

AKRURA : AN APPRECIATION

We record, with a deep sense of loss, the death of A.K. Ramanujan, gifted poet and translator.

Ramanujan was born into a Tamil family settled in Mysore among Kannada speakers. His father was a mathematician and astronomer. Thus, he spoke Tamil downstairs with his mother, English with his father and Kannada with the outside world. This was quite a beginning for a scholar of Indian languages, a poet in English and a translator of poetry from Tamil and Kannada into English.

Ramanujan's translations include *The Interior Landscape*, selections from Tamil Sangam poetry, *Poems of Love and War*, selections from the Eight Anthologies and ten Long Poems of Classical Tamil and *Speaking of Siva*, and devotional songs from Kannada.

Ramanujan adopted the pseudonym 'Akrura' for his early writings. Formed from the initial letters of his own name, it also has the meaning of "gentle, not cruel" and was also the name of an uncle of Krishna. The name epitomises many of the qualities of Ramanujan's poetry, both original and in translation.

We publish below two original poems, in English and Kannada, and a translation from Tamil. **P**

Extended Family

Yet like grandfather
I bathe before the village crow
the dry chlorine water
my only Ganges
the naked Chicago bulb
a cousin of the Vedic sun
slap soap on my back
like father
and think
in proverbs
like me
I wipe myself dry
with an unwashed
Sears turkish towel
like mother
I hear faint morning song
(though here it sounds
Japanese)
and three clear strings
nextdoor
through kitchen
clatter
like my little daughter
I play shy
hand over crotch
my body not yet full
of thoughts novels
and children
I hold my peepee
like my little son
play garden hose

in and out
the bathtub
like my grandson
I look up
unborn
at myself
like my great
great-grandson
I am not yet
may never be
my future dependent
on several
people
yet
to come

Original Poem in English

Tirumal

In fire, you are the heat.
In flowers, you are the scent.
Among stones, you are the diamond.
In words, you are truth.
Among virtues, you are love.
In a warriors wrath, you are the strength.
In the Vedas, you are the secret.
Of the elements, you are the first.
In the scorching sun, you are the light.
In the moonlight, you are the softness.
Everything, you are everything,
the sense, the substance, of everything.

Translated from the Tamil
Katuvan Ilaveyinar
Paripatal 3, From Poems of Love and War.