CHAPTER - IV

A. K. RAMANUJAN

DISCOVERING THE PRESENT THROUGH THE GHOST OF THE PAST

"One of the realities of the literary scene in our time is that of the exile as writer who takes his language and homeland abroad with him, or writes in a language other than his own. Exile is seen as a rite of passage before he earns the right to speak". ¹ The confrontation facing the contemporary Indian English poet today is between tradition and modernity. It forms the significant core of his aesthetic values, corresponding directly to his modern sensibility. It also requires a resolution between the tension of the inherited and the acquired. The modern sensibility of the writers writing in English has also made them conscious of their own rich, traditional heritage, bringing about a palpable change in their outlook by making them approach things in a more realistic manner. To paint this reality, they do not have to idealise or romanticise or be overdecorative in their descriptions.
For the contemporary Indian English poet 'modernism' epitomises a fusion or the harmonising of the past and the present. It also makes tentative demands on the poet, by expecting him to be bolder and more spontaneous in his approach. Modernism is characterised by a break-up of conventional form, even a total crisis of psyche and an attempt to locate one's identity which had become questionable besides generating a general atmosphere of uncertainty. So the modern poet is more questioning in spirit and is full of scepticism about his legacies. As a result, we do come across a lot of cynicism and irony.

In the process, identity, too, becomes important, almost an overwhelming burden on the conscience as guilt and alienation follow. For the artist the quest becomes existential. 'Modernity' also stands for the acceptance of reality. It is not turning away from, but coming to terms with whatever is there. It is the proverbial catching of the bull by the horns. In the words of Nissim Ezekiel: "A man can do something for and in his environment by being fully what he is, by not withdrawing from it".2

Modern Indian poets writing in English have begun to come to terms with this peculiar dilemma. A.K. Ramnujan is one such poet who instead of putting up a struggle, has deigned to accept the world as it is. He is a poet with a modern sensibility and a modern attitude along with
cynicism, irony and the complexities that usually constitute a world which keeps changing from moment to moment. His poetry neither advocates a 'back to tradition' approach nor is he too westernised in his outlook. His poems grow out of a mind that is Indian as well as Western and so they somehow succeed in opening doors to India in more than one way. He does not sound uncomfortable or suffer feelings of guilt or alienation because of his position. In fact, he seems to enjoy it all tremendously, making his poetry vital and hard hitting.

Raghavendra Rao criticises Ramanujan's claim of having successfully overcome his alienation. "I think the pressure to create poetry out of a welter of alienations compels Ramanujan, whether in his precious Kannada non-poetry or in his English poetry, to resort to a strategy of reverse romanticism". ³ Reverse Romanticism, he goes on to describe as "a frame of mind and the operational strategy which transforms the remote into the immediate, thus imposing a pseudo-realism on essentially romantic modalities of experience". ⁴

Ramanujan does not let any dichotomy build around his poetic inspiration and craft. About his own poetry he writes, "English and my disciplines (linguistics, Anthropology) give me my 'outer' forms - linguistic, metrical, logical and other such ways of shaping experience;
and my thirty years in India, my frequent visits and field trips, my personal and professional pre-occupations with Kannada, Tamil, the classics and folklore give me my substance, my 'inner' forms, images and symbols. They are continuous with each other, and I no longer can tell what comes from where.\(^5\)

Ramanujan again and again taps familial roots and conjures up vivid pictures which include scenes, incidents, descriptions of people and places, images and symbols of family life. Parthasarathy, a prominent contemporary poet, comments on Ramanujan's art thus, "The family for, Ramanujan is in fact one of the central metaphors with which he thinks".\(^6\) Family, does indeed become the 'objective correlative' for all his experience.

