

M A SEMESTER IV
TRANSLATION: THEORY AND PRACTICE
PAPER XV(A)
UNIT III
A K RAMANUJAN'S THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TRANSLATION



(Google images)

Prof Madhu Singh
Department of English & Modern European Languages
University of Lucknow

A.K. RAMANUJAN'S THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TRANSLATION

VINAY DHARWADKER

(AN EXTRACT)

[From Chapter 6 – “A.K. Ramanujan’s theory and practice of translation” in *Postcolonial Translation: Theory and Practice*. Edited By Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi]

A.K. Ramanujan occupies a unique position among Indian and post-colonial theorists and practitioners of translation. His independent work focuses on the underrepresented language-combination of English, Kannada and Tamil, and his work in collaboration with other scholars enlarges the combination to include Indian languages like Telugu, Malayalam and Marathi that continue to be marginalized in world literature. Over almost forty years – between the mid-1950s and the early 1990s – he translated texts in several genres from most of the important periods of Indian literary history, covering classical poetry and *bhakti* poetry in Tamil, *Virasaiva vacanas* in Kannada, *bhakti* and court literature in Telugu, folktales and women’s oral narratives recorded in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and poetry and prose fiction written in the post-independence, decades.¹ He usually chose originals of exceptional aesthetic, historical or cultural significance, and produced a large number of versions that are marked by literary excellence in themselves. His output as a translator is distinguished not only by its quantity, quality and variety, but also by the body of prefaces, textual and interpretive notes and scholarly commentary that frame it, reflecting on particular materials and cultures as well as the general process of translation.²

Ramanujan’s contributions to the art of translation, his influence as a model translator of Indian texts, and his impact on the understanding of India among scholars and general readers alike are too extensive and complex to be judged primarily or solely on the basis of a practical criticism of particular translations. In this chapter I shall therefore examine his work in a wider theoretical and methodological perspective, focusing on his general conception of translation and on the articulation of a comprehensive and coherent theory of translation in his practice. Such a perspective enables us to understand his pragmatic goals as a translator in relation to his strategies for attaining them, and to clarify his wide-ranging concerns regarding the conditions, outcomes and limitations of translation. It also allows us to evaluate his intentions and accomplishments with precision, to analyse his connections with other

theorists and practitioners of translation in detail, and especially to link his activities as a translator to his larger enterprise as a writer and intellectual, which I have described elsewhere as the invention of a distinctive variety of post-colonial cosmopolitanism.³

RAMANUJAN'S CONCEPTION OF TRANSLATION

In his published work Ramanujan reflected on translation most often in the context of poetry, and conceived of it as a multi-dimensional process in which the translator has to deal with his or her material, means, resources and objectives at several levels simultaneously. At each level of effort, the translator has to pursue the impossible simultaneous norms of literary excellence in the translation and fidelity to various ideals, even while accepting a number of practical compromises in the face of conflicting demands and allegiances. For Ramanujan, the translator's task is defined by this peculiar set of freedoms and constraints, several of which are particularly important. The translator is expected to render textual meanings and qualities 'literally', to successfully transpose the syntax, design, structure or form of the original from one language to another, and to achieve a communicative intersection between the two sets of languages and discourses. At the same time, the translation has to attempt to strike a balance between the interests of the original author and those of the translator (or between faithful representation and faithless appropriation), to fulfil the multiple expectations of its imagined readers, and to construct parallels between the two cultures and the two histories or traditions that it brings together.

At the most elementary yet challenging level of effort, a translator attempts and is obliged to carry over a text from its original language into a second one as 'literally' and 'accurately' as possible. Ramanujan approached the problem of rendering the so-called literal meanings and qualities of a source-text by trying 'to attend closely to the language of the originals . . . detail by detail' (SS, 13).

His desire to make his final versions as accurate and reliable as possible usually led him to a close reading of the original, a systematic analysis for himself of its devices and effects, and a time-consuming procedure of drafting, correcting and polishing the translation. As he says disarmingly of his labour-intensive input into *Poems of Love and War*, 'I began this book of translations fifteen years ago and thought several times that I had finished it I worked on the last drafts in a third-floor office of the Department of English at Carleton

College where I sat unsociably day after day agonizing over Tamil particles and English prepositions' (*LW*, xv– xvi).

