

Indian Poetry in English
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Lecture - 19
A K Ramanujan-II

Good morning friends, and welcome back to NPTEL online certification course on Indian Poetry in English. Presently, we are actually dealing with Indian English diasporic poets and if you remember well we are discussing A K Ramanujan--- one of the most celebrated, widely known, widely anthologized poet of all times. Not only an Indian poet, but an Indian English diasporic poet who created his niche in the front galleries of Indian English poets.

In the previous lecture, as I had promised you that only one lecture cannot suffice or cannot do justice to the poetic credibility or the poetic credo of A K Ramanujan. And that is why in the second part we shall be discussing if we can connect well the previous lecture had ended on the note of a poem entitled “Snakes.”

And you might be quite familiar that snakes like insects, many animals, birds; natural objects like, rivers, and many other things which A K Ramanujan had formed association with during his childhood actually become a subject of his poetic canvas.

And in this lecture, we shall be discussing how when he writes poems even on Nature or natural aspects, he does not have only Nature in his mind rather he talks of some other things as well, my dear friend. So, the poem that we are going to start with in this second lecture is “ A River”.

(Refer Slide Time: 02:33)

“A River”

In Madurai, city of temples and poets, who sang of cities and temples, every summer a river dries to a trickle in the sand, baring the sand ribs, straw and women's hair clogging the water gates at the rusty bars under the bridges with patches of repair all over them the wet stones glistening like sleepy crocodiles, the dry ones shaven water-buffaloes lounging in the sun The poets only sang of the floods.	He was there for a day when they had the floods. People everywhere talked of the inches rising, of the precise number of cobbled steps run over by the water, rising on the bathing places, and the way it carried off three village houses, one pregnant woman and a couple of cows named Gopi and Brinda as usual.
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17

In one poem after another, you can find A K Ramanujan talking of several things through his poem. Again, we can take another poem “River”. No? “A River”, once again he actually tries to look at the contraries of the river; I mean poets after poets have gone to adore river and its flow, its movements and what not. But the poet also looks at, I mean, the poet in Ramanujan looks at the other side of it, even though you can worship.

I mean the poet says: In Madurai, the poem is titled a river I will simply take up some of the lines.

In Madurai city of temples and poets
who sang of cities and temples
every summer.

The poet actually waited to see the river in flood and you know the poets were actually full of admiration for the river.

A river dries to a trickle
in the sand,
bearing the sand ribs,
straw and women's hair
clogging the water gates
at the rusty bars
under the bridges with patches
of repair all over them.

When there is a flood there are all sorts of squalor, there are all sorts of things in the river and the poets actually get a sort of inspiration, you know, the poets only sang of the floods.

But now, the poet A K Ramanujan what he says is actually very significant and very meaningful. What he says is?

He was there for a day
when they had the floods.
People everywhere talked
of the inches rising

the precise number of cobbled steps
run over by the water rising
on the bathing places.

But, can you really think of what harm did the river do and then,

and the way it carried off three village houses

--- the sort of destruction.

We have talked of a river as a sort of benediction for many people and the poets have been singing of its glory only. But my dear friends, have they ever thought of the damage that the river has done?

carried off three villages
and pregnant women
and a couple of cows
named Gopi and Brinda as usual.

So, there is actually a dig, there is actually a satiric remark--- a sort of ironic

(Refer Slide Time: 04:59)

Continued...

The new poets still quoted
the old poets, but no one
spoke
in verse
of the pregnant woman
drowned, with perhaps twins
in her,
kicking at blank walls
even before birth.

He said:
*the river has water enough
to be poetic
about only once a year
and then*

it carries away
in the first half-hour
three village houses,
a couple of cows
named Gopi and Brinda
and one pregnant woman
expecting identical twins
with no moles on their bodies,
with different coloured diapers
to tell them apart.



The new poets still quoted
the old poets, but no one
spoke
in verse
of the pregnant woman
drowned, with perhaps twins
in her,
kicking at blank walls
even before birth.

Could you ever see- these poets were simply talking of admiration of the river? Could they really think of the damage that was done to a new generation which a woman was having----- the pregnant woman who was having twins in her own womb and that could not come to life?

(Refer Slide Time: 05:26)

“Obituary” (On his father’s death)

Father, when he passed on, left dust on a table of papers, left debts and daughters, a bedwetting grandson named by the toss of a coin after him, a house that leaned slowly through our growing years on a bent coconut tree in the yard. Being the burning type, he burned properly at the cremation	as before, easily and at both ends, left his eye coins in the ashes that didn't look one bit different, several spinal discs, rough, some burned to coal, for sons to pick gingerly and throw as the priest said, facing east where three rivers met near the railway station; no longstanding headstone with his full name and two dates
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19

It carries away in the first half hour, it is hardly half an hour that everything can be destroyed, no? Gopi and Brinda and one pregnant woman expecting identical twins with no moles on their bodies with different colored diapers.

So, the poet here actually becomes very realistic. He does not have much, you know, scope for the imagination as many poets have for the rivers. Rather he becomes very realistic, very scientific and says that could we really also think of the malign aspects of the river that actually took away the lives of a new generation that was there in safe or informative stage.

Now, poet after poet and critics after critics have gone to the extent of saying that Ramanujan was a poet who actually associated himself only with family memories, past, rituals and all. Here is another poem “Obituary”. There also you can find a flash of the remembrance of his own father and where he says how and this can be interpreted in several ways also.

