

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

Lecture - 18
A. K. Ramanujan-I

Good morning and welcome back to NPTEL online certification course on Indian Poetry in English, dear listeners you have been listening to the lectures by Binod Mishra, and if you recollect well we have been talking about Indian poets who have been writing or composing their poems in English, and have made their mark in the field of even world literatures.

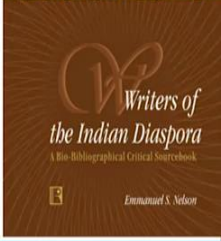

In the previous lecture, we have talked about several Indian English poets who have actually depicted various themes in their poetry and today we are going to start a new phase in the area of Indian poetry in English, and that phase is about those poets who have actually been living abroad. Some of them who have settled abroad rather, but India still lies within them, India is steeped in their heart of hearts and we call them diasporic poets. In this regard the very first poet that we are going to talk about in this lecture today is, A. K. Ramanujan or Attipatt Krishnaswami Ramanujan.

Now, one of the major celebrated Indian English poets that A. K. Ramanujan was, and still holds the attention of the world because of several reasons----- he is an Indian English poet and why he is so, you would like to know when you get to know the details of this poet and his poetic corpus. Now, who was A. K. Ramanujan? As I told you we are going to discuss the diasporic poetry by Indian English writers. Now of course, and quite naturally you might be eager to know what actually is diasporic poetry or what is Diaspora.

(Refer Slide Time: 02:42)

Diaspora

- In simple terms, diaspora may be defined as migration of people from one country to another.
- Migration is an important element of diaspora which may be either **Forced** or **Voluntary**.
- People may have diasporic experience of first generation or second generation or third generation.
- Indian Writing in English has produced many diasporic writers, like- Bharati Mukherjee V. S Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Anita Desai,, Jhumpa Lahiri,, Amitabh Ghosh, and Rohinson Mistry etc.
- Among diasporic poets we have A. K. Ramanujan, Agha Shahid Ali, Meena Alexander, Sujata Bhatt and Vikram Seth.



Writers of the Indian Diaspora
A Bio-Bibliographical Critical Sourcebook
Emmanuel S. Nelson

So, before we go into the details, let us try to understand that diaspora is actually a group of poets, writers---- whosoever who actually straddle between two cultures; I mean one culture may be their own culture, their own identity and the other is when they live abroad they are actually carrying the cultures of their motherland. In this regard, if we can define diaspora we can say it is actually a migration of people from one country to another.

It actually started with Israel's, fine, the Israelites who actually have been living in some other parts. But later on in literature, people from different countries who actually changed their homelands either for a livelihood or for some other professional requirements or whatsoever and sometimes or the other they settle abroad as well they are considered to be diasporic people.

Now migration has become a reality, you know, in a globalised world of today I think you often might have heard people saying that world has become a global village. And in a global village, people from different countries, people from different faiths, different religions, different tastes, they will gather at a particular country, I mean different countries rather, but then they are not able to forget, they are not able to say a good bye to their first home or to their first culture.

People may have diasporic experience, either of first generation or of second generation and of course, of third generation as well, Indian English writing has witnessed several

diasporic writers, especially in the field of novel writing and you might have also come across the novels of several Indian novelists who have also been awarded prizes and you know the several names that can come to your mind are Bharati Mukherjee then V. S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Anita Desai, Jhumpa Lahiri then Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Rohinton Mistry and many more, but all these people are novelists.

But then this trend is not only confined to novel writing, rather it has also affected many poets. Many Indian English poets and we shall be discussing some Indian English poets who have actually been living abroad or have settled abroad, but then they have not been able to forego their Indian experiences as well as their memories which actually have been haunting them from time to time.

So, when we talk about diasporic literature, we also should know the several characteristic features as I have been telling you. Majority of these people whether a writer or a poet---- their focus is on homeland. So, when the moment we talk about home, naturally several experiences gather in our minds, we at times feel dislocated, uprooted, we actually suffer from a sense of our belonging, we feel displaced, our identity is always at stake.

(Refer Slide Time: 06:09)



Characteristic Features of Diasporic Literature

- Focus on homeland, dislocation and displacement
- Social pain of disintegration and Nostalgia
- Mobility between multiple places
- Amalgamation of cultures and identities

Swajati 3

So, there often is a sort of disintegration, and the feeling of nostalgia that is your homeland always tries to keep you back, there is always a backward pull. And this backward pull is towards your homeland, towards your family, people, towards your

relatives, towards your kinsmen through several rites, rituals, celebrations, festivals and all.

So, this mobility between multiple places actually create a sense of diaspora, but when you are living in a diasporic country or diasporic culture, you come across multiple identities, you do not remain one person rather you become many persons. Now when such a scenario is there, what actually should a diasporic writer do or what a diasporic poet do or what a diasporic poet does. In this regard the name that we have been talking about and the very first name is Attipat Krishnaswami Ramanujan.

(Refer Slide Time: 07:17)

Contd.

