

Indian Poetry in English
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Lecture - 28
Niranjan Mohanty


Good morning friends and welcome back to NPTEL online certification course on Indian Poetry in English. Today we are going to start a new phase of Indian poetry in English that can be considered as impressionistic poetry. In this we shall be discussing some poets who are yet to be considered a part of many Indian anthologies which are being published.

My aim behind introducing these poets to this course is to familiarize them with the real Indian English poetry that is still being written. But of course, the need of the hour is that the critics as well as the anthologists paid scant attention to the voices of these poets. In this regard the first poet that I am going to discuss today is Niranjan Mohanty. Now, you might be curious enough to know who Niranjan Mohanty is and what actually makes Niranjan Mohanty a poet, fine?

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Impressionism

- ❖ The impressionists were a school of painters whose painting has transitory effects of lights.
- ❖ Fleeting moments from a subjective point of view.
- ❖ Perception of the spectator.
- ❖ Claude Monet, Vincent van Gogh and Renoir
- ❖ Vague meaning as a literary term.



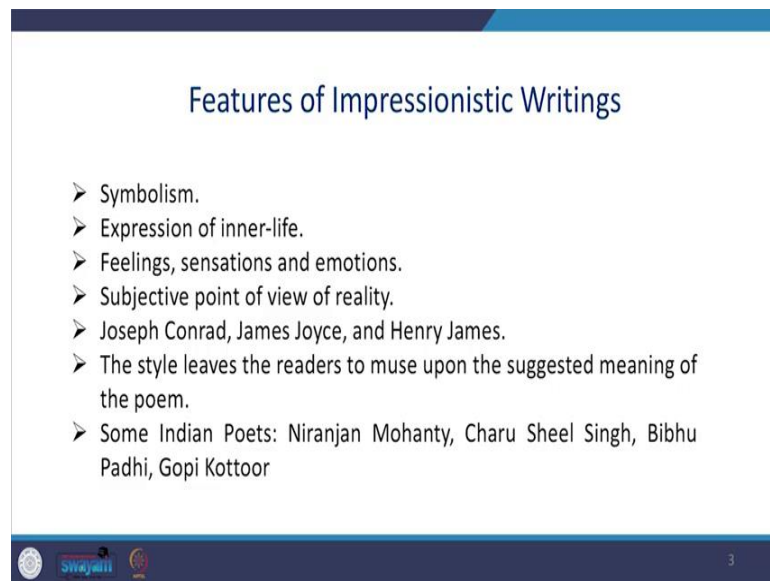
Claude Monet, *Impression, soleil levant*
(Impression, Sunrise)

But before that let us talk about impressionism. You know impressionism, expressionism, experimentalism---- all these actually came from the world of arts. Impressionists were a school of painters whose painting had transitory effects of lights. It

also had fleeting moments from a subjective point of view and also from the perception of the spectators.

The major impressionists were Claude Monet, Vincent Van Gogh and Renoir. Impressionism as a vague term has got its interference in literature as well and still it is considered to be quite vague.

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The slide is titled "Features of Impressionistic Writings" in a blue font. Below the title is a bulleted list of features and authors. At the bottom of the slide, there are logos for "Swayam" and "3".

- Symbolism.
- Expression of inner-life.
- Feelings, sensations and emotions.
- Subjective point of view of reality.
- Joseph Conrad, James Joyce, and Henry James.
- The style leaves the readers to muse upon the suggested meaning of the poem.
- Some Indian Poets: Niranjan Mohanty, Charu Sheel Singh, Bibhu Padhi, Gopi Kottoor

Many of the poets nowadays have started bringing impressionistic writings and they have brought impressionism in their writings. Actually, since it comes from the world of arts, impressionism is a sort of symbolism which actually expresses the inner forms of life comprising feelings, sensations and emotions.

And it actually focuses upon subjective point of views. Many literary artists especially in the field of fiction-- Joseph Conrad, James Joyce and Henry James have also brought impressionism in their writings. Actually, this style leaves the readers to ponder over the suggested meaning of the poem, their suggestions the poet or the writers may not say everything very clearly or vividly.

But then there is a hint when we look at Indian English poetry. We also find the writings of some of the poets having an imprint of impressionism in their works namely, Niranjan Mohanty, Charu Sheel Singh, Bibhu Padhi and Gopi Kottoor. So, today we shall take up


Niranjan Mohanty and we will find out through his poetic oeuvres and through a good number of his poems.

How he has dealt with it and how one can find the pictures of impressionism in the poetic world of Niranjan Mohanty. Niranjan Mohanty reminds us of, if we have a look at Niranjan Mohanty's works. Mohanty actually reminds us of another significant voice of Indian English poetry, Jayanta Mahapatra whom we have already discussed in the previous lectures.

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Niranjan Mohanty (1953-2008)

- Born on 12th April, 1953 in Calcutta
- Watched a series of deaths in his family
- Early education in Orissa, started as a lecturer in Aska Science College, Orissa, joined Vishwa Bharati, Shantiniketan in 1999.
- Left for heavenly abode in 2008.
- 'Human to the core'
- Steeped in the native folklore, natural beauties and superstitions
- Translated from Oriya and Bengali into English and Bengali into Oriya.



Actually, Mohanty was born on 12th April 1953 in Calcutta though Mohanty is from Orissa, but since his father was working in Calcutta, Mohanty got his birth there in Calcutta. And Mohanty's early life was full of sufferings, he could see a series of deaths-- some of the deaths of his brothers, sisters and some of the other family members, which actually had a very bad effect on the psyche, on the mind of the poet.

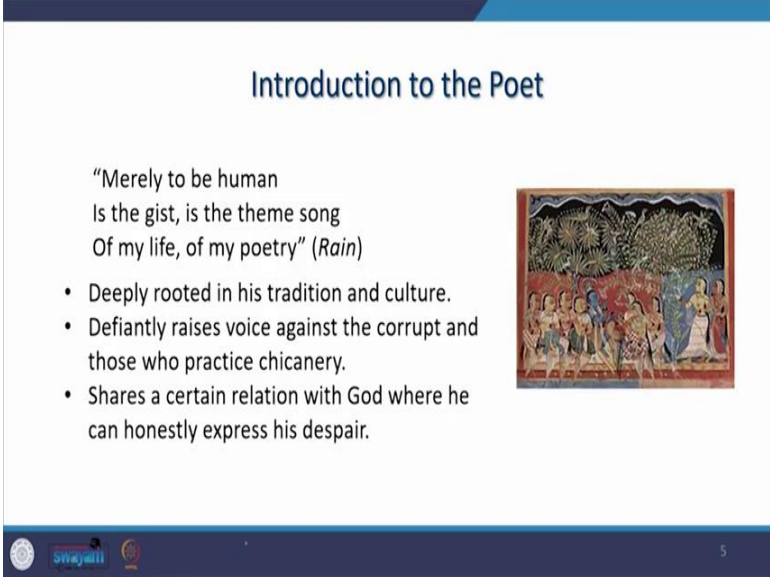
His early education which started in Orissa and later on he actually got appointed as a lecturer in Aska Science College, Orissa. As he progressed as a poet and also as a famous teacher he could have the opportunity of joining Shantiniketan in the year 1999. Actually, Shantiniketan might have paved his way and could have sharpened his poetic sensibility more than anything else, but then it was only Shantiniketan where he actually died in the year 2008.

