

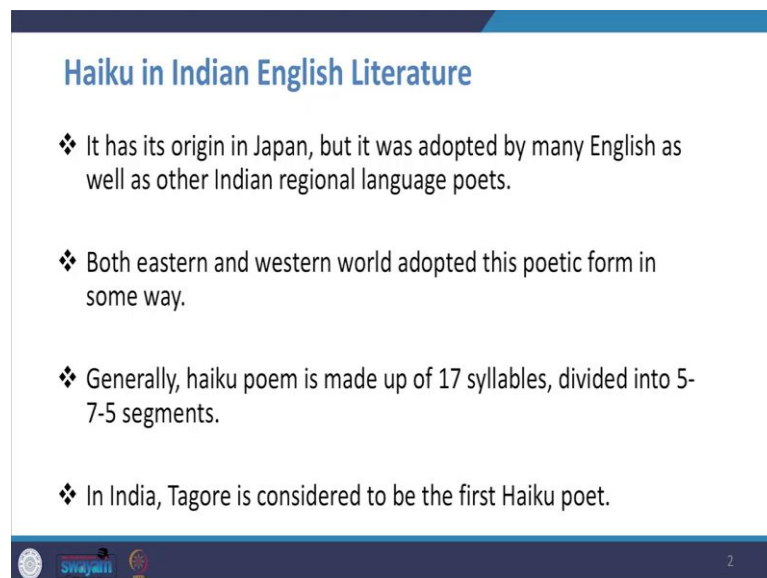
Indian Poetry in English
Prof. Binod Mishra
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Roorkee

Lecture - 33
R K Singh

Good morning poetry lovers and welcome back to NPTEL Online Certification Course on Indian Poetry in English. You might remember well that in the previous lecture we had started Haiku poetry in English and that also in Indian poetry in English. And in that lecture we had discussed the Haikus of T. Vasudeva Reddy. We have another significant major voice who has written Haikus and Tankas in abundance and the name of such a poet is Professor R K Singh.

So, we shall have a detailed discussion on the poetry of R K Singh. But before that, let me just try to bring a recap and as we discussed the other day about the tradition of Haiku in Indian English literature and you all remember that it originated in Japan.

(Refer Slide Time: 01:39)



Haiku in Indian English Literature

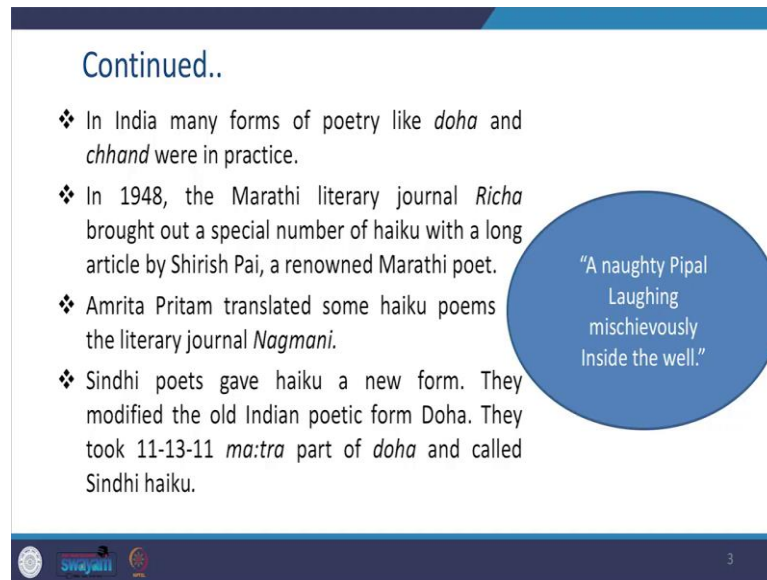
- ❖ It has its origin in Japan, but it was adopted by many English as well as other Indian regional language poets.
- ❖ Both eastern and western world adopted this poetic form in some way.
- ❖ Generally, haiku poem is made up of 17 syllables, divided into 5-7-5 segments.
- ❖ In India, Tagore is considered to be the first Haiku poet.

Swayam 2

And it was adopted by many English as well as other Indian regional languages also. It is quite noteworthy to mention here that one of the veteran poets and novelists Agyeya whom we know by the name Sachhidanand Hiranand Vatsyayan also practised his hands at writing some of the Haikus.

Haiku as we have discussed is a poem which is made up of 17 syllables divided into 5-7 and 5 segments. Most of the Haikus are three liners. And in the previous lecture also we had talked about Tagore being or considered the first Indian haiku poet in English.

(Refer Slide Time: 02:34)



Continued..

- ❖ In India many forms of poetry like *doha* and *chhand* were in practice.
- ❖ In 1948, the Marathi literary journal *Richa* brought out a special number of haiku with a long article by Shirish Pai, a renowned Marathi poet.
- ❖ Amrita Pritam translated some haiku poems the literary journal *Nagmani*.
- ❖ Sindhi poets gave haiku a new form. They modified the old Indian poetic form *Doha*. They took 11-13-11 *ma:tra* part of *doha* and called Sindhi haiku.

"A naughty Pipal
Laughing
mischievously
Inside the well."

3

In 1948, the Marathi literary journal *Richa* brought out a special number of haiku with a long article by Shirish Pai a renowned Marathi poet. Even Amrita Pritam also translated some haiku poems in the literary journal *Nagmani*. Some Sindhi poets have also developed this form, and they modified the old Indian tradition of *doha*. And they took 11-13 and 11 *matra* part of *doha* and called Sindhi haiku.

We can also find some of the haikus which have been translated such as- ‘naughty people laughing mischievously inside the well.’ It is quite significant to mention here that haikus are small poems usually a three liner, but then you can find it is full of images and metaphors. And in order to find out the meaning, one has to be very serious in order to extract the meaning of a haiku poem.

(Refer Slide Time: 03:36)

Contd...

- ❖ Hindi poet, Agyeya, translated some haiku poems into Hindi.
- ❖ "Haiku is closest to our poetic sensibility or perhaps it is closer to us than to the West." _ Agyeya
- ❖ Haiku has been adopted in Bengali, Assamese, Gujarati, Sindhi, Kannada, and Hindi.
- ❖ Some great voices of Indian haiku include Tagore, T.V. Reddy, R.K.Singh, N.V. Subbaraman, Urmila Kaul, Mahashweta Chaturvedi, and others.

"Bird flew away
The leaf trembled
And then settled down."
_ Agyeya

"The koels are singing
Why don't you also
speak O nasty crow!"

swajati 4

Haiku has been adopted in other languages such as Bengali, Gujarati, Sindhi, Kannada and Hindi. And as I had mentioned in the previous lecture and I am going to repeat, we have some haiku poets namely T Vasudeva Reddy, R. K Singh, N. V Subramanyam, Urmila Kaul, Mahashweta Chaturvedi and others.

