CHAPTER V

THE KANNADA PHASE
The Kannada Phase

The study of Ramanujan's Kannada poetry is important from two points of view. It is important because it has added something quite meaningful to Kannada poetry and secondly because it helps us to understand his English poetry by giving a new perspective of a different language and culture. Not that Ramanujan's Kannada poems are easy to understand nor do they give a definite clue to comprehend the kind of poetry that he has tried to create. Ramanujan's poetry, both in English and Kannada, is difficult to grasp, paradoxically enough, because of his effort to make poetry as simple as conversation. It appears chatty, casual and sometimes even trivial; but there is a tough seriousness behind this triviality.

One of his early poems entitled 'Idu ondu Kavan' (This is also a Poem)\(^1\) works like a manifesto of the poetry that he has been writing since then. 'It is not difficult to write poetry', the poem says, 'what is really difficult is not to write poetry'.\(^2\) The poem maintains that the world is teeming with images which cry out for their expression and it is really difficult to resist the temptation of giving expression to them in poetry. Some of the images that the poem has listed have been used by Ramanujan's later poetry. One of these images is that of an epileptic patient with a piece of iron

---

\(^1\) The Kannada Phase

\(^2\) The Kannada Phase
between his teeth, an image which Ramanujan has used with greater effectiveness in his Kannada poem, 'Pitrarjita' (Legacy). What is significant about this image in the early poem is the tension between the throbbing body of the epileptic patient and the immobility of the piece of iron. In the latter part of the poem the piece of iron is transformed into a key and becomes a symbol of ancestral inheritance.

There are many other images in the poem, each one brilliant and telling, and crying out for expression. Some of them are solid objects of the world and some others are internal, mental and conceptual, but at the same time, as concrete and shapely as the solid objects. The poem states - the poem becomes unashamedly a loud statement for the sake of understanding, as a brief note by the poet suggests - that the world with its wonderful objects is the theme of Ramanujan's poetry. What is interesting from our point of view, and, what really matters, is the concept of the world as understood by the poet. The world is meaningless and formless but for the images of objects and events, both natural and human. In this way the poem tempts us to probe further into the relationship of poetic consciousness and the world. The poem maintains that there is an indomitable human urge to identify and name the objects of this world which reminds us of a similar instance of Adam in Milton's Paradise Lost who goes on identifying and naming the objects of nature. It is also true that man
cannot live in an uninterpreted world and the process of identifying and naming continues as long as the human consciousness interacts upon the events of this world.

All poetry that has been created is, in a way, a product of this continuous process of the interaction of the human consciousness and the environment. But what is special about this poem is the fact that the world with all its objects and events is translated, first into a world of images and then used by the poetry. The basic faith of the poem is that every image is a potential poem and there is no poetry outside the area which is illumined by the light of these images. The images listed by the poem are not narrative and they have no history. This fact explains the kind of poetry that Ramanujan created afterwards and the poetry which he chose for translation. The poetry of Ramanujan is fundamentally lyrical and imagistic. There are three mythological images in the poem which are - 1) Kama searching for his beloved Rati in his ashes. 2) Bhima who went in search of a fragrant flower and 3) Rama locked in embrace with Sita. Each character of these images is involved in the events of a long narrative, but these characters, in this poem, are reduced to the size of an image suggesting the strange behaviour of the erotic love.
The poem tells us something very interesting about the genesis of these images. "The images", the poem states, "are born in the centre, (naughtily suggesting by the Kannada word 'nadu' which means the middle portion of the human anatomy) between two darknesses, between reality and illusion". Another image suggests "the semen of truth-god into the ovary of falsehood or illusion". Fortunately this early poem by Ramanujan, at a time when his poetry had not yet fully mastered the art of understatement, has some direct statements about the form and nature of poetry. Ramanujan's poetry makes use of both illusion and reality with perfect detachment.

