"Linguistic Patterns in the Poems of Lakshmi Kannan" - A Stylistic Approach

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Abstract: *Indian English Poetry after independence demanded a new use of language and called for the use of everyday speech. Hence there is a demand, as it were, for the creation of an Indian English idiom, to give an identity to Indian English Poetry independent of a different from the world literatures written in English including British and American Literatures. The modern Indian English poets realize a need to acclimatize English language to an indigenous tradition. They have attempted and succeeded to an extent in evolving and remoulding English to the native needs of expression termed as 'Indianization'. Lakshmi Kannan who joins the movement creates a different music to give poetry a greater informality, to bring it closer to the spoken language. She handles the language with utmost care and competence by giving importance to the contemporary idiom*

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1. Introduction

Indian English Poetry after independence demanded a new use of language and called for the use of everyday speech. Hence there is a demand, as it were, for the creation of an Indian English idiom, to give an identity to Indian English Poetry independent of a different from the world literatures written in English including British and American Literatures. R. Parthasarathy, Nissim Ezekiel, A. K. Ramanujan, Arun Kolatkar, Jayanth Mahapatra, Kamala Das and a few other modern Indian English poets realize a need to acclimatize English language to an indigenous tradition. They have attempted and succeeded to an extent in evolving and remoulding English to the native needs of expression termed as Indianization. O. P. Bhatnagar says, "We cannot, both use English in Indian contexts and yet keep its British cultural antecedents and linguistic sanctities… It is only when the stereotypes of languages, word use and collocation, phrase and image making are dismantled that the medium can be made amenable and renovated to house the native feel of life."[1]

Post-independence Indian English poets have attempted and succeeded in evolving a new Indo-English idiom. Kamala Das in her well-known and oft-quoted poem, 'An Introduction' says:

…The language I speak
becomes mine, its distortions, its queerness
all mine, mine alone. It is half-English, half
Indian, funny perhaps, but it is honest
it is a human as I am human, don't
see? (Indian English Poetry, p.76)

Lakshmi Kannan who joins the movement creates a different music to give poetry a greater informality, to bring it closer to the spoken language. She handles the language with utmost care and competence by giving importance to the contemporary idiom. She is one of the successful Indian poets who has evoked the sense of "Indianness" both in content and language in her poetry. The influx of words is natural for her with all its meaningful and distracting collocations, finally polished by Lord Ganesha, the deity of knowledge and education. In her poem, 'Ekadanta', she says:

You were there
lending a lambent glow to an idea
breathing life into the voices on the page
flowing through my pen to give me words.
Wrapping your trunk over my inept phrases. (Ekadanta, Unquiet Waters, p.110)

She accepts her short-coming and success in the creative use of language. This chapter attempts at the stylistic analyses of her poems to examine language as a tool to shape literary sensibilities.

Literary style, like all style, reveals both the individual personality of the creator and the general language habits of the society in which he/she lives. This double focus is possible by stylistic analysis. E. L. Epstein says that, "As poetic discourse can't exist out of the linguistic structures, the linguistic analysis will therefore turn out to be an analysis of style."[2] Style is choice and poetic rules are extensions of and deviations from the ordinary English transformations. There is a set of variations in the word order. The normal word order is formed by grammatically set constructions and normal patterns. The special word-order is constituted by functional variants of the normal sentence patterns.

Shivendra K. Verma says that, "No one uses all the resources of a language: everyone selects and organizes. Style is the structuring of choices (choice of types of sentences, clauses, phrases, words, morphemes and images) made within the frame work of a language and of literary forms. In this process of structuring, the language is used in a literary text becomes as it were, hypersemanticized."[3] He offers a formal analysis of topicalization transformations which can serve as a tool to explain the stylistic variations which may be produced by the various factors in the communication process.