- Shifting identity
- Quest of identity
- Cultural hybridism
- Dislocated individual

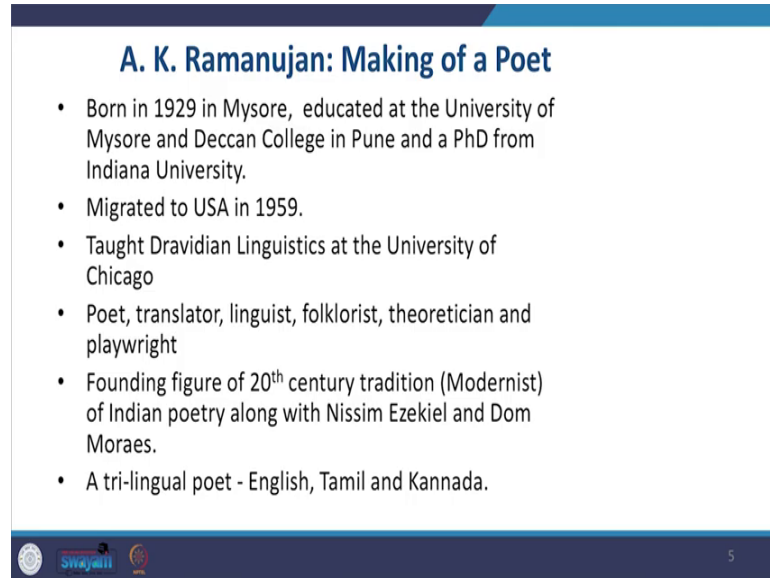
“the only way I could make sense of my confused world was to write.”
- Hanif Kureishi (Pakistani diasporic writer)

Now, this poet also had to shift his identity, I mean there was a sort of movement from India to abroad and then, when you go to stay at a different place in a different country, you actually keep struggling. There is always a yearning, there is always a search for our own identity and you come across a cultural hybridism, and as a dislocated individual as Pakistani diasporic writer says, ‘the only way I could make sense of my confused world was to write.’

So, when you are sandwiched between two cultures what you do, you actually want to express and in order to express what do you do, you write and you take a medium because through that you actually try to recover the lost identities, the identity of struggling and straddling between two cultures. Now, let us also try to see how can this diasporic experience can make somebody a great poet, as I told you in the beginning that

A. K. Ramanujan was one of the most celebrated Indian English poets why did he become so and what were the conditions.

(Refer Slide Time: 08:37)



A. K. Ramanujan: Making of a Poet

- Born in 1929 in Mysore, educated at the University of Mysore and Deccan College in Pune and a PhD from Indiana University.
- Migrated to USA in 1959.
- Taught Dravidian Linguistics at the University of Chicago
- Poet, translator, linguist, folklorist, theoretician and playwright
- Founding figure of 20th century tradition (Modernist) of Indian poetry along with Nissim Ezekiel and Dom Moraes.
- A tri-lingual poet - English, Tamil and Kannada.

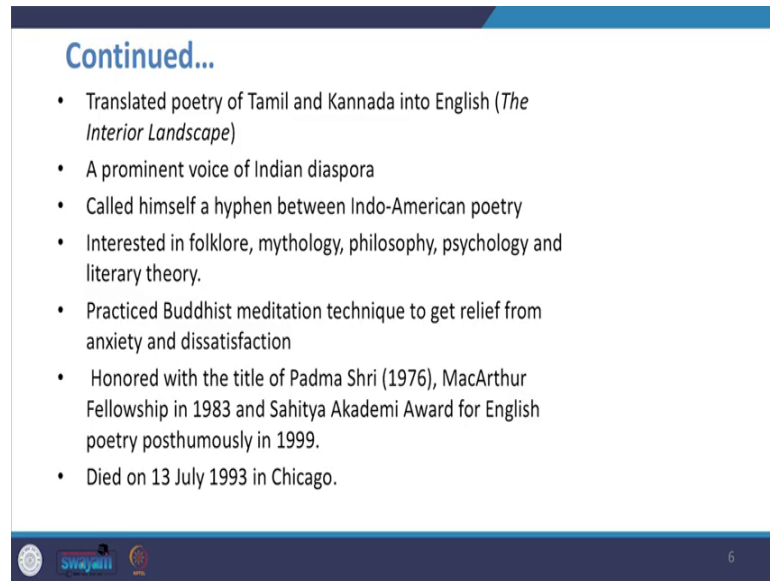
swajati 5

He was actually born in Mysore in 1929 in a Tamil Brahmin family, he got his early education in India especially in Mysore and then Deccan College, Pune, but for his PhD he went to Indiana University and in 1959, yes in 1959 he not only went there rather he also settled there, but having settled there, he could not settle there. He, at times, felt unsettled, because Indian experiences, Indian memories always kept haunting him.

He was actually a professor of Dravidian Linguistics at the University of Chicago, but then A. K. Ramanujan was not only a poet, he was also a translator, a linguist, a folklorist, a theoretician and also a playwright. It is to his credit that not only did he write in Tamil, but he also wrote in a Kannada fine. And he was actually a trilingual poet and a tri-cultural poet also you can consider him to be.

So, he is considered to be one of the founding fathers or the founding figures of Indian poetry especially modern, along with Nissim Ezekiel, Dom Moraes and many more. Now when we note A. K. Ramanujan as a diasporic poet we also should understand that he was not confined only to writing poetry rather he also translated many of the Tamil poets.

