

Elements of Literature and Creative Communication
Prof. H S Komalesha
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur

Lecture - 13
Poetry and its Tributaries

Hello. So, nice to see you again and welcome back to the poetry week. This is the third lecture in the series. In the earlier lectures, we devoted them to the discussion of poetry especially the origins of poetry. In that context, we discussed the origins of poetry in Sumerian culture, African culture, Egyptian culture, Chinese culture, Greek and Indian cultures and all that. Having discussed the origins of poetry now, it is time for us to discuss poetry and its types. And I choose to call the types of poetry - tributaries. And some of you may have as well made the connections as to why I choose to call these tributaries.

If poetry is a river then types of poetry can be called tributaries. Can we call them tributaries? That is the reason why having discussed the origins of the river, now we choose to discuss its diverse flows. That is the reason why we call it tributaries of poetry, in other words, different types of poetry.

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So, before we proceed with the different types I am going to take you through a kind of an outline of the topics that we are going to do in the next 25 or 30 minutes or so. So, we are

going to ask a fundamental question is it possible for us to classify poetry into neat categories, can we typify poetry into neat boxes, if we can why we can, if we cannot why we cannot, ok.

Afterwards, we take up for discussion different subtypes of poetry and whether these subtypes are global ones or are they products of local cultures. Then we are going to discuss the three broad categories of poetry and then of course, after coming to terms with the three broad categories of poetry then we discuss in detail different subtypes of poetry. This is a kind of an outline of how we are going to take this class.


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Can we typify poetry into neat boxes?

A WISE POET ONCE SAID, THERE ARE ONLY TWO KINDS OF POETRY, GOOD POETRY AND BAD.

- Poetry as a genre continually reinvents itself
- The act of reinvention, however, does not take place in a vacuum. The dialectic between tradition and the individual is an ongoing and fruitful endeavour
- While defining and typifying may be hard, feeling or identifying the 'poetic' comes easier and is more crucial

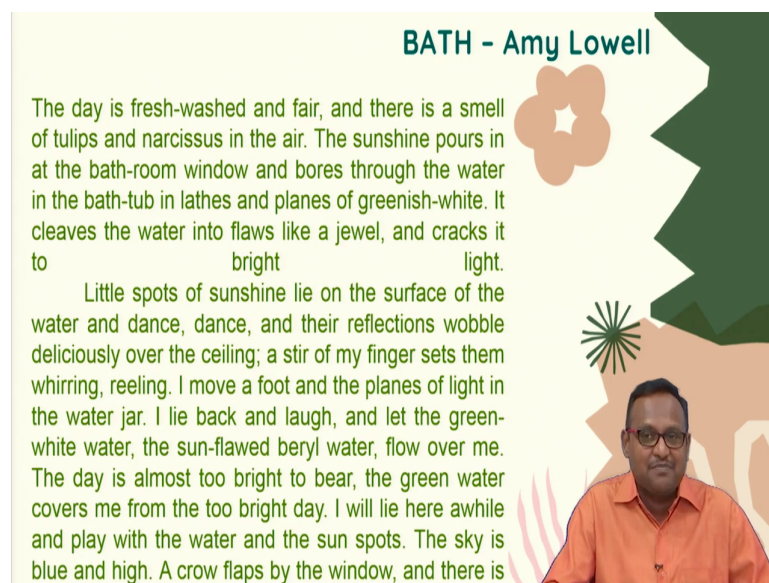


Now, the question is can we really box poetry into different categories, can we do it neatly? Because we are dealing with a category of literature, which is highly dynamic and volatile and obviously, if something is very unstable and volatile you cannot put them into neat boxes right, you already know that.

Nevertheless for the sake of convenience sometimes we have to classify poetry into various categories. Having said that we also need to keep in mind what a wise poet once said - there are only two kinds of poetry. One is good poetry the other is bad poetry irrespective of the types in which you write your poetry, well it can either be good or not so good right? And poetry as a genre is not a static one because if you look at the origins of poetry and if you look at the manifestations of poetry today poetry has undergone a radical transformation in its content, its structure, its outlook everything. Therefore poetry is not stagnant water, it is a

kinetic movement, it constantly keeps reinventing itself. That is the reason why when we classify poetry into so-called neat categories sometimes well poetry does not sit so neatly into those categories. We will have to keep that in mind. Even while discussing the classification of poetry it's better to let the classification be informed by poetry's refusal or defiance to be accommodated into such neat types. And how does this reinvention take place, and how does poetry keep reinventing itself? Well, as we discussed during our discussion of Marxism, feminism, and post-colonialism, it happens through the process of dialectics. It happens through a process of conflict with the earlier forms and the new forms and that is how it constantly goes on reinventing itself and transforming itself. So, now let us take a look at what happens when we identify the poetic, because at the end of the day even in order to identify the different types of poetry we must be able to distinguish what is poetic from what is not poetic.

