CHAPTER – 6

IMAGERY
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The different canons of Indian Poetics have been analysed and their application to the poetry of A.K. Ramanujan have also been made. In the continuity of analysis, this chapter will analyse the role of Imagery in the embellishment of language and for the artistic beauty as a whole. According to the principles of Indian Poetics, the beauty is not only objective but subjective as well. The perception of subjectivity finally becomes objectivity through the feelings of Sahrdaya, a responsive reader.

A.K. Ramanujan has seen the objects of beauty in various natural scenes. And he deals these objects of beauty with the use of appropriate images. But before analysing the objects of beauty, the role and concept of imagery should be defined:

According to New International Dictionary, an image is a mental representation of something not actually presents to the senses, a revival or imitation of sensible experience or of sensible experience together with accompanying feelings, the reproduction in memory or imagination of sight, touch, hearing etc, as visual tactile, auditory images.¹ In broad perspectives, it can be said that an image is an idea which receives and retains an exact image of what is observed. Image, thus, becomes an artificial imitation or representative of the external form of any object, especially of a person or of the bust of a person. The following points can be described for the detail description of the image:

a) An imitation in the solid form, a statue, effigy, and sculptured figure often applied to figures of saints or divinities as the objects of religious veneration.

b) An imitation which is delineated, painted, executed in relief etc. upon a surface, a likeness, portrait, picture carving or the like.
c) An imitation which is applied to the constellation as figures or
delineations of persons etc.

d) An image is applied to a person
   i) as stimulating the appearance of someone as considered to
      be unreal; and
   ii) as compared in some respect to a statue or ideal.²

In Physics, image is an optical representation or counter part of an
object. In rhetoric's image is anything concrete or abstract introduced
figuratively to represent something which is strikingly resembles as sleep
for death. In other words, one can say that it is simile, metaphor or figures
of speech. This way, it represents also the oblique manner and suggestive
pattern of composition. A.K. Ramanujan in his poetry makes the
application of various images in order to create suggestive and oblique
pattern of literary expression. An image in the poetry of A.K. Ramanujan is
often an adventure leading the reader into unsuspected avenues of
experience. His imagery is noted for its concreteness and power. This poet
who spent the best part of his life in the United States of America has a
singular ability to provide a very strong Indian Physical context to the
thoughts his poetry conveys. His imagery has wide range-objects in Nature,
colours, light and darkness, animals, the human body, the city life, legends
and fairy tales—all fall within the range of his imagery. All these images are
drawn with exceptional care and competence. C. Paul Verghese underlines
an important aspect of Ramanujan's imagery when he says that the poet's
images are "highly concentrated in their effect"³ The Striders is a poem
about a water insect, which is called "strider" in "New England". The poet
blends images of the sky and water with those of the body with great skill:

   And search
   for certain thin-
   stemmed, bubble eyed water bugs
see them perch
On dry capillary legs
weightless
On the ripple skin
of a stream
No, not only prophets
Walk on water. This bug sits
on a land slide of lights
and drowns eye-deep
into its tiny strip of sky.4

In the first movement of the poem, the two adjectives for the water bugs are "thin-stemmed" and "bubble eyed". Stem brings to the mind the image of the tree or plant while bubble suggests water. The suggestion that these bugs are found near water and possibly there are stems (of need or other kinds of grass) too in the picture. But the poet is describing a living thing and not water or stems and so in the next line the adjectival for the legs are "Capillary" suggesting a living body. These capillaries, however, are not full of blood; they are brown or translucent and hence "dry". The image related to the living body continues and it becomes a metaphor for the surface of the stream. The surface of the stream is called "ripple skin", suggesting the living insect.

The second movement of the poem brings in a reference to the prophets who were known to walk on water. The strider too can walk on water. The parallel between the water bug and prophets introduces an element of mystery. The poet suggests that the bug's ability to float on water is something of mystery about it. When the idea of floating effortlessly has been established, the poet suggests light and depth of water. The bug is seen sitting on "a land slide of lights" suggesting simultaneously
the lights playing on the rippling waters and the mountains with which the words landslide is associated. The concluding eye deep into "its tiny strip/ of sky". The image stands in contrast with the idea of weightlessness and floating like prophets that the poem has presented so far. The result is that we have a picture of an insect that can walk on the surface of water in which the clear sky is reflected. The small size of the water bug is suggested by the word "tiny" used for that part of the sky's reflection against which the strider is seen such economical and exceptionally evocative use of imagery is typical of Ramanujan and in this area there are very few Indian poets in English who can achieve such powerful effect with so little lexical support.