II

Detachment and a lack of emotional involvement with the objects of the world gives freedom to the poet to use the mode of irony which is unknown to the Indian and Kannada poetic expression. The ironic mode which was developed in the poetics of Greek tragedies is a very effective poetic device to reveal the gap between the human desire and its fulfilment, between the intended meaning and the realised meaning. In this light we can examine the description of Lord Krishna in the Mahabharat. The verse describing the death of Lord Krishna can be roughly translated as follows:
Krishna, although a god and who understood the full meaning of life, in order to cast off his mortal body, intended to end his life; after controlling his senses, speech and mind he slept attaining the condition of yoga.

Krishna, according to the Mahabharat, is not only a god but the supreme godhead controlling the creation, maintenance and the destruction of the universe. But in the context of the story of the Mahabharat he is the human incarnation of the supreme godhead and therefore a petty prince, a friend of the Pandavas and a clever statesman. Such a life must reach its end and Krishna dies when a huntsman shoots an arrow to his foot. The situation of Krishna's death is depicted here in a straight-forward way retaining the contradictions between the inevitability of the death and the immortality of the Hindu gods. The same situation would have provided a Greek or an English poet an excellent opportunity to exploit the full irony of the situation. What is emphasized in the Mahabharat description is the sublimity of Krishna's yogic trance and his divine knowledge.

Irony as a tonal element is present in the ancient poetry of India. But irony as a structural principle can be discovered only in modern Indian poetry. As far as modern Kannada poetry is concerned the poetry of Gopalkrishna Adiga uses irony to expose the moral dichotomy in human behaviour.
and while showing the irrelevance of the poetic expression of the previous generation of poets. But irony in Adiga is only an extension of the tonal irony of our ancient poetry. Only in Ramanujan do we find irony as the structural principle of poetry.

One of the poems entitled "One of the Five Elements" in Hokkulalli Hoovilla (No Louis in the Navel), Ramanujan's first collection of Kannada poems is a very fine example of ironical structure. The poem describes the pollution of water in its various aspects. The water covered by lilies and moss in the lake causes cholera; the water in a river carries all the human excreta, soap and dirt; this water is not fit for drinking; the drinking water supplied by municipality is pure but bitter to the taste, unfit for the death rite of the grand-father and the food one eats has chlorine flavour. The theme of water pollution in the poem is only on the surface. The mischievous question at the end of the poem is significantly ambivalent. "What is to be done when one of the five elements is polluted?" The poem on the one hand laughs at the ancient values which have lost their cosmological basis and on the other hand at the new problem of pollution about which we go on giving political speeches and doing nothing. But behind the laughter is a serious concern of the poem about the silent conflict between the two sets of values -
one ancient and the other modern and the fact that the conflict is due to our ignorance. The poem forces the reader to probe into the substantial appearance of life. The very choice of the theme of water-pollution is ironical since it is a problem without any solution. Water is the main source of life, the source of creativity and when it gets polluted redemption of life from all sorts of corruption is inevitable. But what is ironical in the poem is the fact that the language of the poem effectively makes the serious issue sound trivial.

Irony, thus, is the structuring principle of this poem, making us aware of the destructive power of water which, in fact, sustains us. The facts in the poem are arranged in an order, which reveals the opposite of what is expected. A literal translation of the first two lines of the poem runs as follows: "A lily pond covered by the green moss of peace; drink and you get cholera." The description is carefully worded. The images of lilies and water, as images, have an old-world charm, because these images were used profusely in our ancient poetry. But this poem makes us aware of the fact that the water which breeds lilies and lotuses also breeds moss, because it is peaceful, does not flow. The poem does not use a Kannada equivalent of 'stagnant', just to prolong the illusion of the poetic charm of these images. "Drink, you get cholera" - this sentence at the end of the second line shatters the old-world poetic charm revealing the fact that
the water because it is stagnant breeds cholera. What is important in this description is the hidden word 'stagnant'. 'Lily pond covered by the green peaceful moss'. This expression is simply a camouflage on the word 'stagnant' and the expression is profoundly ironical. Describing moss as 'peaceful' is odd even in Kannada and the very oddness provokes the reader to reinterpret the poem.