Father, when he passed on,
left dust
on a table of papers,
left debts and daughters,
a bedwetting grandson
named by the toss

of a coin after him.

I mean in Indian tradition it so happens that there are many things that actually depend only upon the father. And the father----- when the father goes for a profession or thinks for a livelihood, I mean, here there is actually a subtle remark on those people who are struggling for their own identity. And what they leave behind because, they are actually to think of the welfare of them and for that it becomes a sort of helplessness.

And then the poet says because, this is a poem entitled obituary where the poet says:

Years on a bent coconut

tree in the yard,
burning the burning type, he burned properly
at the cremation.
As before, easily
and both ends
left his eye coins
in the ashes that
did not look one bit different,
several spinal discs, rough,
some burned to coal, for sons.

When the funeral function takes place, how all these are left only in the ashes, and the last one what the poet says is very painful.

To pick gingerly
and throw as the priest

said, facing east

where three rivers met

near the railway station;


no longstanding headstone

with full name and two dates.

So, this is what all the relations simply come to an end And then there is only a ritual where the priest simply tells you to look towards the way, towards the east and throw the ashes because you are a son.

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to hold in their parentheses everything he didn't quite manage to do himself, like his caesarian birth in a brahmin ghetto and his death by heart- failure in the fruit market.	who sell it in turn to the small groceries where I buy salt, coriander, and jaggery in newspaper cones that I usually read
But someone told me he got two lines in an inside column of a Madras newspaper sold by the kilo exactly four weeks later to street hawkers	for fun, and lately in the hope of finding these obituary lines. And he left us a changed mother and more than one annual ritual.



20

And then towards the end you know,

But someone told me

he got two lines

in an inside column

There is an obituary column in most of the newspapers. And with that there comes to the end of a long filial relationship between the son and the father.

And you know what happens, all my father's memories and reminiscences are simply sold, to whom? Only to the groceries where you know 'I buy salt, coriander, / jaggery in newspaper cones/ that I usually read/ for fun, and lately/ in the hope of finding these obituary lines/ and he left us a changed mother/ and more than one annual ritual.'

So, how these relations with the end of somebody's life, you know, it simply remains a memory and every year. So, in a way the poet says that everywhere we remember them just once only and this is how the relations come to an end. So, the poem "Obituary" though we all are familiar with the meaning of the word obituary and it is written on his father's death, but it has actually got many other things also to address.

If we take a minute observation of the lines of the poems as we have been doing, you will find out that it is not only about poet's father, but actually it talks about our tradition. How in Indian contexts there have been people, I mean, the chief of the family or the

head of the family who actually is by default the guardian of the family when he leaves or bids adieu to this earthly world. He actually leaves so many things and the poet has beautifully and very ironically commented upon when he says when he passed on, left dust.

We can have a look at the images; left dust on a table of papers, left debts and daughters. You can also find the use of literary device, assonance--- debt, daughters, dust; meaning thereby, these are actually the images that the father left this world for. But, then what did he leave? Nothing except dust, debt, daughters, and also a bedwetting grandson.

I mean father when he passed away, he actually left for the son so many responsibilities which in Indian contexts have been, many people often call it a sort of taboo, the son is often burdened with the debts of the father.

And here also we find and not only this, the poet actually portrays the father in such a light manner; at times, we can also consider the father has been portrayed here in a very miserable way. The house is also not in a good condition, the house actually rested only on a coconut tree in the yard and being the burning type; look at the word being the burning type, the father always used to be angry.

And you know, anger was considered to be a sort of, you know, when elders in the house become angry. The elders always expected a sort of respect and they always consider themselves to be the provider of everything. And then as the poem progresses we can find that not only the death of the father left everybody in a very difficult situation but in a moment of despair.

But then the poet also makes a comment on the priest who simply says that the ashes of the departed soul have to be thrown. Have to be thrown facing east where three rivers met near the railway station, no longstanding headstone with his full name and two dates, with his full name and two dates.

I mean this is actually the tradition, the poet being in the U.S. Now, when the poet has gathered a lot of knowledge and seen more and more of the world, then when he looks back and he finds that what a sort of legacy we Indians have got. So, the father has been portrayed even though it is a sort of obituary, but at the same time it actually refers to so many realities. The father's passing away may be a shock to many, but to the poet, the

poet simply says like his Caesarian birth in a Brahmin ghetto the tradition that goes well and his death by heart failure in the fruit market.

So, like any other ailment the father also suffered a heart attack, but someone told me he only left two lines in an inside column. Meaning thereby, the death of the father was simply mentioned in a newspaper column and then that way the poet also makes actually a caricature of how death is very insignificant. And at the same time death is a sort of celebration in Indian context.

But then, that death is recorded only in a newspaper column and that is not a sort of sacrament rather and even though it is a sacrament it is given only a little space. And the same paper where the son actually wants to look for in order to celebrate the death of a father. And in order to reminisce the death of the father he simply finds that like many other newspapers which are often used in the grocery store simply to buy things and simply to sell things.

Meaning thereby, that in a context like India where life and death you know where life and death are very important. We have already learnt in the previous lecture how snakes are important. And you know, snakes actually symbolize fertility; snakes also symbolize revere. Because, when the snake actually leaves or sets its own slouch it actually refers to a sort of continuity of life.