'Snakes' is another animal-poem that makes use of the image of the snake in different ways and suggests multiple sensations. The poet finds himself thinking of snakes not when he is walking "through the woods". But when he is least expecting it. The image of a snake comes to him when he is "walking through museums of quartz" or in the airles of book stacks/ looking at their geometry /without curves" and when he touches a book that has "gold /on its spine". The image of the snake that comes to the poet has both visual and aural elements:

The twirls of their hisses
rise like the tiny dust cones on
slow-noon roads
winding through the farmers' feet.
Black lorgnetters are etched on
their hoods,
Ridiculous, alien, like some terrible
aunt
a crest among tiles and scales
that moult with the darkening
half
of every moon.7

The hissing of the snake is transferred to the rising twirl of dust on "slow-noon" roads on which the farmers walk. It brings to the reader the image of snake-charmers displaying their hooded cobras on the side of dusty road on hot days.

The image suggested in the second movement of the poem is detailed further in the following movement. We are given the image of a "basketful of ritual cobras" that comes into the "tame little house". They are left on the floor to crawl:

their brown-wheat glisten ringed
with ripples.
They lick the room with their bodies,
curves
Uncurling, writing a sibilant
alphabet of panic
on my floor.8

In the phrase "a sibilant alphabet of panic" we have a sense not only of the shape of the snake but also of the sibilant sound itself suggesting the hissing of the snake. The panic is both the snakes and those who watch them, particularly the poet as a child. This becomes evident when the speaker's mother is mentioned. She "gives them milk/in saucers", and watches them suck it. The child is scared:

The snake man wreathes their writhing
round his neck
for father's smiling
money. But I scream.9
The image of the snake is intertwined with memories of the poet's childhood. Everything is seen in the shape of a snake even the braids of his sister:

Sister ties her braids
with a knot of tassel
But the weave of her knee-long
braid has scales,
their gleaming held by a score of
clean new pins.¹⁰

The image of the snake is closely linked with violent death. This is the death of the snake that is struck by a "clickshodheel" making the "green white" of the snake's belly turn looking like "a water-bleached lotus stalk/plucked by a landman's hand. The sight of the snake's body fills the child's with a sense of panic. The poem ends with the image of the snake lying like a "Sausage rope" when flies in the sun "will mob the look in his eyes".

Ramanujan's poem about snakes offers elements of comparability with Keki N. Daruwalla's "Haranag" that too describes the killing of a snake:

The stick came down in repetitive rage on a shimmering
dance of coils and his innards lay scattered on the floor."¹¹

The essential difference between the two poems is that in Ramanujan's poem the child's point of view has been used in which there is a combination of fear and fascination, whereas Daruwalla has introduced sexual imagery and a mysterious sense of fascination. The snake was killed by the man in the bathroom in the presence of his naked wife who had been bathing when the snake was seen. Element of superstition is more prominently suggested in Daruwalla's poem:
At night she said, we must make
amends
and offer milk and grain again;
I agreed and started pouring
a most pungent eye drop
and found her eye-ball scuttling north
into the forest of the upraised lid
leaving behind a white desert eye,
and again I found her trembling
like a trapped bird
facing a serpent hood.\textsuperscript{12}

What is common, however, in the two poems is the powerful imagery
that the poets have used.

Ramanujan has used the image of a snake a number of times.
Whenever such imagery is used it suggests fear, mystery and certain kind
of fascination. It can also suggest violence as in his poem 'Breaded Fish'.
The poet is eating bread when the memory of a dead woman "dead/ on the
beach in a yard of cloth" comes to him.\textsuperscript{13}

\begin{quote}
Specially for me she had some breaded
fish; even thrust a blunt headed
smelt into my mouth;
and looked hurt when I could
neither sit nor eat, as a hood
of memory like a coil on a heath
opened in my eyes.\textsuperscript{14}
\end{quote}

Similarly in "A Leaky Tap After a Sister's Wedding" too, there is a
very telling image of snake that concludes the poem:

\begin{quote}
My sister and I have always wished a tree
could shriek or at least writhe
\end{quote}
like the other snake
We saw under the beak
of crow.  