Another poem in his second collection which has no title (It is - "Illi Iga Tane/Kannu bitta mari" - poem) begins in a casual way. The speaker of the poem watches a mother cat which has given birth to two kittens (one black, another white) catching them by the scruff of their neck and changing its abode. The cats do change their places seven times after the birth of their young ones. The poem gives 'a local habitation and a name' to this phenomenon. The cat belongs to the protagonist and it is called 'tiger'. 'It is our house cat' - this is the literal translation of line 9. The kittens are identified by their complexion; one is white and another is black. The cat, the poem says, does not discriminate between the black and white, between male and female, thus suggesting that the identity of the kitten is yet tentative and also suggesting the impartiality of maternal love. The protagonist who is watching the cat changing its dwelling place from his veranda - in the context of this poem he is
Ramanujan is also interpreting the event. What does the event symbolise? The poem, in stead of answering this question, tries to make fun of the mind which mischievously grasps meanings which are remotely connected with the event.

The mischievous mind is called 'a monkey' in the poem "I cannot bear the mischievous pranks of this monkey called mind" says Basavanna in one of his songs. Ramanujan uses the Sanskrit word 'markat' which is loaded with meaning as a metaphor. In common language 'markat' is mind and not an animal. The mind, then, which is mischievous, in stead of interpreting the event, remembers another theory that tries to explain the relation of man with god. According to Ramanuja, the 11th century saint-philosopher who expounded the philosophy of Visistadvaita, you must surrender the responsibility of the whole of your life to God like the young one of a cat which allows it to be carried away by the mother-cat. The mother-cat which carries the young ones by the scruff of their neck appears to be violent. The young ones are helpless and it is impossible to know whether this hold of the mother hurts them are not. In the poem the cat is called 'tiger', a ferocious animal belonging to the same species.

Now the Ramanujan of the poem remembering the Ramanuja of the 11th century is both comic and serious. Did the saint-philosopher actually see such an event and then built his theory? It is like Newton suddenly stumbling upon the theory
of gravitation when he saw an apple falling to the ground. But we know that the Ramanujan of the poem is a totally different person. He knows the two theories of Bhakti or devotion to God - 'marjal kishor nyaya' and 'markat kishor nyaya'. The devotee allows himself to be carried away by God and the devotee who clings to God like the young one of a monkey clinging to its mother. The poem makes use of both the symbols 'cat' and 'monkey'. But what happens in the poem is paradoxical, the monkey interprets the 'cat'. The last two lines of the poem -

The cat disappeared with its family.¹²

are another mischievous presentation of the event. The animal world has its own laws which do not care for the interpretative mind of man.

The distinct feature of this poem is its effort to produce its poetic meaning. Any other poet in Kannada writing about this event - the mother cat carrying its young ones - either would have elaborated the 'marjal-kishor-nyaya' of Ramanuja or would have used it as a metaphor of human love and its instinctive search for a home. Modern poets writing in Kannada are either committed to the tradition or to a version of liberal humanism and their commitment is both sincere and serious. A poet's commitment to his subject-matter can pose
very serious problem in the aesthetique of poetic expression. A poet as an individual may have his own personal commitments depending upon his moral concerns. But if these commitments interfere with poetic expression the value of a poem naturally depends upon the sincerity of the poet's commitments. The problem is in the confusion of moral and aesthetic issues in the complex phenomenon of poetic expression.

The ancient Indian poets, it seems, were not bothered by this problem. The 'vacanas' of our Veershaiva saints never confuse these issues. The Veershaiva saints were god-poessessed and naturally the sincerity of their devotion can never be questioned. At the same time the 'vacanas' are beautiful poetic expressions. Direct expression of metaphysical thought was also a mode of poetic expression. The saints' talk about their god is as natural as their talk about anything else. The nature of poetic expression was neither serious nor casual. The ancients when they wrote poetry wrote poetry and nothing else. Poetry in those days was not a secular medium used for communicating religious experience. Poetry was also a religious mode of expression and communication like prayer, meditation or even worship.

