

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

Lecture - 13
Arvind K. Mehrotra

Good morning and welcome back to NPTEL online certification course on Indian Poetry in English. You are being tuned into the lectures by Binod Mishra. Friends, if you remember well in the previous lecture we talked about the poetic corpus of Arun Kolatkar. And, in that connection I had told you that Arun Kolatkar and Arvind K Mehrotra were very good friends and both of them were experimentalists.

So, in this lecture I am going to make you familiar with the works of Mehrotra. Now, there have been end number of writings on Arvind K Mehrotra and it is said that of all the poets Arvind K Mehrotra was one of the truest representative of contemporary Indian English poetry.

You might be quite curious to know who was Arvind K Mehrotra and what were the qualities in him that made him so popular not only in India, but there was a time when he was also nominated for the position of Oxford professor. So, what are the, what are the main ingredients and what are the main qualities that make Arvind K Mehrotra a living legend, we shall see in this lecture.

(Refer Slide Time: 02:10)

Socio-Political Conditions

- Post-Independence
- Language controversy: *Angrezihatao*
- Emergency in 1975
- French Surrealists of the 20s and the American Beats of the 1960s

IIT Roorkee Swayam 2

As you might remember well that while we had been talking about Arun Kolatkar, we had said that the worldwide scenario had completely changed in the 1960s and India also had witnessed a lot. Because, in post-independent India you know there were several challenges and we could not remain unaffected. So, there was also at one time a controversy about English, *agrezi hatao* you know, that was actually one slogan.

And, then in 1975, the clamping of the emergency that also stirred and that also disturbed many people in India. And, it was at this time that many Indian poets who were actually writing, they also happened to be affected by these incidents. Now, the French Surrealism of the 20s and the American beat poetry of the 1960s had a tremendous impact on Indian English poets. And not only Arun Kolatkar, but also Arvind K Mehrotra was affected very much by this.

Now who is Arvind Mehrotra and what were the literary conditions? We had been discussing in every lecture that many of the Indian English poets, they actually came to the world of poetry through journalism.

(Refer Slide Time: 03:54)

The slide is titled "Literary Conditions" and features a bulleted list of four points. To the right of the list is an image of the book cover for "TEN TWENTIETH CENTURY Indian Poets" by R. Parthasarathy. The book cover is white with a red banner at the top that says "OXFORD INDIA PAPERBACKS". The title "TEN TWENTIETH CENTURY Indian Poets" is written in black and red. Below the title is a colorful illustration of two faces, one red and one blue, with a blue hand holding a red object. At the bottom of the cover, it says "CHOSEN AND EDITED BY R. PARTHASARATHY". The slide also has a footer with logos for Swajathi and a small number 3.

Literary Conditions

- Writers Workshop by P. Lal and his associates
- Emergence of 'New Poets'
- English Language
- International recognition of common wealth literature

OXFORD INDIA PAPERBACKS

TEN TWENTIETH CENTURY Indian Poets

CHOSEN AND EDITED BY R. PARTHASARATHY

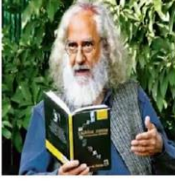
Swajathi 3

And, through the Writers Workshop, fine? The international recognition of Commonwealth literature also added a flavor to it.

(Refer Slide Time: 04:03)

Introduction to the Poet

- ❖ Born in Lahore in 1947, studied at Allahabad and later taught at University of Allahabad.
- ❖ Visiting Writer, University of Iowa
- ❖ Mehrotra was nominated for the post of Professor of Poetry at the University of Oxford in 2009.
- ❖ “Discovering the French and the Americans was, for me, a moment of liberation. My subjects did not lie in Europe or the United States, but I had first to make a detour to those places, through their poetry, to realize that my subjects lay nearer home, if not at home.”
- ❖ Mehrotra has described himself as ‘not an Indian poet writing a universal language of poetry, of feeling, of love , and hate and sex.’ (Naik)



Swajati 4

So, it was in 1947--- a year that was very significant for India and it was also very significant for Arvind K Mehrotra.

Because Arvind K Mehrotra was born in 1947, and where? In Lahore, but he received his education in Allahabad, at Allahabad University and later on he also taught at Allahabad University for quite a good number of years. And, he had been traveling, riding between Allahabad and Dehradun for quite a long time. He was at a time a visiting writer at the University of Iowa in the U.S and Mehrotra, as I said earlier, was nominated for the post of professor of poetry at the University of Oxford in 2009.

It is actually said that Mehrotra’s poetry is very much complex, while taking questions from many Mehrotra once said “Discovering the French and the American was, for me, a moment of liberation. My subjects did not lie in Europe or in United States, but I had first to make a detour to those places, through their poetry to realize that my subjects lay nearer home, if not at home.” And, you can find when you read the works of Mehrotra, you will find that Mehrotra was very particular about location, very much particular about location.

And, that is why majority of his poems have got a sort of grounding in his nearby places. It is often, one can often come across many reminiscences of his childhood, one can also come across many, you know, descriptions of his neighbors. The description of Mr. Roy

in one of his poems, the Roys, the description of an Indian painter, you know, the Sunday painter fine and he talks about common things.