In 'Anxiety' the feeling of fear is evoked with the help of number of images the most prominent among them being those of fire, water and the snake. Anxiety is not branchless as the fear tree "but it has naked roots and secret twigs". The feeling has loose ends with a "knot at the top" that is me: Later we come across the image of a snake and flowing waters:

Not wakeful in its white snake
glassy ways like the eloping gaiety of waters,
it drowses, viscous and fibred as pitch.

The poem "The Fall" makes use of animal imagery in an exceptionally effective way to suggest sudden change. The poem opens with a suggestion of someone plunging down wards helplessly:

Falling,
I think of a man falling,
a plummet in a parachute
that will take half his life to sprout
and take root,
while he, a mere body, a surrender,
a will-less plunge into the down ward
below his blindness, cannot find a word
for a curse, nor an eye for a hook.

Then suddenly there is a sudden catch "of grace". There is a metaphor of wolves to suggest the howling of the wind and that of a "mother cat's teeth/on the scruff of her kitten". The exhilaration felt is that of "larks".
Ramanujan's poem "Fear" in his book Second Sight uses a series of animal images to suggest the different meanings of fear. There is the fear involving destruction on a mass scale:

For you, fear
is Terror
wound museums
of Hiroshima,
the smell
of cooking
in Dacca sewers
Madame Nhu's
Buddhist barbecues;
that well-known child
in napalam flames
with x-ray bones
running, running
a stationary march
in the rods
and cones
of every one's
Reuter eyes.19

Death in Hiroshima, camage in Bangladesh and similar spectacular incidents of violence reposted in the newspapers are what fear means to many people. But for the poet fear is small and it can be caused by "a certain knock /on the back door/ a minute / after midnight. It can even be caused by:

.... a ting
white lizard,
its stare, dead snake
mouth
and dinosaur
toes.20

All these images may frighten a person if they are lodged in his "sleeping ignorant skull".

In his 'Relations' there is an interesting poem about a former prince that has a number of animal figures that contribute to the total meaning. The last of the princes belongs to a family that once was important and rich. The dynasty to which he belongs withered away, some members dying of TB and other of a London Fog. Some die of bone TB and other "imported wine and women." One or two died in "War or Poverty".

Fathers, Uncles, Seven
folklore brothers, sister so young so
lovely
that snakes loved her and hung dead,
ancestral
lovers, from the ceiling; brother’s many
wives their unborn still babies,
numberless
cousins, royal mynahs and parrots
in the harem:
every one died, to pass into his slow
conversation. He lives on, heir to long
fingers, faces in paintings and a belief
in auspicious
snake in the skylight: he lives on, to cough,
remember and sneeze.21

Here the image of the snake objectifies something that is timeless bringing it into contrast with the mynahs and parrots that represent the
ordinary and the familial. Both have disappeared. He is now a sick person whose two daughters "go to school on half-fees" and whose first son who is a trainee in telegraphy has already telegraphed thrice for money.

The use of images related to the human body perform many functions. In Ramanujan's "Pleasure" in Second Sight the images related to the female body suggest the unbridled passion of the "celibate" monk. The naked monk is "ravaged by spring /fever, the vigour /of long celibacy /lusting now as never before /for the reek and sight" of the female body. He lusts for a body represented in terms of flower:

    of mango bud, now tight now
    loosing into petal
    Stamen and butterfly
    his several mouths
    thirsting for breasts
    buttock, smells of finger
    long hair, short hair
    the wet of places never dry.22

The monk's lust is caused by the presence of female devotees and he fantasizes about them. The feeling is roused even "by wisps, self touching self". He almost salivates and the saliva is the cool Ganga" turning sensual on him". The irony in self touching self is obvious as the term "self" used so frequently in the religious discourse of the monks, is used in a completely different sense. His philosophy is "slimed" by its own "saliva". It smears his own "Private" untouchable:

    body with honey
    thick and slow as pitch.23

Throughout the first part of the poem images related to the human body, especially those related to the sense are prominently used. There are words like "sight", "tight," "loosening"; "mouth"; "breast"; "buttock";
"finger"; "hair"; "skin"; and saliva-all adding up to suggest sexual passion of a person who, is forbidden by tradition and his own voluntary decision to live the life of a celibate monk.

