Prayers to Lord Murukan*

I

Lord of new arrivals
lovers and rivals:
arrive
at once with cockfight and banner
dance till on this and the next three
hills

women's hands and the garlands
on the chests of men will turn like
chariotwheels

O where are the cockscombs and where
the beaks glinting with new knives
at crossroads

when will orange banners burn
among blue trumpet flowers and the shade
of trees

waiting for lightnings?

* Reprinted with permission from A. K. Ramanujan, Selected Poems (New Delhi, Oxford University Press).
II

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.

III

Lord of green
growing things, give us
a hand

in our fight
with the fruit fly.
Tell us,

will the red flower ever
come to the branches
of the blueprint
city?
IV

Lord of great changes and small
cells: exchange our painted grey
pottery

for iron copper the leap of stone horses
our yellow grass and lily seed
for rams'

flesh and scarlet rice for the carnivals
on rivers O dawn of nightmare virgins
bring us

your white-haired witches who wear
three colors even in sleep.

V

Lord of the spoor of the tigress,
outside our town hyenas
and civet cats live
on the kills of leopards
and tigers

too weak to finish what's begun.
Rajahs stand in photographs
over ninefoot 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.
We eat legends and leavings,
remember the ivory, the apes,
the peacocks we sent in the Bible
to Solomon, the medicines for smallpox,
the similes

for muslin: wavering snakeskins,
a cloud of steam.
Ever-rehearsing astronauts,
we purify and return
our urine

to the circling body
and burn our faeces
for fuel to reach the moon
through the sky behind
the navel.

VI

Master of red bloodstains,
our blood is brown;
our collars white.

Other lives and sixty
four rumoured arts
tingle,

pins and needles
at amputees' fingertips
in phantom muscle.
VII

Lord of the twelve right hands
why are we your mirror men
with the two left hands
capable only of casting
reflections? Lord
of faces,
find us the face
we lost early
this morning.

VIII

Lord of headlines,
help us read
the small print.

Lord of the sixth sense,
give us back
our five senses.

Lord of solutions
teach us to dissolve
and not to drown.
IX

Deliver us O presence
from proxies
and absences

from sanskrit and the mythologies
of night and the several
roundtable mornings

of London and return
the future to what
it was.

X

Lord, return us.
Bring us back
to a litter

of six new pigs in a slum
and a sudden quarter
of harvest.

Lord of the last-born
give us
birth.

XI

Lord of lost travelers,
find us. Hunt us
down.

Lord of answers
cure us at once
of prayers.