Ramanujan was acutely conscious that even the most scrupulous translator's care and craftsmanship cannot solve the problems of attempting what John Dryden, in 1680, had called *metaphrase*, the method of 'turning an author word by word, and line by line, from one language into another'.⁴ According to Ramanujan, two principal difficulties prevent a translator from producing a perfect metaphrase, especially of a poem: (a) the words in the text 'are always figurative' (*HD*, xvi),⁵ and therefore cannot be rendered literally; and (b) a truly literal version can never capture the poetry of the original, for 'only poems can translate poems' (*LW*, 296), and a poem is always made at several levels, of which the so-called literal level is only one (*HD*, xvi). He believed that, given these obstacles, **metaphrase** is an unachievable ideal, and that 'Translations too, being poems, are "never finished, only abandoned"' (*LW*, xv), so that the translator's task 'more often than not . . . like Marvell's love, is "begotten by despair upon impossibility"' (*LW*, 297).

While struggling with 'the minute particulars of individual poems, the words' at the level of metaphrase (*LW*, 297), the translator also has to try and render into the second language the syntax, structure or design of the original text. Syntax, which Ramanujan treats as a synecdoche for structure, represents the site of textual organization where individual constitutive elements (such as words, images, symbols and figures) combine with each other to produce a larger unit, an ensemble of effects or a whole. In dealing with the original text's construction as a composite entity, Ramanujan sought to carry over not only its **metaphrasable (or at least paraphrasable)** meaning but also, equally importantly, its formal principles, its modulations of voice and tone, and its combination of effects on the reader. Thus, at the level of syntax, he attempted to translate a text 'phrase by phrase as each phrase articulates the total poem' (*IL*, 11).

More broadly, in his effort to render the original poem's structure as faithfully as possible, Ramanujan concentrated on several principles of poetic organization. For instance, he identified and tried to convey in his translation the specific order of elements in the source-text, so that he 'paid special attention to the images and their placement' (*IL*, 11). He also frequently played with the visual form or shape of his versions on the page, for this was 'a way of indicating the design of the original poems' (*IL*, 12). He further sought to

emphasize the relations among the various parts of a poem, which made possible the arrangement of poetic elements as well as the visual form itself. So when he ‘[broke] up the lines and arranged them in little blocks and paragraphs, or arranged them step-wise’, he used the spacing on the page ‘to suggest . . . the distance or the closeness of elements in the original syntax’ (*IL*, 11). Moreover, in his overall strategy of translation at the level of combination, he sought to make ‘explicit typographical approximations to what [he] thought was the inner form of the poem’ (*IL*, 11). That is, in moving from the level of literal signification to that of structural significance, Ramanujan attempted to translate not just the words, lines, sentences, images and explicit themes, but also the shaping principle of the source-text, its elusive ‘poetic’ core.

Ramanujan developed his conceptions of ‘outer’ and ‘inner’ poetic form from two culturally incommensurate sources. On the one hand, he owed the distinction in part to Noam Chomsky’s analysis of surface and deep structure in discourse, and to Roman Jakobson’s rather different structuralist analysis of the grammar of poetry, especially the latter’s distinction between ‘verse instance’ and ‘verse design’.⁶ To a remarkable extent Ramanujan’s differentiation between outer and inner form, which he formulated in the late 1960s or early 1970s, parallels the distinction between ‘phenotext’ and ‘genotext’ which Julia Kristeva developed around the same time from the same structural-linguistic sources, but which she deployed in a post-structuralist psychoanalytical theory of signifying practices.⁷ On the other hand, Ramanujan owed his distinction to the classical Tamil distinction between two genres of poetic discourse, the *akam*, ‘interior, heart, household’, and the *puram*, ‘exterior, public’ (*LW*, 233, 262–9). For much of his career, Ramanujan treated the interior and the exterior as aspects, divisions or characteristics not only of textual and poetic organization, but also of social organization and cultural formation as such, specifically in the domains that Rabindranath Tagore, working in a different Indian tradition early in this century, had independently designated in his novel *Ghare bhaire* as ‘the home’ and ‘the world’.⁸ Ramanujan also applied the distinction between outer and inner form to his own practice as a scholar and poet when, in a rare and therefore frequently quoted comment, he said that English and my disciplines (linguistics, anthropology) give me my ‘outer’ forms – linguistic, metrical, logical and other such ways of shaping experience; and my first thirty years in India, my frequent visits and fieldtrips, my personal and professional preoccupations with Kannada, Tamil, the classics, and folklore give me my substance, my ‘inner’ forms,