Now, Mohanty as a poet had quite many a good quality. Since he had to see a lot of struggle in his family poverty, suffering, and several deaths. So, it made Mohanty a human to the core. What he writes in his poetry is actually soaked in the Orissian landscape.

And also to a larger extent the Indian reality, one can come across the depiction of natural beauties, superstitious beliefs, beliefs, faiths all of them we shall be discussing when we take up some of the poems of Mohanty to justify his poetic oeuvre.

Mohanty was not only a poet, but he was also a translator who translated from Oriya and Bengali into English and Bengali into Oriya. Calcutta actually paved his path to progress because it could give him or contribute to him two languages in addition to English which he was quite in love with as a language.

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Introduction to the Poet

"Merely to be human
Is the gist, is the theme song
Of my life, of my poetry" (*Rain*)

- Deeply rooted in his tradition and culture.
- Defiantly raises voice against the corrupt and those who practice chicanery.
- Shares a certain relation with God where he can honestly express his despair.

The slide also features a traditional Indian painting on the right side, depicting a scene with figures and trees. At the bottom left, there are logos for 'Sri Jagadgururambhadracharya' and 'Sri Jagadgururambhadracharya'. At the bottom right, there is a small number '5'.

In one of his poetry collections what Mohanty writes can pave a way to getting Mohanty as a poet introduced when he says: Merely to be human/ is the gist is the theme song/ of my life of my poetry. So, through these lines we can take a peep in the poetic oeuvre of Mohanty. Mohanty was deeply rooted in Indian culture, Indian traditions.

So, one can also call Mohanty a traditionalist poet, but then there are certain taboos against which Mohanty raises his voice and some of the malpractices which are being

followed in our society in everyday lives. So, that also get a picture depicted in the poetic world of Mohanty.

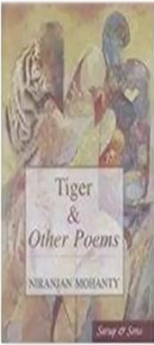
Mohanty actually shares a certain relation with God and you know Mohanty can be considered to be a sort of meditative, a sort of devotional poet, a poet who not only writes only because he has a sort of imagination. But in his imagination he also creates a sort of link between tradition and modern. So, his relation with God where he can honestly express his despair---- the despair that he had witnessed since beginning.

Now, it is quite natural that majority of you would like to know about Mohanty's poetry collections. So, his poetic journey started with *Silencing the Words*.

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Mohanty's Poetry Collections

- ❑ *Silencing the Words* (1977)
- ❑ *Oh This Bloody Game!* (1988)
- ❑ *Prayers to Lord Jagannatha* (1994)
- ❑ *On Touching you and Other Poems* (1999)
- ❑ *Life Lines* (1999)
- ❑ *Krishna* (2003)
- ❑ *A House of Rains* (2008)
- ❑ *Tiger and Other Poems* (2008)



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Now, majority of the titles of Mohanty's poem- they in itself tell a lot and hide a lot as I understand. So, *Silencing the Words* came out in 1977 which can be considered to be full of intellectualism, perhaps as a poet he was actually trying to find out his own way; a sort of mode, a sort of medium.

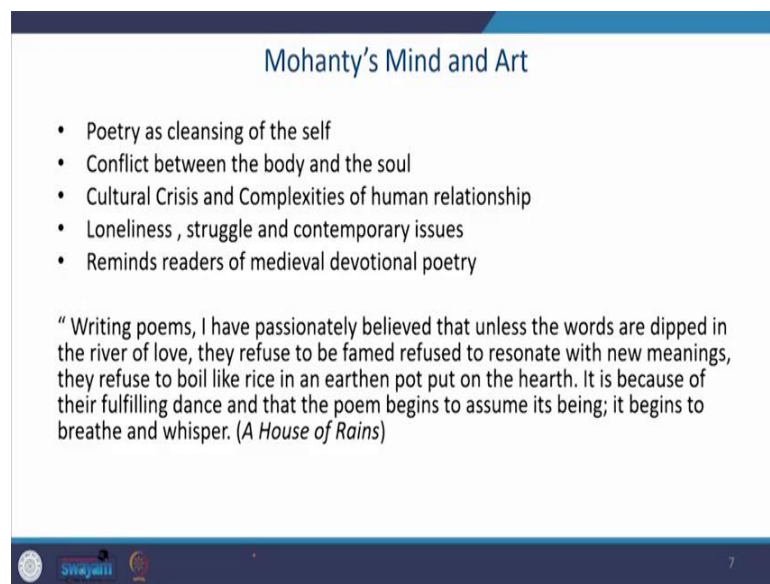
And then came *Oh This Bloody Game* in 1988. Then *Prayers to Lord Jagannatha*, *On Touching you and Other Poems*. Actually, these two poetry collections *Prayers to Lord Jagannatha* and *Krishna* made Mohanty very famous as a religious poet, but when we delve deep into it, we find that Mohanty does not consider God to be God, rather he

actually provides god with the human qualities with personal qualities and creates a sort of rapport that we shall find and enjoy.

Then came *Life Lines* in 1999 then *Krishna* again fine. *Krishna* again and then *House of Rains* and then the last was *Tiger and Other Poems*. I actually had an opportunity to meet Niranjana Mohanty on two times, but then I was so shattered when in 2008 he just took leave of all of us all of a sudden. Because Mohanty was a heart patient and in 2008 you know without any prior notice or whatsoever the cruel hands of God snatched Mohanty from us.

Now, let us try to find out Mohanty's mind and art, but it would be rather better if we can have a look at Mohanty's poetic world before we come to say something more about Mohanty, but then Mohanty considered that poetry has got a cleansing effect.

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Mohanty's Mind and Art

- Poetry as cleansing of the self
- Conflict between the body and the soul
- Cultural Crisis and Complexities of human relationship
- Loneliness , struggle and contemporary issues
- Reminds readers of medieval devotional poetry

“ Writing poems, I have passionately believed that unless the words are dipped in the river of love, they refuse to be famed refused to resonate with new meanings, they refuse to boil like rice in an earthen pot put on the hearth. It is because of their fulfilling dance and that the poem begins to assume its being; it begins to breathe and whisper. (A House of Rains)

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Poetry had got a cleansing effect. And in one or many interviews, he has quite clarified it that, it was just a way to cleanse the self one can find a conflict between body and the soul in majority of the poems of Niranjana Mohanty. And whatever he writes in his poem, he actually has got a mission, he has got a sort of objective. One can find cultural crisis and complexities of human relationships in some of the poems.

Say for example, when he talks about the *Life Lines* he talks about some of his very close people meaning thereby those people who have been associated with him since long and

then he creates. Mohanty rather creates a pen picture of those people. And through that he actually tries at times to mock, at times to shock, and at times to delve deep into the human behavior as well.

There is an element of loneliness. Struggle and contemporary issues abound in Mohanty's world and it also reminds us of a tradition of Bhakti movement, of a tradition of Bhakti poetry that we will find. In *A House of Rains* what Mohanty says can give an inkling to his poetic art.