Death, silence, loneliness, these images haunt, his poetic world and there is naturally a struggle to push them in the background and invoke instead reminiscences of a happy family life amidst companions and relatives of the past. It is tinged with sadness what time does to one. In Ramanujan, the family is important, as it still is all over India. His tiny histories, personal and seemingly insignificant, reflect a concern with the importance of the past, albeit a personal family past. The controlled emotion of Ramanujan's poetry is at its best when he speaks out of an awareness that it is the tiny interrelation of past and present that gives family life that quality it has in the sub-continent.
Ramanujan's poetry is born out of his Indian experience, history, his early formative years; the joint family in which he grew and even the family house; everything becomes a subject for his poetry, exciting his imagination:

Sometimes I think that nothing that ever comes into this house goes out. Things come in everyday to lose themselves among other things lost long ago ....

The ironical attitude which Ramanujan assumes, speaks significantly of his Western education, influence and of his long stay in a foreign country. It also speaks vitally for his urban experience which does not have life simplified, "... and sense of living from moment to moment in a changing world in which older values and attitudes often are seen as unrealistic. While Ramanujan can evoke the warmth of traditional Indian family life and the closeness of long remembered relationships, more often he shows conflicts, arguments, surprises; he also shows that the supposed glory of the Tamil cultural heritage is a fiction which ignores the reality of the past". His poetry evokes vivid pictures of a Tamil Brahmin background. In a bid to scrutinise Indian ethos, he keeps creating, recreating it; always probing and analysing and determined to find:

I must seek and will find
My particular hell only in my hindu mind:
Must translate and turn
till I blister and roast
for certain lives to come, 'eyedeep'...

It is very rarely that Ramanujan lets his American experience interfere with or impinge on his Hindu sensibility. In his mind India and America are two different worlds. They do not exist together except, "... and come together, however, only at a time of personal crisis explored, for instance, in 'Still Another View of Grace'". And when that happens, "Ten Commandments crumbled in my father's past". Although Ramanujan seems to be deeply conscious of his Indian roots, yet he appears to be considerably detached in his descriptions. It is the way that he translates his Indian experience in a Western manner that truly sets him apart and does not let his poems remain a mere social documentation of Hindu joint family life. We also get glimpses of the self of Ramanujan the man besides knowing about his poetic sensibility.

Distance or the 'Reverse-Romanticism' seems to have made him look at it all in a clearer light. Very often he does assume a mock serious tone and uses the device of irony, yet he appears greatly relieved at the physical and the emotional distance between him and the experience. Life in a joint family in India has a strange, insidious way of getting into the very being, never letting go and never making an individual feel truly free! Ramanujan understands and accepts it, yet his stay abroad has granted him a
comparative freedom from his bonds, and he seems to be enjoying and celebrating his liberation. He can afford to be more objective and from the vantage point of his liberation, he can satirise it also, as he does in the poem, 'Small Scale Reflections On A Great House', a house, where nothing that ever comes in, goes out. He uses irony as a poetic mode and the great house becomes an ironic symbol of hallowed tradition, such as the Hindu Joint Family. Everyone seems to get absorbed into the family sprawl. The individuals lose identities. Runaway sons come back to continue the growth and extension of the family. And nothing ever goes out, not even the,

Neighbour's dishes brought up With the greasy sweets they made.  

Being a Hindu is important to Ramanujan. He seems to understand the true significance of being a Hindu. He neither rejects the vedantic tradition nor the Karmic philosophy. He relates himself quite closely to his Hindu background as he firmly resolves to find his own particular hell in his Hindu mind. There is no other way out for him. The body is important to a Hindu as he affirms in 'A Hindu To His Body':

Dear pursuing presence, 
Dear body: 
You brought me 
Do not leave me behind.
Talking about the role of memory in this poem K. Raghavendra Rao comments:

... memory is no longer mere memory, a loss in time, but it becomes a structure coterminous with the present and the continuous, and even with the future unknown. It is then that reverse romanticism rises above a mere strategy of self-defence and becomes the framework for poetry that shakes one to his roots and disturbs one deeply. It takes us to the presence of such moving poetry as '.... to rise in the sap of trees/let me go with you and feel the weight/of honey - hives in my branching/ and the burlap weave of weaver-birds/ in my hair.'

