The third chapter of the research study is to describe the “Infinite in the form of Finite” in Attipat Krishnaswami Ramanujan’s poetry. As Swami Vivekananda says “The one common ground that we have is our sacred tradition, our religion” (qtd. in Ghosh 74). The title “Infinite in the form of Finite” itself gives the expression of Incarnation i.e., the bodily manifestation of a supernatural being. Incarnation of gods is a kind of belief in Hinduism which originates from the Hindu’s religious and philosophic books. In the words of Edward Said itself, “... the imaginative examination of things Oriental was based more or less exclusively upon a sovereign Western consciousness out of whose unchallenged centrality an Oriental world emerged” (Said 8). According to these books the whole universe is commanded by one Supreme Power and Lord Vishnu is considered that supreme power in almost all the writings and scriptures. The manifestations of lord Vishnu is depicted everywhere. He is supposed to be incarnated from time to time for the demolition of the evils and irreligion in the world. Lord Krishna in Srimadbhagavadgita states:

\[\text{yada yada hi dharmasya}\]
\[\text{glanir bhavati bharata,}\]
\[\text{abhyutthanam adharmaysya}\]
\[\text{tatdatmanam srajmy aham (Shrimadbhagavadgita ch. 4, text 7)}\]

(Whenever and wherever there is a decline in religious practice, O descendant of Bharatha, and a predominant rise of irreligion-at that time I descend Myself.)

The God took human form again and again to destroy evil. This doctrine reached its fullest development during the Puranic period (A. D. 300-1200). The avataras or incarnations reconciled the unity of the divine with the multiplicity of local divinities, thus absorbing tribal, racial and community gods. The doctrine of reincarnation, also known with other terms like,
rebirth, transmigration of the soul, *metempsychosis* (or more accurately, *metensomatosis*, (“passage from one body to another”), *palingenesis* (Gr., lit., "to begin again"), concerns the rebirth of the soul or self in a series of physical embodiments, which are customarily human or animal in nature but are in some instances divine, angelic, demonic, vegetative, or astrological. The belief in rebirth in one form or another existed and is still found in tribal or non-literate cultures all over the world, which go to prove that this belief arouse contemporaneously with the origins of human culture. “The evidence in support of reincarnation comes from two sources: (1) *Jatismaras*—people who can remember their past birth or births and (2) the testimony of the scriptures or saints” (Bhaskarananda 91).

Hindu religious literature is full of numerous references to reincarnation. In *The Shrimadbhagavadgita*, Sri Krishna, a Divine Incarnation, says to his pupil Arjuna, “Arjuna, both you and I were born many times in the past. You do not remember those births, but I remember them all” (Bhattacharya 176). This belief is shared by all the other major religions of India, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jains, Sikhs and Sufis. In ancient Greece, belief in rebirth formed part of the philosophical teachings of Pythagorean, Empedocles, Plato, and Plotinus. In modern times, religious teachers like Ramakrishna, Aurobindo or schools of thought, like Theosophy or various new "esoteric" "occultist" religious movements, like *New Age* or humanistic psychology: thinkers like C. G. Jung and Fritz Perls, hold onto belief in reincarnation. Ramanujan too is not different from other Indians living abroad:

I did not mean by regionalism, provincialism, nor did I mean by it just the devotion to a particular region. What I was saying was the particularity of the experience. Even when you are cosmopolitan, you ultimately have to know something quite deeply. (King, Modern Indian 214)
Taqi Ali Mirza rightly quoted the remark made by R. Parthasarthy: “Ramanujan’s poetry is ‘the product of a specific culture’ and that his real greatness lies in his ability to translate this experience in to the terms of another culture” (qtd. in Shahane 160). All the diverse religious groups and philosophical schools of Hinduism, except that of Carvaka, totally materialistic, believe in reincarnation. However, it should be noted that belief in reincarnation is not the basic teaching or the end of their religious cult and practices. Instead, it is deliverance from the chain of reincarnation (karma-samsara) and reaching moksha, the unique and final goal of every Hindu religious belief, cult and practices. According to the Hindu religious and philosophical concepts, man is composed of two fundamental principles opposed to each other per nature: one spiritual, the soul (atman), and the other material, the body (sarira). The atman is eternal, immutable, not born, not created, indestructible; instead, the body is temporal, created, mutable, destructible. In Shrimadbhagavadgita, the idea of atman has been expressed as: “Avyakto ayamachintyo ayamavikaaryo ayamuchyate / tasmaadevam viditvainam naanushochitumaharsi” (Shrimadbhagavadgita, Chapter 2, text 25).

The atman cannot be known or understood by purely using the brain and its mental powers. Hence it is known as ‘avyakta’ or indescribable - that which defies description. It cannot be known purely by meditating or thinking upon it (‘chintan’) - hence it is known as ‘achintya’. Only those entities that can be perceived by our five senses can be understood by ‘chintan’. Since the atman cannot be described by any elements known to man, it is without shape or ‘vikaar’ and is known as ‘avikaari’ or immutable. It is beyond the range of form or thought and the changes that affect the mind, life and body do not touch him. Forms may change; things may come and go but that which remains behind them all is forever.

