

Indian Poetry in English
Prof. Binod Mishra
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Roorkee

Lecture - 11
Shiv K. Kumar


Good morning friends, and welcome back to NPTEL online lecture on the course Indian Poetry in English. In the previous lecture, we had talked about a very strong and authentic Indian poet's voice, that was of K. N. Daruwalla.

And today once again we are going to talk about, another major important authentic modern voice, especially in terms of Indian Poetry in English, and the voice is that of Shiv K. Kumar. Now, before we go into the details of Shiv K. Kumar's works, let us try to find out, who was Shiv K. Kumar. And what sort of poetic corpus did he have? And what were the influences? And how do his poems talk about modernity?

(Refer Slide Time: 01:22)

Introduction

- Born in Lahore in 1921.
- Strict discipline of Arya Samaj, Orthodox Hindu Family.
- A doctorate from Cambridge on *Bergson and the Stream Consciousness Novel*.
- Satiric Rationalist, and a Postcolonial Imagist poet
- Sahitya Akademi Award (1987), Padma Bhushan (2001)
- Indian English poet, playwright, novelist, and short story writer.
- Bergson and the Stream Consciousness Novel* (1962)
- He breathed his last in 2017.



swayamii

Shiv K. Kumar was born in Lahore in 1921. He actually was from a strict family, which maintained the discipline of Arya Samaj. And, he came from an Orthodox Hindu Family. But, as Shiv K. Kumar had different opportunities to get himself educated, he went to some other country, where he did his work on *Bergson and the Stream of Consciousness Novel*.

I mean he was a Bergsonian scholar. It is always said that Shiv K. Kumar was a late bloomer, in terms of his poetry writing, because he started writing poetry only after his 50th year. Most of the works that Shiv K. Kumar did or most of the poems that he composed, had different sorts of images, different sorts of varieties that we will come across because Shiv K. Kumar was not only a learned person, but he was actually a professor in Hyderabad University.

He had also the opportunity to visit and to deliver his talks in many major universities of the world. And that is how, the different sort of experiences found in Shiv Kumar's world of poetry have a different sort of tinge. My dear friends, you remember well that while discussing K. N. Daruwalla, we had actually talked about, how Daruwalla brings the external realities of Indian Poetry.

Here in Shiv K. Kumar's we will find that Shiv K. Kumar actually tries to delve deep into the internalities of man and then at times also we find that Shiv K. Kumar celebrates a zest for life through his poetry. We will come across several other themes that actually have made Shiv K. Kumar, Shiv K. Kumar.

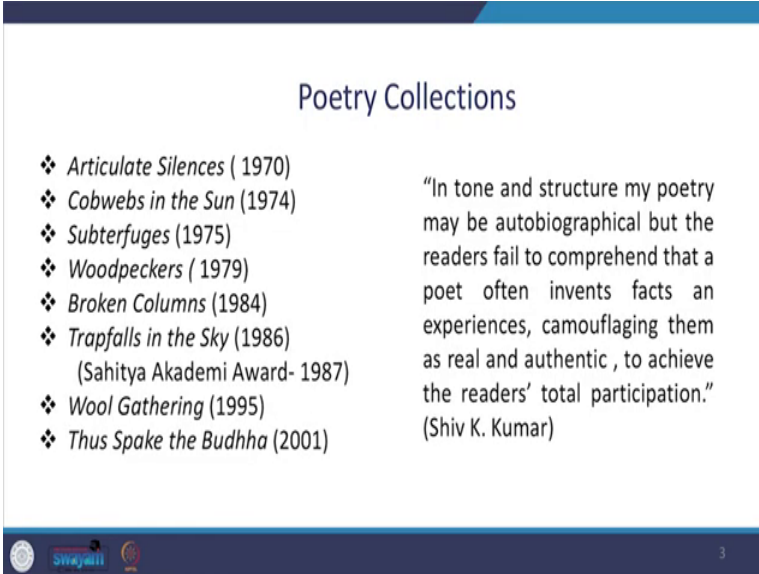
Shiv K. Kumar is actually Shiv Krishna Kumar; he is a Satiric Rationalist. We can call Shiv K. Kumar a realist. But as a realist, we can also find elements of satire in his poetry. His poetry is actually full of love. There are different other themes also associated, themes which in Indian context can be considered to be a taboo, but Shiv K. Kumar has taken it very courageously in his poetic oeuvre.

He was actually a postcolonial imagist poet; he has got a lot of works to his credit. He is not only a poet, but also a novelist, a writer, I mean a writer of short stories, and then also a translator two of his very famous novels. Also you might have come across one of them which is entitled *Nude Before Gods* and the other is about *A Bones Prayer*. And, we will here confine ourselves to the poetic world of Shiv K. Kumar because Shiv K. Kumar also had several accolades to his name.

He also got awarded Sahitya Akademi Award, then there are some other awards also, namely Padma Bhushan in 2001, he also wrote some plays and short stories as well. It was actually in 1962, that he converted his Ph.D. work into the form of a book entitled *Bergson and the Stream of Consciousness Novel*. Shiv K. Kumar breathed his last in the year 2017.

I mean recently only 3 or 4 years back, Shiv K. Kumar bid adieu to this mundane world. But, then what Shiv K. Kumar did through his poetic ventures are really very significant. He started his poetic career with *Articulate Silences* which came out in 1970.

(Refer Slide Time: 05:30)



The slide is titled "Poetry Collections" and features a list of Shiv K. Kumar's works on the left and a quote on the right. The list includes:

- ❖ *Articulate Silences* (1970)
- ❖ *Cobwebs in the Sun* (1974)
- ❖ *Subterfuges* (1975)
- ❖ *Woodpeckers* (1979)
- ❖ *Broken Columns* (1984)
- ❖ *Trapfalls in the Sky* (1986)
(Sahitya Akademi Award- 1987)
- ❖ *Wool Gathering* (1995)
- ❖ *Thus Spake the Budhha* (2001)

The quote on the right reads: "In tone and structure my poetry may be autobiographical but the readers fail to comprehend that a poet often invents facts and experiences, camouflaging them as real and authentic, to achieve the readers' total participation." (Shiv K. Kumar)

At the bottom left of the slide, there are logos for "Swayam" and "eGangotri". At the bottom right, the number "3" is visible.

As I had already said that Shiv K. Kumar was a late bloomer in the world of poetry. And after *Articulate Silences* followed, *Cobwebs in the Sun*. Here one point of caution to be maintained is, let us have a look at the title of his poetic volumes, which itself suggests that Shiv K. Kumar was very close to the images.

And when one reads, and when one interprets and has a journey in his poetic world, one can find the sort of images, the contrariness, the antagonism, the opposites and many other things available in his poetic world. So, *Cobwebs in the Sun* and then came *Subterfuges*, then followed by that came *Woodpeckers* in 1979, then there appeared *Broken Columns* in 1984, then *Trapfalls in the Sky*, for which Shiv K. Kumar was given Sahitya Akademi Award in 1987, though the book was published in 1986.

And then came *Wool Gathering* in 1995 and also came *Thus Spake the Budhha* in 2001. And there is one more collection which we shall also discuss. As regards his poetic volumes, we can find that while like many other poets Shiv K. Kumar also believed in the notion that suffering is at the core of the genesis of poetry. So, one can find in his poetic volumes suffering; suffering of all sorts.