In his poem 'The Hindoo: he does not hurt a fly or a spider either', the poet uses a mocking tone to describe why a Hindu does not hurt a fly or a spider because he believes in the 'reincarnation' of the spirit: 'for who can tell who's who? can you?'. The very spider could be his adulterous grandmother who had enjoyed many lovers behind her husband's back. And the persona in the poem explains his own gentleness and the immense patience by saying that most probably he takes after his grandfather who was so gentle and forgiving that he almost ignored his wife's faithlessness. Ramanujan makes use of ironic humour to make fun of his grandfather's cowardice. The poet always seems to be laughing in his sleeves.

The Hindu believes in the Gita and reads it religiously. A serene spirit accepts pleasure and pain with
an even mind, and is unmoved by either. So the Gita advocates the concept of Sthita-pragna but Rananujan "suggests the near impossibility of the Hindu ideal of Sthita-pragna in 'The Hindoo: He reads his Gita'. Gita reading Hindu does not 'marvel' at good or evil but when he confronts the primeval urge of sex and violence in the innocent face of a boy, his tranquility is smothered". 17

Ramanujan has a sense of history and he even has a taste for it, synonymous in the sense of 'self-knowledge' and 'freedom of the spirit':

Which usually
Changes slowly,
Changes sometimes
During a single conversation. 18

It is the history of the 'present moment of the past' which makes him really aware of the truth, connecting past and the present. Thus, he keeps swinging his present making contact, touching points in the past, endowing him with enlightenment. K. Raghavendra Rao says, "...when the poet resolves the conflict between the past and the present by knitting them together as memory - memory as an endless river in which the past, the present and the future are mere shifting positional perspectives, then his poetry achieves success". 19
The poet as a young, growing boy had held a different view of his petite, little aunt but years afterwards a mere conversation with his mother changes his view into definite knowledge as understanding dawns upon him:

And the dark
Stone face of my little aunt
Acquired some expression
At last.

The poet also satirises what history, the great Indian history stands for again in a very half serious, half mocking tone, in his poem 'Some Indian uses of History On A Rainy Day'. There is a group of clerks waiting for a bus:

They tell each other how
Old king Harsha's men
beat soft songs
To stand a crowd of ten
Thousand monks
In a queue, to give them
And the single visiting Chinaman
A hundred pieces of gold
A pearl, and a length of cloth,
So, miss another bus, the eighth
And begin to walk for king Harsha's
Monks had nothing but their own two feet.

Everyone has a feeling of cultural and social history in one's bones. Ramanujan writes in one of his poems about a professor of Sanskrit on cultural exchange, who gets lost in Berlin rain of lanterns, landmarks, a gothic lotus on the iron gate and suddenly finds himself as he sees a 'Swastika' engraved on his neighbour's arm, in the bus. In the 'Last of the Princes', the poet makes fun of the inheritors of a
dying heritage, who still continue to live on past glories 'a dead past and a deader present', yet go on with the great tradition. Ramanujan believes in tradition, yet he seems critical of the blind or the timid adherence to tradition. For him, tradition has a much wider significance. It is possessing an historical sense which has in it the element of "not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence".  

Like this Ramanujan goes on to describe scenes from Indian life, Indian beliefs, his own beginnings etc. His father, mother, sister, a cousin, a distant uncle, all stir his poetic sensibility. The poet never makes overt comments or criticism, yet makes his meaning clear by making ample use of the device of irony. In his poetry we continuously come across the element of surprise, suspense or pain. The re-enactment or the repossession of the scene in memory helps him to understand more clearly the significance of something that had happened in the past. That is why his poems become unpredictable or even seem to change direction as they develop and the end of the poem often turns out to be different from what it had begun to communicate in the beginning.