Hinduism is one of the oldest known organized religions—its sacred writings date as far
back as 1400 to 1500 B.C. Hinduism one of the most diverse and complex, having millions of
gods. The main texts of Hinduism are the Vedas (considered most important), Upanishadas, the
Mahabharata, and the Ramayana. These writings contain hymns, incantations, philosophies,
rituals, poems, and stories from which Hindus base their beliefs. Other texts used in Hinduism
include the Brahmanas, the Sutras, and the Aranyakas. The Indian epics are totalities of
different, or even contradictory, ideas about morality or religion, the one dharma. At the same
time, they are totalities consisting of a massive number of tales, with interdependent teachings
and stories. As Koskikallio in Changing Ideologies and Changing Epics says:

    Now we are in a position to realize that from the native perspective Indian epics
    as a source of tales or teachings have been encountered primarily through local
    language for a long time. As a result, an average western Sanskrit scholar and an
    average folklorist or anthropologist might have very different ideas about the
    world of Indian epics. (Koskikallio 146)

    The idea of man-made gods strikes the most in case of scriptures and writings about
religion because the books written by several authors contain in them the several kind of
ideologies and notions. What one can perceive the other not and not only the visual approach
towards the things but the emotions with which they interpret the things are different from the
other ones. This is the reason that the liability of the things has diminished and we took the
description of deities as a mere imagination of the poets, writers and the sculptors. As A. K.
Ramanujan puts it, “No Hindu ever reads the Mahabharata for the first time. And when he does
get to read it, he doesn’t usually read it in Sanskrit” (qtd. in Sharma 419). Again to cite A. K.
Ramanujan’s words: “Thus a text like the Mahabharata is not a text but a tradition. It used to
be every poet’s ambition to write a Ramayana or the Mahabharata” (qtd. in Sharma 420).
Further the remark made by Petteri Koskikallio can be added:

Ramanujan and Leavitt find two main changes when classical myths or epics are retold. The first is “fragmentation;” that is, only part of the classical whole is taken up and retold in a new form. Another feature is called “proximation”, which includes “domestication”, “localization”, and “contemporarization”. “With this change the gods and heroes are seen more like tellers and listeners of the story, while pan-Indian myths are transferred to local places and everything happens nearer the present time. (Koskikallio 149)

The poem “Prayers to Lord Murugan” is one of those poems which reflect the above mentioned fact to some extent. In the first poem “Prayers to Lord Murugan” the poet prays Lord Murugan and pleads to help the mankind which has lost its cultural and traditional behaviour. The poet feels the need of the emergence of Lord Murugan at such a crucial time. He prays the god as if He is the listener of the prayers and pleadings. Idolatry is the practice of worshipping and praying to statues regarding them to be gods or some revered person. While the Catechism of the Catholic Church explains: “You shall not carve idols for yourselves in the shape of anything in the sky above or on the earth below or in the waters beneath the earth; you shall not bow down before them or worship them” (qtd. in Heinze 28).

Hinduism neither prescribes nor proscribes worship of images. Although Hinduism is commonly represented by such anthropomorphic religious icons such as murtis, aniconism is equally represented with such abstract symbols of God such as the Shiva linga and the saligrama. Furthermore, Hindus have found it easier to focus on anthropomorphic icons, as Lord Krishna said: “kleso dhikataras tesam avyaktasakta-cetasam / avyakta hi gatir duhkham dehavadbhir avapyate” (Shrimadbhagavadgita, ch. 12, text 5).
(Those whose minds are attached to the unmanifest aspect have much greater tribulations because devoid of any perceptible form and attributes success is achieved with great difficulty due to the beings identifying with the body). In one of Ramanujan’s poems entitled “The Difference”, the practice of idol making by the potters is also revealed. The wives of the potters help their husband in making clay images of gods. He discusses the process of making of the images of gods in intricate detail:

The women mould a core of clay and straw,
wind around it
strings of beeswax on which the men
do the fine work of eyes and toe nails,
picking
with hot needles the look in the eyes;
cover it with a second shell of clay
and pour eight
metals through a hole in the head,
.................................
when they bake the pot of the inchoate god
it makes faces,
exchanging metal for wax, an eye
for an eye, changing its state
as it cools,
when they take a knife to it and hack it
in two to discover the gleaming god. (Collected Poems 171)
Among the remarkable achievements of Hinduism was its blending of the countless cults, gods, and totems of India’s many ages and diverse peoples into one vast mythology—a mythology dominated by the two Hindu gods, Shiva and Vishnu. The roster of these deities reaches, quite literally, into the millions. It includes all the gods of early sacred and epic literature and their later permutations; deified mortals; and the animals, birds, trees, mountains, rivers, and plants revered as divine personalities by India’s primitive tribes. Taqi Ali Mirza’s assessment of Ramanujan’s poetry reflects when he says: “Ramanujan’s work bears the impress of all great poetry-turning the ephemeral into the permanent articulating the predicament of whole people in verse which at one and the same time is changed with emotion and has the detachment of great art” (qtd. in Rukhaiyar 133).