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So, now take a look at this poem or this particular piece. What do you call this? Right at the structural level, it does not look like a poem because you remember in one of our earlier classes we had a discussion on prose and poetry and from the look of it, it looks like a prose piece because there are no stanzas or lines are not aligned. The structure is the way a poem is aligned. However, when you read this, this is when the problem of category comes to the fore. When you read this that is when a doubt crops into your mind and pops in your head saying is this really prose? It looks like prose but is it really prose. For time being let us call it a text. This text is titled bath by Amy Lowell. Let me read it out for you-

During our discussion of prose, we said that one of the distinguishing features of prose is that it is easy to understand, and even with a single reading you would be able to make out. But what is happening here, what kind of imagery the so-called prose is using here? Look at the intensity of feelings, look at the richness of description, look at its diction.

I have every reason to put this piece here because I said from the structure it looks like prose whereas, it belongs to a genre called prose poetry. So, it is a kind of poetry, it is called prose poetry and we know that not from its structure because structurally it can be quite deceptive, but when you read it when you listen to the lilt of sound dancing in your ears as you read it that is when it should be definitely poetry. this is one example that we have to keep in mind.

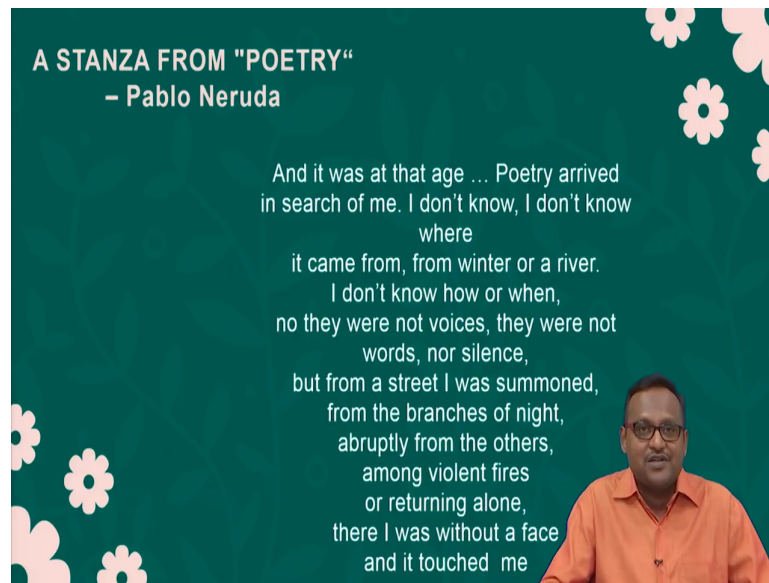
Visual Poetry

- A written poem that creates a visual image that relates to its meaning.
- Uses spaces between words and letters, breaks between lines, and even alternative spellings of words to produce a visual effect
- Concrete Poetry/Shape Poetry
- The typographical effect is more important in conveying meaning than verbal significance.

I have another one. So, now, look at these two structures here, one on my left-hand side and the other one on a crescent moon. What do you call it? It looks almost like, an image almost like an image of something. The Mouse's Tale, in fact, it is a type of poem. Again we do not know where to place it. Is it an image, is it a verbal picture, what do you call it, it is still debatable. This is where the classification of poetry becomes highly problematic. That is where we need to discuss this topic with a lot of nuances. That is the reason why I began this discussion of the classification of poetry with the nuances first so that once we are aware that there are nuances then we do not take things for granted and we move on very carefully. So, this is also called poetry. In fact, it is called visual poetry. It is also called concrete poetry, shape poetry, there are different names assigned to this type of poetry. One of the distinguishing features of this kind of poetry is that it creates a visual image, which can be directly related to its meaning.