(Refer Slide Time: 10:14)



Continued...

- Translated poetry of Tamil and Kannada into English (*The Interior Landscape*)
- A prominent voice of Indian diaspora
- Called himself a hyphen between Indo-American poetry
- Interested in folklore, mythology, philosophy, psychology and literary theory.
- Practiced Buddhist meditation technique to get relief from anxiety and dissatisfaction
- Honored with the title of Padma Shri (1976), MacArthur Fellowship in 1983 and Sahitya Akademi Award for English poetry posthumously in 1999.
- Died on 13 July 1993 in Chicago.

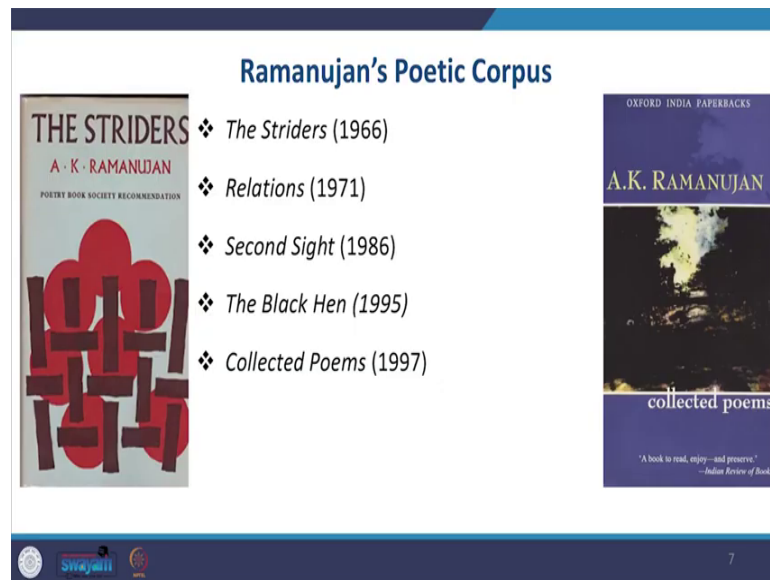
swajati 6

And also into Kannada fine, and he called himself in several interviews he has called himself a hyphen between Indo - American poetry. He was living in Chicago and his Indian experience, Indian memory, you know Indian associations, which always haunted him actually prompted him to write and much of his writing actually is centred fine, centred around India.

Ramanujan also practised a Buddhist meditation, technique to get relief from anxiety and dissatisfaction, because a poet is always the imprint of the surrounding that he lives in and Ramanujan was not an exception my dear friend. It is said as I have read in one of the articles by A. K. Mehrotra who says that, “Ramanujam in his earlier life wanted to become a magician and for that he had got himself tailored a dress which could suit a magician.”

But my dear friends, though he could not become a magician in true self, he became a magician of words and he started shifting words from one corner to another and at the center of it was India and India also, because of his own achievements he was also awarded Padma Shri in 1976. Later on, he got MacArthur Fellowship in 1983, he was also awarded Sahitya Akademi Award for English poetry, but that came too late I mean after his death he got this award posthumously in 1999 and one thing that is actually quite unfortunate that this Indian son of the soil breathed his last in Chicago in 1993.

(Refer Slide Time: 12:23)



Now, actually when we talk about Ramanujan we should also talk about his poetic corpus. Ramanujan wrote 5 or 6 poetry collections, but you will find that his poetry collections actually have certain gaps. He was not writing continuously only in English, rather he was also practising his hand at translations.

Many people consider him to only to be a translator as Nagarajan considers him to be a translator alone, but you know it was actually because of his experience of translating alone that he could come to know of several mythological stories and you know the rich remnants of our Indian mythology which has actually crept in his work one after another.

So, the very first work that Ramanujan started was, *The Striders* which came out in 1966. We will see that when he wrote *Striders*, *Striders* actually is full of or it can be considered to be a sort of hinterland of memory, where you can come across many of his past experiences, many of Indian superstitious beliefs which Ramanujan in a very scientific manner at times mocks at, digs at, but then he is not able to unlearn it because that was in his blood.

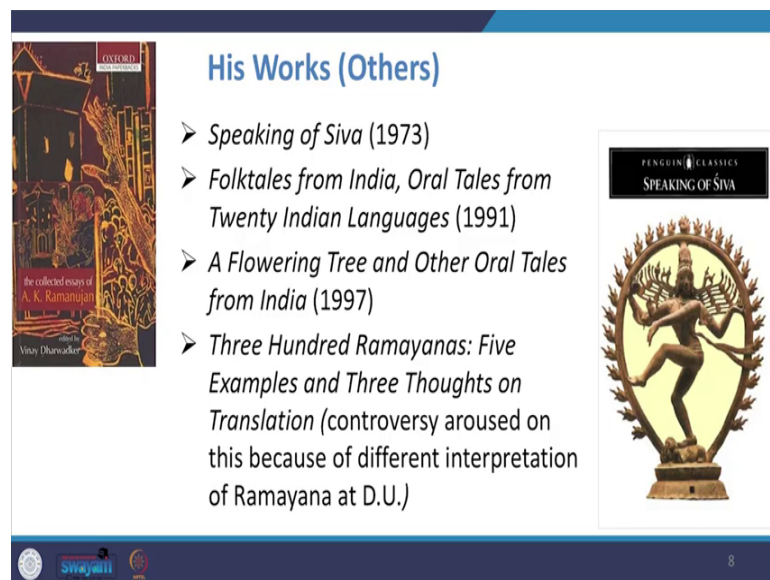
And then in 1971 came *Relations* after that there was *Second Sight*, which came in 1986. Actually, *Relations* are devoted to many of the Hindu poems because he was out and out a Hindu and at times he criticized some of the lapses of this Hindu culture or Hindu religion, but then he always felt himself proud to be considered a Hindu.