The infinite in the form of finite manifests the incarnation of the gods and goddesses or the emergence of the gods and goddesses in the human form on earth. This suggests many aspects such as to consider the pious persons on earth as gods and goddesses and have a staunch faith in them and considering them as the incarnation of the Supreme Being in the human form. The role of deities in the human form or it can also be said that the stories of the incarnation of the gods and goddesses have been depicted in the poems of A.K. Ramanujan. These poems contain the aspect of Hindu gods and goddesses in them. It is mainly due to the poet who is basically an Indian and to reflect the religious thoughts and the native customs and rites and rituals in his poetry was indispensable for him. The first among these are the Mythological poems entitled Mythologies 1, Mythologies 2 and Mythologies 3. A bodily manifestation of a supernatural being is incarnation. Incarnation of gods is a kind of belief in Hinduism which originates from the Hindu’s religious and philosophic books. As in the Shrimadbhagavadgita: “The blessed Lord said: Well, then I will tell thee my divine pervading powers-those of them, at
least, that are fundamental, for there is no end to my extent” (Dhavamony 70). Dasgupta in his book “Telling Tales says:

Tales speak of what can not usually be spoken. Ordinary decencies are violated. Incest, cannibalism, pitiless revenge are explicit motifs in this fantasy world, which helps us face ourselves, envisage shameless wish fulfilments, and sometimes “by indirection find direction out”. (Dasgupta 29)

The first mythological poem which is entitled as “Mythologies 1”, relates the story of lord Krishna when he was a child and the fiend named Putana who came to kill the child Krishna on the command of the tyrannous king Kansa. However the story related to lord Krishna not only gives the evidence of the poet’s ample knowledge about the myths and traditions of India, which he reminds after being settled in U.S.A. The poet while reminding the things about his native country never forgets to recollect the religious part of his native place, India. This religious aspect of India is vast and mingles in all other aspects of the culture so profusely that its presence is perceived everywhere.

The story is about the birth of Lord Krishna, and the story emerges from the Bhagvata Purana when the sins of the cruel king Kansa, were enhancing by leaps and bounds. Lord Vishnu took birth to “Devaki” and “Vasudev”, in the form of lord Krishna, in the jail of the king “Kansa” who was very treacherous. The baby “Krishna” was transferred miraculously by his father, Vasudev to another place named Mathura. He left his son in the house of Nanda and Yashoda. The cruel Kansa send demons to kill that miraculous and invincible child. And one of them who took the form of Putana was an infamous Rakshasi or demoness:

The breast she offered was full

of poison and milk.
Flashing eyes suddenly dull,
her voice was silk.
The Child took her breast
in his mouth and sucked it right out of her chest. (*CP 221*)

(Satpathy 2009)

The result of this misdoing on the part of the fiend “Putana” was her death by the lord Krishna who knew her desires and allowed her to fulfill both of them - to suckle him and attempt on his life. Thus is the story of Lord Krishna’s miraculous feat. The gods and goddesses have always been merciful to all whether they may be demon or the human beings. The idea of salvation and the mercy of gods for demons also get expression here. As is depicted in the poem: “She changed, undone by grace, / from deadly mother to happy demon, / found life in death” (*CP 221*). This is because the poet can also be seen praying to god in several of his
poems, for example “Moulting” here the poet says: “Lord of snakes and eagles, and everything in between, cover / my son with an hour’s shade and be the thorn at a suitable height / in his hour of change” (CP 176). Having spent decades in the West, he is able to form a crystal-clear picture of both the Oriental and the Occidental cultures. The foreign milieu provides him with a platform to evoke a contrast between the western scene and his eastern background. A remarkable facet of Ramanujan’s poetry is his deep-rooted Indian sensibility. Despite his expatriate experiences abroad, there is nothing really westernized about his poetry. Excluding a few stray ones, most of his poems revolve around Indian themes set against an oriental backdrop. About Ramanujan’s modernist attitude K. Vedanta Reddy remarks, “As a modern poet Ramanujan shows no blind reverence for old myths and tradition” (qtd. in Ghosh 89). The poet expresses his philosophical views thus:

You cannot entirely live in the past, neither can you entirely 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. (King, Modern Indian 214)

The another poem is Mythologies 2, and this is the story of a great devotee of Lord Vishnu named Prahalad who got rescued by the Lord Vishnu when he incarnated in the form of “Narsimha”, half man and half lion who killed the cruel king Hiranyakashyap who refused the supremacy and existence of Lord Vishnu. But Prahlada, this demon’s son, worshipped Vishnu. Prahlad infuriated his father who tried to kill him but all his attempt was in vain. The Lord emerged from the pillar in the court-hall, presenting an amazing form, neither wholly human nor wholly animal.
“The demon fell on the Lord with his mace, but the Lord lightly seized him and remembering the favors that he had secured from Brahma, dragged him to the threshold of a door, threw him across his knees, and with his nails tore him open” (qtd. in Dhavamony 79). In this myth Lord Vishnu assumes the shape of a being, half-man and half-lion in order to set free the world from the tyranny of Hiranyakashyap who was such a clever king as he made himself protected by a peculiar kind of boon:

- not to be slain by demon, god, or by beast, not by day nor by night,
- by no manufactured weapon, not out of doors nor inside, not in the sky
- nor on earth. . . . (CP 226)

