

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

Lecture - 31
Gobikrishnan Kottoor

Good morning friends and welcome back to NPTEL online certification course on Indian poetry in English. As you will remember that in the previous lecture, we talked about one very significant voice named Bibhu Padhi. And till now we have discussed three professor turned poets, but then one thing which we all have to realize that poetry is nobody's slave. It is not essential that a poet whether writing in any language has to be a professor.

Today, we are going to talk about one such voice, who even though not attached to any academic institution has created ripples in the world of poetry. And this person is none other than Gopi Krishnan Kottoor. Gopi Krishnan Kottoor is actually a banker by profession, but the sort of depth, the sort of meaning, the sort of message that Kottoor has packed in his poems actually speaks volumes about the person who believes that it is actually suffering which gives birth to real poetry.


And we will witness how Kottoor makes us delve deep in his poetic world through his poetic sparks, and how he brings a sort of variety also. Actually, society also has a greater role to play in the formation of a poet and also providing him with different patterns of life, different experiences that help them soak, that help their thoughts sink, simmer and get forth into the forms of poetry.

The socio-political conditions in post- independent India had quite a different sort of experience especially for poets. Poets instead of confining themselves to the world only of flora and fauna, only of love came to bring in their oeuvre the everyday realities.

(Refer Slide Time: 03:25)

Socio-Political Conditions

- ❖ Humans grapple with daily-life problems, suicide, disease, death, poverty.
- ❖ Alienation, corruption, and dissatisfaction.
- ❖ Confessional Poetry has taken a new form today. It is impersonal.



2

And then certain questions of life, namely the everyday problems, suicide, diseases, death, poverty and even every day affairs of life like anniversaries, marriages, human relationships, also became a part of poetry. So, the post- modern and post- independent Indian English poetry witnessed themes of alienation, corruption, and dissatisfaction in many of the poets.

We have already discussed how confessional poetry also came to affect many of our Indian poets.

(Refer Slide Time: 04:16)

Confessional Poetry

- ❖ American Confessional Poets
Robert Lowell, Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, etc.
- ❖ Sensitive, emotional and personal
- ❖ Pain, rage, fear, guilt and other suppressed emotions are addressed.
- ❖ Rebellion against emotional or social bondage.
- ❖ Indian Confessional Poetry
 - ❖ Kamala Das and others



Confessional
Poetry



3


And then the poets tried to bring their personal experiences, making it impersonal and that is why confessional poetry has also become very popular among many Indian poets. One can also find the imprint and the effect of Robert Lowell, Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, on many Indian English poets.

But at the same time one could also find a sort of rebellion against emotional or social bondage. We have already talked about Kamala Das and many other poets who have depicted a sort of rebellion in their poetic oeuvre. Now, today we are going to discuss in this lecture the poetic oeuvre of Gopi Krishnan Kottoor, who as I told you, is a banker by profession, but the sort of creative writing that he has done, not only as a poet, but also as a novelist, also as a dramatist, also as a critic, also as a translator.




(Refer Slide Time: 05:24)

Introduction to the Poet

- ❖ Born in 1956...., Trivandrum, Kerala, India.
- ❖ Education at an English Jesuit College
- ❖ Master of Fine Arts (Poetry) program of the Texas State University, Southwest Texas, U.S.
- ❖ Poet-in-Residence at the University of Augsburg, Germany, (2005) on a sponsorship by ICCR in association with Tagore Centre, Berlin.
- ❖ The pen name of Raghav G. Nair
- ❖ Poetry journal *Poetry Chain*
- ❖ "A Cut in Jade" (about the struggles of bringing out little magazine)
- ❖ Won several awards: All-India Special Poetry Prize of the British Council, Poetry Society, India, All India Poetry Competitions (AIPC) in 1997.



Poet, Playwriter, Novelist

4

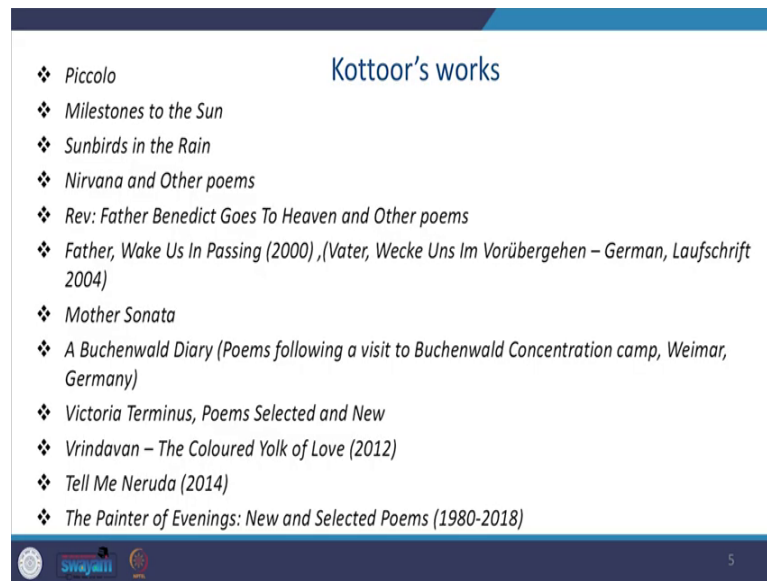
So, Gopi Kottoor or Gopi Krishnan Kottoor was born in 1956 in Trivandrum, Kerala. He was actually educated at English Jesuit College and then he took a Masters in Fine Arts from the program of Texas State University, Southwest Texas, US. Kottoor had also an opportunity of being Poet-in-Residents at the University of Augsburg, Germany on a sponsorship by ICCR in association with Tagore Centre, Berlin.

Gopi Krishnan Kottoor had his pen name Raghav G Nair, and not only does Kottoor write poetry, but he also has a journal poetry chain, fine through which he encourages new and young poets, new voices. Kottoor has won several awards. To name a few are

All India Special Poetry Prize of the British Council Poetry Society, All India Poetry Competitions also in 1997.

Apart from writing poems, he has also written a novel and he is a playwright as well. Kottoor was very much influenced by John Keats, and he has mentioned at many places his influences of Keats which actually help him write many poems and also he did one drama.