But, Shiv K. Kumar is not confined only to one area of suffering, he also looks at poverty, at the ugliness and he also tries to find beauty in ugliness. Then there are some many other- sidedness in his poetry, which really one can find a sort of Laurentian touches in his poetry because Shiv K. Kumar's many poems are also soaked in the celebration of body. You know in an age when we used to talk about many ancient notions that body being a sick and sacred one, Shiv K. Kumar talks of it in a different manner, and he delineates it. There is a sort of logical reasoning as well, and then one can find a search for soul in majority of his poems. As regards Shiv K. Kumar's volumes, we can find that *Articulate Silences* itself articulates his own silences.

Then, *Cobwebs in the Sun*, that is actually a delineation and yearning for the beautiful things. Then came *Subterfuges* which actually talks about the demonization and representation of femininity, fine? Because Shiv K. Kumar talks to a great extent in majority of his poems, how the body behaves and how the body is ignored and then we also try to make a journey to the soul.

So, how can we keep the body, you know, longing and then thinking of the soul to have a sort of perfection----- all these notions one can come across when one glosses over the works of Shiv K. Kumar. Then comes *Woodpeckers* which is a delineation of a death, then *Trapfalls in the Sky* for which he got Sahitya Akademi Award, this *Trapfalls in the Sky* talks about human existence.

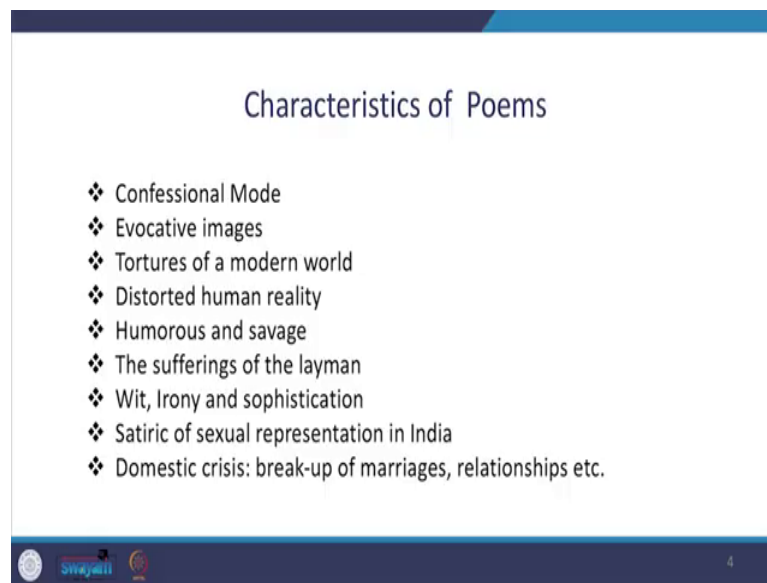
On the other hand, *Wool Gathering* talks about dreams, desires and fantasies, because Shiv Kumar believes that dreams and desire they actually not only correlate, but they co-operate. And the suppression of desire, is also a sort of negation of life, which Shiv K. Kumar believed.

Here we can take a very famous admission or confession of Shiv K. Kumar, because Shiv K. Kumar since he was very much influenced by the Western Philosophy and since he had spent majority of his life in U.S. and he also delivered talks in various other foreign Universities. So, Shiv K. Kumar is very much influenced by Western ideas. But, then what he himself says is, because there is an element of confession in his poetry also.

He has said," In tone and structure my poetry may be autobiographical but the readers fail to comprehend that a poet often invents facts and experiences, camouflaging them as real and authentic, to achieve the readers' total participation". Shiv K. Kumar may not be

as socially committed as Daruwalla, but when we find Shiv K. Kumar's major works which are soaked in Love, Sex and Marriage, then we find, that Shiv K. Kumar is very close to the internal realities of mankind. So, we can also take some of his poems, but before that, let us also try to find out the characteristic features of his poems. Shiv K. Kumar blends in his own poetry, a sort of confessional mode and satiric comments spread here and there.

(Refer Slide Time: 11:05)



The images that he uses, it is said that Shiv K. Kumar sexualizes Indian landscapes. One can find that, when one comes across reading some of the poems like “Kovalam Beaches” and then when he talks about the Flora and Fauna also, he talks about mango orchard also. Then there he talks about a virgin with some sort of swollen breasts and all.

So, in all the poems of Shiv K. Kumar which are specially focused on women, we can also find that Shiv K. Kumar tries to bring out which could have been considered very taboo as a traditional Indian, but that was not because, Shiv K. Kumar appeared on Indian literary scene when two world wars had already been over. And he was very much influenced by several modernist poets like Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot and all.

And we can find the vestiges of it throughout his poetry. We can also come across the tortures of a modern world, in Shiv K. Kumar's world. When one comes across the depiction of reality, we find how the distorted reality we are living around. At times, the

sort of lines that he creates may not rhyme, but there is a musicality in terms of the thought.

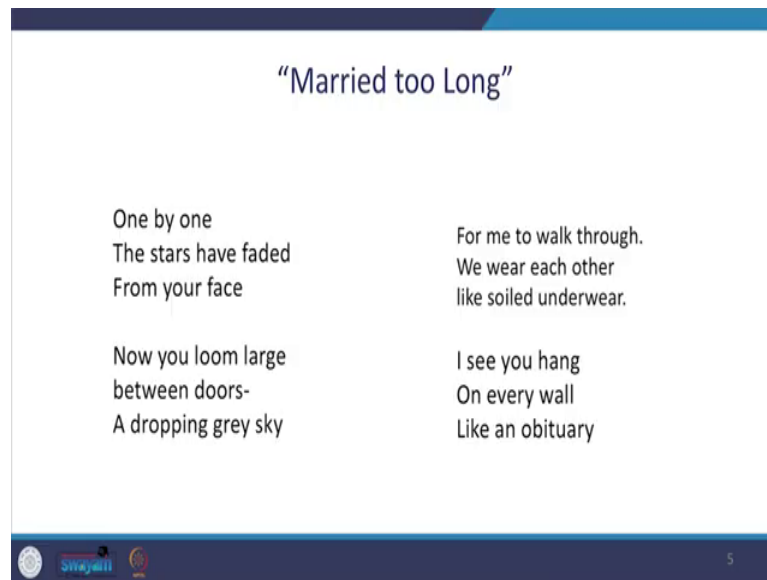
So, one can also find some images of Donne's love poetry, but here in Shiv Kumar, we can find that the lines are very short, they are not didactic, but they reason and they mean also. There is a plenty of a wit, irony and sophistication in his poetry. Sexual representation for which he has been criticized a lot also.

Many people often say that he was anti-woman, but he was not, that we will see when we read some of his poems. Of course, several offshoots of modern life are visible in the poetic world of Shiv K. Kumar, like domestic crisis, breakup of marriages, then the two people appearing to be very much united, but how separated they are. So, how broken relationships are found in and around our own surrounding--- one can have a picture of it through his poetry.

Shiv K. Kumar actually laughs even when there are situations of odds, he actually tries to see beauty even when there is ugliness, he tries to find out beauty even when there is poverty and as a poet, as he himself mentions, that he actually wants his readers to participate in the process of poetry, because he believes like John Keats, that a poem should come naturally as the leaves come to a plant.