So, in India even the stones are celebrated, but here the son actually makes a very satirical comment here and says that I usually read for fun, and lately in the hope of finding these obituary lines. And he left us the last lines are actually a very shocking, surprising and then there is a sort of pathos and suffering as well.

And the suffering is not for the father, because the father could not do anything all around his life throughout his life. He did not have much to leave, but then what father's passing away left was? And he left us a changed mother and more than one annual ritual.

The mother not only became a widow, but then it simply became after the demise of the father, only once a year it became an annual ritual to celebrate like the anniversary, you know, death anniversary being celebrated every year.

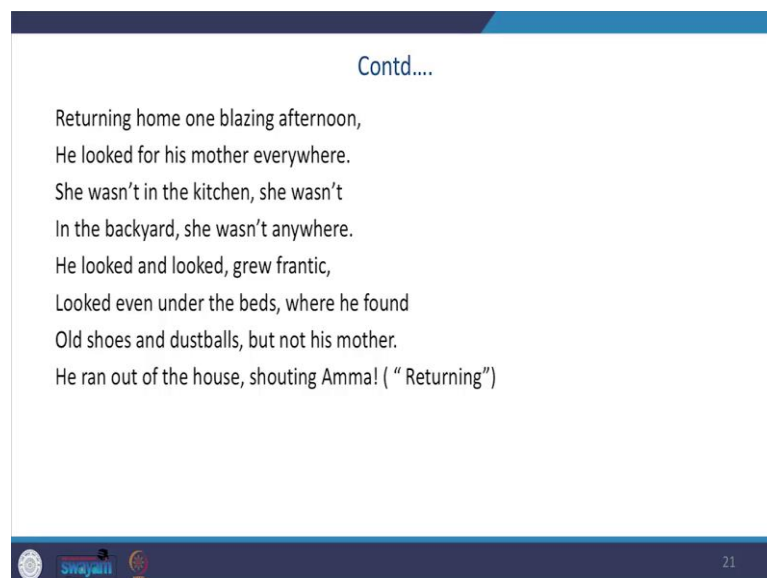
So, my dear friends while while the poet's concern towards his father may might have been depicted in a very light hearted manner. But then the poet also sows his own propensity, and his own closeness towards his mother; his affinity, his sympathy for his mother.

We have always seen in some of the essays and some of the poems that the poet Ramanujan was very close to his mother. In one of the poems he has mentioned that when he was leaving for the U.S.A, the mother did not have too many words to say. The mother was simply silent and at times the poet also reminisces how the mother was rather gathering the rice grains which had fallen on the floor.

So, mothers are often, most often rather they are very submissive, very humble and the tenderness of the mother actually pains the poet, pains the poet in A K Ramanujan. So, while thinking of his mother and once you know after a long time when he returns to India, then suddenly after years and years, then suddenly he thinks of his own mother. And then the lines that he composed they are actually soaked in molten tears, the yearning of a son for his mother who is no more.

The poet writes in the famous poem entitled "Returning."

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Contd....

Returning home one blazing afternoon,
He looked for his mother everywhere.
She wasn't in the kitchen, she wasn't
In the backyard, she wasn't anywhere.
He looked and looked, grew frantic,
Looked even under the beds, where he found
Old shoes and dustballs, but not his mother.
He ran out of the house, shouting Amma! ("Returning")

Swajati 21

Returning home one blazing afternoon,

he looked for his mother everywhere.

As a child you know the poet always used to look for his mother everywhere and all other children you know they are habituated to look for their mother quite often. But, he says;

“She was not in the kitchen,/ she was not/ in the back yard,/she was not anywhere/ he looked and looked grew frantic;/ looked even under the beds, where he found/ old shoes and dustballs, but not his mother./ He ran out of the house, shouting Amma.”

So, we can find here a sort of suffering of the poet, a sort of anguish of the poet. Because, long after when the poet returns what he finds? To his great shock and surprise and to his great pain and misery that mother is no more. The mother’s memories are there and what are the mother’s memories? Mother is not found in any corner--- neither in the backyard nor in the veranda, she was not anywhere, only under the bed he could find the shoes and the dustballs.

So, the poet’s association with his mother was actually so strong that every now and then he felt, he felt for his mother and when he comes back to his shock, he finds that the mother is no more. Suddenly, he comes to realize---- oh his mother passed away too long and had he not missed his mother, had he not lost his mother for all those years when he had been living in the US.

So, time and again we find that majority of the poems of A K Ramanujan are actually, you know, soaked in Indian memory. But then there is a fusion also of Indian and European literary traditions we will find, fine?

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Characteristic Features of His Poetry

- Fusion of Indian and European literary traditions
- Blending of past and present (“A River”)
- Autobiographical notes
- Allusion to his own traditions and customs (“*Obituary*”)
- Longing for family and country continued
- Cultural hybridization in his poem
- Emphasis on sensual and particular rather than abstract
- Irony and ironic symbols, use of everyday diction
- A particular style of stanza division.

22

There are actually allusions to his own traditions and customs, but then we can find irony and ironic symbols, use of everyday diction in majority of his poems. But then the “Striders” alone is not his collection, we can also find some other poems from some other collections.

(Refer Slide Time: 20:42)

Relations

- Hindoo customs, rituals and myth
- Richer in mythical form and content
- Three Hindoo poems depicting truth and non-violence

Remember what the wise callous Hindus
Said when the love-god burned: keep your cool,
Make for love's sake no noble gesture.
All symbols, no limbs, a nobody all soul,
O Kama, only you can have no use
For the Kamasutra.
Ashes have no posture .