(Refer Slide Time: 07:10)



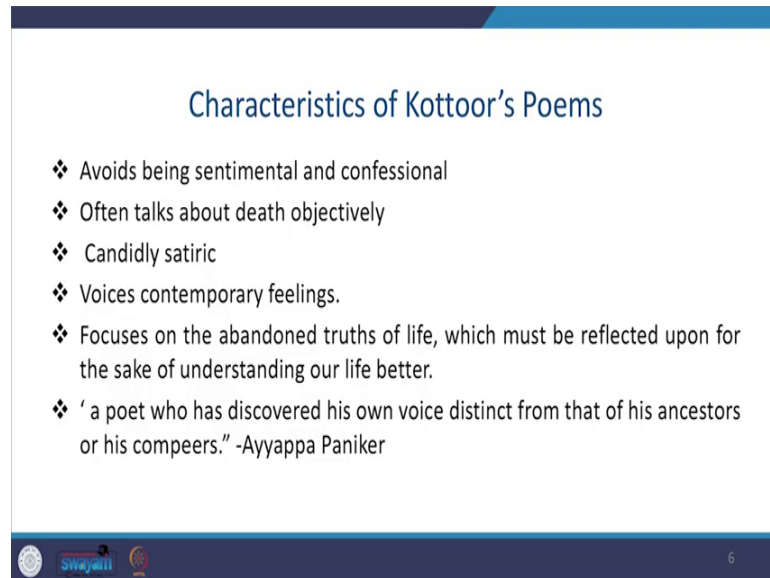
So, some of his works namely, *Piccolo*, *Milestones to the Sun*, *Sunbirds in the Rain*, *Nirvana and Other poems*, then *Reverend Father Benedict Goes to Heaven and Other poems*. And then what made Kottoor become very famous was one collection entitled *Father, Wake us in Passing*, which was also translated in German.

And then he also wrote another collection named *Mother Sonata*, then *A Buchenwald Diary* which is actually a collection which talks about the life of captives, fine, life of captive soldiers and then *Victoria Terminus, Poems Selected and New*. And then another significant poetry collection that Kottoor brought out was the *Vrindavan, The Coloured Yolk of Love* which came out in 2012.

Then in 2014 came *Tell Me Neruda*, and then came *The Painter of Evenings, New and Selected Poems 1980-2018*. Now, what does Kottoor write about? Kottoor is actually if

you read the poems of Kottoor you will once again find a sort of spontaneity. Kottoor is a very simple poet, but very meaningful, fine.

(Refer Slide Time: 08:39)



Characteristics of Kottoor's Poems

- ❖ Avoids being sentimental and confessional
- ❖ Often talks about death objectively
- ❖ Candidly satiric
- ❖ Voices contemporary feelings.
- ❖ Focuses on the abandoned truths of life, which must be reflected upon for the sake of understanding our life better.
- ❖ ' a poet who has discovered his own voice distinct from that of his ancestors or his compeers.' -Ayyappa Paniker

Kottoor avoids being sentimental and confessional. He often talks about death objectively. Pain is one of the main concerns of Kottoor's world. He has actually experienced pains, he has experienced the pathetic condition of his father who was in coma and then one of his collections, *Father Wake us in Passing* is also dedicated and devoted to his father.

He is candidly satiric. Kottoor also voices contemporary feelings in the poetic garb of his small simple words, but very meaningful. Kottoor focuses on the abandoned truths of life which must be reflected upon for the sake of understanding our life better. Ayyappa Paniker has rightly said that 'Kottoor is a poet who has discovered his own voice distinct from that of his ancestors or his compeers.'

So, we shall have a look at the poems of Kottoor to understand Kottoor's poetic world better.

(Refer Slide Time: 09:53)

Characteristics of *Father, Wake Us In Passing* (2000)

- Translated in German by Wolfgang Heyder in 2004 as *Vater, wecke' uns im Vorübergehen'*
- 18 Parts: "Frost", "Cry", "America", "Telephone Call", "Intensive Care Unit", "Nectar of the Gods", "Lone Ranger", "Blue Petals", "Gethsemane", "Gift", "ICU", "Rocks of Calvary", "The Colours of Pain", "Angels on the Moon", "China Roses", "Pigeons", "Sea Crabs", "Wedding Night", "Magic Sleeper".

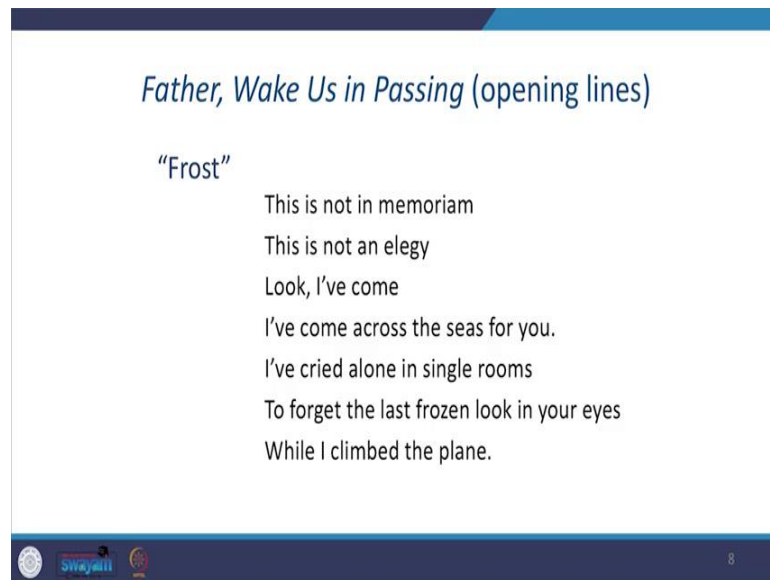
7

As I mentioned earlier that his collection entitled *Father, Wake Us In Passing* which was translated in German by Wolfgang Heyder in 2004 as “Vater, wecke uns in Vorubergehen”. Now, this collection has got 18 parts. Of course this collection talks about the pain which his father suffered, and majority of the poems they are one can always say that maybe it is a sort of tribute to his father.