So, the Mouse's Tale is the title of the poem and the picture is related to the tale of a mouse. In fact, this was first used by Lewis Carroll in his well-known work *Alice in Wonderland*. So, here too we have a crescent moon. So, the poem is related to the crescent moon and that is how it is appropriately structured like that. The emphasis here is more on the typographical effect than on the verbal signification. Usually in poetry verbal signification plays a major role, but here, of course, verbal signification is important more than the shape that you achieve - placing your words becomes important because the effect can be brought out properly. So, that is the reason why a poet here makes clever use of words and letters. A poet even breaks a single word into multiple pieces, makes use of alternative spellings, and even uses space in a very creative way; so that a beautiful visual effect and aesthetic effect are achieved. So, these are some samples to give you an idea about how poetry refuses to be classified into neat categories.

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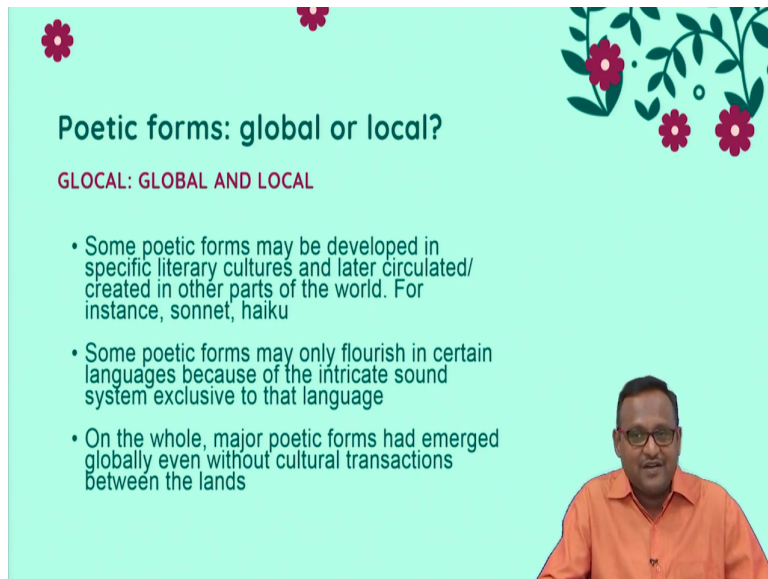
From here we move on to our discussion of poetry. In fact, here is a brilliant line by a people's poet, the poem is called 'Poetry'. It is a stanza taken from that and this is written by Pablo Neruda, one of the most extraordinary poets the world has ever seen. Here he describes how poetry comes to him. In fact, this poem stanza reflects more on the magic of poetry and how when we are in the presence of such live-fire activities such as classifying poetry into their types, how it becomes sometimes futile because what is important is the spirit that the verses convey. When we are in the presence of a live flame we need to enjoy it rather than dissecting it, nevertheless of course, for practical purposes we still have to do it.

And it was at that age.....poetry arrived
in search of me. I do not know, I do not know
where
it came from, from winter or a river.
I do not know how or when,
no they were not voices they were not
words nor silence,
but from a street I was summoned
from the branches of night
abruptly from the others
among violent fires
or returning alone

there I was without a face
there I was without a face and it touched me.

So, this talks about the alchemy of poetry touching individuals and creating its magic there.
Now, we move on to the regular aspect of this class.

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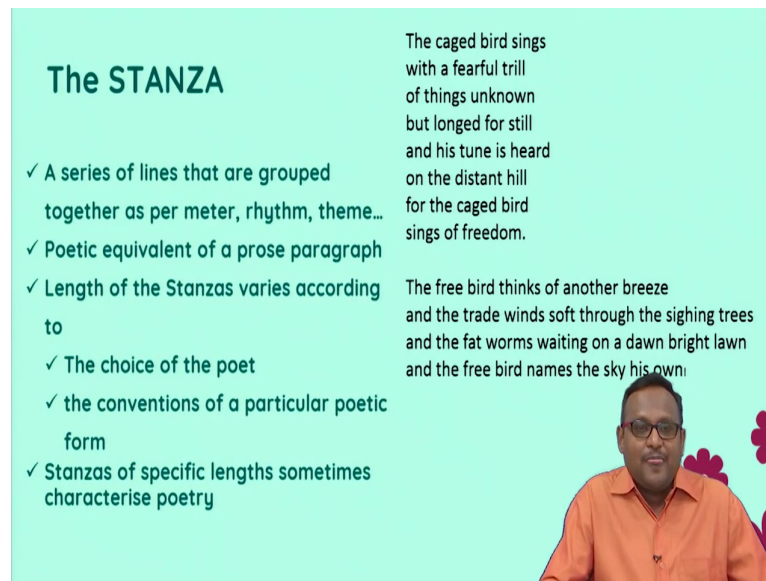
Poetic forms: global or local?