It is perhaps Ramanujan's long stay abroad that explains his persistent pre-occupation with his Indian roots. Ramanujan is an expatriate poet and in the words of
There is something to be said for exile
You learn roots are deep.

- Ramanujan tries desperately to play down his love and fascination for his roots. In the words of K. Raghavendra Rao:

... his poetry tries desperately, not cleverly, to turn the exotic into the ordinary and thus make the ordinary the exotic, involving the strategy of reverse-Romanticism.

But otherwise, too, absence makes the heart grow fonder. Past is so important to Ramanujan that a consciousness of it colours even his love experience. In 'Love Poem for A Wife' he regrets that,

Really what keeps us apart
At the end of years is unshared childhood.

Here one follows the realisation of a hiatus that exists between husband and wife, even after years of marriage. This also makes clear the poet's grief that he will have to learn to accept and live with the fact that his wife will always remain a stranger to him in certain ways. A shared past binds people together, making it easier for them to understand each other. "The purpose behind Ramanujan's descriptions of family relationships is to get the reader to focus on the persona's feelings of alienation". The alienation he experiences, within the
relationship troubles him.

Past stands for continuity and also for roots, without which one will be in a dark abyss of namelessness. Continuity also implies that one belongs. In the poem 'Self-Portrait', it is this idea which has been dealt by the poet ironically:

I resemble every one
But myself and sometimes see
In shop windows,
Despite the well-known laws
Of optics,
The portrait of a stranger,
Date unknown,
Often signed in a corner
By my father. 27

Although continuity gives security, it also stands for a certain namelessness, an obscurity, a certain loss of identity as you become a millennial part of humanity at large, an inheritor of a legacy you yourself are going to hand over to others one day. The poet knows that he is the product of his past, yet in many ways he finds himself a stranger to himself. The poet is also aware of the dreariness of the tradition. Tradition for him is not a matter of dead ritual or mere obedience or conformity towards a set way of life. The poet recognises the need for change and also is aware of the demands of a restless, moving world. In his poem, "Entries for a Catalogue of Fears", he uses images of growing away from the past but
they are of an unwanted future imprisoned by an unhealthy sense of tradition which stifles individuality and puts curbs on human growth by advocating drab conformity:

I'll love my children
Without end,
And do them infinite harm
Staying on the roof,
A peeping Tom Ghost
Looking for all sorts of proof
For the presence of the past:
They'll serve a sentence
Without any term
And know it only dimly
Long afterwards
Through borrowed words
And wrong analyses.

The poem 'Small Scale Reflections On a Great House', might be read as symbolic of the past which keeps absorbing everything. Similarly, it can even be symbolised as great Indian Hindu Tradition which accommodates a variety of people, religions, beliefs, myths, philosophies and Gods, besides having a great capacity for assimilating new with an equanimity, without a loss of balance, without any conflict and without undergoing any change in its basic character:

And ideas behave like rumours,
Once casually mentioned somewhere
They come back to the door as prodigies
Born to prodigal fathers, with eyes
That vaguely look like our own,
Like what uncle said the other day.

There are critics such as Davinder Mohan, who believe Ramanujan's poetry to be nostalgic. "In his poetry the integral self is more active but his world of experience is
essentially of nostalgia of his own cultural past". I do not think that the poet suffers any nostalgia for his cultural past. It is on the other hand, the agonising pain that the poet experiences at the ephemeral nature of things, e.g. in the poem "Of mother's among other Things" :

My cold parchment tongue licks bark
In the mouth when I see her four
Still sensible fingers slowly flex
To pick a grain of rice from the kitchen floor.

It is plain grief, a sense of loss that the poet experiences. The poet feels sad at the change in his mother and is unable to express his feelings. Sometimes, it is even the dreary present which contrasts unfavourably with a beautiful past, leaving the poet sad and wistful. There was a time when :

From her ear-rings three diamonds
Spalsh a handful of needles
And I see my mother run back
From rain to the crying cradles.
The rains tack and sew
With broken thread the rags
Of the tree-tasselled light.

