INTRODUCTION

POETRY AND POETIC LANGUAGE.

(POETIC LANGUAGE SEEN AS A CLASS WITHIN THE WIDE FRAME WORK OF LINGUISTIC REGISTERS AND ITS GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS)

"Idamandam tama: kṛitsnam jaayeeta bhuvanatrayam
Yadi sabdaahwayam jyootiraas samsaaram na diipyate"

[It is the word that enlightens the whole world. But for the word, all the three worlds would have been in total darkness]

Dandin

In a letter to Richard West in April 1742, Thomas Gray wrote thus:

"The language of the age is never the language of poetry"  

Well after another century, i.e., on August 14, 1879, Gerard Manly Hopkins wrote to Robert Bridges:

"Poetic language should be the current language heightened and unlike itself, but not an obsolete one"

Defending the language of the Lyrical Ballads, William Wordsworth wrote in the Preface:

"The principal object, then, proposed in these poems was to choose incidents and situations from common life and to relate or describe them, throughout,

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1 Dandin, Kaavyadarsam. 1 : 4.


3 Leech, p. 8.
as far as was possible in a selection of language really used by men . . . " 4

No sooner does one enter into the precincts of the poetic language than one realises that one has been caught up in a labyrinthine world. It may seem to be a forlorn hope when the linguist tries to assert that he, of all specialists, is best qualified to show a way out and reveal the quintessence of the language of poetry. Yet it cannot be overlooked that the study of the verbal art is intimately connected with, and must be based on the study of the language under the linguist's discipline.

Curtis W. Hayes speaks of a kind of tension that prevails in the relationship between critics and linguists and states that both critics and linguists can contribute a great deal to literary analysis and criticism. 5

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"Some literary critics have been disturbed by the application of recent linguistic technics to the study of literature, and it is true that since linguists appear to have believed that the age old problems of literary criticism could be solved in a summary fashion by the application of these methods. It is clear today, however, that the apparent conflict between the critic and the linguist is almost always the result of a misunderstanding . . . . "
Despite the enormous efforts of both critics and linguists, the question of poetic language still continues as evasive or illusive as a mirage in a wilderness.

A poet in the process of transporting or elevating the readers to a different plane of experience may certainly have to use a special kind of language. He may have to take his readers beyond the dictionary meaning of words.

The following Sanskrit sloka or verse speaks of the benefits of poetry:

"Dharma artha kaama mokgešu
Vaicakśanyam kalaasuca
Karooti prilihan klirist ca
Saadhru kaavya niśeèveاه".

[ Poets get wealth, love, moksa or salvation and every other thing, if he is able to write good poetry. ]

He can never scale such heights with the use of everyday language.

**POETIC LANGUAGE AS A LINGUISTIC REGISTER.**

Register is "Language according to use" which complements dialect which is "Language according to user." And as argued by Raymond Chapman, when a user directs his performance towards a particular style, he is adopting a register.

6 Bhāmahan, *Kaavyaalamkaaram*. 1 : 2.

He adds:

"The common adoption of a register by a number of people in a certain recurring situation creates a style".

Is it possible then to include Poetic language under the wide spectrum of linguistic registers? There is no reason why it should not be. Geoffrey N. Leech, Raymond Chapman, Edward Stankiewics and numerous others have written much on this issue.

Poetic Language forms a class in itself. This leads to another question. Does this specially devised language follow the established rules of the language?

"The Great Poet", as suggested by Stankiewics, is the man who possesses an intuitive mastery of the rules that are obligatory within his own poetic tradition and language.... However, poetic works are unthinkable outside the rules of the language and of a given tradition."

Leech speaks of a certain freedom on the part of the poets to violate the linguistic rules, if necessary:

"Poetic language may violate or deviate from the
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generally observed rules of the language in many ways, some obvious, some subtle".  

But Stankiewics questions this kind of a special privilege allowed to poets. He states:

Poetic language need not violate any rules of the language and still remains what it is, that is, a highly patterned and organised mode of verbal expression. . . Poetic language takes full cognizance of the rules of the linguistic systems, and if it admits "deviations", they themselves are conditioned by the language or by the given poetic tradition.