But nowadays poetry is a secular mode and there is a likelihood or a tension between the form and content whenever a poet tries to express religious experience through poetry.
Surely this is not an advantage for the full expression of poetry. It is really surprising that Ramanujan's poem, which is discussed above, makes use of this very disadvantage in an artistic way. The poem contains two kinds of experience; the poet's personal experience which is secular and the other that of Ramanuja, the saint, which is religious. The image of the mothercat which disappears with its family at the end of the poem highlights the irony of the situation. The reader's imagination is not allowed to go beyond the ironical relation between the actual mother-cat and the mother-cat of the celebrated metaphysical analogy. The poem uses the same language and imagery of the religious experience but it uses it in the light of another language and imagery, so that the truth contained by both the orders of experience but which lies between them, is suddenly illuminated.

III

The analysis of the poems presented in the previous section suggests the general form of Ramanujan's Kannada poetry. Parody is a very important element of his Kannada poetry and it is a very powerful element. The basic sensibility of Ramanujan's poetry, both in Kannada and English, is bilingual and the poetic uses of this bilingual sensibility are varied and interesting - ranging from sheer mischief to a critical faith of a serious type. The natural outcome of
bilingual or multilingual sensibility is, as it appears, either translation or parodying. The various forms of imaginative translation will be discussed in a subsequent chapter and here we confine ourselves mainly to parodying. Parodying in the poetry of Ramanujan is never a crude senseless imitation of a linguistic style for the sake of fun. It is subtle and sophisticated and it is motivated by a very serious purpose.

But it is better to know the basic principles of parody before discovering the elements of the same in the poetry of Ramanujan. Mikhail Bakhtin has something very important to say about the form of parody:

"... in parody two languages are crossed with each other, as well as two styles, two linguistic points of view, and in the final analysis two speaking subjects ....... there is an argument between languages, an argument between styles of language. But it is not a dialogue in the narrative sense; rather it is a dialogue between points of view, each with its own concrete language that cannot be translated into the other."

What is important in this definition is that parody is a dialogue between two points of view but not the dialogue in 'a narrative sense'. The dialogue in a narrative sense, though not appearing continuous, yet traces the continuous
development of the theme. But the dialogue of parody is for the sake of evaluation and clarification. As Bakhtin puts it "it is a dialogue between two points of view each with its own concrete language that cannot be translated into the other". Translation alone can preserve and continue what is translated from one language into the other. Parody, on the other hand, preserves in order to distort and deliberately misinterpret in order to interpret. What happens in a parody happens at the level of language because only at that level you can get a consciousness which is structured and made concrete. There are many Kannada poems by Ramanujan which can be studied from this point of view.

A poem entitled "Sahaja" in Ramanujan's Hokkulalli Hoovilla (No Lotus in the Navel), his first collection of Kannada poems, can be examined here for a better understanding of formal elements of Ramanujan's poetry. This poem mocks a celebrated Sanskrit verse by Shankaracharya. Here is a straightforward translation of the same:

```
My soul, my lord, is yourself and intellect Farvati
My vital spirits your servants and my body is your house,
The happy experiences my senses receive are your worship
And sleep is a state of ecstacy
My walking is the rite of circumambulation
And all my speech is your praise
Whatever work I perform, my lord, is all your worship
```
This verse not only sums up the gist of the whole of Advaita thinking but also presents a practical way of life according to the Advaita doctrine. At the same time, it is a poetry of a very high order maintaining a balance between the ephemerality of human affairs and the immortality of the divine. The doctrine of Advaita helps the poet to juxtapose the two and make each human activity a gesture of worship of the divine. Since according to the doctrine of the Advaita what we see as human is essentially divine, the human appearances being illusory. The doctrine of Advaita asserts the exclusive singularity of the divine.