GLOCAL: GLOBAL AND LOCAL

- Some poetic forms may be developed in specific literary cultures and later circulated/created in other parts of the world. For instance, sonnet, haiku
- Some poetic forms may only flourish in certain languages because of the intricate sound system exclusive to that language
- On the whole, major poetic forms had emerged globally even without cultural transactions between the lands

Initially, we asked a question - the poetic forms that we are going to study in this class, are they global or are they local? Technically speaking; obviously, they will have originated locally. These forms of poetry, subforms of poetry, and types of poetry may have their origins in a particular place, but because poetry is cosmopolitan and because the world we live in is also cosmopolitan well they have travelled both spatially and temporally. In fact, some of the forms that we are going to discuss today some of the types of this poetry are as old as literature itself, but today we still read them. Therefore, they have travelled quite widely in space and in time. That is the reason why I say that they may have had their origins locally, but they have now spread globally. So, therefore, the better term would be now they are 'glocal'.

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The STANZA

- ✓ A series of lines that are grouped together as per meter, rhythm, theme...
- ✓ Poetic equivalent of a prose paragraph
- ✓ Length of the Stanzas varies according to
 - ✓ The choice of the poet
 - ✓ the conventions of a particular poetic form
- ✓ Stanzas of specific lengths sometimes characterise poetry

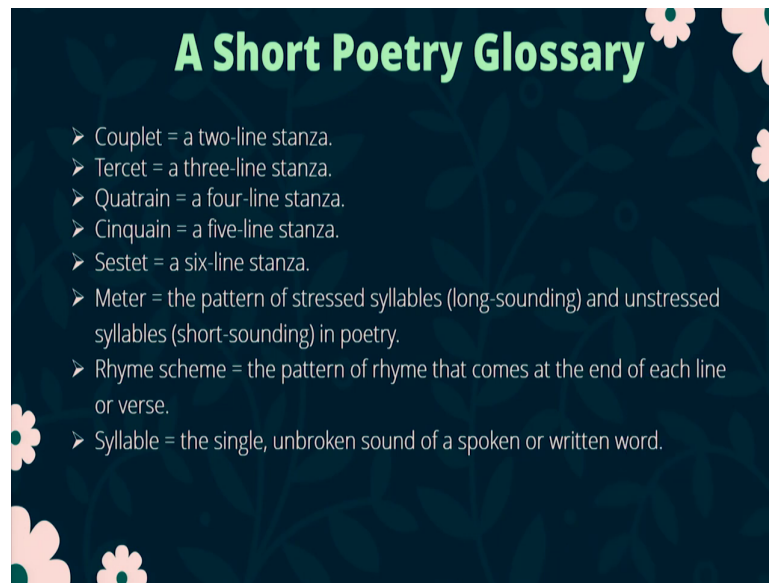
The caged bird sings
with a fearful trill
of things unknown
but longed for still
and his tune is heard
on the distant hill
for the caged bird
sings of freedom.

The free bird thinks of another breeze
and the trade winds soft through the sighing trees
and the fat worms waiting on a dawn bright lawn
and the free bird names the sky his own

Before we proceed with our classification this is something that we need to keep in mind, 'stanza'. Well, a stanza for the uninitiated is the poetic equivalent of a paragraph. In prose pieces what we call paragraphs. In poetry they are stanzas. They are like a group of lines clubbed together, a group of lines of various lengths clubbed together for various reasons. Well, that grouping may take place on the basis of meter, rhyme, rhythm, theme and sometimes even according to the choice of the poet or may be according to the conventions of the poetic type. So, there are various reasons how a stanza is arranged. So, here we have an excerpt from a poem called the Caged Bird by Maya Angelou.