The god came in the form of half man and half lion and took him in his lap it was neither day nor the night it was the mid time of the two and killed him with his fierce claws “Vishnu, man, lion, neither and both, to hold / him in your lap to disembowel his pride / with the steel glint of bare claws at twilight” (CP 226) and thus failed his boon.

\[
\text{paritranaya sadhunam} \\
\text{vinasaya cha duskritam} \\
\text{dharma-samsthapanarthaya} \\
\text{sambhavami yuge yuge (Shrimadbhagavadgita ch. 4, text 8)}
\]

(Sri Krishna said: To deliver the pious and to annihilate the miscreants, as well as to reestablish the principles of religion, I Myself appear, millennium after millennium). It can be summarized the diverse field of written epic texts of India under three main headings. First, we have two great epics attributed to Vyasa (the Mahabharata) and Valmiki (the Ramayana),
respectively. The second group of texts is the body of various literary retellings, both in Sanskrit and other Indian languages. Usually they have one author, either historical or at least partly mythical, with the author continuing or varying the original Vyasan or Valmikian tradition. Thus their works can be considered independent. This group also includes some classics of Sanskrit literature. Because texts of the second group participate in the ideological discussion of the great tradition, so they have been called postclassical epics. The third set of Indian epics is again heterogeneous; it is a group of so called folk epics.

They are in regional languages, either written or oral. John Leavitt describes them in this way, “Vernacular versions of the epic have generally remained autonomous while developing according to specific cultural dynamics alongside and in interaction with the continuing transmission of the Sanskrit version” (qtd. in Sharma 447). In other words, they occupy the ground between the great tradition and the little tradition. In other words, every rewriter of an epic theme considers himself or herself a continuer of the “eternal” epic heritage. But from our point of view it is more significant that these retellers are always commenting on their own era and respective ideologies by using the epic world as a medium for their views. If we bear in mind the Indian context, an essential explanation for this kind of intensive utilization of epic resources is the great prestige inherent in tradition—and for that matter the great prestige one can often achieve (for one’s own work, too) by basing it on and linking it to the tradition.

The third poem entitled “Mythologies 3” reveals another mythical story that is of another devotee but her veneration is presented to Lord Shiva. In a humorous vein the poet describes how a newly wedded bride shows to be indifferent to a physical relationship with her husband. Considering herself an ardent devotee of Lord Shiva, she shunned any kind of union with a mortal being. In the first stanza, she threatened her husband with dire consequences if he dared
to touch her.

‘Keep off when I worship Shiva.

Touch me three times, and you’ll never

see me again’, said Akka to her new groom

who couldn’t believe his ears. . . . (CP 228)

Her whole body echoed with the intonation of ‘OM’. Her husband however refused to see

her as spiritual being and craved for a physical union.

Om, Om!

she seemed to intone in bed with every breath

and all he could think of was her round breast,

her musk, her darling navel and the rest.

So he hovered and touched her, her body death-

ly cold to mortal touch but hot for God’s

first move, a caress like nothing on earth.

She fled his hand as she would a spider,

threw away her modesty, as the rods

and cones of her eyes gave the world a new birth. . . . (CP 228)

Thus, despite the initial reservations, the young bride shoved aside her self-imposed

celibacy and proceeded to enjoy the fruits of conjugal bliss. Now she beheld the divine image

of Lord Shiva in her earthly husband. She also felt that the vehicle of Shiva, Nandi, the celestial

bull and the ordinary bull grazing in her house were one and the same. All differences were

resolved and there was a merger of the body with the spirit. “She saw Him then, unborn, form

of forms, the Rider, / His white Bull chewing cud in her backyard” (CP 228). The other poems
which depict the gods and goddesses in the form of idols and images also comes in the category of the chapter to be presented. The poems are “Zoo Gardens Revisited”, “The Difference” and “Moulting”, “Prayers to Lord Murugan”, “Elements of Composition” and “Some Relations”.

In the poem “Zoo Gardens Revisited” the poet invokes various gods of the Hindus to protect different kinds of animals to be found in the zoo. Animals like flamingoes, monkeys, orangutans, giraffes, ostriches, tigers, tigresses and chimps. The concluding lines of this prose-poem are very relevant to quote here:

Lord of lion face, boar snout, and fish eyes, killer of killer

cranes, shepherd of rampant elephants, devour my lambs,

devour them whole, save them in the zoo garden ark of your

belly. (CP 154)

A number of manifestations of Lord have been recalled in these quoted lines. “Lord of lion face” indicates the incarnation of Narsimha who made the world as well as his devotee Prahalad free from the tyrannous clutches of Hiranyakashyap. “Boar Snout” refers to his assuming the shape of Varaha, who lifted the stolen earth from the waters of the deep and thus freed it from the demon-thief. Lord Vishnu also appeared as Matasya, in order to save Manu, the progenitor of the human race, from a great deluge. According to an Indian myth, the Lord rushed to the rescue of Gajendra from the jaws of a powerful crocodile. He is also represented in our mythology as Kurma, the Tortoise, sitting on whose back he recovered some valuable things lost in the deluge. The Kurma back also served as the pivot of the mountain Mandara during the churning of the ocean in a tug-of-war between gods and demons. The Lord is also depicted as Kalki, the White Horse, who purged the creation. The “zoo garden ark of your belly” pointedly alludes to the Biblical story which tells us that the Almighty God saved two of
every kind of creatures in Noah’s ark when the entire creation was to be destroyed due to its
criminal or immoral activities. In this way, the poet has marvelously combined the eastern and
Western mythology harmoniously, and thereby has transcended the local for the universal and
the familiar for the mythical.