“One , Two, May be Three,
Arguments against Suicide”
Compensations
Prayer to Lord Murugan

24

Namely, *Relations* which was the second collection by him. Here again, you can find that this is soaked actually in Hindu mythological stories, customs, rituals and myth. It is this

this one *Relations* appears to be a bit mature than the first one, where the poet actually provides many poems which depict truth and nonviolence.

Some of the poems namely three that I would like to introduce here; one is---- “One, two, maybe/ three, arguments against suicide.” Here the poet also becomes realistic and draws inspiration from the ancient sacred texts. And here he says that when a man commits suicide, one thing is there that is he commits suicide for a desire and then this desire can be a passion as well. And if a man wants to have a life full of calmness, quietness, perspicuity and all, I mean he should be free from the passions that is Kama.

And that is why in in one of the poems which he says----- one, two, maybe three arguments against suicide what he tells? He actually gives a reference to the story of the Kamadev, is not it, the story of the Kamadev.

And then he says--- “Remember what the wise callous Hindus/ said when the love god burned; keep your cool,/ make for love’s sake no noble gesture./All symbols, no limbs, nobody all soul,/ O Kama, only can you have no use/ for the Kamasutra; ashes have no posture.” You will find that there goes a story that once upon a time Kamadeva, the love-god the Indian love god Kamadeva actually because, he wanted to disturb the Lord Shiva, he was actually punished and he was burned.

So, when he was burned, what happened? Kamadeva’s wife Rati actually came with so many implorations. And all these implorations were to make Kamadeva alive. And then the God said that now Kama will be alive in everyone’s heart, in everyone’s body. And this was also done because of Lord Indra, you know, who actually wanted to create a desire in Lord Shiva who was actually busy in a sort of penance because, see Parvathi wanted to marry Lord Shiva.

And, but then he was so much involved in his penance that he had no attraction and you know, God had so designed that one of the demons had to be killed. And that only could have been killed if Parvathi could have bore a son named Kartikeya, and it was Kartikeya who later on killed Tarakasura who was actually a demon.

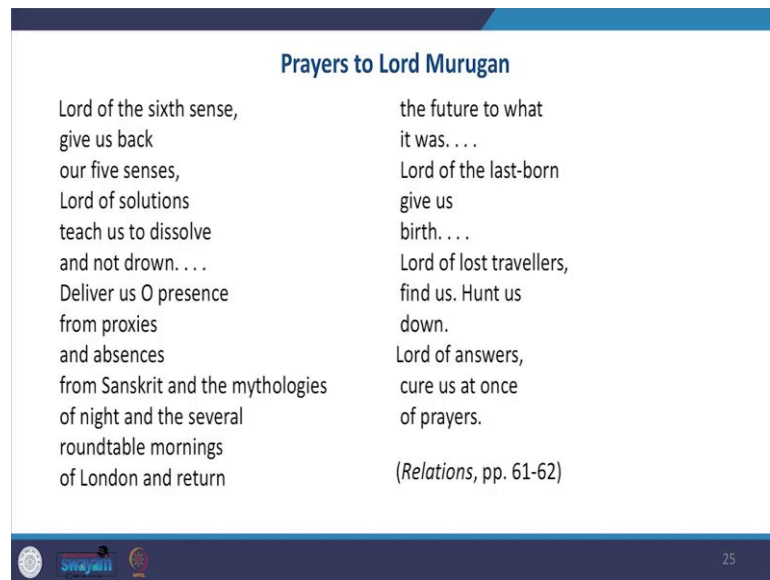
So, we find that even *Relations* is full of many Hindu poems which actually talk about the rituals in mythical form and content and they also talk of truth and nonviolence.

There are also poems in the name of Lord Murugan or the Lord Shiva that we call, this can be considered to be a sort of submission by the poet.

You know, the poet A K Ramanujan was not only struggling, but he was in a sort of conflict, and his Indian roots always called him back, he was always attracted to it. But then there are times when he feels this sort of rebellious idea, but there are times when he feels that he could also be submissive.

This poem “Prayers to Lord Murugan” was also recited at the funeral of A K Ramanujan in Chicago. We can have some lines to see how the poet also believed that it is only the submission that only can bring a sort of salvation, we can take some of the lines.

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Prayers to Lord Murugan

Lord of the sixth sense, give us back our five senses, Lord of solutions teach us to dissolve and not drown. . . . Deliver us O presence from proxies and absences from Sanskrit and the mythologies of night and the several roundtable mornings of London and return	the future to what it was. . . . Lord of the last-born give us birth. . . . Lord of lost travellers, find us. Hunt us down. Lord of answers, cure us at once of prayers. (Relations, pp. 61-62)
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Swajati 25

Lord of the six sense,
give us back
our five senses,
Lord of solutions
teach us to dissolve
and not drown.
Deliver us O presence
from proxies
and absences
from Sanskrit and the mythologies
of night and the several

roundtable mornings
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Lord of the last born
give us
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Lord of lost travellers,
find us, hunt us.