But what was so, important about Mehrotra was he actually described himself not as an Indian poet writing a universal language of poetry, of feeling, of love of hate and sex. So, not an Indian poet. He actually believed that he was not only an Indian poet, he was a poet who actually was writing a universal language of poetry that Mehrotra himself had admitted. And, if you go into the poetic purpose of Mehrotra, you will find that Mehrotra really proved that.


Mehrotra's poems are witty and sophisticated. When, you know, you must not be surprised that he started writing poetry only at the age of 19 and in 1966, he wrote one poem which was actually very much satiric. We will come to that poem also and see at that time what sort of reasoning did he have, how he was actually a follower of Avant Garde literature, how he was actually trying to find fault with the new ways of the world.

And, how he wanted that poetry should not be closed rather poetry should break free, how he was actually full of youthful rebellion and anarchy and how he was also influenced and motivated by Surrealistic acceptance of chance. So, there is a poetry of defiance as we had been saying, that he was influenced by the Beat movement as well.

(Refer Slide Time: 07:42)

Contd...

- Witty and sophisticated
- He observes the everyday life
- Poetry of Defiance in the late 1960s
- Contemporary poet translator
- "The Emperor has no Clothes"
- Considers English language as the best medium for contemporary poetry.



"If criticism has the health of the literary community in mind its frame of reference should not be bound by a country's political boundary."

5

Mehrotra was not only a poet, but he was an anthologist, a critic, a translator and, also a writer of many books of English literatures history, especially Indian English. One of his essays which became very popular, very famous is entitled “The Emperor has no Clothes” in which he has actually taken a ride at Avula Parthasarathy, one of his contemporary poets.

And, Mehrotra has actually defended A K Ramanujan, fine? And if you get some time please read that essay which is very important from the understanding point of view of Mehrotra’s world. In that Mehrotra says “If criticism has the health of the literary community in mind, its frame of reference should not be bound by a country’s political boundary.”

Actually, A K Ramanujan was attacked and his poems were considered to be the interior by Parthasarathy and in that essay Mehrotra has actually defended A K Ramanujan and has talked about so many things. So, the essay is very interesting. Mehrotra considered English language as the best medium for contemporary poetry. And, one can find that Mehrotra’s world is not only full of wit, full of images because Mehrotra was also a sort of a Surrealistic writer and he was also an experimental.

(Refer Slide Time: 09:07)

Influences

- André Breton, Apollinaire, Ezra Pound, Walt Whitman
- Obsessions, memories, doubts, and many personal experiences

“Mehrotra revises continually, a small body of work, polishing, crafting, aiming at elegance, wit, precision, and an impersonality which will fix the poem and the personal memories that are its source ...continually worries his perceptions, his relationship to his feelings and environment, often going over the same themes from different angles....A Mehrotra poem is a construction, a Mahapatra poem a deconstruction itself and what it expresses.” (Bruce King)

Breton defined surrealism as “pure psychic automatism by which it is intended to express either verbally or in writing, the true function of thought. Thought dictated in the absence of all control exerted by reason and outside all aesthetic or moral control.”

Swajati 6

Two writers, two Indian English writers who actually deserve a lot of importance and should be mentioned are Arun Kolatkar and Arvind K Mehrotra, apart from Dilip Chitre and Jayanta Mahapatra, Mahapatra we have already read.

Now, earlier influences in Mehrotra's world were of Andre Breton. Andre Breton who was a surrealist and who was actually the profounder of this Surrealism movement in art. And, then another French poet, Apollinaire and then you know Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot's influence was also very much on Mehrotra. Walt Whitman because in the very first poem that Mehrotra has written, there he has made a mention of Walt Whitman.

So, if Whitman were there he could have also said the same thing. So, we will come to that poetry once again and we will find that. Now, Bruce King in his very seminal book, what he says about Mehrotra is very important. He says because Mehrotra was a post modern poet and Mehrotra did not get satisfied, he was actually trying to discover a sort of language.

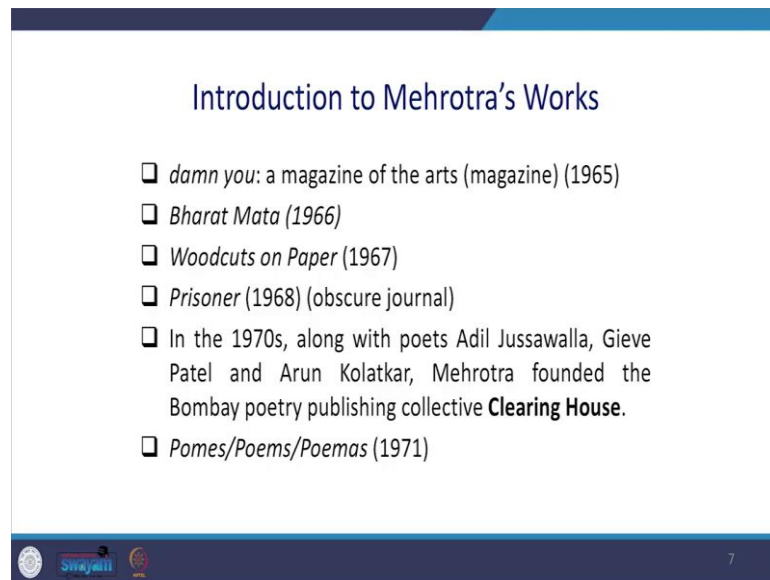
And he said that language has to be free and there that is why time and again he polishes, he actually revises so and he crafts, he actually wanted a sort of elegant and wit, precision and impersonality which he says will fix the poem and the personal memories that are its source.