images and symbols. They are continuous with each other, and I no longer can tell what comes from where.⁹

Seeking to transpose the phenotext as well as the genotext of a poem from its original language into a second one, usually a language belonging to a different family altogether, the translator in Ramanujan had to deal with all the differences that separate one tongue from another. Ramanujan believed that, in any given language, the production of discourse (*parole* in Saussure's sense) results from 'the infinite use of finite means' (*FI*, 323), and that the particular means provided by the *langue* or system underlying the actual usage are determinate and characteristic of that language (*langage*).¹⁰ English and Kannada, for example, use two rather different finite sets of means – sounds, scripts, alphabets, lexicons, grammars, syntactic rules, stylistic conventions, formal and generic principles and so forth – to generate their respective infinite bodies of discourse, including poetry. Consequently, a modern English translation of a premodern Dravidian-language poem, no matter how skilful, can never be 'transparent' the way Walter Benjamin, for instance, idealistically and formalistically thought it could be.¹¹ Ramanujan felt that the systemic differences between two languages ensure that Benjamin's norm of a 'literal rendering of the syntax' of one is impossible in the other, and that a compensatory focus on individual words in such a situation (at the expense of structure or design) conflicts with the translator's obligations to render the poem's inner and outer forms faithfully. As he put it, in the case of tenth-century *bhakti* poetry:

When two languages are as startlingly different from each other as modern English and medieval Tamil, one despairs. For instance, the 'left-branching' syntax of Tamil is most often a reverse mirror image of the possible English. Medieval Tamil is written with no punctuation and no spaces between words; it has neither articles nor prepositions, and the words are 'agglutinative,' layered with suffixes. Moreover, the syntax is a dense embedding of clause within clause. I translate unit by syntactic unit and try to recreate the way the parts articulate the poem in the original. My English thus seems to occupy more visual space on the page than the adjective-packed, participle-crowded Tamil original. The 'sound-look,' the syntax, the presence or absence of punctuation, and the sequential design [of the translations] are part of the effort to bring the Tamil poems faithfully to an English reader. (*HD*, xvii)

A text's resistance to translatability, however, arises from the differences between language-systems as well as, among other things, from the conflict between author and translator. In Ramanujan's view, the relationship between translator and author is subject to two pairs of contradictory desires, with the pairs contradicting each other in turn. One coupling consists of the translator's desire to make a poem out of the translation, and the negation of this desire by the reader's conventionalized demand for metaphrase or absolute literal fidelity to the original (without regard to its 'poetry'). The other coupling, which conflicts with the first, consists of the translator's desire to make out of the poetry of the original a poem of his or her own, and the negation of this desire by the obligation, conventionally enforced by readers, faithfully to make out of the intertextual encounter someone else's poem.

Despite the tension between faithful representation and supposedly parasitic appropriation, Ramanujan was unambiguous about the literary status of the translations he wanted to produce. As he explained quite early in his career, in the specific context of classical Tamil lyric poetry, 'The originals would not speak freely through the translations to present-day readers if the renderings were not in modern English, and if they were not poems themselves in some sense. By the same token, the translations had to be close, as close as my sense of English and Tamil would allow' (*IL*, 11). At the same time, fully recognizing the complexities of the conflict within the translator between self-effacement and self-articulation, or between transmission and expression, Ramanujan argued that a translator is 'an artist on oath.' He has a double allegiance, indeed, several double allegiances. All too familiar with the rigors and pleasures of reading a text and those of making another, caught between the need to express himself and the need to represent another, moving between the two halves of one brain, he has to use both to get close to 'the originals.' He has to let poetry win without allowing scholarship to lose. Then his very compromises may begin to express a certain fidelity, and may suggest what he cannot convey. (*LW*, 296–7)