When he says- "Writing poems I have passionately believed that unless the words are dipped in the river of love. They refuse to be famed, refused to resonate with new meanings, they refuse to boil like rice in an earthen pot put on the earth. It is because of their fulfilling dance and that the poem begins to assume it's being, it begins to breathe and whisper." That is why when one reads *Silencing the Words*, one can find that Mohanty believes that it is not the words that only speak, rather it is the silence that speaks.

Words can melt what he says words can melt and what remains is silence and this silence is meaningless it is not unworthy. So, what a poet needs to do is a poet needs to silence the words poet needs to silence the words.

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Characteristics of Mohanty's Poems

- Ugliness of the society: crying children, hopeless widows, beggars, lepers, girls who are being raped to death, tortured women, suicide, dowry, unemployment and various other social issues.
- Ironic: reflecting at the deteriorating conditions of humanity.
- Contemporary society in true colors
- Celebrating womanhood
- Postcolonial Consciousness
- Blends Tradition with Modernity
- Poet of the common man

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We can also take some of the characteristics of Mohanty's poems. Mohanty through one collection or the other actually depicts the ugliness of society, one can find plethora of examples dealing with the crying children, hopeless widows, beggars, lepers, girls who are being raped to death, then the torches of women, suicide, dowry, unemployment and quite a good number of issues.

One can find Mohanty's world full of ironic descriptions where he talks about the degradation of the society and the contemporary society. Now I mean the society that we are living in has actually deteriorated and he finds this deterioration getting shape in the form of words through which he silences.

Mohanty can be considered to be a post-colonial poet who bends tradition with modernity. There is no denying the fact that Mohanty can be considered to be a poet of the common man.

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Silencing the Words

- ❖ Fourteen poems full of intellectuality, symbolisms
- ❖ Influences of Jayanta Mahapatra
- ❖ Packed with obscure images

"In winter nights
Idle whisperings
Behind the blanket
Bring you more close to me.
Words have already melted
in the shaft of mercury light.
Few months later
We were blessed."

Rumors
like air-borne diseases
relate many words,
words many truths.
An ally of light and shade
Reforming your beauty, frosts
of night have chilled your passion.
Your complaint against
Rumors begets disaffection.
Silence is God.

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Now, let us take a note of some of Mohanty's famous collections because it is very difficult to allow these 30 minutes only to some of them. Because Mohanty's world is so vast. But then the first and some of the important collections actually need deserve attention.

So, the first collection which is *Silencing the Words* that has got 14 poems and they are in 6 segments, it is full of intellectuality. Many people can also call it a sort of the poetic snobbery, where the poet was perhaps trying to find out a mode.

And it has got a lot of symbols used since Mohanty here also mentions various Orissian landscapes. So, one can also find Mohanty to have a sort of closeness with Jayanta Mahapatra. At times there are obscure images also in plenty in the world of Mohanty. We can take some of the lines to attach to the truth of what Mohanty really dwells in.

“In winter nights/Idle whisperings/Behind the blanket/Bring you more close to me./Words have already melted/in the shaft of mercury light./Few months later/We were blessed.”

It actually talks about a couple’s relationship. And then in a very subtle way he says that, whisperings also have got meanings, silences also have got meanings and it is this silence which actually heralds a new beginning and this new beginning is the birth of the multiplication of more people on earth. Mohanty also talks about the rumors that are spread, the rumors that prevail in and around us, and there also he says that how the two members even in a bond, even in a relationship, how they are also at times affected with the in and around activities taking place.

And in such a situation rumor has a great role to play: “Rumors/ like airborne diseases/ relate many words/ many truths....”/

Mohanty is actually an expert at world play. He says- “relate many words/ many truths. An ally of light and shade /.We can find the use of contraries here. “Reforming your beauty, frosts/ of night have chilled your passion/ your complaint against/ rumors begets disaffection /silence is god.” So, for Mohanty it is not only the words that matter rather it is the silence that matters.

Because silence is actually at the root of many creations, but maybe in our life when rumors come they create a sort of chaos. And we actually miss those beautiful hours when silence brings us closer, but at the same time rumor comes in and between and this rumor is a sort of pollutant.

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Oh! This Bloody Game

- ✓ Fifty two poems comprising the complexities of life
- ✓ Loneliness, obsession with death and suffering
- ✓ Picture of contemporary reality

“ But I have chosen to be lonely
For loneliness has its secret roots of bliss,
Secret nests of joy.
How am I to know what flows within,
What makes me myself, what saps my song
If I’m not alone.” (05)

I’ve grown expert in wooing
women,
teasing children, mocking at
saints
as clumsy as politicians. I mate
cross-legged with that
prostitute
who sings hosanna for me
under the kadamba tree. (38)

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Now, another poem which is actually very important, which talks about several relationships entitled *Oh this Bloody Game*. Now, here this collection comprises 52 poems and which actually deal with the complexities of human life, complexities of various relationships, one can get an imprint of loneliness, obsession with death and suffering. But the poet in a way talks about the contemporary reality.

Here there is a dialogue between the father and the son, here there is actually the voice I mean. He in a way talks about the traditions that at times bind us and at times vanish also, traditions which also distance and then the poet very beautifully says:

“ But I have chosen to be lonely/For loneliness has its secret roots of bliss,/Secret nests of joy./How am I to know what flows within,/What makes me myself, what saps my song/If I’m not alone.” (05) So, like silence loneliness also has a boon and the poet actually tries to find out, some fruits which can beget in the arts of idleness in the arts of loneliness.

Now, when we come to certain relationships, we find that how a father often mentors his own son, often mentors his own child and then the growth of the child is actually twisted. But the child’s voice is often ignored and Mohanty has his opinion about that, in a way his sentiments when he writes- “I have grown expert in wooing women,/ teasing children, mocking at saints /as clumsy as politicians.”

So, you see how beautifully there is a sort of suggestiveness in Mohanty's world when he says that I have grown expert in wooing women, teasing children, mocking at saints as clumsy as politicians. There is a simile in it, but there are metaphorical meanings also involved within. "I mate cross legged with that prostitute/ who sings hosanna for me/ under the kadamba tree."

Now, the son who actually has come to this world---the son is growing mature, son is growing adult like and the son says that father oh this bloody game. So, let me be free from this bloody game because I have my own senses and I can find not only loneliness, but I can also find the isolation at the same time I can find a sort of rejoicings because I know how to woo, how to love and I can also know how what has been disregarded. Often there is a magic in it often there is a music in it.

Actually as I told earlier, what we should or what all our readers should look forward to getting in Mohanty is the religious note, how in one poem after another. For example, if we take *Krishna*. The moment we talk about Krishna there is a sort of devotional meaning that comes in and between.

And you know we start thinking of Lord Krishna and we think that Krishna who has got all the colors of life. But here when we take, when we go to the world of Mohanty we find that Mohanty not only attributes human qualities, but then with his fertile imagination he actually delves deep.

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Krishna

- ❖ Krishna is not a God but a God in human form.
- ❖ Famous poem that focuses upon the relationship of man and woman as an immaculate togetherness.
- ❖ Presents Radha as mighty before Krishna, someone who nurtures love.
- ❖ Raises voice against the atrocities which Radha face.
- ❖ Draws a connection between womanhood and nature.
- ❖ Metaphysical abstractions.