So, Bruce King says that Mehrotra 'continually worries his perceptions, his relationships to his feelings and environment often going over the same things from different angles. There are many poems that he has himself revised. A Mehrotra poem here the line that the word that I am going to use has to be really underlined is a construction, Mehrotra's poem is a construction and he believes that the poem is not only, the poem is actually an object.

And, what is more important is the text, what is more important is the text. A Mehrotra poem is a construction whereas, a Mahapatra poem a deconstruction. Meaning, thereby in Mehrotra we can find that every now and then he experiments with lines, with words and with the depiction. And, then the way he puts the words like an expert artist, you will find when you come to see the very first poem at a very early age that he wrote, the poem was entitled *Bharat Mata*.

But, even before that Mehrotra had started, you know, Mehrotra was such a person that he started his own journal in the beginning. And that journal did not get published, but then he himself became its publisher by cyclostyling it.

(Refer Slide Time: 11:59)



Introduction to Mehrotra's Works

- ❑ *damn you*: a magazine of the arts (magazine) (1965)
- ❑ *Bharat Mata* (1966)
- ❑ *Woodcuts on Paper* (1967)
- ❑ *Prisoner* (1968) (obscure journal)
- ❑ In the 1970s, along with poets Adil Jussawalla, Gieve Patel and Arun Kolatkar, Mehrotra founded the Bombay poetry publishing collective **Clearing House**.
- ❑ *Pomes/Poems/Poemas* (1971)

swajati 7

damn you: it was a magazine of the arts fine. So, in 1965 and in 1966, he wrote *Bharat Mata* which is actually full of youthful exuberance of Mehrotra, where he delineates the picture and there is a sarcastic remark as well. And, it is a sort of parroting you will find, then came the wood *Woodcuts on Paper* in 1967, then came *Prisoner* in 1968.

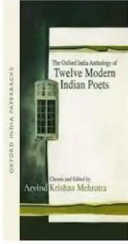
And, in 1970s Mehrotra along with some of his friends namely Adil Jussawalla, Gieve Patel and Kolatkar, they actually started one poetic venture or a publishing house entitled **Clearing House** from which many of even Mehrotra's works also came out. So, one of his works entitled *Pomes/ Poems/ Poemas* that came out in 1971 from this Clearing House itself.

(Refer Slide Time: 13:05)

His Poetic Oeuvre

- ❖ *Nine Enclosures*(1976)
- ❖ *Distance in Statute Miles* (1982)
- ❖ *Middle Earth* (1984)
- ❖ *The Transfiguring Places* (1998)
- ❖ *Collected Poems 1969-2014*. (2014)
- ❖ *Collected Poems*. (2016)
- ❖ *The Oxford India Anthology of Twelve Modern Indian Poets* (1992)ed.
- ❖ *The Absent Traveller* (1991) and *Songs of Kabir* (2011). (Translations)

“While the work of most Indian English poets seems to carry the stamp of British poetry, Mehrotra’s poetry shows a kinship with American poets like Wallace Stevens. In this respect, as also in spurning solemnity, he has been a liberating force in Indian English poetry.”- Sarang



swajati

8

Now, if we come to have a look at Mehrotra’s poetic oeuvre, he has got 6 poetry collections to his name. He began with *Nine Enclosures* in 1976, then came *Distance in Statute Miles*, *Middle Earth*, *The Transfiguring Places* and then *Collected Poems* from 1969 to 2014 and then *Collected Poems* in 2016.

And, Mehrotra was a translator also and he translated many other works and then the two works the *Absent Traveller* and *Songs of Kabir*; these are translations, he translated in Bengali, in Gujarati and in some *prakrit* language also he learned that. So, Abhilash Sarang another contemporary of Mehrotra, what he says about Mehrotra is quite pertinent. And he says “While the work of most Indian English poets seems to carry the stamp of British poetry, Mehrotra’s poetry shows a kinship with American poets; that is why the beats and then like Wallace Stevens. In this respect, as also in spurning solemnity, he has been a liberating force. Look at the lines, he has been a liberating force in Indian English poetry.”

Now, why this liberating force? When we come to his very first poem, we will find how Mehrotra tries to liberate Indian English poetry from the clutches of imitation. Mehrotra’s poetry may not be realistic, Mehrotra’s poetry may appear to be very rebellious. But, then Mehrotra was in search of a style-less poetry which actually was going to be the which actually was going to be the representative poetic world of Mehrotra.

Now, one can divide Mehrotra's poetic periods into 3 phases beginning with a postmodern and Avant Garde style that Mehrotra started in the beginning when he wrote this *Bharat Mata* poem which many people have considered to be youthful exuberance. We can have a look at the lines.

(Refer Slide Time: 15:21)

Various Phases

- ❖ Post-modernist and avant-garde style.
- ❖ Collage- Cubist method of Apollinaire and Ezra Pound.
- ❖ Precise recording of external reality.