So, the poems are titled like “Frost,” “Cry, America,” “Telephone Call”, “Intensive Care Unit,” “Nectar of the Gods,” “Lone Ranger”, “Blue Petals”, “Gethsemane”, “Gift”, “ICU”, “Rocks of Calvary”, “The Colours of Pain”, “Angels on the Moon”, “China Roses”, “Pigeons”, “Sea Crabs”, “Wedding Night”, “Magic Sleeper” etc.

And in this collection and in the other collection also entitled *Mother Sonata* in which he talks about his own mother’s problems, we can also come across many medical terms being used in the poems. But then they do not pose any difficulty when we read them. So, let us take at the first poem from “Father, Wake Us In Passing”. The poems are very smooth and it appears as if the poet in a very conversational manner is telling his father and telling all.

(Refer Slide Time: 11:33)



Father, Wake Us in Passing (opening lines)

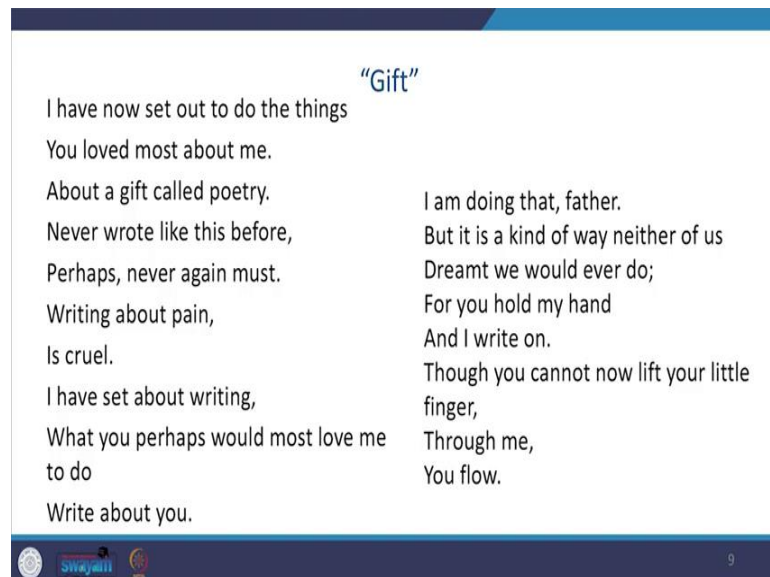
“Frost”

This is not in memoriam
This is not an elegy
Look, I’ve come
I’ve come across the seas for you.
I’ve cried alone in single rooms
To forget the last frozen look in your eyes
While I climbed the plane.

8

“This is not in memoriam,/ this is not in elegy./ Look, I have come,/ I have come across the seas for you. The poet was in Germany at that time. And then he says I have come across the seas for you. /I have cried alone in single rooms/ to forget the last frozen look in your eyes/ while I climbed the plane.”

(Refer Slide Time: 11:54)



“Gift”

I have now set out to do the things You loved most about me. About a gift called poetry. Never wrote like this before, Perhaps, never again must. Writing about pain, Is cruel. I have set about writing, What you perhaps would most love me to do Write about you.	I am doing that, father. But it is a kind of way neither of us Dreamt we would ever do; For you hold my hand And I write on. Though you cannot now lift your little finger, Through me, You flow.
--	---

9

And then there is another poem named “Gift.” Actually, majority of the poems of this collection are soaked in pain. “I have now set out to do the things/ you loved most about

me,/ about a gift called poetry,/ never wrote like this before./ Perhaps, never again must/
writing about pain is cruel.” So, there is an element of truth.

Writing about pain is cruel, I have set about writing. What you perhaps would most love
me to do write about you. So, a tribute to the father. I am doing that father, but ‘it is a
kind of way neither of us dreamt we would ever do/ for you hold my hand/ and I write
on. /Though you cannot now lift your little/ finger,/ through me, /you flow.”

So, perhaps you could never have wanted me to write, fine and you could never have
thought that I will write about the pain, but then as I write it, it appears though you
cannot now lift your little finger father, you cannot lift your little finger, but through me
you flow, your pains flow through me.

So, this goes on to tell us that poetry is not only about the titillation, but poetry is about
suffering. It is suffering that is the root of all poetry. Then, comes another poem entitled
“ICU.” And in every poem it appears that the poet is talking to his father because the
father was in coma and not able to talk.

(Refer Slide Time: 13:39)

“ICU”

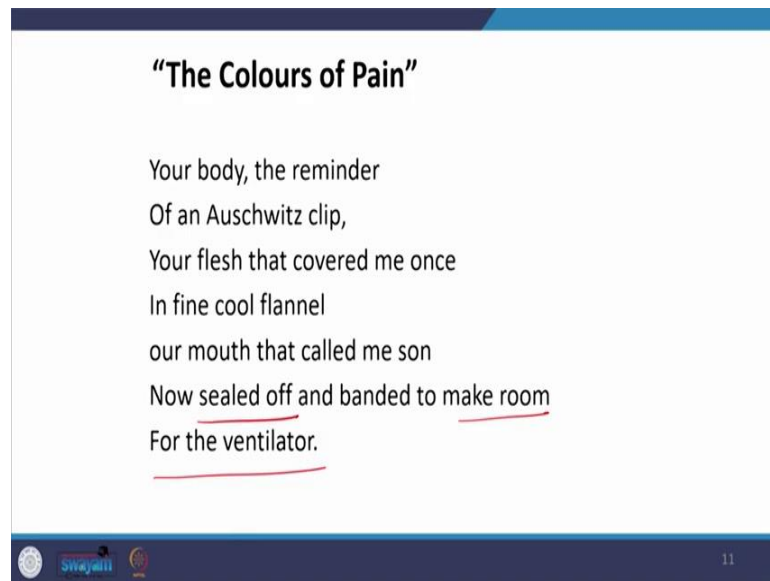
If I must see you, father, again, I must peep in through the glass hole of the ICU. Our second home. How many such homes do we have to cross? I go back to your room. Sit by your empty bed, Where your dog sleeps by your mattress Wondering where you have gone.	I must go to mother To pasteurize her tears. Read together ‘The Buddha and The Mustard Seed’. I must open the Bible Heavy with hammerings, Driving iron nails Upon Golgotha Past midnight.
--	--

“I if I must see you father, again,/ I must peep in through the glass hole of the ICU,/ our
second home./ How many such homes do we have to cross?/ I go back to your room. Sit
by your empty bed,/ where your dog sleeps by your mattress/ wondering where you have
gone./ I must go to mother/ to pasteurise her tears./ Read together ‘The Buddha and the

Muster Seed./ I must open the bible/ heavy with hammerings/ driving iron nails/ upon Golgotha./ past midnight.”