Then came *Second Sight*. *Second Sight* also tells us or makes us familiar with his knowledge of ancient Indian texts especially Hindu myths and legends fine, where we can find quite a good number of poems which are soaked in Indian sensibility.

It is said that half of the poems that Ramanujan wrote, were based on Hindu mythological stories. Then came *The Black Hen* in 1995, and then after that I mean because he left us in 1993 even after that we find that one of these collections, *The Black Hen* came posthumously and again *Collected Poems* also came in 1997.

Some of the poems of his own were read at his funeral, and Ramanujan was very, you know, famous teacher and he always devoted his time along with his students and he always tried to give his best to his students. You can always find that Ramanujan initially at one point of time was asked to teach Tamil, and what he did? He did not know much of Tamil, but he tried to find out some books on Tamil and then consulted some books of grammar on Tamil and then as you know well that he actually was a professor of Dravidian linguistics.

(Refer Slide Time: 15:50)

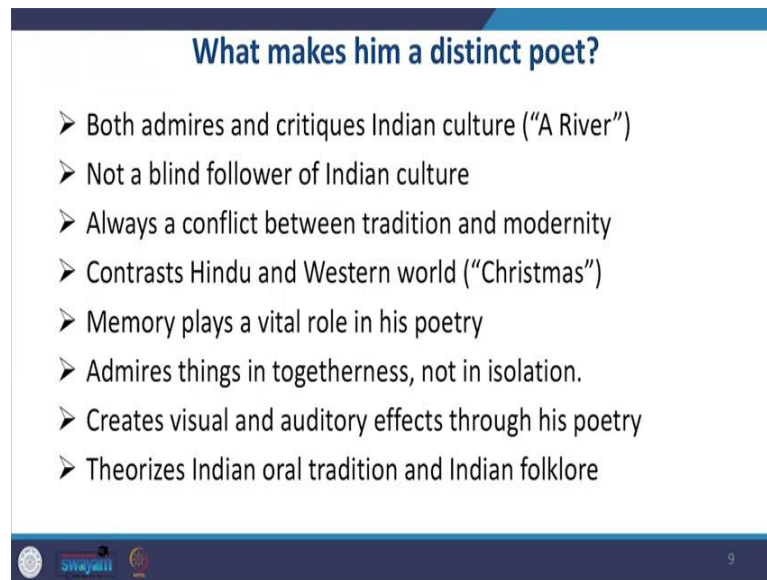


His Works (Others)

- *Speaking of Siva* (1973)
- *Folktales from India, Oral Tales from Twenty Indian Languages* (1991)
- *A Flowering Tree and Other Oral Tales from India* (1997)
- *Three Hundred Ramayanas: Five Examples and Three Thoughts on Translation* (controversy aroused on this because of different interpretation of Ramayana at D.U.)

Now, as I have been saying that Ramanujan was not confined only to writing in English, his other works namely of essays which came out in 1973 that was *Speaking of Siva*, then came *Folktales from India*, then *Flowering Tree and Other Oral Tales from India*, *Three Hundred Ramayanas* at a time, you know. It also had become very controversial thing because of certain interpretations of the *Ramayana*.

(Refer Slide Time: 16:19)



What makes him a distinct poet?

- Both admires and critiques Indian culture (“A River”)
- Not a blind follower of Indian culture
- Always a conflict between tradition and modernity
- Contrasts Hindu and Western world (“Christmas”)
- Memory plays a vital role in his poetry
- Admires things in togetherness, not in isolation.
- Creates visual and auditory effects through his poetry
- Theorizes Indian oral tradition and Indian folklore

Now, you would also like to know what makes A.K. Ramanujan a distinct poet. As I have been saying that since India had actually been ingrained in his veins, in his blood, he at times used to criticise, but then he was a great admirer of Indian culture, you can find that his poems are on different subjects; he is not confined only to one subject, but through his own delineation of them.

He actually tries at times to mock, at times to shock and at times also to give you some pleasure which you could have never thought of. He actually was not a blind follower of Indian culture, even though he was ingrained in Indian culture, but he was not a blind follower and that is why he has criticized some of the lapses and the taboos of Indian culture. You can also find a sort of conflict between tradition and modernity in his poems.

I mean, as many of the critics have also said that majority of his poems are related to family association, kinsmen, parents, mothers, sisters, but then he has also talked about insects, snakes, animals, and of trees around himself. So, many people also consider him to be a sort of a poet who has his concern for nature as well, but then one thing that is quite noticeable in him is, that he did not isolate himself and never did he consider himself to be an American even though he was living in America.