Bharat Mata

India my beloved country, ah my motherland you are, in the world's slum
the lavatory
the septic tank where in paper gutters
fall the
marks rubles dollars pounds yensliras francs yet our stomachs remain sirens
tooting pathetic messages
I am so used to your cities with
a chain reaction of suburbs
where whole families live in bathrooms
and generations are pushed out of skylights
and the next one sticks out its head
like a tapeworm through frozen shit.
used to the village reduced to a bone
and then swallowed.
i am used to seeing pot-bellied children
ride the dog with jockey's confidence.
used to the old man pick his nose
in prayer like concentration.

9

And then comes since he was influenced by painters so, we can also find an imprint of Collage and Cubist method of the French poet, Apollinaire and then also of Ezra Pound. But, then the third stage-- we can find a little bit of change in him, a precise recording of external reality. But, let us have a look at *Bharat Mata*. The poem is very simple, but the poem is very sarcastic. Let us look at the lines, in order to understand because most of Mehrotra's poems are soaked in childhood joys.

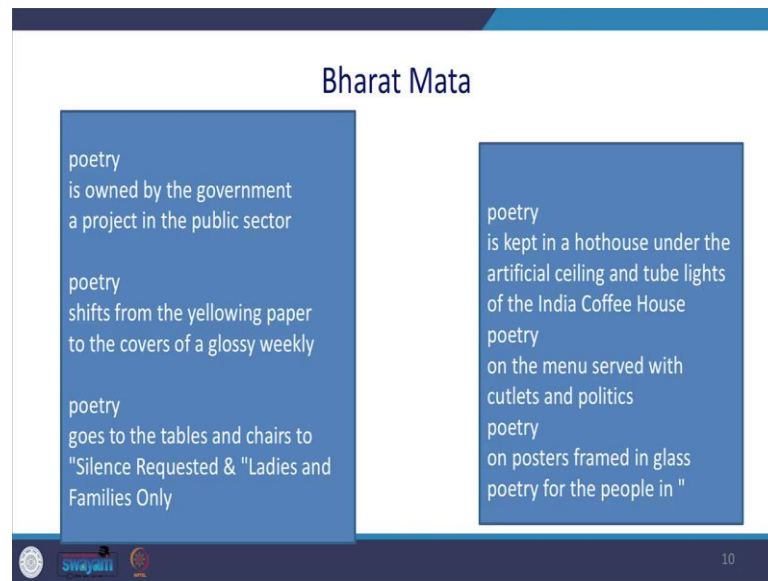
He goes to the past, he narrates, but then he is not without taking a dig at what was happening around him.

“India my beloved country, my motherland you are in the world's slum the lavatory,/ the septic tank where in paper gutters fall /the marks rubles dollars pounds yens liras francs yet our stomachs remain sirens/ tooting pathetic messages. /I am so used to your cities with/ the chain reaction of suburbs/ where whole families live in bathrooms/ and generations are pushed out of skylights/ and the next one sticks out its head/ like a tape worm through frozen shit/ used to the village reduced to a bone/ and then swallowed./

I am used to seeing the pot bellied children/ ride the dog with jockey's confidence.”

At times it becomes very witty, the games of the children which actually Parthasarathy says that in Mehrotra's world you can find a lot of gaming. And, then as the poem proceeds you know the sort of dig he takes.

(Refer Slide Time: 17:03)

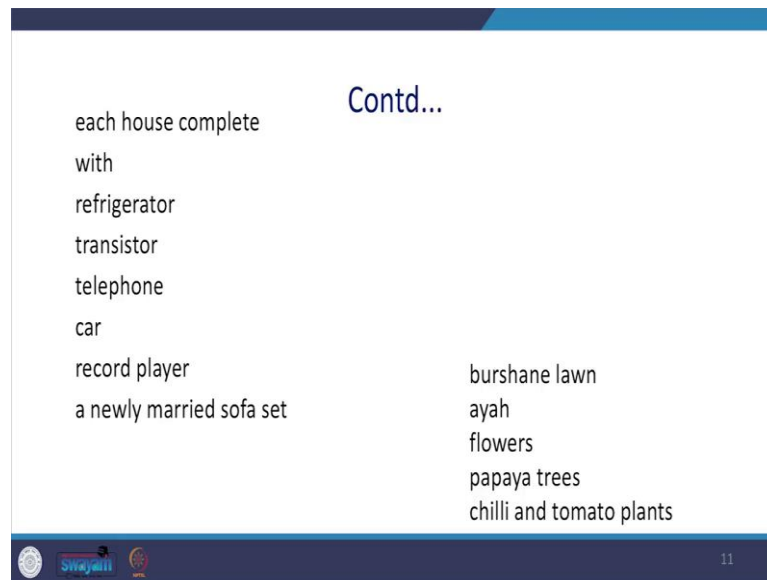


Poetry/ is owned by the government/ a project in the public sector.

You see poetry is owned by the government a project in the public sector, “poetry shifts from the yellowing paper/ to the covers of a glossy weekly,/ poetry /goes to the tables and chairs to/ “Silence Requested and “Ladies and Families Only./ Poetry/ is kept in a hothouse under the /artificial ceiling and tube lights/ of the India Coffee House,/ poetry/ on the menu served/ with cutlets and politics,/ poetry/ on posters framed in glass/ poetry for the people in”.

So, we can find here a sort of reaction and this reaction even though it is satiric, but it is subtle as well. But, then Mehrotra is not going to continue with it because he believes in a sort of freedom and this freedom he not only vouches for, but then what he says-- he takes the dig at the urban a lifestyle and says.