In the concluding part of the poem the image of red ants is the most prominent suggesting the monk's helplessness in the face of an all conquering desire:

and stood continent
at last on an anthill
of red fire ants, crying
his old formulaic cry. 24

The actual sensation of pleasure is more than an idea; it felt "in the million mouths/of pleasure-in-pain". The image of the ants climbing every limb of his shows his helplessness. The word "fire" used with ants conveys a sense of burning. The desire is so strong that it even engulfs his feeling of guilt.

A poem like "No man is an Island" presents the image of the sea and an island in terms of crocodile. The island is seen as an alligator and the ocean seems to foam in its mouth:

The entire island:
an alligators
sleeping in a mask of stone
A grin of land
Even on good days; on bad,
the ocean foams in that mouth. 25

The poet builds on this image and the small "sea-birds" are seen picking "its teeth" for yellow crabs and jelly fish: The last two lines bring in the human element:

But this man,
I know, buys dental floss,
The image of the teeth becomes a means of making statement on
today's world.

A.K Ramanujan often uses colour imagery in which various colors
become a means of suggesting different feelings. In "On the Very Possible
Jaundice of an Unborn Daughter" in The Striders, one of his early poems,
the yellow colour predominates as it is the colour of the eyes of a person
suffering from Jaundice. The poet fears that his unborn daughter may be
born with Jaundice. He thinks this is possible because as so many things in
the world are yellow, the eyes of his unborn daughter too may have eyes
yellow with Jaundice:

When mynahs scream in the cages
siamese cats with black on their paws
tiptoe from the sulphur mines of the
sun
into the shadow of our house.26

The mynahs have a bright yellow band along their beaks, sulphur too
is yellow and the colour that is highlighted (especially by the contrasting
"black on their paws") is yellow. In the second stanza more yellow objects
are mentioned:
Father sits with the sunflower at the
window

deep in the yellow of a revolving chair,
fat, bilious, witty, drawing small ellipses
in the revolving air.
And plunges in a parallax of several eclipses to our earth
where we pull grasshopper's wings and feed red ink and
lemon-peel of dragonflies.27

The sunflower, the yellow revolving chair and the reference to
eclipses in which the sun and the moon become pale yellow all add to the
effect created by the first stanza. In the concluding stanza, the flower that "flaps all morning" in grandma's hands is "that daffodil", a yellow flower. When so many things in the world are yellow by accident, the poet asks:

    how can my daughter
    help those singing yellow
    in the whites of her eyes?²⁸

Similarly, in "It Does not Follow, but When in the Street" in Relation the yellow colour is the most prominently uses. Here too, yellow signifies fear and uncertainty about future:

    yellow trees bend over broken glass
    and the walls of Central Jail
    drip with spring's laburnum
    yellows, yellow on yellow,
    I forget the eczema on my feet,
    the two holes in my shoe: at once
    I know
    I'll have a sharp and gentle daughter
    an old age some where; I walk on air.²⁹

As in the poem about the unborn daughter, here too everything described is yellow: the trees bending over the walls of Central Jail are yellow and laburnum is a small decorative tree bearing bunches of yellow flowers. The poet thinks of the colour yellow and his daughter who is yet to come and his old age "somewhere" and feels a sense of disquit. He can imagine a scene of domestic bliss in future:

    I walk on water, can even bear
    to walk on earth for my wife
    and I will someday somehow share
    a language, a fire, a clean first floor.
    with a hill in the window.³⁰
The poet dares to dream all this despite the fact that colour yellow (signifying decay) is what fills his mind.

In THE HINDOO: he reads his Gita and is calm at all events too the reference to the yellow eyes of a goat signifies fear. The poet describes a character who follows the Gita and watches everything with equanimity:

I've learned to watch lovers without envy
as I'd watch in a bazaar lens
houseflies rub legs or kiss. I look at
the wounds calmly. 31

Yet when he meets "the prehistoric yellow eyes of a goat" on a little boy's face" he chokes. Here the colour yellow once again signifies terror.