So, you can find how the poet very candidly depicts the pains, the loss that he actually could come across in the passage of his father, fine.

(Refer Slide Time: 14:32)




And then comes, "The Colours of Pain." "Your body, the reminder/ of an Auschwitz clip,/ your flesh that covered me once/ in fine cool flannel." Again, we can find here a sort of memory being unfolded. "In fine cool flannel that our mouth that called me son,/ now sealed off/ and banded to make room/ for the ventilator."

So, how suddenly a relationship comes to a halt, but then how the person or the persona how he memorises it, how he unfolds it, only to get a sort of pain but this pain, even in this pain there is a triumph as the poet is actually reminiscing him.

(Refer Slide Time: 15:21)

“Magic Sleeper”

This morning, they brought you out on a bed on wheels.	Be our magic mountain, magic sleeper,
I called out to you to wake up.	We’ll keep our lesson,
It was as if your red eyes that opened, blood-nipped,	That pain is all the treasure we have here on earth.
Was a third eye of god.	Go back in now.
Did you try to move them across to me,	We’ll wait here where we said, we would.
The tiny boats of our sad living, caught among the reeds?	We’ll keep our word for you.
Do you hear me? Do you hear?...	Come back, And wake us, in passing, in paradise.

 12

And then another poem entitled “Magic Sleeper.” “This morning, they brought you/ out on a bed on wheels./ I called out to you to wake up.” The poet knows that the father will not wake up because the father was in coma continuously. “It was as if your red eyes that/ opened, blood-nipped,/ was a third eye of God./ Did you try to move them across to me,/ the tiny boats of our sad living,/ caught among the reeds? /Do you hear me? Do you hear...? Be our magic mountain, magic sleeper.” Father why do not you be our magic mountain, magic sleeper, we will keep our relation, “that pain is all the treasure we have here/ on earth.” The poet becomes very realistic. That pain is all the treasure we have here on earth. “Go back in now. We will wait here where we said we would. We will keep our word for you, come back and wake us in passing in paradise.”

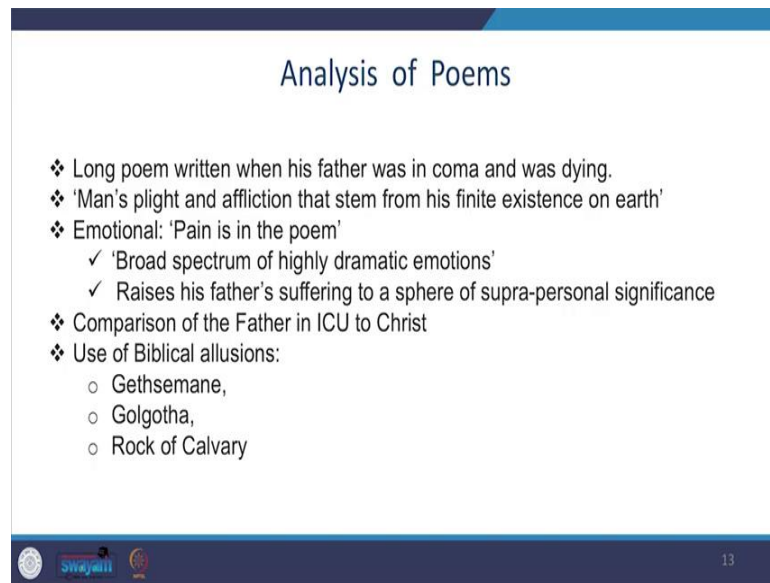
Please wake us. So, through this the poet also tells the mankind, poet also tells all his fellow beings that let the father, let the passing relations make us wake up, let them awaken us to the dire realities and the reality that life is full of pains. The Buddhist way of life is full of pains and it is only the pain that is actually a treasure; why are we always struggling to get the pleasure in the mundane things of life.

Life actually has to be lived, but then life also has to be celebrated because life and death are two phases. And we not only die, our bodies not only die, rather when we die even in our death we should wake up and let our father wake us in passing in paradise. Now, if we have a look at the characteristic features of Kottoor’s poems, we can find that all

these poems from this collection they actually depict a sort of anxiety, a sort of pain, a sort of suffering because the poet's father was in coma and was dying.

Man's plight and affliction that stem from his finite existence on earth. So, pain is in the poem and then the broad spectrum of highly dramatic emotions, they all co- mingle when in pain. So, the poet actually makes his personal suffering very impersonal and in a supra- personal significant way.

(Refer Slide Time: 18:03)



Analysis of Poems

- ❖ Long poem written when his father was in coma and was dying.
- ❖ 'Man's plight and affliction that stem from his finite existence on earth'
- ❖ Emotional: 'Pain is in the poem'
 - ✓ 'Broad spectrum of highly dramatic emotions'
 - ✓ Raises his father's suffering to a sphere of supra-personal significance
- ❖ Comparison of the Father in ICU to Christ
- ❖ Use of Biblical allusions:
 - Gethsemane,
 - Golgotha,
 - Rock of Calvary


The comparison of the father in the ICU is to the Christ and through the passage of the father the poet actually makes all the human being, all the mankind realize that one should always be quite affectionate and should be obedient and should always be grateful to what lessons have been told, what lessons have been left behind by one's parents.

So, there is a comparison of the father to the Christ and then there are Biblical allusions which actually not only make the poem beautiful, but then they also make us ponder over.

(Refer Slide Time: 18:45)

Contd...