And now,

But her hands are a wet eagle's
Two black pink-crinkled feet,
One talon crippled in a garden,
trap set for a mouse. Her sarees
Do not cling : they hang, loose
Feather of a one time wing.
Although the poet seems adjusted to the idea of change which is inevitable, yet he feels grieved at the idea that the world has to change. Finally, it is the acceptance of reality which makes him modern in his approach. The poet does appear reminiscent, yet for him it is more of memory play and less of nostalgia. Memory becomes the main structural element of his poetry. "Everything is memory for man, since everything turns into the past with a devastating rapidity and fury". For Ramanujan it is memory which is the real tormentor. If it were plain nostalgia, he would have redeemed the events or persons with more compassion, but he does not. Occasionally, he succeeds in cloaking the nostalgia with an ironic mask.

Ramanujan summons from the hinterland of memory buried moments of suspense, surprise or agony, and turns them into disturbingly vivid poems. The mutilated beggar, the drowned woman, - they are caught in their contortions and misery, and they are there like the denizens of Dante's hell. The images are unforgettable, but perhaps there is not always the touch of compassion to redeem the doomed:

I have known
That measly looking man
Not very likeable...

There are two worlds: one 'outside' and the other 'inside'. The 'outside' world of Ramanujan is made of descriptions where he purposely avoids romanticising. Infact, he appears to be ruthlessly exact and correct.
he seems to be doing it with a ferocity. By being blatantly prosaic in his details, Ramanujan somehow succeeds in not letting the reader enter his very private, secret world of pain. At a very painful juncture he assumes a mock serious tone, always mixing trivial with the important to take the edge off his despair. On one hand there is this experience which makes his roots yet Ramanujan never sounds complacent of his past. It is a simple acceptance. It fills him with a feeling of deep rooted security, yet it is not blind acceptance, as he is so sharply aware of its dark and negative side. Coupled with this are his urban influences and challenges, which he can not ignore. All this is represented in pain, fears, anxieties he experiences. For him anxiety is "not branchless as the pear tree, It has naked roots and secret twigs". And also, "Anxiety has no metaphor to end it".  

He seems to have deeply experienced anxiety which is different from hope. And the fears, rational or irrational, have come to become a part of his psyche. He draws upon memory freely. Infact, the memory would not let him forget and rest, haunting him always. Memory for him becomes a vigorous, creative force, opening door after door, almost forcing him to describe relations, places, incidents, scenes etc. Memory becomes a theatre, where one emotion after the other is acted out, through the description of a scene, incident or person, and through it all the poet's own
personality emerges.

Ramanujan tends to underplay the emotional aspect. Maybe he does it to emphasise his unemotional involvement or even objectivity, as in the words of T.S. Eliot, "Poetry is not turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion. It is not the expression of personality but an escape from personality". Also the passage of time and the physical distancing has endowed him with a protective shield or enough capacity to detach himself physically and emotionally and thus evolve a new relationship between the past and the present. The core of the poet's inner world remains memory and how it reestablishes in a quickly changing world, giving new meanings, and getting new names, in the process. The evolving process has been continuous from the past to the present and from there on to the future.

Although the poet fervently seeks liberation from his tormenting world of memories, yet he never seems to be truly free of them. It remains a moment frozen in the consciousness of the poet's experience. It must have been something which had inspired either great awe, interest, intrigue or fear in the highly impressionable and sensitive mind of the growing boy of a middle class, Southern, Hindu Brahmin joint family. "It is not 'emotion recollected in tranquility', but recollections emotionalised in an untranquil moment that appears to be the driving force
behind much of Ramanujan's poetry. Time and again 'A hood of memory like a coil on heath', unfolds itself on the mind'.

The past continuously keeps intruding on the present. Something in the present, an ordinary incident, is enough to bring the past back in all vividness. Present keeps opening doors to the past:

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.