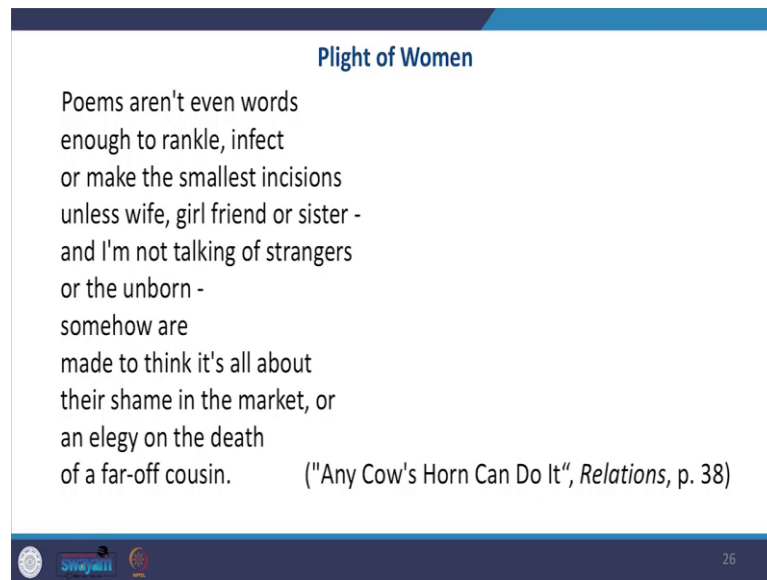
See the lines----- find us, hunt us, return us, give us back all these in a way symbolize the poet's (Refer Time: 25:32) return to his own homeland. Lord of answers, cure us at once of prayers, fine.

So, this has also been taken from *Relations* and this poem was also recited at his funeral. So, there is actually a note of submission, there is a note of surrender, there is a note of imploration. There is a note where the poet actually believes that it is only the Lord Shiva or the Murugan, Lord Murugan is actually a Lord of youth, beauty, you know, joy and everything; so, let the Lord bless us with all these.

I mean as I have been saying that A K Ramanujan was not confined only to one theme, he also had his eye on the suffering of the women. And there are end number of poems which have been dedicated to women where the poet actually says that in order to understand, in order to know what is poetry you should actually render meaning to it.

The way meanings can be given to women and if you really want to have good poetry, you also should think of the women's plights, the women suffering, the archetypal suffering that they are suffering from and then some of the lines which are very meaningful in this regard.

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Plight of Women

Poems aren't even words
enough to rankle, infect
or make the smallest incisions
unless wife, girl friend or sister -
and I'm not talking of strangers
or the unborn -
somehow are
made to think it's all about
their shame in the market, or
an elegy on the death
of a far-off cousin. ("Any Cow's Horn Can Do It", *Relations*, p. 38)

swajati 26

“Poems are not even words/ enough to rankle, infect /or make the smallest incisions/
unless wife, girl friend or sister/ and I am not talking of strangers.”

So, the poet says that India is a country of traditions, no doubt, but then why should women only be the sufferers? He had seen, you know, the traditional marriages and all how the women only could be the second sex or the things of exploitation or abuse even in their own family members.

So, through this the poet actually wants to encourage and raise others to say—“somehow are /made to think it is all about/ their shame in the market or/ an elegy on the death of a far off cousin.”

So, if you really want to write good poetry, please bring in your own poetry some compassion for women so that they can come out of this suffering not from one, but from others also. The poem is titled “Any Cow’s Horn Can Do It” and it is from *Relations*. We can also take some other collections, you know, in a very a cursory manner, because the time is always at our back.

My dear friends, we often find that Ramanujan’s poems are not only soaked in Indian sensibility, rather we also find that his poems actually tell us some of the saddest, cruellest fact that many of us often cannot fail to realize. And this not only as an Indian, because you know Ramanujan was not such a poet who simply was confined to Indian

memories or Indian experiences. Rather what we find is that even when he was in U.S.A, because I have always already been saying that Ramanujan transcended, transcended from what he had lost.

But even in America, in Chicago where he was working, we could find that Ramanujan had grown a sense of alienation. And this can be justified and this can be attached to in one of the poems of the second sight, one of his another collection, where he as a poet, he narrates one episode which is very important and that he later on composes in the form of a poem.

And the episode is that he suddenly found a person who was actually throwing away from his car only the female dresses, only the female dresses and he stopped and then the poet stopped and then could find.

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had he stripped
not only hat
and blouse, shoes
and panties
and bra,
had he shed maybe
even the woman
he was wearing
or was it me
moulting, shedding
vestiges,
old investments,
rushing forever
towards a perfect
coupling
with naked nothing
in a world
without places?
(*Second Sight*, p. 60)

Sense of Alienation

Now you know what you always
knew:
the country cannot be reached
by jet. Nor by boat on jungle
river,
hashish behind the Monkey-
temple,
nor moonshot to the cratered
Sea
of Tranquility (p. 84)

28

So, and he later on narrates it in the form of a poem and he says,

“had he stripped/ not only hat,/ and blouse, shoes,/ and panties,/ and bra./ had he shed maybe/ even the woman/ he was wearing/ or was it me/ moulting, shedding,/ vestiges,/ old investments,/ rushing forever/ towards a perfect/ coupling/ with naked nothing/ in a world/ without places?”

My dear friends, even though this poem has been written in the context of a man throwing female dresses and to his surprise when he went near the car, he could find that

there was only one person- one male in the car. And when he found these things being thrown away from the car, he actually links it to his own identity. And he puts himself in the position of the dresses and he finds himself that he is also such a discarded one.