So, we have already discussed T Vasudeva Reddy. And in his haiku poems we have found out the realism, the irony, the contemporary picture; and here again in the world of R K Singh who is actually one of the leaving legends of haiku poetry in Indian writing in English. But who is this R K Singh? Let us have a peep into his life.

(Refer Slide Time: 04:26)

R K Singh

- ✓ Born on 31 December 1950 in Varanasi, India.
- ✓ Poet, critic, journalist, and reviewer.
- ✓ Worked as a journalist with the Press Trust of India, New Delhi
- ✓ He has authored more than 160 articles, 175 book reviews and 46 books, including 20 collections of poem.
- ✓ A prominent voice of Haiku and Tanka poems.
- ✓ Wrote many volumes on Haiku poetry.
- ✓ His poems have been translated into Chinese, French, Spanish, Serbian, Japanese, German, Italian , and others.

swajati 5

R K Singh Singh was born on 31st December 1950 in Varanasi, India. Professor Singh who retired as a Professor from Indian School of Mines now IIT ISM Dhanbad, but he began his career with the Press Trust of India. But of late, I mean, once he came into his teaching world though he had been composing poems since his school days as well he has authored more than 160 articles, 175 book reviews. And he has also authored 46 books, 20 collections of poems that are actually to his credit.


Professor Singh has a worked as an ELT practitioner whose contribution in the field of Indian writing in English as well as in ELT is quite great. He has written quite a good number of volumes on haiku poetry. And he is one such hikuist whose works have been translated into majority of languages of the world, namely in Chinese, in Japanese, French, Spanish, then Serbian, German, Italian, and many more.

Many of his works which are available online also and there have been many e-books also in the translated forms. It is quite good to get ourselves acquainted with Professor R. K Singh. And since Professor Singh has written more than 20 books I mean we can have a look at his poetry collections.

(Refer Slide Time: 06:11)

His Poetic Corpus

- ❑ *My Silence* (1985)
- ❑ *Memories Unmemoried* (1988)
- ❑ *Music Must Sound* (1990)
- ❑ *Flight of Phoenix* (1990)
- ❑ *I Do Not Question* (1994)
- ❑ *My Silence and Other Selected Poems : 1974-1994* (1996)
- ❑ *Above the Earth's Green* (1997)
- ❑ *Every Stone Drop Pebble* (with Catherine Mair & Patricia Prime, 1999)
- ❑ *Cover to Cover* (2002)
- ❑ *Peddling Dreams, Pacem in Terris* (haiku, English and Italian, 2003)



The image shows two book covers. The top one is 'THERE'S NO PARADISE and Other Selected Poems, Tanka & Haiku' by A.K. Singh, featuring a photograph of a hand holding a pen. The bottom one is 'My Silence' by A.K. Singh, featuring a photograph of a person's face.

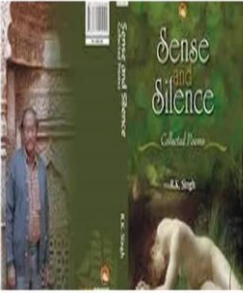
Namely, he started with *My Silence* in 1985, then *Memories Unmemoried*, then *Music Must Sound*, *Flight of Phoenix*, *I Do Not Question*, *My Silence and Other Selected Poems* which is actually a collection of his poetry for 20 years---1974 to 1994.

And then *Every Stone Drop Pebble* which was actually a joint venture with Catherine Mair and Patricia Prime came up in 1999, then *Cover to Cover* in 2002, *Peddling Dreams*-- it is also a collection of three languages haiku, then English and Italian.

(Refer Slide Time: 06:51)

Contd...

- ❑ *Sexless Solitude and Other Poems* (2009)
- ❑ *Sense and Silence: Collected Poems* (2010)
- ❑ *New and Selected Poems Tanka and Haiku* (2012)
- ❑ *I Am No Jesus and Other Selected Poems, Tanka and Haiku* (2014)
- ❑ *You Can't Scent Me and Other Selected Poems* (2016)
- ❑ *There's No Paradise and Other Selected Poems* (2019)



The image shows two book covers. The top one is 'Sense and Silence: Collected Poems' by A.K. Singh, featuring a photograph of a person's face. The bottom one is 'THERE'S NO PARADISE and Other Selected Poems, Tanka & Haiku' by A.K. Singh, featuring a photograph of a hand holding a pen.

And then one of his books which actually made him at times very critical and he had to face several brick bats from many of the contemporary poets and critics. So, the book entitled *Sexless Solitude and Other Poems*, then came *Sense and Silence: Collected Poems, New and Selected Poems, Tanka and Haiku, I Am No Jesus and Other Selected Poems, You Cannot Scant Me and Other Selected Poems, There is No Paradise and Other Selected Poems*.

(Refer Slide Time: 07:21)



Even of late he has published in 2019 *Tainted With Prayers, Silencio: Blanca Desconfianza: Silence: White Distrust* that was again a Spanish Edition.

Then *A Lone Sparrow*, then in 2021 came *Against the Waves*. And since 2021 happened to be a year of the COVID, so one of his collections came *Covid 19 and Surge of Silence*, fine. It was published from Romania, and then came *Changing Seasons* which is actually the last, but then Professor Singh is just still not going to stop, he is still playing and he is a still writing.

So, he is not an extinguished volcano fine. Professor Singh is still writing his haikus. So, before we come to understand the nitty-gritty of his poetic world and the and the and the meaning that Singh tries to convey through his poetic lines. Let us take some of the lines.

Because Professor Singh had to face so many charges, charges by many of his friends who consider him only a poet who is confined simply to the delineation of women, body, sex and many things.

(Refer Slide Time: 08:45)

Some Important Lines

I am no Jesus
but I can feel the pains
of crucifixion

as a common man
suffer all what he suffered
play the same refrains

(*Sexless Solitude and Other Poems*)

I seek new strides
In each of your moves
New dreams in your eyes and thighs

....

each time I look at you
I see natural woman
The fount of poetry.

(*I Do Not Question, p.41*)

9

So, in one of the poems a Professor Singh writes this is from sexless solitude and other poems where he writes: “I am no Jesus,/ but I can feel the pains/ of crucifixion;/ as a common man /suffer all what he suffered,/ play the same reference.”

So, Professor Singh is never defensive rather what he believes is that he is a person who actually delineates or depicts the truth, the truth of contemporary reality even when he is dealing with the flesh, is dealing with the spirit, he is dealing with the contemporary picture of poverty, of pollution, of politics and what more. Professor Singh can be considered to have a sharp and soft tone and specially at times satirical also. We can take some of the lines from one poem entitled *I Do Not Question*.

I mean it is a collection where he says and that can also be taken as a defense mechanism by Professor Singh where he writes—“I seek new strides/ in each of your moves/ new dreams in your eyes and thighs.”

So, Professor Singh also creates a sort of musicality, even though there may not be rhymes because you know haikus may not rhyme at times, but Professor Singh creates a sort of internal melody, internal music. And that is why there is no wonder to come

across thighs, legs fine, I mean all the parts of human body being delineated and represented by Professor Singh in majority of the poems.