The Upanishads, which form the philosophical ‘conclusions’ (Vedanta) of the Vedas,
repeatedly stress the formlessness (nirakara, no material form) and unimaginable nature of
God, and advise the aspirant to realise the divine presence inwardly. Bhagavata Purana
recommends meditation on and worship of pratima (murti) with the understanding that it is not
an ordinary material object. The most important poem in this category is “Prayers to Lord
Murugan”. The poem is significant enough from various points of views. First the poem shows
the great devotion of the poet towards Lord Murugan who is an ancient Dravidian lord of war,
youth, beauty joy and love. He is presented as a six-faced god with twelve hands” (CP 113) and
is highly venerated in the southern region of India. Lord Murugan. The poet prays Lord
Murugan and venerates Him with several of His attributes, when he says: “Lord of new arrivals
/ lovers and rivals: / arrive” (CP 113). Further he remembers the celebration which had been
organized in the admiration of the Lord Murugan. But the poet laments over the present mode
of prayers, condition of the celebration and the enthusiasm of the people which has been
diminished due to the modern attitude adopted by the people.

The structure of the prayer has been utterly reduced to manifest the deep and dense
selfishness of the individual. Lord Murugan known and loved in early Tamil civilization, he has
adapted to virtually every significant cultural change in South India, even to the present day, so
that his history reflects in large measure the history of South India itself. The Lord is known by
various names as Skanda, Kumara, Subrahmanya, Kartikkeya, and Velan, Murugan is one of
the most persistent and significant deities of South India. Ramanujan’s ironical attitude towards the things gets its height in “Prayers to Lord Murugan”. Lord Murugan is an “ancient Dravidian god of fertility, joy, youth, beauty, war and love. He is represented as a six-faced god with twelve hands” (CP 113). The poet laments over the present manner of prayers and laments over the loss of ancient ritualistic practices which were performed at the altar of god. The timely obviousness of Ramanujan’s dig at the modern man’s irresponsible withdrawal from the spiritual centre is really captivating. His regret over the loss of faith is explicit in the opening section of the poem:

O where are the cockscombs and where
the beaks glinting with new knives
at crossroads
when will orange banners burn. . . . (CP 113)

The lightning is no longer accepted as a divine revelation. The prayer is no longer an instrument of human good. It has lost its devotional content. It is devoid of sincerity. It is no longer a hymn of the heart. The dense and deep dedication of has been wrecked due to the modernity. The structure of the poem has also changed and it now shows only the individual selfishness. Ramanujan rightly highlights this incurable degeneration when he writes:

Lord of headlines,
help us read
the small print.

Lord of the sixth sense,
give us back
our five senses.
Lord of lost travellers,
find us. Hunt us

down.

Lord of lost answers,
cure us at once

of prayers. (CP 116-17)

The poet in the poem entitled “Prayers to Lord Murugan” wants us to snap off the shackles of the old-age myths and senseless rituals as well as the newly-conceived westernized ideas. He wants the future to portray a revival of the simple joys of the past. As an overall evaluation of the poem, S.K. Desai remarks:

> In the frame work of the Existentialist ontology within which Ramanujan’s poetry has its existence being, there is no God, no faith, no hope, no transcendence, no political and social action. In ‘Prayers to Lord Murugan’, for example, there is neither Bhakti nor faith; there is only irony. . . . (qtd. in Naik 119)

In the similar vein Nissim Ezekiel too, opines, “Paradoxically, the “Prayers to Lord Murugan” which promise a wholly Indian ethos remind us that Ramanujan does not believe in Lord Murugan or any other Hindu God” (Ezekiel 40). Prayer, which is redemptive, has become a disease and a device of agitation. That is why the modern man, divorced from the spiritual centre, from the centre of the faith can articulate such prayers to get rid of them. But the the poem “Prayers to Lord Murugan” shows the poet’s intense devotion towards the god and has prayed Him considering Him to be the supreme power. And the most important aspect which
emerges significantly is the element of welfare made in the poem by the poet. His belief in the idolatry also gets expression in the poem but the poet’s attitude towards the deities is dual here.

However he offers his prayers to god Murugan but doubts the other practices of the Indian people which they perform in the service and praise of other gods. The doubt which strikes the most is that why the poet only praises Lord Murugan and invokes him to protect, guide and help the mankind. While the belief of the people in other cultural and religious rites and rituals which are related to natural objects as trees, animals etc., seems to the poet as malpractice of the people who follow such things without using their reason.