So, even though he has talked about several issues, but majority of his poems are confined to the women's world. Of course, death also has been a perennial theme in his poetry. In many of his poems he talks of death, where many people have also gone to the extent of saying that it is actually colored by his personal crisis and all. So, we shall be taking some of the poems in order to make our point verified and justified. For example, here is one poem entitled "Married too Long."

(Refer Slide Time: 14:39)



Let us look at the lines and then you will find that how he believes, because Shiv K. Kumar is a poet of immediate change that can be said. He does not believe in much of the traditionality, even though while he was spending his life outside, I mean outside the country, he felt that he really was fed up with the darkness there. But then, he in India also he talks about certain traditions and certain norms which appear to be very awry and which appear to be very outdated. But then as a poet, he cannot control himself and says things which are soaked in reality. Let us look at the lines.

Married too Long,

One by one

the stars have faded

from your face.

See the image,

The stars are faded from your face.

Now you loom large

between doors

a dropping grey sky

for me to walk through.

We wear each other

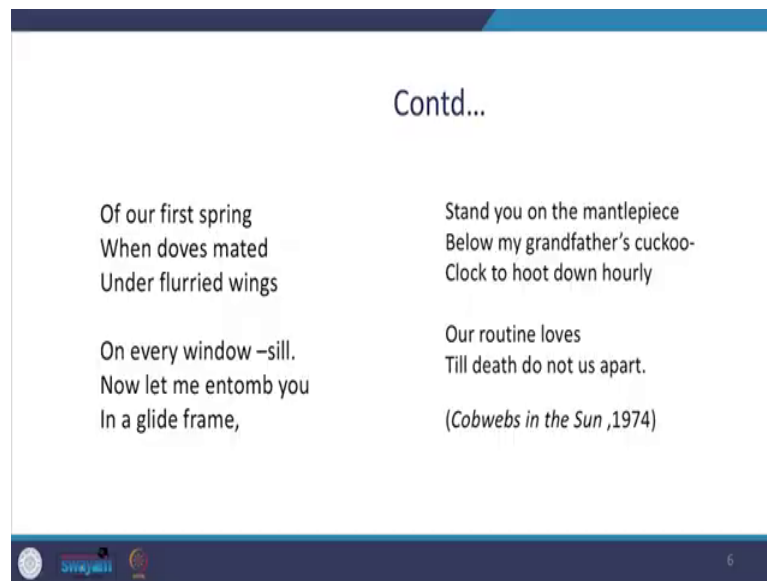
like soiled underwear.

Now see, how he talks about, how the passing of the days also has got a sort of effect on our relationship. And then, here the poet actually yearns for a sort of newness.

I see you hang on every wall

like an obituary.

(Refer Slide Time: 16:05)



Of our first spring
when doves mated
under flurried wings.

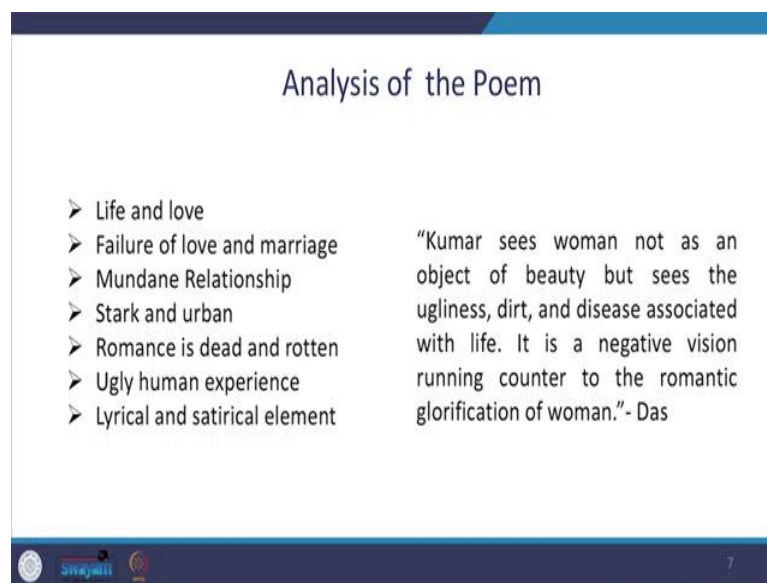
So, there is a depiction of the memory of the days that are gone by. And then,

On every window- sill.
Now let me entomb you
in a glide frame,
Stand you on the mantelpiece
below my grandfather's cuckoo
clock to hoot down hourly
our routine loves
till death do not us apart.

Now, here is one thing to be noticed that according to the Indian notion and tradition we find that once marriage is solemnized, it is an everlasting bond. But then, the poet actually tries to find out and steal away some moments where he says that all traditions we should also try to find out, if the relationships are going to stand for a long time. Is the age not going to have its own imprint also on the relationship?

So, there is a sort of thinking, a sort of pondering even on relationships. We can also find, in some other poems. But before that, let us also have a sort of analysis of the poem, where we find that love and life -----these are actually two things, I am actually reminded of one very important poem, which is entitled “Broken Columns” where the poet appears to be very autobiographical. We will come to that where he says that how our forefathers have been telling us all wise sayings, and providing us with moral lectures, but they try, they actually fail to understand the splits and the gaps that are there, in the mind and in the psyche of a growing boy, who is actually said who is actually to feed on the moral lessons.

(Refer Slide Time: 18:01)



The slide is titled "Analysis of the Poem" and is divided into two columns. The left column contains a list of seven key themes, each preceded by a right-pointing arrowhead. The right column contains a quote in italics. At the bottom of the slide, there is a dark blue footer bar with a logo on the left and the number "7" on the right.

Analysis of the Poem	
➤ Life and love	
➤ Failure of love and marriage	
➤ Mundane Relationship	
➤ Stark and urban	
➤ Romance is dead and rotten	
➤ Ugly human experience	
➤ Lyrical and satirical element	
	"Kumar sees woman not as an object of beauty but sees the ugliness, dirt, and disease associated with life. It is a negative vision running counter to the romantic glorification of woman."- Das

But then, as the boy grows, the boy's forefathers or his grandparents should also understand the realities of the growing boy; that is not, how long can we do that. So, we will come to that. Now, in the modern day world, I mean we cannot remain unaffected by our surroundings, what happens around ourselves in our surroundings.

And of course, one can also find the imprint of a sort of crisis, after the two world wars have been over, and mankind is oscillating between conflict and resolution and all and there are several things that can be done and that can also be undone. And in this there is also a possibility of the failure of love and marriage, relationship which we consider to be so permanent eternal can also yearn for a sort of change, fine.

One cannot always be considered to stick to one relationship, with the changing times. With days, romance becomes dead and forgotten. The ugly human experience cannot be relegated, rather they are also to be brought on to the paper and as man realizes that everyday realities are also changing. Of course, the poet at times becomes very satirical.

But then, we cannot deny that with changing times, our psyche, our spirit, our mind, our notions, our practices also can undergo a change. It is here a worth mentioning quote to be made mention of. Because Kumar has often been described as a poet who has always negatively deliberated upon women.