And what he says is actually an eye-opener. He says that human body has always been sacrosanct. And in defense of writing his poems, majority of them directed or addressed to women what he says is: “woman itself is poetry” fine. So, Professor Singh when he talks about a woman he talks about women in all sorts of manifestations actually he believes that it is woman who is act who is a creative force. In fact, what he wants to say is there are certain things which many of us actually feel. But then we are not able to express that is why he uses a term like *sexpression*, fine it is not only expression, but *sexpression* and you can come across. And it is Professor Singh who to his credit also practised this hand at Tanka poems.

Now, you might be curious to know what is the difference between a haiku poem and a *tanka* poem. My dear friends, haiku is a short liner and when we come to haiku is a poem of three lines whereas, *tanka* is a poem of five lines. We can also find that *tanka* was developed much earlier I think it has got a history of 1300 years whereas haiku has a history of 300 years.

So, when we talk about *haiku* and talk about *Tanka* many people often find a sort of resemblance. But what is quite significant in this regard is when we talk about *tanka*, a *tanka* can be considered to be classical *tanka*, then traditional *tanka*, then we can also talk about a *tanka* which has got a sort of autobiographical tone. Actually *tanka* was written in the form of a love note it is always said that the composition of *tanka* is after somebody has spent a very pleasant night with his beloved and the next time he actually drafts it in the form of a love note.

So, *tanka* is a love note between two lovers it has got 31 syllables whereas, haiku has got 17 syllables and these 31 syllables are divided as 5-7 5-7- 7. Actually, when we talk about the themes of Professor Singh’s poetry usually the theme is nature the theme is women sexuality. And in this regard Professor Singh believes that both nature and women have got the creative impulse the creative power and we cannot deny them their rights. It is actually because of them that the world has become so beautiful.

And that is why in a way even though he is talking about other body parts of the women and the sexuality of the woman, but then Professor Singh actually celebrates life because he celebrates the struggle between the flesh and the spirit.

He actually also talks about the culture and tradition. In his defensive way he may be considered to have representing our ancient you know ancient gospel and ancient truths that we find in the works of Vidyapati and we find in the works of Vatsyayan and all.

But then if one looks at Professor Singh's poetic oeuvre with a new sensibility, he will find out how there is a modern sensibility. And then he is not devoid of the depiction of myth, ritual and religion in his poetry. Of course, at times, Professor Singh's becomes very, you know, he represents the stark reality of the society that we are living in.

So, that way he is a poet who is courageous as a thinker and he does not hesitate. He does not have any inhibition of hiding. We often say that when we talk about poetry we say that poetry is actually a sort of concealment, but if you come across Professor Singh's poetry, we find that Singh's poetry is a sort of revelation.

This revelation--- the secret of which lies and lucks at the heart of everyone, but then nobody dares expressing it. What Professor Singh says in one of his interviews and what he admits is he says—"I write because I want to feel lighter."

(Refer Slide Time: 15:11)

General Themes of His Poetry

- Nature
- Women
- Sexuality
- Culture and tradition
- Modern sensibility
- Indian myth, ritual, and religion
- Question of existence

“I write because I want to feel lighter, liberated or refreshed within. I write to seek a release from myself as much as from others; to feel free by unburdening myself in verses; to experience an inner balance, feeling, probing, sensing, recalling, or whatever.” (R.K.Singh)

Woman
is the measure
of all things: body, truth
love, spirit, God, society,
peace....”
(Above the Earth's Green)

10

So, “writing is a form of relief, writing is a form of relieving, liberated or refreshed within. I write to seek a release from myself as much as from others to feel free by unburdening myself in verses to experience an inner balance feeling, probing, sensing, recalling or whatever.”

When he talks about women in one poem after another we can here take a note of it when he says in one of the poems entitled “Above the Earth’s Green”, where he says “woman/ is the measure/ of all things;/ body, truth,/ love, spirit, god, society/ and peace/ and the poem continues.

Now, one of the major you know poetic collection which is full of *tankas* because we have been talking about Professor Singh’s *tanka*, also haiku, we have already talked about in Vasudev Reddy’s world, but then let us here focus more on the *tankas* and then we will also take up some of the haikus by Professor Singh.

So, “The River Returns”, it is actually a collection of 372 *tankas*. It is very difficult to take up all of them, but then we shall take up some of them in order to understand the essence of what Professor Singh talks about.

Let us take *tanka* number 10 where he says and in all these *tankas*, you will find Professor Singh is talking about the various forms of love; the separation, the union, the manifestation, the blending fine. So, at times, because love has to face all sorts of situation; sometimes the storm, sometimes eyes, sometimes cold, sometimes hot, sometimes union, sometimes separation.

(Refer Slide Time: 17:19)

“The River Returns”

At the river she folds her arms and legs resting her head upon the knees and sits as an island (10)	Ghosts rise to mate In moonlight tear the tombs Frighten with fingers Rhino horns rock the centre Granite sensation (39)
When I wanted to change seats my friend said she can only if the door is locked the light out and her moon in another city (20)	Roses await Sun and wind to clear The baleful fog: I fear she'll say no To my love again (72)
My hand held out In the dark remained empty No one reached it To give joy of The meeting hands (39)	One thousand miles Travelling together In tense silence He and she contemplate The next round of duel (111)

11

So, let us take tanka 10 where the poet says—“At the river/ she folds her arms and legs/ resting her head/ upon the knees and sits/ as an island.” Now, look at this tanka, this is actually where the poet tries to picturize or delineate the sort of separation. And when in separation what actually are the two lovers ---one of them being woman how she and then here again you can find, she folds her arms and legs resting her head upon the knees and sits as an island. So, as an island--- there is actually a note of loneliness, the beloved being discarded, being abandoned. And then what he says is another and in another tanka, in tanka number 20, “When I wanted to change/ seats my friend said she can/ only if the door is locked/ the light out and her moon/ in another city.”

Now, here also see also the poet talks about how you know during the union, they actually want that everything to be a sort of affair where no other person can have a glance and only if the door is locked. So, here we talk about the tradition as well. “My hand held out/ in the dark remained empty/ no one reached it/ to give joy of /the meeting hands.” Again, how when the lovers are separated and then each one trying to meet each other each one trying to reach each other.

But then the poet says—“My hand held out/ in the dark remained empty/ no one reached it/ to give joy of meeting hands”. And then in love also one can find fear, frustration, anxiety. And this is also being depicted by Professor Singh as--- “Ghosts rise to mate/ in

moonlight tear the tombs/ frightened with fingers/ rhino horns rock the centre/ granite sensation”.

“Roses await,/ the sun and wind to clear/ the baleful fog/ I fear she shall say no/ to my love again”. When the agitated or the longing lover tries or wants or longs for a sort of union, but then there is a continuous fear involved and that is being represented as the baleful fog. Look at the use of the words--- I fear she will say no to my love again.