Topicalization:

One of the stylistic mechanisms by which an element is fronted for thematic prominence is called topicalization or thematization. Topicalization may now be defined as a syntactic device which isolates one of the constituents of a sentence as 'topic' and shifts it to the sentence-initial position. We approach an English sentence with certain expectations conditioned by our language acquaintance with the basic non-transformed sentence patterns. We come expecting a subject first and only then a predicate. When we find something non-normal, contrary to our expectation, we at once realize that the speaker/writer has pulled certain features into the foreground or relegated them to the background to produce certain effects.

Subject (s) and predicate (p) represent the normal order of the constituents in a sentence. Within predicate (p) the normal order is: verb (v), object (o) and adjunct (a). Two types of non-normal, stylistic shiftings are possible - (s) may be shifted from its normal initial position to the end position to delay the introduction of the main theme, that is, to keep the readers/listeners in a state of suspense. One of the distinguishing features of this (s) - shifting is that it leaves a trace behind either in the form of a dummy it/there of the pronouns this/that/they/he/she or in the shape of some other pro-form. This shifting is called extraposition.

Lakshmi Kannan, who is a language-sensitive poet uses topicalization as a syntactic device to give impetus to her innermost emotions. We can find some of the striking structures in her poems, 'An Autopsy' and 'A Sea Sweep'. She writes:

1. She had stashed away her private moments, this woman. [SVOS]

Instead of ('An Autopsy', Unquiet Waters, p.119)

2. This woman had stashed away her private moments. [SVO]

3. They swept over the gifts, the waves. [SVOS]

Instead of ('A Sea Sweep, Unquiet Waters, p.123)

4. The waves swept over the gifts. [SVO]

The above sentences are stylistically variant forms of the same set of basic constituents: they are 'allosentences'. The subjects of sentences (2) and 4) and its topics are the same: 'This woman' and 'The waves', but by using the mechanism of extraposition the speaker separates these two rules in (1) and (3): She introduces the pronouns 'she' and 'they' as grammatical subjects and puts her reader in an anticipative mood for the delayed topics appear at the end of the sentences.

Shifting:

The other type of shifting is front-shifting - shifting an item from its normal, non-initial position to the initial position, for example O-fronting, V-fronting, A-fronting and PP-fronting. We can witness these unique structures in Lakshmi Kannan's poems:

1. How very small and trivial they looked for the sea. [OVS] = O-fronted

Instead of ('A Sea Sweep', Unquiet Waters, p.124)

2. They looked very small and trivial for the sea. [SVO]

3. Very soon, the flowers will turn into pods. [ASV] = A-fronted

Instead of ('Past Imperfect', Unquiet Waters, p.128)

4. The flower will turn into pods very soon. [SVA]

5. Beaten, tossed about by the surge her body. [VOS] = V-fronted

Instead of ('Conus Gloriamaris-The Song of the Seven Seas', Unquiet Waters, p.114)

6. Her body, beaten, tossed about by the surge.

The inversions in the above lines, which are the extensions and the deviations from the 'ordinary' English transformations exhibit exceptional linguistic maneuvering by the poet to bring about her turmoil of experience. These are examples of topicalization which represent a foregrounding of the speaker's point of departure and have a contrastive meaning. Lakshmi Kannan being a creative artist exploits the possibilities of this mechanism of 'non-normal front-shifting' to highlight the salient features, whereby some features of the language of her poems stand out to contribute to the total meaning.

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Foregrounding Tropes:

'Figures' or 'tropes' in the sense of deviant or foregrounded features of literary language are observable and classifiable features of texts. Figures can be initially classified as either **symptomatic** or **paradigmatic**. According to G. N. Leech, "Items are associated **syntagmatically** when they combine sequentially in the chain of linguistic events, and **paradigmatically** when they enter into a system or set of possible selections at one point in the chain."[4]

In the **syntagmatic foregrounding**, the normal functions of the language are undisturbed and the total linguistic event is meaningful. **Paradigmatic foregrounding** constitutes a disruption at one particular level of the normal patterns of linguistic organization.