So, this feeling of alienation is not confined only being an Indian, but this feeling of alienation can also be found because, Ramanujan had been travelling from one country to another, one place to another and this had become a universal phenomenon, my dear friend.

In the same light, we can take another poem which is based on his experiences of Chicago, fine. where he says and this is not a feeling which can be considered to be a native sort of feeling, rather this is a feeling which has actually got the tinge of universal alienation. And in that poem what he says is really of quite importance and very brilliantly he says.

“Now, you know what you always knew,/ the country cannot be reached by jet/ nor by boat on a jungle river,/ hashish behind the Monkey temple/ nor moonshot to the cratered Sea/ of Tranquility.”

I mean, if you think of this problem being confined only to one reason, no. This is actually prevalent everywhere. This growing sense of, you know, awareness, this growing sense of the search for his own identity and then you cannot see it that now you know what you always knew. It has already been a proven fact that once you are in a different country, you can always come across this growing sense of alienation, my dear friend.

(Refer Slide Time: 32:31)

Second Sight

- ❑ Hindu Myths and Legends, Gods and Goddesses
- ❑ Images of Violence and pain
- “No Amnesiac King”, (Tale of Dushyant and Shakuntala)
- “A Minor Sacrifice”, (Parikshit and Janmejaya)
- “The Difference” (King Moradhvaj and Lord Vishnu)

But today, out of the blue,
when Vishnu
came to mind, the dark one you know
who began as a dwarf and rose in the world to measure
Heaven and Earth with his paces...

As we enter the dark,
someone says from behind,
'You are Hindoo, aren't you?
You must have second sight.
'I fumble in my nine
pockets like the night-blind
son-in-law groping
in every room for his wife,
and strike a light to regain
at once my first, and only,
sight, (Second Sight p. 89)

Swajati 27

This collection is entitled *Second Sight* and in *Second Sight* we can find again there is a mention of Hindu myths, gods and legends and all. But then there are three poems which actually are worth mention. Here, they are “No Amnesiac King.” It is actually a tale of Dushyant and Shakuntala. Many of you might be familiar with that. Once upon a time king Dushyant was not able to recognize Shakuntala because, Shakuntala had come back after bathing and she had lost her ring. So, the king could not recognize. The king had forgotten, fine and the king could not recognize; finally, when he asked--- where is your ring and the lady said that I lost it. Finally, the fisherman could bring the fish and the belly of the fish was cut and the ring was recovered and then Shakuntala could be united with Dushyant.

Then another is about Parikshit and Janmejaya, it is called “A Minor Sacrifice” where again the poet talks about how is simply in the name of a sacrifice, we actually create a sort of harm to many animals, fine and even to snakes. Here again there is question of snakes. The king Parikshit was bit by snake and Janamejaya decided that he will actually terminate the entire race of a snake.

And one was not to be distracted and that was Takshak as you might have remembered. And then this yagna which Janamejaya had started, this actually was with a vow that all the snakes of the world will be terminated forever.

Then there comes another poem entitled “The Difference”, where it is said that once upon a time King Mordhwaj who was known for his own generosity. So, once God wanted to test his generosity and that is why the God, I mean, Lord Vishnu said--You can ask for any anything fine and you know the God was disguised as a Baman you know as a dwarf and said I simply want three steps. And in these three steps he had measured the entire world, you know, from the Heaven to the Hell, from the Heaven to the Earth.

Now, the King Mordhwaj was surprised and then what should he do, but still you know, still Lord Vishnu was not satisfied. He had come on a lion and said, now you have still one thing to do because, my lion is hungry and he can only eat the fresh flesh of your son and the king and the queen were speechless. And they decided to cut their son into two halves and offer it to Lord Vishnu. While they started to do it, Lord Vishnu then appeared and granted, you know, all blessings to a King Mordhwaj.

My dear friends, you can always understand that the entire mythological stories have a message and A K Ramanujan in his own capacity, has tried to revive. Many people call him a sort of revivalist, but then through this he was actually trying not only to awaken people, but he was also trying to answer some of the relevant questions.

One poem from *Second Sight* which is a bit more philosophical where he says and there is actually a dig on Hindu where he says:

“As we enter the dark, someone says from behind;/ you are a Hindu, are not you?/ You must have second sight./ I fumble in my nine/ pockets like the night blind,/ son-in-law groping/ in every room for his wife/ and strike a light to regain/ at once my first and my only sight.”

I simply want to have my only sight that is my first sight and the first sight is what? The first sight is my Indian origin, my Indian belonging. There are stories and stories which are embedded in and A K Ramanujan is not an exception. Another, there are some stories from *Panchatantra* which have also been given due weightage in his poetry collection where the poet actually talks about 4 Brahmins who actually wanted to. Because they were very proud of their mantras and with their mantras they wanted to resuscitate a dead tiger, you know a dead tiger.

And you know what happened, when it was proved when it was done all three of them were killed. There was the fifth one who was actually not that knowledgeable, but he had common sense and he climbed a tree and he escaped. So, on that the poet says, “But today out of the blue/ when Vishnu/ came to mind, the dark one you know/ who began as a dwarf and rose in the world to measure/ heaven and earth with his paces.” This is actually a reference to that King Mordhwaja and Lord Vishnu’s story.