"The Day Went Dark" in "The Black Hen" makes a very effective use of colour imagery. The poem begins with a description of carpet that the poet bought. It has a design of "orange flower/ and green leaves." But when it is spread it makes everything look old and ugly:

but all my furniture
looked bilious yellow
in its gorgeous light. 32

This has a parallel in a situation involving a relationship:

I loved a woman
with turquoise eyes,
naval like a whirlpool
in a heap of wheat
and the day went dark
my hands were lizards,
my heart turned into hound. 33

In this poem the colour imagery coupled with images drawn from farming and the animal world conveys the sense of contrast powerfully.
Similarly in 'LOVE 6: Winter' too, colour imagery has been used quite powerfully. This is a poem about different perceptions and the habit and the of the mind to translate an experience in to terms that it is used to. The poem opens with very graphically suggested visual imagery:

Green leaves on a grey tree
look almost like flowers,
Sudden smiles on a chickenpox
face, or an accidental touch between quarrels.\(^34\)

The poet brings together visual imagery ("green leaves on a grey tree and a smile on a chickenpox face") and tactile imagery ("an accidental touch") and suggests the element of unexpectedness in situations. The second movement of the poem foregrounds the auditory:

Though blindness cannot see,
it can hear the hours
Chime, now close now far from clocks
across my shop window city.

After this momentary loss of sight as it were, the poet once again brings in images of colour and light. He speaks of a "hall/ of mirrors for squirrels" and finds that the blind eye can begin to "look for grey within grey". The sky scrapers are seen" in silhouette"

    every cell lit in gold
    without waiting for night:

The eye within, however sees what it wishes to see :

    but unseeing, the eye with in
Wants only red or green on grey
to sense in winter the heat,
translate new signals in old
Ways taking the dark for light.
The colours are in the mind and everything seen is transformed by a person's desire to see what he wishes to see.

In Ramanujan's Relations, "Prayers to Lord Murugan' makes use of colour imagery at regular intervals, once very prominently in very section. A poem about Murugan an ancient Dravidian god of fertility, war, love and youth, it is in the form of an address of the god in tone that is not very respectful. Murugan is the lord of "new arrivals /lovers and rivals". He arrives with "cock fight and banner/ dance": There are "garland / on the chests of men" that will turn like "Chariot wheels". The poet suggests the atmosphere of a village festival in honour of the god:

O where are the cockscombs and where
the beaks glinting with new knives
at cross roads
When will orange banners burn
among blue trumpet flowers and the
shade
of trees
waiting for lightnings?35

The section builds the picture on colours like orange, blue and the green of the trees and suggests how people pray to the god for rains suggested by "lightnings".

The god is shown as having six faces and twelve hands. The second section has more statements than suggestive imagery laden lines. The plainness in the pictorial quality is in contrast with the first section:

Twelve etched arrowheads
for eyes and six unforeseen
faces, and you were not
embarrassed.
Unlike other gods
you found work
for every face,
and made
eyes at only one
woman. And your arms
are like faces with proper
names.

After this relatively non-visual section, there is once again strong
colour imagery. Lord Murugan is described as the lord of "green growing
things". He protects the crops and helps the farmer in his fight "with the
fruit-fly". He decides whether things will grow:

Tell us,
will the red flower ever
come to the branches
of the blueprint
city?

The next section too makes use of colour imagery. Murugan is the
"Lord of great changes and Small / Cells". He is requested to exchange "our
painted grey /pottery /for iron copper" and "our yellow grass and lily seed".

for rams
flesh and scarlet rice for carnivals
on rivers

The sections ends with more colour images:

O dawn of nightmare virgins
bring us
your white-haired witches who wear
three colours even in sleep.

Lord Murugan is the lord of "the spoor of the tigers". Then the poem
acquires a bitterly angry tone and the pronoun "our" used throughout the
fifth section refers to us as people. The animal imagery with which this section begins gains momentum as the poet adds more such images to it:

outside our town hyenas
and civet cats live
on the kill of leopards
and tigers
too weak to finish what's begun.
Rajahs stand in photograph
over nine foot silken tigresses
that sycophants have shot.
Sleeping under country fans
hearts are worm cans
turning over continually
for the great shadows
of fish in the open
waters.36

We live on legends and in the past. We remember the ivory, the apes and the peacocks that we sent to King Solomon. We are proud of the quality of muslin we produced in the past. He speaks in terms of the similes for the fine quality of our muslins: "Wavering snake-skins, a cloud of steam". We are like ever rehearsing astronauts. We "purify and return our urine" to "the circling body". This section thus enlarges the context of the poem and can be seen as criticism of the sham that characterizes our national life.

Section 6 continues the comment on our national character. Murugan is called the "Master of red bloodstains" but we have lost the redness of our blood. Here redness may signify courage. Our blood today "is brown" and "our collar" is white. The white collar refers to the middle class Indian, which while dreaming of Indian's supposed past greatness does not do
anything to contribute to nation building. We talk to the "sixty four rumoured arts." Such memory of our past greatness is like the feeling of pins and needles that an amputee has in his "phantom muscle".