Syntagmatic foregrounding occurs, when the writer repeatedly makes the same selection. Parallelism, anaphora and many of the schemes distinguished in renaissance rhetoric are **formal schematic figures** and alliteration, rhyme, vowel harmony and assonance are **phonological schematic figures**. But we can't handle these two different linguistic levels in isolation from one another. The presence of formal schematic patterning to some extent implies the presence of phonological schematic patterning (i.e., to repeat a word is to repeat the sounds of which it is composed).

The recurrent words and other repetitions are the hallmark of Lakshmi Kannan's poems. This technique of repetition is handled meticulously by her to create desired effect. Moreover, it gives a distinctive style to her poems. Each language possesses some special devices for heightening the overtones of words. The norms of the language are regarded as a **'background'** against which features which are prominent because of their abnormality are placed in focus. Such features are then said to be **'foregrounded'.** Some of the unique innovations in poetry are the result of foregrounding.

Look at the following lines for instances:

1. Perfect the shape

Perfect the curving petals

Perfect too the resemblance. ('Wood Rose', Unquiet Waters, p.143)

2. Soft, the feel of silk on her skin,

Soft, the flowers around her neck
Soft, the pearly glow of her jewels.
('A scented Burial', Unquiet Waters, p.145)

3. I return to you, my cool well,

I return to your healing waters
that never fail. ('The Salt in you, Mother', Unquiet Waters, p.121)

4. I know it, mother

I know it only too well ('Come, Mother', Unquiet Waters, p.125)

In spite of the difference in structure, they can all be represented by the formula (a……), and is known as anaphora. The repetition in the lines reinforces the idea, for example in (3) the recurrent words put forward the speaker's irrevocable urge to return to water, which is the only source, supporting life on earth. The depiction of this yearning is deliberately foregrounded through **parallelism**.

Every parallelism sets up a relationship of equivalence between two or more elements which are either similar or contrastive. In the examples chosen, the parallelism is stylistically appropriate in the context, as it sets up a special relation between expression and content. Here, Lakshmi Kannan gives vent to the matters which touch her deeply through these language structures.

Here is another example of parallelism, involving initial and final repetition:

Bloom and Burst
Bloom and burst. ('Past Imperfect', Unquiet Waters, p.127)

This can be represented by the formula (a…. . b), where 'a' and 'b' symbolize the constant elements initially and finally. This is a form of parallelism known in classical rhetoric, as **symploce**. The parallelism is significant as it sets up a relationship of similarity. The repetition has an onomatopoeic effect of a natural phenomenon, where the 'silk cotton flowers' 'bloom and burst'. The meticulous use of deviant language structures to express her literary sensibilities shows Lakshmi Kannan's creative genius. Let us examine these lines:

1. In April,
you give and give and give
the green of your leaves. ('A Retreat', Unquiet Waters, p.182)

2. In the bowl, clear, round, liquid.
I drank some more, little by little,
I let it flow down my guest. ('Ask for the Moon', Unquiet Waters, p.131)

3. I saw a sea in her eyes then
it has since spilled over to the rest of her.
('A Sea Sweep', Unquiet Waters, p.123)

4. Voices called from a distance
before they dissolved into its
aqueous folds. ('A River Remembers', Unquiet Waters, p.129)

The lexical repetitions in these lines contribute to the effects produced by alliteration, rhyme and vowel harmony. The lexical repetitions (formal schematic pattern) of 'give' in (1) imply the phonological schematic patterning - the repetition of the consonant sounds /g/ in 'give'. The repetition not only produces a rhythmic effect but also reinforce the idea of 'giving' as a spontaneous act of nature. This is yet another example where Lakshmi Kannan's intimacy with nature is evident. The periodic occurrence of the word 'give' characterizes the quality of abundance in nature, where the tree secretly works in winter to give birth to green leaves in 'April'. The immediate repetition predominates here. It unfolds the reservoir of energy in nature which has the capability to give plethora of gifts to mankind. The repetition of sounds like /l/ in (2) and /s/ in (3) & (4) at regular intervals give musical exuberance to the poem. The quoted lines, which illustrate the feature of parallelism in the poems, stand out

rhythmically in sharp contrast to other lines in their lessened tempo. This in turn reinforces the meaning.