But the dilemma is due to more than a split in the translator's self or a schism in his or her brain: it arises also from an *aporia* – a choice involving competing options that cannot be made on rational grounds alone – between loyalty and betrayal, commitment and freedom, reflection and refraction or, in one of Ramanujan's own late metaphors, mirrors and windows ('*WM*', 187–216). For, as Ramanujan confesses, 'A translation has to be true to the translator no less than to the originals. He cannot jump off his own shadow. Translation is choice,

interpretation, an assertion of taste, a betrayal of what answers to one's needs, one's envies' (SS, 12–13). In following his own inclinations, prejudices and self-perceived strengths and shortcomings, the translator, no matter how skilled technically, risks being 'eccentric or irrelevant to the needs of others in the two traditions' (SS, 13), the one he translates from and the one he translates into. If the translator fails to achieve a balance between representation and appropriation, then he (or she) undercuts the utility of the translation as a representation of something otherwise inaccessible, as well as the value of such a representation beyond its 'utility'.

What potentially saves the translator from the seemingly inescapable subjectivity of his or her relationship with the author of the original is the dynamics of a binding series of 'several double allegiances' (LW, 296). For Ramanujan, these divided loyalties generate yet more levels at which translation performs, or has to fulfil, its polyphonic functions. The translator again risks being labelled a traitor, as in the old Italian formula *traditore, traduttore* ('the translator is a traitor'), but he or she can succeed by working through three sets of conflicting allegiances: to the reader, to the culture of the original text, and to the text's historical context or tradition.

No matter what else the translator does, he or she has to be true to the reader of the translation. A translator works in a relatively well-defined and predictable rhetorical situation, since his or her work is addressed to a reader who makes multiple demands on the translator and the translation. This reader, both 'real' and 'imagined', expects the translator to be faithful to the source-text, at the level of metaphor and at that of outer and inner form. This reader also expects the translator to produce a version that is at once true to the original poem and a poem in its own right. The reader further expects the poem, as translated, to be a reliable representation of the original text, its language, its poetics and tradition, its historical and cultural contexts and so on. That is, in order to fulfil the reader's expectations, a translator has to submit to three concomitant, conflicting norms: textual fidelity, aesthetic satisfaction and pedagogic utility. While the translator can satisfy the demands of verbal faithfulness and poetic pleasure when he or she negotiates the difficulties of metaphor, the search for inner and outer forms, and the intrusions of poetic desire and subjectivity that create a tension between representation and appropriation, he or she can fulfil the norm of pedagogic utility only by stepping beyond the immediate constraints of textual transmission,

and invoking his or her allegiances to a phenomenon that stands outside the text and beyond its reader in translation.

The phenomenon in question is the culture in which the original poem is embedded before translation. The translator cannot carry across that culture as a whole: in fact, the translation of an individual text or a selection of texts is already a part of the effort to translate that culture. Ramanujan's strategy in the face of this version of the hermeneutic circle was to create an opening or aperture with the help of the reader.¹² He argued, therefore, that even as a translator carries over a particular text from one culture into another, he has to translate the reader from the second culture into the first one. This complementary process of imaginative transposition or intertextual acculturation can be initiated and possibly accomplished by framing the poetic translations with prefaces, introductions, afterwords, notes, glossaries and indices. As Ramanujan says in the Translator's Note to *Samskara*, 'A translator hopes not only to translate a text, but hopes (against all odds) *to translate a non-native reader into a native one*. The Notes and Afterword [in this book] are part of that effort' (*S*, viii; emphasis added). Or, as he puts it in the *Interior Landscape*,