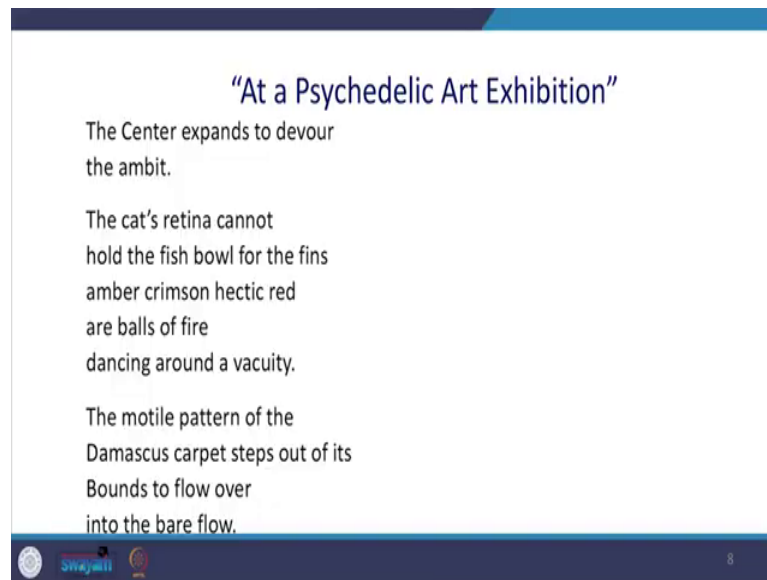
So, Kumar sees women, not as an object of beauty but sees the ugliness, dirt and disease associated with life. But then this is actually a negative reason, running counter to the romantic glorification of women. Now, Kumar has a point to prove here, that women always cannot be glorified. You know, you only make her a sort of idol or a piece of beauty or whatsoever.

But, then we should also try to understand their inner feelings, what they really want and we will find in some other poems as well, that when marriage is celebrated between the two parties the bride and the groom, the bride is supposedly a very submissive creature and never are her notions being understood nor her feelings. So, what Kumar actually advocates is, that they should also have a sort of freedom, they also vouch for a freedom, they also yearn for a freedom and that they should be provided with.

We can also take another poem because Shiv K. Kumar, often, at times we find that Shiv K. Kumar often also paints the landscapes in his poetry, poetic world. Here is a poem entitled "At a Psychedelic Art Exhibition", I may not be able to read the entire poem.

But you can read it at your own leisure, but I will simply read some of the lines which are very important from the point of view of Shiv K. Kumar being a poet of landscape.

(Refer Slide Time: 21:32)



The cat's retina it is about an art exhibition,

The cat's retina cannot
hold the fish bowl for the fins
amber crimson hectic red
are balls of fire
dancing around a vacuity.

We will come across such images, vacuity, emptiness fine. And then will also find,

the motile pattern of the
Damascus carpet steps out of its
Bounds to flow over,
I mean captivity wants to get a sort of real flow
into the bare flow.

(Refer Slide Time: 22:05)

Contd...

The sunset broods over the insidious
by-lanes of San Francisco:
the men in the pavement pubs
drinking from Leviathan tankards
will soon roll down the slopes.

On the front wall
The Buddha's eyes
shaken out of potty quietude
blink hysterically
under the throbbing neon lights

The sunset broods over the insidious

By- lanes of San Francisco:

the men in the pavement pubs

drinking from Leviathan tankards

will soon roll down to the slopes.

And then again, the poet becomes conscience and here we find,

On the front wall

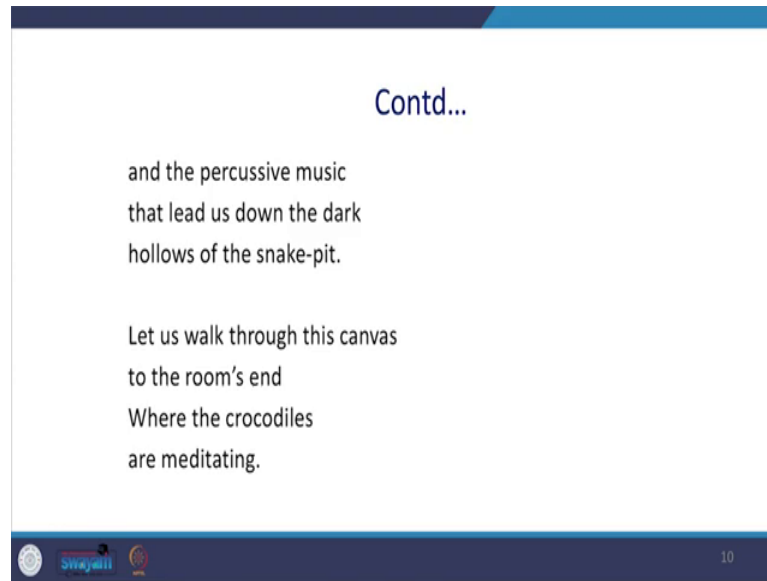
the Buddha's eyes

shaken out of potty quietude

blink hysterically

under the throbbing neon lights.

(Refer Slide Time: 22:32)




And the percussive music
that lead us down to the dark
hollows of the snake pit.
Let us walk. Now, are the concluding lines,
Let us walk through this canvas
to the room's end
where the crocodiles
are meditating
where the crocodiles are meditating.

Now, see he also brings in the images of the snakes, the crocodiles, the animals and others. So, one can find a sort of impressionistic picture of the art exhibition. So, Shiv K. Kumar's poetic canvas has a different sort of pattern; pattern of all colors, of all tinges. There are imprints of abstraction. Of course, there is an element of satire in majority of his poems.

(Refer Slide Time: 23:23)

Interpretation of the Poem, "At a Psychedelic Art Exhibition"

- ❖ Impressionistic pictures of an art exhibition.
- ❖ Tapestry of Images
- ❖ Ideas and abstractions
- ❖ Lyrical and satirical element
- ❖ Poetry for him, 'is a spontaneous discoveries of the imagination about one or another aspect of reality.'
- ❖ A picture of fragmentation, squalor, crassness, stress of modern life especially in the west.



11

Shiv K. Kumar actually believed that poetry is a spontaneous discovery, discovery of what? Of the imagination about one or another aspect of reality. It is not only about imagination but also, about realization and this realization in different forms have to come and humans have to face. Shiv K. Kumar's world is not bereft of the abstraction.

It is not bereft of the fragmentation, a squalor, crassness of the modern commercial world specially in the West. That is why, in many poems you can come across the impression of T. S. Eliot's, A Wasteland, the way T. S. Eliot also makes a mention of how there is nothingness all around, and relationship simply are just like people wearing masks.

And Shiv K. Kumar also mentions in one poem that, I am reminded of it is about a marriage party where everyone except the bride is happy. They are celebrating a sort of happiness. But this happiness--- the poet says is only a sort of masked happiness, where the bride's feelings are not taken into consideration but everyone simply wears a sort of happiness we will come to that.