Now the experience begins in the poet's land of exile, North America, but inevitably and predictably, goes back in time, taking him back to the life, once, lived in India. The memories crowd in. The poem, "Breaded Fish" has the phrase 'a hood of memory', and it also confesses to a reluctance to face up to the experience except as poetry. Memories bring back the picture of a half naked, dead woman on the beach. For the poet there seems to be some symbolic relationship between the dead woman and the affectionate gesture of his wife who has specially prepared breaded fish for him. It evokes in his mind death and the cold indifference of the world towards the death of a human being. It also poignantly contrasts the warmth of a wife's
love and care with the usual indifference of the world at large to the suffering of the other human beings. The poet is unable to enjoy eating the breaded fish.

The poem 'Looking For A Cousin On A Swing', talks about latent sexuality in children. It describes in a beautiful manner the vague, faint and half formed sexual stirrings of childhood. The sexuality was always there but the child was not conscious. A girl of four or five, experienced sexual feelings as she sat on a swing with her cousin, who was also only six or seven:

... and afterwards
We climbed a tree, she said,
Not very tall, but full of leaves
Like those of a fig tree,
And we were very innocent
About it...

The girl has grown and is now living in the city. The experience still lives in her and she unconsciously goes about looking for the same swing, i.e., the same quality of sexual experience to give an outlet to her not so dormant libido now. There is a hint of promiscuity. Notice the irony as the poet remarks:

Now she looks for the swing
In cities with fifteen suburbs
And tries to be innocent
About it.

The simple ride on the swing is so dramatised as to bring to conscious
memory the primitive sense of guilt as posited against the pure innocence with the archetypal patterns with the Edenic theme.

In the poem 'Still Life' memory turns into deep longing for the beloved. The poet would like to relive every moment that his beloved was with him. He looks again at the leftovers of a half eaten sandwich, which carry the shape of the beloved's bite. The acceptance and the denial of loneliness are matched. His acceptance of loneliness lends poignance which however is stripped of intensity. The spiritual and the psychological elements are merely suggested:

But I suddenly wanted
To look again
And I saw the half eaten
Sandwich,
Bread,
Lettuce and salami
All carrying the shape of her bite. 44

What the poet relives in his mood and moment of loneliness is merely the shadow of the beloved. The poem has an element of deep sensuality.

The poem on the snakes describes the poet's still living fear of the snakes, stirring primeval fears. He has not really been able to free himself of the fear of the snakes of his South-Indian Childhood. As he steps into the Library his fear returns and becomes alive, evoking a feeling of terror. Snakes also remind him of family life;
of his mother performing rituals of snake worship, for which his father used to pay. Snakes also remind the poet of a terrible aunt. The fear goes on building up in him so much that he screams on seeing his sister's long, black braids. The critic K. Raghavendra Rao writes about the poem 'Snakes'

..., in which the ordinary experience of a scholar such as the poet and the no less ordinary experience of a person with a tropical background tend to collapse into the exotic, which the subsequent lines try to make look like the ordinary and the immediate. And, of course, the key element in this operation is carefully preserved memory, ferreted out of a life increasingly mortgaged to memories of "the tiny dust-cones on slow noon roads," of an aunt, sister, and indeed, a whole world of childhood and boyhood, invoked with a haunting sense of loss.

The paranoia continues to haunt him as he visits bookshops or libraries stacked with old books. The fear stays with him till he himself accidently steps on and kills a snake. And, from then on he hopes to walk through life free! It is like this in many other poems. What the poet offers is a mere image, an amalgam of feeling and memory, of a seemingly significant or insignificant incident, the force of which now appears to be diluted—presented without elaboration or even comment. I feel that the poet is unconsciously, aiming at a catharsis—again and again of a painful burden. He wishes to free himself of that moment in memory, but he is not really able to. Temporarily he does
achieve some relief and is able to rid of the ghosts of his past but the relief is only short-lived. Memories are important to him, representing something 'indefinable' and refusing to die, yet remaining fresh, vivid and alive in his consciousness.

