off old clothes to put on new ones. But all this knowledge would not help the protagonist to understand the physical horror of the cat's death and the vacuum created by its absence. His wife having bathed and put on a new saree shows her children yellow butterflies. The protagonist moves from
one room to the other. Yet he cannot come to terms with the
death of the cat.

I would not even remember
the quotation from the Gita.18

These last lines of the poem besides being poignant point out
the separation of knowledge from experience. The protagonist
does not negate the wisdom of the Chinese proverb or of the
verse from the Gita. But he is unable to see the relation
between them and the experience of the world in which a cat
is killed by a running car and the callousness of it.

The modern world is already an 'interpreted world'
in the words of the German poet Rilke. But the more inter­
preted the more mysterious it grows. What comes in the way of
the harmonious relationship of the self and the world is,
perhaps, this mass of interpretation. In case of Ramanujan
the break between knowledge and experience becomes all the
more acute as he sees his own self divided. The division in
the self does not mean abnormality. It is a problem which is
epistemological. The critical self watches the experiencing
self. In a poem entitled "Questions" Ramanujan puts a verse
from Mundak Upanished as a superscription:

Two birds on the selfsame tree:
one of them eats the fruit of the tree,
the other watches without eating.19
This is not the theme of the poem but only a starting point. The conclusions from this given fact that the Upanishad draws are different from the questions that the poem asks. But the poem accepts the duality of the human soul as a fact. The soul is both the eater and the eaten, but the English verb 'eat' unlike the Sanskrit counterpart suggests the carnivorous quality of the soul and the resultant violence appears in the images of the poem's questions.

But what is important from the point of view of the discussion here is the break between knowledge and experience. It is the poet's spirit that feels alienated because knowledge and experience do not spring from the same source. The experience becomes an object of study of the critical subject and the critical self has no experience of its own.

IV

In his 'Afterword' to his Poems of Love and War, A.K. Ramanujan has something very significant to say about the art of translation:

"All too familiar with the rigors and pleasures of reading a text and those of making another, caught between the need to express himself and the need to represent another, moving between the two halves of one brain, he has to use both to get close to "the originals". He has to let poetry win without
allowing scholarship to lose. Then his very compromises may begin to express a certain fidelity, and may suggest what he cannot convey. Crossing languages, one ancient or foreign, another current and familiar, searching in one language for forms and tones that will mimic and relive those of another, he may fashion now and then a third that will look like the one and speak like (or for) the other. 20

This passage gives us a very interesting account of the difficulties and pleasures of translation since the work of translating from one language to another is both a scholarly and hence mechanical and a creative work. Earlier in the same note Ramanujan says that a translator has a "double allegiance" and even several double allegiances. What is generally expected of a translator is that he ought to be as faithful to the original work as it is humanly possible. The fact that his work should also read like an original work becomes only incidental. But there are translators who are very creative and their translated works sometimes lose in fidelity to gain in creativeness. A translator, according to Ramanujan, has to move between the two halves of one brain and he has to use both to get close to the "originals".

Since a chapter of this thesis is devoted to the discussion of Ramanujan's translations it is needless to say anything about the quality of his translation apart from
saying that it is both successful and creative. But is necessary to consider the problem of 'double allegiances' and see what light it throws upon the creative process of a poet who also chooses to translate works from other languages. It is but only obvious that the work of translation is based upon a sensibility which is bilingual and it is also true that the sensibility of poetry derives largely from language. The sensibility is derived from a language in which a poet chooses to write and also from a language from which he translates. Thus a poet is caught unawares by the culture of the language in which he writes and more so when he tries to translate from another language.

Considered from this angle the translations of Ramanujan differ from the translations of a poet like Ezra Pound, both in choice and purpose. The purpose of Ezra Pound's translations was to give a new direction to English poetry by introducing new poetic modes and values. And pound translated poetry from foreign languages into English which was his first language. The poetic values that Pound sought after were in the poetry written in classical languages which were remote from English. The translations of Ramanujan are inspired by different purposes. The purpose is to introduce Indian poetic modes into English and also to examine these poetic modes against the perspective of modern English poetry.
Ramanujan translates from Tamil and Kannada which are his first languages into English which is his second language. The content of these translated works is Indian but their form is modern and it becomes an altogether different work, "a third that looks like one and speak like (or for) the other".  

These translations by Ramanujan, one feels, are necessary for the development of his own poetry. There is very little difference between the translations and Ramanujan's own work in English and Kannada, although the original works when read in Kannada or Tamil, look and speak in an entirely different fashion.

The rich
will make temples for Siva.
What shall I,
a poor man,
do?
My legs are pillars,
the body the shrine,
the head the cupola
of gold.

Listen, O Lord of the meeting rivers,
things standing shall fall,
but the moving ever shall stay.  

This is a very careful translation of a 'vachan' by the medieval Kannada saint Basavanna. We get a penetrating study of this in the introductory pages of Speaking of Siva.
It is true that 'sthavara' (Immovable) and 'Jangama' (that which moves) are very profound concepts in Veershaiva theology. Lines 6-9 describe the body of the poor 'devotee' imitating the temple which is the imitation of the human body. The poem, as Ramanujan puts it, 'suggests circles of identities - a temple is a body is a temple'. Ramanujan as a critic recognises the true spirit of the poem which the translation ably demonstrates. But the translated work has also its nuances and shades of meaning and this is precisely the reason why Ramanujan has chosen it for translation. The poem in English highlights not only 'a circle of transformations' from temple to body and to temple again but also the polarities of body and temple, sthavara and jangama, rich and poor, external and internal, falling and standing and making and doing. These polarities are not emphasised in Kannada for cultural and linguistic reasons. As Ramanujan himself has suggested the one Kannada word 'madu' suggests both making and doing. The words 'sthavara' and 'jangama' lose their primary connotation and become theological terms. What is important in the English translation is the paradox in the last two lines, 'things standing shall fall/ the moving ever shall stay'. The meaning of the last line enhances the meaning of 'lord of meeting rivers', moving rivers confirming and stabilising the meeting which is impossible in Kannada.
This piece ably demonstrates the creativeness of Ramanujan's translations. This is not to say that Ramanujan's translations are trans-creations—which obviously they are—but to say that Ramanujan's translations are a very important aspect of his creativity. Ramanujan, a poet who has published two volumes of poetry in Kannada and three in English need not have translated poems from Tamil and Kannada. But it seems that his poetic imagination needs other poetic works for its own fulfilment. It must be noted that Ramanujan has not translated any contemporary work; he has translated works from Tamil and Kannada of medieval times and a few passages from Homer into Kannada. Does it mean that these ancient works express the spirit of modern age better than modern works? On the other hand, it seems that Ramanujan's imagination functions through the finished products of early civilisations. The characteristic feature of Ramanujan's imagination is nostalgia which is a civilised emotion. Prof. S. Nagarajan observes in an introductory note to the poems of Ramanujan that "they (the poems) deal with the poet's memory of his relations and the ambiguous freedom that life away from them confers". But it must be noted that memory in Ramanujan does not function in the same way as it does in Wordsworth. Memory for Wordsworth is a personal emotion and the experience of a Wordsworthian poem is shaped and given a meaningful form by the poet's memory which is as creative as imagination. But
in Ramanujan memory is never allowed to be personal, memory and amnesia representing the two diametrically opposite aspects of the same consciousness which is responsible for the rise and fall of civilizations. Ramanujan does not quote in the way Eliot does, but translates works belonging to remote ages.
REFERENCES


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