(Refer Slide Time: 18:01)



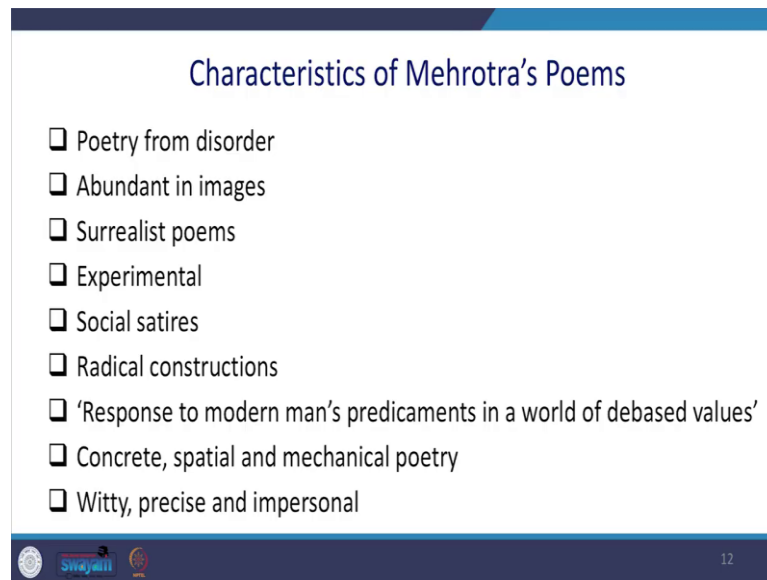
“Each house complete/ with/ refrigerator/ transistor/ telephone/ car/ record player/ a newly married sofa set. See, the dig a newly married sofa set.”

“burshane lawn/ ayah/ flowers/ papaya trees, chili and tomato plants.”

So, he takes here a dig at the urban life as well and you know when the poem comes to an end he says- ‘bharat mata ki’ and then he says- JAI HIND JAI JAWAN JAI KISAN, whatsoever. Now, Mehrotra is such a poet that even though he appears to be very rebellious, but then he believes that a poem consists of images presented in juxtaposition.

So, the later poet later poems of Mehrotra you will find that reality is juxtaposed; reality is not imitation. But, then reality is actually turned and turned in a way that there is no logicity rather there is a sort of psychology involved into it. So, the characteristics of Mehrotra’s poems are-- Mehrotra actually creates his poetry out of disorder, his poetry comes out of disorder that is why it may appear to be complex. Images are abundantly used, poems as I have been saying are surrealistic in nature satiric they are.

(Refer Slide Time: 19:27)



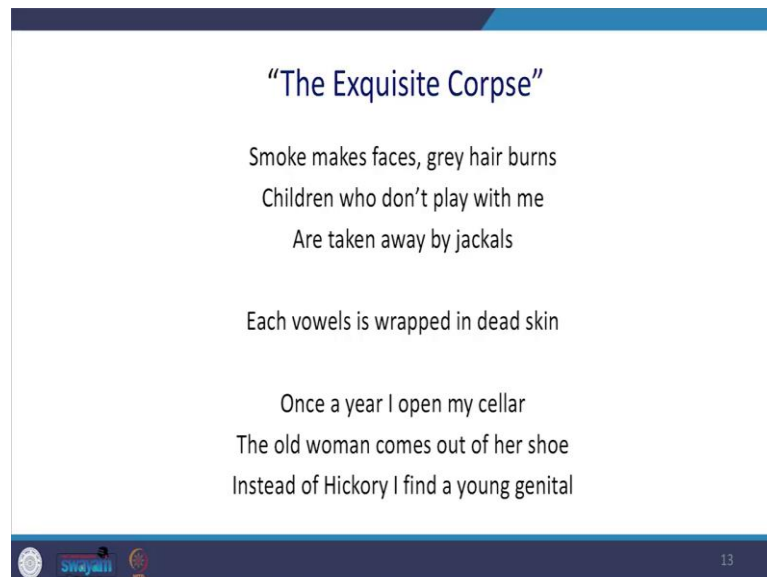
Characteristics of Mehrotra's Poems

- Poetry from disorder
- Abundant in images
- Surrealist poems
- Experimental
- Social satires
- Radical constructions
- 'Response to modern man's predicaments in a world of debased values'
- Concrete, spatial and mechanical poetry
- Witty, precise and impersonal

12

But then there is a radical construction and this construction which may appear at times very arbitrary, but then it is actually very willingly; concrete, spatial and mechanical poetry Mehrotra writes. But, then one cannot divest Mehrotra's world of the witty, precision and impersonal nature of his poetry.