But then he did not want to live in isolation, even though he had these bouts of isolation, he admired togetherness and then created some visual impacts or visual impressions

through his poetry. He theorizes Indian oral tradition and Indian folk tradition as well. It would be better if we can take up some of the poems in order to understand what sort of poet was A. K. Ramanujan. A. K. Ramanujan actually, if we have a look at his poetic creation, I mean, he was a poet who believed that poetry resides or poetry exists even in common things that actually we leave unnoticed.

Now, here is an example of one of the poems which is from one of his first collections named *The Striders* which came out in 1966. The poem is entitled which reminds me and you know if we have a look at the lines of the poem you will understand what sort of poet Ramanujan was, not only there is a flow, he may not be a metrical one, but then the musicality he creates through the spontaneity that is there in Ramanujan's work that actually makes us all spellbound.

(Refer Slide Time: 19:21)

Mystery of Ramanujan's Poetic Creation

I have known
that measly-looking man,
not very likeable, going to the bank
after the dentist,
catching a cold
at the turn of the street
sitting at the window of the local bus,
suddenly make
(between three crossings and the old
woman at the red light)
a poem.
Which reminds me
of the thrown-away seed
of the folktale tree
filling with child the mangy palace dog
under the window,
leaving the whole royal harem
barren. ("Which Reminds Me," *The Striders*, p. 23)

10

So, here is the poem let me read some of the lines so that you can have a thorough justification of Ramanujan as a poet.

I have known
that measly - looking man,
not very likeable, going to the bank
after the dentist,
catching a cold
at the turn of street
sitting at the window of the local bus,
suddenly make

a poem,
which reminds me
of the thrown-away seed.

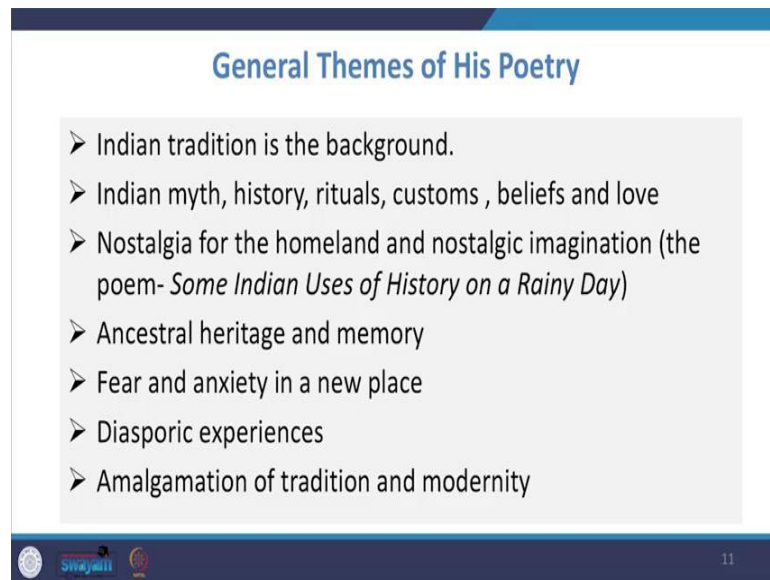
Now, through this because Ramanujan was ironic also, and there are ironic images now
here you can find,

which reminds me
of the thrown - away seed
of the folktale tree
filling with child the mangy palace dog
under the window,
living the whole royal harem
barren.

Now, see here is a person, here is a poet who has his eye for the common minutest
details ----every day experiences which are soaked in his poetry, but then there is one
word that in a way actually takes you back to his own frustration, or to his own
disillusionment where he says----- which reminds me of the *thrown away seed* of the folk
tale tree.

So, there is actually a meaning on it, there is a metaphor on it, a thrown away seed
because while being in Chicago he himself, at times, felt isolated, how he was distant,
but then how he was still related to his own roots. Now, if we can consider the general
themes of his poetry, we have been saying that there is a conflict between tradition and
modernity.

(Refer Slide Time: 21:03)



The slide is titled "General Themes of His Poetry" in blue text at the top. Below the title is a light gray box containing a bulleted list of seven themes. At the bottom of the slide, there are logos for "SWJRI" and "11".

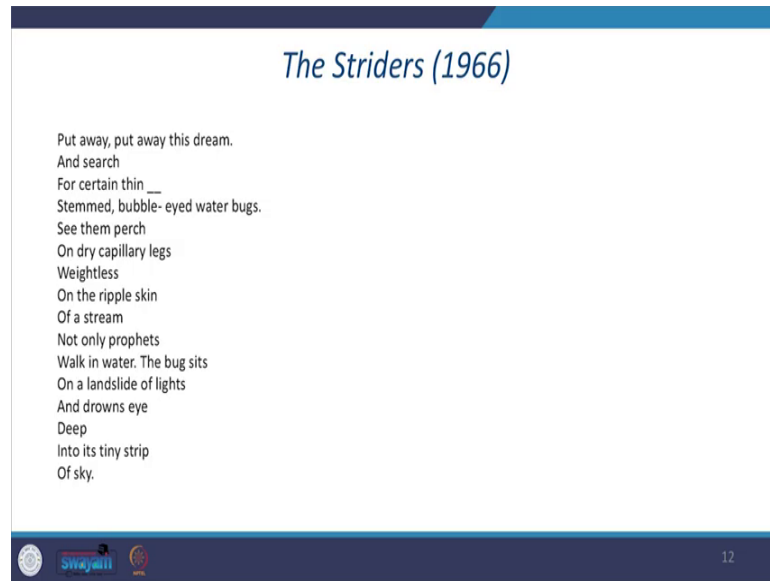
- Indian tradition is the background.
- Indian myth, history, rituals, customs, beliefs and love
- Nostalgia for the homeland and nostalgic imagination (the poem- *Some Indian Uses of History on a Rainy Day*)
- Ancestral heritage and memory
- Fear and anxiety in a new place
- Diasporic experiences
- Amalgamation of tradition and modernity