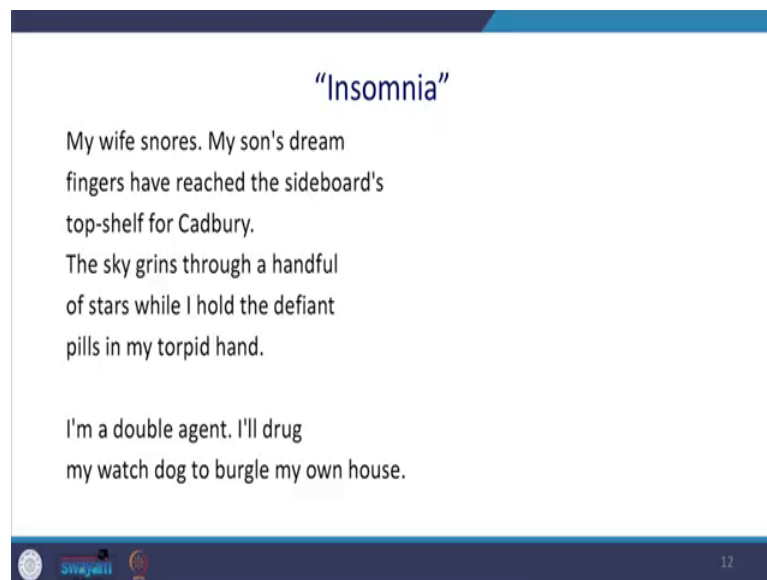
There is another poem named "Insomnia," where we can find, the poet or for that matter the creator, or for that matter the maker, is always at unrest. This poem can be interpreted into various ways. One can have different interpretations of this poem.

But, this poem specially talks about insomnia---- sleeplessness which is actually a modern-day problem you know. A person is not able to sleep and when he is not able to sleep what sort of thoughts actually bombard his mind, and how he is transported to a new world. But again, he is anguished and he is in a state of sorrow, that once again he will have to face another night where he is not able to sleep. Let us have a look at the poem, and through some of the lines we can also interpret,

My wife snores,

You see what a sort of a life a modern man is living in or experiencing rather.

(Refer Slide Time: 26:03)



My wife snores. My son's dream
fingers have reached the sideboard's
top-shelf for Cadbury.

So, the wife and the children or the son they are sleeping, but the poet, the persona is not yet sleep. He does not feel like sleeping. So, my son's dream fingers have reached the sideboard's top shelf for Cadbury.

The sky grins through a handful
of stars while I hold the defiant
pills in my torpid hand.

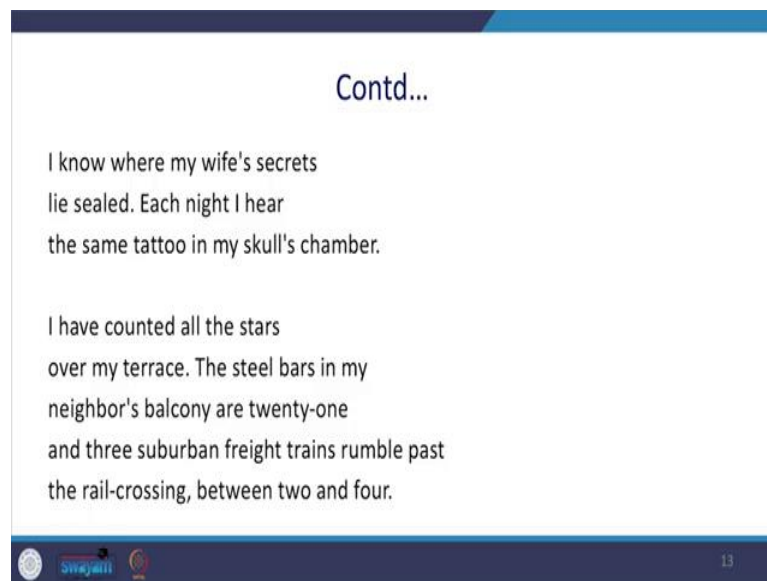
So, restlessness, but then we actually have to take the pills to invite sleep.

I'm a double agent. I will drug
my watch dog to burgle my own house.

And he says, I will drug my watchdog to burgle my own house.

I know where my wife's secret
lie sealed.

(Refer Slide Time: 26:56)



Each night I hear
the same tattoo in my skull's chamber.

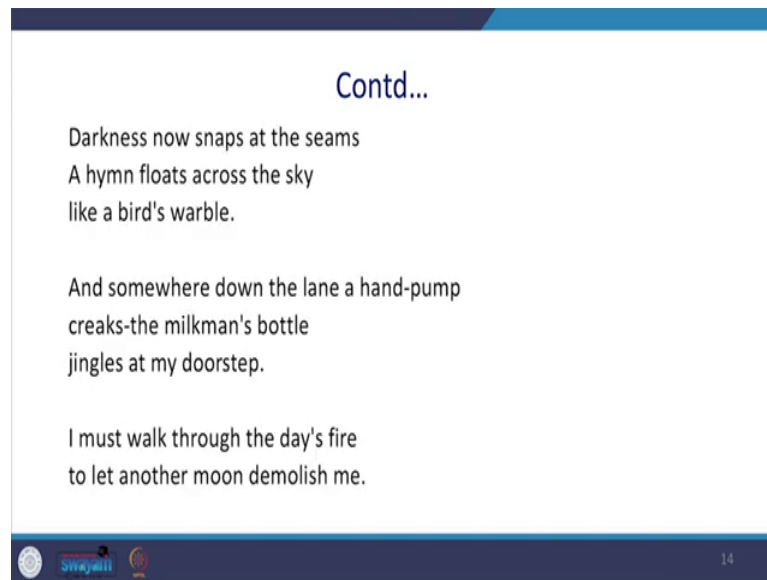
I have counted all the stars,

When the persona is not able to sleep, what the poet does? The poet says,

I have counted all the stars
over my terrace. The steel bars in my
neighbor's balcony are twenty-one
and three suburban freight trains rumble past
the rail-crossing, between two and four.

So, it is here a state of anxiety and this is actually the affect of the modern ways of life.

(Refer Slide Time: 27:41)



Contd...

Darkness now snaps at the seams
A hymn floats across the sky
like a bird's warble.

And somewhere down the lane a hand-pump
creaks-the milkman's bottle
jingles at my doorstep.

I must walk through the day's fire
to let another moon demolish me.

Where,

Darkness now snaps at the seams
a hymn floats across the sky
like a bird's warble.
And somewhere down the lane a hand-pump
creaks the milkman's bottle
jingles at my doorsteps.

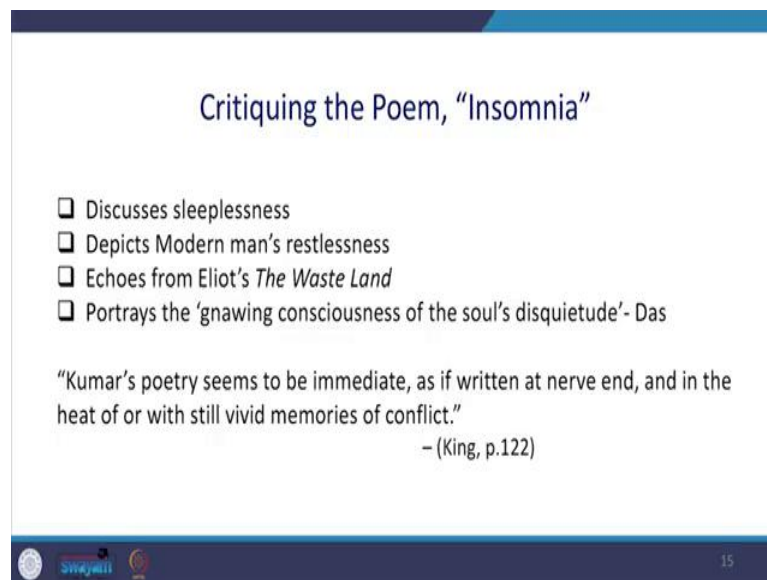
So, it is actually a world, where even the pills are not able to induce sleep in me and the poet has been sleepless throughout the night. And he is not able to sleep and the dawn comes. You know the coming of the dawn and it is being indicated to the poet by the jingles of the milkman, who is coming with his bottles and then also the creaking voice of the hand-pump. So, the arrival of a new dawn it can also be interpreted philosophically, that while I am struggling, while I am in a moment of conflict, the dawn begins. But, then at the physical level we can find the poet to be in a state of sleeplessness. And then he says, you know every day you know this is actually routine affair,

I must walk through the day's fire
to let another moon demolish me.