(Refer Slide Time: 20:02)



"The Exquisite Corpse"

Smoke makes faces, grey hair burns
Children who don't play with me
Are taken away by jackals

Each vowels is wrapped in dead skin

Once a year I open my cellar
The old woman comes out of her shoe
Instead of Hickory I find a young genital

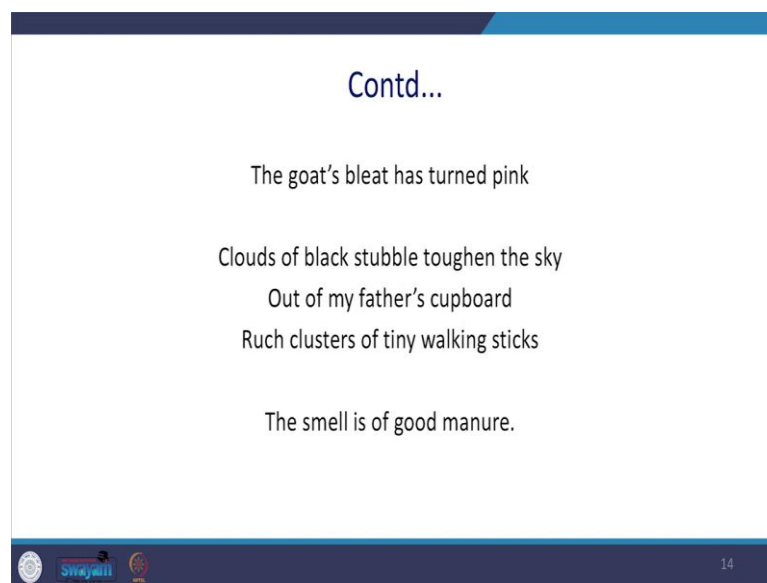
13

If you can have a look at the later poems of Mehrotra you will rather find, if we take a poem entitled "The Exquisite Corpse" look at the lines:

“Smoke makes faces, gray hair burns,/ children who don’t play with me/ are taken away by jackals.” So, there is a child like imagination here. But, then when we are composing poems of seriousness, Mehrotra is composing poetry which is witty, but which is soaked in satires.

Because, we are living in a world which is full of you logic, which is full of reasoning which is where there is loss, there is a sense of loss. “Once a year once a year I open my cellar/ the old woman comes out of her shoe/ instead of Hickory I find a young genital.”

(Refer Slide Time: 20:55)

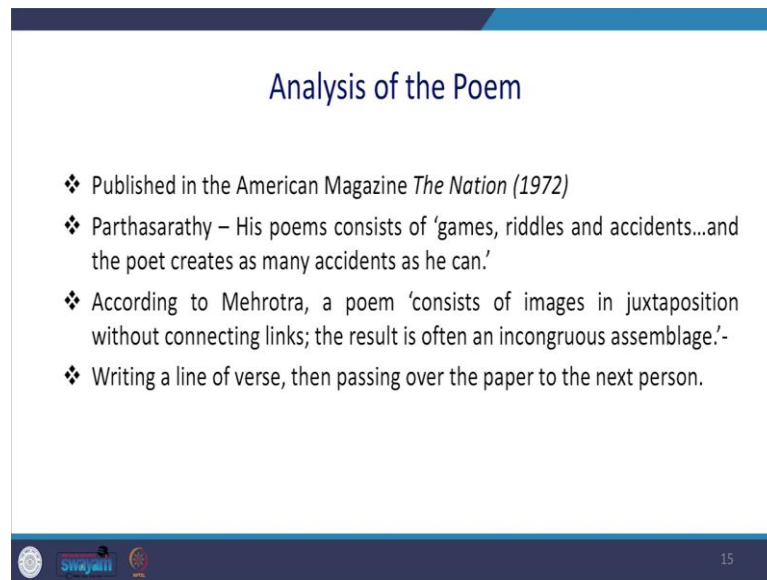


“The goat’s bleat has turned pink/ clouds of black stubble toughen the sky;

In one of his poems, he says that the ‘clouds have come to my room. Fine?’ And, they are actually barking fine and the dish is cracked. In one poem he says that I brought a pigeon and sought it and kept it fine behind the covered.

So, many childhood reminiscences are there and then he says- clouds of black stubble toughen the sky/ out of my father’s cupboard/ Ruch clusters of tiny walking sticks/ the smell is of good manure.”

(Refer Slide Time: 21:37)



The slide is titled "Analysis of the Poem" and contains four bullet points. The first bullet point states that the poem was published in the American Magazine *The Nation* in 1972. The second bullet point quotes Parthasarathy, saying his poems consist of 'games, riddles and accidents...and the poet creates as many accidents as he can.' The third bullet point quotes Mehrotra, stating a poem 'consists of images in juxtaposition without connecting links; the result is often an incongruous assemblage.' The fourth bullet point describes the writing process: 'Writing a line of verse, then passing over the paper to the next person.' The slide footer includes a logo for 'Swajati' and the number '15'.

Analysis of the Poem

- ❖ Published in the American Magazine *The Nation* (1972)
- ❖ Parthasarathy – His poems consists of 'games, riddles and accidents...and the poet creates as many accidents as he can.'
- ❖ According to Mehrotra, a poem 'consists of images in juxtaposition without connecting links; the result is often an incongruous assemblage.'
- ❖ Writing a line of verse, then passing over the paper to the next person.

If you analyze this poem, you will find that his poems comprise games as rightly said by Parthasarathy, 'riddles and accidents and the poet creates.' Because he himself has says that his poetry has so 'many accidents that he can' create. According to Mehrotra himself- a poem consists of images in juxtaposition.

So, you may not find the reality, there is a different sort of reality which is hidden, you know, as we have been saying the unconscious and the conscious being brought together to unlock the wisdom of the heart. Writing a line of verse, then passing over the paper to the next person as to the order of the things might different.