Indian myths, history, customs and beliefs, and superstitions---- they actually can be found in abundance, fine. There is ancestral heritage and memory, but there is also fear and anxiety in a new place, in some of the poems you can come across, but then all these are full of diasporic experiences.

Actually, Ramanujan tries to amalgamate, Ramanujan tries to annex the tradition and the modernity, he is not completely soaked in it, he is not simply for it, he actually wants to move, he actually wants to transcend, but then at the back of it, there is a memory which is there. Because in one of his earlier poems he says---- ‘When we pluck a fruit, does the fruit forget the inverted tree.’ I mean, while he says all this he is actually thinking of his own ancestral, you know family, his own ancestral memory can he really be totally terminated, can he keep himself away from what he is.

Now, the title poem of his very first collection namely *The Striders* where he actually makes strider a metaphor now. This strider is an insect, but then what he tries to say--- what the poet actually tries to say through this is--- he actually is struggling for his own identity and then he says that he just like a strider, but then he is on a search and some of the lines are quite identical to his own condition.

(Refer Slide Time: 22:47)



Put away, put away this dream.

So, whenever anyone goes to the foreign country to earn a livelihood or for a profession, naturally he feels himself segregated and then he says he goes there for a dream. So,

Put away, put away this dream.

And search

for certain thin

stemmed, bubble-eyed water bugs,

These water bugs which appear to be so indifferent, so insignificant.

See them perch

on dry capillary legs

weightless,

Again take this word *weightless*, in one word he actually talks about everything that he really wanted to--- weightless, no weight, no significance.

on the ripple skin

of a stream

Not only prophets

walk in water.

It is not only that good people only can make name, it is not only that only the prophets can walk in water, even this insect, this strider.

The bug sits
on a landslide of lights
and drowns eye
deep
into its tiny strip
of sky.

So, here is actually a sort of self-appraisal. Here is actually a sort of self-comparison, here is actually a sort of self-exploration through the strider that the poet is actually trying to find out. He is actually looking and finding for --- there is a sort of search there is a sort of you know identical search, which he actually wants to have it, but then the poet himself at times feels to be very invalid.

At times it may appear, that through the foliage he actually wants to return to his root, but then he always wants to say that even when something is so insignificant that does not mean that should be the end of the world, that is what actually the poet tries to say there are many more poems in these striders we can take some of them in order to evaluate this poet A. K. Ramanujan.

(Refer Slide Time: 24:43)

The slide is titled "Some Memorable lines from *The Striders*". It contains two poems by A.K. Ramanujan. The first poem, "A Poem of Particulars", is presented in a blue rounded rectangle. The second poem, "Self Portrait", is in a blue rectangle. At the bottom of the slide, there are logos for Swajathi and a page number 13.

A Poem of Particulars

But
every one of these
had an absurd, almost human
umbilicus
at the top
where once the Tree
had poured its
future
from forgotten roots
and possessed it close
to feed
this Fall-minded
pot-bellied
bud
till it rounded
for our baskets. (*The Striders*, p.52)

Self Portrait

I resemble every one
but myself, and sometimes see
in shop-windows,
despite the well-known laws
of optics
the portrait of a stranger,
date unknown
often signed in a corner by my father.
(*The Striders*, p. 21)

Here is “A Poem of Particulars”, now you see, this poet A. K. Ramanujan, as I have been saying, that he always tried to find the substance of his poetry in his own surrounding. Here is a poem which he calls a poem of particulars, but here the poet is actually looking at a basket of oranges and he compares human beings to the basket of oranges to these oranges while what he says is,

But
every one of these
had an absurd, almost human
umbilicus
at the top
where once the Tree
had poured its
future.

So, when he talks of tree he actually talks of his own roots----

had poured its
future
from forgotten roots

and possessed it close
to feed
this Fall - minded
pot-bellied
bud

Now look at the comparisons---

the pot-bellied bud
till it rounded
for our baskets
till it rounded for our baskets.

So, what you see in baskets, have you ever thought of where from this came, from where did this come, could you really find out, you perhaps were not able to find out. Then, the other poem that is on the right side you can find it is also about self-portrait where the poet once again tries to have a look at his own self and the poem is titled *Self-Portrait*.