And then, tanka no.111, fine. Here once again there is a note-- we can find one thousand miles travelling together, intense silence he and she contemplate the next round of dual.

Now, my dear friend even in love there can be not only a sort of despair, but then as we progress and as we mature, perhaps the longing for the love takes a different dimension and the poet has rightly said-- one thousand miles/ traveling together,/ find the journey of love. In tense silence/ He and she contemplate/ he and she think ‘the next round of duel’. There may be a sort of coral there may be a sort of a dwell between each other fine.

And that is how this entire collection titled “The River Returns”, fine. So, the river also here symbolical and the return also. The return may be triumphant, the return may be sadistic, the return may be full of frustrations, but the nature and the women’s nature they actually some way or the other bear a sort of similarity fine.

So, we proceed further. So, we can also continue taking some more *tankas* and as I have mentioned earlier. These tankas are actually the love notes and here we can find since it is a five liner and it has got 31 syllables, but Singh is an experimentalist. He will keep on experimenting. Sometimes he will bring a sort of musicality in terms of word play where you can find lots of assonances and consonances working together in order to give others the impression of the same note of unification or the same note of separation.

(Refer Slide Time: 22:23)

Ten Tankas

1 butterfly cushions flutter the skirt flame flickers ground to whiteness for her feast	4 in the air I expected romance— corona:— avoid her kiss and breathing too
2 in the park seeing the green in her eyes joy wells up: she feels the silver blue the leaves breathing her touch	5 light switched off for love sliding on window pane moon too shies away behind the bare tree
3 looking for image of divine on the wall to pray or chant a mantra or hymn in mind she leans on him to kiss	6 intruding the darkness of bedroom a tree's silhouette: she whispers its masked presence and says no to making love

12

Let us take the first one where he says- “butterfly cushions/ flutter the skirt,/ flame flickers/ ground to whiteness/ for her feast.” Now see how the poet actually plays on a particular sound butterfly, flutter, flame, flickers ground to whiteness for her feast. So, the poet is actually a great observer and he observes here one woman’s skirt and where he says how the picture that is delineated and he makes a word play, but then he provides a sort of senselessness at times also.

Again, “In the park/ seeing the green in her eyes/ joy wells up/ she feels the silver blue/ the leaves breathing her touch.” “Looking for image/ of divine on the wall/ to pray or chant /a mantra or hymn in mind/ she leans on him to kiss.”

So, in majority of these *tankas* you will come across some sort of senselessness, some sort of romantic longings or whatsoever, but at times the poet also becomes very conscious and he also looks at the world and then he becomes so conscious that even when he is, I mean, when the poet is actually trying to provide us a sort of melodious love song, but then he is conscious and he wants his persona to be conscious as well and he says—“in the air/ I expected romance/ Corona/ avoid her kiss and breathing too.”

So, the poet in a way because the poet here is very suggestive and he is conscious of Corona being in the air and that is why in a very suggestive manner he indicates in the air I expected romance, but corona avoid her kiss.

And then again you know in one *tanka* or another what he says, how he comes across the depiction of love, “Light switched off/ for love sliding on/ window pane;/ moon too shies away/ behind the bare tree”, “intruding the darkness of bedroom/ trees silhouette/ she whispers its masked presence/ and says no to love making.” The poet actually in a way, at times, appears to be impressionistic also. And he finds because his observation is very strong. The poet is very fertile in terms of his observation and then in one *tanka* after another you can find. And then again he is also telling you something. There is, one can also come across, a sort of autobiographical note in several of the *tankas*.

And then here as with the progression of the age and with the advancement of the society how love has also had certain restrictions. Love has also had certain impediments and the poet says--- “The power goes off suddenly/ summer heat chokes/ in bed sleepless she turns/ undoing a hook or two/ of a tight blouse.”

(Refer Slide Time: 25:36)

<p>7 the power goes off suddenly summer heat chokes in bed sleepless she turns undoing a hook or two of her tight blouse</p> <p>8 it's not ageing but eternal delight you under me smooth belly, nude necking slow stroking, parting flesh</p> <p>9</p>	<p>short nights and long days sleep loss rustles a friction echoing in bed the cycle of cravings over and over again</p> <p>10 in the white of night <u>sighs for supreme delight</u> steal tender pleasure <u>manipulating wetness</u> <u>in bed unmask simple sin</u></p>
---	---

And then, “It is not ageing,/ but eternal delight/ you under me/ smooth belly nude necking/ slow stroking parting flesh.” So, the poet talks of love in all ages. Every man has got several ages youth, adult, then old age and then he says, but love continues maybe its form is different.

So, as humans find what actually Professor Singh tries to tell us is that love is a continuous force and women got a sort of creative impulse. So, calling him simply a poet who is obsessed with women and obsessed with sexuality will perhaps be a very early

statement. As he says—“In the white of night/ sighs for supreme delight.” See the poet also rhymes at times. “Steal tender pleasure/ manipulating wetness/ in bed and mask simple sin.”

(Refer Slide Time: 26:49)

“Peace in Sin”

I thought I'd locate you in the dark lonely street but I myself got lost	dazzle my eyes shades of terror in alleys smell of treachery
mind's mazy prompts shocked me into nakedness I never perceived	at the crossroads the selfish gene's tarots of my random choices
the misleading sun the unreal reflections the dumb show	in dim blue light smiling breasts invite autumn breeze
	I chuckle to myself hearing raps of inverse world and peace in sin.

So, we can also, but then the poet is not confined only to love. The poet also talks about peace, the poet also talks about greater things, “I thought I would locate you/ in the dark lonely street./

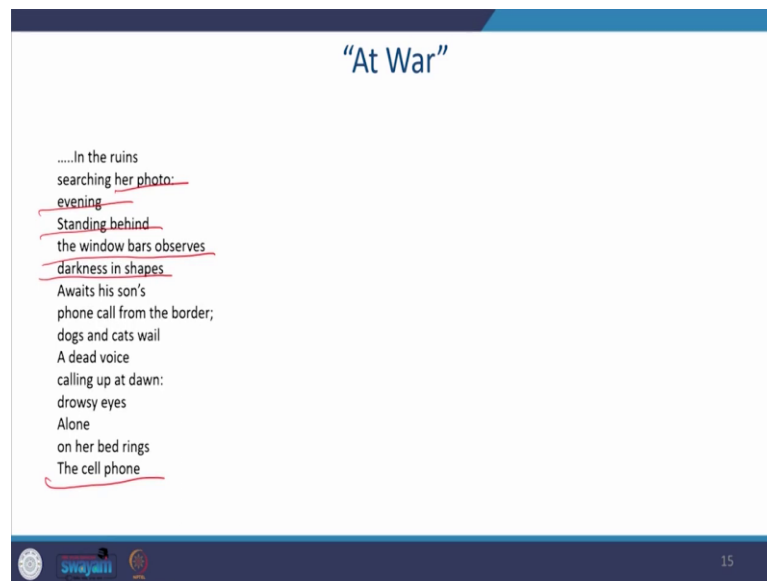
Now, we have come to some haikus—“I thought I would locate you/ in the dark lonely street./ but I myself got lost.” So, what a sort of contrariness, what a sort of irony; I am trying to locate I am trying to find my beloved, but then in that I am myself lost. “Mind’s mazy prompts, / shocked me into nakedness/ I never perceived.”