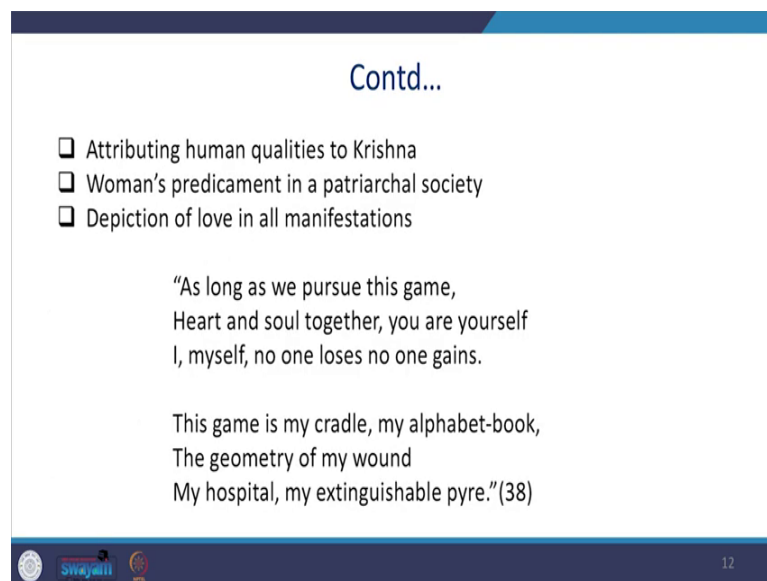
Swayam 11

And makes Krishna a Krishna the beloved and Radha the lover. And there are role reversals. There are quite a many thing Krishna is not a god, but a god in human form fine. So, Mohanty actually defies the traditional view that Krishna is a god, he actually says Krishna is only an incarnation. And then here he tries to, with the help of his own imagination, present or delineate Krishna in human form the famous poem which focuses upon the relationship of man and woman.

So, we all revere Krishna, but Mohanty actually reveres Krishna in a different way. Through Krishna he actually brings about the man- woman relationship as immaculate togetherness, love is actually a force that can defy all sorts of hostilities love is actually a force, that can melt all sorts of emotions, love is a force that actually comes to bind and also at times blind.

So, through *Krishna* Mohanty presents Radha as mighty before Krishna, Radha is mightier than Krishna someone who nurtures love and the poetry raises voice against the atrocities which Radha face. So, Radha here is a sort of metaphor for all women who are actually in love. There is a connection between womanhood and nature, there are metaphysical abstractions also. We can also take some of the lines in order to justify our line of thinking and to see Mohanty's depiction of Krishna through our own eyes.

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- Attributing human qualities to Krishna
- Woman's predicament in a patriarchal society
- Depiction of love in all manifestations

"As long as we pursue this game,
Heart and soul together, you are yourself
I, myself, no one loses no one gains.

This game is my cradle, my alphabet-book,
The geometry of my wound
My hospital, my extinguishable pyre."(38)

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Not only does Mohanty provide human qualities to Krishna, but then one can also find the depiction of the predicament of women in a patriarchal society and that is why

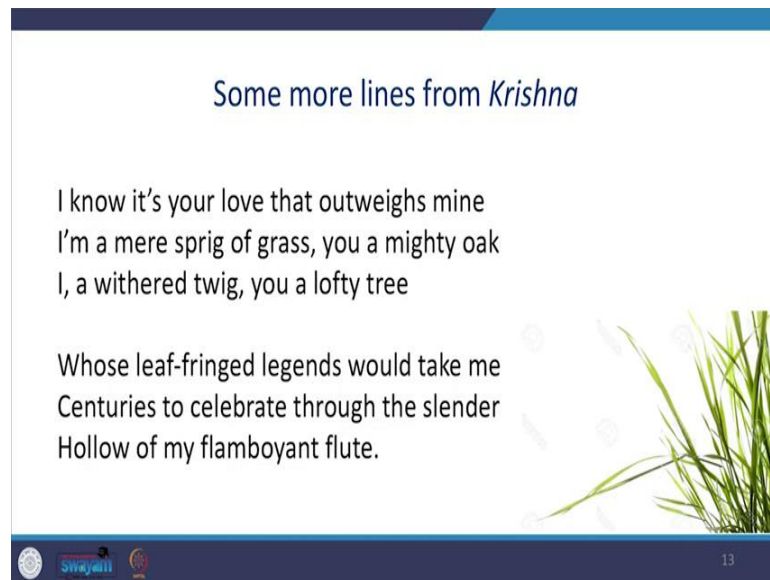
Mohanty picturizes Krishna as less mighty than Radha. So, depiction of love in all manifestations we shall read some of the lines in order to prove our line of thinking.

“As long as we pursue this game,
Heart and soul together, you are yourself
I, myself, no one loses no one gains.
This game is my cradle, my alphabet-book,
The geometry of my wound
My hospital, my extinguishable pyre.”(38)

As long as we pursue this game heart and soul together you are yourself, I myself no one loses no one gains. We often say that in love there is often you know there is often a conflict who is the winner, but then love has got a cementing force love has got a blinding force a binding force and that is why Krishna says this game is my cradle my alphabet book, the geometry of my wound, my hospital my extinguishable pyre.

Actually if one gets time to read and enjoy *Krishna* I think it will take a whole day and whole week, because the lines are so beautiful and I am at times tempted.

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So, I will also share with you some more beautiful lines also. “I know it is your love that outweighs mine,/ I am a mere sprig of grass you a mighty oak.”

Now Krishna says, that Radha you are great, what am I? “I am mere sprig of grass/ you a mighty oak.” You have got that sheltering power. “I a withered twig”. Meaning thereby in love one has to be very humble. Love actually does not know the difference between great and small because love itself is vast, love itself is great. “You are a lofty tree whose leaf fringed/ legends would take me/ centuries to celebrate through the slender/ hollow of my flamboyant flute”. You are a shelter. And I can take on centuries to celebrate through the slender hollow even the flute that I am playing. I am playing just to call you, but I am also trying to celebrate through the slender hollow of my flamboyant flute what your loftiness your beauty your benignity.

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“Krishna”

<p>Time and again I assume human form To purify what is divine in me. Time and again, I'm born on the earth</p> <p>To taste the sweetness of corn or rice That are grown <u>between the vale</u> <u>Of your bee-hunting breasts.</u></p>	<p>I know that I'm in a burning paradox. I'm insignia Of all that is paradoxical. And that is why I need you so earnestly, so urgently.</p> <p>That's why I hope to become a silent part of your body so that the sting of my own ambivalence wont haunt me as it does now I wish I could ripen with your love...</p>
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swajati 14

Time and again and then see how the poet makes a beautiful use of imagination when he says. “Time and again I assume human form/ to purify what is divine in me/. People consider me to be divine, but I am as human as anyone. But I keep on changing I keep on assuming human form time and again I am born on this earth. So, people who attribute divine qualities to me I want to come down to the earth in order to celebrate your love Radha.

“To taste the sweetness of corn or rice/ that are grown between the vale/ of your bee hunting breasts”. So, let me take the human form, so that I can enjoy the benignities of human love. So, in a way it is not the love between Radha and Krishna in a way it is actually love between man and woman.