Ramanujan, has himself admitted it in a conversation with Rama Jha (The Humanities Review, Vol. 3, No. 1, Jan.-June 1981, pp. 5-13):

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You can not entirely live in the past, neither can you entirely live in the present, because we are not like that. We are both these things. The past never passes. Either the individual past or historical past or cultural past. It is with us. It is what gives us the richness of - What you call it - the richness of understanding. And the richness of expression we bring that to whatever is present and some of this understanding might be simply ironic, that is, so much of it can not be truly supplied, or related to the present.

To Ramanujan memory becomes mythical and his poetical world encompasses it all. Concentrating on a particular experience from personal life and making an indepth study he tries to make a connection with the past and reach an understanding of that eternal continuity. He never forgets that special inner world of memories which represents "an unconscious namelessness","
You begin to recognise me
As I pass from ghost to real.

Ramanujan is an expatriate poet, to whom his exile has made the meaning of his roots doubly clear. The mobility available to him because of his modern influences has made him even more sharply aware of his beginnings. He goes on finding his vision in experience, binding him inextricably with the unknowable past to the unknowable future. Always growing and always changing yet, always with a deep consciousness of his roots.

Parthasarathy writes, "Ramanujan's deepest roots are in the Kannada and Tamil past, and he has repossessed that past, infact made it available, in the English language." 49

Writing in the tradition of exile, Ramanujan has made a landmark. He realises that to be a truly representative poet of one's time and spirit one has got to have a deep understanding of the ancient traditions of culture and language, because language too helps in interacting with the environment. His beautiful translations of Kannada 'Vachans' and 'Kurunthohi' (fifteen poems from a classical Tamil Anthology 1965) in English with great simplicity, establish that he has been able to build a bridge between his Indian roots and his Western education viz. influence. Parthasarathy comments, "Both the 'Striders' (1966) and Relations (1971) are the heirs of an anterior tradition, a
tradition very much of the subcontinent, the deposits of which are in Kannada and Tamil, and which have been assimilated into English".50

The occasional ambivalence he displays towards his own culture is cleverly disguised in the garb of humour and irony. His craft proves that he is very much at home in his role of a bilingual poet. Parthasarathy writes, "Prayers To Lord Murugan" is an imitation of the Tirumurukārupatāi (A Guide to the Holy Murukan) in which the Tamil poet Nakkīrār (Fl. 7th cent.) sings the praises of Murukan, the Dravidian God of Youth, beauty, Love and War".51

And 'Prayers to Lord Murugan' can be seen as being embedded in, and arising from, a specific tradition. It is the first step towards establishing an indigenous tradition of English verse. And it can be established and kept alive only, if Indian English verse increasingly aligns itself with the literatures of India.

His quest is different from his contemporaries and almost sets him apart, keeping in mind the fact that he too is writing in the tradition of the exile. His concerns are different from Mahapatra's metaphysical meditations on the relationship between the creative impulse and the world outside the perceiving self. Ramanujan's world is made of memories of a past which shifts while the self and the others change.
Nissim Ezekiel is prone to intellectualising his experience and has the ability to make moral choices. In Parthasarathy, the tension is never really resolved. Ramanujan's world is ever changing, growing and continuous from the tradition and it is this which imparts his poetry with vision; a vision that portrays man's primordial quest for the truth of what is and in living with that:

It is not obsolete yet to live
In this many lived lair
Of fears, this flesh.

The poet realises that it is impossible to shake off the deep rooted habits and ways of thinking that are a part of the sub-conscious. Ramanujan seems to be quite reconciled to the fact that though external change that leads to a conflict between tradition and modernity is always taking place, the essential properties of the human mind do not change and once something is ingrained, it does not disappear of its own accord.
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