The translations and the afterword (which some readers may prefer to read first) are two parts of one effort. The effort is to try and make a non-Tamil reader experience in English something of what a native experiences when he reads classical Tamil poems. Anyone translating a poem into a foreign language is, at the same time, trying to *translate* a foreign reader into a native one. (*IL*, 11 ; emphasis in original)

Even as he attempts to initiate the foreign reader's movement towards the native culture of the translated text, however, Ramanujan invokes a different allegiance. This is the translator's fidelity to the original poem's historical situation and tradition – the framework, material and process of transmission over time and across generations, within a culture and even between different cultures – which make possible the survival of texts, ideas and practices in the first place. In giving the reader a sense of the translated poem's native tradition (in the translation itself as also in the scholarly discourse around it), the translator, together with his or her reader, enters an immense network of intertextual relations, transactions and confluences spanning both time and space. Ramanujan gives us a metonymic glimpse of such a network when, referring to his versions of classical Tamil poems, he remarks:

Dancers and composers have translated my translations further into their own arts. Over the years, the poems have appeared not only in a variety of anthologies but in wedding services. The ancient poets composed in Tamil for their Tamil corner of the world of antiquity; but, as nothing human is alien, they have reached ages unborn and ‘accents yet unknown.’ I am grateful, and astonished, to be one of the links, undreamed of by them or by me. (*LW*, xviii)

But the traditions that become the sites of such multiple transpositions are not ready-made or already available. Echoing T.S. Eliot’s argument that a tradition has to be acquired with great labour,¹³ Ramanujan acknowledges that ‘Even one’s own tradition is not one’s birth right; it has to be earned, repossessed. The old bards earned it by apprenticing themselves to the masters. One chooses and translates a part of one’s past to make it present to oneself and maybe to others. One comes face to face with it sometimes in faraway places, as I did’ (*LW*, xvii). At the most general level of effort, then, the translator is engaged in carrying over not only texts but also readers, cultures, traditions and himself or herself in radically metamorphic ways. Translation – which, in its most elementary form, appears to be a matter of paraphrasing, say, a single ‘adjective-packed, participle-crowded Tamil poem of four lines’ (*IL*, 12) – thus no longer hinges upon a product, or even a bundle of relations. It evolves instead into an open-ended, multi-track process, in which translator, author, poem and reader move back and forth between two different sets of languages, cultures, historical situations and traditions. In a fluid process of this sort, which we attempt to freeze under the label of ‘intertextuality’, the translations that succeed best are those capable of making the most imaginative connections between widely separated people, places and times. The poems and stories Ramanujan himself chose to translate over four decades had the power to make precisely such connections, and they continue to energize his readers’ heterotopic worlds.

Notes

1. In this chapter I have transliterated Indian-language words, including some proper nouns, using standard diacritical notation. For Kannada, see the notation system in A.K. Ramanujan, *Speaking of Siva* (London: Penguin Books, 1973), pp. 14–15; for Tamil, see A.K. Ramanujan, trans., *The Interior Landscape: Love Poems from a Classical Tamil Anthology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967), pp. 12–14; for Sanskrit and Tamil, see G. Flood, *An Introduction to Hinduism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. xiii–xiv.

2. An overview of the career of A. K. Ramanujan (1929–1993) appears in my ‘A.K. Ramanujan: Author, translator, scholar’, *World Literature Today* 68 (2) (Spring 1994), 279–

80. Quotations from seven of Ramanujan's works are cited in the text hereafter, with the abbreviations listed below.

IL A.K. Ramanujan, trans., *The Interior Landscape: Love Poems from a Classical Tamil Anthology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967).

SS A.K. Ramanujan, trans., *Speaking of Siva* (London: Penguin Books, 1973).

S A.K. Ramanujan, trans., *Samskara: A Rite for a Dead Man*, by U.R. Anantha Murthy (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1976; corrected edn, 1978; new paperback edn, New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

HD A.K. Ramanujan, trans., *Hymns for the Drowning: Poems for Visnu by Nammalvar* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981).

LW A.K. Ramanujan, ed. and trans., *Poems of Love and War: From the Eight Anthologies and the Ten Long Poems of Classical Tamil* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

FI A.K. Ramanujan, ed., *Folktales from India: A Selection of Oral Tales from Twenty-two Languages* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1991).