And time and again, Krishna says-- I know that/ I am in a burning paradox, I am insignia/ of all that is paradoxical/ and that is why/ I need you so earnestly, so urgently./ That is why I hope to become a silent part/ of your body, so that the sting/ of my own ambivalence would not haunt me/ as it does now, I wish I could ripen with your love.”

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Contd...

Even if I were not born as Krishna
 And you as Radha, I would have remained
 Yours faithfully, yours. Do names matter?
 Can you tell me the name of the bird that sits
 And sings in the cage of your body?
 Where do the names go, where do the words go
 When body becomes a mere shadow? (54)

Perhaps so long as you treat me
As divine, abstract, distant, dizzy
 I can't get answers to all my questions.
 I can't solve the riddle, the mystery
 Of my problems as long as I'm not
 Born in human form on the earth. (64)

My fair lady, I'm human
 My needs are human too. Whatever
 I possess or dispossess is human.
 In whatever form I love you
 I remain human, you are
The acme of my human need, my dear.
 (71)

There comes a time when Krishna says that I do not want to die fine, because I do not want to see you a widow fine. See the imagination of the poet—“ Even if I were not born as Krishna/ and you as Radha I would have remained/ yours faithfully yours, do names matter.” Now the poet while talking about love also makes at times some questions of identity.

And he says, “Do names matter? Can you tell me the name of the bird that sits/ and sings in the cage of your body,/. The sort of nimbleness that you have Radha; “where do the names go where do the words go /when body becomes a mere shadow.” He also hints at the worthlessness of this body and he says-- why to boast of all these things when we all know that names do not matter, it is actually the sweetness, it is actually the memory that matters.

“Perhaps so long as you treat me as divine abstract distant and dizzy”. look at the alliterative use, as divine abstract distant and dizzy. “I cannot get answers to all my questions/ I cannot solve the riddle the mystery/ of my problems as long as I am not/ born in human form on the earth.”

I am not a god I actually want to take a human form because I have to solve, I have to resolve several issues I have to resolve several riddles several mysteries. And you know the acme of love, the culmination of love that one can find, when Krishna says--

My fair lady, I'm human
My needs are human too.
Whatever
I possess or dispossess is
human.
In whatever form I love you
I remain human, you are
The acme of my human need,
my dear. (71)


So, in these lines, the poet actually wants to tell that man and women are the needs, man and women are complementary to each other. And then the relation between man and woman is not only romantic, but it is actually religious.

So, when you start attributing me with the divine qualities perhaps I am deprived of all the love that is there on earth. You know at times or the other we start thinking what a sort of life we are leading, but then when Krishna yearns for a life on earth then we can understand what a beautiful life we are perhaps enjoying on this beautiful earth fine.

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Rain

- ❖ 'Rain is a part of Orissa landscape.'
- ❖ Relates it to his identity.
- ❖ Nostalgically reminds him of the cremated grounds
- ❖ Multiple voices of rain in his poems



I never go to temples, I envy
those who go. How nicely they go pious
ringing the bells, swaying holy flowers!
Perhaps it's fear---
The gist of my existence. (Rains 74)

swayam 16

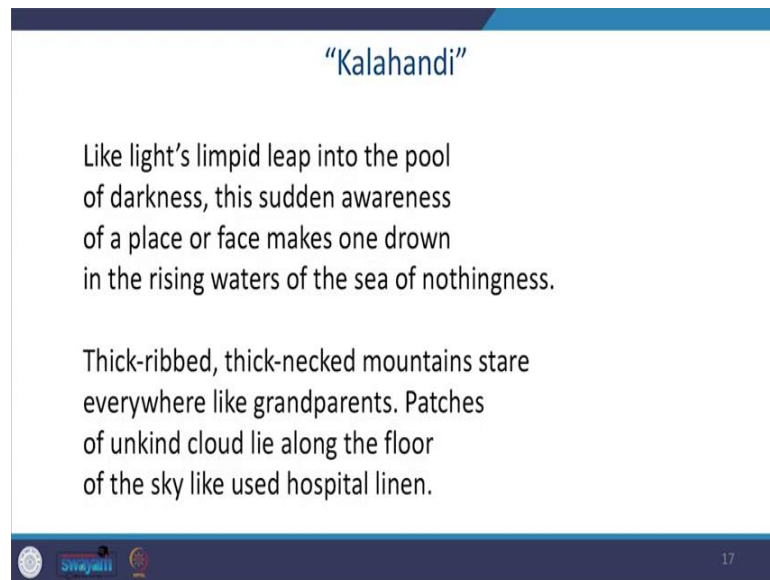
So, we can go on and on when we start discussing Niranjan Mohanty as a poet, but then we can also take some other aspects of Mohanty's poetry; where he talks about in the

famous collection *House of Rains*. Because you know since the poet is from Orissa and Orissian landscape is always on his mind like Jayanta Mahapatra.

So, he is also struggling for his own identity and his nostalgia reminds him of the cremated grounds where many of his forefathers have been cremated of long. So, in *House of Rains* we can find multiple voices of rains in his poems where he talks about the creation and the destruction. Where he talks about the force of the rain and we can take one very beautiful stanza where he says. And then he also talks about some other issues namely the issues of faith and other things, where he says that “I never go to temples, I envy/those who go. How nicely they go pious/ringing the bells, swaying holy flowers! /Perhaps it’s fear---/The gist of my existence.” (Rains 74)

So, now there is also a dig, there is also an irony when he talks about these religious practices, but at the same time he also talks about how man because he is frightened of death, man because he is frightened of his own existence he actually goes to ring the bell in the temples and offer the flowers. So, the poet at times becomes quite realistic because he also talks about the several problems that are in and around. And he justifies that it is only because of the fear of death that people go to offer their prayers to god. One poem entitled “Kalahandi” which is actually infamous for the hunger and for actually the drought and all. So, he also provides a sort of a beautiful depiction of the landscapes where he talks about how poverty and how the scarce of food has actually converted people where he says.

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“Kalahandi”

Like light’s limpid leap into the pool
of darkness, this sudden awareness
of a place or face makes one drown
in the rising waters of the sea of nothingness.

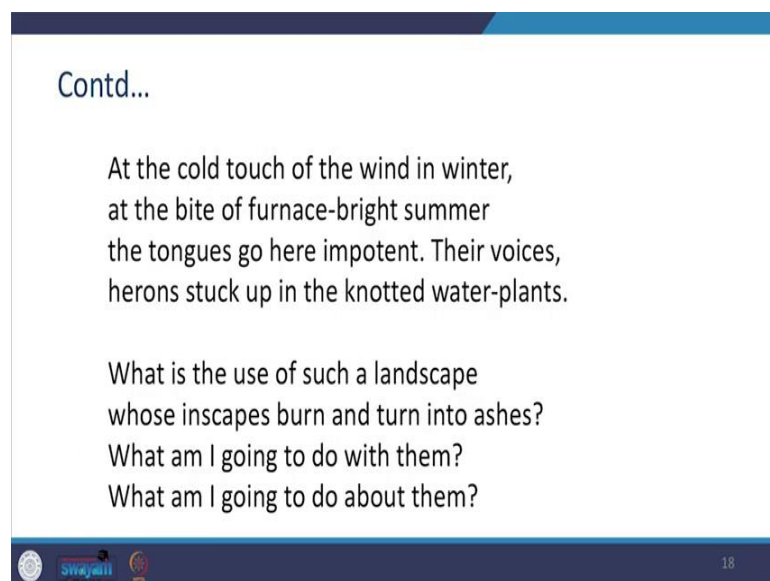
Thick-ribbed, thick-necked mountains stare
everywhere like grandparents. Patches
of unkind cloud lie along the floor
of the sky like used hospital linen.