So, it has now become an everyday habit, that I am not able to sleep. And again, I am waiting for another moon, another night rather, which will demolish my sleep, is not it?

So, now we can be reminded of--- “And what shall we do? Fine. If we are reminded of *The Waste Land*, there is one line and what shall we do? The game of chess, you know, the game of chess. And then a closed car at four,” I mean he talks about how every day passes, every night passes. But, the poet as a thinker, the poet as a creator is not able to have a sort of sleep. But then, time does not stop, time is in a flux. It is changing, my dear friends. So, we can here find that, as an effect of the modern-day life, sleeplessness has become a part and parcel, is not it?

(Refer Slide Time: 30:02)



Critiquing the Poem, "Insomnia"

- Discusses sleeplessness
- Depicts Modern man's restlessness
- Echoes from Eliot's *The Waste Land*
- Portrays the 'gnawing consciousness of the soul's disquietude'- Das

"Kumar's poetry seems to be immediate, as if written at nerve end, and in the heat of or with still vivid memories of conflict."
- (King, p.122)

swayam 15

Modern man is always restless because he is always waiting for his own goal. We have become so much goal oriented that we are in the midst of a subterfuge, my dear friend. We are always having a sort of deceit in order to have a sort of aim fulfilled, fine. So, as I said, that we can hear several voices, we can hear several echoes from T. S. Eliot's *Waste Land*, because the poet was highly influenced by many western poets.

At the same time, one can also notice a sort of consciousness--- the knowing consciousness, of the soul's disquietude. As one critique has gone to the extent of saying that "it is not only a common sleeplessness; rather it is a sort of soul's disquietude, my dear friend."

Bruce King in his book, has rightly mentioned that Kumar's poetry seems to be "immediate as if written at nerve end, and the and in the heat of a with still and the heat of or with still vivid memories of conflict." So, this is actually the modern man's crisis. Kumar's poem may appear to be very angry, at times very angry moods you can find, and at times you can also find that there is a sort of passivity, there is a sort of repression also.

But, then as a poet it is his task to bring out all these passivities and all these repressions because, these are some such things which can be understood only internally; not the external realities, as we have mentioned and discussed while we were discussing K. N. Daruwalla. As I was mentioning about one very important poem, poetry collection named *Broken Columns*. This *Broken Columns*, you will find that as a poet even though Shiv K. Kumar as a poet, may appear to be rebellion. But in *Broken Columns*, through, 12 poems, it is actually a sequence of 12 poems, the poet presents to us the becoming of or the growth of a child, from the child, to the man, to the artist, as you know we can think of a sort of the image of the Bildungsroman, how a man becomes, how a child grows into a man, then he becomes an aesthete or an artist.

(Refer Slide Time: 32:39)

Broken Columns

- A sequence of twelve poems
- Autobiographical
- Struggle for existence
- Particularities of Indian Hindu life

"Kumar's poems, for all their wit and humour, are angry, satiric responses to an India of passivity, sexual repression, political hypocrisy and over-glorified, crumpling past."
(Bruce King)

At ten I play hide and seek
down the school-lane in a shop
Stacked with teak and deodar
And suddenly Sheila's chequered
Skirt blows into life...
I transfix her behind a pillar
Of deodar and my lips
Release the tongue to plumb
The Bay of Bengal
Is there a point at which even the
parallel lines meet
Out of sheer exhaustion?

Swajati
16

So, here in these 12 sequence of poems also we can find, there are different stages, where you know, where the poet there is an interaction between the child; child who is the poet and the father which who actually can be understood as a sort of a traditional mores, and

as a sort of dictate that is being followed and maintained in our society, every now and then.

So, this *Broken Columns*, may appear to be very autobiographical, where we find that as a child you have a fancy for several images. As a young boy growing into, a young man how your fancies, your attractions, your fascinations for a girl. Whereas, the adult world will tell you--- no this is not proper, fine. This is not proper, why? Because they will always tell you that you have to maintain the order and the decorum.

So, these conflicts ---we can find and then, how when time is right for the young man to get married. So, this is actually the traditional practices being followed. But, the poet is in conflict, the poet is actually struggling for a sort of existence. Here, in this poem entitled *Broken Columns*, the poet Shiv K. Kumar also laughs or takes a dig at the particularities of Indian Hindu life.

I will only take some of the lines, in order to make my point very clear,

At ten I play hide and seek.

This is the third stage, like the seven edges of man, but here Shiv K. Kumar talks of 12 poems and in 12 poems, he talks about the different stages. And he says,

At ten I play hide and seek
down the school-lane in a shop
stacked with teak and deodar
and suddenly Sheila's chequered
skirt blows into life...

A child's fascination or attraction for a girl. But then, society would not permit because there is order, there are dictats. And then he says,

I transfix her behind a pillar
of deodar and my lips
release the tongue to plumb
The Bay of Bengal.

And then what he says towards the end is very significant.

Is there a point?

Now, the poet interrogates also. And the poet's interrogations are many questions. Questions that actually interrogate the traditions which are a part and parcel of Indian life.

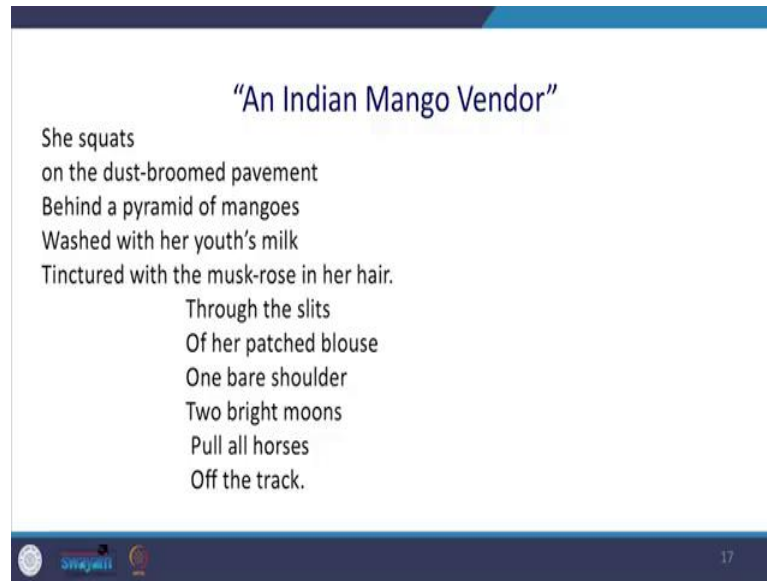
Is there a point at which even the
parallel lines meet
out of sheer exhaustion?