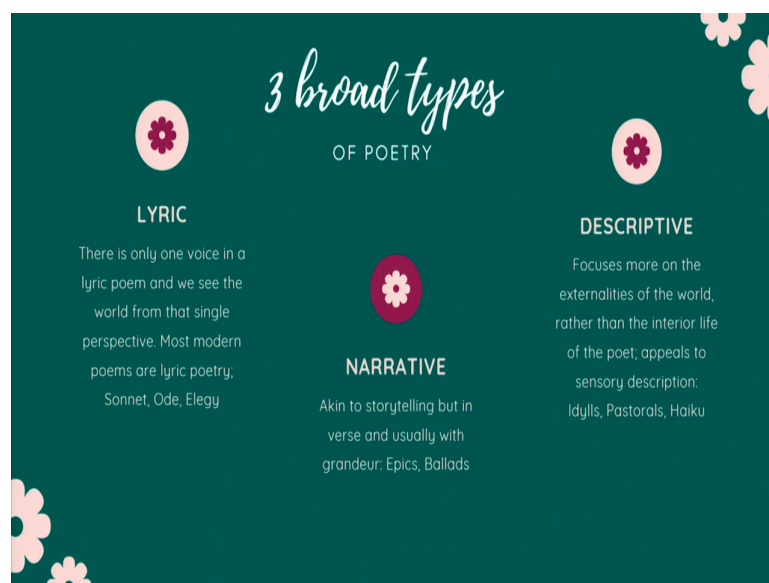
So, in these stanzas, in fact, this particular stanza the first one is comparatively longer and the second one is shorter not in terms of length, but in terms of the number of lines. So, this is the poetic convention. So, this is how in other words what we need to remember here is a stanza is a series of lines grouped together clubbed together according to either the conventions of the poetic form or according to the intention and choice of the poet.

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So, according to the stanza we even poetry is classified. For instance, if it is a poem that makes use of two-line stanzas, it is a couplet. So, if it is a three-line stanza a poem made up of three-line stanzas you can call it a tercet. Similarly, a quatrain for a four-line stanza, a cinquain for a five-line stanza and a sestet for a six-line one. So, this is something that we need to keep in mind. We will come back to rhyme schemes, meter and syllables in a short while, but for time being let us understand stanzas.


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Coming to the broad categories of poetry we have three broad categories of poetry. The first one is lyrical poetry, the other one is narrative poetry, and the third one is descriptive poetry. These we can call the bigger tributaries of the river called poetry. So, lyric or lyrical poetry is a predominant type of poetry that we see today. So, it is written from a single perspective. Most modern poets use this form of poetry and here we see the world from the poetic perspective of a single poetic person here and some of the types of poetry that belong to this broad type are sonnets, odes, elegies and other things. Narrative poetry is something that has existed since time immemorial. In fact, if you remember in the earlier classes we discussed The Tale of Shipwrecked Sailor, Epic of Gilgamesh and other Homeric epics. All of them belong to this tradition this type of poetry narrative poetry. So, therefore, you can call epics, heroic epics, and ballads some subtypes of narrative poetry.

The third one is descriptive poetry. So, any poem when you read if it focuses more on the external conditions of the world it makes use of rich descriptions then you can call it descriptive poetry. Usually, idylls, pastorals, and haikus can be called descriptive poetry. Of course, these are tentative ones that are something that we need to keep in mind.

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Some sub-types of poetry

 **SONNET**

- Petrarchan, Shakespearean and Curtailed
- **Petrarchan** comprises 3 stanzas. The octet poses a question; 2nd stanza or sextet answers the question posed [ABBAABBA, CDECDE]
- **Shakespearean** comprises 3 quatrains of 4 lines each. Ends with a rhyming couplet which forms a conclusion [ABAB, CDCD, EFEF, GG]
- **Sonnets are predominantly concerned with love and exalted human emotions**

So, having discussed how poetry refuses to be categorized and some exceptions to these categories and having discussed the broad categories now we move on to the subtypes of poetry. The first one is a sonnet. Sonnet is something that we need to know more about. Again, there are different types of sonnets. You have a Spenserian sonnet named after the