The next section presents the twelve-handed image of Lord Murugan. The god has twelve hands all of which are "right hands" while we "are your mirror men" with two left hands. The left hands suggest our inability to do anything properly:

Lord of the twelve right hands
Why are we your mirror men
With the two left hands
Capable of only casting
reflections? Lord
of faces,
find us the face
we lost early
this morning.\(^{37}\)

The section depends on images related to hands and face for its appeal. The hands symbolize man's ability to bring about a change in the given situation. The two left hands show that we have proved to be incapable of doing that. Similarly, the face represents the image a person has. When it comes to having an identity we have lost it. It is like losing our face. The contrast between the ideal (the god) and the actual (we) is very sharply brought out.

The poem then lists what the devotee would want to have. The poem becomes almost a prayer. We wish to read the "small prints" and we pray to the "lord of headlines" to give us this ability. To be able to read the small print may mean the ability and the humility to understand the "ordinary" things in life. The lord has the sixth sense also but we wish to have our five senses back:
Lord of the sixth sense,
give us back
our five senses.

Getting back the five senses implies that once we could see and hear but now we have become desensitized. We are so much engrossed in ourselves that we cannot interact with the world. The five senses suggest channels of moving away from the personal to the non-personal. The loss of the five senses becomes a metaphor for the loss of an entire world of experience. The 8th section concludes with the lines:

Lord of solution,
teach us to dissolve
and not to drown

The devotee prays for power to control things and not be swamped by them.

The next section is very similar to section 8 in its directness and simplicity. The devotee prays to the lord who symbolizes "presence" to deliver him" proxies and absences". Proxy suggests that most of us lead lives that are modelled on someone else's life. Absence implies that we live only in name. He wants to be delivered

from Sanskrit and the mythologies
of night and the several
round table mornings
of London and return
the future to what
it was.

The prayer for deliverance from various kinds of falsehood is very strongly uttered.

The next section is built round images drawn from rural life:
Lord return us,
Bring us back
to a litter
of six new pigs in a slum
and a sudden quarter
of harvest. 38

The images suggest birth and regeneration. Section 11, which is the
last section of the poem, has images suggesting movement. We are lost and
the poet prays to the lord to find us. The god needs to "hunt us down". The
lord has all the answers and let us have those answers that cure us at once
"of prayers". Then the need to pray will end as we shall have
understanding. "Prayer to Lord Murugan" is a typical Ramanujan poem in
which images are drawn from a wide area of experience through one kind
of image-work predominates. The poem makes good use of colour imagery.

In many of his poems, Ramanujan has made a very effective use of
the images of light and darkness. "On a Delhi Sundial" may be cited as the
example of a poem in which the poet uses light imagery with success. The
theme of the poem is time and its relationships with human life. The poem
opens with the image of clock-tower that stands in the market-place and
controls life around it:

Four-faces clocks on market-towers school
the town
and make the four directions sell and buy
in the stall below where watches run
their certainties on the uncertain pulse. 39

The entire activity of buying and selling is controlled by the clock-
tower in the market place. The watches represent the certainty of time when
the pulse that marks time itself is uncertain. The watches are described as
"pretty machines that slice the country silence". But the certainty of time is
unreal as all watches "give up their four and twenty circles" on to time "like rings /from a smoker's youth". The simile of a smoker's youth is very effective as it at once conjures up images of waste and death.

The second movement of the poem takes the readers through a series of images that culminate into the final image of light and darkness:

Only sundials today do not remind
you
of the right under your eyes. Their
time's
Circles never drive beyond the
dusk.
but lie down as Children's hoops
beneath the shoe-infested stairs.
Only they
sleep with us in the dark and wake
into time
with the light of the moon like antiquity's
lovers.
But who, among tourists
On a five-day tour, can put the clock
back
and run into sundial time?
Or endure these wheeling knives
that mince
the night for the morning's breakfast.40

The poem has two sets of contrasting images: the watch that runs no matter whether it is day or night and the sundial that shows time only when the sun is up. The watch image hints at the mechanical nature of our life while the sundial objectifies another sense of time which does not mince
the day into small units. The context is that of a tourist visiting a place, which has a sundial. It is possible that the tourist is on a five-day visit to India in which he has to do all his sight-seeing including the observatory or the Jantar Mantar in Delhi. The poet seems to have a desire to free himself from the tyranny of the ever-present sense of time that seem to remind us of the "the rings" under our eyes caused by over work or stress or anxiety-all consequences of allowing time to dominate our lives.