The verse has the complete structure of a religious poem and the truth it presents is highly serious. The very seriousness of the poem tempts any other poet to mock at it. Ramanujan's Kannada poem is a parody of this verse. The Kannada poem is entitled "Sahaja" which means 'natural'. The word also has a religious connotation. One of the Bhakti cults of the eastern part of India is called 'Sahaja Panth'. The poem makes use of this connotation also. But the poem describes the natural human activities like eating, drinking, breathing, walking, sleeping, defecating and copulation. But each of these activities is described in religious terms.

'Defecating in hurry is your offering'. This description is surely a parody in the sense it mocks at the serious
description in the Sanskrit verse. Sanskrit, like Latin, is an ecclesiastical language and what is parodied here is the language and the style of language. What appears to be serious and sacred in Sanskrit sounds profane and trivial in Kannada. But the mischief in the last four lines is the most subtle.

When (it) is fallen it is salvation, my lord,
When (it) is raised, rebirth

In the middle of the waist
Another birth.

The first line describes ejaculation which is liberation and is as blissful as salvation. In the second line what is raised is the male member, a cause of birth. And the same thought is continued in the last two lines. The play upon the Kannada words is both mischievous and sophisticated.

But definitely the poem is not a school-boy parody, a verse which takes delight in pronouncing four-letter words. The purpose of the poem, it seems, is to show the complete truth which cannot be revealed by the serious word. The verse of Shankaracharya presents only one aspect of the truth in such a serious and final way that it neglects the other aspect of the truth which is its opposite. The Sanskrit verse asserts that there is no difference between the divine and the human, between sacred and profane and between religious
and non-religious. Ramanujan's poem questions this statement and tries to assert the opposite. The sacred is sacred because it is different from the profane. In stead or writing another poem insisting on the difference which is crucial, Ramanujan writes a parody of the Sanskrit verse. Another poem making a positive statement maintaining the opposite truth would be again a partial statement. Parody alone can complete the truth.

The element of parody is a very important aspect of Ramanujan's Kannada poetry, but it does not mean that his Kannada poems are a bunch of parodies. There are many serious poems like "Tata Kootidda" (The Grand-father was Sitting), "Nalavattu Neralu" (Forty Shadows), "Bagilu" (Door) etc. which convey a profound sense of reality which is possible only through a poetic workmanship of a high order.

"Teredare Bagilu"17 (The Door When it is open) uses the metaphor of a door in order to express the two life-styles. The door of a house is an opening into the outside world and it is the door which divides the inside from the outside. If there is no house and no door to that house it is impossible to have the two hemispheres, inside and outside. In America the door is always closed and it is easy to open and close the door, thanks to technological devices. In India the door is always open, and if it is closed there is a crowd outside the
house during daytime and serious doubts during night. The
closed door of a house in India is inauspicious and spells
disaster. The beautifully decorated doors of temple would
remain open until midnight formerly, but recently they close
the doors at 8 p.m. due to the fear of theft. The poem
seriously tries to define the door. It is a door when it
opens otherwise it becomes a wall. The wit contained in this
statement sheds light on the unexplored area of meaning
regarding opening and closing, the two opposite and also
relative functions which are creative of culture. The Indian
life the openness of which is obvious surprisingly contains
some secrets and mysteries. One of the daughters-in-law of the
protagonist's paternal aunt went to the bathroom and she had
to be brought out after breaking the door open. What might
have happened inside the bathroom is not revealed until we
come to the end of the poem. She delivered a male child who
when he grew up went to Bengal and at present is working as
an engineer. The devastating wit of this statement reveals
the fact of human life finding its openings in unexpected ways.
The last lines -

Bagilu dwara
Dwarake 18

refuse to get translated. 'Bagilu' is a Kannada word for
'door' and 'dwara' is Sanskrit word. 'Dwarake' is a place-
name, the name of a town on the sea shore of western sea and
was once the capital of Lord Krishna. 'Destiny finds its doors everywhere,' is a statement found in Act I of Kalidasa's famous play Abhijnana Shakuntalam. All these statements are related to the fact that the closed doors of the bathroom suddenly opened the way of a child who was born behind the closed doors of the bathroom. The child-birth in India takes place behind the closed doors, but the birth itself is an opening. The poem exploits the irony which is inherent in this situation. The last word 'Dwarake' is significant from another point of view. A city on the sea shore is also a door for the outsiders to come in. The gateway to India can also become a gateway from India.