“The misleading sun/ the unreal reflections/ the dumb show.” “dazzle my eyes/ shades of terror in alleys/ smell of treachery”. “At the crossroads/ the selfish genes/ tarots of my random choices/”, “I chuckle to myself/ hearing raps of inverse world/ and peace in sin.”

Even there is peace in sin, even when you long for something and you long for some such things which may invite troubles, but still you can find a sort of peace. Actually, love has got this sort of quality you know. The more you are in love the more you are in longing and with all sorts of because when you are going to accept somebody as one of your mates or somebody as one of your friends or somebody as one of your darlings.

Even then as the poet says finally, you return to the same because love has got such a captivating touch, it has got such a force that you cannot. But remember, as I have been saying the poet is not confined only to the love making and sexuality, the poet is also a sort of existential thinker, the poet is a philosopher who is also worried about the contemporary problems of the world who also can talk about the politics, who also can talk about the war. And in one of the poems entitled “At War”, look at the picture that the poet actually tries to create here.

(Refer Slide Time: 29:10)



“In the ruins,” now it is a war has been lost or war has been won, but think of those who have lost something or the other and “in the ruins/ searching her photo/ evening/ standing behind/ the window bars observes/ darkness in shapes/ awaits his son’s/ phone call from the border./Dogs and cats wail/ a dead voice calling up at dawn/ drowsy eyes/ alone /on her bed rings/ the cell phone.” So, now, how a mother, how a parent who actually is worried about the son who is at the war front and how the anxiety level suddenly suits up, and then every call that is going to come may be a call that might be very frightening and that might may bring some ill news bring some ominous news and that the parents are waiting for and then alone.

See, the poet actually uses the words and unfolds a lot of meaning alone on the bed rings the cell phone; and the moment the cell phone rings I mean maybe something very disastrous something very suturing a sort of news will come. And you know. So, the poet

is not only dipped as many poets have said that the poet is dipped in sexuality and all, but the poet also talks about the contemporary problems of the world.

Now, what actually are the characteristic features or hallmarks because Singh is being known nowadays as a writer of haiku and as a writer of tanka poems. And naturally when we talk about tanka poems, we talk about love notes and all, but then are there other things also yes of course, Singh actually experiments with the style and the theme.

Singh is not a traditionalist haiku or tanka writer. Singh actually tries to, because you know, he is an ELT practitioner, he knows how to play with the words he knows how he can create a sort of pun, he knows how he can create a sort of assonance and consonance and how he can create internal rhyming and musicality through his poetry.

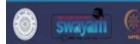
Actually, Professor Singh prefers speech rhythms over rhymes meaning thereby thought is more important. There is a use of enjambment because one line flows to the another in order to get or provide it the meaning there are at time juxtapositions you can find, but at the core of it there is actually a philosophy of life, because Singh has already said—“I am not Jesus,” is not it?.

And you know all of us need to understand this crude fact that all of us are waiting simply for one thing and that is death and one can find the delineation of death in some of the poems of Professor Singh as well. Singh draws images from nature and surrounding. It is quite noteworthy to make a mention of one quote about Singh where it is said most of the images in Singh’s long poems are conventional.

(Refer Slide Time: 32:31)

Characteristic Hallmark of His Poetry

- ❖ Experiment with the style and theme
 - ❖ Prefers speech rhythms over rhyme
 - ❖ Use of enjambment and juxtaposition
 - ❖ Philosophy of life at the core of his poetry
 - ❖ Draws images from nature and surrounding
- “Most of the images in Singh’s long poems are conventional, drawn from myth, ritual, and religion, nature and literature, and urban settings, with a small infusion of images and symbols which are synthetical or compounds of the conventional and the fabricated.” (Rajni Singh)



16

When he writes a long poem, “the images are ‘conventional’ maybe they are from ‘myth, ritual, religion, nature, literature and urban settings with a small infusion of images and symbols which are synthetical or compounds of the conventional and the fabricated.’”

(Refer Slide Time: 32:45)

Theme of Death

- Questions of existence and death have been discussed by great philosophers like Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Hiedegger, Sartre and Aurobindo.
- R.K. Singh also delineates this theme in many of his poems.
- He takes a dig at the false notion of afterlife and rituals related to it.
- For him, death is a “metaphor for the meaninglessness, nothingness, falsehood, corruption, manipulation and consequent suffering of life.” (Kumari & Singh)

“I don’t fear death.....
but I fear I know
what life has been and could be
without fortuity.” (*My Silence and Other Poems*)



17

Now, as I have been saying that Singh believes that this human life is very temporary very short naturally one should always be prepared for death because who knows whether once you die people will remember you or not. So, what he intends to say is as he says--- I do not fear death,/ but I fear I know/ what life has been and could be/ without fortuity”.

He believes in fate also, but he says I do not fear death. He delineates the theme of death in many of his poems and that way we can also consider Professor Singh to be an existentialist like Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Sartre and Aurobindo. Death in majority of the poems of Professor Singh is a sort of metaphor, and metaphor for what? Metaphor for meaninglessness, uselessness, nothingness, negation, falsehood, corruption, manipulation, fine.

Of course there are the themes of sexuality dominating in majority of the poems, but then as I have been saying that Singh is a very candid, a very frank poet. He does not have any hesitation and what he says is that human body is sacred, human body is very sacred. He has anti-dogmatic view of sex and that is why you can find the use of legs, thighs, eyes, breasts fine. So, everything in his poems. For him body is not a taboo, body is actually a purifying force. So, that way Singh becomes a realist.

(Refer Slide Time: 34:29)

Theme of Sexuality

- Explores this theme in a frank way in many of his poems.
- He has anti-dogmatic view of sex.
- For him, this should not be a taboo, instead a purifying force.