(Refer Slide Time: 22:28)

“Genealogy”

I

I recognize my father's wooden skin The sun in the west lights up his bald bones I see his face and then his broken pair of shoes His voice comes through, an empty sleeve. Birds merge with the blue like thin strokes. Each man is an unfinished fiction And I'm the last survivor of what was a family; They left in a caravan, none saw them Slip through the two hands.	The dial spreads on the roof Alarms put alarms to sleep Led by invisible mules I take a path across The mountains, my alchemies trailing behind Like leather-bound nightmares; There isn't a lost city in sight, the map I had Preserved drifts apart like the continents it showed.
--	--

16

There is another poem entitled “Genealogy” where also he talks about his family, there he talks about the race and all and there is once again another poem where he talks about his own India from the Aryans to the Europeans. We can have a look at it. Let us have a look at the poem “Genealogy” which is in three parts.


It is a longer poem, but then some of the lines can always be read; “I recognize my father’s wooden skin/ the sun in the west light ups his bald bones/ I see his face and then his broken pair of shoes./ His voice comes through, an empty sleeve/ Birds merge with blue like thin strokes/ each man is an unfinished fiction.” You see each man is an unfinished fiction and ‘I am the last survivor of what was our family.’

(Refer Slide Time: 23:21)

Contd...

II

My shadow falls on the sun and the sun	Fire breaks out in the nests
Cannot reach my shadow; near the central home	Trees laden with the remnants of squirrels
Of nomad and lean horse I pick up	Turn into scarecrows
A wheel, a migratory arrow, a numeral.	The seed sends down another merciless root;
The seed is still firm. Dreams	My alembic distills these fairytales
Pitch their tents along the rim.	Acids, riddles, the danger in flowers
I climb Sugar Mountain	I must never touch pollen or look
My mother is walking into the horizon	Into a watchmaker's shop at twilight.

 17

So, he talks about the family and as it proceeds----“ my shadow falls on the sun and the sun/ cannot reach my shadow near the central home/ of nomad and lean horse I pick up/ a wheel, a migratory arrow, a numeral./ The seed is still firms. Dreams/ pitch their tents along the rim./ I climb Sugar Mountain/ My mother is walking into the horizon./

So, in a way he is reminiscent of his own family members, but then as the poem proceeds, the poet says- “Fire breaks out in the nests/ trees laden in with the remnants of squirrels/

You can find you know some images and you can also go back and think of- are we really reading the *Waste Land*. But, it is not *The Waste Land*, my dear friend, it is Mehrotra’s land turned into scarecrows, “the seed sends down another merciless root/ my alembic distills these fairy tales/ acids, riddles, the danger in flowers/ I must never touch pollen or look/ into a watchmaker’s shop at twilight.”

(Refer Slide Time: 24:34)

Contd...

III

My journey has been this anchor	Only once did I twist the monotonous pendulum
The off-white cliff a sail	To enter the rituals at the bottom of twelve seas
Fowl and dragons play near the shores	Unghost like voices curdled my blood, the colour
My sea-wrecked ancestors left.	Of my scorpion changed from scarlet
I call out to the raven, & quot ;My harem, my black rose	To scarlet; I didn't mean to threaten you
The clock's slave, keeper of no man's land between us & quot;	Or disturb your peace I know nothing of
And the raven, a tear hung above his massive pupil,	But you - living in these fables, branches
Covers my long hair with petals.	And somehow icebergs - tell me, whose seed I carry.

18

And, and the last section which is very important where what he says towards the end becomes very important.

My journey has been this anchor,
the off white cliff a sail,
fowl and dragons play near the source,
my sea wrecked ancestors left.
I call out to the raven and quote my harem, my black rose.
The clock slave keeper of no man's land between us and quot;
and the raven a tear hung ever which massive pupil.


And, as it proceeds towards the end he will say--- to enter the rituals at the bottom of twelve seas/ unghost like voices curdled my blood the color/ of my scorpion changed from scarlet/ to scarlet; I did not mean to threaten you/ or disturb your peace I know nothing of.”

It appears as if the poet is trying to find his own identity and towards the end what he says, but “you living in these fables, branches/ and somehow icebergs tell me whose/ seed I carry.” So, the poet appears to be very metaphysical here, but then the poet interrogates and then there appears to be no logic. But, then towards the end what he says is a very valid question because he is a poet of the postmodern age and he says--- “tell me whose seed I carry.”

(Refer Slide Time: 26:05)

Analysis of the Poem

- ❖ Domesticity and family
- ❖ Racial and ancestral fantasy
- ❖ A parody narrative
- ❖ Fragmented allusions
- ❖ Accumulation of images



The slide features a central illustration of a tree with a thick brown trunk and green foliage. Several faces and figures are integrated into the branches, some appearing as if they are part of the tree's structure. The slide has a blue header and footer. The footer contains a logo on the left, the text 'Swajati' in the center, and the number '19' on the right.

Now, if we analyze this poem, we can find that even though the poet talks about the domesticity and the family; we have got a vestige of the racial and ancestral fantasy that the poet creates. And, then it has been a narrative, but it there is a sort of parody involved in it. So, he parodies and sometimes he reminds us as if his father was like a king or whatsoever. But then there are recourses to fragmented illusions.