The Kannada poems of Ramanujan, it seems, employ techniques which are unknown to Kannada poetry. "Nalavattu Neralu" (Forty Shadows) a poem in his first collection of Kannada poems is apparently an imagistic poem. But a close look at the poem would show that it is something more than a mere cluster of images. The central image of the poem is shadow and its relation with the substance and also with light which is its polar opposite. The poem begins with a tentative statement that some poets are fond of shadow because for them shadow is Krishna and light is Radha. Krishna was dark and Radha had a fair complexion. But this juxtaposition, the poem mockingly asserts, is instant poetry. This is the first section of the poem which is a prologue to this
long poem of seven parts. The second part has two images. The first is that of the shadow of a donkey fallen on the uneven surface of a dilapidated wall. The second is shadowy structure of the legs of women exposed by the sun and which provokes the hidden but free lust of the eyes of men. Both these images reveal the relation between the shadow and light. The donkey and its shadow and the faint outline of a woman's body - these images have the undertones of sexuality at various levels. What is common to both these images is the function of fantasy - in this case sexual fantasy - which is the fusion and confusion of substance and shadow. The third section presents an image of red sunlight veiled by a cloud. The cloud covers the light but does not hide it completely. But the light and the cloud are covered by anything on earth, the stray bull on the street, a car with a broken body or any other mundane thing.

The images of the first three sections present different combinations of shadow and light, and each pattern suggesting pattern of sexual love. Section IV presents the same problem in two different cultural and religious contexts. The Saint Sophia church has forty windows which allow light from forty directions and naturally men and women entering the church can have forty shadows each. Contrary to this the Hanuman temple in India has no windows. The temple priest lights camphor and as the light moves there is one shadow of
forty heads. The light and shadow have a free communal life in the church and the individuality of each person is kept in tact by the community. The Indian temple, on the other hand, has no windows and the light of camphor produces a communal dragon of forty heads.

Section V presents the image of an old planetarium—Jantar Mantar—built by Raja Jayasimha of Delhi. It suggests the cosmic relation of the moon and the earth. These structures are rooted in earth and therefore cannot move, but they can measure the movements of the planets in a silent way. Every moment time moves like the 'Sunday race-horse', but it is a movement which looks like stagnation. Time which measures everything is like the protean body of Lord Vamana which goes on expanding and contracting every moment. It is interesting to note that the Sanskrit word Trivikrama means not only Vamana but also the Sun. This time is both creative and destructive which creates tender grass and also dead yellow leaves under its foot.

Section VI moves from the earth to the sky. The bodiless flow of this primal energy is split into light and shadow only when it is obstructed. Both light and shadow flow like two rivers. The shadow of the solar or lunar eclipses is caused by the intervention of the earth and the earth receives the moon-light hidden in the heat of the sun.
The dragon like serpent of Rahu lives in the mole-hill of the moon. The poem means that creative energy starts from the tail of this huge serpent.

The diction of this section is rather poetic and the poem suddenly becomes conscious of this poetic sublimity and changes its tone in the last section.

It's all words and words,
and superfluous words.
Look
Along with the hair dropped from head
There is a minishadow
which does not become gray.²¹

The poem ends with this casual statement. The paradox at the end contains a serious truth in spite of the casual tone of the expression. The shadow of a hair has the same colour whether the colour of the hair is black or white. The fact that the hair grows grey and its shadow has the same colour is ironical.