- ❖ The depiction of his father's disease and wounds
- ❖ Records of conversations with doctors and nurses
- ❖ Reports on scenes from family life and how it is affected.
- ❖ Final journey into the infinite: Relationship of father with the metaphysical



The slide features a blue header and footer. The footer contains the Swajati logo on the left and the number 14 on the right. The image shows a hand reaching out over a body of water at sunset, with the sun low on the horizon and its reflection on the water.

The depiction of his father's disease and wounds have been deliberately done in order to tell mankind that life is not full of pleasures, life is also full of suffering. The conversation with doctors and nurses and that is why we come across many usage of medical terms throughout the poems, fine.

And the final journey to the infinite that all of us should remember, fine. And the poem also talks about the relationship between the father and the son. So, this relationship is a sort of metaphysical relationship and we should always try to think of in a greater significance and should try to extract more meanings, the relationship of father with the metaphysical world has got a lot for us to extract, to unravel my dear friend.

(Refer Slide Time: 19:43)

Characteristics of Poems

'No psychological arrangement for a late patricide, no literary attempt at treating old sores of childhood. On the contrary, amidst the world of intensive care and high technology medicine, a son sets about singing his dying father's praises in words and images.'

Martin Langanke and Christine Marendon, *Closing Statement*.

swajali 15

Now, about the characteristics of these poems there is one comment that we can take. “No psychological arrangement for a late patricide, no literary attempt at treating old sores of childhood. On the contrary, amidst the world of intensive care and high technology medicine, a son sets about singing his dying father’s praises in words and images.” And that is why *Father Wake us in Passing* has become a very beautiful piece and for which Kottoor is being remembered.

(Refer Slide Time: 20:09)

“USG”

The doctor says,
‘Try and keep her happy,
Satisfy all her wishes’.
A farewell mounts bright purple
On the ultra sound scan.
Along her bed we light camphor,
And let her fall back in amber.
As I watch her,
her stare quickens.
In her eyes break,
The falling ice of the Himalayas.

swajali 16

I mean after this there came another collection entitled *Mother Sonata*, where he talks about the pains of his mother. Kottoor actually pays a tribute to his mother and the poem is titled “USG,” ultra-sonography. And look at the lines of the poem that are full of thoughts. And you know the lines are run on, there is no musicality in terms of meter and rhythm or whatsoever, but the meaning comes to us quite naturally, quite spontaneously.

The doctor says “Try and keep her happy, /satisfy all her wishes./ A farewell mounts bright purple/ on the ultra sound scan./ Along her bed we light camphor/ and let her fall back in amber./ As I watch her, her/ stare quickens./ In her eyes break,/ the falling ice of Himalayas.”

So, one can see the pain that a son comes across when he finds his mother bidding adieu to this mundane world. And what we get out of this poem is as the doctor says try and keep her happy, satisfy all her wishes. My dear friend old is each a reality. And in old age all our sons and daughters, should try to see that they can keep their parents happy.

A farewell mounts bright purple on the ultra sound scan, because during our old age when we are perhaps bidding adieu to it, we are not able to express all our wishes and emotions. And then suddenly the poet actually makes a very metaphoric use, in her eyes break, the falling ice of the Himalayas, and then these tears soaked eyes, these tears are just like gems, as I watch her stare quickens the mother simply casts a last look.

But then in her eyes one can find the falling ice, this falling ice is actually the coagulation of all sorts of emotion that are falling like from like the ice from the Himalayas my dear friend. Actually, it would not be appropriate to call Kottoor a poet who is soaked in pain, rather Kottoor is a poet of love also. Whereas, we could see the love of a son, love of a child to his parents.

In another collection entitled *Vrindavan poems*, one can find how the poet unravels his love for the divine Krishna, for the divine love between Radha and Krishna. And through this Vrindavan poems, Kottoor became very famous. Here, we are also reminded of when we talk about Krishna, suddenly, we actually go back to Niranjan Mohanty’s Krishna.

But here there is a different sort of love and here the poet does not talk about any contemporary problems, but here there is only love, love, love whereas, in Mohanty’s

Krishna he also talks about the contemporary problems of the world. But here it appears as if it is actually a love between two human beings which take the form of a sort of divine love.

And the poet becomes here Radha, the poet does not become Krishna and then there is a sort of conversation. And then through this love, the poet also talks about the love of the body, is love only reminiscent of the body that is what the poet talks about. The collection starts with the arrival and the collection comes to an end with the departure. So, there is a beautiful cycle of how we come to this earth and how finally, we depart.

But then what leaves in and between us is the love between Radha and Krishna, the divine love--- the love of the Vrindavan. So, let us take some of the lines and through these beautiful lines, we can find out how he packs meanings, he does not have to make any effort in order to make his poem beautiful. Rather it appears that there is a frame in which suddenly the lines come and take their positions.

(Refer Slide Time: 24:51)

“The Arrival”

Today is the day
you said you'll come.

In the lotus pond
are two blue lotuses.


On the other shore
the bangle maker I see
calls me. 'Radhae,
I have brought blue bangles
all for your hands...'

In the afternoon grass
I see the wild blue snake.

Upon the wet tuft
a chameleon dries in the sun,
turning hydrangea blue.

All, blue, Krishna.


Is that All...?



“The Departure”

The next time you come,
Krishna, you won't have to search for me
in Brinda, no, not even in Brasna.
Trace me
back to your blue feather.
Wading in Radhamrith,
as you hold my hand
and lead me
and we fall
in love
galaxy,
upon
galaxy...

radhea-radhe -radhae -krishna-krishna-
krishna-krishna-radhae


17

“Today is the day/ you said you will come”. It is actually a day of waiting. “Today is the day/ you said you will come/ in the lotus pond/ are two blue lotuses./ On the other shore,/ the bangle maker I see/ calls me. ‘Radhae,/ I have brought blue bangles/ all for your hands’/ In the afternoon grass/ I see the wild blue snake./ Upon the wet tuft/ a chameleon dries in the sun,/ turning hydrangea blue,/ all blue, Krishna. Is that all?”

So, what actually the poet tries to convey here is that when you are in love everything becomes very unified. Love is a sort of unification. The unification of the body and the mind, the unification of the body and the soul. And the last poem which is the departure and through this, and in between there are different poems where how Krishna and Radha talk to each other, vow, the swear, how they talk about love, how they make promises, how they interact with each other.