There does not seem to be any sort of coherence as is true of the modern world fine. And, the entire poem is you know full of accumulation of images. Now, if we have a look at his world, we can really find. But, before we come to wind up this lecture, we can find that Mehrotra is such a poet, Mehrotra is such a poet who actually tries to bring illusions in it.

There is actually a sort of fragmentation as you might have witnessed, but then Mehrotra says that poetry cannot be linear, you know; poetry cannot it cannot be arranged in a manner that our people have been doing it. But, poetry is somehow different my dear friend.

(Refer Slide Time: 27:32)

We can also find in many of his poems, there are a parody of readymade literary phrases, the construction appears to be arbitrary fine. Because, Mehrotra believes that literature is artificial and it is not an imitation of reality, rather it is somehow or the other different.

In many poems, you know there have been many poems like “The Songs of the Ganga,” where what the poet says is; “I am the bridge/ I am the fort and the archer/ taking aim/ I am the great dissolver of men.” You know here once again the poet says that many of us simply believe, many of our aged values you know, but then we must also be ready to realize like the Ganga, through which the poet says, “I am the great dissolver of men, I give life and I also take it back.”

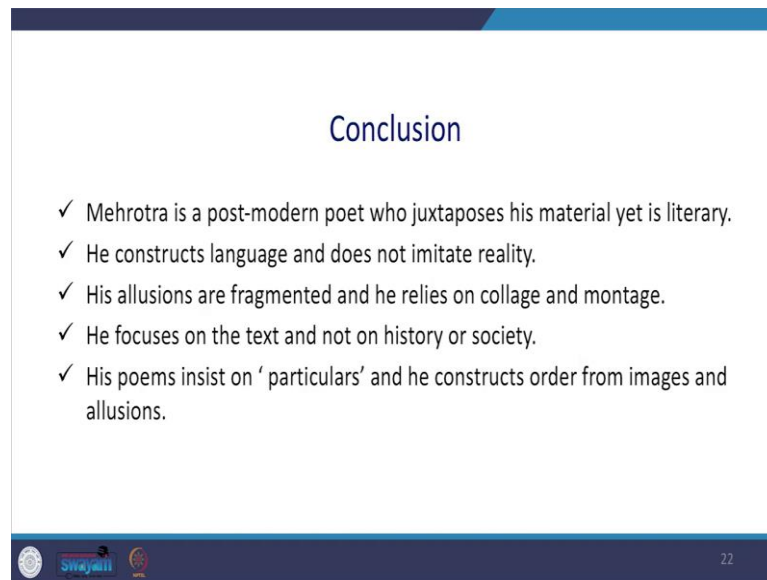
(Refer Slide Time: 28:42)

Features of Expymental Poetry

- Foregrounds technique
- Explores uncommon experiences
- Neglects the common world/environment
- Treats everything unconventionally

20

(Refer Slide Time: 28:49)



Conclusion

- ✓ Mehrotra is a post-modern poet who juxtaposes his material yet is literary.
- ✓ He constructs language and does not imitate reality.
- ✓ His allusions are fragmented and he relies on collage and montage.
- ✓ He focuses on the text and not on history or society.
- ✓ His poems insist on 'particulars' and he constructs order from images and allusions.

Swajati 22

My dear friends, we can also find that Mehrotra being a postmodern poet not only juxtaposes his material, but then it does not mean that Mehrotra's poetic volumes do not have that literary flavor. Mehrotra constructs language and he does not imitate reality. His allusions may appear to be very fragmented and he relies on collage and montage, because he was very much influenced by art and especially by the movement by Surrealistic movement.

He focuses on the text and not on the history or society. Mehrotra's poems because in many of his essays also, he mentions that he actually attaches too much importance to particulars. And, he constructs order from images and allusions, we can also find an example when we say while we have to sum up; "I am the bridge". Look at the language, I am the bridge he talks about the language. And, he does not believe that one language is important and the other is not, because he himself was familiar with so many languages and he had translated so many works.

Summing up

I am the bridge
I am the fort and the archer
Taking aim
I am the great dissolver of men

I give life and I take it back. ("Songs of the Ganga")

Thank You

21

“I am the fort and the archer/ taking aim /I am the great dissolver of men/ I give life and I take it back.” So, we can find Mehrotra’s world which is based on many things, but Mehrotra does not confine him only to the set notions rather he wanted poetry to be free, free from the closets. He wanted poetry to follow a sort of discourse, a sort of language and in one more poem. In another poem entitled “The Book of Common Places” he once again goes back to his childhood and there he makes a mention of his own India. And, he talks he talks about the Aryan India and to the European and he provides some very beautiful lines which we should not miss before we finally wind up this talk. “My childhood wanders off into the family tree and the tree gets lost in the north, I am told we followed the tracks left by none in particular, the horse was an animal and once in the plains we settled among rivers.

So, one can find Mehrotra’s world even though appearing to be very complex, but he was of the notion to create a sort of synergy between the conscious and the unconscious. So, that the wisdom of the heart can be unlocked. I hope you will enjoy reading Mehrotra’s poetic world.

And, we will lend your ears to understanding the beats, to understanding the lyrics and to understand the meaning even though it is devoid of the sort of musicality in terms of the meter, but it has got a musicality of thought. And, that is why Mehrotra is considered to be one of the most powerful voices of modern Indian English contemporary poetry.

Thank you very much.