'WM' A. K. Ramanujan, 'Where mirrors are windows: toward an anthology of reflections', *History of Religions* 28 (3) (1989), 187–216.

Ramanujan's important posthumous publications, not quoted here, include: V. Dharwadker and A.K. Ramanujan, eds, *The Oxford Anthology of Modern Indian Poetry* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994); A.K. Ramanujan, V.N. Rao and D. Shulman, eds and trans., *When God Is a Customer: Telugu Courtesan Songs by Ksetrayya and Others* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); *The Collected Poems of A.K. Ramanujan* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995); A.K. Ramanujan, *A Flowering Tree and Other Oral Tales from India*, eds S. Blackburn and A. Dundes (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); and *The Collected Essays of A.K. Ramanujan*, ed. V. Dharwadker (Delhi: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

3. See my 'Postcolonial cosmopolitanism: a note on A. K. Ramanujan's theory and practice of criticism and translation', *Indian Literature* 37 (2) (1994), 91–7.

4. *Essays of John Dryden*, ed. W.P. Ker, 2 vols (1900; repr. New York: Russell & Russell, 1961), 1:237.

5. Here Ramanujan quotes Dryden's *Essays*, 2:228.

6. See N. Chomsky, 'Current issues in linguistic theory', in *The Structure of Language: Readings in the Philosophy of Language*, eds J.A. Fodor and J.J. Katz (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1964), pp. 50–118, esp. pp. 50–52; and R. Jakobson, 'Linguistics and poetics', in his *Language in Literature*, eds K. Pomorska and S. Rudy (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press; Harvard University Press, 1987), pp. 62–94, esp. pp. 78–81.

7. Julia Kristeva's conceptions of genotext and phenotext are discussed in R. Barthes, 'Theory of the text', trans. I. McLeod, in *Untying the Text*, ed. R. Young (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 31–47; see esp. p. 38.

8. See R. Tagore, *The Home and the World*, trans. S. Tagore, with revisions by the author (1919; Madras: Macmillan India, 1992). The affinity between the two sets of conceptions is striking, although Tagore may well have been unaware of the classical Tamil tradition.

9. Quoted in R. Parthasarathy, ed., *Ten Twentieth Century Indian Poets* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1976), pp. 95–6.

10. On *parole* and *langue*, see Chomsky, ‘Current issues’, pp. 52, 59–60; E. Benveniste, ‘Saussure after half a century’, in his *Problems in General Linguistics*, trans. M.E. Meek (Coral Gables, FL: University of Miami Press, 1971), pp. 29–40; and J. Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics, and the Study of Literature* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975), pp. 8–10. On *parole*, *langue* and *langage*, see M. Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972); esp. pp. 21–117.

11. Walter Benjamin, ‘The task of the translator: an introduction to the translation of Baudelaire’s *Tableaux parisiens*’, in his *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. H. Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), pp. 69–82; see p. 79. Hereafter cited in the text as ‘TT’.

12. On the hermeneutic circle, see E.D. Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967), pp. 76–7.

13. T.S. Eliot, ‘Tradition and the individual talent’, in *Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot*, ed. F. Kermode (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich; Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1988), pp. 37–44; see p. 38.

READING GUIDE

Introduction to A K Ramanujan

A K Ramanujan was a leading Indian poet writing in English, folklorist, linguist, translator and a scholar of Indian aesthetics- in brief, a transdisciplinary scholar. He believed that Indian folk tale traditions are the richest in the world as he translated the Kannada folk tales into English and brought the beauty and elegance of the Tamil *Sangam* poetry to the world. He translated into English U.R. Anantmurthy’s Kannada novel *Samskara*; and his rendering into English of Kannada Bhakti poetry was published as *Speaking Shiva*. In his introduction to a collection of folktales he pointed out that “most of the Indian tales lose their indigenous charm when translators ‘bowdlerise’, ‘Victorianise’, and sentimentalise the earthy, often bawdy, Indian tales and render them fit for middle-class English nurseries.” He further lamented that in the “hands of ethnographers, the tale loses its style and spunk and acquires ‘italics and brackets’. Ramanujan gave us the tales in English rendering without letting them lose their Indian ambience. (Bande 2005)

The following extract is an abridged version of the 1994 essay by Vinay Dharwadker titled “A K Ramanujan: Author, Translator, Scholar” published in the *World Literature Today*, 68(2),279.

