

Another View of Grace

After Ezekiel and Pathasarathy, as one turns to study Ramanujan, One is pleasantly surprised to discover how different he is from both the poets, although the three of them belong to the same group of New poets. Ramanujan's poetry has, however, a completely different literary character. It seems to possess a kind of glow, a literary patina which, in some respect is unique in the whole range of modern Indo-English poetry.

Ramanujan's poetry, in this sense, has no 'problem' to deal with. The poet's only dedication is to his own originally conceived creative discipline.

"Still Another View of Grace" has something like comparison between a bride in India and a bride in Western country. Here in this poem Ramanujan compares the bride to western thought and gives an allegorical treatment to the poem.

In India a person has to follow the age old tradition to get a life partner. It is strictly a religious affair and there is no choice as marriage is strictly conventional. In a Hindu orthodox family it is all ritual, and ceremonial without giving an occasion for choice. Year after year, this custom has continued:

Find a priest, find any beast in the wind
for a husband. He will give you a houseful
of legitimate sons.

There is no need to know each other's nature or liking. Family progeny is all that matters in an orthodox Hindu family. This kind of marriage is not a marriage of two minds; it is more a traditional practice rather than togetherness in real sense. This is particularly so among the Brahmins of whom this poet is a descendant.

Against this the Western way of choosing one's spouse is quite refreshing and there is all freedom given to the couple, even of choice in that society:

But there she stood
upon the dusty road on a nightlit april mind
and gave me a look. Commandments crumbled
in my father's past. Her tumbled hair suddenly known
as silk in my angry hand, I shook a little
and took her, behind the laws of my land.

This is the difference between the western bride and her Indian counterpart. 'She' here indicates the western tradition. The poet is basically enamoured with that western custom of choosing the bride. Because that freedom is not present in India. This also shows an openness of an orthodox Brahmin. The social

dogmas of an orthodox Brahmin family make the poet tremble. He says —'I shudder to the bone.' There is a thirst to go beyond this world of restrictions. It is the 'april mind' of the poet, it is the romantic attitude and youthfulness in him, that make those age old Hindu commandments crumble in his father's past.' This action makes him feel heroic. This is the way Ramanujan handles his theme of love poem and shows his conversion to the western mode. Breaking all the barriers of Hindu orthodoxy he carves his own way of life to adopt a new one. It is here, Ramanujan sounds different from both Ezekiel and Parthasarathy. Ezekiel is serious about his approach to our tradition. Parthasarathy is still more serious. But Ramanujan looks at the tradition in levity.

In all his 'Indian Poems' the poet has looked at the Indian tradition in this way only. He doesn't surrender wholly to Indian tradition. He is sceptical. Even when he has to look at the close relations etc., he does have this attitude. Even the rituals of the family become an object of ridicule. Ramanujan thus caricatures life.

Hunger

Hunger is one of the best known poems by the internationally acclaimed Indian English poet [Jayanta Mahapatra](#). The poem is widely anthologised in most important modern Indian poetry collections and is the most widely analysed piece among his works. The poem explores the informal child sex trade lurking in the social fabric, and is unique in its bold treatment of sexuality unlike a typical poem by him. The poem was originally a part of the poet's collection "A Rain of Rites". In the poet's own words, the poem is based on a direct real life experience. The poem is an expression of the speaker's loneliness as a youth, as Mahapatra had a disturbed childhood.

The speaker at the outset of the poem asserts that "the flesh was heavy on my back". He experienced an incredible urge for sexual gratification. He finds himself before a fisherman, who is willing to 'compromise' on his daughter. The fisherman puts forward the question 'carelessly'. The word 'carelessly' might point to 'callously', and to the fact that he did not put the question across with a sense of propriety. "Will you have her?" was the question as though the girl in question was an item or commodity. Her individuality was relegated, and what she wanted was not of significance.

Even a prostitute has a command over her own sexuality, and who her customers ought to be. The fisherman was "trailing his nets". The symbolism was apparent; he was laying out a net for customers. The insensitivity in his words were set out to erase the guilt from his purpose, that of sacrificing his daughter. He affected 'ignorance', as if the quality of ignorance seemed to sanctify the purpose itself. The white bone seemed to thrash his eyes, as though his very inner being wanted to thrash out against his vision.

The speaker followed him across the extensive stretches of sand. His heart was throbbing rapidly. His skin is said to perform the function of a sling. That is, as a sling supports a fractured arm; likewise the instinctive feelings of the skin helped fight back the apprehensions of the mind. Redemption from his sins perhaps lay in burning the house that he lived. Silence seems to consume his self, as though they tugged at his sleeves. The fisherman's net had froth from the sea. It is symbolic of the fact that wrongdoings may leave apparent traces behind.

His lean body in the flickering dark appeared like a wound. The inevitable wound that poverty had gifted him with. At the current moment, the speaker felt he was at will, as free as the wind. The palm leaves scratched his skin, leaving marks of guilt. Hours in the shack are portrayed as stacks bunched up to those walls splayed by the burning oil lamp. It signifies that all the hours were similar in being confined to the small shack. The space in his blank mind was filled with soot from the lamp.

I heard him say: My daughter, she's just turned fifteen...
Feel her. I'll be back soon, your bus leaves at nine.

He could comprehend the tricks the father employed to allure customers. He views this stock of tricks as exhausted because probably most of them were already used numerous times to suit his needs. 'Fifteen' was an age that marked the blossoming of a girl into a woman, an age where her beauty is fresh and fragrant. Nevertheless the years felt like cold rubber owing to impoverished malnutrition. He uses the term 'wormy' for her legs as she opened them wide. The word reflects the speaker's perception of the girl as abject as a worm, thin and slimy perhaps, something that was revolting to him at the moment.

I felt the hunger there,
the other one, the fish slithering, turning inside.

For the first time, the speaker understood the real meaning of the word 'hunger', not owing to sexual displeasure but that driven by dismal poverty. The image is metaphorically juxtaposed with the feeling of the empty stomach, as though the fish turned inside.

'Hunger' is brutal in its precision of despair, neither pseudo-romanticism nor routine realism, according to S. Iyengar. As critic Devinde Mohan states: "He is at par with European poets who are obsessed with the modernistic impulse for man's finitude: his physiology, his economics and culture. His poetic focus transforms what is regional in culture, myth and thought to a universal predicament. His poems "Hunger", "Myth", "India" and "Accusation" are flawless examples."