Due to the impression of his regionalism, the poet offers his prayers to Lord Murugan, in the poem entitled “Prayers to Lord Murugan”. The regional atmosphere makes a great influence
on the development of the personality of the people. This is true to some extent in the case of poet also, who reflects his gratitude towards Lord Murugan and prays the god by addressing Him variously. Not only this, the poem “Fear No Fall” again reflects the supremacy of the Lord Murugan. The god is presented as the savior in the poem and the poet suggests that the man who had done the wrong deeds can get the liberty only by praising god Murugan. And the poem shows these lines thus: ‘Sing now of Murugan!’, the gist of the poem is that the people should devote their life in the service of god and thus they will never fear of the fall or their redemption.

when a voice both within and without
said, ‘Fall, fall,
you’ll never fear a fall again,
fall now!’ (CP 277)

The element of humour can also be perceived in the description of Lord Murugan when the poet depicts:

Twelve etched arrowheads
for eyes and six unforeseen
faces, and you were not embarrassed. (CP 113)

Raghukul Tilak says about the poet’s recollected personal experiences and emotions, “The collective nostalgia of a whole people who look back, often in an attitude of love-hate, to the past, at once drawn towards and repelled by it. The ‘presence of the past’ is a unique feature of the poems . . .” (Tilak 6). The other poem which depicts the importance of the devotion and the result of that dedication is, “A Devotees Complaint” wherein the author depicts how a
person can get the blessings of gods and goddesses. The poet here suggests that the intense devotion to anything is the way to achieve the desired object so is the case with the veneration and worship of the gods and goddesses. When the poet says: “Try to curry favor / with Lakshmi, / you lose an eye-tooth. (CP 237)

A.K. Ramanujan here depicts that to get the support of goddess Lakshmi one would have to do labor. To get her is not an easy work rather it needs the toil of years only then one would be able to achieve the blessings of the goddess and the wealth that is the blessing of Lakshmi. In another way to be rich one has to go through the hard labor and it takes a long time.

\[
\text{karmay evadhikaras te} \\
\text{ma phalesu kadachana} \\
\text{ma karma-phala-hetur bhur} \\
\text{ma te sango \textquoteright stv akarmani (Shrimadbhagavadgita ch.2, verse 47)}
\]

(Sri Krishna said: You have a right to perform your prescribed duty, but you are not entitled to the fruits of action. Never consider yourself the cause of the results of your activities, and never be attached to not doing your duty.)

The deep dedication towards the things helps to receive the object so is the case with the goddess of knowledge, Saraswati. The knowledge and prudence enhances only by the practice which takes time. To own something one has to devote and merge himself wholly and entirely in that thing with complete dedication only then the desired thing can be achieved. And the concluding lines of the poem show the same idea:

If Siva touches you-

when you cut your finger

in the kitchen
nor blood but ash spills
from your cut as it did
for that ascetic
who dried out for Siva. (CP 237)

Not only the intense dedication and devotion is expressed here but the authority of the
gods and goddesses has also been accepted here who are venerated on earth in the idol form.
Thus the views of poet about idolatry and his belief in this kind of worship are also expressed
by the poet in a very significant manner. Catholicism says:

the idolater credits the image he reverences with Divinity or divine powers, the
Catholic knows ‘that in images there is no divinity or virtue on account of which
they are to be worshipped, that no petitions can be addressed to them, and that no
trust can be placed in them. . . . (qtd. in Menegon 268)

The poem “Some Relations” depicts the condition of the idol of Lord Shiva, which was
perished by some muslim invader and here the poet depicts the history of India when the
Muslim invaders came to the country to loot and laid the foundation of the Muslim rule over
here. Hindu reformist movements in the 18th-19th centuries such as the Brahmo Samaj and
Arya Samaj, were highly critical of image worship like the Semitic religions and called for a
return to the ancient Vedic and Upanishadic teachings.

The poem “The Difference” is a poem which mentions “the Hindu soul at death” (CP
171) and the “tiny Taj Mahals for tourists” (CP 172) and brings into sharp focus the myth of
Lord Vishnu who assumed the shape of “the Dark one” i.e., the Vaman God-who appeared
before King Moradhvaj as a dwarf-beggar to test the latter’s world renowned generosity and
charitable nature and who demanded of the King just three steps of earth. This mythical tale has
been mentioned in the poem as:

when Vishnu
came to mind, the Dark One you know
who began as a dwarf and rose in the world
to measure
heaven and earth with paces. . . . (CP 172)

Regarding the deep-rooted sensibility of A.K. Ramanujan, S.K. Desai says:

If some critics perceive in it (Ramanujan’s poems) the syndrome of expatriation-alienation—obsession with the past, these are others who speak of Ramanujan’s rootedness in his Hindu experience, of his “Indian sensibility sharpened and conditioned by a Western education”, of his “deep unfractured Indian spirit.
(qtd. in Naik 109)

With his three steps, the Lord measured “heaven and earth” as well as the underworld which has not been mentioned here. But the testing of the noble King was not ended here, for the lion on whom the Lord rode had hidden nothing to feed the lion, as they were mere paupers presently. The Lord added to their misery and helplessness by pointing out that his chariot could eat nothing but the fresh flesh of their only lovely son, and that the son should be slashed into two halves by the royal couple without shedding even a drop of tear. The king knew that it was a severe test for them, yet he could not allow anyone to go hungry from his door. So, he and his wife took up the saw in their hands and moved it over the head of their son blinding their eyes. Instantly, Lord Vishnu appeared in his true mettle and caught hold of the hands of the flabbergasted royal pair and pronounced glory and lasting fame for the king, who had come off with flying colors through the test.
The excellent poetic use to which Ramanujan has put this unforgettable Hindu myth of Lord Vaman and King Moradhvaj speaks volumes of his grounding in the quintessence of Indian culture and wisdom. Moulting is a small prose-poem, the concluding lines of which are quite important from the viewpoint of the application of Hindu mythology by the poet. This lines run as follows: “Lord of snakes and eagles, and everything in between, cover / my son with an hour’s shade and be the thorn at a suitable height / in his hour of change” (CP 176).