During his life time, his reputation as one of the world’s great modern translators, especially of poetry was based on his ‘Seven finely crafted books.’ *The Interior Landscape*(1967) and *Poems of Love and War* (1986) contained selections of his English versions of classical Tamil Sangam poetry, both included scholarly commentary on the language and culture of the original texts, but the latter offered a larger and more representative body of work and more comprehensive and critical account of the tradition. *Speaking of Siva* (1973) brought together Ramanujan’s translations of more than 200 vacanas or ‘sayings’ by four major bhaktas or saint-poets in the counter-cultural Virasaiva religious tradition in Kannada, from the early centuries of this millennium. *Hymns for the Drowning: Poems for Visnu* by Nammalvar(1981) consisted of Ramanujan’s renderings of nearly 90 poems of a 10th century Tamil saint-poet in a very different Srivaisnava bhakti tradition, complementing in language, religious orientation, and poetic quality his versions of Kannada vacanas in *Speaking of Siva*.

In historical and textual contrast, in *Songs of the Earth and Other Poems*(1975), Ramanujan and his collaborator M G Krishnamurthy brought together their versions of selected poems of by Gopalkrishna Adiga, the Kannada modernist poet who his admirers regarded as India’s greatest living poet in the early post-Independence decades. In *Samskara: Rights for a Dead Man*(1976, 1978) Ramanujan published a version of U R Ananthmurthy’s existential 1965 Kannada novel which was made into an award winning, controversial film in 1970. Moving away from high culture and touching on a new boundary in the last years of his life, Ramanujan presented *Folktales from India*(1991), his re-tellings and edited versions in English prose of 19th and 20th century oral narratives from 22 Indian languages. With the exception of Adiga’s *Song of the Earth* which appeared from the small Writers Workshop press in Calcutta, all these books have been remarkably successful in the international literary marketplace, reaching sizable communities of students, scholars as well as general readers interested in Indian literature.

Ramanujan’s output as a translator was not limited to the seven book length works... Between the mid-1960s and the early 1990s, he also published a substantial quantity of material in other forms, translated either independently or with collaborators which consists primarily of various kinds of twentieth century Indian texts. This body of publications includes, e.g, modern Malayalam poems, rendered with K M George... in *Indian Poetry Today* (1980); modern Telugu poems translated with V Narayan Rao as well as modern Kannada and Tamil poems, translated independently. He left behind other works such as *When God is a Customer*, a selection of Telugu bhakti poetry, *The Oxford Anthology of Modern Indian Poetry*(1994) which included more than 30 translations by Ramanujan from recent Kannada, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam poems. His last project was *A Flowering Tree and Other Kannada Folk Tales* (1997) , a large collection of orally narrated stories that he had recorded, transcribed and translated over three decades of filed work in Karnataka.

NOTES:

Page 2: Virasaiva *vacanas*

Virasaivas, also known as Lingayats, are the followers of a strong reform movement of the 12th century, and are in large numbers in Karnataka, Maharashtra, parts of Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. The movement's founders defied the Hindu orthodoxy of that era by rejecting the birth-based *varna* system of society. In the monotheistic Virasaiva tradition, as with other Hindu traditions, everyone is a repository of Divinity, which one needs to experience through individual effort and *bhakti* without the need for an intermediary, like a priest. It also rejected the propitiatory and compensatory rituals.

It did not differentiate people based on birth (caste), creed, gender, or language. That the Lingayats eventually became a caste by themselves is an ironic twist on how reform movements work in India.