Then I can tell you a number of stories that have been dealt by A K Ramanujan in one or the other poetry collections. The last one which came out after his death that is posthumously was the black hen where again there are mythological stories about Pootna and Krishna you are all familiar with. How Kansa wanted to get Krishna killed and that is why he had sent a she- demon in the form of Pootna. And while sucking the milk of Pootna, Pootna had actually to get herself killed, because she spurted blood the way Krishna sucked her.

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The Black Hen (1995)

- ☐ Interconnections among body, nature and culture
 - Krishna-Pootna mythology
 - Hiranya Kashyapu and Lord Vishnu
 - Obduracy of a young female votary of lord Vishnu

Poetry too is a tigress
 Except there is no fifth man
 Left on a tree
 When she takes your breath. (“No Fifth Man”)

When the clever man asks the perfect boon:
 Not to be slain by demon, god or by
 Beast, not by day nor by night,
 By no manufactured weapon, not out
 Of doors nor inside, not in the sky
 Nor on earth, come now come soon
 Vishnu, man, lion, neither and both , to hold
 Him in your lap to disembowel his pride
 With the steel glint of bare claws at twilight.

29

And then there is another story about Hiranya Kashyapu and Lord Vishnu. So, where Hiranya Kashyapu also because of his own atrocities, you know. He only wanted that he should rule the entire world and nobody should kill him and he had taken very mischievously a boon from the Lord. But the Lord knew it all that he was not to be trusted and when all his atrocities were at the height, the Lord appeared and then Hiranya Kashyapu was killed.

There is one more that is about a young female who is a supporter or who is a devotee of Lord Vishnu. So, here what happens is; now, there is a reference of all Indian women who actually are being perturbed, who actually are being exploited by their husbands where this lady did not want to grant the advances of her own husband and every now and then while being in bed she used to say OM OM OM.

And once when the man tried to have a sort of, you know, take a sort of undue advantage, the woman actually through her own hands she actually tried to flee that man. Now, in order to do that there is actually a power that A K Ramanujan wants to put even among women. I have already mentioned that how the 4 Brahmins who were proud of their knowledge, how they wanted to bring to life the dead lion and how the lion killed them, but one who had a common sense who climbed the tree.

And you know what the poet actually tries to say through this was- poetry too is a tigress, poetry has got more power. Except there is no fifth man, who is this fifth man? This fifth man is a man with a common sense left on a tree when she takes your breath. So, when you are writing poetry, poetry also is a tigress except there is no fifth man; poetry is innocent, poetry is powerful. You have to find, you actually have to amalgamate the balance between the two, my dear friend, and that that is how poetry can survive.

Now, there can be end number of poems to be discussed when we talk about A K Ramanujan or Atipatta Krishnaswami Ramanujan, but since time is not on our side we will have to finally, assess the works of A K Ramanujan and here we can take the views of some of the critics who say.

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Critical Assessment *autochthonous*

- ❖ “Ramanujan is neither a nostalgic traditionalist nor an advocate of modernization and westernization. He is a product of both and his poems reflect a personality conscious of change, enjoying its vitality, freedom and contradictions, but also aware of memories which form his inner self, memories of an unconscious ‘namelessness’, which are still alive, at the foundation of the self.” - Bruce King
- ❖ “Like tricky Chinese boxes, A. K. Ramanujan's poems are difficult to open but of exquisite workmanship; they're objects to hold between fingers as much as they are printed lines to read with the eyes.” - Mehrotra
- ❖ “Though Ramanujan was an expatriate academician teaching linguistics in Chicago, the Indian sensibility and experience was deeply rooted in him. He retained an unfractured Indian spirit.” - Hari Mohan Prasad

Swajati 30

Because there are charges and charges on A K Ramanujan. Many people say that his poems are simply soaked in, I know family associations, memories, rituals and all to which Bruce King has given a proper response.

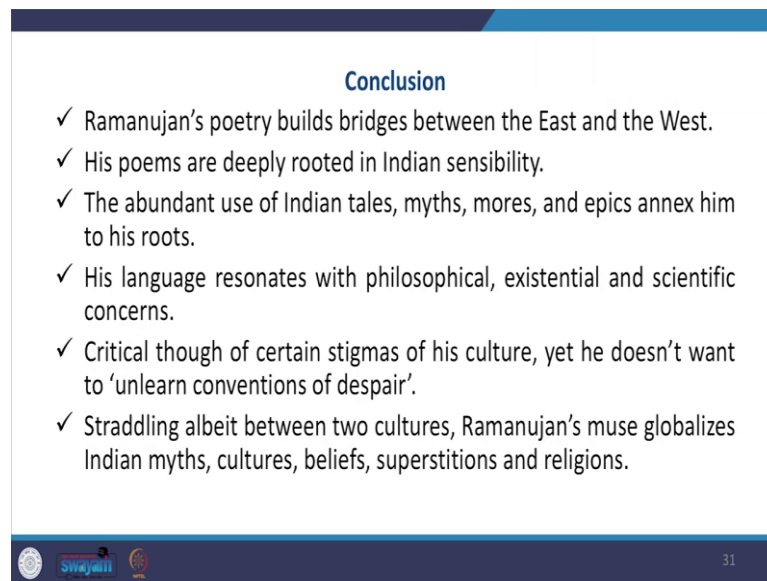
And the response is that these are and not only Bruce King, there have also been other people who say that his Indian experiences can be considered to be a sort of autochthonous, autochthonous. You know meaning thereby there is a sort of indigenusness, indigenusness, autochthonousness.