17

Like lights limpid leap into the pool, whatever poem you read about Mohanty you can find a beautiful combination of alliteration assonance and consonance. “Like lights limped leap into the pool/ of darkness this sudden awareness/ of a place or face makes one drown/ in the rising waters of the sea of nothingness./ Thick ribbed thin necked mountains stare/ everywhere like grandparents patches /of unkind cloud.../

I mean there are no rains and that is why the problem persists, fine.

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Contd...

At the cold touch of the wind in winter,
at the bite of furnace-bright summer
the tongues go here impotent. Their voices,
herons stuck up in the knotted water-plants.

What is the use of such a landscape
whose inscapes burn and turn into ashes?
What am I going to do with them?
What am I going to do about them?


18

So, you can read it at your own disposal because I have some more important poems also to discuss fine.

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Characteristics of “Kalahandi”

- Exploring a cultural landscape
- Unfavourable conditions heightened by meteorological imageries
- The geographical legacy of the place.
- Clinical imageries to suggest withering.
- Rhetorical ending: How can one contribute?
- ‘Nature plays a foe’



19

Actually when we talk about “Kalahandi”, we do know that this, actually Kalahandi is a geographical legacy of the place, And when the poem actually ends, the poet says how can one contribute. So, the poet actually raises a question and the poet shows that just like Wordsworth, that nature can not only be malign always nature can also be benign always and man has to face man the offshoots of nature at times.

So, there is a sort of consciousness and this consciousness appears in various forms.

Prayers to Lord Jagannatha

Teach me how to sharpen my belief
and polish the stone of my faith
in the essence of a human heart. (25)

What knowledge, what wisdom, what power
made my mother's tongue so sharp, so humble
so human and so bright?

With what vision were those saint poets
of my tribe born? What courage had they
to tame the words of deep metaphors?

Perhaps language is a river now
where I can swim and float anyway I like
only to get a feel that I'm part of the tribe. (37)

Often when cornered by grief,
I light incense sticks at day's end,
Closing my eyes and standing still.. (78)

Are we born to demolish mosques and
temples?

Rob the deities of their robes?

What else is cruelty, oh lord? (111)

20

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One thing that I wanted to share with you all is that his *Prayers to Lord Jagannatha* where once again this became very famous. Here also the poet is not depicting the qualities of the lord, but the poet actually in a very interrogative manner raises certain questions and at the same time the poet also wants Lord Jagannatha to be his guide.

And he wants Lord Jagannatha to educate the people. And there are end number of lines which go on, where he says that it is only because of Lord Jagannatha that we could get the language that we are using. It is only because of Lord Jagannatha that we are, but at times the poet also takes a dig at the worldly atrocities, at the worldly chaos.

And then the poet also says that how can if the lord is so powerful, how can the lord keep quiet when there are several atrocities being played in the name of caste, creed, nationality and what not. We shall take up some lines: “Teach me how to sharpen my belief/ and polish the stone of my faith/ in the essence of a human heart.” So, he wants Lord Jagannatha to become his guide.

And then he raises a question and says—“what knowledge what wisdom what power/ made my mother’s tongue, so sharp, so humble/, so human and so bright.” So, he says that while we have got a language which at times is harsh and humble, but at the same time the poet as he moves on he says often. But then looking at the worldly picture he the poet is aggrieved. At the rising tension at the killings of people, nameless killings in the name of some belief or the other. And he says, “often when cornered by grief/ I light incense sticks at days end/ closing my eyes and standing still.”

So, dear lord at times when I feel cornered I actually close my eyes and still wait for you, but what are you doing and the poet says- “Are we born to demolish mosques and temples.” So, there is actually a hint at the destruction that we have caused robbed the deities of their robes fine. What else is cruelty oh lord you have become so mute do you not see how we humans have been behaving with each other fine. We are actually disrobing the deities of their robes what can be what can be more cruel than this.

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Contd...

It's true that nothing possesses me
So madly, so deeply, so neatly
As does the rotundity of your eyes, oh lord! (78)

Let's mutually agree to exchange
Our positions: You come down to earth
And I fly to your throne bearing all mirth. (66)

Let's sort out our follies and differences
So that you being wise become a fool
I being an idiot, become a wisdom pool.(79)

“It is true that nothing possesses me/ so madly, so deeply, so neatly/ as does the rotundity of your eyes.” So, he also tries to create a sort of physical manifestation of Lord Jagannatha and he says then. “Oh lord let us mutually agree to exchange/ our positions:” you are sitting there you are sitting there. So, can we not exchange our positions, you come down to earth.

So, there is actually a sort of invocation to Lord Jagannatha. So, that he could come ‘down to the earth and I fly to your throne bearing all mirth.’ “Let us sort out our follies and differences/ so that you being wise become a fool/ I being an idiot become a wisdom pool.” Now he says let us exchange our positions if you come to this world perhaps you will be able to resolve. So, many riddles if you come to this world and you know you can only educate people like me who are fools.

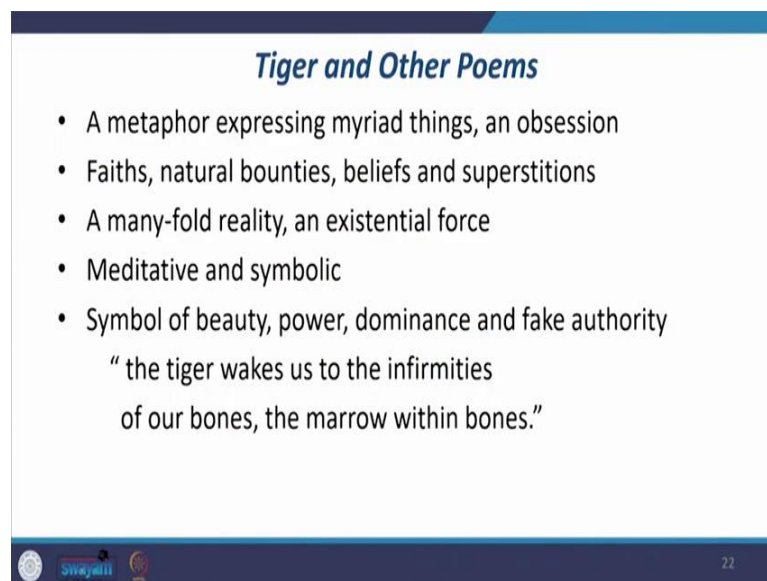
So, let me take your position and you take mine and in this way only all the follies of the world, all the falsities of the world, all the indifferences and differences of the world will be mitigated oh lord can you not do that fine. So, through this *Prayers to Lord Jagannatha* it is not only a prayer, but through these prayers the poet actually talks about the contemporary situation of the world.

So, I my aim here is to familiarize you with the poetic world of Niranjan Mohanty, but then it would be an injustice if I do not take the last collection of Mohanty which is

entitled *Tiger and Other Poems*, which was composed and which got published in 2008 the year when Mohanty breathed his last.