The Lingayat teachings are in *vacanas*, meaning "sayings," rendered in Kannada. The *vacanas* of Virasaiva thinkers — Basava Anna, Mahadevi Akka, Allama Prabhu, among others — are well-known. Like the writings of the Tamil Bhakti poets who preceded them between the 5th and 10th centuries, Virasaiva thinkers wrote in the native language Kannada for the understanding of their message by everyone.

The *vacana* composers addressed their sayings to the presiding deity in the Shiva temple of their choice, like the Tamil Bhakti poets between 6th and 10th centuries. The *vacanas* are pithy and sometimes cryptic, needing commentaries. The *vacana* literature continues to influence life in Karnataka and other places.

Page 4: **Metaphrasable**: Derived from 'metaphrase' which is literal translation or a word by word, line by line translation.

Paraphrasable: Translation which is a restatement the meaning of a text or passage using other words.

Metaphrase is one of the three ways of transferring, along with paraphrase and imitation.

Dryden considers paraphrase preferable to metaphrase and imitation.

Page 5 Chomsky's analysis of surface and deep structure

The terms 'deep structure' and 'surface structure' were introduced by Noam Chomsky as a part of his work on transformational grammar. As per Chomsky deep structure refers to concepts, thoughts, ideas & feelings whereas surface structure refers to the words / language we use to represent the deep structure.

Roman Jakobson recognizes two ways of analysing metric form: verse design and verse instance. 'Verse design' is the abstract model and 'verse instance', the actual metric realization in the poem. While writing his 1960s paper 'Linguistics and Poetics', Roman Jakobson renamed deep structure and surface structure as 'verse design' and 'verse instance'.

Kristeva's Concepts of Geno-text and Pheno-text

In *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Julia Kristeva offers a distinctive way to analyse entire literary texts. In a brief chapter entitled "Geno-text and Pheno-text," she uses these terms to describe two aspects of a literary text. The geno-text is the motility (or spontaneous mobility) between the words, the potentially disruptive meaning that is not quite a meaning below the text. The Pheno-text is what syntax and semantics of the text is trying to convey again, in plain language.

One can identify a text's pheno-text by noting the 'language that serves to communicate, which linguistics describes in terms of 'competence' and 'performance' (Kristeva 1984: 87) The geno-text and pheno-text "do not exist in isolation; they are co-constitutive and always in process."

To put it simply,

Pheno-text: the physical text, that which is expressed, contained in language or other signifiers. It is a presentation of meaning in verbal signs – words, comprising the imprinted text etc

Geno-text: the creative means by which the physical text comes into being (not language, but the means of producing language in a biological and somatic sense, as it is constrained by social interaction)

Dharwadker observes that Ramanujan developed his ideas of outer and inner poetic forms from Noam Chomsky's concept of deep structure and surface structure, Jakobson's distinction between 'verse instance' and 'verse design'. He also finds similarities between this and Julia Kristeva's distinction between 'phenotext' (the manifest text) and 'genotext' (the innate signifying structure).

Ramanujan owed his distinction also to the classical Tamil distinction between two genres of poetic discourse, the *akam*, 'interior, heart, household', and the *puram*, 'exterior, public'. Dharwadker states:

English and my disciplines (linguistics, anthropology) give me my 'outer' forms – linguistic, metrical, logical and other such ways of shaping experience; and my first thirty years in India, my frequent visits and fieldtrips, my personal and professional preoccupations with Kannada, Tamil, the classics, and folklore give me my substance, my 'inner' forms, images and symbols. They are continuous with each other, and I no longer can tell what comes from where." [From the essay]

Page 6. 'transparent' way of Walter Benjamin

In his 1921 essay "The Task of a Translator", he says that "A real translation is transparent; it does not cover the original, does not block its light, but allows the pure language, as though reinforced by its own medium, to shine upon the original all the more fully" (260).

The distinction between the French words, *langue* (language or tongue) and *parole* (speech), enters the vocabulary of theoretical linguistics with Ferdinand de Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* which was published posthumously in 1915. *La langue* denotes the abstract systematic principles of a language, without which no meaningful utterance (*parole*) would be possible. Langage is the system of languages, that is, the whole sum of the languages that are present in the world.