So, can these traditions be broken? And then, the poet will further mention, how when it is time he is married, and then he may have children, and then he may have a sort of disillusionment with the world. And then he may think of, he may yearn for a change and all. So, this is all and you know and all these things even though they are in truth, but then, they are actually part of the practice and the poet actually tries to make a search for the soul's question for the interrogation of the soul. So, Bruce King has rightly mentioned, because when the poet makes such interrogations, he also tries to laugh.

And you know in one poem he says, the poem is entitled "Kali," where he says---" if to create is to kill if to create is to kill. " Now you look at the sort of contraries because we talk of Kali and then we talk of the different avatars and then we talk because he actually laughs at the superstitious beliefs which are prevalent in Indian society. "Kumar's poems as Bruce King says, for all their wit and humor, are angry, look at the lines, satiric responses to an India of passivity."

Till now we have been practicing this passivity, sexual repression, Bruce King also goes to the extent of saying that, Kumar is sexualizing Indian landscapes as in "Kovalam Beach" we can find. Political hypocrisy, there are also mentions of political hypocrisy and over-glorified, crumbling past. Now, as I have been saying that Kumar actually tries to laugh, even out of oddities. he has also his eye, for the minor details of common Indian scenes and themes.

(Refer Slide Time: 37:31)



Here is a poem entitled, “An Indian Mango Vendor.” If you look at the lines, here it is a common sight one can come across that a mango vendor, may be sometimes a girl may be also a mango vendor, how she is selling. She is actually poor, but then the person I mean the buyer, what the buyer is looking at that is actually a depiction if you look at it.

But, then the poet actually tries to not only neutralize poverty, but also tries to find beauty even amid poverty.

She squats
on the dust-broomed pavement
behind a pyramid of mangoes,

Look at the images, behind a pyramid of mangoes : washed with her youth's milk. I mean, on the one hand the poet admires that even though this young vendor is poor, Tinctured with the musk-rose in her hair.

And now the onlooker, the buyer.

Through the slits
of her patched blouse

One bare shoulder

Two bright moons

Pull all horses

Off the track.

Look at the images, horses, moons, I mean you can understand the reference there. But here the poet, actually tries to find out how even we can find beauty amid poverty, beauty amid ugliness. So, as a poet Shiv K Kumar is not anti-women as many people have charged him with. But, he actually is a poet of intuition, a poet of impression who can find who has his eye for details, even among common subjects.

(Refer Slide Time: 39:25)

From Woolgathering

- Futility of dreams and fantasies
- Submission and surrender alone are not approved of
- Union of two souls matters much
- Love is a centripetal force and requires attachment
- A woman's feelings are equally important as a man's.

But before you shatter this vase,
won't you
Join in my prayer for awhile? I'd
then swallow
Your words, for ritual's sake
It will be easier for me to jump
Onto the flaming pyre.
("First Night After a Dowried
Wedding")

18

Now, there is another work by Shiv K. Kumar, entitled *From Woolgathering*, fine. And here again, one can find that how the poet actually tries to rebel against the tradition. It is about an Indian woman going to be married, and this marriage in Indian system it is so that, a bride is married to a groom based on the social conditions and all. And the bride is supposed to be a silent creature, who has got no right to open her veiled tongue. But here if we look at the lines, the poet actually tries to put some voice in the throat or in the lips of the lady, and the lady says. This poem is from *First Night After a Dowried Wedding*. Dowry is a common feature in Indian marriages, where the women are considered to bring a dowry from their father's house. And then when the marriage is over, now look at the way the woman says,

But before you shatter this vase,

so vase here is the symbol and this vase is the lady,

won't you

join in my prayer for a while? I would

then swallow

your words, for ritual's sake.

It will be easier for me to jump

onto the flaming pyre.

Now, by saying this, what the poet actually tries to convey is that, these creatures, especially these women who are married as dumb creatures, also should have their own feelings and which can be understood. Because in olden days as you remember, when the women were buried if they lost their husbands. So, she is also taking a dig that it is very easy for me to jump on the flaming pyre.

But should my feelings not be understood? Should my feelings not be considered? That is actually the question. My dear friend, in Shiv K. Kumar's world, one can find that the poet actually appears at times to be anti-women, but he is not anti-women. The poet actually tries to purge mankind of this reality of having silenced women for ages. I mean every individual may have dreams and desires and fantasies and they ought to be heard.

It is not only that women are simply meant to be the pieces of surrender and stone, fine. So, at in many poems he has said that, we are actually worshiping the stones, but we are

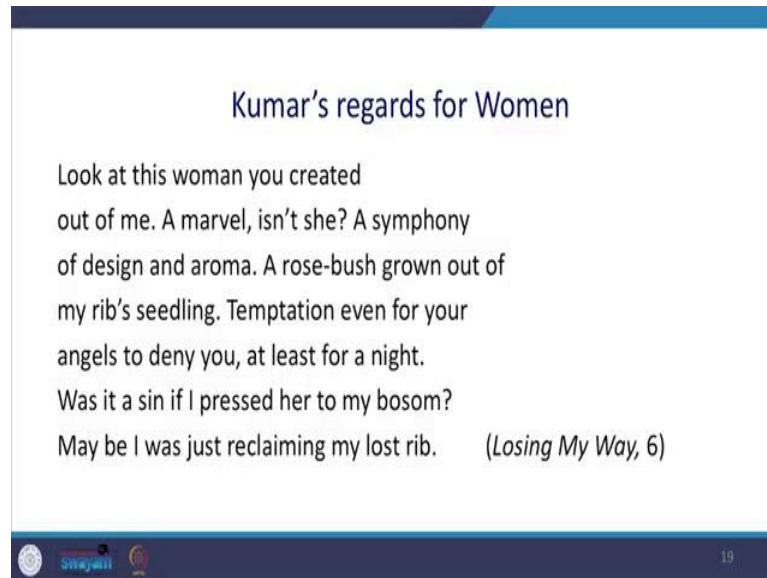
actually leaving the human beings. You can also find, that there are poems which are composed after you know Khajuraho and others, where the poet actually tries to say that, if you simply feel that these are stoned but then there are also intuitions of union between man and woman and that can also be there, but how?

Only when the two can understand each other. The union of two souls, they actually matter much, love is a force. And love is a force that actually has got to bring two people together and that only can bring happiness. Women should not be considered only a thing, rather they should also be considered a sort of entity. Fine.

And a love is actually such a force, that requires attachment and not detachment; it has been for ages been considered they are simply things and they are things just like twice utilized and being thrown. But, then a woman's feelings are as important as a man's. And that is what this poem, "First Night After a Dowried Wedding". I am also reminded of another line, because the poet may be straight forward, but what he says is not devoid of truth.

As he says in one of his poems, that "a man should come to his woman whole, not when the mind is a perverted sunflower turning to darkness", fine. So, meaning thereby there should be a complete dedication, there should be a complete devotion, there should be a complete love and this love should be from both the parties, there should be a complete union and this union of feelings between the two. In some of the poems he says, loving you is like loving an ice, loving an ice loving a treacherous ice. So, there he refers to the coldness, but then one has to understand the reason behind this coldness. My dear friends, Shiv K. Kumar has often been criticized for his anti-women views, but then we can defend him if we find some of the lines from one of his famous collections entitled, *Losing My Way* where the poet actually makes God a witness and then, he puts voice into the throat of the women.