I resemble everyone,

but myself,

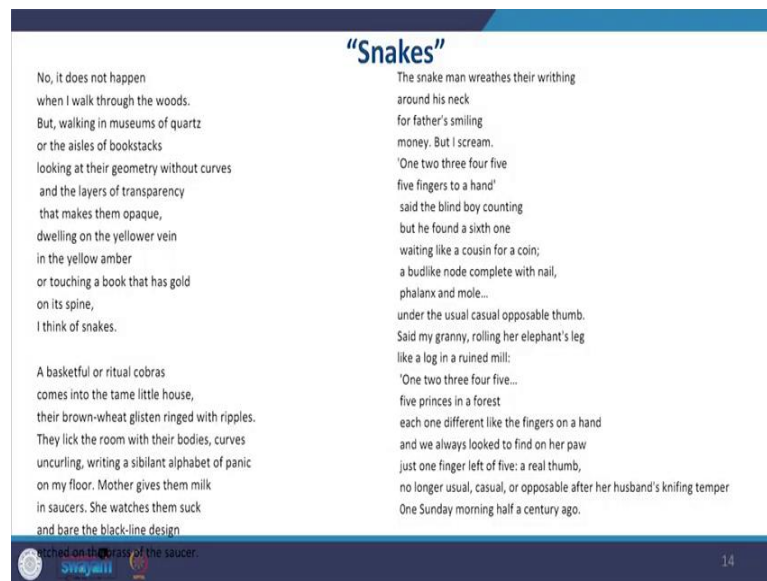
Now see the contraries-- on the one hand he is searching for his own identity, on the other hand, he is trying to efface himself there is a sort of self-effacement and in his self-effacement he says--- I resemble everyone, but myself. So, the poet is once again saying that even though I look like everyone, but then I am not.

and sometimes see
in shop windows,
despite the well-known laws
of optics
the portrait of a stranger,
date unknown
often signed in a corner by my father.

Now, here there is actually a connection. When he looks at the walls and he finds as if he is also one of those portraits which have only been signed in a corner by my father. So, throughout you can find that majority of the poems of the first collection that is *Striders* actually remind the poet or they are the reminiscences of his past, they are the reminiscences of an Indian life that he has lived.

There is another poem named “Snakes”, where you know when we talk about snake we may think of it an insect or animal, but then here also the poet actually shows how the Indians revere snake even though it can create a sort of fear and anxiety among children. But then the poet actually describes it that even though he is frightened, but think of his mother who actually used to provide the snakes with jarfuls of milk. We can read these poems. I have already provided these poems--- you can read it at your leisure, but I will simply take out some of the lines in order to make my point clear.

(Refer Slide Time: 28:07)



Mother gives them milk
in saucers. She watches them suck,
mother gives them milk
in saucers. She watches them suck
and bare the black line design
etched on the brass of the saucer.

And in the same poem, the poet not only talks about the snakes as being fearful, but this snake actually provides a livelihood to the snake- man. And

the snake man wreathes their writhing
around his neck
for father's smiling
money. But I scream.

Now the snake man for his own livelihood actually writhes it around his neck and the family members smile, but the poet is frightened, the poet is frightened, and then as the poem moves forward you know even if you go back, you can find---

I think of snakes.

A basketful of ritual cobras

comes into the little house,

their brown -wheat glisten ringed with ripples.

They lick the room with their bodies, curves.

So, snakes are a common feature in Indian houses and the poet actually annexes it to Indians way of worshipping it, but at the same time for somebody it may be a worship whereas, for other it may be may be a sort of profession whereas, for the children they are mostly frightened.

Thus, if you have an analysis of these poems and especially the poem entitled “Snakes” you will find, that it not only talks about the fear of the poet, rather it is actually a sort of obsession for the poets. And, dear friends, there has been a long association of snakes in Indian mythological stories. You might have come across several of them in our ancient sacred texts named *the Mahabharata*.

(Refer Slide Time: 30:20)

Analysis of the poem

- Indigenous tradition
- Obsession
- Critical of modern outlook
- Blessing for the poor
- Cultural Consciousness

“The poem presents an image, a complex of feelings, distilled memories and events which are not elaborated or commented upon. But as it begins in the present ‘now’ of museums of book stacks which contrast with rural India and family life, the poem celebrates the liberation from the fears of the past, ‘ghosts’ from which Ramanujan now feels safe.” - Bruce King

• “ Indian tradition is not a single street or one way street but consists of many connected streets and neighbourhoods... India doesn’t have one past but many pasts.” (“ Classics Lost and Found”.)

15

So, we find rather that it is actually a sort of indigenous tradition, and what the poet could see in his childhood that continues to play at the back of his mind and that is why when he uses words, if we have once again a look at the poem

and the layers of transparency
that makes them opaque,
dwelling on the yellower vein
in the yellow amber
or touching a book that has gold
on its spine
I think of snakes.

So, even when he goes to the libraries in the USA and in and between the stacks and the aisles, whenever he sees something he can actually think of or he is frightened of a snake. So, through this poem, the poet not only actually talks about the childhood memories, but he also talks about the association of snakes with Indian sacred rituals and all, and we also can say that even though the poet is in USA and he has got a modern outlook.