Any inquiry into poetic language must begin with the basic question what poetry itself is. But it is quite evident that even Dr. Johnson fumbled at this point. There have been a plethora of definitions for poetry, but even after all these, the riddle remains unresolved.

William Peterfield Trent has tried to picture the strange nature of poetic experience in the following manner:

A fine frenzy siezes the poet's heart and brain, transmits itself to his verse, passes through that medium into me, and losing for the time being its creative quality, is transformed into that more or less

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10 Geoffrey N. Leech. p. 5.

11 Edward Stankiewics. p. 70.
passive state we call rapture. This is to me the
supreme value of great poetry. It lifts me higher
towards heaven, opens my eyes more surely to the
beautiful vision, wraps me out of space, out of time,
transmits me and transforms me more completely and
ecstatically than any other transforming agent of which
I have knowledge. 12

To contain this kind of a thaumaturgical experience into the
capsule of a definition seems to be a futile exercise. Even
T. S. Eliot was flabbergasted by the elusive nature of this fine
art called poetry. In 'East Cocker' he writes as follows:

So here am I, in the middle way
having had twenty years -
Twenty years largely wasted, the years
of L'entre deux guerres -
Trying to use words, and every attempt
Is a wholly new start, and a different
kind of failure
And so each venture or effort at writing
Is a new beginning, a raid on the
inarticulate with
Shabby equipments always deteriorating
In the general mass of impressions of feeling
Undisciplined squads of emotions.
This crisis can be resolved by asking a simple question. 14

12 William Peterfield Trent, Greatness in Literature. (New
York: Columbia University Press, 1905) 228.
poetry merely a verbal art? F. R. Leavis in his *New Bearings of English Poetry* tries to establish that poetry is primarily a verbal art. In his well known book *English Poetry and English Language*, F. W. Bateson also postulates that poetry is above everything a verbal exercise. The writing of poetry according to this theory consists in the conscious and deliberate construction of a musical pattern of words which gives some kind of delight, and the theme is not of much importance.

J. Middleton Murry says of poetry that its purity "lies in its absolute independence of the subject." Herbert Read is perhaps the foremost English exponent of this kind of a verbal music theory. In *Poetry and Anarchism*, he says of English poetry that its greatest beauty "is inherent in its sound; it too is a kind of music." 

When the history of Sanskrit poetics is examined, it is found that there were some scholars like Vamana who wholeheartedly held this view.

Vamana (A.D 770 - 840), the proponent of the 'Riti School' in his *Kavyalamkaara Sustravrirtti* has stated thus:

"Riritiraatmaa kaavyasya" 15.

[ Style is the soul of Poetry ]

14 Herbert Read, *Poetry and Anarchism* (Faber & Faber 1938), P. 37
15 Riti School of thought upholds the view that style is the soul of poetry. They defined 'riti' as "vīśiṣṭa padaracanā riti" (Combination of excellent words constitute style).
But it would be a mistake to assert that poetry is nothing but a wordy exercise. With what purpose do poets employ words? The verbal medium is used to convey some kind of meaning. There will always be some sense within the verse structure. An electrical wire is a carrier of power energy. If there is no electricity, there arises no need for the conductor.

Here one may be tempted to assert that the essence of poetry lies in the semantic shades of the words employed. In other words, meaning is extolled as the life of poetry. When melopoeia - musical property of the words - is refused to be accepted as the primary end of poetry, many are made to believe that meaning is the be-all and end-all of poetry.

In English, Ben Jonson, Carlyle, Arnold and others followed this line of argument whereas in India celebrated scholars like Bharata supported this view. Deliberating on Kaavyaśareera (body of poetry) Bharata says that the theme constitutes the body of poetry -

"Itivṛittam tu kaavyasya śarīram
parikalpitam"

[ Itivṛittam or theme makes the body of poetry ]

Dandin's statement "Śarīram tāvadiṣṭaarthaa vyavachinna padaavalil" also stresses the importance of meaning in poetry, as it says that the group of words that bring in the desired meaning makes the body of poetry.

But most of the other ancient Indian poeticians were of the opinion that both sound and meaning constituted the inevitable

16 Dandin: Kaavyaadarām, 1:10.
ingredients of poetry. While Bhamaha writes of poetry as

"Sadbhaarathaah sahitu kaavyam"17

[Poetry is constituted of sound and meaning.]

