



A STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF A. K. RAMANUJAN'S POEM 'BREADED FISH'

Leelawati Patil

Asst. Prof. in English
SMDBS College, Miraj

Dr. M. V. Rodrigues

Head, Dept. of English
CSIBER, Kolhapur

ABSTRACT:

Stylistics is the study of stylistic variation in languages and of the way in which it is exploited by their users. In restricted sense the term 'stylistics' is used with reference to the study of language of literary texts. It studies the features of situationally distinctive uses of language. Stylistics is an area of mediation between two disciplines, it can provide a way of mediating between two subjects – English language and literature. A. K. Ramanujan is a stylist, he is known for his poems which rely on unusual techniques and forms. There is a fusion of sound and sense in his poems. The present paper aims to study structure and style of Ramanujan's poem 'Breaded Fish' with reference to phonological, graphological, syntactic and semantic patterns present in the poem.

Key words: style, stylistic, phonological, graphological, lexical, syntactic, semantic features.

INTRODUCTION:

Style is a word derived from Latin word 'elocution' which means style and which means lexis in Greek. Style is a broader term, it has several meanings in and outside the literary text. It reflects the thought in a person's mind; it also describes the way of person's speaking and writing. Style has traditionally been defined as the manner of linguistic expression in prose or verse – as how speakers or writers say whatever it is that they say. Style in language is a set of conscious or unconscious choices of expression, inspired or induced by a particular context. It also refers to the characteristic diction, or the choice of words, the type of sentence structure and syntax and the kind of figurative language.

Stylistics is a branch of applied linguistics specifically concerned with the study of style in texts. It is the study of style. It can be defined as the analysis of distinctive expression in language and the description of its purpose and effect. In "Stylistics and The Teaching of Literature" (1975)

H. G. Widdowson defines stylistics as –

“the study of literary discourse
from a linguistic orientation” (Widdowson.1)

M.H. Short defines stylistics as below -

“Stylistics is an approach to the analysis of
Literary text using linguistic description”.
(Short: 1)

The concepts of modern linguistics are used to identify the stylistic features, or “formal properties” which are held to be distinctive of a particular work. These stylistic features may be phonological, syntactic, lexical and rhetorical.

A. K. RAMANUJAN AS A STYLIST:

A. K. Ramanujan is known for his ultramodern poems which rely on unusual techniques and forms. His best ones teach us in most extraordinary way the importance of the fusion of sound and sense, form and meaning. Ramanujan’s poetic art presents his unconventional use of punctuation, capitalization, word displacement, unusual arrangement of stanzas, lines, words and even individual letter to produce visual typographical forms. Ramanujan has an eye for the specific physiognomy of an object or situations which he then reveals with telling details. Precision, accuracy and fidelity to truth make his poetry vivid and visual. His poetry is image oriented. His image carries within itself the precise figure of the object with a vivid sense of its distinctive quality.

INITIAL INTERPRETATION OF “BREADED FISH”

‘Breaded Fish’ is one among the best poems of A.K. Ramanujan. It appears in his first poetic collection “The Striders” (1966). The poem is a lyric, there is a concrete pictorial imagery which evokes memories which horrify the poet. It is also nauseating and disgusting memory, so he is unable to eat the breaded fish and turns away from it in utter disgust.

He says –

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, (CP.7)

Breaded fish is simply a fish made into bread; and the poet is invited to eat. But the appearance of the fish at once reminds him of certain memories of a half naked woman dead on a beach, while the memory is not explicated, it appears to be a symbolic relationship between the affectionate gesture of a woman who specially preparing fish for him and the dead woman

breaded
by the grained indifference of sand.

(CP. 7)

The companionship of death and an indifferent cosmos is brought to mind by the dead fish.

PHONOLOGICAL FEATURES:

Phonology basically deals with sound patterns, the rhyming scheme and utterance of the word in the sentence . It is the study of linguistic systems, specifically the way in which sound represents, differences of meaning in a language.

The poem ``Breaded Fish'' is of twelve lines, divided into four stanzas of three lines each having the rhyme scheme – a a b c c b a a b a a b. the ending words in the each line of first stanza are repeated in concluding stanza subsequently.

breaded – headed – mouth, (I stanza)	}	Repetition
breaded – headed – mouth (IV stanza).		

The other rhyming words are

- could – hood, half-naked – dead, health – cloth. - end rhyme
- thrust - blunt - smelt
C V C C V C C V C - consonance
- sit – eat, dry – by, by – my - assonance

Ramanujan uses the devices like rhyme, repetition, consonance and assonance to create music in this poem.

GRAPHOLOGICAL FEATURES :

Graphology is the formalized rules of writing. It deals with the systematic formation, structure and punctuation in the sentence. According to Leech –

“Graphology refers to the whole writing system,
punctuation, and paragraphing as well as spacing”
(Leech, 1969 p. 39)

The present poem "Breaded Fish" is developed into four stanza of three lines each.