Here the poet invokes the blessings of Garuda, the Lord of snakes and eagles, for the protection of his loved son, especially in his hour of change. The patriarch of Vedic studies in the West, Max Muller (1823-1900), was emphatic about the absence of image-worship among the Vedic Aryans: “the religion of the Vedas knew no idols. The worship of idols in India is a secondary formation, a later degradation of the more primitive worship of ideal gods” (qtd. in Salmond 15). Muller echoes H.H. Wilson, who wrote,
The worship of the Vedas is for the most part domestic worship, consisting of the prayers and oblations offered, in their own houses, not in temples, by individuals for individual good and addressed to unreal presences, not to visible types. In a word “the religion of the Vedas was not idolatry. (qtd. in Salmond 15)

Pandurang Vaman Kane, in his *History of Dharmasastra*, endorses this position:

It is extremely doubtful whether images were generally worshipped in the ancient Vedic times. In the Rigveda and the other Vedas, there is worship of Agni, the Sun, Varuna and various other deities; but they were not worshipped in the abstract, as powers and manifestations of the one Divine person or as separate deities or functions behind natural phenomena or cosmic processes. (qtd. in Salmond 15)

He later adds, “One can say without much fear of contradiction that the religious practices among the higher strata of the Vedic Aryans did not include the worship of images in the house or temple” (qtd. in Salmond 15). This position is echoed by R.N. Dandekar, who writes, “It is well known that the religion of Vedic Indians, as represented in the Vedic literature, is essentially uniconic (qtd. in Salmond 15). Jan Gonda has commented on the absence of images in Vedic religion in contrast with later Hinduism:

There is an enormous difference between the puja of the Hindus period and the Vedic Yajna. The often extremely complicated Vedic “sacrifice”, the centre of the aniconic Aryan cult, involving the slaughter of animals and the participation of many specialized priests consists of the worship of a god in the form of an icon, to which flowers, betel quids, water for washing the feet and the other-as a rule vegetarian-presents are offered. The image in which the god is believed to
have in some sense taken up his abode is honored, fed, fanned and placed in a
shrine or temple, erections and edifices which in the Vedic cult are conspicuous
by their absence. (qtd. in Salmond 15)

Von Stietencron emphasizes that the shift in religious practice was not without its
conflicts:

The process of change from the Vedic altar to the Hindus temple and from the
moving celestials to the stationary images was accompanied by bitter freuds
between traditionalists and innovators. Orthodox Vedic Brahmans were furiously
opposed to the new type of priests who were in charge of the temples and their
images, who organized processions of the deity through the village street and
treated the deity in analogy to a human king. In a later period these priests
became known as sevakas, the servants of god. But they had to struggle for
centuries against the social discrimination which they experienced from the
orthodox Brahmans. (qtd. in Salmond 22)

Von Stietencron does not see this as a result of class conflict whereby the Brahmins are
attempting to keep out a new group of ritual specialists originating in the lower classes, but
rather as an internecine struggle between Brahmins over economic interests and religious
orientations. In the Vedic view, the gods either came to the place of sacrifice on the invocation
of the priests or stayed in heaven and the sacrificial food was taken up to them by the flames of
Agni. In the new orientation, the god reside on the earth in their image forms in the temple and
it is the devotee who goes to the god rather than the god being summoned by the ritual
specialist. Indeed, the very power and prestige of the Brahmin was based on his alleged ability
to invoke the deities and summon them for help.
Von Stietencron argues that the social status of the Vedic priest was threatened by the democratization of access to the divine brought about by the worship of a deity who is permanently present in the temple image. This caused a schism within the Brahmin class between those Brahmins who deemed it prudent to integrate the new religious practices into the brahminic sphere and their purist colleagues who denounced them as *patita*, meaning fallen from Brahmin rank to that of *sudra*. The Manu Smriti reflects the orthodox view. Here, the priests who earn their livelihood in carrying out the service of the image, living on the proceeds offered to the gods, are subjected to the reproach. In Manu 3. 152, they are compared to doctors or shopkeepers who offer services for money. Such priests should not be used for making offerings to the *pitr* (manes): “Doctors, priests who attend on idols, people who sell meat, and people who support themselves by trade are to be excluded from offerings to the gods and ancestors” (qtd. in Salmond 22). This shows the lower status of the Brahmins who depended upon the care of images.