In contrast to this is the image of the peacefully rising and setting sun controlling lives without giving circles under our eyes. Dusk is the time beyond which time's circles do not go. Here we have contrasting images of light and darkness. Sleeping is associated here with darkness and waking with light. The image suggests the natural cycle of nature. We however, have forgotten about "Sundial time" and like these tourists want to pack everything in the short time allotted to us. The final image is of the night being shredded by the seconds for morning's breakfast. The poem has a signification that goes beyond the questions of living a life more closely attuned to the natural rhythm of life. It also draws into its area of relevance the larger issues of the purpose of life-and the harmony between man and Nature.

On Memory in The Striders, a poem that reminds us of Donne's 'Go and Catch a Falling Star' in its structure and tone, has images of light and mirrors. The poet is ready to give "tangent" answers to all kinds of questions except the one that concerns the nature of memory. He can answer questions about Tipu Sultan or Jack and Jill or about anything at all.

Ask me
nursery rhymes
on Tipu Sultan or Jack and Jill:
the cosmetic use of gold when
the Guptas ruled:
an item of costume in
Shakespearan times.\textsuperscript{41}

All such questions "will gobble away" their "tangent answers" but
not for all his "blood beat" or "the drill of that wood pecker beak" that is his
will can be hold or "keep" "one face":

and those words random-thrown
in a tumble of your multiple faces
as they turn in this day's dazzle,
this sun-struck house of mirrors.
Memory
in a crowd of memories, seems
to have not place
at all for unforgettable things.\textsuperscript{42}

Like a typical Donne poem, this ends with a statement that is
intriguing. It is the yoking together of contrasts-memory unable to hold the
really unforgettable things. The contradiction is resolved only when one
remembers that poet has used the words memory and unforgettable things
in two different contexts. In a poem that is more a statement than conscious
image making what really shines is the image of the "day's dazzle" and that
of the "sun-struck house of mirrors": Mirrors indicate the repetition of the
same pattern again and again. Keki N. Daruwalla in his poem "The
Professor Condoles" uses the image of multiple mirrors when he describes
the world of tragedy as sky canopied by mirrors.

A series of surrealistic images foregrounding the visual and the
contrast between light and darkness are presented in Ramanujan's contraries
(The Black Hen). This style of writing is one of the constant features in the
poetry of Ramanujan. The poem reminds us of 'On Memory' thought the
two poems are separated by a period of about thirty years. Here a number of
impossible situation are described:
Blinking in the light
she stares into midnight
Crowed by the dark
her eyes see glowing monarch
butterflies.\textsuperscript{43}

The images of mutually exclusive light and darkness create a surreal
sense of things happening at different planes simultaneously. This is the
poet's attempt to describe the experience of living in today's world:

Beauty is now ugly, sad is glad,
truths are lies
when living by contraries
his roots are topsy-turvy trees.\textsuperscript{44}

The last line echoes Swift's essay "Meditations Upon a Broomstick'
with its evocation of a world in which the real is far removed from the
ideal.

"Fog" in The Black Hen is, once again about the predicament of
contemporary life. The poem presents a series of images related to the
human body, each objectifying the different sides of the existential angst.
The need to move on is great and yet the movement does not result in
progress. This has been suggested by the images of oxen turning round at the
oil press, a picture that has been coupled with the turning of the eyes
suggesting the desire to find a way but not succeeding in it:

Stuck in the need to move on,
eyes turn round and round
Oxen at the oil press.\textsuperscript{45}

The eyes turning in the sockets are themselves a metaphor for
helplessness which has been strengthened by another metaphor of oxen
moving in a circle. The poem then takes up the idea of change and finds the
wait for change endless. Here again, there is a conflict between desire and
actuality. The central image in this movement is that of a body seen together with that of a pupa trying to become a butterfly. There is restlessness and the inability to move forward:

Waiting for change, the body
Changes a Chrysalis
that will rot unless it breaks
into wings. Restless, unable to move,
Claustrophobic in elevators,
those prisons that move on their own,
hand strain against the present tense,
a labyrinth with cement pillars,
trees without leaf or season,
legs running without moving.\textsuperscript{46}