What is interesting in this poem is the change in meaning of the shadow. In the beginning shadow is Krishna as perceived by innocent Romantic poets without realising the full significance of the image. The meaning is realised by rejecting this meaning and through other meanings interacting upon one another. Some of the Kannada critics like P.L.
Subramanyam, Madhav Kulkarni and D.A. Shankar have noted intricate imagery of the poem and have tried to spell out the central theme. But all of them have followed only the shadow neglecting the substance in the form of architectural structures like Sophia church, the Hanuman temple and the huge planetorium built by Jayasimha. These structures are symbols of human culture, each one trying to utilise or obstruct the natural flow of primal energy. The windows of Sophia church, for example, have pattern of stained glass and they tint the white radiance of light which is a reminder of the Shelleyan image. The parody contained in this image is subdued because the poem both accepts and rejects the meaning of Shelley's lines. Unlike Shelley Ramanujan emphasizes the importance of the metaphor of the stained glass. The metaphor in Ramanujan is more important than the meaning it suggests.

I use the word 'metaphor' here in the sense that Roman Jacobson uses it; that is, one of the two poles of writing, metaphor and metonymy. Metaphor is based on similarity between things and metonymy on contiguity. According to Jacobson metaphor is a characteristic principle of verse and metonomy that of prose.

"The principle of similarity underlies poetry; the metrical parallelism of lines, or the phonic equivalence of rhyming words prompts the question of semantic similarity and contrast; there exist,
for instance, grammatical and antigrammatical but never agrammatical rhymes. Prose, on the contrary, is forwarded essentially by contiguity.\(^25\).

But any poem or a prose passage may employ these principles and create a pattern. The poetry of Ramanujan, as I have said, is predominantly the poetry of metaphor, and it is consciously so. Even an ordinary poet can use metaphor either unconsciously or out of habit. 'The ships plough into deep waters' - a line like this anybody can write without knowing that he is creating a metaphor by using the verb 'plough'. A poet like Ramanujan who knows that ordinary language contains many metaphors writes with a conscious effort to exploit the hidden richness of language.

add the lepers of Madurai,
male, female, unmarried,
with children,

lion races, crabs for claws,
clotted on their shadows
under the stone-eyed

goddesses of dance, mere pillars,
moving as nothing on earth
can move - \(^26\)

This rather long passage has been cited here not for the detailed analysis, but the last two lines which must be attentively studied, need a poetic context. The image of lepers which is sharply contrasted with the image of the 'stone-
eyed goddesses of dance, mere pillars' moves 'as nothing on earth can move'. The verb 'move' has been used here firstly as an intransitive verb and then as a transitive verb and as a result, the two levels of meaning converge and create a curious complex of meaning. The metaphorical relation between the moving shadows of the clawed hands of the lepers and the graceful movement of the 'goddesses of dance' is still more intriguing. It is built on similarity which is also contrast. The lepers are living, live specimens of rotting life while the stone-goddesses are non-living, aesthetic and also divine. In a Kannada poem entitled 'Kale mattu Jeevan Soundarya' Ramanujan uses the same image of Madurai lepers and the dancing goddesses with some modifications. The lepers in that poem have broken limbs, of course; but the stone-goddesses are also broken, ravaged by human history. The memory of the Kannada poem is inevitable when we consider the image in the English poem and the memory enhances the meaning of this passage. The meaning of the transitive verb and that of the intransitive verb both converge into one another and also stand apart since the poet has exploited the ambiguity of the verb 'move'.

The point that is made a little before that a metaphor is more important in Ramanujan than the meaning it suggests, is seen in a clearer light now. Poetic meaning, unlike the meaning of ordinary language, cannot be taken for
granted, nor can it be predicted easily. Great poetry creates its meaning every moment by using poetic devices. What I suggest here is that the use of metaphor in Ramanujan is to play tricks with the easy flow of meaning and also to keep the nature of created meaning tentative.