The stanza break gives a turn to idea. Ramanujan has used two complete sentences in the poem. The use of comma and semicolon suggest Ramanujan's attempt to maintain the tempo of his thought. The fish breaded by the host lady creates the nausea in him as he immediately recollects the memories of –

a dark half-naked length of woman,
dead on 'a beach in a yard of cloth.' dry,
rolled by the ebb breaded by the grained indifference of

sand (CP.7)

The description of the scene is made intense by appropriate and effective use of comma.

The full stop at the end of the line gives a break to his reverie and he comes to reality and becomes indifferent to his own thoughts.

LEXICAL FEATURES :

The poem is relatively brief; it consists of simple concrete words. A. K. Ramanujan exclusively uses miscellaneous substantive expressions – nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, determiners, conjunctions which carry majority of meaning and sense in his poetry. The following table shows the distribution of content words used in the poem.

Distribution of content words in 'Breaded Fish'

Nouns	:	fish, mouth, heart, hood, memory, coil, heath, eyes , woman, beach, yard, cloth, ebb, indifferent, sand, shore, heart, mouth,	18
Adjectives	:	some, breaded, blunt-headed, dark, half-naked, length, dead, dry, grained	9
Verbs	:	smelt, looked, sit, eat, opened, rolled, breaded, headed, beating, had, thrust	11
Adverbs	:	specially	1

The poem, Breaded Fish consists mainly of nouns which show the poem is object oriented. The nouns are concrete and they create a visual picture of the scene. The reader also involves in the scene.

The poem is rich in the use of adjectives too. Almost all the adjectives are used simply for the description of the woman, died at the shore in helpless situation, "breaded", "half-naked", "dark", "blunt-headed", "dead", "dry", "grained" help to visualize the scene.

The verbs “smelt”, “looked”, “sit”, “eat”, “opened”, “breaded”, “rolled”, “headed”, “beating” are action verbs and significantly contribute to the understanding of the poem. The verbs are in the simple past tenses that help creating the vivid scene the poet had seen the past.

There is one specific adverb “specially” shows the series of events in the past are only the event he had seen in the past. He suggests only he could share the scene and the memories of the past make him restless. There are vivid prepositional phrases that function as adverbials in the poem, “into my mouth”, “on a health”, “in my eyes”, “on the beach”, “in a yard of cloth”, “for the shore”, “in my mouth” and show poet’s involvement in the scene.

The structure words in the poem consist of determiners, prepositions, pronouns, and conjunctions; they indicate grammatical relationships in the poem. The frequent use of structure words states Ramanujan’s intensity towards the object, association of the fish breaded by the lady and the woman at the shore breaded by the sand. It also signifies Ramanujan’s strength in using shorter words to express his mind. The frequent use of personal pronouns: “I”, “me”, “my” make the poem; subjective and the feelings expressed in the poem are almost personal.

SYNTACTIC FEATURES:

M.H. Abrams and Geoffrey Harpham define syntax as

“the man that sequences of words are ordered into phrases, clauses and sentences”.

(Abrams and Harpham, 153)

Any good composition contains use of varied sentence type and structure. In “Breaded Fish” A. K. Ramanujan has used two sentences to express the emotional turbulence in his mind. The first sentence, however, lengthy suggests the definite theme of the poem. The fish breaded by the lady, the memories of the half-naked woman breaded by the sand on the shore are expressed in the first sentence. He has prolonged the sentence by using a comma where a new sentence could be started. Both the sentences are in declarative form, they denote emotional upheaval in the poet’s mind. Structurally, the sentences are the compound sentences consisting multiple independent clauses joined together either by conjunction or by using punctuation marks as semi colon and comma. The structure of the sentence is S + V + A.

Ramanujan uses this structure to achieve the desired effect by expressing his thoughts in a continual flow and the content deliver the maximum punch.

SEMANTIC FEATURES:

Ramanujan communicates his feelings through the skilled use metaphors and similes. He has attempted to crystallize the perception of the object using metaphors and smiles to create concrete imagery. He commonly uses oblique expressions. What he says has always a hidden meaning.

- a hood of memory like a coil on a health. (Simile)

The fish breaded by the lady takes the poet back where he had seen the woman breaded by the sand. The memories of that event aroused in his mind are compared to a call of a heath.

- a dark half-naked length of woman breaded, by the grained indifference of mind. (Metaphor)

Ramanujan compares breaded fish served by the lady to the breaded woman by the sand. The poet considers the woman breads the fish indifferently similarly the sand breads the half-naked woman with the same or more indifference.

The figures of speech Ramanujan employs here justify the theme and image oriented nature of the poem. The poem conceals a lot more than what is extremely visible on a general reading of the poem. The poet used to say a lot through the adept use of figurative language.

CONCLUSIONS:

A. K. Ramanujan is chiefly concerned with memory. His memories are seldom as pleasant as the shared past of family relations. "Breaded Fish" reminds memories of a half-naked woman dead on a beach. The companionship of death and an indifferent cosmos is brought to mind by the "dead fish". Ramanujan is a remarkable and original craftsman. Each word in his poem is used carefully, precisely, and economically. His adept style, with the use of concrete nouns wherever possible, renders a visual quality and terseness to his poetry. The present paper puts forth how the linguistic features of a poem are directly related to the meaning.

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