The condition for liberation from this shell is the breaking of it. Unless that happens, the Chrysalis does not become a butterfly and rots in its shell. The act of growing old goes on ("the body changes") but not much else changes. The restlessness coupled with the inability to move leads to frustration. This sense of frustration is suggested by images of an elevator and that of a prison. The poem once again makes use of imagery related to the body when the poet shows hands straining against the present, a action that shows the desire to prevent the collapsing walls of this claustrophobic world. Immediately after the image of the straining hands there is that of running legs that seem to be moving on a treadmill. They actualize a situation that is full of meaningless unproductive activity. The poem brings in images of cement pillars and that of leafless trees and finally that of fog that "lifts an hour at a time" and a "cold that burns without blisters." The concluding lines once again refer to the human body. The passing of time is like the beating of the pulse at a moment of defeat that is suggested by the image of a fallen wrestler over whom the umpire is counting seconds. It is:
Pulse ticking off time like
an umpire over a fallen wrestler.

This poem uses a mixture drawn from city life and those of the human body. The starkness of the situation is hinted at by the images of limbs reducing it to a fundamental physical level. The human situation is comparable to the animal, perception that has been implied by the images of the oxen turning round an oil press and that of a pupa. The lexis and syntax in the poem reflect the theme. The poem has a nervous, Jerky rhythm and words that are generally short give a sense of urgency to the tone.

Ramanujan has made an effective use of imagery drawn from the human body in his poem, "A River". This is a poem that uses both contrast and irony and describes the Vaigai near Madurai in flood as well as when it is dry. The river has been the subject of many poems in this "City of temples and poets" who sang of "cities and temples". The poet, then, describes the river in summer and the receding water and the rocks becoming visible that have been seen as a human body getting emaciated:

every summer
a river dries to a trickle
in the sand,
baring the sand ribs,
straw and woman's hair
clogging the Watergates
at the rusty bars
Under the rusty bridges with patches
of repair all over them.\(^{48}\)

The poem then uses animal images associated with the river. The wet stones shine in the sun like sleepy crocodiles and the dry ones like "shaven water-buffaloes". The river is described in flood destroying people
and once again we have the image of twins "Kicking at blank walls/ even before birth" when their mother is washed away.

Ramanujan has used images related to city life too in his poetry. "Some Indian Uses of History on a Rainy Day" in Relations can be cited as an example of a poem that makes good use of city-life imagery. The poem opens with the image of office workers returning home:

Madras,
1965, and rain. Head Clerks from city banks
curse batter, elbow
in vain be patch work gangs
of coolies in their scramble
for the single seat
in the seventh bus

Then unexpectedly the poem moves into history. They tell each other how "Old King Harsha's men" beat soft gongs to "stand a crowd of ten/ thousand monks" in a queue so that they could be given gold pieces, a pearl and a length of cloth. There is a reference to "the single visiting Chinaman," that is, Huen Tsang. The poem then shifts back to the present:

So, miss another bus, the eighth,
and begin to walk, for King Harsha's
monks had nothing but their own
two feet.

The second part of the poem takes the reader to Egypt and describes the tourists as children whose faces are pressed to the museum glass of the past. Here too, the past and the present are brought into the same frame of imagery:

faces pressed against the past
as against museum glass
tongue tasting dust,
amazed at pyramidfuls
of mummies swathed in millennia
of Calicut muslin.

The final part of the poem is set in Berlin where a professor of Sanskrit "on cultural exchange" is lost in Berlin. It is raining and the professor cannot spell the German signs:

1935 Professor of Sanskrit
on cultural exchange;
passing through lost
in Berlin rain; reduced
to a literal, turbaned child,
spelling German signs on door, bus
and shop,
trying to guess go from stop.

Then he finds his way "comes home" suddenly when he sees "The Swastika" on the neighbour's arm "in that roaring bus from a grey/ nowhere to a green". His coming home has a significance that extends beyond the physical and the cultural symbolic meaning of the Swastika for an Indian.

Ramanujan imagery objectifies various states of feeling and often reinforces something that takes place at the subliminal level. His imagery is accumulative in nature and often succeeds in establishing a physical context. He makes use of colour symbolism very frequently and colours like yellow and grey are very commonly used. The sharp out line of the images, the concreteness and the sensuous quality of his imagery sets him apart from many of his contemporaries in whom tame philosophizing often mars their poetry.
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