poet Spencer, you have a Petrarchan sonnet again named after the poet Petrarch, and you have a Shakespearean sonnet again named after Shakespeare. So, what we need to know about Sonnets is that it is a poetic composition done using 14 lines. So, if you come across a poem that makes use of fourteen lines, generally it would be a sonnet. Of course, there are exceptions to it. There are sonnets that make use of 16 lines. There are exceptions to this 14 lines rule of a sonnet. There are sonnets with 16 lines. There are Sonnets with 12 lines. So, these exceptions are there that we have to keep in mind. In fact, 16 lines sonnet is called a coda sonnet and a shorter one a 12 line sonnet is called a curtail sonnet that we have to keep in mind, but generally speaking Petrarchan sonnets and Shakespearean sonnets are what we get to discuss and we get to see more. So, both Petrarchan's sonnet and Shakespearean sonnet, have 14 lines. The difference is in their line arrangement. The 14 lines are divided into 8 and 6 for Petrarchan sonnets. In fact, the 1st part has 8 lines and the 2nd stanza has 6 lines with a kind of a rhyming pattern ABBAABBA and CDECDE. In Shakespearean sonnet well the 14 lines are divided into quatrains or 4 lines, 3 quatrains of 4 lines each. 4 3 za 12 and the last one is a couplet and here the rhyming scheme is ABAB, CDCD, EFEF and GG. So, what are this notation ABA and all that CD, we are going to discuss this when we pick up a sonnet for discussion. Generally speaking, sonnets are used to express love to represent exalted human feelings and emotions we make use of sonnets. Think of any Shakespearean sonnet that you have read you would understand what we mean by this.

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SONNET 116, SHAKESPEARE



Let me not to the marriage of true minds ^A
 Admit impediments. Love is not love ^B
 Which alters when it alteration finds ^A
 Or bends with the remover to remove. ^B

O no! it is an ever-fixed mark ^C
 That looks on tempests and is never shaken; ^D
 It is the star to every wand'ring bark, ^{-C}
 Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken. ^D

Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks ^E
 Within his bending sickle's compass come; ^F
 Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks, ^E
 But bears it out even to the edge of doom. ^F

If this be error and upon me prov'd, ^G
 I never writ, nor no man ever lov'd. ^G

Let's read a sonnet now

So, I have here a sonnet by Shakespeare, an extraordinary Sonnet and an off quoted sonnet on love.

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
admit impediments. Love is not love
which alters when it alteration finds
or bends with the remover to remove.

Look how extraordinary how immortal lines these are. It talks about love and says how love is not love which alters when its alteration finds. The concept of love here is given a noble touch, it is not something that is fickle-minded, it does not change with the vagaries of time, it does not change with the vagaries of conditions, it is something that remains constant. It is a remarkable sonnet. Please take a look at it. And what is the rhyming pattern here - ABAB the notation that we did? Please keep this in mind here. So, what I will do? Now, look at this. So, here is a Shakespearean sonnet. Let us take a look at the rhyme scheme here. In fact, we said that in order to distinguish Shakespearean sonnet from Petrarchan sonnet we need to look at how the stanzas are arranged and what is the rhyme scheme, right. So, stanzas you can make out here because there are 3 quatrains; that means, 4 lines stanzas, there are 3 of them are there; 12 and there is a couplet towards the end. Now, look at the rhyme scheme here. How do you mark the rhyme scheme? It follows the end rhyme scheme; which means, you will have to pay attention to how the last word of each of these lines ends how the last word ends.

So, look at the first line - "...true minds." The sound [S]. Let it be A. Love does not love [V], the sound is [V]. So, let us call it B. Then the third line- "... finds." So, [S] here is matching with minds there, minds- find. Therefore, we can call this A. Then, Love - remove. Therefore, [V] this sound is B. Now, look at the rhyme scheme ABAB. And let us go to the next stanza, mark. The sound is [K]. Therefore, we can call it C. Never shaken; so, this is [N], the sound is [N] therefore, D. Bark, mark and bark. Therefore, it is C. Taken and shaken, it is D; ABAB CDCD. Similarly, you have [S]. The sound is cheeks, EFEF, comes, dooms, and proved - the sound is G, so it's [D]. Sound - loved is G. So, this is how you mark the rhyme scheme. So, in order to know the rhyme scheme of a poem you need to see if it is an end rhyme scheme. You need to see how the last word and the last sound of the last word ends and mark it accordingly. So, in a Petrarchan sonnet, we discussed this rhyme scheme is different. This is

what we need to keep in mind. I am sure this would help us a great deal in identifying a Shakespearean sonnet from a Petrarchan sonnet or other types of sonnets.