The paradigmatic pattern is a pattern where there is a gap in the established code - a violation of the predictable code. The gap can be filled, and the deviation rendered meaningful, only if the missing linguistic relation is interpreted in the context, if sense is to be made of the linguistic event as a whole. Figures of speech or tropes depend essentially on paradigmatic relationships. The lexical deviations can be termed as metaphor. It can be considered metaphor as the basis of figurative language with other delicate sub-divisions in mind. Some kind of likeness is the basis of every metaphor. If the likeness as to communicate, it shouldn't lose its contact with reality. Metaphor will focus attention on some aspect of the 'referent'[5] says Raymond Chapman, which makes analogy possible.

Lakshmi Kannan experiments with deviant linguistic structures and word-choice. This deviation foregrounds the structures and diction which demands unique literary sensibility on the part of the reader to decode the undercurrents of the meanings G. N. Leech says that, "the figurative/literal dichotomy is primarily a matter of referential semantics. The term 'figurative' implies that an item has been given a referential meaning outside its normal range of meanings"[6]. I would like to examine some of the paradigmatic relationships in lakshmi Kannan's poems which make the core of her poems:

1. She watered the family tree everyday
with the rain of her sweat. ('Family Tree', Unquiet Waters, p.120)

2. Around you, the grass is bleached
by the white rage of the sun. ('Family Tree', Unquiet Waters, p.120)

3. His heart is dark and sunless though.
having threatened to marry a second time.
 ('The Salt in you, Mother', Unquiet Waters, p.121)

4. Just put your ear to the apex of the animate shell.
will you? You'll hear not only her brown voice
but voices shaded yellow, white and black.
('Conus Gloriamaris: The Song of the Seven Seas', Unquiet Waters, p.114)

5. The thieving letters on the wall take wings.
They fly down to the palm leaf. ('Don't Wash', Unquiet Waters, p.112)

6. See how the letters move In the eyes of the mind….
('Don't Wash', Unquiet Waters, p.113)

7. She too her sin and walked toward the river.
('Ganga', Unquiet Waters, p.120)

Metaphor often makes a bridge between levels of experience which are not normally considered to be expressible in the same terms. In (4) one type of sensory perception is expressed in terms of another. The change in

the pitch of the voice is compared to different colours, which are symbolic of different qualities in human beings. In (5) and (6) inanimate referents are given human attributes. The 'letters' written 'on the wall' 'take wings' and begin to 'move' like a thief. In (1) and (2) non-human referent, the 'tree' and 'the sun' are given human attributes in the form of family and 'white rage'. In (7) an abstract noun, 'Sin' is treated as if it were animate. At least one item generally refers to something perceptible by the senses, which foreground the other item by its actuality.

Some kinds of **semantic foregrounding** can be signaled by deviant collocation. The juxtaposition of semantic incompatibles is the linguistic basis of metaphor. **Antonymy** is a special case of semantic incompatibility in the following quoted lines:

They lit up the hour of aarti, the boats
Till Ganges became a river of hope burning.
('Aarti', Unquiet Waters, p.161)

Lakshmi Kannan collocates 'hope' and 'burning'. She produces a particular type of 'semantic absurdity' we recognize as paradox or oxymoron. The word 'hope' exhibits a standard pattern of co-occurrence with conventionally expected words:

'Hope': glowing radiating
glimmering glistening
scintillating reflecting
lightning brightening
glittering enlightening
shimmering gleaming

The list above illustrates, a full semantic profile of 'hope' will clearly require some account of the types of lexemes with which it regularly combines. None of the standard collocates suggested above are realized in the quote lines. Instead, an unlikely collocation is produced which doesn't meet the strong expectations of the regular word-order. We can see other unusual collocations in the following lines:

1. with your young, shining feathers
the small, un wordly life. ('A Poem' Unquiet Waters, p.186)

2. Programmed to wither
she now stood in dehydrated dignity.
('Wood Rose', Unquiet Waters, p.143)

3. Brooding hills. They gathered the clouds
Swelling by the minute, with unasked questions
('More Answers', Unquiet Waters, p.187)

The combination of the semantically disparate items, 'unwordly' and 'life' (1), 'dehydrated' and 'dignity' (2) and 'unasked' and 'questions' in (3) create a 'collocational clash'[7] according to Paul Simpson. The simple linguistic technique of juxtaposition has a profound effect in the whole poem.

Some of her poems exhibit startling images and descriptions which are rarely found in Indian English

Poetry. She generates exaggerating fusion of natural elements with human body. This technique of disparate amalgamation of ideas, things or concepts is known as hyperbole, which was widely employed by metaphysical poets. Lakshmi Kannan's powerful imagination shrinks the boundless sea to the water-filled eyes:

I saw a sea in her eyes then.
It has since spilled over to the rest of her.
('A Sea Sweep', Unquiet Waters, p.123)

This is a kind of **poetic over-statement or extravagant exaggeration**, where impossible things are made possible in the world of poetry. The reader should have a vision to visualize the compression of 'sea' into the 'eyes' and fathom the unfathomable sea through the eyes. Water, which is a life-giving force is a visible presence in her poems. River as a metaphor flows through her collection, "Unquiet waters". In 'A River remembers' She says:

Rivers in India dry up, they say.
Not quite.
Not the river Ponni
She flows within the blood-stream of women.

The flowing of rivers and their metaphorical counterpart in the women's life has been painfully brought out in her poems. Ponni, the river cauvery, a sacred river not only flows in the blood but also in the labyrinth of her mind.

Another striking possibility has been achieved in the poem 'Ask for the Moon' where the moon slowly dissolves in water and flows down the throat to the stomach:

The moon descend on the waters
In the bowl, clear, round, liquid.
I sipped at the jasmine moon,,,,
,,"
The moon shivered just a bit
In the waters
it went down my throat. ('Ask for the Moon', Unquiet Waters, p.131)

Lakshmi Kannan is a creative genius to fuse disparate images and at the same time permitting them to be individual entities. Drinking the dissolved moon is a feast for the mind, which has been possible by the technique of **miniaturizing**, which is another hyperbolic expression, used by metaphysical poets. The dissolving of moon in the water and the speaker's acknowledgement of its physical presence in the sky occurs simultaneously. Lakshmi Kannan uses language as a manipulating tool to foreground the wild exaggeration of the dissolved moon which co-exists with the strong presence of its genesis, the moon itself in reality. The image of the dissolved moon is not so far-fetched an imagination which can be considered uncommunicative, as it is perceptible by our senses.

The examples examined hitherto show the words and structures foregrounded are paradigmatic deviations. Some of the important words and expressions chosen deliberately were necessary to consider the force of the chosen word or expression in relation to other possibilities of the same class. The deviant use of language in her poems has heightened the meaning and set the benchmark for other creative writers.

It seems, natural to a poet with a live cultural past behind him/her, a wave of his/her roots and perhaps prejudiced by those roots, has a greater probability of writing significantly than one who has no knowledge of any Indian language other than English. For a writer who uses English as a second language (L_2), it is difficult (appear nonsensical or meaningless) to translate cultural and traditional specific words from his/her first language (L_1). The import of words from L_1 by Lakshmi Kannan to address the contemporary needs of the Indian readers facilitates her to assure an identity of her own. The **transfusion of words** from L_1, is a stylistic device to make the reader recognize himself/herself with the textual environment. Lodger Hoffmann says:

"Considering the linguistic level of expression, i.e., the local surface forms of the text, four different stylistic possibilities present themselves to an author writing In a foreign language. These will be called transfer, mixture, integration and installation."[8]

Lakshmi Kannan uses **mixture and integration** as stylistic devices to transport words from L_1 to L_2. Our concerns here are the cases where isolated expressions from the first language are taken on into the second language. Lodger Hoff's several reasons for this are:

➤ The expression is not translatable (e. g., specific terms);
➤ The writer does not know the appropriate expression in L_2;
➤ The writer considers the expression from L_1 to be particularly effective (e. g., in order to pass on a particular atmosphere)

Precautions should be taken by the writer to assure comprehension. The writer must:

➤ Realize that reproduction in L2 is liable to produce problems of understanding;
➤ Use a paraphrase, foot notes or explanation of the integrated expression;
➤ Insert the expression in a context which may help the reader in grouping its meaning, without translation.

For Example:

For the akshara which you scratched
on the walls so furtively,
the akshara you tried to match
with the sounds you heard…
Then leap over, back to the wall
from the page of Chaitanya Bhagavata.
('Don't Wash', Unquiet Waters, p.112)

In this poem the poet presents a strong urge on the part of Rasha Sundari to learn alphabet. Though the word 'akshara' is a translatable term, Lakshmi Kannan retains the same word as it means that Raṣha Sundari was leaning a native tongue. The writer takes precaution to place the

word in a right position in close proximity to the words like 'scratched' and 'sounds' which assures reader's comprehension. The words, 'Chaitanya Bhagavata' is understood as the name of a book, in the context. This has been made possible by the preceding word. 'page'. But the writer is careful enough to provide foot notes to comprehend that it is a holy scripture. Names are normally taken over in to L_2 texts unchanged as they are not translatable terms. The names like, 'Gomati', 'ponni', 'Avadh', 'phalgu', 'Murugan' and 'Aadi'. For example:

It is the Tamil month of Aadi
A time for sowing, rooting, planting.
('A wrong time for Gleaning', Unquiet Waters, p.174)

Though the reader can make out the word 'Aadi' as the name of a month in the context, the poet takes precautions to explain it in foot notes.

The expressions of cultural value like, 'Brahmopadesh' 'Gayatri mantra' 'PanchaBhoothas' 'Kalpas' 'Visarjan' and 'Aarti' are integrated in L_2 to carry over the cultural atmosphere without tampering. Integration is made simpler by its strategical positioning in the context and foot notes. Though some cultural-specific items are translatable, they are retained for its ritualistic value and avoid dilution in the process of translation. For Example:

1. They lit up the hour of aarti, the boats
Till Ganges became a river of hope burning.
('Aarti', Unquiet Waters, p.161)

2. We worship for a couple of days,
And when we give you away to the water on Visarjan.
('No Collector's Item', Unquiet Waters, p.192)

Though the words, 'aarti' and 'visarjan' can be translated into 'flame' and 'immersion ceremony' correspondingly, they can't convey the spiritual value of the words in L_1. Lakshmi Kannan successfully employs the stylistic devices of mixture and integration in L_2 to bring out the 'Indianness' in her poetry.

Lakshmi Kannan's incorporation of all the aspects of language is a customized approach to the use of English language for literary achievement by an Indian writer. George Orwell says:

"As users generate unique sentences but some
User's sentences are more unique than others."

She has used the whole body of language to express her churning emotions. The language in all its form and beauty has been explored and exploited to concretize her physical and metaphysical experience. Her language is competent enough to express suitably the pre-occupations of her psyche. The experimental linguistic patterns contribute to the contemporary Indian English Poetry in the pursuit of creating a new idiom in order to give a distinct identity and status.

Our poets have accelerated the process of desired linguistic deviation to stabilize the naturalization of English to native hues. R. Parthasarathy has rightly observed:

That language is a tree
 loses colour
 under another sky.9
('Rough Passage', Ten Twentieth Century Indian Poets, p.75)

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