And in the departure-- the next time you come Krishna, you will not have to search for me. It is actually the voice of Radha. "The next time when you come Krishna,/ you will not have to search for me/ in Brinda, not even in Brasna./ Trace me, back to your blue feather,/ wading in Radhamrith,/ as you hold my hand/ and lead me/ and we fall/ in love/ galaxy,/ upon/ galaxy./ Radhae Radhae Radhae Krishna/ Krishna Krishna Krishna Radhae."



The question is that love is such a force that not only unifies, but that actually makes the two one. There is no distinction between one or the other, rather it is a sort of oneness and that is why Radha says, the next time you come Krishna you will not have to search for me anywhere. I mean places do not matter. You can only find me to your blue feather wading in Radhamrith, everything will become Radhamrith, fine.

So, everything will be poured in Radha, you will find me being poured in Radha as you hold my hand everything will have a touch and this touch will be in love galaxy upon galaxy. And that is why he says Radhae Radhae. There are other poems also which we can take for our consideration.

(Refer Slide Time: 27:34)

Contd.

<p>"Captive in your heart"</p> <p>Captive in my heart I'm quiet. I know your reasons 1001. I taste your flute, the bamboo smells, your breath-song that is mine. Captive in your heart I watch the clouds pass. nothing more I'll say, Nothing. Dew over you, I'll stay captive in your heart, set free.</p>	<p>"How can I Show You, Krishna"</p> <p>How can I show you, Krishna, all my secret pores where my love for you hides? The gopis, they'll all laugh. Even you will be amused. how can I show you, Madhava, all the sad places where my love for you cries? Even you will shed tears, But if you really want to know them all, disrobe your bright pitambara, come under the Yamuna. There, break me, take it all.</p>
---	---

 Sri Jayati  18

“Captive in your heart”—“Captive in my heart,/ I am quiet/ I know your reasons/ 1001./ I taste your flute,/ the bamboo smells,/ your breath-song/ that is mine./ Captive in your heart,/ I watch the clouds pass./ Nothing more/ I will say,/ nothing, dew over you/ I will stay,/ captive in your heart,/ set free.” I am always a captive in your heart, can you set me free.

And then Radha again continues and in another poem says –“How can I show you Krishna, all my secret pores”. you find that I am only love and you want me to know my secrets. How can I how can I show you all my secret pores where my love for you hides? The Gopis, they will all laugh.

So, in love it is not only a sort of unification, but in love it is also a sort of play and then I cannot tell you, I cannot show you all my secret pores because my friends, “the Gopies will laugh./ Even you will be amused/ how can I show you, Madhava/ all the sad places/ where my love for you cries?” My love for you cries even in sad places.

My love is not meant only for joyous moments, but even in sad moments I can I can tell you that even during sad moments, sad places, I cry for your love. Even you will send tears, “if you really want to know them all/ disrobe your bright pitambara,/ come under the Yamuna./ There, break me, take it all.”

(Refer Slide Time: 29:20)

“Is Love Just The Body?”

Is Love just the body, beloved?
is your love just my body Krishna?
or is it Radha, formless lightning?
is it you? Your blue body
warm as the kingfisher's feather
untouched by every water? →
What is love?
is love soul,
bereft of the thirsts of longing
or our bodies entwined
in the night ooze of the senses,
among the dipp'd blue lotuses
Tell me.
Am I, the flute, Radhae
is the flute me?
Don't you remember me with every note,
though you are the song
that pours and pours?
So, love must be, must be

when you can't just tell
the body from the soul.
Where the colours of the rainbow
prism
colourless
there flows love.
With me in you,
you and me in me.
you in me.
me and you in you,
when you open to me
as your eyelids close,
there's just our togetherness
turning divine.
steadfast as moonlight
upon calm Yamuna
in unassuming celestial
flow

19

And one more poem that I want to take is how on this human earth all of us simply have a feeling that love is in the body and then the question that is being raised here is love just the body? “Is love just the body, beloved?/ Is your love just my body, Krishna?” I mean through this the poet actually wants to give a message to this fighting mankind, to the mankind which is always a confabulating whether body is true or the soul is true.

So, is love just the body beloved? “Is your love just my body, Krishna? Or is it Radha, formless lightning? / Is it you? Your blue body/ warm as the kingfisher’s feather/ untouched by every water? / What is love?” So, there is actually a talk, there is a question. What is love?

“Is love soul, bereft of the thirst of longing/ or our bodies entwined/ in the night ooze of the senses,/ among the dipped blue lotuses?/ Tell me,/ am I, the flute, Radhae./ Is the flute me?/ Do not you remember me with every note/ though you are the song/ that pours and pours?/ So, love must be,/ must be when you cannot just tell/ the body from the soul.”

Love does not know how to distinguish the body from the soul, how to discriminate the body against the soul, love is just love, fine. Again there we can find a sort of experienced sweep, no. Love is love. It never alters when it alteration finds, fine. So, where the colours of rainbow prism colourless there flows love.

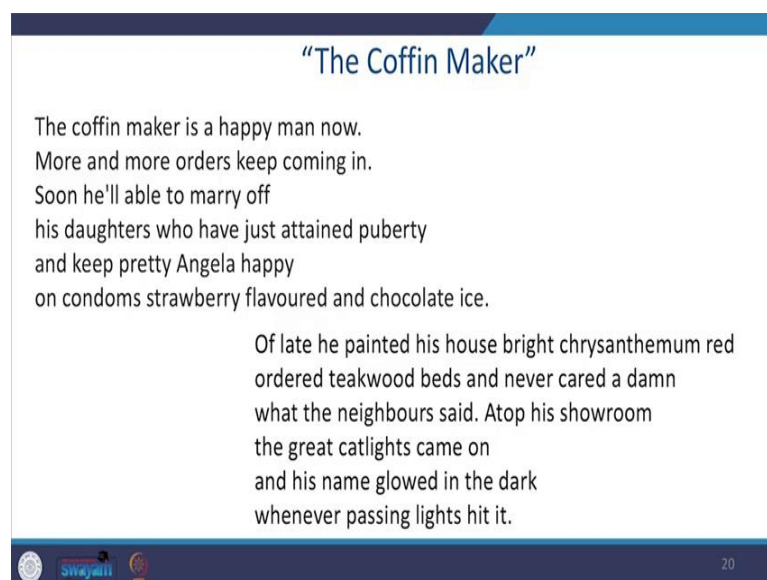
With me in you,/ you and me you in me,/ me and you in you,/ when you open to me/ as your eyelids close,/ there is just our togetherness/ turning divine, steadfast as moonlight/ upon calm Yamuna/ in unassuming celestial flow.” Love is actually a sort of ambience. Love is a sort of feeling.