So, in a way he is also trying to find out, to create a sort of ironical situation that how despite the fact that we have moved ahead, we are still not able to leave our past behind. It is actually playing on the back of our mind. This snake which actually creates a sort of fear in the minds of the children and which actually creates a sort of reverence in the heart and the psyche of the old people, actually is also a source of livelihood for the poor snake- man, we have already seen in some of the lines that for the snake man, snake man actually gets money for this.

So, while the poet also tries to show the sort of poverty that is there. So, it cannot only be associated with a sort of religious preference rather it can also have an association with a sort of poverty that is prevalent, and that is why the snake- man out of the fun even that can be a fun to many, that can actually be a sort of satisfying the belly for the poor people, and it is a blessing for the poor and we can also say that even though Ramanujan is rooted, Ramanujan is rooted in Indian culture and tradition, but yet he is not like other diasporic people.

Say for example, if we talk about V. S. Naipaul, who though he did not live or spend much time in India yet he was thinking of India, he was writing about India and writing in a very different manner. But then Ramanujan does not do that, Ramanujan actually talks about all the good things, but then that does not mean he is not critical at times.

We can also say that Ramanujan is a poet of cultural consciousness, and on many occasions you can find that he has in several of his poems mentioned because he seems to transcend, you know transcend from what he had seen in India he wanted to move forward.

So, there is a sort of transcendence in his poems and what he has mentioned in his poems can give us two pictures----- one that India is a culturally context country, it is a context bound country where there is a context sensitivity whereas, in USA there is a sort of a context free country, and that is why in one of his famous essays entitled *Classics Lost and Found* what he says is actually an eye opener.

He says -----“Indian tradition is not a single street, Indian tradition is not a single street or one-way street, but consists of many connected streets and neighbourhoods. India does not have one past, but many pasts.” My dear friend, it is actually right to quote one very famous critique and a writer of modern Indian English poems, Bruce King who did an extensive research on Indian English poets, what he writes about this poem is,

“the poem presents an image, a complex of feelings distilled memories and events which are not elaborated or commented upon, but as it begins in the present, now, of museums, of books stacks which contrast with rural India.”

So, when the poet is thinking of the snakes, because the snake has become an obsession. So, Bruce King says that even he what he does is contrast with rural India and family life. The poem celebrates the liberation from the fears of the past ghosts which Ramanujan now feels safe. So, being in USA he actually feels safe, but at the same time one cannot deny the fact, and majority of us are familiar with how snakes are being worshipped in India.

No one might be unfamiliar with the name of Astika, Astika who was the son of Jarat Karu and serpent goddess Manasa. And it is said that Astika was the saviour of King Takshak and the same snake King Takshak had actually bitten Parikshit, Janmejaya's

father and that is why in order to take a revenge because you know the king died because of the bite of the snake Takshak and hence in order to take a revenge a yagna was conducted and this yagna is called *Sarpasatra*.

You can find more and more details if you have a look at our ancient Indian texts. My dear friends, we have come to know that Ramanujan even though he went to USA and he continued there for so many years, but then he has not been able to forget his own tradition and in one of the poems what he writes is actually an eye- opener and when he writes that how still being in the U.S he follows the Indian tradition.

(Refer Slide Time: 37:28)

The slide features a blue header with the title "Continuing the Tradition" in white. Below the title, a list of lines from a poem is displayed in black text. At the bottom of the slide, the words "Thank You" are written in a large, bold, blue font. The footer contains a small logo on the left and the number "16" on the right.

Continuing the Tradition

Yet like grandfather
I bathe before the village crow
The dry chlorine water
My only Ganges
The naked Chicago bulb
a cousin of the Vedic sun
Slap soap on my back
Like father
And think
In proverbs. (*Collected Poems*)

Thank You

16

And let us take the lines of this poem from collected poems where he says,

yet like grandfather

I bathe before the village crow.

The dry chlorine water

My only Ganges

The naked Chicago bulb

a cousin of the Vedic sun

Slap soap on my back

Like father

And think

in proverbs.

So, he has not been able to obliterate his Indian sensibility, and that is why he says that---
- 'I bathe before the village crow,' I mean, there has been a tradition in India there was rather a tradition to get up quite early in the morning and get a bath, a holy bath. This was actually very famous with most of the Hindus and 'the dry chlorine water-- my only Ganges, /. Here, being in USA whenever I take my bath I simply visualise that even this dry chlorine water is my Ganges. 'The naked Chicago bulb/ a cousin of the Vedic sun'. When he looks at the bulb, he actually visualises the Vedic sun, 'slap soap on my back/ like my father/ and think in proverbs.'

My dear friends, if we go on reading the lines of A. K. Ramanujan, there cannot be an end. A.K. Ramanujan is such a vast poet and his poetry has got such an aesthetic value that one lecture cannot suffice, but then time always waits for us and the time now indicates me that I should wind up my lecture.

And I should continue the lecture once again in the next part of the same lecture, where I can delve deep, and I can also take you with me to see the gems that A. K. Ramanujan's poems possess. But at the precinct juncture let me wind up and let me say that as Ramanujan continued his journey and as he was in the USA even though memory always kept flickering on the back of his mind, yet he also tried to involve himself to the best of his knowledge and to the best of his ability in the culture of America, or in Chicago where he continued for a long time. So, before we come to the next lecture till then good bye have a nice day!

Thank you. Thank you very much.