*"Culture is not repression
but sublimation through expression"*

*why do they police
art for lesbianism
homosexuality
naked sex or blasphemy? (Portraits We Fear to See)*

- The poet discovers meaning in passion; and sex is interpreted as a liberating and purifying factor in Singh's poetic scheme. To that extent the poet exhibits anxiety for tradition and heritage." (P.C.K. Prem)

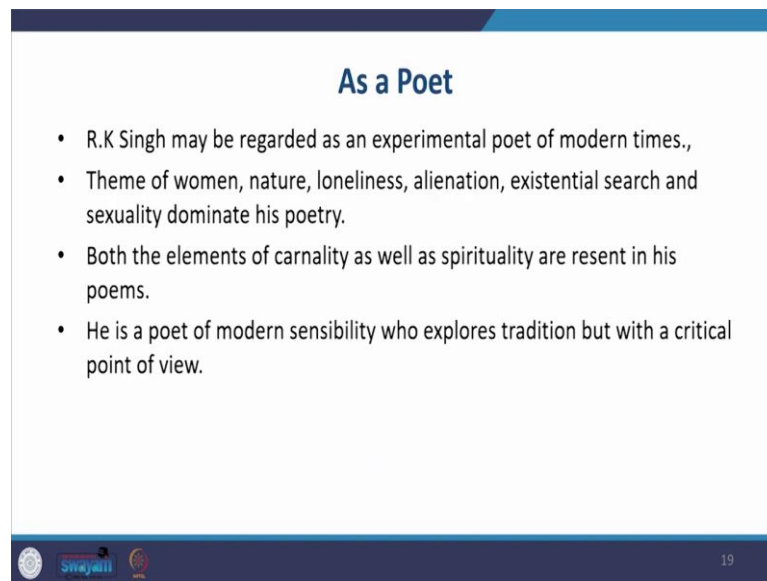
18

And he says culture is not repression, but sublimation through expression. So, it is a sublimation through expression. And then as the poem follows he says, "why do they police/ art for lesbianism?" And you see how the poet also has got a sort of foresight, today you see there are many such taboo things which have actually been which have which have got a sort of approval.

So, as a poet he is a thinker and he always looks into the seeds of time and he says- "why do they police/ art for lesbianism/ homosexuality/ naked sex or blasphemy?" So, this is

from portraits we fear to see; in this regard it is quite pertinent to make a mention of the quote one of for the contemporary poets and editors of several volumes, P C K prime says—“The poet discovers meaning in passion and in sex, passion and sex is interpreted as a liberating and purifying factor in Singh’s poetic scheme to that extent the poet exhibits anxiety for tradition and heritage.”

(Refer Slide Time: 35:41)



As a Poet

- R.K Singh may be regarded as an experimental poet of modern times.,
- Theme of women, nature, loneliness, alienation, existential search and sexuality dominate his poetry.
- Both the elements of carnality as well as spirituality are resented in his poems.
- He is a poet of modern sensibility who explores tradition but with a critical point of view.

19

Now, having discussed the oeuvre of Professor Singh as a poet, we find that Singh is very close to our ancient poets and our ancient theorists who have delineated body as a force that can liberate.

So, long as the body becomes the prison house perhaps the door to the spiritual home is always locked. And that is why Singh may be considered to be a sort of experimental poet of modern times. No doubt, one can find plethora of depiction of women loneliness, alienation, existential search, but then carnality and spirituality though they go hand in hand in majority of the poems.

So, to say that Singh is a poet of modern sensibility, perhaps will not be an exaggeration. We can take some of the lines from his latest collection named *Against the Waves* and the poet is also against the waves because the poet is against the traditional ways of thought process and you know as I have been saying that Singh is as a poet is a thinker as well.

(Refer Slide Time: 37:06)

From Against the Waves

<p style="text-align: center;">Post-Election</p> <p>They don't hear the silent screams of Millions</p> <p>tired of misfortune play games of convenience innocent voters</p> <p>sordid life – Nation's destiny heaven-fed</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">"Covid-19"</p> <p>Punitive corona viruslepreuse some say it's invasion the barbarian without</p> <p>quarantined I clear my throat behind the face mask breathe in unknown viruses suffer new repressions</p> <p>now lockdown cut off life: castration Hugo said monasticism resisting death O</p>
---	---

swajati 20

So, he looks at what the contemporary society has to offer us and then in one of the poems entitled “Post- election” what he says—“They do not hear/ the silent scream of/ millions”. See the reality.

So, the poet cannot be considered simply to be following blindly the adoration of women in all forms. The poet also derides the politicians and says—“They do not hear/ the silent screams of/ millions”. “Tired of misfortune/ play games of convenience/ innocent voters”. See the beauty innocent voters, “sordid life--/ nation’s destiny/ heaven fed.”

So, Singh as a poet is a philosopher, is a thinker. And he is also worried about the contemporary scenario. In one of the poems he says that perhaps those who are actually playing on sounds playing on songs to you know to an utmost way or without bothering much perhaps they do not know how their songs or how these vociferous voices will affect the sick, the old, the little child and all.

So, Singh is a thinker in that respect he also has a poem entitled “Covid 19” where he says--- Punitive/ Corona viruslepreuse/ some say it is invasion/ the barbarian without/ quarantined/ I clear my throat/ behind the face mask/ breathe in unknown viruses/ suffer new repressions/ now lock down/ cut off life/ castration/ Hugo said monasticism/ resisting death O.”

So, even the contemporary situation of Covid gets mentioned in his poetry and then he says how even though we have masked ourselves, we have quarantined ourselves yet we are breathing in many unknown viruses.

(Refer Slide Time: 39:19)

Contd...

"New Gods"
Meditation –
future uncertainties
beyond crisis

new strains, new virus
villains of the new order
peeking from windows

create new mantras
for life to continue
envision new gods

"Third Wave"
I don't recognize
the bright new star in the sky:
a beacon of hope
they say a new age begins
on earth the virus mutates

scaring millions
post-Christmas repeat events
no vaccination
could change astro-calendar
of universal revenge

remains of prayer
now wrapped in gift box, held up
shipping delays
no burial, no third day
total lockdown, here and there

21

Then there are some poems entitled “New Gods” where he says—“Meditation--/ future uncertainties/ beyond crisis/ new strains, new virus/ .Every now and then we are hearing that the new mutant has come the new virus has come ‘villains of the new order/ peeking from windows.”

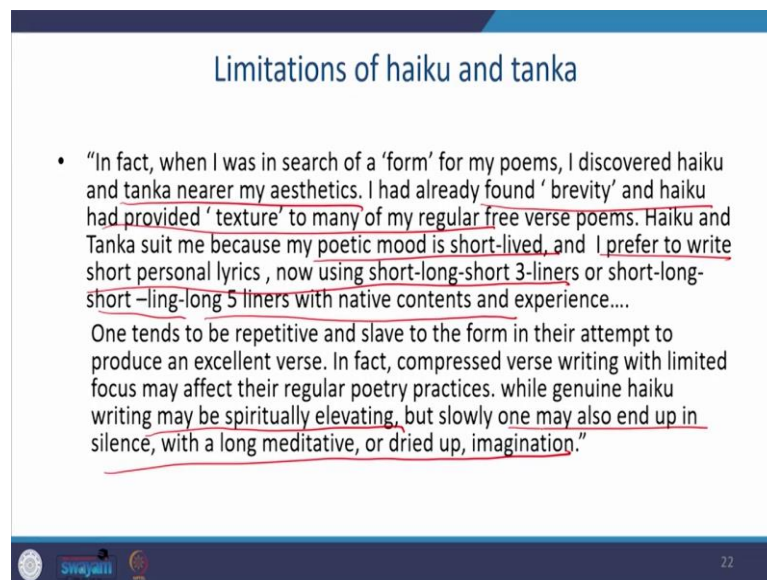
“Create new mantras/ for life to continue/ envision new gods.” Perhaps gods have also been very helpless and gods are also not helpful. So, Singh actually tries to, Singh can be considered to be a sort of iconoclast in this regard. And then there is always a sort of indication or prediction or there is something on wall that people say the third wave may come. So, the poet writes--- “I do not recognize/ the bright new star in the sky.”