A Kannada poem entitled 'Tirugi Bande' (I Returned) can be considered here in order to understand this phenomenon in the poetry of Ramanujan. The theme of the poem is stated in a brief sentence of only two words - 'I returned'. The rest of the poem serves as a metaphorical context for this fact. Returning presupposes the event of going, journey. The journey in this case is rather an adventure because the poem uses the metaphor of an astronaut going to the moon. The metaphor of space travel suggests that the purpose of the journey could be spiritual. The astronaut leaves his hometown, country, frees himself from the bondage of the earth and the attraction of the gravitational pull, conditions the needs and the requirements of his body to the extra-terrestrial environment and then returns in reverse order. The journey of the astronaut and his return from the moon to the earth is described in all its details and then at the end a brief sentence says, 'like that I returned'. The very brevity of this sentence tempts the reader to know the how and where of this return. The answer, of course, is in the astronaut-image. The poem seems to maintain that any
spiritual experience - there are clear hints in the description about the spirituality of the experience - is bound to be short-lived as long as man is imprisoned in the cage of his body and has strong affinities with the earth. But the metaphor of the astronaut has other meanings too. The astronaut even in the remote regions of space has not changed much. The freedom of the astronaut is only a fiction. The man who has seen the other side of the moon has retained his human limitations.

These are some features of Ramanujan's Kannada poetry which have helped to distinguish his poetry from the poetry of other Kannada poets. Modern Kannada poetry is strongly assertive in the sense that each poet feels that he has something very important to say and poetry is only a medium to convey what he wants to say. Again, Kannada poetry has its own commitments. For example, the poetry of Gopalkrishna Adiga, the most important among the modernist poets, can be divided into two kinds. The poetry of public concerns is full of rhetoric, denouncing the corruption of our society and the decline in moral values. The personal poetry, on the other hand, is quite subdued and profoundly introspective. All the same, the poetry of Adiga is insistent on finding a final answer to any problem. The image of a poet in Kannada is that of a prophet who not only identifies the problems that we are facing but also has to find out a
solution to each problem that he identifies. The concept of poetry as a sophisticated game is not acceptable to the world of Kannada poetry.

Compared to the achievements of other Kannada poets, the poetry of Ramanujan appears to be an irresponsible play. The element of parody, irony and comic overtones which are integral in the poetry of Ramanujan are unknown to Kannada poetry. What is more intriguing is the fact that comic overtones do not reduce Ramanujan's poetry to comic verse. The comic in Ramanujan is symptomatic of a special attitude to life. It does not mean that Ramanujan's attitude to life is negative but it is an attitude which does not recognise the positive and negative as two irreconcilable categories. The acceptance of the positive is bound to become the rejection of the negative without realising the basic fact that the norms which create these categories are shaky and tentative. The modern poetry in India is passing through a phase of revolution and it is the idea of revolution that does not allow the poets to free themselves from the norms acceptable. The very obsession for freedom can be and is a bondage. Ramanujan's poetry fortunately is free from any such obsession. Ramanujan knows the value of freedom because he knows its limitations too. There is a significant statement in the last paragraph of a foreward which he has written to a
Kannada translation of an unpublished English novel entitled *Yellow Fish*, which says - "Discipline is necessary for sustaining the health of the mind. We need a set of values, not only uniform and communicable but also universal values. Without these values freedom becomes a popular and cheap word."
REFERENCES


5 Ibid, p. 169.

6 Mahabharat "Mousala Parva" Last Canto Verses 81-82


8 Ibid, p. 28.

9 Ibid, p. 28.

10 A.K.Ramanujan, Mattu Itar Padyagalu (Dharwad : Manohar Grantha Mala, 1977) p. 79.


14 Acharya Shankar


Ibid, p. 42.


19 Kalidas, Abhijnana Shakuntala, Act I. Scene i Verse 16.


Madhava Kulkarni, " " p. 91-107.


28 Ibid, p. 18.