Vagbhadan defines poetry as the following:

"pramaapadaa navaartha yuktyudhoodha
vidhaayinii
sphurantii satkaveer budhi : pratibhaa
sarvatoomukhi"18

[A poet who is a genius gives us pleasing words and new meanings.]

Anandavardhanan who was one of the celebrated Indian Poeticians, tried to establish that it was neither sound nor meaning but 'Dhwani', that constituted the soul of poetry.19

But do we turn to poetry for its meaning? Do we admire Shakespeare and Kalidasa for their philosophy? If our infatuation for Valmiki, Goethe, Kalidasa and Shakespeare is not for the depth of their thoughts or for the soundness of their cogitations, then what is that favours their being perpetual fountains of inspiration for ages?

We are compelled again to further our search for the soul of poetry. It has been generally held that the intrinsic merit


19 Dwami School argues that it is not direct meaning but suggested meaning or the implied meaning that gives life to poetic language.
of poetry doesn't rest with sound nor is its quintessence equated with the thoughts embedded in it. The appeal of poetry is neither to the ears nor to the intellect but to the heart. Hence it can be stated that poetry is the language of the heart.

No one will deny that poetry is the expression of "powerful feelings". When feelings become intensified, the language also becomes intense. If one accepts this, one will have to accept that emotional and imaginative expression, at its best, is possible only through figurative language. Hence poetic language becomes essentially figurative language.

In the famous lines of Kalidasa, quoted below he describes the beauty of a lady:

uduraaja mukhli mragaraaja ghatil
gajaraaja virajita mandagatil,
yatisa vanitee manasee vasitee
kwajapa kwatapa kwasamaadhigati?

[Her face is like the moon, her waist slender as that of the lion and her movements as slow and elegant as that of the elephant. When such a lady is in my mind where else is the japa (prayer), where else is the samadhi (comfort) ?]

These lines would mean nothing without the three similes employed. When love, anger and other similar passions are expressed, language tends to become figurative. This can be proved by any number of examples from everyday conversation and from literature.

William Wordsworth seems to have committed a serious mistake while propounding his theory of Poetic Language. In the Preface to the Lyrical Ballads he wrote:
I have said that poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings. It takes its origin from emotions recollected in tranquillity: the emotion is contemplated till by a species of reaction, the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exists in the mind. In this mood successful composition generally begins... 20.

While formulating his views on poetic language he states that all care was taken to avoid the figures of speech in order to bridge the gap between poetic diction and everyday language:

My purpose was to imitate, and as far as possible, to adopt the very language of men; and assuredly such personifications do not make any natural or regular part of that language. They are, indeed, a figure of speech occasionally prompted by passion, and I have made use of them as such, but have endeavoured utterly to reject them as a mechanical device of style, or as a family of language which writers in metre seem to lay claim by proscription. 21


Even when Wordsworth says that he had consciously tried to avoid figurative language, he admits that he has occasionally accepted some figures "prompted by passion". This is where he contradicts himself. Figures are prompted by passion. Then how is it possible - if poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings - to avoid figurative language? Suffice it to say that Wordsworth's mind was not that sharp as that of Coleridge's, who later challenged many of the concepts of his friend in his *Biographia Literaria*.

In *The Anatomy of Prose* Marjorie Boulton writes of the relationship of emotion and language:

> It is almost impossible to discuss emotions for any length of time without figurative language - anything other than figurative language could be very little more than a scientific account of our secretions and the changes in the brain cells.²²

Anyone who seriously studies Kalidasa or Shakespeare will agree that the charm of their poetry rests with their imagery. The well known statement "Upamaa Kaalidaamasya" - Kalidaasa in essence is simile - speaks volumes about this aspect.

Imagery, as the word suggests, is an outgrowth of imagination, which is the essence of creative personality. And since the creative personality is shared by the reader also, he responds to the imagery and shares likewise the emotional effectiveness of the poem.