So, in *Tiger and the Other Poems* again this is very symbolical. Tiger actually becomes a metaphor here, there are other poems as well, but there are quite a good number of poems which are in the name of tiger only. And the tiger-- through this tiger the poet has actually has a purpose to serve, the purpose of how the tiger is powerful, but how the tiger when he loses power. So, tiger is a metaphor here and through tiger the poet actually mocks at this contemporary world and its situation. How one tries to overpower, how one tries to dominate, how one tries to show one's force, but then the worldly go of the world and the custom of the world is that every tiger sometimes or the other will become old. So, if you can read some of the poems it will really be a delight to delve deep into the world of Niranjan Mohanty.

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Tiger and Other Poems

- A metaphor expressing myriad things, an obsession
- Faiths, natural bounties, beliefs and superstitions
- A many-fold reality, an existential force
- Meditative and symbolic
- Symbol of beauty, power, dominance and fake authority

“ the tiger wakes us to the infirmities
of our bones, the marrow within bones.”

22

Through this poem the poet actually talks about the various faiths, natural bounties, ecological concern, various superstitions. And the tiger ,he says, it is actually a manifold reality it is tiger is an existential force and the entire collection is meditative and symbolic tiger is a symbol of beauty it reminds us of the tiger of William Blake-- Tiger,tiger burning bright.

But here there are in this collection more than you know more than 80 to 90 times the use of tiger. And through tiger the poet actually wages a war and the poet satisfies

himself as well. He says—“The tiger wakes us to the infirmities/ weaknesses, the tiger wakes us to the infirmities, of our bones/ the marrow within bones. We will also take up some of the poems from Tiger and Other poems, so that you can understand.

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Contd...

"I collect pebbles of my dreams
To drop them one by one
Into the earthen pitcher of your being
So that the margin of your love
Would rise to quench my thirst." (Escaping into You, 10)

Who can disown whom?
Neither I, the tiger,
Nor the tiger, myself.
This is perhaps, the only thing
Common between ourselves,
The point where we meet.
As though, it were a zone
Where all else looks insipid,
Shadow-like, insignificant. (The Tiger & I)

This is not yet the new year,
Yet, I can see a new tiger
Moving into the mosque,
Staining and tainting the flower
That blooms in every heart.

I see it approaching...
Towards Sankatmochan temple
Causing cries, echoes of heart-rending cries
Which redden waves of the Ganges
And silence voices of other woes
Between one darkness and another.
("The New Tiger")

23

In the beginning of the poems entitled “Escaping into You”, he says- “I collect pebbles of my dreams”, Here he talks about the dreams and then here he talks about love that as a lover I am just like a crow. And every day I am gathering every day I am, because as a crow I am thirsty of love, every day I am gathering pebbles one after another. “So, that the margin of your love/ would rise to quench my thirst.”

And then some poems which are actually in the name of tiger- “The Tiger and I”. There is one poem entitled “The Tiger” and I will take up only a few poems because I know time is at our back- “Who can disown whom/ neither I the tiger/ nor the tiger myself.” So, if you consider yourself as tiger to be very important, very powerful, no neither man nor the tiger is powerful. “This is perhaps the only thing/ common between ourselves/ the point where we meet/ as though, it were a zone/ where all else looks insipid/ shadow like insignificant.”

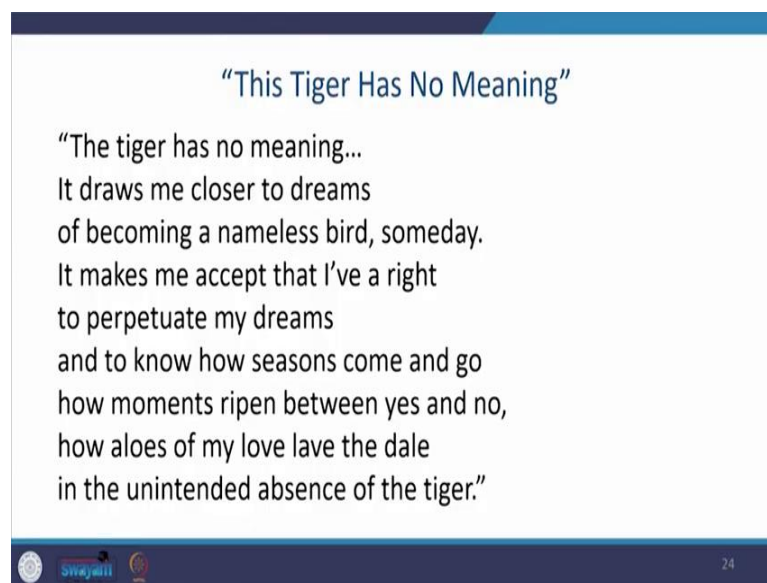
And then there is another poem entitled “The New Tiger” and in new tiger he actually says, how you know in several institutions also namely in several religions also the tiger as a metaphor enters and destroys everything. “This is not the new year/ yet I can see a

new tiger/ moving into the mosque/ staining and tainting the flower/ that blooms in every heart.” My dear friends, please mark there is a note, there is a suggestive note.

I see it approaching every now and then, “I see it approaching/ towards Sankatmochan temple,/ causing cries, echoes of heart rending cries/ which redden waves of the Ganges/ and silence voices of other woes/ between one darkness and another”. I think it is written, so in a simplistic manner; but then there is a suggestiveness that can actually help you understand the meaning of the suggestion that the poet actually tries to wrap through his words.

Now, the last poem that I am going to take up is “The tiger has no Meaning” and this actually talks about the worthlessness of life, the worthlessness of power, the worthlessness of dominance and all. Because ultimately the poet is existential the poet is post colonial my dear friend.

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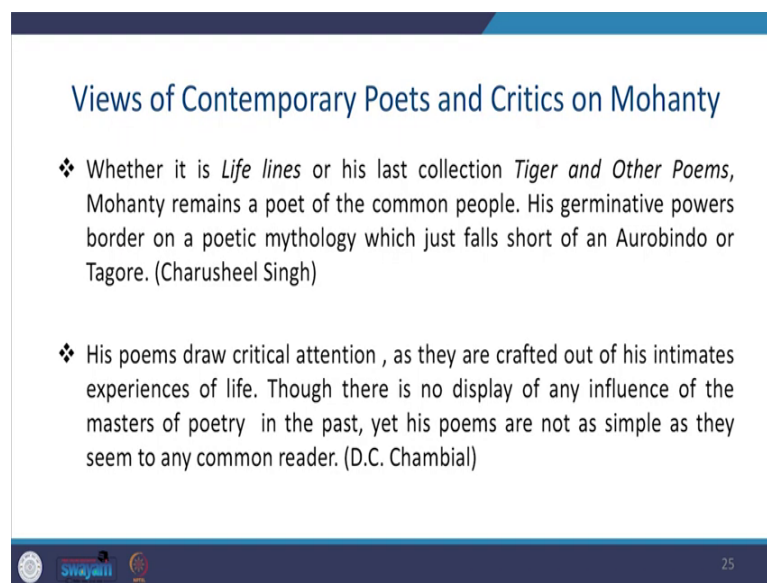
And this poem says the tiger has no meaning and the poem continues. “The tiger has no meaning”. Tiger is only a metaphor. “It draws me closer to dreams/ of becoming a nameless bird someday/ it makes me accept that I have a right/ to perpetuate my dreams/ everyone has got ambition.