(Refer Slide Time: 44:46)



Where he says,

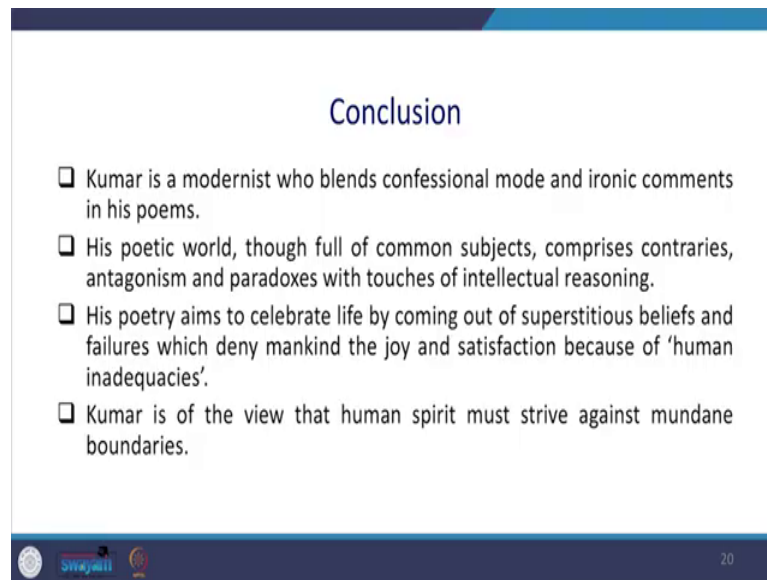
Look at this woman you created
out of me. A marvel, isn't she? A symphony
of design and aroma. A rose-bush grown out of
my rib's seedling. Temptation even for your
angels to deny you, at least for a night.
Was it a sin if I pressed her to my bosom?
Maybe I was just reclaiming my lost rib.

So, those who say that Shiv K. Kumar was anti-woman, can get a lot of food for thought, in these lines from Shiv K. Kumar's *Losing My Way*.

Now, having discussed because it is very difficult to discuss the entire corpus of Shiv K. Kumar's poem. But, I have tried my level best to familiarize my listeners and readers with the world of Shiv K. Kumar, where there are gems you know, where there are gems in every stone, in every stone why I say? Because he has, at times, said, that these gods and goddesses are--- they are you know like stone gods.

But, then he also depicts Mother Teresa's sacrifice and all. Actually, he tries to say that man is more important, human beings are more important, these superstitious beliefs are only man-made and we need to come out of it, that is Shiv K. Kumar's wish as a poet.

(Refer Slide Time: 46:12)



Conclusion

- ❑ Kumar is a modernist who blends confessional mode and ironic comments in his poems.
- ❑ His poetic world, though full of common subjects, comprises contraries, antagonism and paradoxes with touches of intellectual reasoning.
- ❑ His poetry aims to celebrate life by coming out of superstitious beliefs and failures which deny mankind the joy and satisfaction because of 'human inadequacies'.
- ❑ Kumar is of the view that human spirit must strive against mundane boundaries.

20

So, before we conclude, we can draw out some findings. Kumar is actually a modernist and he has rightly been called a romantic modernist by Mohanty. “Shiv K. Kumar, blends confessional mode and ironic comments in his poems. He is actually his poetic world though full of common subjects. “

There are many common subjects-- it is Shiv K. Kumar's world where you can find all sorts of people being discussed also. So, people being you know pictured. His world comprises contraries, create, kill, I mean there are end number of such contraries you can come across. Antagonism and Paradoxes, with touches of intellectual reasoning. It is often said that since Shiv K. Kumar was a professor naturally, there can be some intellectual sweeps of imagination, but that is not devoid of reality.

“His poetry aims to celebrate life, by coming out of superstitious beliefs and failures, which deny mankind the joy and satisfaction, because of human in- adequacies human in- adequacies.” We have in us, the power, we have in us the adequacies. And these adequacies have to be exploited, these adequacies have to be exposed, in order to enjoy the beauty and the benignity of life my dear friend.

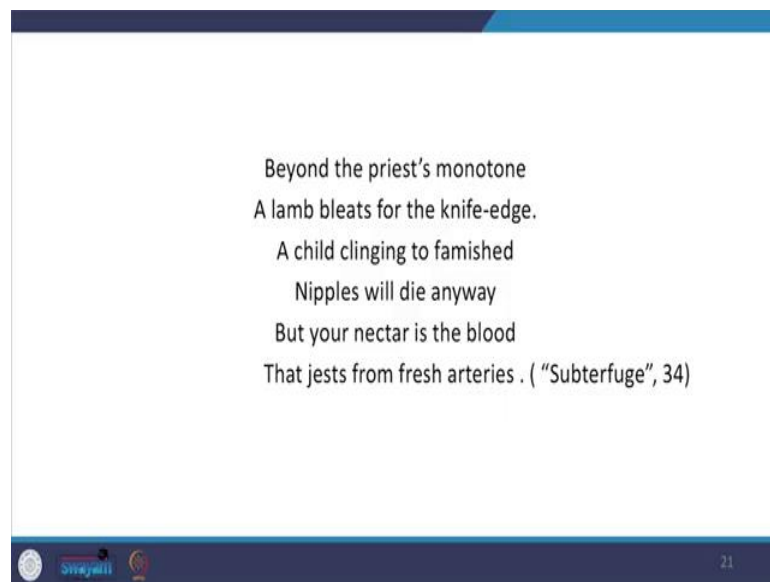
If we remember well, the way we talked about mango vendor, we can also find out how in one poem Shiv K. Kumar talks about women who are like empty pictures waiting for their men to come, because they have to be guarded. And they cannot draw sketches on the walls, fine. I mean why?

And Shiv K. Kumar, really, when he is considered to be a rebellion, is only because of the fact that he raises some valid questions, whose answers can be understood once one takes a leap in the poetic world of Shiv K. Kumar.

Kumar is of the view that human spirit, must strive against mundane boundaries. My dear friends, those people who believe that Shiv K. Kumar is an anti-woman, should understand that man and woman maintain a relationship. And this relationship, is not only romantic, but this relationship is religious also, my dear friend.

So, with this we come to the end of the talk.

(Refer Slide Time: 48:47)



But before that, let me quote one line from Subterfuge, where the poet says,

Beyond the priest's monotone,

Because in Indian culture priest is very important. And if you read *Broken Columns* where the son is suggested to visit the priest in the temple and when the son goes to visit the priest in the temple the priest actually tries to sensualize or to make some such comments or create some such atmosphere which cannot be considered to be religious, my dear friend.

So, Beyond the priest's monotone
a lamb bleats for the knife-edge.

Here there is a dig on how animals are being sacrificed in the name of religion and all.

A child clinging to famished
nipples will die anyway.
But your nectar is the blood
your nectar is the blood.

How can a God take, the blood of other living beings as the nectar,

That jests from fresh arteries.

So, how can the blood that comes out of living beings how can be considered a nectar or an *Amrit*? But then our Indian cultural beliefs, which are based on several superstitions, they are in every age been proclaiming that the sacrifice in the temples is often considered to be sacrosanct.

But my dear friends, nothing can be as sacrosanct as life. A life has to be celebrated, one has to move beyond the boundaries, in order to have a zest for life, in order to make life a sort of celebration, in order to make life a sort of impression that as human beings we are here to enjoy, because life is meant to be very short lived. And one has to live, but not at the cost of others. Thank you very much, with this we come to the end of this lecture. I wish you all a very good night.

Thank you.