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A few examples from both English and Malayalam Poetry are cited here in order to clarify the statement that genuine poetic language is truly figurative language. Without a proper study of the numerous figures of speech employed by poets, poetry will remain unintelligible even to the most enthusiastic readers. It is surprising to note that all the important books in English which make references to the figures of speech mention only a few of the two hundred odd rhetoric figures.

All the five poems of T. E. Hulme, included in the Faber Book of Modern Verse (3rd Edition) are reproduced here. All the notable figures of speech employed by the poet are also underlined.

1. *AUTUMN*

A touch of cold in the autumn night
I walked abroad,
And saw the ruddy moon lean over a hedge
Like a red faced farmer.
I did not stop to speak, but nodded
And round about were the wistful stars
With white faces like town children.

2. *MANA ABODA*

Mana Aboda, whose bent form
The sky's in arch'd circle is,
Seem ever for an unknown grief to mourn,
Yet one day I heard her cry:
'I weary of the roses and the singing poets -
Josephs all, not tall enough to try'.
3. **ABOVE THE DOCK**

Above the quite dock is midnight,
*Tangled in the tall mast's corded height*
Hangs the moon. What seemed so far away
*Is but a child's balloon forgotten after play*

4. **THE EMBANKMENT**

Once, in finesse of fields found I ecstasy,
*In a flash of gold heels on the hard pavement,*
Now see I
That warmth's the very stuff of poetry,
Oh, God, make small
*The old star-eaten blanket of the sky,*
That I may fold it round me and in comfort lie.

5. **CONVERSION**

Light hearted I walked into the valley wood
In the time of hyacinths
*Till beauty like a scented cloth*
Cast over, Stifled me. I was bound
motionless and faint of breath
By loneliness that is her own eunuch.

Now pass I to the final river
Ignominiously, in a sack, without sound,
*As any peeping Turk to the Bosphorus.*

Any casual reader of these poems will testify to the fact
that the irresistible charm of these pieces is ingrafted in the
figurative language. Remove the figures used, these poems will be
nothing but dry specifications of facts.
Another poem written by Philip Larkin, which is also included in the same edition of the Faber Book, is given below.

**DAYS**

What are days for?
Days are where we live.
They come, they wake us
Time and time over.
They are to be happy in
Where can we live but days?

Solving that question
Brings the priest and the doctor
In their long coats
Running over the fields.

It is difficult to find anything poetical in these lines which can render the 'rasa' or aesthetic pleasure, which is the ultimate end of poetry.

The first few lines of the Malayalam poem *Kuratti* which is acclaimed as one of the best creations of Kadammanitta Ramakrishnan, a contemporary poet, are reproduced here. He is introducing *Kuratti*, the protagonist:

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malanuura mazayil ninnum urattiyettunnu

Vilanna cuura panambupooole urattiyettunnu.
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* Kuratti (a working class woman) is arriving from the valley of chuura plants. She comes like a panambu, (a mat made of chuura plants, used for drying food

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grains and other objects), which can be easily folded with hands.]

karillaincible kaatttil ninnum kurattiyettunnu
karillaincible valll poole kurattiyettunnu.
[She arrives from the Karillaiechi (another kind of plant) woods where she works all day long cutting and collecting the same. And she comes like a long thread of long karillanchi plant.]

deeptu paaatakkarayillirappoliyill ninnum
kurattiyettunnu
liiraclinti erinnakaripool kurattiyettunnu.
[She arrives from the place where aha has been working with bamboo and she looks as black as the bamboo powder.]

weettanaaykaate pallilninnum viintukliiya neucumaal
kurattiyettunnu
malakalaanli varunna nadipool kurattiyettunnu.
[Kurattl arrives with bruised breasts, freeing herself from the clutches of hunting dogs. And she comes like a violent river that shakes the mountains.

muutupottiya maaluktattin muivil ninnum mirivumaayi
kurattiyettunnu
venta mannin vilirupoole kurattiyettunnu.
[She comes with many wounds and comes with the pangs of hot earth.]

uliyulukkliya kaattukallin kannel ninnum kurattiyettunnu
kaattutliyaay patarnnaporipool kurattiyettunnu
[She comes from the rock as a spark that spreads like wild fire]

In these first twelve lines, the poet uses six highly suggestive similes portraying his heroine, which arrest the attention of the readers and slowly transport them into unknown realms of sublimity and to an indescribable sense of rapture. The poet would have drawn a blank without these literary figures.