But you know the moment you become a tiger or the moment you have the tiger’s quality, then perhaps your dreams are destroyed ‘to perpetuate my dreams/ and to know

how seasons come and go.” So, seasons also come and go. So, the force that you are so proud of that is also destructive, it will come and go. “How moments ripen between yes and no/ how aloes of my love lave the dale/ in the unintended absence of the tiger.”

So, do you really think that it is only the tiger that is very important, my dear friends? Niranjan Mohanty’s poetic oeuvre is so vast that it can continue for a long time, but let us very quickly take up some of the views of critics who have said something or the other about which is really worth noticing.

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The slide is titled "Views of Contemporary Poets and Critics on Mohanty" and contains two bullet points. The first bullet point is a quote from Charusheel Singh about Mohanty's connection to common people and poetic mythology. The second bullet point is a quote from D.C. Chambial about the critical attention drawn by Mohanty's poems due to their intimate nature.

Views of Contemporary Poets and Critics on Mohanty

- ❖ Whether it is *Life lines* or his last collection *Tiger and Other Poems*, Mohanty remains a poet of the common people. His germinative powers border on a poetic mythology which just falls short of an Aurobindo or Tagore. (Charusheel Singh)
- ❖ His poems draw critical attention, as they are crafted out of his intimate experiences of life. Though there is no display of any influence of the masters of poetry in the past, yet his poems are not as simple as they seem to any common reader. (D.C. Chambial)

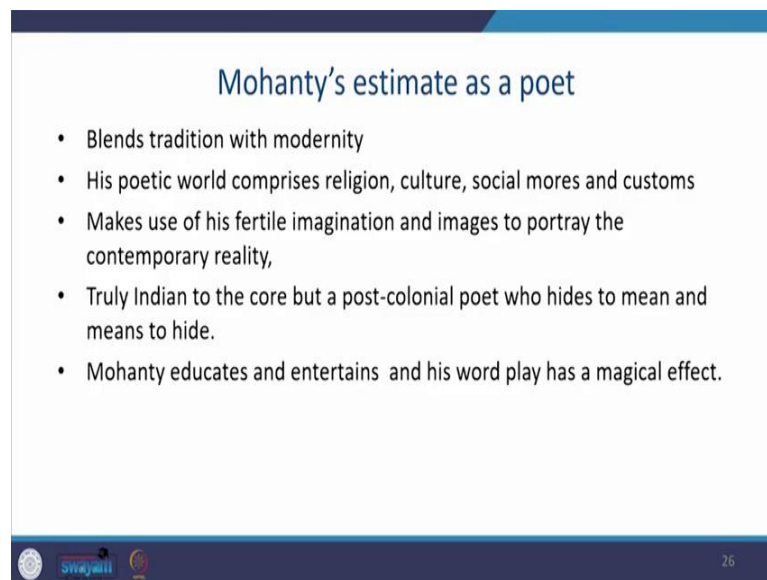
Charusheel Singh another poet whom we will discuss in the later lectures says, “Whether it is *Life Lines* or his last collection *Tiger and Other Poems*, Mohanty remains a poet of the common people. His germinative powers border on a poetic mythology which just falls short of an Aurobindo or Tagore.”

We can find the rural poetry, we can find the images which are from the rural landscape and all.

So, one can find an echo of Aurobindo or Tagore in the world of Niranjan Mohanty. Mohanty’s poems, another important poet and critic Chambial says, “draw critical attention as they are crafted out of his intimate experiences of life. There is no display of any influence of the masters of poetry in the past, yet his poems are not as simple as they seem to any common reader.”

So, though I have already discussed the poetic oeuvre of Niranjana Mohanty, but it would always be better if you can have a feel and you can enjoy and if you can rejoice in the poetic world of Niranjana Mohanty, but the time has come to estimate Mohanty as a poet. Mohanty, as we have been discussing, blends tradition and modernity.

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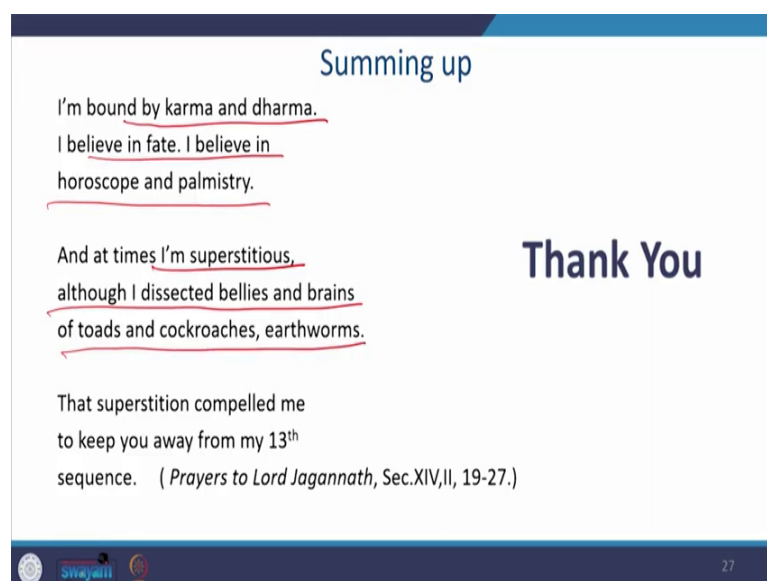


Mohanty's estimate as a poet

- Blends tradition with modernity
- His poetic world comprises religion, culture, social mores and customs
- Makes use of his fertile imagination and images to portray the contemporary reality,
- Truly Indian to the core but a post-colonial poet who hides to mean and means to hide.
- Mohanty educates and entertains and his word play has a magical effect.

26

His poetic world ranges from religion to culture to social modes and customs his imagination is fertile. Niranjana Mohanty is truly an Indian English poet because he also talks about various post colonial questions, where he tries to hide meaning and where he actually means to hide. Mohanty's poetic world not only educates, but also entertains and his word play has got quite a magical effect.(Refer Slide Time: 46:03)



Summing up

I'm bound by karma and dharma.
I believe in fate. I believe in
horoscope and palmistry.

And at times I'm superstitious,
although I dissected bellies and brains
of toads and cockroaches, earthworms.

That superstition compelled me
to keep you away from my 13th
sequence. (*Prayers to Lord Jagannath, Sec.XIV,II, 19-27.*)

Thank You

27

Let me sum up this lecture once again taking some lines from Niranjana Mohanty and the lines are very representative; not only of Niranjana Mohanty as a poet, but also as an Indian where he says and where he actually talks about the Indian masses in general where he says,

“I am bound by karma and dharma”

I believe not only in action, but I also believe in religion. I believe in faith.

“I believe in horoscope and palmistry”, the typical Indian.

“And at times I am superstitious although/ I dissected bellies and brains/ of toads and cockroaches earthworms./ That superstition compelled me/ to keep you away from my 13th sequence.”

These lines are actually from *Prayers to Lord Jagannatha's* 14th section and with this let me come to wind up this talk. But let us remember that Mohanty was a poet par excellence I invite you all to read the works of Mohanty.

Thank you very much I wish you all a good day.