Love is a sort of feeling that actually blinds you to the other dire necessities of this mundane world. Love is not body. Love is not ephemeral. Love is eternal. Love is divine. Love is actually a sort of unification. Love is in knowing that you are in me and I am in you. I mean there is a sort of togetherness in love.

So, we can find that Gopi Krishnan Kottoor actually makes or tries to give a message through the divine love of Radha and Krishna. He tries to pass on the message to this mankind on earth that love is not only about body, love is actually a feeling, love is about a sort of unification. The unification of the feeling that it does not divide, it does not disintegrate, rather it is a sort of integrity of the body and the soul together.

There is the another poem entitled “Coffin Maker” where what the poet wants to say is that even a person like coffin maker can be happy, devoid of what profession he has taken, but he also has got the right to be happy.



(Refer Slide Time: 33:00)



“The Coffin Maker”

The coffin maker is a happy man now.
More and more orders keep coming in.
Soon he'll able to marry off
his daughters who have just attained puberty
and keep pretty Angela happy
on condoms strawberry flavoured and chocolate ice.

Of late he painted his house bright chrysanthemum red
ordered teakwood beds and never cared a damn
what the neighbours said. Atop his showroom
the great catlights came on
and his name glowed in the dark
whenever passing lights hit it.

 swjain  20

And then when the, what the poem describes here is—“The coffin maker is a happy man now./ More and more orders keep coming in,/ soon he will be able to marry off.” Even

though his profession can be considered to be a despicable one, but yet he is happy. Why?


“Of late he painted his house bright chrysanthemum red,/ ordered teakwood beds and never cared a damn/ what the neighbours said. Atop his show room/ the great catlights came on/ and his name glowed in the dar/k whenever passing lights hit it.” Even a common person has got the chance to be happy.




(Refer Slide Time: 33:42)

Contd.

Now he's not wondering any more,
he knows he's the best in town.

What about air-conditioning? That would lengthen
the life of coffins. Now he's struck with a bright new idea
that would revolutionize coffin making for
all time. Electronic remote-controlled polymer coffins
with micro chips and inbuilt flash units
that brought home to your PC screen
your dear dear dear departed along with up to date
information on the state of decomposition
that you could activate or slow down
much like a video-game.



   21

“What about air-conditioning? That would lengthen /the life of coffins. Now, he just struck with a bright new idea/ that would revolutionise coffin making for/ all time. Electronic remote control polymer coffins/ with microchips and inbuilt flash units/ that brought home to your PC screen,/ your dear dear dear departed along with up to date/ information on the state of decomposition.”

I mean the newer techniques of man being given the last rights and that actually makes the coffin maker happy. “That you could activate or slow down/ much like a video-game”.

(Refer Slide Time: 34:15)

Contd.

Now whenever he kneels down with Angela
to pray,
he can only think of this
no one else can help him raise such funds
so hi-tech
which of course secretly meant
more and more accidents, casualties, fatalities
of course work was worship, it didn't matter what you did.
you just had to put in your best, there could be no wrong asking

22

“Now, whenever he kneels down with Angela/ to pray,/ he can only think of this/ no one else can help him raise such funds/ so hi-tech.” The poet actually talks about the materialistic outlook of the world. And then he says that there can be a vicissitude even in the life of a coffin maker ‘which of course, secretly meant/ more and more accidents, casualties, fatalities./ Of course, work was worship, it did not matter what you did/ you just had to put in your best, there could be no wrong asking,” fine. There can be no wrong asking. So, whatever profession it is, your profession is good and one has got the chance to be happy.

(Refer Slide Time: 34:59)

“My Daughter Reports A Senior's Suicide”

Why dear, I ask her. In my mind, somebody fallen in love Has been jilted. But things are simpler.	Don't lose focus dear, I tell her, And end the conversation with a telephone kiss.
‘Her parents had strange diseases.....’ That baffles me.	Back in my mind, a young girl, The poison she ran to, Lips gone cold, on thresholds of beauty, And a mind cut inside salted flesh, Baked in sprouting alphabets of love.
I think of AIDS, of nothing in particular, But drift to the silent body Of a young girl, and her puberty, Laid among the freshly done roses.	

23

There is another poem named, “My Daughter Reports a Senior’s Suicide.” And then we can only take up the last lines. “Lips gone cold, on thresholds of beauty,/ and a mind cut inside salted flesh,/ baked in sprouting the alphabets of love.” The poisons she ran to it was only because of a love affair, the love that could not be fructified and that actually led to a very unpleasant situation.

And then he says, I mean the persona here says—“why dear I ask her/ in my mind, somebody falling in love/ has been jilted/. But things are very simpler,” fine. So, somebody being jilted in love. “Her parents had strange diseases.../ that baffles me. And the love finally, had a very different sort of consequence. Back in my mind, a young girl, the poison she ran to, lips gone cold, on thresholds of beauty and a mind cut inside salted flesh, baked in sprouting alphabets of love.

(Refer Slide Time: 35:57)

On the Process of Poetry

- “I feel that process of poetry is like blood running in the body. The body does its function. Poetry for which you are ordained is doing its job all the while for you whether you are aware of it or not. I let it. The poetry runs within, taking resources from all around and stirs it with emotions of all kinds. The poet is only the outlet, the medium. When the trigger comes, poetry bleeds.”