The first poem in 'O N V - yude Kaavya Samahaaarnnaal', is named 'Simhaasaanattileekku Viniitum'. The first section of this poem consists of twenty two lines and the poet uses not less than fourteen figures of speech in these twentytwo lines. If this is the case of great poets and good poetry, then what is poetry without figurative language?

That is why the ancient Indian poeticians asserted that poetry must be 'alamkaarasabhuu ситam', ie, fully adorned with alamkaaras:

\[
\text{saadhoo sabaadaratha sandarbhham} \\
\text{guncaalankaara 'huu ситam} \\
\text{aphuतaritirasaapanam} \\
\text{kaavyam kurvita kiirttaye.} \\
\]

[Poetry must be composed of excellent words and meaning and it must be adorned with 'guñas' (qualities) and alamkaarasa.]

Edward P.J. Corbet in his 'Classical Rhetoric for Modern Student' writes about the figures as follows:

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\[24\] O.N.V Kurup is one of the most prominent contemporary Malayalam poets.

\[25\] Vagbhadaan. Vagbhadaalamkaara 1: 2.
"Figures can render our thoughts vividly concrete, they help us to communicate with our audience clearly and effectively, because they stir emotional response; they convey truth, in Wordsworth's phrase "alive into the heart by passion", and because they elicit admiration for the eloquence of the speaker or writer, they can exert a powerful ethical appeal". 26

In their joint work 'Poetry as Experience' Norman C. Stageberg and Wallace L. Anderson speak of rhetoric figures as "an integral part of what the poet has to say". 27


Poetry is written in a language which makes ample use of figures of speech, such figures, however, are seldom merely ornamental like gargoyles on a Gothic Cathedral, but instead forms an integral part of what the poet has to say. They are more like the arched windows encased in stone, giving essential support to the structure and illuminating the interior with light and colour. In other words, figures of speech, serve a structural purpose in poetry and make possible a richness and complexity unattainable through literal statement. To understand poetry then, it is imperative one learns how to interpret figurative language.
In the fifteenth chapter of 'On the Sublime', Longinus speaks explicitly on the rhetorical functions of the figures:

"What then can oratorical imagery effect?"

"Well, it is able in many ways to infuse vehemence and passion into spoken words, while more particularly when it is combined with the argumentative passages, it not only persuades the hearer, but actually makes him its slave".

Browning calls poets the "makers see" and Carlyle writes of them as "gifted to discern the God-like mysteries of God's universe". Arnold once described Wordsworth as "a priest to us all of the wonder and bloom of the world". This can be said of all other genuine poets also. In whatever role a poet may appear, there can be no doubt to the fact that the most effective tool that he can make the most of, is the imagery.

In the West it was Quintilian who most emphatically related the figures to the logos, pathos and ethos of argument. He looked upon the figures as another means of "lending credibility to our arguments", "of exciting emotions", and of winning approval for our characters as pleaders.28

And it is very interesting and important to remember that in ancient India, the very name for what is called, 'Literary Criticism today', was 'Alamakaara Sastra' ("the science of rhetoric figures"). This was the term popularised by Bhamaham, Vamanan, Rudradan, Vagbadan and others. Later it was Bhojan, who in his 'Sarasvathi Karmabharenam' used

the term 'Poetics' (kaavya Sastra) for the first time.29

A historical overview of rhetoric figures in both Indian and Western traditions, is reserved for the ensuing chapters. In conclusion a statement by Robert Millar and Ian Currie, where they pointed out how Aristotle reckoned the importance of the rhetoric figures is cited below:

It was Aristotle, the ancient Greek critic, who was of the opinion that the quality of a poet, and hence poetry, could be established by the originality and fitness of the metaphors and similes employed. It was perhaps not too fanciful to assert that the 'discovery' of metaphor and simile were to civilization, just as important as the discovery of fire or the wheel, or to say that a metaphor or simile was the first encyclopaedia, because in using one, man took the first step towards creating order out of the diversity of objects around him, by seeing some identity in two of them.30