In *Shrimadbhagavadgita* Arjuna said: “Those devotees who are always disciplined and honor Thee, and those who worship the Imperishable and the Unmanifest-which of these are more learned in Yoga?” (qtd. in Salmond 26). Then in answer of the question asked by Arjuna the Blessed Lord said:

Those who, fixing their mind on Me, worship Me with complete discipline and supreme faith, them I consider to be the most learned in yoga. But those who worship the imperishable, the Undefined, the Unmanifested, the omnipresent, the Unthinkable, the immovable, the Unchanging, the Constant. And have restrained their senses, and are equal-minded and rejoice in the welfare of all the beings-they also obtain Me.(qtd. in Salmond 26)
The *Gita* thus endorses two methods of worship—with and without form—and makes explicit that the latter is the more difficult path. There are several other poems which depict the gods and goddesses in the human form. And among these are “Fear No Fall” where in the poet recalls how the great Tamil Saint Arunagiri’s life witnessed altogether a different routine once he found himself in the lap of ‘The Old Man’ i.e. his Lord Murugan. His life had previously been unbearably miserable—“His despair, deeper than his wounds”—but all this suffered a sea-change:

leaving Arunagiri a lifetime

of seeking and finding and losing Him

again and again in a labyrinth

of winding words, . . . (CP 276)

Sujit S. Dulai mistakenly opines that such a crucial decision was possible for the persona only under alien influence: “The protagonist refuses to give up the solid substance of his foundational self for the fashionable but empty attitudinizing as a palliative in his new, modern and difficult environment” (Dulai 153). The poem entitled “Fear No Fall” depicts the protagonist as:

Arunagiri, truant extraordinary,

escape artist, burglar of hearts,

.................................

hated temple bells and hypocrisies. . . . (CP 276)

The spiritual transformation of the wayward Arunagiri into a saint was expressed in his devotional songs that ensnared passersby “unlocking cages / for mynahs and parrots” (*CP* 276). The poet’s spiritual dilemma appears to dissolve as he feels that he too may be redeemed:
when a voice both within and without

said, ‘Fall, fall,
you’ll never fear a fall again,
fall now!’ (CP 277)

And thus the voice averts his fear of “falling in the gutters below” (CP 277). Further the
depiction of idols of goddesses can be perceived in the poem entitled “Elements of
Composition”. The deities in the form of idols reside in the temples and are venerated in a very
auspicious way but they do not play any kind of active role in helping the have- nots and in
removing their poverty. According to the poet the role of deities is thus negligible in the society
and the veneration of them is futile. Idolatry is nothing but the disbelief of the people who
consider that the gods and goddesses reside on the earth, see the miseries of the people, listen to
their prayers but such things do not possess any importance in real and thus they satisfy their
belief of the existence of the deities only. The poet mocks at the goddess of dance named
Minakshi who though exists in the temple but does not do anything to remove the miseries of:

add the lepers of Madurai,

male, female, married,

with children,

lion faces, crabs for claws,

clotted on their shadows

under the stone-eyed

goddesses of dance. . . (CP 122)

The poet is anxious about the pitiable condition of the lepers and so he calls gods and
goddesses as “stone eyed”. S.S. Dulai expressively says: “Ramanujan observes closely and
often laments poignantly the human misery resulting from material want and moral corruption in contemporary India” (qtd. in Rajeshwar 192). The poet not only satirizes on the idols in the temples but their existence in the beliefs of the people also does not seem appropriate to him. According to him these are nothing but the religious beliefs of the people who follow their religious rites and rituals blindly and does not see the importance of their existence and don’t look at the things scientifically. After residing in abroad the vision of the poet towards the things changed and he looked at the things using his reason thereafter.

It is true to some extent that if a person looks at the things with a different perspective another phase of the things appear to him so is the case with the poet who after staying in U.S.A. changed his approach and presented the things with their another phase. In the same way he does not believe on the rituals and rites practised in the society blindly. The people do not know their significance and importance in following them rather they do the things only to satisfy their traditional beliefs. The idols neither eradicate the miseries nor they offer the relief to the poor still the people enjoy the veneration and adoration of the deities but to support the Indians view it can be said that the people venerate them because they regard that someday their wishes will be fulfilled by the gods and they will surely help them or the belief of life after death also inspires them to worship the deities.

In Indian myths it is mentioned that the people after their death take birth again or if they have always done good or worshipped the god they will get “Moksha” or salvation. There are few general assumptions which inspire the people to worship and adore the deities. For example the people consider that their rebirth is decided according to the doings of their prior birth thus the fear of their existence in the next birth inspire them to pray the gods and goddesses. And above all the achievement of “Salvation” is the primary goal of life of every person so that they
can get rid of the cycle of birth and death. Thus we find in Ramanujan’s poetry a perfect amalgamation of the Indian sensibility and modernization which came to him due to his long stay in United states. But it is also perceived that after remaining out of the nation he used his analytic aptitude towards the traditional rites and customs of India very aptly. Lord Vishnu is depicted in the poems of A.K. Ramanujan elaborately and in these poems the god is associated with the animals as depicted in the legends and myths. As he says in one of his interview, “The past never passes, either the individual past or historical past or cultural past. It is with us . . . the disconnection is as much an understanding of the past as making the connection. And the living in the present have to see both” (Jha 7-8).
REFERENCES


University Press, 1995. Print. Referred to as CP.

Dulai, Surjit S. “First and Only Sight: The Centre and Circles of A.K. Ramanujan’s Poetry.”


22 May 2011.