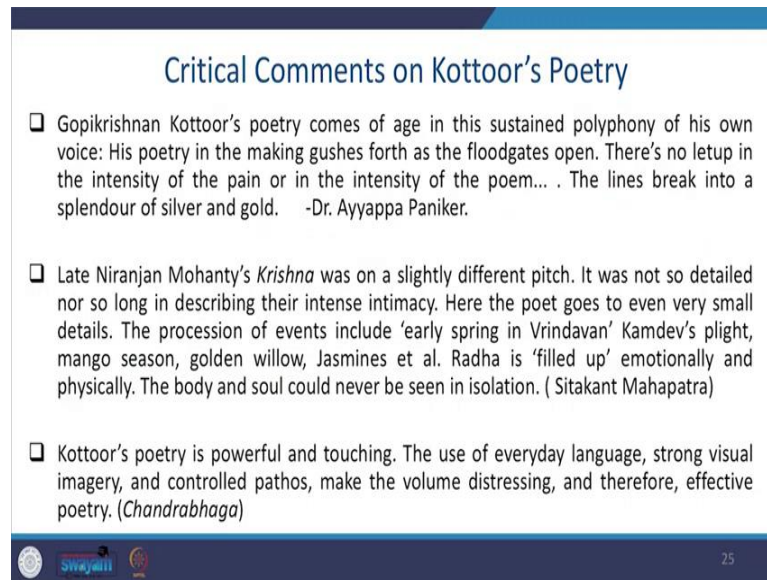
(Kottoor in an Interview to Arvind Nawale)

Now, we can continue a discussing the poetic world of Gopi Krishnan Kottoor because it is so vast, but then it is time that we took what inspired a Kottoor to write poetry and what did he understand by the process of poetry. As he says--- “I feel that the process of poetry is like blood running in the body.” It is actually just like the blood running in the body.

“The body does its function. Poetry for which you are ordained is doing its job all the while whether you are aware of it or not.” Poetry is spontaneity. Poetry is a flow. “The poetry runs within, taking resources from all around and stirs with emotions of all

kinds.” You cannot shut your eyes; you cannot shut your heart to all the happenings which are going around you. “And poetry keeps on taking its birth. When the trigger comes poetry actually bleeds.”

(Refer Slide Time: 37:04)



Critical Comments on Kottoor's Poetry

- ❑ Gopikrishnan Kottoor's poetry comes of age in this sustained polyphony of his own voice: His poetry in the making gushes forth as the floodgates open. There's no letup in the intensity of the pain or in the intensity of the poem... . The lines break into a splendour of silver and gold. -Dr. Ayyappa Paniker.
- ❑ Late Niranjan Mohanty's *Krishna* was on a slightly different pitch. It was not so detailed nor so long in describing their intense intimacy. Here the poet goes to even very small details. The procession of events include 'early spring in Vrindavan' Kamdev's plight, mango season, golden willow, Jasmines et al. Radha is 'filled up' emotionally and physically. The body and soul could never be seen in isolation. (Sitakant Mahapatra)
- ❑ Kottoor's poetry is powerful and touching. The use of everyday language, strong visual imagery, and controlled pathos, make the volume distressing, and therefore, effective poetry. (*Chandrabhaga*)

So, this is actually the gist of what Kottoor believes in the poetic process. We can also take a very quick look on what critics think about Kottoor's poetry. In this regard what Paniker says is very significant. “Krishnan's poetry comes of age in the sustained polyphony of his own voice. His poetry is in the making gushes forth as the flood gates open. There is no letup in the intensity of the pain or in the intensity of the poem...” I mean there is a sort of continuity. And as I have been saying that many people might try to compare Gopi Kottoor with Niranjan Mohanty. But then what Sitakant Mahapatra another famous Oriya poet says. “Late Niranjan Mohanty's *Krishna* was only on a slightly different pitch. It was not so detailed nor so long in describing their intense intimacy.”

As I told you earlier that through Krishna Niranjan Mohanty was also talking about the contemporary problems of this mundane world. But in here in the world of Gopi Kottoor, ‘the poet goes to even very small details, the procession of events include early spring and Vrindavans Kamdev's plight, mango season, golden willow, jasmines et al. Radha is filled up emotionally and physically. The body and soul could never be seen in isolation.” The body is the soul and the soul is the body, and together they make a sort of

divine love. The last comment is by Chandrabhaga, which says, “Kottoor’s poetry is powerful and touching. The use of everyday language, strong visual imagery, and controlled pathos, make the volume distressing, and therefore, effective poetry.”

My dear friends, the world of a Kottoor or the poetic world of Kottoor is so vast and varied that one lecture cannot suffice. But then time has come that we have to sum up and let us sum up from one of the poems entitled poetry by Gopi Krishnan Kottoor.

(Refer Slide Time: 39:06)

Summing up

You are not to me A token for fame. Erase my name. I'll still make love to you. I don't want to be What you don't want to give me. I want to give you All I have. I'll lay down my life for you I'll lay you down Like a fresh body. All lavender smells. All awake and risen. And how much I love you That love knows Not itself,	Such love That I want you That I must no longer come With you So even in death I'll not turn To sleep, Poetry, Union of you and me, I'll not turn to Sleep without you But I must have Always had you Naked Beside me, Half clothed, The other side. (Poetry)
--	---

Thank You

26

You are not to me/ a token for fame./ Erase my name,/ I will still make love to you./ I do not want to be,/ what you do not want to give me./ I want to give you/ all I have./ I will lay down my life for you,/ I will lay you down/ like a fresh body,/ all lavender smells,/ all awake and risen,/ and how much I love you/ that love knows not itself.”

So, this is actually the love of Gopi Krishnan Kottoor for poetry. “Such love/ that I want you,/ that I must no longer come/ with you./ So even in death,/ I will not turn/ to sleep/ Poetry./ Union of you and me, /I will not turn to/ sleep without you,/ but I must always had you naked/ beside me,/ half clothed,/ the other side.”

So, this actually gives us a quintessence of what Gopi Krishnan Kottoor thought about poetry and believed about the poetic process. Let poetry continue its spontaneous flow. Let it not cease. Let it continue. Let it delight. Let it enlighten.

Thank you very much. I have to wind up this lecture at this juncture.

Thank you very much. Good night.