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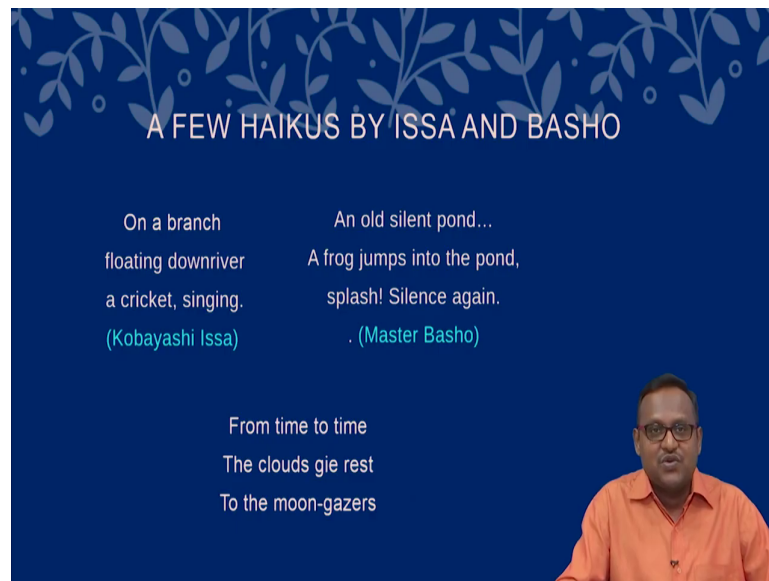
The slide has a light pink background. On the left, there is a small illustration of a yellow flower with green leaves. On the right, there is a vertical decorative border with green leaves and pink flowers. The title 'Haiku' is centered at the top in a bold, dark green font. Below the title, there is a bulleted list of five points. In the bottom right corner, there is a small video inset showing a man with glasses and an orange shirt speaking.

Haiku

- A disciplined form with origins in 17th century Japanese poetry.
- Written in 3-line stanzas (tercet) having a syllable division of 5-7-5.
- Haikus are meditative in tone and capture an image/mood
- Usually revolve around nature and the natural phenomena and have an aphoristic aura to them.

I have here another interesting type of poetry called haiku. Haiku is generally associated with Japan. In fact, it has its origins in Japan, but these days it is no longer confined to Japan. It is now a global form. This is where you can recall our earlier discussion; how a particular type of poetry is born in a particular culture or in a particular geographical locale and how that moves on later to the rest of the world. So, haiku has its origins in Japan, very haiku is a very short poem. So, it is a highly disciplined form in the sense that there is no scope for extravagance here. There is no scope for verbal extravagance here. So, the economy of expression is what matters a lot. So, you can trace it back to Japan, 17th century Japan. So, usually, it is written using a stanza of 3 lines, a tercet. And generally speaking, haikus are highly meditative in tone, they are highly meditative, almost Zen-like quality and they capture a mood or an image. Generally, haikus capture a single image or single mood and they revolve around the theme of nature or natural phenomenon. A 3 line stanza evokes a verbal picture that revolves around nature or natural phenomena. Let us take a closer look at some of the well-known haikus.

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So, here we have a couple of very interesting and well-known haikus by Basho and Issa. These are masters of haiku. Of course, these are now available to us. They are available to us through English in English translation. Now, look at these poems.

On a branch
floating downriver
a cricket, singing.

It evokes a kind of a mental picture and look at the imagery here, there is a branch floating downriver and there is a branch that is spread across it and on that branch, a cricket sits and sings. How all this is captured or evoked using almost minimum of words; on a branch floating downriver a cricket singing.

Or here is another very very well known haiku by Basho.

An old silent pond.
A frog jumps into the pond,
splash! Silence again.

Now, look how evocative it is. Each line each word here is capable of evoking or you can even say it is capable of invoking a mental picture. So, it is like using the word and painting the picture using the word and painting a picture with the help of that. An old silent pond. A frog jumps into the pond and splashes. Silence again after a while.

From time to time
the clouds give rest
to the moon-gazers.

How if you are fond of watching the moon on a clear sky night, so, occasionally how you are disturbed by wandering clouds sometimes so. It is evocative of that image. So, what we have learnt in this class is some subtypes of poetry and before that, we discussed some exceptions to these subtypes and how poetry itself most of the time defies to be put into boxes. In the next class we take up some more subtypes of poetry and I am sure this would give us the necessary tool; this would equip us in a proper way to look at a poem and analyze it structurally as well. Until then take care, bye.