So, indigenusness, nativity and you know what is the harm if our poets are singing the nativity songs. So, “Ramanujan is not a nostalgic, traditionalist nor an advocate of modernization and westernization. He is actually a product of both and his poems reflect a personality conscious of change. It is not that he just stepped in, but he actually wants a change as well enjoying its vitality, freedom and contradictions. But also aware of memories which from his inner self, memories of an unconscious namelessness which are still alive at the foundation of self”. These are the remarks of Bruce King.

We can also take the remark of Mehrotra who considered A K Ramanujan to be ‘a magician and he says like tricky Chinese boxes A K Ramanujan’s poems are difficult to open, but of exquisite workmanship.’ He always you know since he was a translator know he always wanted to revise his poems at times. They are objects to hold between fingers and as much as they are printed lines to read with the eyes.

One last remark that I am tempted to take is by Hari Mohan Prasad who says—“Though Ramanujan was an expatriate academician, expatriate academician still he was he was you know when he died, he was there in Chicago. Teaching linguistics in Chicago, the Indian sensibility and experience was deeply rooted in him he retained an unfractured, unfractured Indian spirit.”

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Conclusion

- ✓ Ramanujan's poetry builds bridges between the East and the West.
- ✓ His poems are deeply rooted in Indian sensibility.
- ✓ The abundant use of Indian tales, myths, mores, and epics annex him to his roots.
- ✓ His language resonates with philosophical, existential and scientific concerns.
- ✓ Critical though of certain stigmas of his culture, yet he doesn't want to 'unlearn conventions of despair'.
- ✓ Straddling albeit between two cultures, Ramanujan's muse globalizes Indian myths, cultures, beliefs, superstitions and religions.

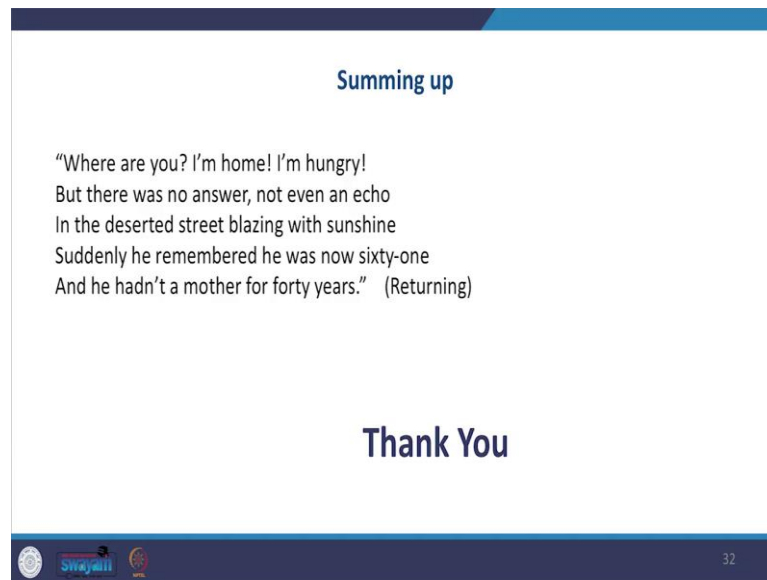
31

And that is why he is to be considered one of the major voices and of all the voices that we have read so far. His voice can be considered to be the most promising voice of Indian English poetry. Before we conclude we can also draw certain findings. Ramanujan's poetry actually builds bridges between the East and the West. He was not only simply because some of his poems are also about American life and all, fine.

Of course, his poems are rooted in Indian sensibility, there is an abundant use of tales, myths, mores and epics annexing him to his roots. His language resonates with existential, philosophical and scientific concerns. Of course, he is critical of certain stigmas of his culture, yet he does not want to unlearn conventions of despair.

So, this conventions of despair he did not want to unlearn; even though there were despair, but he actually found a sort of triumph in this despair. Straddling albeit between two cultures, Ramanujan's muse globalizes Indian myths, cultures, beliefs, superstitions and religions. And to sum up let us take some lines of Ramanujan and that actually will provide a quintessence of all that Ramanujan was striving towards.

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Summing up

“Where are you? I’m home! I’m hungry!
But there was no answer, not even an echo
In the deserted street blazing with sunshine
Suddenly he remembered he was now sixty-one
And he hadn’t a mother for forty years.” (Returning)

Thank You

Swajati 32

“Where are you? I am home, I am hungry./ But there was no answer, not even an echo,/ in the deserted street blazing with sunshine.” So, here there is a reference to his stay outside, ‘in the deserted street blazing with sunshine./ Suddenly he remembered he was now sixty one/ and he had not a mother for forty years.” And the poem is from “Returning.”

So, and you know you will be surprised to know that when he was 61, even then he felt that he had not a mother for 40 years, these 40 years are the years that he spent in Chicago. My dear friends, Ramanujan left this world at the age of 64 fine. So, to sum up we can say that Ramanujan was such a poet who straddled between two cultures, but yet he was intact.

And its psyche was ingrained, soaked in Indian sensibility, but then he was towards a change a change for betterment, a change for authenticity, a change for poetic beliefs. A change for what man has done to man, a change for what geography has distanced us, a change for what history is a witness to.

With these words let me come to the end of this talk.

Thank you very much.