The pensive poet has become frustrated now and says—“ a beacon of hope they say/ a new age begins/ on earth the virus mutates.” So, here is a new age—“scaring millions/ post Christmas repeat events/ no vaccination/ could change astro- calendar/ of universal revenge.”

So, on the one hand we are getting vaccinated, but do we really think that can post Christmas repeat events no vaccination “remains of prayer/ now wrapped in gift box held up/ shipping delays/ no burial no third day/ total lockdown here and there.”

So, how our everyday activities have come to a halt. You might quite be aware of the fact that many people who had to suffer on account of this virus or this disease they could not get the proper funeral at least. So, and that is why the poet rightly says—“remains of prayer/ now wrapped in gift box held up/ shipping delays/ no burial no third day/ total lockdown here and there.”

(Refer Slide Time: 41:25)



The slide is titled "Limitations of haiku and tanka" in blue text. It contains a bulleted list of points and a quote. The quote is: "In fact, when I was in search of a 'form' for my poems, I discovered haiku and tanka nearer my aesthetics. I had already found 'brevity' and haiku had provided 'texture' to many of my regular free verse poems. Haiku and Tanka suit me because my poetic mood is short-lived, and I prefer to write short personal lyrics, now using short-long-short 3-liners or short-long-short-long-long 5 liners with native contents and experience... One tends to be repetitive and slave to the form in their attempt to produce an excellent verse. In fact, compressed verse writing with limited focus may affect their regular poetry practices. While genuine haiku writing may be spiritually elevating, but slowly one may also end up in silence, with a long meditative, or dried up, imagination." The slide also features a Swajal logo and the number 22 in the bottom right corner.

Now my dear friends, actually Singh had to face many questions many interrogations and why he writes haikus and tankas why he expresses in these form.

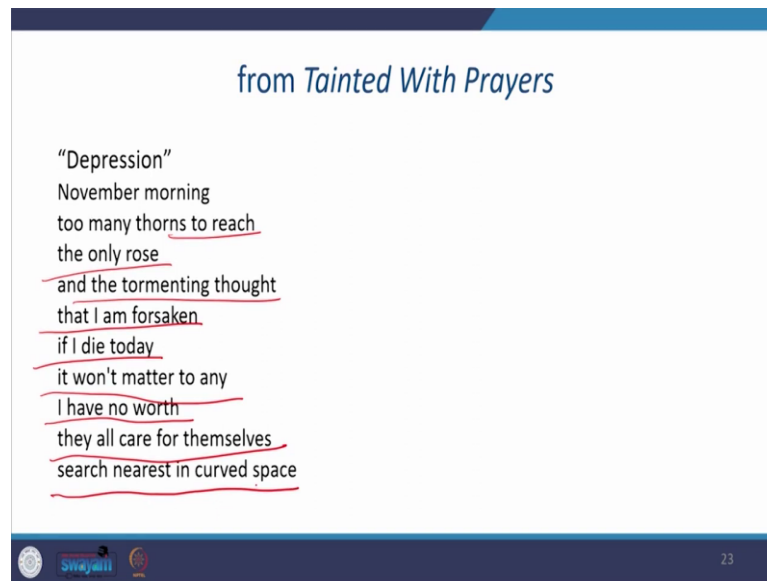
So, what he said in one of the interviews. “In fact, when I was in search of a form for my poems I discovered haiku and tanka nearer my aesthetics”. Because he wanted to say more things in less words. “I had already found brevity and haiku had provided texture to many of my regular free verse poems. Haiku and tanka suit me because my poetic mood is short lived and I prefer to write short personal lyrics now using short long short 3 liners or short long short long 5 liners with native contents and experience.”

Of course while one does such one may become repetitive and the poet also admits—“one tends to be repetitive and slaved to the form in their attempt to produce an excellent

words. In fact, compressed words writing with limited focus may affect their regular poetry practices while genuine haiku writing may be spiritually elevating....’

So, this gives him a sort of a spiritual elevation, ‘but slowly one may also end up in silence with a long meditative or dried up imagination.’

(Refer Slide Time: 42:52)




So, the poet becomes a realist here. So, we can take some lines from *Tainted with Prayers*. Look at the title *Tainted with Prayers* as the poem is titled “Depression” where he says—“November morning/ too many thorns to reach/ the only rose/ and the tormenting thought”, fine. Too many thorns to reach too many impediments the only rose what is this rose?

This rose may be hope, this rose may be a new progression that ‘I am forsaken/ if I die today/ it would not matter to any,/ I have no worth/ they all care for themselves/ search nearest in curved space’. The poet also becomes depressed and he says that if I die today perhaps nobody will be affected, they all care for themselves everyone you know in this age is thinking of themselves. I am actually reminded of T Vasudev Reddy who says nobody is no one to whom, fine. I mean ultimately, we all are alone and the poet also here makes such a realization and then it continues--- “Last night rain/ paves way for a clear sky/

(Refer Slide Time: 44:04)

Contd...

last night rain	a dark street	choking air
paves way for a clear sky	chaos on the road	in a walled colony:
this morning	fear delays	two tired pigeons
the breeze is cool and the sun	homeward move at nine	perch on overhead tank
adds a new hue to the spring	lumpens lie in wait	whisper pity on us
<u>source of salvation</u>	<u>peeping through the fog</u>	<u>when change comes</u>
<u>depository of sins</u>	<u>the sun feebly comforts</u>	<u>things change they saysight</u>
<u>no cake cutting</u>	<u>a sparrow's nest</u>	<u>beyond sight</u>
<u>in church promise of reaping</u>	<u>built under the window sill:</u>	<u>in the wealthy vacuum</u>
<u>if I could sow recovery seed</u>	<u>I hear a new-born crying</u>	<u>all is well with limping days</u>

 24

This morning/ the breeze is cool and the sun/ adds a new hue to the spring/ source of salvation”. The poet progresses now and thinks of a sort of spirituality.

And says—“source of salvation/ depository of sins/ no cake cutting/ in church promise of reaping/ if I could sow, recovery seed”. Can there be, you know. The poet actually longs for can there be because all along love we have done all sorts of crimes we have committed all sorts of evil deeds-- Can there be a recovery seed, “a dark street/ cash on the road/ fear delays home ward move/ at nine lumpens lie in wait.”

So, the poet wants to go homeward meaning thereby there is a return, but in return is there also reconciliation and then the poet says—“peeping through the fog/ the sun feebly comforts... even the sun does not have that much of power now.

“The sun feebly comforts/ a sparrow’s nest/ built under the window sill/ I hear a new born crying”, fine. Think of those people who have got no proper shelter like a sparrow’s nest, but then when the sun also has got a very feeble ray and a very feeble comfort “choking air/ in a walled colony/ two tired pigeons/ perch on overhead tank/ whisper pity on us.”

So, like you know, there can be a sort of autobiographical tone because the poet also might be thinking that they are only two people left and the children like the children of all the birds they have gone and settled in their homes. So, perhaps the poet also feels

and there is a sort of parallelism also here fine, there is a sort of a commiseration, there is a sort of sympathy when the poet looks at the pigeon and says that the two tired pigeons tired of life tired of all these struggles they ‘perch on the overhead head tank/ whisper pity on us.’”

So, we are now old, helpless, aged people. This is actually the picture, this is a universal picture and then the poet once again says--- “When change comes/ things change, they say sight/ beyond sight/ in the wealthy vacuum/ all is well with limping days.”

(Refer Slide Time: 46:36)

Contd...

earthy body	life is beautiful
and nightness of silence	when you enter another
fear in mirror	body... mind
return to the river	and become one
echoing hollowed sound	in each other
	with foreign sound
wearied winter	
each night bed a living grave:	I couldn't be lasting poem
drying breathing passage	provisional body
and lonely shadows	nude smell and white distrust
delaying disaster	play freedom in mounds of cloud

Swajati 25

All is well with limping days why? Because the earthy body/ and nightness of silence/ fear in mirror/ return to the river/ echoing hollowed sound.”

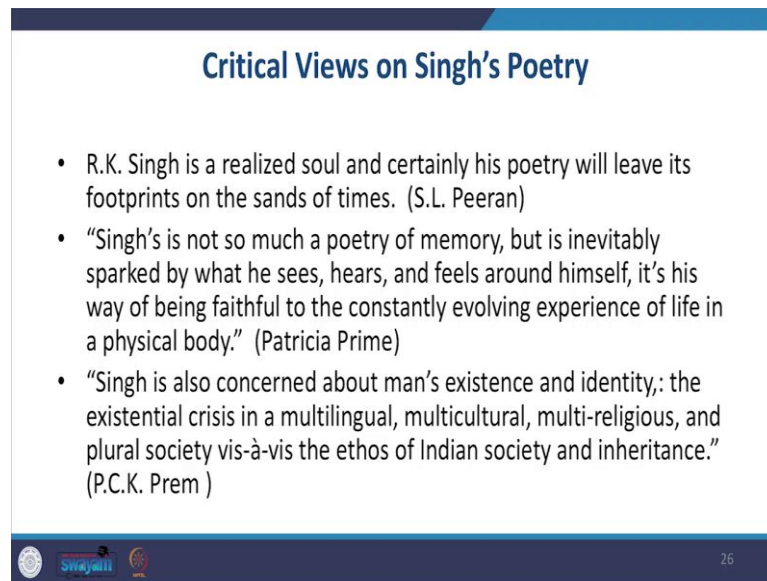
And then the last one that we can take. “Life is beautiful/ when you enter another body mind/ and become one/ in each other/. Again the poet thinks of love and says life can be beautiful only in union in each other ‘with foreign sound/ I could not be the lasting poem/ provisional body”. Of course, our body is provisional my dear friend. “Nude smell and white distrust/ play freedom in mounts of cloud.”

Everywhere there is anxiety, everywhere there is fear, everywhere there is a fear of the unknown, everywhere there is a fear of death, everywhere there is a fear of the time passing by. So, the poet also is a realist and that is why whatever the poet has written in

one poem after another he actually tries to sing, he actually tries to celebrate the ethos of this life which we have got to live on this earth.

We can very quickly take some critical comments and in this regard one of the comments which is very eye opening is--- “Singh’s is not so much a poetry of memory’

(Refer Slide Time: 48:04)



Critical Views on Singh's Poetry

- R.K. Singh is a realized soul and certainly his poetry will leave its footprints on the sands of times. (S.L. Peeran)
- “Singh’s is not so much a poetry of memory, but is inevitably sparked by what he sees, hears, and feels around himself, it’s his way of being faithful to the constantly evolving experience of life in a physical body.” (Patricia Prime)
- “Singh is also concerned about man’s existence and identity,; the existential crisis in a multilingual, multicultural, multi-religious, and plural society vis-à-vis the ethos of Indian society and inheritance.” (P.C.K. Prem)

swayam 26

It is not a poetry of memory as many people say, ‘but it is inevitably sparked by what he sees hears and feels”. because Singh is a great observationist, fine.

Singh is a person who experiments no doubt, but then Singh celebrates. It is his way of being faithful to the constantly evolving experience of life in a physical body. Singh is concerned about man’s existence and identity and that is why there is every now and then there is actually a sort of you know struggle and the struggle towards the higher aims of life, struggle towards the higher aims not only of life but also a sort of realization that this human life is short-living.

So, before we come to end of this talk let me take a few lines and these lines may summarize what actually Singh wants to convey through his poetic world.

(Refer Slide Time: 49:12)

Summing up

half-fleshed faces
track from behind the window:
rawness of journey

little candles fail
to illumine the deity
or golden dome
in the valley darkness reigns
and god too awaits light

lying listless
on withered creeper
a golden bird (from God too Awaits Light)

“Half fleshed faces.” Look at the lines—“half fleshed faces/ track from behind the window/ rawness of journey.” I mean this is actually a longing for life, whatever life we live, we never have a sort of satisfaction and we always feel rawness of journey the journey is still incomplete.

We have even towards the end of life many longings which we think what if this could have happened what if this could not have happened.

“Little candles fail/ to illumine the deity/ now even the god has become very helpless and you think that simply by lighting some candles you perhaps will be lightening it and god will perhaps see you in the light, no. “Little candles fail/ now to illumine the deity/ or golden dome/ in the valley darkness reigns/ and god too awaits light.” God is also looking for light god is also looking for more happiness.

God is also looking for more submission; God is also looking for more admission the admission of man before the Almighty “lying listless/ on withered creeper/ a golden bird.” And you know, how our own soul lying listless on a withered creeper on a golden bird no, we have all sorts of images we have all sorts of images.

And these images which are in the form of art sometimes or the other, we go to see those art pieces sometimes or the other we go to see what are inscribed on the walls in the divine temples, but when we talk about the same in our day- to- day affairs, this becomes

a taboo and Singh actually wants to disapprove of all the charges and say human life is meant to be lived, human life is meant to be loved and human life is meant to be celebrated.

I think I have been able to familiarize you with the great and the vast poetic oeuvre of Professor R. K Singh who is perhaps a living legend whose works have been translated into majority of languages of the world. With this let me come to the end of this talk.

Thank you very much I wish you all a very good life, I wish you all a very good love, I wish you all a very good longing. Longing again for poetry, longing again for music, longing again for celebration. With this thank you very much. I wish you all a good night.